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Exploring Relationships and Interactions Between District Leadership and School Leadership Teams

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

in
Educational Leadership

by
Peggy E. Johnson

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2008
The Dissertation of Peggy E. Johnson is approved and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm:

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Chair

University of California, San Diego
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California State University, San Marcos
2008
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my dear mother who passed away on February 3, 2002. She was such a positive influence in my life as well as the lives of my five siblings. She instilled in each of us a belief that with hard work and a positive attitude, each of us could accomplish whatever we desired. I have thought of her often over these past three and one-half years. Each time I stumbled or lost faith that I could complete the journey, I felt her presence and heard her gentle voice of encouragement. I know how proud she would be if she were here with me today. Thanks Mom!
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Without the support of my family, I would not have completed this journey. My son Chris provided excellent feedback in my initial stages of writing. He and his wife Tomoko, though far from home, have provided me with so much love and support. I thank my daughter Erin for her help with charts and figures and for “tucking me in” on many a night when I was too exhausted to realize it was time to call it a day. My husband Bill has been my greatest source of strength throughout this project. He provided endless
encouragement at every step along the way. He is the most loving and kind person I have ever known and I would be lost without him.
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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Exploring Relationships and Interactions Between District Leadership and School Leadership Teams

by

Peggy E. Johnson

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

University of California, San Diego, 2008
San Diego State University, 2008
California State University, San Marcos, 2008

Professor Janet H. Chrispeels, Chair

Effective schools and district effectiveness studies have shown that high levels of student achievement are possible and more likely to sustain when a district and its schools coordinate and collaborate in the reform process. Much less research has been conducted to understand the linkages between districts and schools and how they may interact to build the social, human, and intellectual capital needed for school reform. Furthermore, district administrators often rely on principals as the primary communicator and implementer of district reform initiatives. Yet, there is growing recognition that the
principal cannot lead alone and that school leadership teams are essential to the improvement process. The purpose of this study was to investigate the central office leader, the principal, and the school leadership team perceptions of ideological, structural, communication, resource, and relational linkages between the central office and schools. In addition, this study explored how these linkages may be supporting and/or constraining the district’s efforts to build system capacity and capital. The study also provides a unique opportunity to examine in what ways providing professional development to a subset of school leadership teams facilitates district/school efforts to move the district’s reform agenda forward by serving as a linkage between schools and the district.

This embedded case study was conducted in one K-8 midsized urban fringe district, designated year-two program improvement for failing to meet the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) targets for its English-language learners and students with disabilities. In this case district, five school leadership teams are receiving six days of professional development a year for three years as part of a national study of an effective schools intervention design. Incorporating qualitative data sources as well as a quantitative source, this study presents first-year findings from 45 team members, 5 principals, and 10 central office leaders.

Results suggest that the ideological linkage of a shared understanding about what constitutes good instruction may be essential to successful reform implementation. A trusting relationship (social capital) between the central office and schools appears to be a key linkage to supporting structural, communication, and resource linkages and in
creating the collective knowledge and capabilities (intellectual capital) needed to move the district’s reform efforts forward
CHAPTER 1

Context of the Problem

Historically, school improvement initiatives and research has focused on the individual school as the unit of change (Harris & Chrispeels, 2006). Thirty years of research clearly documents effective schools processes that correlate with improved achievement for at-risk students (Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schweitzer, & Wisenbaker, 1979; Edmonds, 1979; Levine & Lezotte, 1995; Mortimore, Sammons, Stoll, Lewis, & Ecob, 1988; Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, Ouston, & Smith, 1979; Teddlie & Stringfield, 1993; Weber, 1971). Through individual efforts of the principal and the staff, schools across the country have improved the educational outcomes for their students. However, Chrispeels and Gonzalez (2006) argue that focusing improvement efforts solely on the individual school often leaves the district out, ultimately affecting the depth and sustainability of the change efforts. As a result, reform efforts at the school level may be undermined by lack of funds and district practices and policies that may be counter to the school’s improvement model goals. Research in support of their argument suggests that improvement efforts focused solely on the individual school often result in temporary fixes and that coordinated support from the school district along with education authority at the local, state, and federal levels enhances the likelihood that the reform effects will be lasting (Clune, 1998; Fullan, 2004; McNeil, 2000; Stringfield, Datnow, & Ross, 1998).

Although reform efforts aimed at individual schools have had success, the gap in achievement remains, especially in many high poverty areas and in schools and districts serving large numbers of low-income and diverse students (Datnow & Stringfield, 2000).
A growing number of researchers and scholars have concluded that districts play a fundamental role in what occurs in schools and classrooms (Elmore & Burney, 1997; Hightower, 2002; Massell & Goertz, 2002; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003; Murphy & Hallinger, 1988; Skrla, Scheurich, & Johnson, 2000; Snipes, Doolittle, & Herlihy, 2002; Spillane, 1996; Spillane & Thompson, 1997; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Although there are varying lists of characteristics in studies of effective schools and effective districts, strong leadership throughout the organization is documented as a characteristic in virtually every study. Coupled with this understanding of the importance of the role of the district in sustaining improvement in teaching and learning is the emphasis on strong leadership throughout the organization.

Research on the role school districts play in the improvement of teaching and learning has been conducted largely within the past 10-15 years. The studies have identified characteristics and actions that shed some light on the relationship between school district policy, programs, and practices and the improvement in student learning (Anderson, 2003; Marsh, 2000). What is lacking is a description of how districts actually go about doing these things organizationally. Specifically, in what ways do district leaders and school leaders, particularly school leadership teams, interact to build capacity for improvement in teaching and learning? More specifically, how well is the district’s theory of action articulated and understood in the district? Do schools share the district’s theory of action? Are there specific linkages between district leadership, principals, and school leadership teams that facilitate district/school interactions? How does the district support and interact with important school structures such as school leadership teams? To answer these questions, this embedded case study explored the relationships and
interactions between central office leadership, principals, and school leadership teams as the teams engaged in an effective schools process reform effort. The case study district has been designated year-two program improvement for failing to meet the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) targets for English-language learners and students with disabilities and is engaged in developing and implementing strategies designed to improve teaching and learning. The study also provides a unique opportunity to examine in what ways providing professional development to a subset of school leadership teams within the district may facilitate district/school interactions.

Rationale for Study

The importance of studying the relationships and interactions between a district and its schools needs to be placed in the larger context of research on school improvement efforts. The following sections will first trace the evolution of improvement research from the focus on the school as the unit of change to the current focus on the district as the unit of change. Additionally, research suggests that system-wide leadership capacity building in the form of strong instructional leadership by principals and school leadership teams correlates to improved teaching and learning and holds the promise of building coherence between a district and its schools. Finally, researchers propose that schools and districts operate as interdependent systems and the development of supportive linkages between the two is necessary to build system-wide capacity and capital in support of reforms focused on improving teaching and learning.

Effective Schools Research—A Focus on the School as the Unit of Change

With the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965, federal funds were authorized for educators’ professional development,
instructional materials, resources to support educational programs, and promotion of parental involvement. Initially, the focus was on schools as the unit of change. Concerned with the disparities in student achievement, particularly between White students in the suburbs and minority students attending inner-city schools, the federal government supported a nationwide study that surveyed the availability of educational opportunity. The study, commonly referred to as *The Coleman Report* (Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood, & Weinfeld, 1966) had a profound impact on the perceptions of schooling in the United States. Coleman and his colleagues concluded that the primary determinant of student achievement was not the school, but the socioeconomic status and home background of the student. A reanalysis of the Coleman et al. data completed by Jencks, Smith, Ackland, Bane, Cohen, & Grintlis (1972) corroborated the findings of *The Coleman Report* with the researchers concluding that, “everything else—the school budget, its policies, the characteristics of teachers—is either secondary or completely irrelevant” (p. 256).

This conclusion that school inputs had little chance of overcoming the influence of students’ backgrounds has been cited by many as the impetus for the Effective Schools’ Movement in which researchers identified a body of evidence demonstrating that students from impoverished backgrounds can learn and that schools indeed do have control over factors necessary for student mastery of the core curriculum (Brookover et al., 1979; Edmonds, 1979; Levine & Lezotte, 1995; Mortimore et al., 1988; Rutter et al., 1979; Teddlie & Stringfield, 1993; Weber, 1971). Early effective schools researchers identified practices, policies, and philosophies common in schools identified as being effective. Ron Edmonds, one of the most well-known researchers in the effective schools
movement of the 1970s shifted the focus from the inputs of schooling to the processes of schooling and, through a compilation of his research findings and the research findings of others, identified five correlates common in effective schools that were linked strongly with student achievement. These five factors included (a) strong administrative leadership, (b) an emphasis on basic skill acquisition, (c) high expectations for student achievement, (d) a safe and orderly atmosphere conducive to learning, and (e) frequent monitoring of student progress (Edmonds, 1979). This early work on school effects has been repeatedly confirmed in many subsequent studies (Brookover et al., 1979; Chrispeels, 1992; Levine & Lezotte, 1995; Mortimore et al., 1988; Rutter et al., 1979; Teddlie & Stringfield, 1993) and illustrates the need to retain a focus on individual schools in the reform process.

**Whole School Restructuring**

The focus on the school as the unit of change continued with the School Restructuring Era, begun in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which later gave way to Comprehensive School Reform (CSR). The foremost messages of this era were that school improvement efforts had been too narrowly focused and that real educational reform would require a restructuring of the basic organization of schools. During this era, the focus of school improvement efforts shifted from schools serving the disadvantaged to a focus on creating schools able to better prepare all students for the workforce of the 21st century (Teddlie & Stringfield, 2006). Reforms focusing on the school as the unit of change intensified with the release of *A Nation at Risk* by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) resulting in a flood of school improvement initiatives. During this same time period, school districts were often vilified as being impediments to
reform efforts (Anderson, 2003; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Finn, 1991 as cited in MacIver & Farley, 2003; Tyack, 2002). By the early 1990s, educators and researchers became aware that just focusing on single school improvement was not yielding the desired results. The U.S. Department of Education reported that “stagnation at relatively low levels appears to describe the level of performance of American students” (DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

District Role in School Reform

Over the past 15 years, there has been a renewed focus on the role of the school district in relation to sustained school improvement. Several studies examined the key role that districts play in mediating state standards for instruction and their potential to lead district-wide school improvement (Elmore & Burney, 1997; Hightower, 2002; Massell & Goertz, 2002; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003; Murphy & Hallinger, 1988; Skrla et al., 2000; Snipes et al., 2002; Spillane, 1996; Spillane & Thompson, 1997; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). These studies suggested that the district plays an essential role in promoting, or inhibiting, the improvement of teaching and learning in American schools. They showed that some districts do quite well in supporting their schools’ reform and suggest that district reform is essential to successful, sustained school-level reform. For example, McLaughlin and Talbert in their study of 15 districts in California, concluded that successful reforming districts invest in learning throughout the organization through (a) a system approach to reform, (b) developing a learning community at the district office, (c) developing a coherent focus on teaching and learning, (d) support of professional development, and (e) data-based inquiry and accountability. Others have found similar results (Snipes et al.; Togneri & Anderson) pointing to the critical need to
better understand the linkages that connect districts and their schools, a focus of my study.

*The Importance of Building Leadership Capacity*

A common element in the research on effective schools and districts is that strong leadership is essential for improvements in teaching and learning. With increasing demands on school leaders, Leithwood and Riehl (2003) in their extensive review of the research on school leadership, concluded that the changing needs of educational systems can be met by improvements in leadership capacity. Lambert (2002) defined leadership capacity as “broad based, skillful participation in the work of leadership. In schools with high leadership capacity, learning and instructional leadership become fused into professional practice” (p. 38). Schools with high leadership capacity have specific features in common: skillful participation, vision, inquiry, collaboration, reflection, and student achievement.

Researchers proposed that school leadership teams can play an integral role in designing and implementing practices that improve student achievement (Chrispeels, 2004; Chrispeels, Brown & Castillo, 2000; Chrispeels, Castillo, & Brown, 2000; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). The practice of distributing leadership across the organization in order to capitalize on the strengths and abilities of organization members can be one way of building greater coherence and alignment between schools and the district office (Camburn, Rowan, & Taylor, 2003; Copeland, 2003; Elmore, 1999; Gronn, 2000; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). Less studied are the linkages between a district and its schools that support and/or constrain the building of coherence and alignment, which is the focus of my study.
Linkages Between Districts and Schools

In exploring the linkages between districts and schools, several factors have emerged that suggest the kind of linkages and actions that may be needed to build coherence and alignment. Researchers have identified strong leadership, system-wide implementation of research-based instructional practices, system-wide and school-embedded professional development, and collaborative relationships as integrated, interrelated themes correlated with district-wide improvement in teaching and learning (Elmore & Burney, 1997; Hightower, Knapp, Marsh, & McLaughlin, 2002; Snipes et al., 2002; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Senge maintains that organizations are interconnected systems with interconnecting parts that are dependent on one another and influence one another (Senge, 1990). Spillane and Thompson (1997) argue that as interconnected systems, a district’s capacity for successful reform implementation hinges on the interactions of human capital, social capital, and financial resources. Taking the lead from the work of Senge and Spillane and Thompson, Lasky (2004) argues that, “Understanding interdependence between organizations and individuals in a policy or reform system requires research that examines the linkages across the system that connects people, resources, and organizations” (p. 3). An important capacity not addressed by Spillane and Thompson or Lasky is intellectual capital, which Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) define as the “knowledge and knowing capability of a social collectivity, such as an organization, intellectual community, or professional practice” (p. 245). A study of these linkages and how they interact to build human, social, and intellectual capital is the primary focus of this study. Further studies are needed to understand the kinds of district actions that activate effective linkages between a district and its schools.
Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to investigate the linkages between central office leadership, principals, and school leadership teams in a program-improvement district and to explore how these linkages support and constrain the district’s efforts to build system capacity and capital in support of reforms focused on improving teaching and learning. The specific research questions that guide this study are:

1. What are the linkages between the central office and its schools that support and constrain school reform?
   a. What are the similarities and differences in perceptions of the linkages among three key stakeholders, central office leaders, principals, and school leadership teams?
   b. In what ways is the system using linkages to support school reform?
   c. In what ways is the system’s use of linkages constraining school reform?
   d. In what ways are school leadership teams serving as a resource linkage between the central office and schools in the reform process?

2. In what ways do the linkages enhance the human, social, and intellectual capacities needed for school reform?

Overview of Methodology

This study utilizes the concept of linkages between a central office and its schools to explore the relationship and interactions between central office leadership, principals, and school leadership teams in a program improvement district that is engaged in a professional development intervention based on effective schools research. The embedded case study approach is used to describe and analyze three subunits within the
district case: school leadership team members, principals, and central office leadership personnel. Yin (2003) defines a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). As such, the embedded case study allowed the researcher to gain significant insights into how central office leaders perceive their role as compared to the perceptions of their role by principals and school leadership team members in order to identify the linkages that support and constrain the district’s reform efforts.

As a descriptive and exploratory case study, this study incorporates qualitative data sources (interviews, focus groups, observations, field notes, and a document review). In addition, quantitative data consisting of a School Leadership Team Implementation Continuum (UCSB Center for Effective Schools, 2004) completed by each school leadership team member at the beginning and end of his or her first year of participation was used to assess team development, especially in his or her perceived relationships with the district. Qualitative data were coded to identify major themes and patterns. Quantitative data were analyzed utilizing descriptive statistics and the first level of statistical analysis (t-tests).

Significance of Study

The results of this study contribute to educational research in three ways: (a) by identifying linkages between the central office and schools and how key stakeholders perceive that the various linkages as supporting and/or constraining school-reform efforts, (b) by identifying the linkages that enable the case district and schools to build human, social, and intellectual capital in support of reforms focused on improving
teaching and learning, and (c) by identifying the ways in which school leadership teams, with professional development, may serve as a resource linkage between the central office and its schools.
CHAPTER 2

Review of Related Literature

Introduction to the Literature

With the passage of No Child Left Behind in 2002, states, districts, and schools are charged with developing research-based policies, programs, and practices that will result in quantifiable improvements in instruction and student achievement. Chapter 1 presented the case that early effective schools research identified specific factors or correlates in schools evidencing improved student achievement for low-income and diverse students in urban settings. Further research has suggested that reform efforts focused on the individual school as the unit of change have resulted in pockets of success, but that the achievement gap remains in some schools and districts serving high numbers of low-income and diverse students (Datnow & Stringfield, 2000). Until recently, researchers have ignored the district, blamed the district for allowing ineffective schools to exist, or questioned the need for school districts at all (Anderson, 2003; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Finn, 1991 as cited in MacIver & Farley, 2003; Tyack, 2002). Recent studies, however, provide evidence that specific strategies at the district level can have a positive influence on student achievement and result in district-wide improvements in teaching and learning (Elmore & Burney, 1997; Hightower, 2002; Massell & Goertz, 2002; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003; Skrla et al., 2000; Snipes et al., 2002; Spillane & Thompson, 1997; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Less studied is how a district and its schools interact to improve. A common characteristic identified in both the research on effective schools as well as the research on effective districts is the importance of strong
leadership in the organization. The intent of this study is to explore the relationships and interactions between central office leaders, principals, and school leadership teams as the school leadership teams participate in school leadership team training designed around the effective schools process. The purpose is to identify and understand the ways in which specific linkages between the central office and schools that may support or constrain efforts to improve teaching and learning.

This chapter examines research relevant to the research questions posed in chapter 1. First, I review the body of research regarding effective schools with a specific focus on processes identified in the literature as correlated with improved student achievement. Second, I analyze the research on effective districts with a focus on how this body of research overlaps with the effective schools research in the identification of effective processes correlated with improvements in teaching and learning. Third, I review the emerging body of literature that suggests that there are critical linkages between a district and its schools, which affect the implementation of reforms at the school level. Finally, the research on leadership particularly as it relates to building leadership capacity through leadership teams is examined to gain an understanding of the role that school leadership teams play in building capacity at the school site and in serving as a linkage between the district and its schools.

Research on Effective Schools

In their comprehensive compilation of school effectiveness research, Teddlie and Reynolds (2000) have categorized the school effectiveness research into three major strands: (a) school-effects research defined as early input-output studies as well as current research utilizing multilevel models, (b) effective schools research defined as research
concerned with the processes of effective schooling, and (c) school-improvement research defined as studies examining the processes whereby schools can be changed through the utilization of models increasing in sophistication that go beyond the simple applications of school effectiveness knowledge to “multiple lever” models (p. 3).

Teddlie and Reynolds (2000) place these strands of school effectiveness research in the United States into four overlapping stages that have evolved over the past 30 years. Stage 1, from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s, encompassed the input-output research focused on the effects of school resources (physical and human) on student outcomes. Stage 2, from the early to the late 1970s, centered on research commonly referred to as “effective schools” studies in which a wider range of school processes as well as a wider range of school outcomes were studied. Stage 3, from the late 1970s to the mid-1980s, centered on studies which identified factors correlated with improved student achievement and attempted to incorporate these effective schools “correlates” into schools through a variety of school improvement programs. Stage 4, from the late 1980s to the present, has involved research examining context factors and utilizing more sophisticated methodologies, resulting in higher-quality research in all three strands of the school effectiveness research.

The field of research dealing with school effectiveness is vast. The purpose of this section of the literature review is to focus on studies that have attempted to identify the factors (or correlates) of elementary and secondary schools identified as unusually effective and to review studies that highlight the importance of context in examining effective schools. In early studies, students in these schools had higher academic achievement as measured on achievement tests than those in most other schools in which
students were similar in socioeconomic status. The later studies focusing on context utilized other factors in addition to achievement data to document school effects and demonstrated a link between effective teaching practices in the classroom and effective schools.

Perhaps the most cited school-effects research studies that served as an impetus to the effective-schools research, are those of Coleman and his colleagues (Coleman et al., 1966) and the subsequent reanalysis of the data by Jencks et al. (1972) in which the researchers concluded that school inputs (teacher characteristics, salary, length of tenure, funding, size of school library, etc.) had little chance of overcoming the influence of students’ backgrounds. In these studies, student outcomes were measured by student achievement on standardized tests. One of the major criticisms of Coleman et al. was that the study focused too much on inputs and not enough on the process of schooling. This research set the stage for the next phase in school effectiveness research—the study of effective schools.

Rather than centered around school “inputs,” early effective schools researchers sought to dispute the results of Coleman et al. (1966) by conducting research focused on explaining what goes on within schools to produce different outcomes, resulting in a process-product model of change rather than a simple input-output model of change (Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000). The purpose of the effective schools research has been to identify effective schools and to understand why these schools had student outcomes that exceeded the norm. Following is a review of the seminal studies that identified factors common in what Levine and Lezotte (1995) have termed “unusually effective schools” (p. 525).
Effective schools researchers conducted studies demonstrating that all students can learn and that schools indeed do have control over factors necessary for student mastery of the core curriculum (Brookover et al., 1979; Chrispeels, 1992; Edmonds, 1979; Levine & Lezotte, 1995; Mortimore et al., 1988; Rutter et al., 1979; Teddlie & Stringfield, 1993; Weber, 1971). Early studies focused on urban, low-SES elementary schools in an effort to demonstrate that successes in these environments were proof that schools did make a difference. For example, Weber’s case study of four inner-city elementary schools in which third grade reading scores were above national norms, demonstrated that low-income and ethnically diverse students had reading levels equal to their White middle-class counterparts. Weber identified eight factors in these low SES schools that appeared to account for the high level of reading. These factors were: (a) strong instructional leadership; (b) an orderly, pleasant, and purposeful environment; (c) a strong emphasis on basic reading skills; (d) high expectations for students; (e) additional reading personnel; (f) use of phonics in the reading program; (g) individualization; and (h) careful evaluation of student progress. This study is significant as it is one of the first studies of effective schools to identify actual processes ongoing at schools as compared to the earlier studies by Coleman et al. (1966) and Jencks et al. (1972) that had focused on “static, historical school resource characteristics” (Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000, p. 7). Edmonds, regarded by many as the father of the effective schools movement, analyzed the results from studies he completed as well as results from a number of other early effective schools studies, and identified practices, policies, and philosophies common in each of the schools. These characteristics came to be known as the correlates of effective schools, so named because of their strong correlation with
student achievement. The initial five correlates—strong administrative leadership, an emphasis on basic skill acquisition, high expectation for student achievement, a safe and orderly atmosphere conducive to learning, and frequent monitoring of student progress—became known as the five-factor model and were the focal point of school reform in the 1970s and early 1980s (Marzano, 2003).

Another important early study that contributed to identifying factors that helped to explain differences in outcomes was a study by Brookover et al. (1979). This study was based upon survey data completed with fourth and fifth grade students, teachers, and principals selected from random samples of 68 public elementary schools in Michigan. Case study data of four selected low-socioeconomic schools paired on the basis of similar racial compositions and socioeconomic status (SES), but with significantly different outcomes, were also collected. An important aspect of this study was the focus on school context. The researchers examined the possible effects of the school as a social unit—hypothesizing that the social climate, structure, and role definitions, which characterize a school social system, will affect student acquisition of cognitive and other behaviors. Results indicated that school social climate and social structure make a significant contribution to achievement when SES and racial composition are controlled. Brookover et al. summarized the characteristics of an effective school social system that would produce high achievement as follows: (a) the school-evidenced assumptions, expectations, and norms that all children can and will learn at high performance levels; (b) patterns of interactions between students and teachers consistently reinforced and recognized appropriate learning behavior; and (c) failure was followed by immediate feedback and reinstruction with positive feedback reserved only for correct responses. Put
simply, results indicated that the school social system is no different from any other social organization in that “children learn to behave in the ways that the social system defines as appropriate and proper for them” (Brookover et al., p. 148). This study was particularly significant because it identified some of the key elements of school climate that impact student learning. Students’ sense of efficacy and the quality of rewards and recognition given were identified as important school and classroom variables contributing to higher achievement.

During this same period, studies of effective schools were taking place in the United Kingdom. Rutter et al. (1979) conducted an extensive and longitudinal study in twelve inner-city high schools in London. Purkey and Smith (1983) note that this case study was unique for several reasons. First, it was one of the first longitudinal studies tracking students over a five-year period. Second, the study examined secondary schools, which had not previously been studied extensively in the United States. Third, the study assessed more than test scores. Other student outcomes such as attendance, student behavior, examination success, and delinquency were measured. Similar to the Brookover et al. (1979) results, school climate emerged as a significant variable. More effective schools had the following processes in place: (a) classroom management that kept students actively engaged in learning activities, (b) classrooms in which praise was freely given and discipline applied infrequently but firmly, (c) a general attitude and expectations for academic success coupled with specific actions emphasizing those attitudes and expectations, (d) giving a high proportion of student responsibility for personal and school duties and resources, (e) immediate feedback to students on what was acceptable performance at school, (f) staff consensus on the values and aims of the
school as a whole, (g) the establishment of clearly recognized principles and guidelines for student behavior, (h) the provision of a clean, comfortable, and maintained physical environment, (i) demonstrated staff concern for individual and group student welfare, and (j) the treatment of students in ways that emphasized and assumed their success and potential for success (Rutter et al., 1979).

Mortimore and his colleagues (Mortimore et al., 1988) conducted an effective schools study of junior schools in London that built on the Rutter et al. (1979) study by refining and addressing some of the methodological questions that arose in reviews of the Rutter et al. study. The researchers followed a group of 2,000 students from 50 randomly selected schools over a 4-year period. Their close observations of these students in their classroom life resulted in the identification of twelve key factors within the control of the head teacher and teachers that were crucial and could be changed and improved. These factors were as follows:

1. *Purposeful leadership of the staff by the head teacher.* Head teachers in the more effective schools were actively involved in the school, knowledgeable about student progress, and knew when to involve the whole staff in decision making and when it was appropriate to exercise their decision making.

2. *The involvement of the deputy head.* Achievement was higher in schools where the deputy head was delegated responsibilities, shared in decision making, and was actively involved.

3. *The involvement of teachers.* Successful schools evidenced active teacher involvement in decision making about which classes they were to teach, curriculum development, and other policy decisions affecting them directly.
4. *Consistency among teachers.* Consistency among teachers in their approach to instruction had a positive impact on pupil progress.

5. *Structured sessions.* Teachers in effective schools structured the school day in broad strokes, taught students the necessary skills, and then allowed students to exercise a degree of independence, which allowed the teacher to spend time in high-priority areas.

6. *Intellectually challenged teaching.* Pupil progress was greatest in those schools where students were stimulated and challenged to use his or her imagination and creativity with higher-order questions and statements. Classrooms in these effective schools were bright and interesting, with teachers displaying interest and enthusiasm to the students.

7. *Work-centered environment.* Successful classrooms were businesslike and purposeful with the students evidencing enjoyment in work tasks.

8. *Limited focus within sessions.* Instructional time in the more effective schools focused on one or two curriculum areas with work geared specifically to the level of student needs, meaning that not all students were engaged in the same task—but all students were working in the same curriculum area.

9. *Maximum communication between teachers and pupils.* Students progressed faster in schools where there were frequent and high-level interactions between teachers and pupils.

10. *Record keeping.* In the more effective schools, head teachers and teachers monitored student progress through careful record keeping, many times passing examples of student work on to the student’s next teacher.
11. *Parental involvement.* Involvement of parents to include help in classrooms, educational visits, and meetings about their child’s progress had a positive influence on pupil progress and development.

12. *Positive climate.* The climate of the school was positive in nature for both students and teachers. Discipline was firm and fair. The emphasis was on rewards rather than punishments and teachers communicated their enthusiasm for teaching to the students. (Mortimore et al., 1988, pp. 250-255).

The methodology used in the Mortimore et al. (1988) study allowed the researchers to examine school-wide and classroom variables with results demonstrating a link between effective schools and effective teaching practices. Of critical importance is that the variables used to describe effective schools and effective teaching practices in the United Kingdom were quite similar to those that described effective schools and effective teaching practices in the United States, lending further credence to the effective schools research that had been conducted thus far.

That being said, by the mid-1980s in the United States there were serious critiques of the research methods used in the effective schools studies (Cuban, 1983; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Ralph & Fennessey, 1983; Rowan et al., 1983). A sample of these criticisms included “the use of skewed samples and flawed measures, the instability of test results, the lack of longitudinal studies, and the frequent ignoring of socioeconomic status” (Cuban, 1993, p. ix). Even with these criticisms, in 1989 more than 50% of American schools had undertaken school improvement efforts that were based on the five-factor model identified by Edmonds (1979) a decade earlier (Teddlie & Stringfield, 1993). The importance of the effective schools research for school improvement was demonstrated
with the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1988. This legislation specifically mandated the use of the effective schools correlates in improvement programs funded with ESEA Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 monies (General Accounting Office, 1989). As noted earlier, the five-factor model developed from research conducted primarily in low-SES urban elementary schools, and critics questioned the generalization of this model to schools in different locations or with different populations.

The Louisiana School Effectiveness Studies (LSES) (Teddlie & Stringfield, 1993) did much to establish rigor in the field of school effects research through the researchers’ systematic use of a careful research design, the use of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, and, importantly, the longitudinal collection of data. The LSES consisted of four phases: LSES I Pilot Study, LSES II Macro level study, LSES III Micro level longitudinal study, and LSES IV Micro level longitudinal study, continued, that occurred over a 10-year period. Aware of the concerns in the literature regarding context and stability, the researchers selected schools from different SES contexts in the Phase Two study and studied schools across time in Phases Three and Four. The longitudinal portion of the study followed 16 Louisiana elementary schools over an 8-year period. Overall, results confirmed findings from the early effective schools studies. For example, their data demonstrated that elementary schools could raise student achievement that persisted over time. They also gathered longitudinal data that showed that schools initially found to be effective could deteriorate over time. The data confirmed the importance of strong leadership by the principal. Of critical importance was their investigation as to whether schools were differentially effective in their ability to educate students and whether
schools from different contexts required different strategies for success. Specifically they found that context—meaning where students attended school, student background, and grade level—had an important effect on which effective schools strategies would be successful (Teddlie & Stringfield).

With respect to the importance of context, building on the efforts of Brookover et al. (1979), Edmonds (1979), and Rutter et al. (1979), the LSES II consisted of a stratified sample of 76 schools in which researchers collected data to include student SES, curriculum referenced and norm referenced test information, school structural characteristics, and school climate survey questionnaire responses from 74 principals, 247 teachers, and 5,389 students (Teddlie & Stringfield, 1993). In contrast to the Brookover et al. study, two design improvements strengthened the study. These included the use of student body SES as the context variable rather than ethnicity; and a typical school level was included as well as effective and ineffective levels (Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000). Results were indicative of a “partial replication” of the Brookover et al. findings, demonstrating, again, that schools with very similar inputs or resources can generate very different climates (Teddlie & Stringfield, p. 23). Specifically, there were some characteristics that distinguished the effective schools from the ineffective schools, regardless of the SES of the schools: (a) clear academic mission and focus, (b) orderly environment, (c) high academic engaged time-on-task, and (d) frequent monitoring of student progress (p. 36). The importance of strong instructional leadership by the principal was also confirmed. Additionally, results indicated that staffs at effective schools implemented different strategies for creating and maintaining effectiveness based on the SES context of the school.
Another multimethod, longitudinal study highlighting the importance of school context was that of Chrispeels (1992). Utilizing a case study methodology, Chrispeels examined eight schools in California undergoing restructuring programs involving an effective-schools assessment and planning process. The purpose of the study was to analyze factors that contribute to achieving and sustaining school effectiveness and to gain a better understanding of organizational changes required to achieve and sustain effectiveness. School populations included students with high, middle, and low SES. The qualitative data were analyzed using an interactive model of school improvement encompassing four components: (a) school climate and culture that encompassed a safe and orderly environment, rewards and recognition, shared mission, high expectations, and home/school relations; (b) curriculum and instructional practices encompassing test data analysis, curriculum alignment, academic focus, staff development to improve instructional practices, frequent monitoring, and time on task; (c) organizational structures and procedures, which included committee structures that foster collaboration and opportunities for shared decision making; and (d) leadership by district, principal, and staff, which involved the articulation of a shared vision, a commitment to change, shared leadership, and shared learning. Quantitative data included a 5-year analysis of test-score data from the California Assessment Program, allowing for both an assessment of the degree of effectiveness attained by each of the schools as well as a comparison among the schools in terms of overall achievement in reading and math for students in grades three and six. Results indicated that the school-improvement process had a positive impact on student achievement in five of the eight schools. The schools that achieved the highest degree of effectiveness implemented changes in all four
components; no single element accounted for high levels of achievement. Interestingly, Chrispeels also identified areas in which district leadership could support site-based improvement efforts: (a) setting a goal focus, (b) curriculum alignment, (c) well-planned staff development, (c) test data analysis, and (d) setting achievement targets. As will be seen in the section on effective districts, these areas are identified as strategies correlated with system-wide improvements in teaching and learning over the past 10 to 15 years.

Results of these later studies demonstrated that when schools plan for improvement, it is not enough to list the characteristics of school effectiveness. The school plan needs to consider the entire social context of the school. Where early effective schools researchers had been concerned with an equity orientation—providing schooling for poor, minority students in urban settings that allowed them to attain those skills that middle-class students attained—research by Teddlie, Stringfield, and their colleagues (Teddlie & Stringfield, 1993) demonstrated a shift to an “efficiency” orientation. Researchers became concerned with studying schools in a variety of contexts to determine how to produce better schools for all students rather than better schools for just the disadvantaged (Teddlie and Stringfield).

Table 2.1 summarizes the key effective schools studies and shows points of similarity and differences across the studies. As can be noted in the chart, the later studies of effective schools by Moritmore et al. (1988) and Chrispeels (1992) identified more specifics in terms of classroom practices. The Chrispeels study also found that the more effective schools in her study had more site-embedded professional development designed to enhance instructional practices, a finding that will be shown in the next section is critical to high-performing districts.
Table 2.1: Comparison of Key Effective Schools Studies Conducted from 1971 to 1992

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<td>Teacher leadership</td>
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<td>High Expectations</td>
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<td>Clear Mission/Shared Values</td>
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<td>Positive culture &amp; behavior approaches</td>
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<td>Focused consistent lessons, Professional development</td>
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<td>Intellectual challenging work</td>
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<td>High student engagement, time on task</td>
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<td>Frequent monitoring of progress &amp; feedback to students</td>
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<td>Student responsibility</td>
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<td>Individualization</td>
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<td>Parents informed &amp; engaged</td>
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<td>Consistent, aligned curriculum</td>
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To summarize, the research on effective schools began with the identification of characteristics of effective schools, commonly referred to as the five-factor model or the correlates of effective schools, based on studies of unusually effective schools in urban areas with high numbers of disadvantaged students evidencing higher achievement than their middle class peers. Over the years, studies have improved in methodologies and have broadened the research to include the comparison of effective schools with
ineffective schools as well as the study of schools in a variety of contexts. This later research confirms there are characteristics that distinguish the effective schools from the ineffective schools, regardless of the SES of the schools. Additionally, results of these later studies confirmed that staff at effective schools implement different strategies for creating and maintaining effectiveness based on the SES context of the school. Table 2.1 documents that effective schools research has identified several characteristics of effective schools that have overlapped with those identified by Edmonds (1979).

Over the course of several years, researchers have reviewed the numerous effective schools studies and added or renamed Edmonds’ (1979) original five effective schools correlates. Levine and Lezotte (1995), in their extensive review of the effective schools research, identified nine “effective schools correlates” frequently cited in the literature as “generators of unusual effectiveness” (p. 525). More recently, Teddlie and Reynolds (2000) discuss nine “processes of effective schools” (p. 144). Overlapping strongly with Edmonds, Levine and Lezotte, and Teddlie and Reynolds, Taylor (2002) presents a summary of seven more broadly based correlates relevant to the effective schools in the 21st century specified as follows: (a) clearly stated and focused school mission, (b) safe and orderly climate for learning, (c) high expectations for students, teachers, and administrators, (d) opportunity to learn and student time-on-task, (e) instructional leadership by all administrators and staff members, (f) frequent monitoring of student progress, and (g) positive home/school relations (p. 377). As will be seen in the next section reviewing the research on effective districts, there is considerable overlap between the characteristics of effective schools and those of effective districts.
The effective schools studies provide an important baseline for understanding how individual schools can improve instruction and student achievement. With the exception of the Chrispeels (1992) study, the studies leave unexplored the school and district relationships and how the district may support or impede individual school efforts. The following section explores the literature regarding effective districts.

Research on Effective Districts

This section of the literature review discusses the research on districts, which informs the unit of analysis in my study. Until recently, researchers have either ignored the district, have blamed the district for allowing ineffective schools to exist, or have questioned the need for school districts at all (Anderson, 2003; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Finn, 1991 as cited in MacIver & Farley, 2003; Tyack, 2002). Elmore (1993) argued that there was little evidence that districts played a constructive role in instructional improvement. Others posited that school autonomy was the most effective prerequisite for school effectiveness and that school reform was destined to fail with the existing public education system as it inhibits the emergence of effective organizations and stifles student achievement (Chubb & Moe). Some scholars even questioned the need for school districts at all (Finn, 1991 as cited in MacIver & Farley; Tyack). However, Chrispeels and Gonzalez (2006) argue that focusing improvement efforts on the individual school often leaves the district out, ultimately affecting the depth and sustainability of the change efforts. As a result, reform efforts at the school level may be undermined by lack of funds and district practices and policies that may be counter to the school’s improvement model goals. Research suggests that improvement efforts focused solely on the individual school may result in temporary fixes and that coordinated support from the
school district along with local education authority, state, and federal levels enhances the likelihood that the reform effects will be lasting (Clune, 1998; Fullan, 2004; McNeil, 2000; Stringfield, Datnow, & Ross, 1998).

Datnow and Stringfield (2000), in their summary of major findings from diverse multiyear studies conducted by the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk (CRESPAR), would concur, concluding that detailed quantitative and qualitative data gathered at sets of schools indicate that while some schools improve, others fall back. They note that schools using similar reforms have differing results with some schools showing dramatic improvements, while others using the same reforms do not improve. Lastly, some schools fail to institutionalize reform models that have demonstrated multiyear success while other schools have maintained successful reforms for 10 years or longer. They argue that in order for reforms to sustain, coordinated and systematic support must come from multiple levels. Recent research has suggested that school districts play an important role in providing coordinated, systematic support resulting in improvements in teaching and learning across the district rather than just within individual schools.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 has placed the district back at the forefront as federal and state accountability mandates hold districts increasingly responsible for the improvement in teaching and learning in their schools. Based on the effective schools literature, we know that school reforms have led to higher student achievement. After 30 years of focus on schools as the unit of change, results from research on the role of the district recognizes that schools are embedded in systems and that the relationship between a district and its sites may be critical to improvement in teaching and learning.
Many policy makers, reform organizations, and foundations have a renewed confidence in the role of the district office in bringing about coherence in a complex policy environment and in promoting an environment of equity across all schools in a system. There is a growing body of research that school districts are important agents of change and units of instructional renewal (Anderson, 2003; Chrispeels & Gonzalez, 2006; Hightower et al., 2002; MacIver & Farley, 2003; Marsh, 2000; Shannon & Bylsma, 2004). Recent studies provide evidence that certain actions at the district level can have a positive influence on student achievement and result in district-wide improvements in teaching and learning (Elmore & Burney, 1997; Skrla et al., 2000; Snipes et al., 2002; Togneri & Anderson, 2003).

Research on the role of the district in improving teaching and learning has as its basis the effective schools research (MacIver & Farley, 2003) and those who criticized the approach for its failure to consider the district context (Cuban, 1984; Purkey & Smith, 1983). Marsh (2000) examines the emerging body of literature regarding the key roles that districts play in improving teaching and learning. She asserts that studies of school districts tend to focus on two distinct lines of inquiry: studies of how districts relate to state policies and studies of district strategies for system-wide improvements and the effect these strategies and contexts have on schools and teachers. Marsh reviews the literature regarding district-state relations and concludes that numerous studies demonstrate that there are variations both across and within districts as they implement state policies. Furthermore, she concludes that districts both intentionally and unintentionally alter state policy to fit local contexts. She finds that studies regarding district-school relations point to strategic actions by districts, which result in the creation
of new roles for teachers, the alteration of teaching practices, and ultimately the improvement in student achievement. Since the purpose of this study is to examine how districts interact with school structures, in particular, school leadership teams, the focus of this literature review will be on studies of district relations with schools and teachers.

Several studies have developed lists of actions that characterize districts evidencing improvements in teaching and learning. When discussing the district role in change, various terms have described district actions and policies connected with educational reforms. District actions are described as “policies” (Elmore, 1993), “characteristics” (Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001; Murphy & Hallinger, 1988), or “strategies” (Massell & Goertz, 2002; Snipes et al., 2002; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). For purposes of this literature review, the term “strategy” describes district practices associated with improvements in teaching and learning. It is important to note that the effective strategies are integrated and interrelated. Evidence suggests that successful school districts mobilize and support system-wide improvement through the comprehensive use of these strategies in a coordinated way, not the selective use of some strategies over others or in isolation (e.g. Snipes et al.; Togneri & Anderson).

Early research by Murphy and Hallinger (1988) identified a group of 12 effective districts (5 Elementary, 3 High School, and 4 Unified) in California. Districts were selected on the basis of their ability to promote high levels of student achievement on standardized tests (aggregated to the district level) after controlling for socioeconomic status, previous achievement, and language proficiency. Utilizing a case study format, the researchers gathered qualitative data through interviews with superintendents and document analyses. They examined the overall level of student achievement across
subjects, growth in achievement over time, and consistency of achievement across subgroups over time and developed a list of district strategies that correlate with districts that were instructionally effective. Strong, instructionally focused leadership from the superintendent and district level administrators, an established instructional and curricular focus, consistency of instructional activities, and an emphasis on monitoring instruction and curriculum were identified as strategies utilized in effective districts. As organizations, these districts evidenced a balance of district control and school autonomy and collaboration with strong leadership.

Qualitative studies of high performing districts in Texas (Ragland, Asera, & Johnson, 1999; Skrla et al., 2000) examined factors at the district level that led to high academic achievement for all subgroups in these districts. The researchers found important similarities among the successful districts and grouped them into themes similar to those identified by Murphy and Hallinger (1988). Themes included a climate of urgency to improve achievement for all students, a sense that student achievement was seen as the responsibility of every staff member in the district, a shared sense that the central office was a support and service organization for schools, coherent professional development based on research, and alignment of curriculum, instruction, instructional practice, and assessment.

In another early study, Chrispeels and Pollack (1989) examined activities by the district that supported or constrained the achievement of equity in schools. The researchers defined equity schools as those schools having equitable achievement scores as measured by results on the California Assessment Program across all economic subgroups of the school’s population. In an earlier study, Pollack, Chrispeels, and Watson
(1987) had examined the differences found in 10 elementary schools that had participated in training based on the effective schools process. The results of the study identified important organizational, instructional, and cultural differences between the equity and nonequity schools that appeared to correlate with district office practices that supported principals in their improvement efforts. Chrispeels and Pollack (1989) analyzed survey data from principals and district administrators in six districts that met equity criteria based on organizational, instructional, and culture/climate practices as well as leadership control functions. Parallel leadership practices emerged in equity schools and equity districts: (a) setting expectations based on a common vision, (b) articulation of goals and objectives, (c) being proactive and highly visible, (d) focusing on curriculum and instruction, (e) modeling and monitoring change, and (f) providing support through staff development and coaching (p. 306). Organizational policies and practices common in equity schools and districts included: (a) academic focus, (b) goals and objectives shaped organizational activities, (c) instructional leadership, (d) shared curriculum decision making, and (e) staff development (p. 306). Common instructional policies and practices included the following: (a) focus on curriculum and instructional improvement, (b) testing and use of test results, and (c) support services for students with special needs (p. 306). In the area of culture and climate, the only characteristic shared by equity schools and equity districts was high expectations. Although acculturation, communication, rewards and recognition, and collegiality and collaboration were essential in equity schools, these aspects were not significant at the district level (p. 306).

Based on the theory of systemic change, research in New York’s Community District #2 provides a wealth of evidence regarding effective strategies at the district level
resulting in improved teaching and learning (Elmore & Burney, 1997). Specifically, District #2 used extensive professional development along with a strong culture that placed value on instructional improvement to change instructional practices that, over time, led to dramatic improvements in test scores for a diverse student population. Results of the study by Elmore and Burney document that improving student performance requires very specific organizational conditions for instructional leadership. The strategy utilized by Community District #2 to improve teaching and learning focused partly on the process of systemic change and partly on specific professional development activities. Central to this strategy was the belief that instructional improvement involves both administrators and teachers working collaboratively on a coherent set of actions and programs. The researchers identified seven key principles of the strategy: (a) it is about instruction, (b) change is a multistage process, (c) shared expertise drives instructional change, (d) system-wide focus, (e) good ideas come from talented people working together, (f) set clear expectations, then decentralize, and (g) collegiality, care, and respect. Elmore and Burney (1999) note that New York’s Community District #2 offers “an ‘existence proof’ that it is possible for local districts to be agents of serious instructional improvement” (p. 264).

The study of reforms in San Diego City Schools (Darling-Hammond, Hightower, Husbands, LaFors, Young, & Christopher, 2006; Hightower, 2002; Hubbard, Mehan, & Stein, 2006) involved both a theory of instruction about teaching and learning brought from the former superintendent of New York City’s Community District #2 and a theory of change. San Diego City Schools, the eighth largest school system in the United States, took a radical approach to orient the district bureaucracy around systemic instructional
change. The district superintendent utilized a theory of change that “countered the views of incrementalism and the assertions of up-front buy-in and instead centered around the belief that systemic instructional reform in a district that was entrenched in structures must begin with a big boom or jolt to destruct pre-existing structures, cultures, and norms before new reforms or support structures can take hold” (Darling-Hammond et al., p. 138).

Utilizing a mixed-methods approach involving survey data, semistructured interviews and focus groups with more than 150 participants to include administrators, teachers, site principals, union officials, community members, and state policy makers, observations of district events, and extensive document review, the researchers chronicled the reform over a 5 year period (Darling-Hammond et al., 2006). Among key reform strategies were: (a) a massive investment in intensive professional development focused on first developing teachers’ and principals’ skills in literacy instruction and later developing their expertise in mathematics, science, and other subjects; (b) an overhaul of personnel practices in order to recruit and retain high quality teachers and principals; (c) a redesign of administrative responsibilities that involved assigning instructional leaders to work with principals to improve the quality of teaching at the building level; (d) reallocation of resources to the classroom level resulting in a downsizing of the district office; (e) development of a centralized approach to guidance regarding curriculum and teaching that was based on research on teaching and learning; and (e) efforts to develop a culture of shared expertise and professional accountability to support instruction. Not surprisingly, many of these strategies mirror those found by Elmore and Burney (1997) in New York’s District #2. The study documents gains in student achievement in reading
and mathematics as well as transformations in teaching practices particularly at the elementary and middle-school levels. Darling-Hammond et al. noted that although gains in achievement had been made, the top-down approach used by the central office could, in the long run, prove counterproductive. This finding was echoed in another study of the San Diego reform, which suggested that the top-down approach failed to generate a shared understanding of the meaning of the reforms by all educators in the system. This inhibited organizational learning in that many educators in the system, even though they perceived that the changes may benefit student learning, resisted the reforms because they viewed them as rigid mandates (Hubbard et al., 2006).

Massell and Goertz (2002) in their 3-year case study of standards-based reforms in 23 districts across eight states found three common strategies used by districts to build capacity: (a) increasing professional knowledge and skill, (b) strengthening and alignment of instructional guidance, and (c) use of data to guide improvement in instruction. Additionally, Massell (2000) identified a fourth strategy: targeting interventions on low-performing students and/or schools. Interviews with teachers regarding districts’ capacity-building strategies suggest that teachers valued consistency and focus, sufficient time and support to implement changes in practice, and relevance of the strategies to their daily work (Massell & Goertz). In terms of district control over schools, results indicated that school empowerment was a key strategy for supporting instructional reform, meaning that most districts practiced a balance between loose and tight control, confirming the findings that Murphy and Hallinger (1988) had made 10 years earlier. This idea of balance seemed to have been achieved in the reform of New York’s District # 2, but appeared to be less present in the San Diego case studies.
Togneri and Anderson (2003) completed a cross-case analysis of five high-poverty districts identified as making strides in student achievement and found seven common strategies utilized by districts to improve instruction and student performance:

1. Key leaders accepted ownership of challenges identified through public accountability data
2. A system-wide approach to improving instruction was established
3. A vision focused on student learning guided instructional improvement
4. Instructional decision making was database
5. A coherent approach to professional development
6. Redefined leadership roles
7. There was a district-wide commitment to sustaining reform over the long haul

Although many of their findings were similar to other district studies, significant in this study was the emphasis on a redefinition and expansion of instructional leadership involving multiple stakeholders through: (a) an intentional and focused engagement in ongoing dialogue to promote collaboration and trust between stakeholders and (b) a focus on the right work with accountability shared by stakeholders (p. 32).

Snipes et al. (2002) completed an exploratory case study of three urban districts and a portion of a fourth selected based on their improved academic achievement across the district as a whole, while also reducing racial differences in achievement. The successful districts evidenced preconditions for reform to include a prolonged period of political and organizational stability and a consensus by all stakeholders on the reform strategies. Since turnover in superintendent leadership has been noted as a challenge for many low-performing districts, their identification of stability as a precondition for high
performance is noteworthy. The researchers found that these effective districts had eight strategies in common:

1. A district-wide focus on student achievement and specific achievement goals
2. Concrete accountability systems that went beyond the state requirements in order to hold all stakeholders responsible for producing results
3. A focus of resources on the lowest performing schools
4. The adoption of uniform curriculum and instructional approaches across the district supported by the district through professional development
5. The role of the district office was to drive reforms to the classroom level by guiding, supporting, and improving instruction
6. A commitment to data-driven decision making and instruction by providing assessment data to staff along with training in its use
7. Reforms focused on the elementary levels instead of trying to reform the entire district at once
8. Intensive instruction in reading and mathematics was provided to middle and high school students (Snipes et al., 2002, p. 5)

Findings from this study are particularly significant because Snipes and his colleagues compared the successful districts with districts that had not seen similar improvements, allowing the researchers to develop hypotheses about the reasons for improvement in achievement. Comparison districts evidenced several important differences that prevented them from achieving similar gains: (a) a lack of clear consensus among key stakeholders regarding district priorities/strategies for reform, (b) a lack of clear, specific standards and achievement goals, timelines and consequences, (c) a lack of responsibility
by the district office regarding improving instruction or providing cohesive instructional strategies district-wide, (d) little or no connection between the policies and practices of the district office and changes in classroom teaching and learning, and (e) multiple and conflicting curricula and instructional expectations given by the district with schools left alone to decipher (pp. 5-6).

Another study linking district strategies to improved student outcomes is one completed by McLaughlin and Talbert (2003) over a 4-year period involving districts in California. Utilizing multilevel survey data in the San Francisco Bay Area and case study data collected in two San Francisco Bay Area districts and San Diego City Schools, McLaughlin and Talbert offer evidence that the district has an effect on school reform progress and improved student outcomes. The study addressed questions of whether districts matter and what reforming districts do to achieve systemic change and to maneuver though the hazards associated with systemic change. The researchers examined the effect of district culture and reform support on school organization outcomes encouraged by the reform through longitudinal survey data collected from teachers at 18 schools in 15 districts participating in the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC). To determine what reforming districts do, McLaughlin and Talbert surveyed district administrators from 58 of the 118 Bay Area school districts to determine patterns of district actions. Student academic outcomes were measured based on longitudinal SAT-9 test data from the California Department of Education. The researchers identified five ways in which the reforming districts promote and invest in learning throughout the organization: (a) a system approach to reform, (b) learning community at the central office level, (c) coherent focus on teaching and learning, (d) a stance of supporting
professional learning and instructional improvement, and (e) data-based inquiry and accountability (p. 10). The most fundamental aspect of the district role is its focus on the system as the unit of change. Through system-wide communication and strategic planning, effective districts develop a culture of shared norms. In essence, effective districts in their study developed capacity by playing a strategic role in leading and supporting school reform.

Table 2.2 summarizes the strategies used by districts to engage in system-wide reforms to improve teaching and learning. The most salient findings identify the strategies of strong instructional leadership, a system-wide focus on achievement, and consistency of instruction as commonly found in effective districts. Other common strategies utilized by effective districts include district guided curriculum and aligned assessment, coherent professional development, frequent monitoring and use of data for decision making as well as the existence of a shared vision, responsibility, and expertise.
Table 2.2: Comparison of Factors Found in Studies of Effective Districts

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong Instructional Leadership</td>
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<tr>
<td>District-guided curriculum &amp; aligned assessment</td>
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<td>System focus on achievement, consistency of instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frequent monitoring &amp; use of data for decision making</td>
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<td>Balance of district control and support</td>
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<td>Climate of Urgency</td>
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<td>Shared vision, responsibility and expertise</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coherent professional development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collegiality and respect</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overhaul of district practices</td>
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<tr>
<td>Classroom focus, targeted interventions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Involvement of multiple stakeholders</td>
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Effective Schools and Effective Districts—An Overlap

A comparison of strategies employed by effective schools and effective districts, which have been correlated with improved teaching and learning, presents persuasive evidence that specific strategies at the school and district levels have a positive impact on student achievement. Findings from studies of high-performing schools and districts speak to policies and practices in place that support an ethical commitment to equity in student achievement. Table 2.3 provides a comparison of the strategies correlated with improved student achievement identified in the studies of effective schools and effective districts reviewed in this paper.
Table 2.3: Comparison of Key Effective Schools Correlates with Effective Districts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effective Schools Correlates</th>
<th>District Effectiveness Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructional leadership</td>
<td>Instructional leadership of central office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher leadership</td>
<td>Expected, but not explicit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High expectations</td>
<td>Focus on achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear mission/</td>
<td>Shared vision, responsibility and expertise, stakeholder agreement on reform plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared values</td>
<td>Shared vision, responsibility and expertise, stakeholder agreement on reform plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-wide positive culture &amp; behavior approaches</td>
<td>Collegiality and respect among staff at district and school levels (one study)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistent, aligned curriculum</td>
<td>Consistent and aligned curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focused consistent lessons</td>
<td>System focus on curriculum and instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District and site embedded professional development</td>
<td>Coherent professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High student engagement, time on task</td>
<td>Focus on classroom and targeted interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent monitoring of progress &amp; feedback to students</td>
<td>Frequent monitoring and use of data for decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents informed &amp; engaged</td>
<td>A few studies mention need to work with stakeholders and gain their agreement on reform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Climate of urgency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Balance of district control and site support and autonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overhaul of district practices and central office operations to support schools better</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can been seen in Table 2.3, there are considerable overlaps between the effective schools correlates and practices found in effective districts. These similarities in factors of effectiveness at different levels of the system are not surprising since both the school
and the district represent a part/whole relationship. In their 1989 study of equity districts and equity schools, Chrispeels and Pollack (1989) noted many of these similarities. One difference worth noting is that all effective-schools studies highlight the importance of a positive school culture, but only one study of effective districts reported that collegiality and respect was a factor. Three of the nine studies of effective districts found that it was important to have a balance of central control and school autonomy. In their study of San Diego City Schools, Darling-Hammond et al. (2006) note that the top-down approach used by the district office may in the long run prove counterproductive. It would appear that districts might need to take a page from the effective schools research and work harder to build a positive district culture. Results from McLaughlin’s and Talbert’s study clearly document that “for better or worse, districts’ actions and reform stance are strongly related over a 4-year period to their schools’ progress on a range of school culture outcomes sought by reform initiatives” (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2002, p. 174).

Another interesting contrast in the two sets of factors is that effective schools studies, especially later studies and those from England, documented classroom factors that contributed to student learning. Strong instructional leadership, consistent aligned curriculum, professional development, and frequent monitoring of progress are common strategies employed in effective schools as well as effective districts. The district studies indicate that effective districts are directing their reforms to the classroom level, but the focus is on insuring that teachers carry out a prescribed curriculum. Little attention is given to the quality of the relationship between students and teacher or that students are given intellectually challenging work. Since the focus of this study is on the linkages
between the district office and schools, especially leadership teams, these comparisons point to areas for exploration in the case study district and its schools.

Linkages Between Districts and Schools

The focus of my study is to explore the linkages between central office leaders, principals, and school leadership teams, and to investigate how these linkages support and/or constrain district efforts to build system capacity and capital. The early effective schools research identified correlates of unusually effective schools where students at risk demonstrated improved academic achievement. Research suggests that although reform efforts focused on the school as the unit of change have had success, the gap in achievement remains, especially in many high poverty areas and in school and districts serving large numbers of low income and diverse student populations (Datnow & Stringfield, 2000).

NCLB has created a more tightly coupled educational policy system with an emphasis on aligned accountability systems and curriculum frameworks as a means of improving student achievement (Clune, 1998). The result has been an increased demand for coordinated communication and distribution of resources across the system. The research regarding effective districts emphasizes coordinated efforts across the system when implementing reforms.

Senge (1990) has made the case that learning organizations are interconnected systems with interconnecting parts that are dependent on each other and influence each other. Taking the lead from the work of Senge (1990), Spillane and Thompson (1997), and others, Lasky (2004) posits that, “Understanding interdependence between organizations and individuals in a policy or reform system requires research that
examines the linkages across the system that connects people, resources, and organizations” (p. 3). To guide this study, I draw on the concepts of system capacities reflected in social, human, and intellectual capital. Coleman (1988) describes social capital as consisting of specific elements of social structures that enable its actors to act in productive ways. According to Coleman, social capital arises from the relationships among members of a community in three different forms: (a) trust, (b) access to information channels that provide a basis for action, and, (c) norms and sanctions within a community that promote common good over self-interest. Through a study of the education of youth, Coleman illustrated the crucial role of social capital in the creation of human capital, defined as knowledge and skills. Spillane and Thompson (1997) build on the work of Coleman in their study of why some districts made more progress than others in realizing the state’s vision for more challenging math and science instruction. They found that the variation had to do with the district’s capacity for learning new ideas and their capacity to do what the new policy asks and to share the reforms with others. Spillane and Thompson measure district capacity for reform by the dimensions of human capital, social capital, and financial resources. They expand on the economist definition of human capital as being not only knowledge and skills, but to include individual leaders’ commitment to reform and their disposition to learn in order to support the reform work. They define social capital as the social links within and outside of the district, together with the norms and trust to support open communication via these links, and financial resources allocated to staffing, time, and materials. An important capacity not addressed by Spillane and Thompson is intellectual capital, which Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) define as the “knowledge and knowing capability of a social collectivity,
such as an organization, intellectual community, or professional practice” (p. 245). Intellectual capital parallels human capital, but reflects explicit and tacit knowledge contextually and socially embedded within the organization. It is greater than the aggregate of individual human knowledge. Nahapiet and Ghoshal argue that strong social capital within an organization can enhance its intellectual capital, thus increasing its productive advantage. As noted earlier, Spillane and Thompson argue that a district’s capacity for successful reform hinges on the interaction of the capacities. What is less understood is how these capacities interact and how they can be leveraged and linked across the educational system to support school reform.

Increasing attention is being given to how the parts of the system are connected or linked (Datnow, Lasky, Stringfield, & Teddlie, 2006; Lasky, 2004). Lasky posits that these different types of capacity as described by Spillane and Thompson (1997) exist in varying degrees within the policy domains of a system and connect to one another by linkages. She defines a linkage as “in essence, a bridge which creates a connection between two otherwise disconnected points” (p. 2). She suggests that linkages can be structural as in federal, state, or district policies relative to reform. I expand structural to include practices and organizational arrangements designed to complete tasks. Other linkages include formal and informal communication regarding educational reform; ideological links reflecting the shared values, vision and goals and what constitutes good instructional practice; relational linkages, which include trusting professional relationships within and across levels of the system; resource linkages encompassing material, technological, and human capital brought to the system to enhance reform; and temporal links referring to the need for continuity over time. Lasky suggests that these
critical linkages between districts and schools affect the reform implementation at the school level. In this study, I explore what linkages were used by one school district and how these linkages supported or constrained their efforts to build system capacity and capital in support of school reform. Research over the past 10 to 15 years would support Lasky’s hypothesis as there is evidence that suggests that the district plays an important role in the improvement of teaching and learning, that districts and their schools must operate interdependently to build capacity, and that linkages across the system are necessary to improve teaching and learning.

While Lasky’s (2004) work is theoretical in nature, recent work by Knapp, Copeland, Ford, Markholt, McLaughlin, and Milliken (2003) and Knapp, Copeland, and Talbert (2003) has provided a practical framework that includes reflective ideas and tools for leaders in education. The framework offers five action areas for improvement and routes or “pathways” to advance professional and student learning, while constructing a system connecting and sustaining these efforts (Knapp, Copeland, et al., 2003, p. 5). In their extensive review of the research, Knapp, Copeland, Ford, et al. provide a compelling argument that powerful, equitable learning results when leaders engage three learning agendas: student learning, professional learning, and system learning. Each learning agenda acts as a context for the other two, meaning that what professionals learn can influence student learning and information about both student and professional learning impacts system learning. This learning in turn can reshape the experiences and actions of students and adults in the system (Knapp, Copeland, Ford et al., p. 17). Knapp and his colleagues label this interaction leading for learning and argue that it is essential to sustaining improvements in teaching and learning. Leading for learning involves
leadership carried out simultaneously by individuals at different levels of the system and with varying proximity to instruction. At the school level, this involves the work of principals, assistant principals, department heads, teacher leaders, instructional coaches, and others. At the district level, the superintendent, assistant superintendents, directors, coordinators, school board members, and others work across the district to support teaching and learning. Lasky describes this interdependence: “To capture the interrelations among social contexts, the reform process is analyzed as a co-constructed, ‘conditional process,’ ‘as a web of interrelated conditions and consequences,’ where the ‘consequences of actions in one context may become the conditions for the next’ (Hall & McGinty, 1997, p. 61)” (Lasky, 2004, p.4).

Where the research on effective schools and effective districts has identified a list of strategies correlated with improved teaching and learning, Knapp, Copeland, Ford, et al. (2003) and Knapp, Copeland, and Talbert (2003) have synthesized the research literature related to instructional leadership, school reform and renewal, teacher learning and professional community, teacher leadership, organizational learning, policy-practice connections, and education in high-poverty, high-diversity settings. Their synthesis has resulted in the identification of five areas of action for leaders to take as they work to improve student and professional learning in schools and districts. Within each action area, Knapp et al. list examples of specific behaviors at the district and school level that bring together the strategies employed by effective schools and effective districts. The result of their efforts is a practical framework designed to support leaders’ efforts to enable powerful and equitable learning for students in districts and schools. The five key
actions that allow school and district leaders to advance powerful and equitable student learning are:

1. *Establishing a focus on learning*—by persistently and publicly focusing their own attention and that of others on learning and teaching.

2. *Building professional communities that value learning*—by nurturing work cultures that value and support their members’ learning.

3. *Engaging external environments that matter for learning*—by building relationships and securing resources from outside groups that can foster students’ or teachers’ learning.

4. *Acting strategically and sharing leadership*—by mobilizing effort along multiple “pathways” that lead to student, professional, or system learning, and by distributing leadership across levels and among individuals in different positions.

5. *Creating coherence*—by connecting student, professional, and system learning with one another and with learning goals (Knapp, Copeland, Ford, et al., p. 18).

Within each of the action areas, Knapp, Copeland, Ford, et al. identify essential tasks for leaders and provide specific examples of what leading for learning might look like at the site and the district level. Table 2.4 provides a summary of the five actions and how they might be operationalized at the school and district level.
Table 2.4: Areas of Action and Examples in Schools and Districts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas of Action</th>
<th>Leaders in schools</th>
<th>Leaders in districts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Establishing a focus on learning</td>
<td>• Regularly visit classrooms</td>
<td>• Regularly visit schools</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Use student data for planning</td>
<td>• Collect student data and share with staff</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Focus performance evaluation, goal setting and faculty meetings on teaching and learning</td>
<td>• Focus decisions, resource allocation, and personnel evaluation on their contribution to student learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Building professional communities that value learning</td>
<td>• Create structures for regular staff interactions</td>
<td>• Work with union to establish provisions for collaborative work</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Allow staff a voice in decisions about teaching and learning</td>
<td>• Redefine work in terms of relationship to learning improvement</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Set up cycles of inquiry into teaching and learning</td>
<td>• Guide an inquiry process into district-wide organization and performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Engaging external environments that matter for learning</td>
<td>• Visit families and community groups to explain program of instruction and learning</td>
<td>• Educate school board members and make them a part of district learning community</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Establish educational opportunities for community members</td>
<td>• Promote the learning agenda with the media and community leaders</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Develop allies in the central office</td>
<td>• Develop allies at the state level</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Acting strategically and sharing leadership</td>
<td>• Locate and draw on staff expertise to develop school improvement initiatives</td>
<td>• Support the development of school-level leadership aimed at improving learning</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Create positions that share instructional leadership with the principal</td>
<td>• Evaluate and revise district curriculum and assessment policies to promote teaching and learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Consider curriculum and instruction issues along with workplace improvement</td>
<td>• Collaborate with teacher leaders and unions to provide teachers with time and resources to act on district and school improvement plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Creating coherence</td>
<td>• Build professional development based on data from student learning</td>
<td>• Develop data that provides information about student learning which can be used in professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Organize professional development around classrooms and particular problems of classroom practice</td>
<td>• Communicate persistently with schools and central office about learning</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>• Use inquiry into teaching and learning to plan for improvement.</td>
<td>• Allocate resources consistently in support of teaching and learning goals</td>
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An important aspect of the work of Knapp and his colleagues is their contention that through the action of *acting strategically and sharing leadership*, leaders “mobilize activity along pathways leading to student, professional, and system learning in the process” (Knapp, Copeland, & Talbert, 2003, p. 22). They posit that leaders at both the school and district level will have a greater likelihood of advancing learning goals for students, professionals, and the system when they activate improvement efforts along multiple pathways. Some pathways focus on curriculum, assessment, and accountability; others give attention to learners and learner support. Still others concentrate on conditions or structures affecting the work lives of teachers and some pathways center on professionals and their practice. These pathways offer concrete examples of what Lasky (2004) terms structural, formal and informal communication, relational, ideological, and resource linkages. These pathways or linkages allow system-wide interactions and development of the human, social, and material capacities that Spillane and Thompson (1997) argue are necessary for successful reform implementation. A critical question to be explored in this dissertation is do these linkage also help to build intellectual capital that allow the organization to generate new knowledge and collective action?

The framework developed by Knapp, Copeland, Ford, et al. (2003) and Knapp, Copeland, and Talbert (2003) in this complex environment of high-stakes testing and accountability indicates strong leadership has multiple dimensions and can be carried out by many stakeholders in the system. Clearly, effective leadership can no longer be the sole responsibility of a single individual but rather effective leadership is about developing system-wide leadership capacity. The following section will examine the
research regarding leadership capacity, with particular emphasis on distribution of leadership across the organization through expanding the role of the principal, the creation of professional learning communities, and finally the emergence of school leadership teams as a vehicle for building leadership capacity.

Leadership Capacity

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) argue that achievement standards at the state and national level focused on learning for all children have changed the playing field of educational accountability. School districts, schools, and teachers are under increasing pressure to perform and educational leaders are being held accountable not only for the procedures they establish, but for the performance of teachers and students under their charge. Researchers and practitioners are keenly interested in identifying the leadership practices that will ensure that schools and teachers engage in research-based strategies and practices necessary to improve teaching and learning.

With increasing demands on school leaders, Leithwood and Riehl (2003), in their extensive review of the research on school leadership, also conclude that the changing needs of educational systems can be met by improvements in leadership capacity building. Put simply, schools can no longer rely on the principal as the lone instructional leader if they wish to improve student achievement. Instead, they need substantial participation by other educators (Elmore, 1999; Lambert, 1998, 2002; Spillane et al., 2001). Lambert (2002) submits that educators and policy makers are in pursuit of a framework for instructional leadership that will produce school improvement which is sustainable. The development of leadership capacity in a learning organization holds the promise of providing this framework. Lambert defines leadership capacity as “broad
based, skillful participation in the work of leadership. In schools with high leadership
capacity, learning and instructional leadership become fused into professional practice”
(p. 38). Schools with high leadership capacity have specific features in common: skillful
participation, vision, inquiry, collaboration, reflection, and student achievement. Lambert
believes that “shared instructional leadership” links leadership with learning (p. 40).

With respect to how leadership is shared, Elmore (1999) believes that school
leaders are those who have the skills and knowledge to lead to the improvement of
instruction and student performance. It is the responsibility of school leaders to “guide”
instead of “control” teaching and learning. Elmore believes that teachers as the
“deliverers of instruction” have the best grasp of how to improve it. Thus, knowledge is
shared or “distributed” in what he calls “distributed leadership” (p. 5). He defines
distributed leadership as a system in which people operate in networks where expertise is
shared as opposed to the traditional hierarchical forms of leadership where there is a clear
division of responsibilities. Elmore believes that by distributing the responsibilities for
leadership and creating a coherent goal, improvement of instruction; the likelihood that
decisions made by principals and teachers will result in benefits for student learning is
increased. Hargreaves and Fink (2003) concur and note that for sustainable success in
education, teachers must see themselves as being leaders of their colleagues, as well as of
their classrooms. They posit that educational leaders need to create cultures of distributed
leadership, which will sustain over time and will result in the “deep learning and
sophisticated teaching that we need in the future” (p. 8).

Lambert (1998) also views the role of the school leader more broadly. She
proposes that we redefine leadership and think of it as a verb rather than a noun. Lambert
envisions leadership as a reciprocal process in which adults learn in a community and share goals and visions. In this community, leadership is engaging as it focuses not only on the learning of students, but on the learning of colleagues through dialoguing, inquiry, coaching, mentoring, and inviting new ideas. (p. 18). This active involvement by individuals at all levels of an organization is viewed as necessary for sustainable change linked to improved student achievement (Elmore, 1999; Spillane et al., 2001).

**Professional Learning Communities**

One method for engaging principals, teachers, and teacher leaders in active dialogue regarding effective teaching and learning is the establishment of professional learning communities (DuFour, 2003; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996; McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993). The importance of a professional learning community in supporting teachers grappling with today’s students and the intensive curriculum demands brought about by standards based reforms is well documented in a study completed by McLaughlin and Talbert (1993). Results of their study demonstrate that some teachers who struggled to change their teaching practices to better meet the needs of today’s students, became frustrated and were unable to sustain the changes in their practice. McLaughlin and Talbert found that the commonality for those teachers who were able to make and sustain effective changes to their teaching practices resulting in improved student learning was that they belonged to an active professional community, which provided the necessary support to transform their teaching. With respect to building leadership capacity for sustainable change, McLaughlin and Talbert concluded that a strong professional community, be it a department, school, network, or
professional organization, can offer the most opportunity for successful intervention and reform on the part of teachers.

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) argue that the most sophisticated empirical study, both conceptually and methodologically, of the effects of professional communities is that of Louis et al. (1996). The conditions found to contribute to a professional learning community in the study were structural conditions and human and social resources. Structural conditions included small school size; fairly simple, nonspecialized forms of school organization; scheduled teacher planning time; and the opportunity for teachers to have direct influence on decisions regarding teaching and learning. Human and social resources included supportive school leadership, openness to innovative strategies, feedback on teaching, and professional development opportunities. Leithwood and Riehl note that results of this study and others (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; and Newman & Associates, 1996; as cited in Leithwood & Riehl, 2003) provide evidence that participation in professional communities “promotes instructional program coherence across the school … stimulates growth in teachers’ instructional skills, enhances teachers’ sense of mastery and control over student learning, and builds teachers’ sense of responsibility for student learning” (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, p. 29). In sum, students benefit when teachers participate in professional learning communities.

Similarly, DuFour and Eaker (1998) believe that the development of professional learning communities offers schools the best strategy for school improvement. They believe the essential characteristics of a professional learning community include: (a) a shared mission, vision, and values; (b) collective inquiry; (c) collaborative teams; (d) action orientation and experimentation; (e) a commitment to continuous improvement,
and (f) results orientation (pp. 25-29). These strategies are very similar to those identified by Chrispeels (1992) when she surveyed schools regarding how the district can support improvements in teaching and learning at the school site. DuFour and Eaker argue that a professional learning community model offers an organizational focus that will lead to sustained school improvement. As proposed by them, the professional learning community approach can be an antidote to the isolation of teaching and address the character of the professional community as referenced by McLaughlin and Talbert (1993).

Since a focus of the study is on how district relationships and interactions with school leadership teams support and constrain reform efforts, it is important to note that several studies have examined ways in which districts build on the concept of professional learning community to improve instruction and achievement. McLaughlin and Talbert (1993) documented that the level of professional community within a district affected teachers’ sense of pride as well as their level of commitment to the profession. Teachers’ perceptions of their district cultures either enhanced or dampened aspects of their school or department culture. For example, a strong district community served to increase teachers’ professional motivation, even when they belonged to a weak department. McLaughlin and Talbert argue that the relationships (social capital) between a district and its teachers have powerful influences on teachers and teaching practices, a finding confirmed by Spillane and Thompson in their study of successful districts (1997). These influences are based on the norms, expectations and values that form professional community at the district level and not on hierarchical structures and controls. Similarly, Rosenholtz (1985), in her study of low income and rural districts in Tennessee, found that district organization and culture affected teacher commitment and attitudes. “Moving”
districts evidenced a clear focus on coherent instruction, kept staff informed regarding best practices, and encouraged risk taking and growth. These districts had a greater number of “moving” schools with higher levels of teacher commitment as compared to “stuck” districts with fragmented goals, policies and practices that resulted in schools and teachers with lower levels of commitment and progress. One of the four major capacity building strategies identified by Massell and Goertz (2002) included a district’s ability to build teacher knowledge and skills (human capital). Districts employing this strategy provided teachers with traditional and nontraditional professional development resulting in the development of successful school-level learning communities.

*Sharing Leadership Through School Leadership Teams*

The establishment of professional learning communities has the potential to build a collaborative culture at both the site and district level thus enhancing social capital. However, moving from the notion of professional community to the establishment of a culture in which school leadership is a shared responsibility provides the necessary next step in ensuring that a school operates effectively. Hargreaves and Fink (2003) concur and note that for sustainable success in education, teachers must see themselves as being leaders of their colleagues, as well as of their classrooms. They maintain that educational leaders need to create cultures of distributed leadership, which will sustain over time and will result in the “deep learning and sophisticated teaching that we need in the future” (p. 8). As noted earlier, individual school leaders can no longer manage the many responsibilities necessary to run an effective school without assistance from others (Marzano et al., 2005). Recognition of teachers as leaders stems from a new understanding about organizational development and leadership (York-Barr & Duke,
High stakes testing based on state standards in each curriculum area holds schools and districts accountable for student achievement. As teachers ultimately have control over what is taught and what is learned in their classrooms, developing their leadership capacity is deemed critical in order for them to mentor, coach, and increase effective instructional practices in others that will result in academic achievement for all students (Lieberman & Miller, 2004).

The importance of sharing leadership was demonstrated in a study carried out by Marzano et al. (2005). Their meta-analysis of research conducted over the past 30 years examined the relationship between school leadership and student achievement. Seventy studies, representing a sample size of 2,802 schools, approximately 14,000 teachers, and 1.4 million students, met the researchers’ rigorous criteria for selection. Marzano and his colleagues identified 21 leadership responsibilities and 66 practices associated with these leadership responsibilities. A key finding of the study is that the leadership of the principal significantly correlates with student achievement. They note, however, that it would be impossible for one school leader to master this complex assortment of skills. They conclude that the solution is for the focus of school leadership to shift from a single individual to a school leadership team. This shift will allow all 21 responsibilities to be adequately addressed. Marzano et al. maintain that an effective leadership team is an outgrowth of a “purposeful community” (p. 99). A purposeful community is defined as “one with the collective efficacy and capability to develop and use assets to accomplish goals that matter to all community members through agreed-upon processes” (p. 99).

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) would concur, noting that a growing body of research is examining the leadership practices of teachers and evidence suggests that
teacher leaders can assist other teachers in embracing goals, understanding what is needed to strengthen teaching and learning, and can work collaboratively toward improvement. Although we know that the principal plays a critical role in school reform, studies in the last decade have repeatedly shown that successful implementation of school reform requires active participation by teachers (Chrispeels, 2002). Chrispeels reports a number of educational reform programs require the creation of school leadership councils or teams as a structure to involve teachers. Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) propose that leadership must fulfill four primary tasks:

1. Setting Direction—Develop a clear, specific goal to unite and inspire
2. Developing People—Use a Strengths-based Reflexive Inquiry Process to guide the change process, develop the team, and develop the school
3. Designing the Organization for Success—Develop structures and processes that foster trust, coherence, shared leadership, organizational learning, and flexibility
4. Leading for Social Justice—Keep equity and excellence agenda central and critically examine teaching practices that enable all students to succeed

These same leadership tasks seem relevant to leadership teams as a frame for guiding and analyzing their work (Leithwood & Menzies, 1998). Chrispeels, Brown, et al. (2000) cite research that indicates that these teams have not always been successful in carrying out these tasks often because of a lack of training and clarity about their tasks. They note: “Nevertheless, the involvement of teachers and community in the school improvement process and the establishment of teams or councils is regarded as essential

My study examines in what ways district interactions with principals and school leadership teams engaged in a professional development intervention based on effective schools processes are perceived as supporting or constraining reform efforts. We know that teams are essential to organizational learning (Senge, 1990; Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton, & Kleiner, 2000). Chrispeels, Castillo, et al. (2000) note that studies of school-based management (SBM) have identified a number of factors that influence the effectiveness of leadership teams. The factors mentioned most frequently in studies are: (a) clarity of roles and responsibilities; (b) support from the district; (c) collaborative and supportive principal leadership; (d) positive relations with the school community; (e) training in how to function as a team and resolve conflicts; (f) knowledge of budgets, planning, and pedagogy; and (g) a focus on students and issues of teaching and learning (p. 23). The majority of studies on teams in the educational arena focus on teams in schools with few studies focusing specifically on school leadership teams (Chrispeels, Brown, et al., 2000; Chrispeels, Castillo, et al., 2000). In addition, Chrispeels and Martin (2002) note that “few studies have explored how existing school structures facilitate and constrain roles teams can play, the influence they can wield, and the actions they can take to improve student learning and enhance the profession” (p. 329).

Previously conducted studies confirm that the establishment of school leadership teams creates new roles and relationships for principals and teachers within schools and between the school and the district. For example, Chrispeels and Martin (2002)
conducted a multiple case study of four middle school leadership teams participating in school leadership team training designed to build the team’s capacity to engage in actions leading to “powerful learning for all members of the organization” (p. 334). The researchers collected quantitative and qualitative data to explore how the teams situated themselves in the overall organizational structure of the schools, what cultural and political factors supported or constrained the roles the leadership teams played and the influence they were able to wield, and the actions leadership teams were able to take to improve student learning and build professional community. In addition, the researchers explored how the leadership teams used the knowledge they acquired at the leadership team training to exercise power and influence to achieve their goals. Results indicated that context matters in that teams and educational leaders need to recognize the influence that existing organizational structures have on teams and the actions they are able to take. However, knowledge of the organizational structures and understanding of school and district micropolitical dynamics can also serve as leverage points for the construction of team roles and for the initiation of change by the leadership team. Of critical importance was the finding that the leadership team training enabled team members to take on the roles of “… communicators, staff developers, problem solvers, and leaders of change” (p. 327).

In another study of school leadership teams, Chrispeels, Castillo, et al. (2000) sought to understand which factors were predictive of effective school leadership teams as demonstrated by their ability to successfully focus on teaching and learning. Chrispeels, Castillo, et al. analyzed survey data from 71 elementary and 71 secondary school leadership teams that had received one full year of school leadership team training.
focused on developing group process skills and content knowledge regarding restructuring strategies, as well as learning to use research and data to improve teaching and learning. The researchers used a path analysis to test a model that identified relationships among factors most likely to have an influence on the team’s ability to focus on teaching and learning. Results indicated that the strongest predictor of a leadership team’s ability to focus on teaching and learning was the use of data collected within the school in order to identify needs and guide decisions for the future. Other findings particularly significant to my study were the importance of developing team skills in problem solving as a predictor of other positive relations, and the finding that the “…stronger the professional relations among the team, the stronger the link to the district” (p. 48). Specifically the researchers found that teams were more likely to connect with the district if the team felt the district was in support of their work. Chrispeels, Castillo, et al. concluded that district support may serve to enhance the team’s sense of responsibility for achieving district goals.

To summarize, school leadership teams can serve as an important linkage between the school and the district as both work to improve teaching and learning. Leithwood and Riehl (2003) propose improvements in leadership capacity building, arguing that the focus on accountability for student learning has caused the school environment to increase in complexity. Curriculum standards, achievement benchmarks, program requirements, and state and federal mandates necessitate leadership that is distributed across the organization to include principals, teachers, teacher leaders, and a focus on the school organization as a community of learners in order to support the learning of all members of the community, including students. School leadership teams have a unique
opportunity to facilitate interactions between the school and the district as they collectively work to improve teaching and learning.

Summary of Literature Review

Federal and state efforts to improve schools and achieve higher levels of student learning and address inequity in student outcomes spans more than four decades, beginning with the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965. School reform efforts intensified with the release of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. The 1980s and 1990s saw the emergence of the effective schools movement and subsequent federal and state attention to comprehensive school reform models. Throughout these reform efforts, the school was seen as the primary unit of change. Reform efforts aimed at individual schools have had success, but the gap in achievement remains, especially in many high poverty areas and in schools and districts serving large numbers of low income and diverse students.

After more than 30 years of effective-schools research focused on the school as the unit of change, we know that schools are embedded in systems and that there is a close relationship between districts and schools. As schools moved to comprehensive school reform models, many which embraced all or some of the correlates of effective schools, it became apparent that actions by the district office could either support or constrain the effectiveness of the reform efforts. Research in the past 10 to 15 years recognizes the critical role that a district may play in improving teaching and learning across the system. Studies have identified successful practices and/or strategies in successful districts that have resulted in system-wide improvements in instructional practices and student achievement.
We also know that leadership matters, especially principal leadership—but that in this complex environment of standards based accountability and increased public scrutiny, many more have to be actively involved in leadership at the school level in order to build capacity for improvement. Leadership distributed to teacher leaders and school leadership teams can only enhance the ability of a school to improve teaching and learning.

We know that the district can play an important role in building and sustaining system-wide improvement. Less studied are how linkages between a district and its schools support and/or constrain the district’s efforts to build system capacity and capital in support of reforms focused on improving teaching and learning. In addition, in what ways might districts and school leadership teams establish linkages that result in a coherent system of policies and practices focused on improved teaching and learning? The following section will describe the methods to study these interactions.
CHAPTER 3

Methods

The previous chapter reviewed the research on effective schools and effective districts, documenting that there is considerable overlap between effective schools correlates and practices found in effective districts. Recent research suggests that the district plays a crucial role in assuring system-wide, sustainable improvements in teaching and learning, not surprising since both the school and the district represent a part/whole relationship. Increasing attention is given to how parts of the system are connected or linked with researchers proposing that a district’s capacity for successful school reform hinges on the interaction of human, social, intellectual, and material capacities. Research indicates that leadership-capacity building through school leadership teams can enhance the relationship between a district and its schools and bring about a more coherent focus on school improvement. However, what is less understood is how these capacities interact and how they can be leveraged and linked across the educational system to support school reform.

A qualitative strategy of inquiry utilizing a case study approach was employed in the study to gain an in-depth understanding of the nature of interactions between central office leaders, principals, and school leadership teams in the study district. More specifically, this approach allowed the researcher to investigate the linkages between central office leadership, principals, and school leadership teams as they developed and implemented strategies to improve teaching and learning and to explore how these linkages supported and constrained the district’s efforts to build system capacity and
capital in support of reforms focused on improvements in teaching and learning. This section presents the methodology selected for this case study analysis. Six components in the methods will be discussed: (a) Research design, (b) Context of study, (c) Researcher’s role and ethical considerations, (d) Data collection methods, (e) Data management, and (f) Data analysis. The final sections include a description of the limitations of the study followed by a summary of the methods. Interview protocols and the participant consent form, are located in the appendixes.

Research Design

A case is defined as a “phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 25). In this case, the phenomena of study are the study district interactions with principals and five school leadership teams engaged in a reform intervention based on the effective schools process. The research design of the proposed study is an embedded single case study of Evergreen School District. The principals and five leadership teams are subunits embedded within the Evergreen School District case. An embedded case study approach was used to investigate the linkages between Evergreen School District’s central office leaders, principals, and five school leadership teams and to explore how the system is using the linkages to leverage and enhance the human, social, and intellectual resources needed for school reform.

Case studies “concentrate attention on the way a particular group of people confront specific problems, taking a holistic view of the situation. They are problem centered, small scale, entrepreneurial endeavors” (Shaw, 1978, p. 2). Yin (2003) defines a

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1 Evergreen School District is a pseudonym for the school district used throughout this study to ensure the anonymity of the participants.
case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). As such an embedded case study approach allowed me to gain significant insights into how Evergreen School District leaders perceived their role as compared to the perceptions of their role by principals and other school leadership team members in order to identify the presence of linkages, and theories of action that support and/or constrain system-wide development of human, social, and intellectual capacities necessary for successful reform implementation. The nature of this qualitative embedded case study allowed me to spend a “substantial amount of time in the natural setting of the study, often in intense contact with participants” allowing for a rich, “thick” description of the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 1998).

The embedded case study approach provides a description and analysis of three subunits within the district case: school leadership teams participating in the intervention, principals participating in the intervention, and central office leadership personnel.

Merriam (1998) explains a descriptive case study in education is one that presents a detailed account of the phenomenon under study—a historical study that chronicles a sequence of events. Descriptive case studies are helpful in presenting basic information that can often form a database for future comparison and theory building. A second application of case study design is to explore the situations in which an intervention strategy has no set of specific, predetermined outcomes. A well-designed descriptive and exploratory case study permits a holistic and context sensitive lens, two of the major themes of qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2002).
According to Yin (2003), a major strength of case study research is that the researcher has the opportunity to use multiple sources of evidence, allowing for the inclusion of a broader array of issues (pp. 97-98). It is important to gather data from a variety of sources because every data collection method has some weaknesses and if utilized alone would not provide enough information to capture the full perspective. For example, observations are limited by the researcher’s lens, interviews are limited by participants’ personal perceptions and biases, and documents can be inaccurate and variable in quality (Patton, 1990, p. 244-245). Thus, this study draws on a variety of primarily qualitative data sources.

Patton (1990) explains that triangulation is an important way to strengthen a study. The validity and reliability of a study increase through the triangulation of multiple data sources (Patton, 1990; Yin, 2003). Through the use of “converging lines of inquiry”, the findings of this study will be more accurate as they are based on several different sources of corroboratory information (Yin, p. 98). For this study, I used both data triangulation and methodological triangulation (Patton; Yin). I collected data from different sources: central office leaders, principals, and school leadership personnel, and documents, using a variety of methods: observations, interviews, document evidence, and a survey. The use of multiple methods in this study served to strengthen the findings and capture a comprehensive picture of the linkages that characterize central office leadership’s interactions with school leadership as they work implement district reforms.

Context of the Study

Evergreen School District and five of its elementary schools are in the first year of a 3-year national study entitled 21st Century School Effects Study (ES21) involving 16
schools in 5 districts in 4 states. The purpose of the larger study is to conduct and study a school intervention based on the latest effective schools research that provides support and training to school leadership teams and their principals. As part of the larger study, five of Evergreen School District’s elementary schools were randomly selected as participants in the intervention. School leadership teams and their principals selected for the intervention participated in six leadership team trainings throughout the 2006-2007 school year. This context provided a purposeful site in which to pursue my doctoral study as a part of the design of the larger study was to have a district liaison attend the leadership team professional development sessions. This connection provided an opportunity to explore the linkages between a district and its schools engaged in the process of reform.

**District Selection and Context**

Merriam (1998) explains that *nonprobability* sampling is the method of choice for most qualitative research since generalization in a statistical sense is not the goal. The most common form of nonprobability sampling is what Patton (1990) refers to as *purposeful* sampling. Patton argues, “The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting *information-rich cases* for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term *purposeful sampling*” (p. 169, emphasis in original). Merriam reports that purposeful sampling is based on the belief that the researcher wants to “… discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 61). Given the characteristics of Evergreen School District and the five schools as described herein, Evergreen School District and the schools represent
a sample that allowed me to gain a comprehensive view of the ways in which a district and its schools interact to implement a reform agenda designed to improve teaching and learning.

Evergreen School District is a medium-sized K-8 elementary school district described as urban fringe located in Southern California. Enrollment had been steadily growing until the 2005-2006 school year when the district experienced a decline in enrollment from 20,239 students in 2004-2005 to 19,654 students in the 2005-2006 school year. The district has 17 elementary schools, 1 community day school, and 5 middle schools. The ethnic breakdown in the district is Hispanic or Latino (63.5%), White (27.4%), African American (3%), Asian (2.6%), Filipino (1.9%), and American Indian (0.5%). Demographic data reveal diversity in the student population in socioeconomic status with 62% of the students in the district qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch and diversity in linguistic proficiency with 46% of the students in the district classified as English learners. The predominant language of English learners in the district is Spanish (97%). Nine percent of the students are classified as students with disabilities (California Department of Education, 2006).

California has a comprehensive accountability system to monitor the academic achievement of all the state’s public schools, charter schools, and local education agencies (LEAs) that serve students in kindergarten through grade twelve. The accountability system is based on state requirements that were established by the Public Schools Accountability Act (PSAA) of 1999, and on federal requirements established by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (California Department of Education, August, 2006). The California Department of Education uses the Accountability Progress
Reporting (APR) system to report results for each public and charter school and LEA in the state on a yearly basis. Included in the APR are the state Academic Performance Index (API) Base and Growth Reports, the federal Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Report, and the federal Program Improvement (PI) Report.

The API report shows how much a school is improving from year to year based on its API. The API is a number between 200 and 1,000 and is calculated from the results for each school’s students on statewide testing. The state has set 800 as the API target for all schools to meet. Schools that fall short of 800 are required to meet annual growth targets based on growth targets set each year until that goal is achieved. Schools must meet API growth targets for the whole school as well as for all “numerically significant” subgroups of students. In order to be numerically significant, the student subgroup must include at least 100 students or at least 50 students who make up 15 percent or more of the school’s total population. Categories include: African American (not of Hispanic origin), American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Filipino, Hispanic or Latino, Pacific Islander, White (not of Hispanic origin), socioeconomically disadvantaged, English learners, and students with disabilities.

The Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) Report shows how well schools and school districts are meeting common standards of academic performance by measuring whether the school or school district makes AYP. Targets increase almost yearly, with the mandate that by the year 2013-14 all schools must have 100% of their students performing at or above the proficient level on state tests. Schools and districts must meet four set of requirements each year in order to make AYP. The requirements include: (a) student participation rate on statewide tests, (b) percentage of students scoring at the
proficient level or above in English-language arts and mathematics on statewide tests, (c)
API growth, and (d) graduation rate (if high school students are enrolled). Numerically
significant subgroups at a school or school district must also meet participation rate and
percent proficient requirements (California Department of Education, August 2006).

The Program Improvement (PI) Report supplements the AYP Report by providing
information about the program improvement status of schools and school districts.
Schools or school districts that receive federal Title I funds are subject to identification
as PI if they do not make AYP for two years in a row. A school identified as PI must
notify parents/guardians about the PI status and offer school choice to attend another
public school in the LEA that is not PI. A school district that is PI must notify its
parents/guardians, develop or revise its improvement plan, implement the revised plan,
and provide additional high-quality staff development for its teachers.

Although Evergreen School District met its Academic Performance Index (API)
growth target in 2005 and 2006, the district failed to meet the federal accountability
measure of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as it did not meet the percent proficient
target in English-language arts and mathematics in 2005 for the numerically significant
subgroups of English-language learners and students with disabilities. In 2006, Evergreen
School District met its percent proficient target in mathematics for both subgroups, but
again failed to meet the percent proficient target in English-language arts for both English
learners and students with disabilities. Based on these criteria, the district is in its second
year of Program Improvement. Five of the district’s 17 elementary schools are in the first,
second, or third year of Program Improvement and one of the five middle schools is in
Year 5 of Program Improvement. Four of the district’s elementary schools experienced
significant demographic changes in enrollment in the 2005-2006 school year and thus did not have any growth or target information for the 2005-2006 API report (California Department of Education, 2006). The district has instituted a number of initiatives aimed at improving student achievement. Most recently, in addition to participating in the ES21 study, the district volunteered to participate with four other districts across the state in a District Assistance and Intervention Team (DAIT) pilot program sponsored by the California State Department of Education. The theory of action of the DAIT pilot program is to improve districts through:

- Commitment to increased district and school leadership and deep organizational and instructional change
- Realignment of resources to assist lowest-achieving students in meeting state standards
- Targeted professional development and accountability at all levels with the expectation that student achievement must improve (PowerPoint Presentation, EUSD, nd).

Three of the district’s elementary schools in PI status and the one middle school in PI status were selected by the district as high priority schools to pilot the DAIT process. One of the elementary schools was also participating in ES21. In midyear, three additional schools were added to the pilot. Again, one of them was an ES21 school. The plan is to gradually phase in all other schools in the district to meet California Department of Education requirements for Program Improvement districts.

The superintendent is new to the position this year, having been promoted from her previous position as deputy superintendent for the district. The assistant
superintendent of educational services is also new this year, promoted from her assignment as a middle school principal in the district. Other central office cabinet members participating in this study include the deputy superintendent of human resources, the assistant superintendent of pupil personnel/special education, and the assistant superintendent of business services. The central-office leadership team structure also includes a director of educational technology and media services as well as coordinators of staff development, language acquisition, GATE and Title 1, Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA), and extended learning. As part of the DAIT pilot program, the central office leadership met on a monthly basis throughout the 2006-2007 school year with representatives from the local county office of education. Representatives from the central office leadership team and the county office team conducted structured observations of the selected schools on a monthly basis and reviewed each school’s student test data and observations at the monthly meetings. As a researcher for the ES21 project, I was invited to participate in the district meetings since the intent of my study was to explore the relationship between the central office and schools as they work to improve student achievement. The district appears to have an intense interest in improving teaching and learning across the district as evidenced by their openness to participation in the ES21 study as well as volunteering to be a DAIT pilot district.

Selection of Participating Sites

In the spring of 2006, the principal investigator for California met with Evergreen School District’s then-superintendent and deputy superintendent of educational services, to describe the purpose and goals of the ES21 study. Both the superintendent and deputy
superintendent expressed full support for the study. Shortly after this meeting, the deputy superintendent was selected to replace the retiring superintendent beginning July 1, 2006. The deputy superintendent met with the principal investigator in the spring of 2006 to randomly select schools\(^2\). Two of the participating sites (Schools A and E) are sites that experienced significant demographic changes in the 2005-2006 school year and thus did not have any API growth or target information for the 2005-2006 API report. School A did not meet AYP in percent proficient in English-language arts for the English learner subgroup. School E did not meet AYP in percent proficient in English-language arts for the Hispanic or Latino and English-learner subgroups. These two schools are not Title 1 schools and thus have not been designated as PI. One of the participating sites (School D) is in Year 2 of PI. School D did not meet AYP for percent proficient in mathematics for the Hispanic or Latino and English-learner subgroups (California Department of Education, 2006). Besides participating in the ES21 study, School D is identified as a DAIT high priority school and is a Reading First school. Table 3.1 summarizes the demographic and achievement data for the five elementary schools participating in this study.

\(^2\) Pseudonyms will be used for the participating schools throughout the study to ensure the anonymity of the participants.
Table 3.1: Demographics of Participating K-5 Elementary Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Enroll</th>
<th>Free/Reduced Lunch</th>
<th>English Learners</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Filipino</th>
<th>Pacific Islander</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>American Indian or Alaska Native</th>
<th>API</th>
<th>Met AYP</th>
<th>PI Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>840</td>
<td>62.3%</td>
<td>49.4%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>.2%</td>
<td>706</td>
<td>Not Met</td>
<td>ELA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>729</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>63.8%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>.5%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>.7%</td>
<td>883</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not Title 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>789</td>
<td>65.9%</td>
<td>46.3%</td>
<td>66.9%</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>.6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>.6%</td>
<td>759</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not in PI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>764</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>675</td>
<td>85.4%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>.7%</td>
<td>.1</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>.4%</td>
<td>657</td>
<td>Not Met</td>
<td>Math Year 2 PI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>761</td>
<td>54.8%</td>
<td>44.7%</td>
<td>58.7%</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>.7%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>.9%</td>
<td>707</td>
<td>Not Met</td>
<td>ELA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. a Pseudonyms will be used for the participating schools throughout the study to ensure the anonymity of the participants. b CDE website notes on API report that school had significant demographic changes and will not have any API growth or target information. c CDE website notes on API report that school had significant demographic changes and will not have any API growth or target information. From California Department of Education, DataQuest. (2006). Retrieved from http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/.
The deputy superintendent informed principals of the participating schools of their selection and arranged a meeting in late spring of 2006 between the principals and the principal investigator who gave an overview of the study. The principal investigator also made a presentation regarding the study to staff of two of the five participating schools in June 2006. Throughout the summer of 2006, I accompanied the principal investigator and ES21 trainers as they met with the principals of the participating schools to give more in-depth information regarding the study. In August 2006, I went to Atlanta, Georgia, to accompany four of the five principals and the new assistant superintendent of educational services, who would be serving as the district liaison for the ES21 project. At this cross-site meeting, other administrators from participating schools in two of the states, along with trainers and the principal investigator for the overall ES21 study, became acquainted with each other and the overall aims of the study. In August 2006, I accompanied the principal investigator from California as she made presentations to the remaining three staffs regarding the purpose and goals of the larger study.

**Researcher’s Role and Ethical Considerations**

My interest in this study stems from my own role as an administrator in a neighboring district. As a fellow educator, I have been welcomed and given access, and yet not being part of the district or involved in the intervention enabled me to be a participant observer (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003). As such, I interacted with the participants, but used discretion as to my involvement in activities. Access to the ES21 leadership team trainings and district leadership team meetings allowed me to observe, firsthand, the interactions, problem-solving techniques, and actions that took place at these meetings. Merriam (1998) suggests that using this method allows the
researcher the ability to establish an insider’s identity without participating in all the core activities of the group. Patton (1990) reiterates the importance of balance in being a participant observer noting, “There is clearly an observer side to this process. The challenge is to combine participation and observation so as to become capable of understanding the program as an insider while describing the program for outsiders” (p. 207).

I completed all the required steps to protect the rights of the participants in the study. First, I completed the Human Subjects Approval process with the Office of Research at UCSD, SDSU, and CSUSM. The study district and the participating sites were assigned pseudonyms that were used throughout the study to ensure the anonymity of the participants. Participants signed informed consent forms (see Appendix A) requesting their consent to participate in the study and to use the data collected from them for my dissertation. They were informed in advance that their participation was completely voluntary. They were advised that any participant who felt uncomfortable during an interview could stop the interview at any point. All survey data collected, as a part of the larger, national study, was given a numeric code so that the identity of the respondent was protected as well as the name of each school.

Data Collection Methods

The inquiry of this study was conducted using ethnographic techniques drawing upon multiple sources of evidence. Interviews were conducted with central office leadership, principals, and leadership team members. In addition, focus group interviews were conducted with each of the participating leadership teams. Field notes were taken at each of the leadership training sessions as well as at district meetings, and national ES21
meetings with all principals and district representatives. Documents from the trainings as well as pertinent district and site documents were collected, reviewed, and compared with field notes and interview data. Observations of ES21 planning meetings with the principals and Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services, school leadership team trainings, and central office leadership team meetings were conducted to validate information collected from other data sources. As part of the larger study, the School Leadership Team Implementation Continuum (UCSB Center for Effective Schools, 2004) was administered at the beginning and end of the first year of the study. Extant data pertaining to team-district relations from this survey was made available to me and were utilized to further triangulate the data collected. Following is a description of each of the data collection methods. Table 3.2 presents a timeline of the major data collection.
### Table 3.2: Data Collection Timeline and Types of Data Collected.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Data Collected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June 2006</td>
<td>Observations of informational presentation of ES21 project to two participating school staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2006</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2006</td>
<td>Observations of informational presentation of ES21 project to three participating school staffs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observation of cross-site meeting in Atlanta, Georgia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2006</td>
<td>Observation of two-day ES21 professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2006</td>
<td>Research team for ES21 Study interviews 45 team members and 5 principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observation of ES21 Professional Development, Day 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2006</td>
<td>Observation of DAIT Cabinet meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2006</td>
<td>Observation of ES21 Professional Development Day 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2007</td>
<td>Observation of DAIT Cabinet meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviews of Central Office staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observation of ES21 Professional Development Day 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2007</td>
<td>Observation of DAIT Cabinet meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviews of Central Office Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2007</td>
<td>Observation of DAIT Cabinet meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observations of ES21 professional development Day 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2007</td>
<td>Observation of DAIT Cabinet meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Second one-on-one interviews with principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2007</td>
<td>Observation of DAIT Cabinet meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observation of cross-site meeting in San Diego, California</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus group interviews of SLT members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2007</td>
<td>Focus group interviews of SLT members</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interviews**

A combination of a standardized open-ended interview format with an interview guide approach as described by Patton (1990) allowed me to collect data regarding the same questions from interviewees with different perspectives while also allowing me more flexibility in asking probing questions when it was appropriate to explore certain subjects in more depth. Semistructured interviews (see Appendixes B, C, D, and E) were conducted with members of the central office leadership team, as well as with principals and with school leadership team members of the five schools participating in the
intervention. The semistructured interview protocols were designed to gather information about interviewee perceptions of the role the district plays in supporting or constraining the work of leadership teams. Questions addressed how district staff and school leadership team participants perceive the role, responsibilities, and work of school leadership teams; the alignment of district goals and initiatives with school leadership team goals and initiatives; the ways in which the district shares its theories of action in regard to improving teaching and learning; the role the district liaison plays in facilitating linkages between school sites and the district; and what linkages seem to best facilitate the work of school leadership teams.

The semistructured interview protocol developed for central office leaders focused on their role in relation to schools (Appendix B). A semistructured interview protocol for school leadership team members was developed as a part of the larger ES21 study and focused on their views regarding district-office supports or constraints as well as their perceptions of their work as a leadership team (Appendix C). As part of the larger study, the principal investigator and her research team conducted these individual interviews with members of each of the leadership teams. This extant data was made available for my research. The semistructured interview protocol developed for principals (Appendix D) focused on their perceptions of district-school relations. A semistructured focus group interview protocol for school leadership team members (Appendix E) was developed for use in the spring of 2007, focusing on school leadership team members’ perceptions of district/team relations and the impact of the professional development on their work as a school leadership team.
The district superintendent, assistant superintendent of educational services, deputy superintendent of human resources, the assistant superintendent of special education, and coordinators and project specialists in the educational services division were interviewed individually in the winter of 2007 using the semistructured interview protocol designed for the central office leadership team (Appendix B). The assistant superintendent of educational services also was interviewed using guided conversations directly before or after ES21 planning and training sessions and at the two national meetings that occurred during the first year of the study. Principals from each of the participating schools were interviewed using the semistructured interview protocol designed for principals (Appendix D) in the spring of 2007. I also engaged in guided conversations with principals before and after ES21 planning and training sessions and during the two national meetings. These guided conversations augmented the interviews and observations and provided deeper insights into district/school interactions.

*Focus Groups*

Patton (1990) defines focus groups as an interview on a specific topic with a small group of people. He explains that focus group interviewing was developed in recognition that consumer decisions are made by people in a social context, many times growing out of discussions with other people. Kleiber (2004) explains that “Despite its deceptively simple appearance, the focus group process is profound in its potential for revealing socially constructed meaning and underlying attitudes” (p. 89). Kleiber notes further that the major strength of the focus group method is its ability to elicit member’s opinions, attitudes, and beliefs. Data generated from focus groups are “…typically very rich as ideas build and people work to explain why they feel the way they do. The focus group
moderator has the chance to ‘listen in’ on people’s conversations, gathering data not available through individual interviews or surveys” (p. 97). As described earlier, the extant data from individual interviews with school leadership team members conducted by researchers as a part of the larger study was made available to me. In order to triangulate the data collected from individual interviews with the help of researchers from the larger study, focus groups with members of each of the participating school leadership teams were conducted in May and June 2007 (Appendix E). Focus groups used in conjunction with the other data sources added to the rich, thick description of the district case.

*Field Notes*

Since my investigation is embedded in the larger study and I was invited to observe each of the pretraining meetings with the principals, assistant superintendent of educational services, ES21 trainers, and the principal investigator, I was able to take field notes from the beginning of the project. Field notes were taken during each of the six school leadership team training sessions in order to document the nature of the intervention and the work of the leadership teams. Field notes were taken at subsequent district meetings, and at national ES21 meetings with all principals and district representatives.

*Documents*

In order to triangulate the data collected from interviews, field notes, focus groups, and observations, documents were collected from the district and from each of the participating sites. Documents included school and district mission statements, the district LEAP plan, single school site plans, DAIT cabinet meeting agendas and meeting
minutes, samples of district Monday Updates, and memorandums and news releases from the superintendent and/or assistant superintendent of educational services, and from principals pertaining to district expectations regarding curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Training agendas, PowerPoints, and handouts from the six ES21 site leadership team trainings were also collected, reviewed, and compared with field notes and interview data.

Observations

Patton (1990) notes that observational fieldwork has advantages over other data collection methods in terms of understanding context, capturing routines, gathering data otherwise inaccessible in interviews, moving beyond the perceptions of the participants, and using direct experience as data (pp. 202-205). Specific to this study, observations of school leadership team trainings, school leadership team interactions at ES21 trainings, district principal meetings with the superintendent and assistant superintendent of educational services, and DAIT cabinet meetings were made in order to validate information obtained from interviews and document review.

Survey

As part of the larger ES21 study, in October 2006 the School Leadership Implementation Continuum (UCSB Center for Effective Schools, 2004), a Likert-scale rubric was completed by all leadership team members. This survey was re-administered during the time frame of my proposed study and extant data made available to me. The School Leadership Team rubric is of particular interest because it contains questions regarding perceptions of team-district relations.
Data Management

As recommended by Yin (2003) to ensure high-quality, accessible data, I kept notebooks throughout the study in order to organize and retrieve the data for analysis. One notebook includes all training materials from the six ES21 leadership team trainings as well as notes and materials from national ES21 meetings. The second notebook contains manually recorded observational field notes collected from all six ES21 leadership team trainings; planning meetings with the trainers, principal investigator, district liaison, and principals; meetings with the district leadership team and site leadership teams; memos from informal and guided conversations; and interview transcriptions from individual and focus group interviews. Also included in this notebook is demographic data collected from the DataQuest section of California Department of Education website for the study district and the five participating schools along with any district or school documents and document summary forms pertinent to the data collection. In addition, the second notebook contains survey results from the School Leadership Team Continuum completed by leadership teams at the beginning and end of the first year of the study. All field notes, interview transcriptions, contact summaries, memos, and document summaries were also word processed and kept in a file on my personal computer.

Data Analysis

This section describes the strategies used to analyze observation, interview, field note, and document data. The process of qualitative data analysis involves preparing the data for analysis, conducting differing analyses in order to move deeper into understanding the data, determining how to represent the data, and finally “…making an
interpretation of the larger meaning of the data” (Creswell, 2003, p. 190). Following
traditional ethnographic methods, data collection and analysis for the proposed study
occurred simultaneously (Merriam, 1998). Merriam explains that throughout the data
analysis, the researcher attempts to uncover meaning by moving back and forth from the
data collected and abstract concepts and ideas that relate to the larger purpose of the
study as opposed to making deductions from theory. Merriam notes that unlike
experimental designs where validity and reliability are justified before the investigation,
the application of precise and exacting standards in qualitative research stems from the
researcher’s presence, the quality of the interactions between the researcher and the
participants, the triangulation of the data, the analysis of perceptions, and thick, rich
descriptions.

Miles and Huberman (1994) describe the process of data analysis as being in three
concurrent flows: (a) data reduction, (b) data displays during the collection, and (c)
conclusion drawing to explain the findings. Data reduction encompasses transforming the
collected data into the categories or themes as a method of developing grounded theory.
The data displays entails compressing the information to draw preliminary conclusions
and actions. The third step in the analysis is the conclusion drawing and verification
based on confirmable evidence. The goal of qualitative data analysis is to make sense of a
given situation based on integrating the concurrent flows of information in order to
understand, provide evidence, and suggest information based on the data collected.

The constant comparative method of data analysis developed by Glaser and
Strauss (1967, as cited in Merriam, 1998) was used to construct categories or themes
from the data. Merriam explains that this method was developed as a means of
developing grounded theory. Grounded theory involves deriving a general, abstract theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the view of participants in a study (Creswell, 2003). Strauss and Corbin (1998) explain further that this method involves the use of multiple stages of data collection resulting in the refinement and interrelationship of categories of information. Creswell notes that grounded theory is characterized by “…the constant comparison of data with emerging categories and theory sampling with different groups to maximize the similarities and the differences of information” (p. 14).

Merriam (1998) reminds the researcher that data analysis should be done in conjunction with data collecting and suggests using a step-by-step process in order to construct categories from the data. These categories should reflect the purpose of the research and serve to answer research questions. There were five stages of step-by-step data analysis that occurred during the course of this study: (a) organizing the data and comparative analysis; (b) generating categories, themes, and patterns; (c) coding; (d) testing and validating the emergent understandings through triangulation and member checking; and (e) writing the case summary. In the sections that follow, I describe the process of qualitative data analysis based on the data I collected.

Organizing the Data and Comparative Analysis

The step-by-step process consisted of reading and rereading the interview and focus group transcripts. I began by an initial reading of each of the interview and focus group transcripts in order to gain an overall sense of the meaning made by respondents to the questions. During this first reading, I read each transcript separately, making notes, comments, observations, and questions in the margins and keeping the overall research question and subquestions in mind. Merriam (1998) explains that as the researcher reads
through the transcripts “…these notations are next to bits of data that strike you as interesting, potentially relevant, or important to the study” (p. 180). This initial reading through the content of the transcripts allowed me to begin to derive meaningful relationships within the data, ask questions, of the data, and determine what needed further investigation.

Generating Categories, Themes, and Patterns

In order to identify salient themes and categories, I paid close attention to the reoccurring language, themes, and patterns of belief that link participants and settings together (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). This process entails identifying common elements across the data that suggest patterns and dividing those patterns into sorted categories (Patton, 2002). After reading the first transcript, I reviewed the margin notes and grouped comments that seemed to go together into categories or themes, which I attached to the transcript. As I read each transcript, I went through the same process, keeping in mind the categories extracted thus far and comparing them across transcripts, ultimately coming up with a master list of the reoccurring patterns in the data. In addition, the transcripts were uploaded into NVivo Software. Using the themes and categories I had identified from my initial reading, the software was used to scan the transcripts to gain a deeper understanding of the reoccurrences of the themes across participants and schools. The tree function of NVivo also made it possible to look for relationships among the themes. Table 3.3 presents the major theme identified from the initial readings of the transcripts.
Table 3.3: Major Themes Identified From Reading of Interview and Focus Group Transcripts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principals and Teacher Team Members</th>
<th>Central Office Staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DAIT Process</strong></td>
<td><strong>DAIT Process</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Concern with increased assessments</td>
<td>- Brought central office staff together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Saw value in visitations</td>
<td>- Increased focused contact with schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Unknown, fear</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assessment and data analysis</strong></td>
<td><strong>Assessment and data analysis</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Taking too much time</td>
<td>- Teacher resistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Takes away from teaching</td>
<td>- Teachers don’t use data well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Does not inform instruction</td>
<td>- Use data from assessments to inform instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- No time to reteach, prepare for next test</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Concern with validity of tests</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Importance of relationships</strong></td>
<td><strong>Importance of relationships</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- With principal</td>
<td>- With central office team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Among team members</td>
<td>- With principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- With grade levels</td>
<td>- With teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- With other ES21 schools</td>
<td>- Trust has been rebuilt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- With central office</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- With superintendent and assistant superintendent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quality teaching</strong></td>
<td><strong>Quality teaching</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Feel constraints with curriculum, pacing guides, testing</td>
<td>- Teachers should follow the curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Unable to do what feel is best for kids</td>
<td>- Children should be engaged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- No common definition of what is good teaching</td>
<td>- Differentiated and scaffolded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaboration</strong></td>
<td><strong>Collaboration</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Value collaboration</td>
<td>- Recognize the need for it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- A board and district goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time – insufficient</strong></td>
<td><strong>Time</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- To teach everything mandated</td>
<td>- negotiated early release days for team collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- To meet to plan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- To test and enter data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Edusoft</strong></td>
<td><strong>Edusoft</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- See value and district support</td>
<td>- Major district initiative to get data into hands of teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Insufficient support and equipment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Too much time to enter data</td>
<td>- Teachers not using as well as they should</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.3 (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principals and Teacher Team Members</th>
<th>Central Office Staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pacing Calendars</td>
<td>Pacing Calendars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Valuable in guiding teaching</td>
<td>- Provide equitable instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Too rigid and inflexible</td>
<td>- Use as a guide, but let data drive instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shifting demographics</td>
<td>Shifting demographics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Population has changed</td>
<td>- These are our students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- High needs of English learners</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Demands of teaching these students not recognized by district</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- From district through the principal</td>
<td>- From district through principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- One-way from district to schools</td>
<td>- We listen and take input</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Team’s role to communicate with grade levels</td>
<td>- Team needs to communicate with grade levels, get word out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Gather input from colleagues to take back to team</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of leadership team</td>
<td>Role of leadership team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Communicate</td>
<td>- Communicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Make decisions</td>
<td>- Work with grade levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Work with grade level colleagues</td>
<td>- Provide professional development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coding

Generating themes and categories provided a vehicle to code the data, which entailed “sensitizing concepts” into codes to discover what is happening (Charmaz, 2002, p. 263). Miles and Huberman (1994) explain that coding is the pivotal first analytic step to move the researcher from simple description toward conceptualization of that description through analytic thinking. They define codes as “tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study. Codes usually are ‘chunks’ of varying size—words, phrases, sentences, or whole paragraphs, connected or unconnected to a specific setting” (p. 56). The process of coding the information involves the separation of data from the raw notes by drawing out
meaningful information into smaller descriptive data and attaching words or phrases to describe the category or theme. Miles and Huberman go on to say that codes are a way to organize and then retrieve the chunks of information so that the researcher can “quickly find, pull out, and cluster the segments relating to a particular research question, hypothesis, construct, or theme. Clustering and … display of condensed chunks, then sets the stage for drawing conclusions” (p. 57). Miles and Huberman suggest creating codes by developing an initial “start list” based on the conceptual framework, list of research questions, and other key variables that the researcher brings to the study (p. 58).

In applying this method to interview data collected in the study, after the initial reading, I read each transcript a second time, reflecting on the literature reviewed and my research questions, and, using a grounded lens approach, coded transcripts for emerging themes that are prevalent in the preponderance of the data. I reread the transcripts a third time utilizing the key terms from Lasky (2004), Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) and Spillane and Thompson (1997), and the frameworks provided by Knapp, Copeland, Ford, et al. (2003) and Knapp, Copeland, and Talbert (2003) as described in chapter 2 to determine if there was a match to the themes identified. This final review led me to use the linkages identified by Lasky as the framework for organizing and presenting the data gathered in this study.

Once I identified the major themes and codes, I reviewed documents (e.g. district and school site plans, training session PowerPoints, district Monday updates, memorandums and news articles from central office leaders and principals, meeting minutes) to see if the themes identified in the interviews were supported or contradicted by the documents. During this process, I was also observant for any emergent themes not
previously identified. This entire process was repeated with my observation field notes of DAIT cabinet meetings, leadership team planning meetings, and school leadership team trainings.

Testing Emergent Understandings

As noted earlier, multiple sources of data were collected (participant observation, interviewing, document analysis, and survey data) and triangulated. Yin (2003) refers to this as “converging lines of inquiry” to ensure that there are consistencies and patterns among the sources (p. 98). Merriam (1998) explains that if similar patterns and categories emerge, the sources strengthen the reliability as well as the internal validity of the study. Quantitative data included the results of School Leadership Team Implementation Continuum (UCSB Center for Effective Schools, 2004) completed by each school leadership team member at the beginning and end of the first year of the study. Researchers in the larger study analyzed this survey data utilizing descriptive statistics and first level of statistical analysis (t-tests). This quantitative data was another method of triangulating the qualitative data collected.

Case Summary

Marshall and Rossman (1999) note that the case study takes the reader into the setting and focuses in-depth on the specific phenomenon of interest. The data collected for this embedded case study provides a rich description of the interactions between the Evergreen School District and its schools focusing on the linkages that support and/or constrain the work of the schools in improving teaching and learning.
Limitations of the Study

According to Locke, Spirduso, and Silverman (2000) limitations are limiting conditions or restrictive weaknesses and occur in part when the study design cannot control for all factors. There are three major limitations to this study. First, as the embedded case study was conducted in one district in a limited geographical area, the findings are not statistically generalizable. In addition, the participating school leadership teams represent only elementary schools, which restrict the ability to generalize the findings to other levels of schooling. However, the study does offer the potential to contribute to theory building. The framework offered by Lasky (2004) has not been empirically tested and the study offers the potential to test the framework and concepts of linkages within a real district context.

A second limitation concerns the potential for participant-observer bias since I am a central office administrator in a neighboring district. However, I mitigated this potential bias by “check-coding” (Miles & Huberman, 1994) with researchers collecting the data for the larger study, who are not administrators, to triangulate with my own observations of district efforts.

A third limitation of the study arises from the nature of qualitative research, which can present significant problems in terms of validity and reliability because it depends heavily on the interviewing, observational, and interpretive skills of the researcher. Trustworthiness in research involves producing valid and reliable results in an ethical manner (Merriam, 1998). Using multiple sources of evidence, establishing a chain of evidence, and having researchers from the larger study review the analysis helped to enhance the construct validity and trustworthiness of the study (Yin, 2003). With respect
to reliability, Yin explains, “The goal of reliability is to minimize the errors and biases in a study” (p. 37). The objective is to ensure well-documented procedures so that if the same case were studied again, the investigator would arrive at similar findings and conclusions. I carefully documented all procedures utilized and kept meticulous files on the data collected to ensure reliability.

Summary of Methods

This embedded case study explores the interactions between central office leadership and school leadership teams engaged in a professional development intervention based on effective schools research. The purpose of this study was to investigate the linkages between central office leadership, principals, and school leadership teams in a program improvement district and to explore how these linkages support and constrain the district’s efforts to build system capacity and capital in support of reforms focused on improving teaching and learning. As a descriptive and exploratory case study, the study incorporates qualitative data sources (individual interviews, focus groups, observations, field notes, and document review) as well as quantitative data consisting of the analysis of survey data collected as part of a larger, national study. The embedded case study approach allowed the description and analysis of three subunits within the district case: school leadership team members, principals, and central office leadership personnel. Yin (2003) defines a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). As such, the embedded case study methodology allowed me to gain significant insights into how central office leaders perceived their role as compared to the perceptions of their role by
principals and school leadership team members to identify the presence of linkages that support or constrain the work of school leadership teams in improving teaching and learning. Chapter 4 presents the results of this study.
CHAPTER 4

Results

The previous chapters described the scope of this study, the connection between this study and the existing research, the conceptual framework that guides this study, and the research design and methodology. As stated in chapter 1, the purpose of this study is to investigate the linkages between central office leaders and school leadership teams in a program improvement school district and to explore how these linkages support and/or constrain the district’s efforts to build system capacity and capital in support of reforms focused on improving teaching and learning. In this chapter, I will first present information gained from interviews and archival data regarding Evergreen School District’s central office leadership history in order to frame the context in which the district is responding to accountability demands. Utilizing five of the six linkages identified by Lasky (2004) as an organizing framework, I then present the findings to answer the research questions from the perspectives of central office leaders, principals, and school leadership team members.

A District in Turmoil

As I explored Evergreen School District’s path to reform, interviews with central office leadership and a review of archival data from local newspapers indicate that the recent history of top-level leadership in the district appears to have had an impact on the district’s ability to develop the human, social, and intellectual capacities needed for successful school reform. As expressed by one central office administrator who has been in the district for a number of years;
I think people trust the direction that the district is going [now]. There is a trust factor that has not been in this district for years. I would say that for the majority of my time here that hasn’t been here. That is not a criticism of others but we got to a culmination point before our previous superintendent came where the district really was in a bad place: student achievement, trust factor, all those different pieces. (Central office leader (4) interview, winter 2007)

Another central office leader noted, “I came in as an outsider and it appeared to me that the schools had been run as an independent agency for so long that the previous superintendents had allowed them to just do their own things because as long as you kept data pretty good you were alright” (Central office leader (9) interview, winter 2007).

Archival data from newspapers and interviews with central office leaders paint a picture of a district that experienced turmoil in its superintendency, board relations, and relations between management and the teachers’ union for a number of years preceding administration brought on board in 2001. In 1997, the board selected its third superintendent within a seven-year period. With the support of a board majority, the new superintendent initiated some dramatic changes in school accountability and the board praised him for an increase in student test scores. But within two years of his appointment, the new superintendent’s leadership style and allegations regarding his treatment of employees and community members led to contentious board meetings where parents and teachers publicly denounced the superintendent’s reprisals against staff members and his intolerance for those who disagreed with him. Local newspapers at the time noted that the then-teachers’ union president indicated the district had a history of contentious relations with its teachers’ union and the relationship had only worsened with complaints about intimidation by the administration and a lack of consultation with staff. In an unprecedented move, in January of 2000, the teachers’ union circulated an
evaluation of the superintendent to the district’s 1,000 teachers. Seven hundred teachers responded, giving the superintendent a letter grade of D or F. Eighty percent expressed concern that the superintendent did not instill a sense of professionalism and cooperation in the way he supervised school principals. Many respondents expressed that he failed to show openness to opinions differing from his own, failed to engender teacher confidence, and lacked an understanding of the increasing demands upon teachers’ personal time and diversions from instructional time. Relations within the administrative team were also at odds. Referring to the relationship among management team members during this time period, one central office leader, in an interview in winter 2007, commented about the lack of trust in the district during that time, noting: “That was something that was lost even between administrators and district people because I was a principal at that time, and there was a lot of mistrust, and there were a lot of things that were said that weren’t followed through and so forth.” The studies by Snipes & colleagues (Snipes et al., 2002) suggest that under these tense and dysfunctional district conditions reform and improvement are almost impossible.

Throughout the turmoil, the board continued to publicly support the superintendent. However, in May 2000, the board fired the superintendent, noting a loss of confidence in his ability to serve as an educational leader of the community due to the distraction of events. The board appointed an interim superintendent—a popular principal widely respected by management, certificated, and classified staff in the district—while they spent the next year searching for a superintendent who could restore order and confidence and establish positive relations among the board, parents, administrators, and the teaching staff. The new superintendent selected in March 2001, was an experienced
superintendent with a reputation for being an honest, inclusive, and strong leader. The board entrusted him with the task of bringing people together to work as a team again.

According to local newspapers published at the time, during his first years in the district, the new superintendent faced a board that still experienced infighting left over from disagreements regarding previous leadership, as well as lawsuits brought against the district by the disgruntled former superintendent and district administrators angry with the district for not supporting their claims of being harassed by the former superintendent. With growing enrollment necessitating the need to pass a bond to build more schools and a continued focus on raising student achievement, the new superintendent faced significant challenges. Even with these pressing issues, it was estimated that, initially 90% of his time as a new superintendent was spent fostering a positive working environment.

During this tumultuous time of healing, the superintendent hired an assistant superintendent of instructional support who had extensive experience with improving student achievement in her previous districts. Two years later, she moved to the curriculum and instruction side of the house and within a year after that, she became the district’s deputy superintendent. In an interview in the winter of 2007, she noted that the superintendent’s decision to make her the deputy superintendent of curriculum and instruction was very strategic: “He wanted everyone in the district and outside the district to know that instruction was our top priority. So it made sense to have his Deputy or Second in Charge be the instructional leader.” While the superintendent worked on rebuilding trust and bringing people together as a team, the deputy superintendent began working on changing the culture regarding instruction from what one central office leader
interviewed in the winter of 2007 termed, “a very passive culture, passive in the sense that people tended to do what they wanted to do behind closed doors” (Central office leader (9) interview, winter 2007) to a culture emphasizing a cohesive and coherent focus on teaching and learning. As deputy superintendent, she had her work cut out for her. In an interview in the winter of 2007, she stated:

You know, when I first came here, the District didn’t have, when I first came even to the C&I part, so you can even say three years ago, we didn’t have the Pacing Guides, we didn’t have Benchmark Assessments. We had what I call spray and pray staff professional development. It wasn’t required. If we had a new textbook, unless it was staff development at a mandatory staff meeting, or at a beginning of the year preservice day, teachers didn’t have to attend. It was optional. And so, here even though we may have been providing innovative materials there was no sense or semblance of whether those were being used, and kids receiving a kind of equitable instruction. So, rather quickly, probably more quickly than as an instructional leader I would have felt comfortable doing, we put those into place. (Superintendent interview, winter 2007)

The superintendent retired in June 2006 and was credited with excellent vision. His efforts to bring the district back together as a team included restoring a positive relationship with the community, restoring positive employee relationships and high morale, and being visible at schools in order to meet face-to-face with teachers. He established regional coaches for all principals, instituted a brain trust known as the Superintendent’s Planning Council, and not only raised student achievement but brought it to the forefront in the district and community (Board minutes, June 20, 2006). In referring to the retired superintendent, one central office administrator expressed a feeling echoed by the majority of teachers and administrators interviewed, stating; “He really mended a lot of bridges and really got things going for us and I think that each year things have gotten better and better” (Central office leader (2) interview, winter 2007).
The board faced the new challenge of selecting a replacement and, after an extensive nationwide superintendent search; the district’s deputy superintendent was selected by the board as the new superintendent. In July of 2006, as the new superintendent took the helm, she faced declining enrollment resulting in significant budget cuts, a change in demographics—resulting in an increase in the number of non-English or limited-English speaking students, new expectations of instructing, and higher expectations regarding student achievement. With respect to the latter, NCLB greatly raised the stakes—so that even though the district had improved student achievement, it was identified as a program improvement district for its failure to meet Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) for the significant subgroups of English-language learners and students with disabilities. However, with order restored, improved relations with teachers and administrators, and a supportive board, the new superintendent continued her plan to implement a district-wide cohesive and coherent focus on powerful, equitable learning and the instruction that would bring it about. One central office leader commented in a recent interview on the changes that have occurred in the district since 2001:

I think that overall in the whole district teachers believe and trust what’s said. So, there is more trust in the district. . . . I think that that’s been repaired, and so teachers now are willing to step up because they know that that will be appreciated and they also know their expertise will be used instead of just training and closing the door. So, it isn’t like going to something and I’m the only one that uses it because nobody else knows about it, because I’m going to now go back and work with my team on it. (Central office leader (4) interview, winter 2007)

Another central office administrator concurred that there has been an increase in trust across the district, but expressed concerns about teachers’ resistance to district reforms commenting:
There’s a lot of trust now between teachers and the district in terms of the budget, things that relate to teacher issues. The one thing about the culture though, is, that I’d say is still, I’d say is one thing that we still need to work on…and I think you’ll hear this from others. We don’t have a culture where we have nonnegotiables about here is what … will happen and … let’s just move on. I think there’s still a lot of stuff that needs to be processed and negotiated every time there’s kind of a big change. And, it’s less and less. But, benchmarks, you know, first we went through the standards, then it was the benchmarks, and there are still a few strays, schools, you know that are coughing up negative stuff about the benchmarks. And eventually they kind of move on. Now, there are issues with what are we doing with our subgroups and what are we doing with English Language Development. (Central office leader (7) interview, winter 2007)

**Current District Context**

With this history as a backdrop, Evergreen School District has taken aggressive steps to move the district out of program improvement. As mentioned in chapter 3, at the beginning of the 2006-2007 school year, the district volunteered to be one of four districts in the state to pilot, with a local county office of education, a new state-initiated program called District Assistance and Intervention Team (DAIT) at targeted schools in the district, two of which are participants in the current study. With regard to the DAIT participation, district-level leaders to include the superintendent’s cabinet visited classrooms of the targeted schools on a regular basis, gave feedback to the principals and, in some cases, school leadership teams regarding their observations. They also met with the county office personnel on a monthly basis throughout the 2006-2007 school year to monitor the achievement of English-language learners and students with disabilities at these participating schools. In addition to the DAIT pilot, as discussed in chapter 3, five of the district schools agreed to participate in a national study (ES21) with four other school districts in three other states. Leadership teams from the five schools completed six full days of professional development sessions based on effective schools correlates
and team development processes. These two efforts are illustrative of the commitment that the district has undertaken to engage in strategies to move the district out of program improvement. As stated earlier, the purpose of this study is to explore the interactions and relationships between the central office and school leadership teams. Building on the work of Lasky (2004), Spillane and Thompson (1997), and Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), I also explore how linkages support and constrain the district’s efforts to build system capacity and social, human, and intellectual capital in support of reforms focused on improving teaching and learning. In the following sections, I will display the findings to the research questions posed in this study:

1. What are the linkages between the central office and its schools that support and constrain school reform?
   a. What are the similarities and differences in perceptions of the linkages among three key stakeholders: central office leaders, principals, and school leadership teams?
   b. In what ways is the system using linkages to support school reform?
   c. In what ways is the system’s use of linkages constraining school reform?
   d. In what ways are school leadership teams serving as a resource linkage between the central office and schools in the reform process?

2. In what ways do the linkages enhance the human, social, and intellectual capacities needed for school reform?

   Linkages Between the Central Office and Schools

   As discussed in previous chapters, Lasky (2004) maintains that linkages serve as a bridge between at least two policy domains and create a connection between otherwise
disconnected points. She posits that linkages can be structural, relational, ideological, or temporal, and that linkages can also be communication or resource links that occur across systems. These linkages have the potential to serve as a bridge to build the interactions of human, social, and financial capacities identified by Spillane and Thompson (1997) and the intellectual capacity (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998) needed for successful school reform. In a similar way, Knapp, Copeland, Ford, et al. (2003) and Knapp, Copeland, and Talbert (2003) suggest that successful districts create learning opportunities for students, professionals, and the system by establishing a focus on learning, building professional communities that value learning, engaging external partners, acting strategically and sharing leadership, and creating coherence. They argue that these learning opportunities occur when districts act strategically and share leadership using multiple pathways. These pathways focus on content, assessment, and accountability, professionals and their practice, the workplace and the system, and the learner and learner support, which reflect another way of thinking about linkages within the educational system.

District Agenda for Reform

As a precursor to discussing the linkages in place in Evergreen School District, it is important to outline the district’s reform agenda. Document review and interviews with central office leaders, principals, and school leadership team members clearly indicate that the district’s reform agenda centers on improving student achievement and exiting program improvement indicative of what Knapp, Copeland, Ford, et al. (2003) and Knapp, Copeland, and Talbert (2003) would term a coherent and cohesive focus on learning. The district’s mission statement published in their 2006-2007 Local Education Agency Plan (LEAP) is reflective of the district’s intent: “Evergreen School District, in
partnership with our community, provides quality learning experiences for all students in a supportive environment, enabling them to be lifelong learners, productive members of the community, and positive contributors.” Board focus goals presented to the community and staff for input beginning in February 2007 and adopted by the board in April 2007 also support the district’s focus on learning:

1. Exit Program Improvement status by fully implementing the Local Education Agency Plan (LEAP), each school’s Single Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA), and the Response to Instruction (RTI) model in order to ensure the long-term improvement of ALL students.
   - For 2006-2007 through 2008-2009, 60 percent of all English Learners will move one or more levels on the CELDT level every year.
   - For the next three years, 50 percent of intensive and strategic students will move one or more performance level(s) on the CST ELA every year.
   - For the next three years, 50 percent of intensive and strategic students will move one or more performance level(s) on the CST math every year.

(Evergreen School District Board Focus Goals, Adopted March 21, 2007 Amended April 26, 2007).

The superintendent acknowledges that this detailed focus on student achievement is a relatively new goal for the Board stating:

The first goal is all about instruction and really, the first time, oddly enough, we have very elaborate LEAP Plans [Local Educational Agency Plans] and very elaborate school site plans, but we really have not had SMART Goals as part of the Board Focus Goals, so we have the instructional goal with three SMART Goals underneath it. (Superintendent interview, winter 2007)

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3 SMART Goals are goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely.
Presentation of Findings

Findings suggest that Evergreen School District has established a number of linkages between the central office and schools with the intent to move the district’s reform agenda forward. In some cases, these linkages seem to have provided a framework that has supported moving the district’s reform agenda forward. However, in other cases although a linkage is in place, findings suggest that there is a disconnect between the central office and the schools resulting in a lack of fidelity to the reform agenda. In the following sections, I use the concepts of linkages as an organizing frame to present the data to answer the research questions. Figure 4.1 illustrates how the linkages are overlapping and interconnected in the district system. I begin with ideological linkages in that they represent the degree to which the individuals in Evergreen School District share a common vision and sense of purpose regarding academic expectations for students, good instructional practices, and beliefs regarding accountability for student learning. As can be seen in Figure 4.1, ideological linkages form the center of the district system. I then present structural linkages as they represent the frameworks in place for advancing the district’s reform agenda. I then present communication linkages related to how the structures in place have affected the patterns of communication across the district in advancing the reform agenda. Relational linkages are then presented as they impact how interactions are perceived across the system and may affect how and if reforms are implemented. Last, I present resource linkages as these linkages represent the foundation necessary to implement the district’s reform agenda. Although Lasky (2004) also discusses temporal linkages, during initial interviews temporal issues did not
emerge. In addition given the timeframe of my study, the five linkages appeared to serve as the most relevant conceptual framework.
Figure 4.1: Linkages
Ideological Linkages

Ideological linkages as defined by Lasky (2004) reflect shared values, vision, and goals, and what constitutes good instruction. As can be seen in Figure 4.1, they form the center of the linkages model and are critical in that they represent the belief systems that shape district and teacher willingness to work collaboratively to implement the district’s reform agenda. According to Elmore and Fuhrman (2001), the ability of a school to respond to any kind of external accountability that is performance-based rests on the degree to which individuals share common values and beliefs about academic expectations of students, what constitutes good instructional practices, who is responsible for student learning, and how students and teachers justify their own learning and work. Datnow et al. (2006) argue, “When reform leaders initiate improvement efforts that challenge individuals’ existing belief systems, one of the most important linkages that people need to make is ideological” (p. 63). They maintain that through the creation of shared vision or purpose, we may need to bridge ideological chasms. They argue that the failure to bridge these chasms makes it unlikely that productive change will occur. In the following sections, I present findings about the perceptions of central office leaders, principals, and school leadership team members regarding Evergreen School District’s vision, values, goals, and what constitutes good instruction and in what ways the district’s reform agenda may be affected by the varying perceptions held by central office leaders, principals, and school leadership team members.

Vision, Values, and Goals

Findings suggest that some ideological linkages exist between the central office, the principals, and the teachers regarding the district’s vision, values, and goals of
improving student achievement, particularly for English-language learners and exiting program improvement. Evergreen School District’s mission statement, board focus goals, Local Education Agency Plan (LEAP), and single-site plans are all in concert with the goal of improving student achievement, which suggests there is a clear and focused vision regarding providing comprehensive and high quality educational experiences for students. One central office leader explained, “We have a lot of underperforming kids, lots of underperforming kids, and that has to be a focus for our district. When you are in district program improvement whether you agree with No Child Left Behind sanctions or not, it is what it is, and it’s not acceptable to have 20% of your kids at proficiency” (Central office leader (7), winter 2007). According to the superintendent, the goal is not only for English-language learners and for students with disabilities, but for all students in the district to reach “proficiency and beyond.” The assistant superintendent concurred when asked about district goals explaining, “Being able to establish and implement a very cohesive and coherent education plan that’s being systematically implemented throughout the district and using the very best practices that would afford all students to have the best instruction, [and] maximizing that instructional time” (Assistant superintendent interview, winter 2007). School leadership team members concur as evidenced by statements such as, “I think the biggest issue facing the district, and it’s an ongoing issue, is the English language learners and supporting those learners. I see it in a real positive way that as a community we’re looking at how we can best serve the students” (School B teacher interview, fall 2006). Another School B leadership team member explained,
One of the major issues in our community reflected in our district is the fact that we have a recognizable percentage of language learners and that has an impact in how our programs are implemented….While at the same time [we are concerned with] providing a strong program for our GATE-identified as well as meeting the needs for our English-only students that don’t fall in any little corners.

A School A leadership team member concurred, noting, “Well, I think one of the main issues is how to best reach our second language learners, and help them succeed and at the same time the other side of the coin is not to leave the other kids behind.”

In order to meet the goal of improving student achievement, the district has adopted a standards-based curriculum, pacing calendars, and benchmark assessments as part of their cohesive and coherent education plan. Central office leaders believe that fidelity to the adopted curriculum, frequent assessment to monitor student progress, and collaborative planning based on analysis of student data will result in improved achievement. Overall, school leadership team members do not disagree with being held accountable, but as shown in Table 4.1, school leadership team members at Schools A, B, C, and E question the methods they are mandated to use to improve achievement. A School A leadership team member’s comment captured the view of others when she stated, “I think it is important to hold students accountable and teachers accountable and schools accountable. [But] I don’t think it’s working only because I feel we are teaching kids how to take tests and not how to think critically.” For many teachers this focus on test scores is viewed as getting in the way of what they believe is good teaching suggesting a lack of congruence between central office leaders’ and teachers’ beliefs regarding what constitutes good instruction. When asked if improving achievement of English-language learners was a concern shared by central office leaders, principals, and teachers, a School A leadership team member responded, “Definitely! The only
difference that I would see between the district and the teachers and the administrators, you take the triangle, it that approach that we all differ on.” A School B leadership team member echoed this concern, stating,

I think the district concerns are complying with No Child Left Behind, state regulations, test scores…I think in the classrooms; we’re more interested in getting time to teach the children we have…. They’re not mutually exclusive, but I don’t think they’re particularly the same … and [referring to following NCLB] I don’t know … if that’s the way we’re going to get there.

What Constitutes Good Instruction?

Central office leaders define good teaching as instruction that promotes a high level of “student engagement,” is “standards based,” “scaffolded,” and “differentiated.” One central office leader described his vision of good teaching and what he hopes is communicated to teachers,

[When] it comes to differentiation and scaffolding you are going to have to know a little more in understanding the standards, you are going to have to be anthropological, you are going to have to understand accommodations that are reasonable, that still keep the same cognitive tasks. Even when you’re doing a linguistic change or some kind of a concrete material change for Special Ed kids, the point is to still expect the kids to have the same growth in their thinking. I think that is the difference in the way I would like to see this being in differentiation and scaffolding. Some people conceptualize it as a watering out of the standards when it really was just making standards accessible but not dropping our expectations. (Central office leader (9) interview, winter 2007)

Central office leaders believe in order to meet the needs of the diverse population in Evergreen and to improve student achievement; teachers need to initiate changes in their instructional practices in order to provide instruction that is more “scaffolded and interactive.”

In examining whether there is ideological congruence across the groups regarding what constitutes good teaching, findings suggest that there are mixed perspectives. Eighty
percent of central office leaders perceive that there is a shared perspective among central office leaders and school administrators about what constitutes good teaching. Central office leaders who disagree believe the shared perspective is not necessarily about what constitutes good instruction, but rather the shared perspective is about “insisting on high achievement.” Interestingly, principals define good teaching as “differentiated,” “standards based.” and using “ongoing assessment” suggesting their ideology regarding good instruction is in line with central office leaders. However, as can be seen in Table 4.1, contrary to the perceptions of most central office leaders, principals do not necessarily know if there is a shared perspective of good teaching in the district among administrators as evidenced by comments such as

There are people that I have worked with … that have a very good understanding of … what excellent teaching is. And then … there are others who—it’s been a very long time since they were in the classroom or set foot in a school site and I really question whether they really understand that. (School B principal interview, spring 2007)

As Table 4.1 shows, school leadership teams’ perception of what they believe to be good teaching does not appear to be congruent with what they believe to be the district’s ideology. They express that the demands placed on them are not allowing them to teach in “the ways we know have worked in the past.” School leadership team members express concerns about the narrow educational focus as a result of NCLB. A view expressed by one school leadership team captured the views of many when she stated,

It’s the requirements of No Child Left Behind that have narrowed the role of the teacher. They’ve narrowed it down so we no longer can take the teachable moment and go with it. You can’t do that anymore. You can’t do a lot of enrichment. I can’t even do a lot of re-teaching. I just have to hope they get it and just keep going. (School A SLT focus group, spring 2007)
 Whereas the superintendent “expects people to use the core curriculum because to me that’s how we ensure access,” the curriculum and assessments adopted by the district are viewed by many teachers as not meeting the long-term needs of students. As can be seen in Table 4.1, school leadership team members express concern that the curriculum lacks depth and does not allow them to individualize based on the developmental needs of their students. A School E leadership team member commented, “We’re feeling, for example, in math that we are teaching a mile wide and an inch deep instead of really having the time to focus on number sense … which we think is a critical component of kindergarten math.” Central office leaders, on the other hand, believe that the core curriculum with its focus on standards and “research based strategies” should not “limit” teachers at all.

Referring to the core curriculum, the superintendent explains,

> There are so many designed ways to enhance the teaching and learning for all the different levels of kids, the challenged GATE kids, the English learner, the below grade level student … there’s also plenty of time and plenty of space for a teacher to do their magic, to bring in some of that regalia, to stop and talk about the key vocabulary, what the kids’ connection is, what they think something means.

(Superintendent interview, winter 2007)

However, school leadership team members complain that they have become “test proctors” and that their creativity has been taken away and that there is not time to “do their magic.” They long to return to how it used to be, as evidenced by one School A leadership team member, who stated,

> I know the way I used to teach 10 to 15 years ago I feel like we are requiring more and more and more paper, pencil type learning and for young children I think there could be long range repercussions in that we’re trying to have kids do things that they may not be developmentally ready for. We’re trying to force information or knowledge or skills on boys and girls who are not ready. Therefore they don’t retain it or they don’t understand it with the depth that they need to. I
am concerned right now that we are doing testing just to produce numbers, it doesn’t inform my teaching.

As illustrated in Table 4.1, school leadership team members made references to not being allowed to use good instructional strategies such as differentiating their instruction and engaging in the kind of assessment that comes from “walking around the classroom.” A School B leadership team member commented:

I think that there is just not enough time for teachers to teach, that the kids are not getting quality, or think time. It’s more like we have to get this done, and we have to do this lesson let’s go whether they get it or not, and the kids who need that extra think time don’t, and they just get farther and farther behind.

Findings suggest that, in some ways, principals are caught in the middle. They recognize how hard their teachers are working and the increasing demands on their time. In addition, they themselves are under increasing pressure and, due to budget reductions, no longer have assistant principals to assist with the day-to-day operations of their schools. Central office leaders expect principals to learn the technical aspects of the curriculum—they can no longer just be plant managers—rather they must work with teachers to ensure that they provide high quality differentiated instruction to all learners. Principals are expected to be in classrooms frequently and to regularly engage in collegial conversations with their teachers regarding student achievement. One teacher expressed her view of where principals fit in the picture, stating,

The district has a set curriculum, a scripted curriculum if you will, basically that they want us to use with the students. The administrators, however, as much as they want to back up the district office, they also are a little bit closer to the teaching environment, and see that sometimes you need to waiver on some of the methodology involved. But, we as teachers, tend to have the outlook of, we take each child individually, whether they are a language learning child, a reading difficulty child, a resource child, it does not matter. We look at the child and the child’s needs, and that just cannot be scripted. (School A 5th grade teacher interview, fall, 2006)
Field notes from DAIT cabinet meetings and interviews indicate the superintendent and other central office leaders believe that the changes in curriculum and increased accountability require a change in instructional practices by teachers and for many teachers in the district, particularly veteran teachers, the superintendent understands that “this is not what they signed up for.” Based on school leadership team interviews, there appears to be an ideological chasm between the district and teachers regarding what constitutes good instructional practices that needs to be bridged. The following section describes findings regarding efforts that the central office has made to provide an ideological linkage between the district and its schools regarding good teaching.

*Communicating the ideology about good teaching.* As will be described in the Resource Linkages section of this chapter, the central office has allocated a number of resources to include principal and teacher coaches, site-based and district-wide professional development focused on instructional strategies, and strategic use of categorical funding designed to assist both principals and teachers in providing the “best instruction.” According to central office leaders, expectations regarding good instructional practices are communicated to principals via principal meetings in which time is spent discussing good teaching strategies, coaching is provided to principals by “seasoned, retired principals so they have somebody who can instruct them,” and cabinet members make regular visits to schools where there’s a “lot of conversation about instruction.” As the principal from School B stated: “I think the district’s focus is to get the principals comfortable working with the data so that they can guide their staff to look at data effectively and really make some systematic changes in the way that instruction is delivered (School B principal interview, fall, 2006). When asked if the district leaders
had engaged in specific discussions with principals regarding the ways in which the
district thinks instruction should change, that same principal noted,

> Yes, we have had some [discussions]. Actually I have attended several voluntary, administrator trainings that have to do with observing instruction and becoming familiar with what the teachers are using on a daily basis so that when I’m in a classroom I can more closely monitor. If I know where the teachers are in the curriculum and what they’re supposed to be teaching or how they’re supposed to be teaching it and what kinds of supplemental materials they’re supposed to be using then I can make some judgments on whether that’s being done effectively or not. So I think that’s sort of the focus is just to sort of familiarize and get the principals comfortable with that. (School B Principal interview, spring, 2007)

However, overall as illustrated in Table 4.1 principals do not necessarily perceive that the
district’s philosophy regarding good teaching is communicated to them in a structured
manner as evidenced by statements such as, “There isn’t like a definitive, ‘this is good
teaching,’ it’s just, it’s very nebulous.” Two of the five principals linked the district’s
communication of the ideology of good teaching to “quick in-services” regarding the
certificated evaluation process, which is based on the California Standards for the
Teaching Profession. Three of the principals referred to training their coaches had
provided on how to conduct focused walkthroughs using a “4 lenses” model.

Interestingly, team members at one of these schools referred to their principal giving
them handouts about things they would be looking for in classrooms, but the teachers
interviewed did not really link this to an ideological congruence regarding what
constituted good instructional practices and expressed that they thought perhaps the
information had come from the district, but they were not really sure. These comments
would support the comment of one central office leader who stated a district-wide
message regarding what constitutes “good teaching” is not an explicit message that has
been communicated to principals and teachers, explaining,
You know holistically as this is what the district thinks; I don’t think there is a communication of this is what it is. There is an expectation that is communicated that you should set the right strategies with English learners so that’s like one way of saying it … I think it gets done … we’ve had some district wide staff development last year that was really good … now we can really have a district message to staff. (Central office leader (5) interview, winter 2007)

School leadership team members at Schools A, B, C, and E perceive that the district message regarding their expectations of good teaching are communicated via “memos, pacing schedules,” or “schedules of chapters and due dates.” Another school leadership team member mentioned that, “When the district puts the topic out there for site based staff development you can assume that that’s an important topic to them.” One School A leadership team member commented, “I don’t know…. It’s like you’re given something that says you should be doing this and this and this at this time. But how you go about it seems to be left up to you.” A School C leadership team member explained, “To come up with the best teaching practices, that’s a big concern, making it all fit. Taking all the pieces, all the things that you know are good to do and trying to make it work and make it work smoothly.” Overall, interviewees perceive what the superintendent terms “a hodgepodge of programs” leading to splintered instructional programs and practices and an inordinate amount of instructional time focused on assessment rather than instruction, especially for English learners.

Findings would suggest that explicit discussions about the ideology regarding what is “good teaching” are not occurring on a systematic basis between the central office, principals, and school leadership team members. An exception is School D, the Reading First School, which appears to have more of an ideological congruence with the
central office regarding what constitutes good teaching. As explained by one central office leader,

Reading First schools that have had teams going through to observe them for a few years and have really had to fine-tune what they are doing. When you go through those particular sites you go through what they are doing, assessment wise, and how that is tied to what they are doing in the classrooms, it’s a well-oiled machine. So they are ... those teachers are understanding it and are doing that. As we are continuing to expand to DAIT and others aspects of it I want to see that everywhere, I want to see that piece. So I think the foundation is there, it's just a matter of fine-tuning what it is that they are going to do with that.

(Central office leader (2) interview, winter 2007)

Although expressing some concerns that the adopted curriculum “excludes some of the things we know to be good teaching,” School D leadership team members expressed an understanding of systematically using data to develop instructional strategies to tap into each student’s potential. Both the principal and school leadership team members discussed focusing on what one leadership team member terms “quality teaching … because that’s where all the test scores and student performance is going to be affected.”

Another School D team member commented on the school’s focus this year on student engagement, explaining, “If you don’t get the kids engaged, they’re not going to learn.”

The principal and school leadership team members commented about the frequent classroom visits from Reading First teams who support them with specific “commendations and recommendations” regarding their instructional practices. These explicit discussions about good teaching practices based on classroom observations suggest that discussions between central office leaders, principals, and school leadership teams may provide the necessary ideological bridge.

As will be shown in the Structural Linkages section of this chapter, the District Assistance Intervention Team (DAIT) may be a vehicle for engaging in explicit
conversations between the central office, principals, and school leadership team members about what constitutes good teaching. These conversations may provide opportunities for bridging the ideologies held, meaning that participants may find that there is some common ground among the groups regarding good instructional practices. A majority of central office leaders mentioned that they see the District Assistance Intervention Team (DAIT) as a vehicle for communicating district expectations regarding good instruction to non-Reading First schools in the district, “… which have not had the intense training and the regimen in terms of how they are going to instruct.”
### Table 4.1: Ideological Linkages

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<td>There is agreement across groups about the goal of improving student achievement</td>
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<td>I think that teachers would not argue with the fact that they want to see student achievement improve when they look at data that we are not where we want to be at this point, so I don’t think they would argue with that. I don’t know if everyone agrees that this is how you get there but at the same time I think people have taken it... there is enough trust to be able to say “Ok we may not agree but we will do what we need to do to get that achievement” … You are never going to have 100% agreement though (Central office leader (2) interview, winter 2007).</td>
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<td>I think that generationally speaking the veteran teachers that we have, truly were not trained to, necessarily deal with the diversity and the significantly different teaching expectations that are in position</td>
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<td>There is agreement across groups about the goal of improving student achievement</td>
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<td>I think it’s based on our data that we have analyzed throughout the district and things that are being shared to us. I think that one of the focuses that we’re seeing is that we need to continue making progress with our EL’s. And so, that’s why we’re taking the initiative at our sites and I’m going to talk about this site to focus on the EL population. Making sure that we’re giving them the appropriate tools and intervention so that they can become more successful in their academics and even become a grade level proficient (School D principal interview, fall 2006).</td>
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<td>[Referring to English language learners and change in demographics] So one of the challenges that we have here is to make sure that we meet the needs of those students. Because we did have a</td>
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<td>There is agreement across groups about the goal of improving student achievement</td>
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<td>Well, I think one of the main issues is how to best reach our second language learners, and help them succeed and I think at the same time the other side of the coins is not to leave the other kids behind (School A Kdg teacher interview, fall 2006).</td>
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<td>Well I know the district, the main thing the district is working on is pulling up test scores and a lot of the focus is on the second language learners, the Spanish speakers, primarily (School E 2nd grade teacher interview, fall 2006).</td>
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<td>Well district and our site is really connecting with our second language learners and bringing up their scores and how to move them toward proficient… And how are we going to connect with them to get them to want to learn and</td>
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now, than when they first received their training. I suppose as with anything, you have different human reactions, but, we have some that have said “Yes, absolutely,” and have the attitude “I’m a continuous learner, and my job is to meet the needs of my kids.” But then there’s also another group of veterans that say, “No, I don’t think so, this is not what I signed up for, this is not what I want to do” (Superintendent Interview, winter 2007).

I have taught a lot of in-services, I have done a lot of coaching and teachers feel very comfortable with they have been doing for years and from their perspective it’s very successful and it’s hard for them to kind of step out of their little world and kind of see that perhaps if you change just a little bit you could make a difference (Central office leader (8) interview, winter 2007).

Bonnie, your whole core thing about systems work, causes me to reflect on what I need to do; [Refers to the work of certain population before and now we’re learning that we need to use additional resources, we need to get other folks coming in to help us out working in small groups with these kids, adjusting our teaching strategies to meet the needs of these students (School A principal interview, fall 2006).

I don’t know if our teachers see the urgency as much as I do. At the beginning of the year, I brought to them how they were on alert last year because one of their areas was low and if they were low again in that area for basically AMO’s, they would be in program improvement for year one. So there is an urgency. And that’s something that I’ve alerted our staff that we need to continue to move up. And I’ve heard a variety of responses like, you know, “We’ll be fine,” they’ll change it to “Boy, we’re going to be really screwed in the next couple of years if we don’t do anything about it” (School C principal interview, fall 2006).

help them make progress in their learning (School D 1st grade teacher interview, fall 2006).

Is there a shared perspective in the district regarding good teaching?

Between the district and their policy and the curriculum and implementation of that curriculum versus the teacher and the one-to-one assessment of the needs of the child. That’s where we split in our ways. The district has very sound policy, and backed up with you know, a lot of information, a lot of testing, a lot of prior knowledge…. But, it still doesn’t meet that relationship that a child has with his or her teacher and the way we can assess the needs in a totally different way (School A 5th grade teacher interview, fall 2006).

It’s like there’s no time for the art of teaching…. we need to value our teachers for that art and the way they differentiate and the way they adjust this

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<td><strong>Richard DuFour and his presentation from Stevenson High—they had agreements about what they believe about kids. Do our teachers really understand we are committed to a continuous improvement cycle? (Superintendent comment, DAIT cabinet meeting 2-26-07).</strong></td>
<td><strong>Is there a shared perspective in district about what good teaching is?</strong></td>
<td>and that and deal with all the millions of decisions they make …feelings and the whole child (School E SLT interview, fall 2006).</td>
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<td>So what I was going to say then is that when we developed the LEAP plan, which is the Local Education Agency Plan, and we established the specific goals based on our data, which for us is program improvement because of English language arts. Our subgroups are English learners, students with disabilities, so our LEAP is developed around that and from there we have meetings with school teams that come in as part of professional development and we talk about, these are the things that need to be incorporated into the single site plan and you need to be looking at, because we want a greater coherence between the single site plan supporting</td>
<td><strong>Well you know what, I really don’t. I don’t know what happens at other sites. I know that when I meet with my colleagues, we have the same objectives and expectations. So I can only assume that we’re trying to implement the same objective. How we get there, it’s very different (School D principal interview, spring 2007).</strong></td>
<td>Right now there is no teaching to the learning styles … that’s something they will say at almost every workshop at the district, “you have to teach to the learning styles,” but it’s like “well let me!” But they’re not letting me. They’re not letting any of us (School A SLT interview, spring, 2007).</td>
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<td>I can’t speak of other sites—I can talk about my cohort though. And principals from time to time, we will have conversations regarding other teachers or teachers at other sites. And I would say my cohort—we are pretty right on</td>
<td><strong>I don’t think so (School E principal interview, spring 2007).</strong></td>
<td>It’s just like when they come to a collegial conversation and they bring their benchmark tests and they know all these details about the kids, but you’re just looking at scores … it just makes it ridiculous (School E SLT interview, fall 2006).</td>
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<td>I don’t think so (School E principal interview, spring 2007).</td>
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<td>Asking more and more of us and just taking away any freedom or discretion that we have as professionals, you know, what little we have is getting taken away</td>
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<td>the LEAP plan because ultimately, everybody has those intensive and strategic students, even the school that has 853 as API. So in those conversations and in those meetings, it’s important for us to share that all of us have to include and target these specific student groups because it also impacts the entire district (Central office leader (1) interview, winter 2007).</td>
<td>How does district communicate its philosophy regarding “good teaching”? I would say more often than not in the context of teacher evaluation...I wouldn’t call them workshops...but kind of quick in-services that we’ll get from HR...I would think they revolve around the California Standards for the Teaching Profession (School E principal interview, spring 2007).</td>
<td>from us.... And we also feel like the children are not benefiting necessarily from this because it’s just more time spent on assessing and less time spent teaching and zero spent time on doing just fun kid stuff (School B 5th grade teacher interview, fall 2006).</td>
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The LEA Plan was created by Educational Services, basically, our division put this together along with the County DAIT Leadership Team, and so the LEAP informs what they put in the Single Site Plan for student achievement. So, when we did the training for how to write the Single Site Plans, the DAIT information was given to those leadership teams and [they were told] “Okay, now here is what we’re saying are the focus for the district, align your program and your finances to that, to achieve your goals that your students need specific to your data.” So, that’s | All of our regional coaches got some focused walkthrough training that they shared with us ... and then we used those tools to do walkthroughs with our coaches and to give our teachers feedback in between coaching visits (4 lenses) ... I don’t know how every principal made that training come alive on their staff (School E principal interview, spring 2007). | And that as a veteran teacher is extremely frustrating. Give me good curriculum to let me use it the way I see fit, or the way it meets the needs of my students. That’s not happening. It’s giving me fairly mediocre curriculum and said “you must do it this way!” (School A SLT focus group interview, spring 2007). |

| We have the standards for the teaching profession…. (Referring to discussions | We’re not allowed to teach the child in a completely scaffolded methodology, which in my opinion as a teacher, is necessary (School A 5th grade teacher interview, fall 2006). |

I’ve been doing this a long time. I think sometimes we’re taking some of the creativity out of teaching. The programs are very scripted.... And you know I feel | |

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<td>how it went, so the LEAP to the Single Plan for student achievement and then the implementation in the classroom (Central office leader (4) interview, winter 2007).</td>
<td>at principals meetings regarding what the district views as good teaching) I don’t remember a specific time that that occurred this year (School A principal interview, spring 2007).</td>
<td>fortunate that I have a principal who says look, I know your capabilities I know your experience and yes you can bring other things to the table other than the program. And she gets the scores and the results from the children to support that (School E Kdg teacher interview, fall 2006).</td>
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<td>As to what I’m not confident about yet, is that they’re actually changing any practice based on the data. They may be changing a focus a little bit, “Well then I’m going to spend more time on my writing structures during UA with this group of ten kids,” but what I’ve come to realize is, it may not, we may be shooting ourselves in the foot just focusing on those ten kids, [instead of] well tell me about your overall writing program or how you make sure, or how you piece out the teaching and learning, and then, eventually aggregate it, or put it all together. So, we’re not at that point yet. A few of our schools are at that reflective point. So, the whole data piece, in order for that to be fulfilling, the site leadership teams and the grade level teams are going to have to design their</td>
<td>Through our meetings, through our inservices, they model what, what’s expected, they give us feedback and background of why they want us to do that, how it’s going to help our students (School D principal interview, spring 2007).</td>
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<td>own short term measurement of what they determine was so important to get across to kids. And that kind of empowerment from the data and the assessments isn’t there yet (Superintendent interview, winter 2007).</td>
<td>allowing me to create the foundation (School A 5th grade teacher interview, fall 2006).</td>
<td>And I think some of the kind of things that we used to do, the projects and the California days and those kinds of things, people feel like they are not sure they can spend time to do those. And yet those are things that often really turn the kid on to leaning and make it exciting (School E Kdg teacher interview, fall 2006).</td>
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<td>I think we, with the LEA Plan and making sure that school plans are feeding into that, when the LEA Plan feeds into what we know about our data and standards, that they should be, and using Standards Based Materials and research based strategies—all of that should be aligned (Central office leader (7) interview, winter 2007).</td>
<td>Everybody has potential. And it is just a matter of being able to tap into it and then provide them with the opportunity. And that comes from our instruction and how we can push them and move them (School D Reading First Coach interview, fall 2006).</td>
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<td>When you teach for a long time with a diverse population, some teachers give up good practices because they feel that they can’t use them with the new program. Our message should be that data should drive the instruction and that the good instruction should continue to be used (Superintendent, DAIT cabinet meeting, 11-27-2006).</td>
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Summary

Although findings suggest that central office leaders, principals, and teachers share a belief in the need to focus on improving achievement, particularly for English-language learners, and many see the importance of collaboration as a means for meeting the needs, there was much less agreement on what constitutes good teaching, suggesting the ideological linkage or pathway of a shared vision for instruction is unavailable to support school improvement. Findings suggest that central office leaders and principals believe that in order for student achievement to improve, teachers need to change their practices. Many teachers, particularly those that have been in the district a long time, are what one central office leader terms as “recalcitrant to changing their instruction.” The superintendent expresses a belief that “Culturally teachers are at a very big shift in time. One of our jobs is how do we support teachers in looking at data and trying new practices and saying, ‘you don’t need to have all these bells and whistles.’”

Central office leaders, principals, and school leadership team members use terms such as differentiation, ongoing assessment, and scaffolding to describe good instruction. However, with the exception of School D, the only Reading First school in the study, school leadership team members express frustration with the narrowing of their role based on the demands of NCLB. Their impression is that the district focuses solely on improving test scores and the expectation is for teachers to adhere to a rigid curriculum that stifles their creativity, ignores student developmental levels, and is counter to what they believe to be “good teaching.”

School D provides an interesting contrast to the other schools, in that as a Reading First school for the past three years they have been implementing a standards-based
curriculum, assessments every six weeks, and developing instructional actions plans based on student data. The School D leadership team’s frustration with the curriculum and the assessment is substantially less that the other teams. As will be seen in the Structural Linkages section of this chapter, DAIT has the potential to allow central office leaders, principals, and school leadership team members to engage in the same types of school visits and interactions that the Reading First schools have undergone regarding good instructional practices, which may provide a bridge to the ideological chasm between the central office and the schools regarding what constitutes good teaching.

Structural Linkages

Lasky (2004) defines structural linkages as federal, state, or district policies relative to reform. I expand this definition to include practices and organizational arrangements within the district designed to complete tasks, and especially to meet policy mandates. Data from interviews, field notes, and document reviews suggest that there are number of structures in place in Evergreen School District that are intended to support a district-wide focus on improving student achievement. NCLB and the statewide accountability system form structural linkages with the district to meet policy mandates. The district has responded to these mandates by initiating structural linkages with the state and local county office of education through the district’s participation in the District Assistance and Intervention Team (DAIT) pilot project. Other structures put in place by the district to link with its schools include the adoption of district-wide curriculum and pacing calendars, the district’s development of benchmark assessments, and its adoption of a data management system. In the following sections, I describe the data collected regarding each of these structural linkages and how central office leaders,
principals, and school leadership team members perceive that these structural linkages support and/or constrain Evergreen School District’s goal to improve student achievement and exit program improvement.

*NCLB, State Standards, and Accountability*

The district’s mission statement and board focus goals, as well as observational and interview data at all levels of the system, indicate that the policy levers of NCLB, state standards, and accountability are the structures that are directing the system toward reform. During interviews, central office leaders, principals, and school leadership team members specifically highlighted the district’s program improvement status for its failure to meet Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) in English-language arts for English-language learners and for students with disabilities as the major issue and concern in the district. Virtually all those interviewed concur that the achievement of the district’s English-language learners needs to improve. While interviews with school leadership team members overall reflected a frustration with what they perceived to be unrealistic expectations placed upon districts and ultimately teachers particularly by NCLB, principals and central office leaders were more focused on the fact that the accountability measures reflected a need to improve student achievement. One of the principals noted, “I think that the state accountability system has forced schools and school teams to look more closely at true student achievement. They have forced us to dig and really look at what our kids can and can’t do” (School B Principal interview, fall 2006). Table 4.2 summarizes the interview data from central office leaders, principals, and school leadership team members regarding their perspective on NCLB and accountability as the driving forces for school change. As can be seen in the table, there is a convergence of
views that the major issue facing the district is exiting from program improvement status, which matches with the adopted board focus goals. One interesting difference reflected in the chart is that school leadership team members at four of the study schools specifically mentioned that the emphasis of the district was on raising test scores of the underperforming groups. In year 2 of program improvement, all eight teachers at School D, although expressing some frustration with the federal and state accountability demands, consistently viewed test data as a means of informing their instruction to enable their school to exit program improvement. One School D leadership team member explained, “I don’t think it’s constrained it’s just made us more focused. And it’s set the expectation and we are working on how to meet that expectation” (School D teacher interview, fall 2006). When asked if these accountability measures are an incentive for improvement, she goes on to say;

They are for me and I think the teachers are starting to see that. There are still holdouts. There are still people who perceive it as a negative. But I think as our test scores go up … they feel like … yes we are making a difference. And they went up a lot this year. We barely missed our AYP, just barely. But our API went up like 39 points. So, I think they’re starting to see that it’s paying off. So as long as they can see progress. (School D Reading First Coach interview, fall 2006)

Central office leaders also clearly see the need to improve student achievement and their comments focused on the need to target instruction for low-performing groups in order to bring them up to proficiency. This focus on improving instructional practices in order to raise student achievement represents a common theme of central office leaders and the School D leadership team as will be seen as other linkages are discussed.

However, most school leadership team members at schools A, B, C, and E see the focus on student achievement by the district as really being a focus on testing. They
maintain that this focus interferes with their ability to provide quality instruction and
creates a feeling that they are not treated as professionals as evidenced in the following
view of one teacher and shared by many;

I feel pressured in what I have to teach and when it has to be taught. I feel like I am not being treated as a professional. That all I need to do is open up this book and follow the course. And if I do it right, the kids will do well and if they don’t do well, I have not followed the course they said to. (School A 1st grade teacher interview, fall 2006)
Table 4.2: Shared Perspective of How NCLB, State Standards, and Accountability Are Driving Change

| Central Office Leaders  
| n=10 | Principals  
| n=5 | School Leadership Team Members  
| n=45 |

We are very focused on instruction and student achievement; especially in making sure that our subgroups are meeting those goals, EL’s and Special Ed. (Central Office leader (2) interview, winter 2007).

Our main focus is student achievement. We’re Program Improvement district so obviously we’re looking at how we support our students and instruction within our schools to no longer be a Program Improvement district. (Central office leader (3) interview, winter 2007).

Mainly the focus is raising the student achievement of our English Learners, that’s the one that pertains specifically to our Ed services department, and getting us out of Program Improvement (Central office leader (6) interview, winter 2007).

We have lots of underperforming kids, and that has to be a focus for our district. When you are in District Program

The major concern I would think is always student achievement. In particular we’re a Program Improvement district. We’re in our second year and quite possibly next year would be the third year (School A principal interview, fall 2006).

Well I think one of the biggest concerns facing the district right now is that we have been identified as an underperforming district. Two of our subgroups did not meet their growth targets for the past two years. Our students with disabilities and our English Learners (School B principal interview, fall 2006).

I think the biggest issue right now is that our school district is in Program Improvement. That is the federal policy of No Child Left Behind. Our scores are below the annual measurable objectives in English Language Arts for English learners and students with disabilities (School C principal interview, fall 2006).

I think the big major issue of the district is student achievement and because we are now being driven by No Child Left Behind, the district is working very very hard to doing the best they can to get our students up to the proficient levels—that is their concern, that is their drive (School A ELL Reading facilitator interview, fall 2006).

I think really as far as issues go, I would say that we’re looking at being … a program improvement district, so we’ve got everything that goes along with that, including working on a pilot program, which is going to kind of bump up our assessments a little bit for many of our schools and … more assessment data for the state to look at, and so that’s a big project for the district (School B ELL facilitator interview, fall 2006).

I’d say the first issue on everyone’s mind is test scores. The performance of the students. We have a lot of schools in this district that are underperforming.... And
### Table 4.2: (cont.)

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**Central Office Leaders**

- Improvement whether you agree with No Child Left Behind sanctions or not, it is what it is, and it’s not acceptable to only have 20% of your kids at proficiency (Central office leader (7) interview, winter 2007).

- I think our main focus is student achievement, I mean we’re Program Improvement district so obviously we’re looking at how we support our students and instruction within our schools to no longer be a Program Improvement district (Central office leader (3) interview, winter 2007).

- Probably our biggest concern as a Program Improvement district is how to reach the English Learners and how to bring them up to proficiency in a timely manner (Central office leader (8) interview, winter 2006).

**Principals**

- Based on our data that we have analyzed throughout the district and things that are being shared with us. I think that one of the focuses that we’re seeing is that we need to continue making progress with our EL’s. And so, that’s why we’re taking the initiative at our site … to focus on the EL population; making sure that we’re giving them the appropriate tools and intervention so that they can become more successful in their academics and even become a grade level proficient (School D principal interview, fall 2006).

- I see the major concern is the achievement data, the achievement of our students. The data is indicating to us that we have some pretty low-performing groups, so I think that’s the biggest challenge the district is facing (School E principal interview, fall 2006).

**School Leadership Team Members**

- so, I think because of No Child Left Behind, the schools that are being sanctioned, and the State program, I think test scores are really the focus of the district (School C 4th grade teacher interview, fall 2006).

- I think the main concern is to increase the reading scores of our students, particularly our second language learners, and bringing the test scores up on the California Standards Test (School D 3rd grade teacher interview, fall 2006).

- Well I know the main thing the district is working on is pulling up test scores and a lot of the focus is on the second language learners, the Spanish speakers primarily (School E 2nd grade teacher interview, fall 2006).
The next section discusses key stakeholders’ perspectives regarding the use of accountability measures, and focuses on the structural linkage that the district established with the state through their decision to volunteer to participate in the District Assistance Intervention Team (DAIT) program.

*District Assistance Intervention Team (DAIT)*

Evergreen School District’s decision to participate in the state pilot of the DAIT program designed to assist schools and districts in exiting program improvement was another significant structure linking the state with Evergreen School District and the local county office of education. According to Evergreen’s assistant superintendent of educational services, after reviewing data from the SAIT (School Assistance Intervention Team) program, the state concluded that in order to affect school change, change needed to come from the district level. Specifically, districts needed to provide an infrastructure to support increasing academic achievement (field notes, 10-27-06; 11-27-06).

The DAIT infrastructure put in place in Evergreen School District consisted of three components. The first component included implementing a more cohesive and comprehensive assessment and data analysis system in the district. The district had already implemented benchmark assessments administered every 12 weeks in language arts and math and a district-wide writing assessment. DAIT added assessments at the six-week mark in language arts and math. In addition, the district had purchased Edusoft, a data management tool that was being utilized at all schools and had assigned a project specialist at the district office to manage the assessment data and assist schools with any questions they had regarding data.
The second component of DAIT involved a connection to participating schools by having teams composed of district central office staff and representatives from the county office of education visit schools with a specific classroom observation rubric to document the implementation of specific instructional practices. Visits were conducted by this team at each of the seven participating pilot schools at regular intervals during the 2006-2007 school year. According to the assistant superintendent of educational services, the goal is to develop capacity within the district so that ultimately teams would be comprised of central office leaders, principals, and school leadership team members (field notes, fall 2006). Each school was provided a report after each visit listing commendations and recommendations.

A third component of the plan was for grade level teams at each pilot school to meet on a regular basis to analyze assessment data and submit grade level instructional action plans to the district based on their review of the student data and the commendations and recommendations from the DAIT team visits (field notes, 10-27-06). The district had already bargained with the teachers’ association for a weekly early release day beginning in the 2007-2008 school year; in the interim, the bargaining agreement allowed for individual schools to implement early release days as long as 80% of the staff at the school was in agreement. Grade level team instructional action plans from these meetings were reviewed along with visitation summaries and student assessment data at the monthly DAIT cabinet meetings.

The superintendent presented the key strategies of DAIT to Evergreen School District staff in her first staff newsletter as district superintendent in September 2006:
DAIT’s key strategy to improve student achievement revolves around the idea of teacher collaboration to review frequently student progress in six-week assessment intervals. As our teachers know, this concept is not new to EUSD. We believe in benchmark assessments, teacher collaboration, and data conversations between individual teachers and principals, which we call “collegial conversations.” The DAIT process will guide the district to intensify the frequency of assessments (our checks of student understanding), and intensify our focus for data conversations… More information about DAIT is coming forward to you soon from your site principal/manager. In the meantime, district staff will be looking to reduce other teacher time commitments to allow for more data-driven teacher collaboration. (Superintendent Staff Newsletter, September 2006)

Throughout the 2006-2007 school year, central office leaders in concert with their local county office partners engaged in focused classroom observations, detailed discussion and review of student assessment data, and review of grade level action plans. Monthly DAIT cabinet meetings with the local county office of education included the superintendent and cabinet level administrators representing educational services, human resources, special education, and business services. In addition, coordinators and project specialist assigned to the educational services department and directors in the technology department all participated in the DAIT school observations and monthly meetings. Interviews with central office leaders and field notes taken at six DAIT cabinet meetings between the Evergreen central office leaders and the local county office of education staff during the 2006-2007 school year indicate that central office leaders viewed DAIT as a way to establish a cohesive and coherent focus on student achievement and instructional practices.

Findings suggest that DAIT school visits proved to be an extremely important component of the program. Before the district’s participation in DAIT, cabinet-level administrators would schedule visits to schools, but according to one cabinet-level administrator, the visits did not have the “articulated focus” that characterized the DAIT
team visits. Central office leaders expressed that DAIT visits gave them a true picture of the instructional practices occurring in classrooms. In interviews with central office leaders, all concurred that the DAIT process allowed them to engage in interactions with schools specifically around instruction and served as a linkage between the district and its schools by providing a vehicle for communicating district expectations about curriculum, assessment, data analysis, and instruction. One central office leader in referring to how DAIT conveyed district expectations explained,

We’ve had principals who have said that it has helped them … to have someone else come in and … concur with a direction … from the leadership team or the site administrator … that [for example] we need to define our time for English Language Development, it’s hit and miss … so I definitely think it reinforces strong instruction. (Central office leader interview (2) winter 2007)

Another central office leader noted that review of grade-level action plans also provided valuable insights as to what was occurring in classrooms district-wide:

The whole DAIT process, with as many flaws as it has had, has brought to the awareness level that there is going to be some accountability and we have a far way to go to get there but we are now at least sitting down, we’ve done this one time this year and looking at grade level meeting action plans and giving feedback and it’s amazing what we’re uncovering as we turn over those stones. We can find who is really tending to business and who isn’t. And until you have that site goal of communication out and then communication back and then feedback back to the whole system’s approach it is not going to happen district wide or it’s not going to happen well and so that’s the missing link. (Central office leader (6) interview, winter 2007)

Data from interviews with central office leaders also reveal that DAIT served as a catalyst for changing the culture of the central office from a group of leaders acting as independent contractors within their own departments and budgets tied to categorical programs to a culture of leaders sharing with one another with the goal of improving
teaching and learning. This shift in culture was captured in the view expressed by a central office leader when she stated:

We’re a very cohesive group. We have built a single mindedness about what our work is and that we are support to schools. Our cabinet has always visited schools and classrooms. But as far as actually being involved and talking to teachers about instruction; that has not been there…. It is there now. (Central office leader (4) interview, winter 2007)

In contrast, interviews with school leadership team members reveal that DAIT was not well received by many teachers who indicated that rather than being a supportive structural linkage between the district and schools, it was viewed as mandate from the district that further constrained the time teachers could devote to instruction. Although the central office leaders viewed DAIT as structure to better link the district with its schools, members from four of the five school leadership teams interviewed in the fall of 2006 expressed concerns that DAIT was just “one more thing” to be added to their already overburdened schedules. With the exception of the School D’s (the Reading First school already doing 6-week assessments for 3 years) school leadership team, who viewed DAIT as a “refinement of what we are already doing” (School D Kdg teacher interview, fall 2006) and looked forward to “consistent assessments across the district so teachers can [collaboratively] analyze and plan” (School D 5th grade teacher interview, fall 2006), virtually all team members interviewed expressed deep concerns about the DAIT process, highlighting the increases in the frequency of assessments and again charging that teachers were merely “test proctors” and the increased assessments would take away time from instruction.

In her September 2006 newsletter, the superintendent informed staff that principals would be providing their staffs with more information regarding DAIT. In
analyzing how principals perceived DAIT expectations, it is interesting to note that with
the exception of the School D principal, who informed his staff that DAIT would allow
them to go “deeper” into the data, principals at the other schools also expressed concerns
regarding DAIT and the added stress on teachers. The School E principal expressed to
her staff that the assessments were not extra—these were assessments they were doing
anyway. However, in an interview in the fall of 2006, she noted that now the data would
have to be put into Edusoft by teachers, whereas before this had not been a requirement.
She reflected on the fact that as an instructional leader, although her staff was making
progress, she still had not brought them to the point where they viewed assessment as
“time well spent.” She felt that the mandate to increase the frequency of assessments
would hamper the progress her staff had made because rather than focusing on having
meaningful conversations about the data they were back to “Holy crud, more
assessments!” The principal from School B expressed a belief that the superintendent’s
decision to participate was very strategic and would put the district in a better place the
following year when DAIT was implemented statewide. She reports that she told her staff
“This is a pilot year for us in the way we get these assessments done and in the way we
pace our instruction so that kids are getting good quality instruction.” However, in
contrast to the School E principal’s understanding of the assessments, the School B
principal expressed concerns that district had “scrambled” to find additional assessments
that would “appear appropriate.” The principal at School C expressed concerns that
DAIT caused a lot of “grief” at the school by mandating assessments that had previously
been optional.
Table 4.3 summarizes the contrasting views between central office leaders, principals, and school leadership team members regarding their perceptions of DAIT. Although central office leaders viewed DAIT as a means of better focusing district efforts on improving instructional practices and supporting schools in using data to design effective instruction, interviews with principals reveal that they felt caught between supporting the district initiative and yet viewing DAIT as blocking progress that they had made with teachers at their schools regarding data and assessment. Principals found themselves in the middle—understanding the need to collect data and use it to make instructional decisions, yet feeling that the district was out of touch with what was happening at the school, placing demands on teachers that were unrealistic, and, in effect, taking a step backward as teachers were just beginning to engage in meaningful conversations around assessment and data. The principal at School E noted, “It makes having a meaningful conversation about [data] much more challenging, so I wish we wouldn’t have had to add on the extra things this year … but it is what it is.”

With the exception of school leadership team members at School D, teachers expressed considerable frustration with DAIT as they felt it dramatically increased the amount of assessments teachers were required to complete. From the perspective of teacher members on four of the five leadership teams, again the focus of the district was on testing rather than a focus on improving instructional strategies to improve achievement. One teacher expressed a view that seemed to capture the thoughts of many teachers participating in the study. When asked in what ways the DAIT process had affected her school leadership team she replied,
It’s just given me another thing to be angry about. Maybe I’m getting upset over nothing. But I fail to understand how more testing improves my instruction. That is just more time giving more tests, me doing more bubbling. How is that improving my instruction? That really makes me angry. The amount of time. And this year I tried to do it all. I tried to do all the benchmarks and the summative even if it wasn’t required. And I did the extra test required by DAIT. And you know what I discovered? I have less time to teach, to fine-tune their reading. And so on their very last test I don’t feel like they did as well as they could have. Had I been able to use the time that I was giving extra tests, if I’d been able to use that time in instruction, I think they could have done better. I really strongly feel that more testing does not make my instruction better. (School A SLT focus group interview, spring 2007)

Two of the schools participating in the study (School D and School E) were DAIT pilot schools. School B and School C were originally scheduled to be DAIT schools but principals at these schools requested that they not be included as they were new principals at their schools and had a lot on their plates (field notes, spring 2007).

Interestingly, school leadership team members at the schools that participated in the DAIT visitations shared positive feedback about DAIT suggesting the potential for DAIT to serve as a supportive linkage between the district and schools in conveying the district’s reform agenda. Their comments support the perceptions of central office leaders regarding the benefits of the visits. School D participated from the very beginning of the DAIT implementation. Interviews with School D school leadership team members revealed that they were pleased to have classroom visits by the superintendent and assistant superintendent, feeling that the visits validated all the hard work they had been doing and that the members of the DAIT team “go out of their way to show their appreciation and support of what we’re doing” (School D SLT focus group interview, spring 2007). Another leadership team member from the same school commented that through the DAIT commendations and recommendations she felt that the district was
communicating its vision of good teaching. School E entered the DAIT pilot in January 2007. By this point, the district had incorporated their capacity-building strategy and included teachers from other schools in the district on the DAIT visits. One school leadership team member from School E commented regarding their DAIT visit: “It’s all about what they can do to help us, and some of them are teachers … they’re just here to form this group to be a well-balanced representation of education to actually help us.” Another School E leadership team member expressed that initially teachers were stressed, but the DAIT visits “did force grade levels to work collaboratively … to agree on methods to use and how we’re going to evaluate and what rubrics we’re going to use” (School E SLT focus group interview, spring 2007). Table 4.3 provides a summary of comments from these school leadership team members and demonstrates a sharp contrast with comments from team members at schools that had not participated in the DAIT visits.
With our DAIT visits, we’re trying to give commendations and recommendations.... Working with the principal, to help him facilitate those recommendations. It’s just heightening everybody’s awareness in terms of what needs to happen for kids. We keep saying on our visits, it’s not evaluative, it’s supportive (Central office leader interview (1), winter 2007).

I think that [DAIT] definitely reinforces strong instruction (Central office leader (2) interview, winter 2007).

The other piece with the DAIT visit that has been a nice aspect to it is that all cabinet has been involved … so even from a school level to be able to say “Well the Assistant Supt of Business Services is coming through looking at classrooms.” This is important to all of us. We are all spending time looking at [instruction] and giving input (Central office leader (2) interview, winter 2007).

Well I do believe we’ll get there [that teachers believe that assessment is time well spent], which is kind of why I’m disappointed we had to do more assessing at the 6 week mark because we would’ve gotten there quicker (School E Principal interview, fall 2006).

This DAIT process … allows us to assess and monitor our school’s performance. The hard thing is our school’s not in program improvement ... our school still has to go through the process, all of us including some of the high performing schools, we’re all going through the same process ... we’re doing all this extra work, but when in reality … it’s just a way to monitor how we’re doing (School C principal interview, fall 2006).

[Our goal] was Best Practices and actually the intent was to align it with the District professional development and bring in and really expand it so that we were going one or two steps further …

The DAIT process has made us into test proctors or test givers and we’re not teachers anymore. We don’t have time to teach anymore. There was a week that I just had tests. I had one test after another test after another test. And my kids were just burned out. And it wasn’t the standard state tests, it was just stuff that all fell together (School A SLT focus group interview, spring 2007).

And those were extra tests that were thrown in because of the DAIT process. That’s the basic thing that DAIT’s done for us. It’s given us more tests...I don’t see that it’s done too much other (School A SLT focus group interview, spring 2007).

Being a DAIT school is a big concern. I think, in general, all the teachers feel that teaching is becoming more and more challenging, and more and more demanding, and stressful and difficult and there’s so much accountability, and sometimes so little support…. This DAIT thing is aiming at “what are you failing at?” instead of “what are you good at?” (School B 5th grade teacher)
Table 4.3: (cont.)

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<th>Principals n=5</th>
<th>School Leadership Team Members n=45</th>
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<td>I think we all have a shared idea of what good instruction is but I think it has been more refined … through the DAIT process, even for us (Central office leader interview (3), winter 2007).</td>
<td>really trying to get teachers involved in really seeking that out. The District focus has really kind of changed [referring to DAIT] and it’s much more dealing with assessment, dealing with interventions for intensive and strategic students (School B principal interview, spring 2007).</td>
<td>interview, fall 2006).</td>
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<td>I like the changes about getting back to the schools, and actually seeing instruction and talking to teachers. [That has] come with the DAIT process (Central office leader (4) interview, winter 2007).</td>
<td>The DAIT process … really caused a lot of grief on this campus because it really changed the culture. It changed the demands of things, the things that people wanted, the things that people expected, the timetables, the expectation of assessments on a regular basis versus it being optional (School C principal interview, spring 2007).</td>
<td>Now the district has added another … it’s called DAIT. So that’s another test to give and that takes away teaching time and I think most important is for the kids to learn and the more time you can spend teaching [rather] than giving the test. I know you need tests for assessment, but I think there’s a point where it’s too much testing (School C 1st grade teacher interview, fall 2007).</td>
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<td>But now we are getting other people [from other central office departments] who are now realizing “Oh, this isn’t about funding, this isn’t about compliance.” This is about kids learning and what they are learning in their classroom. So that’s very new (Central office leader (4) interview, winter 2007).</td>
<td>I invited Leadership Team members to be a part of the DAIT visitation, so, that meant three teachers were on the DAIT visitation teams. So they went into classrooms with the DAIT team, they could hear those conversations and listen to those kinds of things. The DAIT process is in place for Program</td>
<td>When she’s come on the DAIT visitations she’s just been just very impressed by what type of instruction that she sees in the classrooms. And she’s just made it really clear; make sure your teachers are aware that we see how hard they’re working…. And she’s one of the assistant superintendents (School D SLT focus group interview, spring 2007).</td>
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<td>One of the things I think has been helpful is that we have been pulling principals to attend visitations of the school, when we do these district visitations. What it has done is it has opened the doors for</td>
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<td>You know when the superintendent has come through the classroom she always just comments about how evident it is</td>
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principals to say “Oh so-and-so is doing this great thing, how did you get that to happen?” and that has started to change the culture of the district (Central office leader (9) interview, winter 2007).

Well, you know, and as much as I hate to admit it, it really has sharpened my saw about what is going on or not going on instructionally. It’s real easy to walk in the classroom and I’m sure the teacher is obviously trying to do her very best. But you could walk in very quickly and see something that you can suggest (Central office leader (7) interview, winter 2007).

Improvement Districts and we are one and I think sometimes only those who haven’t really been a part of the process, are having trouble understanding that. You know, like, “well, we’re a Program Improvement District.” Why? Well, because we don’t have the achievement data that we should have with the student populations that we have. And these are proven activities that we must engage in order to improve. We must be engaged in ongoing assessment. Well, some of us aren’t yet over the fact that we have to give them so we haven’t gotten to the good conversation about what the data’s telling us (School E principal interview, spring 2007).

that good teaching practices are going on (School D SLT focus group interview, spring 2007).

It was really high stress when it began. But it did force grade levels to work collaboratively…. Once the first visit happened, at least at my grade level, everybody kind of went “well that wasn’t a big deal.” And I kept saying, “you know, we’re doing good teaching. We really are.” And they’re going to come in and they’re going to see it.” And then by the time the second one came the stress level was down a lot (School E SLT focus group interview, spring 2007).

It’s all about what can they do to help us. And some of them are teachers. They’re not state or county or district people. Some of them are teachers from other schools. And they’re just here to form this group to be a well-balanced representation of education. Actually help us. And it’s actually like I’m going to look forward to them coming next year (School E SLT focus group interview, spring 2007).
Pacing Calendars, Assessment, and Data Analysis

Curriculum pacing calendars, frequent assessments, and data analysis represent another set of structures that serve as a link between the central office and schools.

Interview data, field notes, and observations reveal that central office leaders, principals, and school leadership team members have differing views both across and within groups regarding these structures. The superintendent recognized early on in her role as Evergreen’s Deputy Superintendent of Educational Services that even though the district had shown improvement in student achievement, given the NCLB timeline requiring all students to be proficient by 2014, the state’s aggressive accountability timetable, and Evergreen’s changing demographics, the district would have to take a more aggressive stance to achieve continuous improvement in both teaching and learning. She believed improving student achievement across the district would require that the district design a cohesive and coherent instructional program where teachers would implement standards based curriculum, frequently measure student progress, analyze assessment data, and adjust their instruction accordingly. In an interview in the winter of 2007, she noted that “Only three years ago … rather quickly, probably more quickly than as an instructional leader I would have felt comfortable doing,” the district put into place pacing calendars, benchmark assessments, and adopted Edusoft (a data management tool) and specific dates for giving assessments. At the same time the district also initiated what she termed “collegial conversations,” which are one-to-one teacher-principal meetings every 12 weeks to discuss student achievement, grouping, and what a teacher’s challenges are. She has seen the awareness level of teachers regarding their students rise over the past couple of years. In a recent classroom visit, when she asked the teacher about his classroom
makeup and specifically the number of English learners she explained, “He knew their levels … as well as their proficiency or lack thereof in certain areas. I’m not sure that a conversation with that specificity would have happened a few years ago. There just wasn’t that awareness.”

In the following sections, data is presented that suggests that although there is a convergence among key participants regarding the need to improve student achievement, there are divergent views among central office leaders and across teams as to whether the structures of pacing calendars, frequent assessments, and data analysis are supporting Evergreen’s reform agenda to improve teaching and learning.

**Pacing calendars.** I begin with pacing calendars as they form the basis for the delivery of the district’s reading, language arts, mathematics, and English-language development curriculum. Table 4.4 provides a comparison of the key participants’ perceptions of pacing calendars and summarizes data gathered in the fall and spring of 2006-2007. Given the enormous amount of state standards within each subject area at each grade level, interview data suggest that central office leaders view pacing calendars as a way of assisting teachers in focusing their instruction. One central office leader explained that pacing calendars “keep us on the same path so that when Johnny goes from one school to the next [in the district], hopefully he is having the same access and the same opportunities for that content” (Central office leader (6) interview, winter 2007). According to another central office administrator, this had not been the case prior to the implementation of pacing calendars as “…for years we had a student leaving from school A to school B in the same grade and [at the new school] they were doing something completely different” (Central office leader (2) interview, winter 2007). This lack of an
adopted curriculum and pacing calendars was confirmed by one school leadership team member who relayed the frustration she felt as a first-year teacher several years ago, noting, “There was no particular curriculum and teachers were just doing whatever they wanted and I floundered my first year.” Other school leadership team members agreed that the adopted curriculum and pacing calendars provide a focus and keep the teachers on target in preparing students for the state testing at the end of the year. A school leadership team member from School E explained in a focus group interview in spring 2007,

> We all recognize that these are the things we need to teach. This is where we need to be at a certain time like the end of the year. I think that that’s helped focus our teaching. I think we waste less time with things that aren’t as valuable and we spend more time on things that are really going to focus on the skills the children need, the content standards they need to master. That’s been a change. (School E focus group interview, spring 2007)

However, as shown in Table 4.4, many school leadership team members have major concerns regarding the rigid timelines that need to be adhered to in order to “teach everything” rather than being allowed to differentiate instruction based on the unique needs of their students. A comment by one school leadership team member represents the thoughts expressed by many regarding pacing calendars;

> Give me good curriculum to let me use it the way I see fit, or the way it meets the needs of my students. That’s not happening. It’s giving me fairly mediocre curriculum and saying you must do it this way!... And I feel increasingly that my abilities as a teacher are of no account, totally discounted … I don’t feel my kids are doing as well as they should just because there’s very little wiggle room in the pacing. (School A SLT focus group interview, spring 2007)

There is also a divergence of views regarding pacing calendars by central office leaders. Not all central office leaders see pacing calendars as something that needs to be rigidly adhered to by teachers, “It is not going to be as tight as one school being on page
9 and another school on page 9, but they should be pretty much on the same theme, there should be some consistency in what’s happening” (Central office leader (2) interview, winter 2007). The superintendent supported this view noting “To the extent that teachers are following the pacing guide [calendar] and using the core or even supplementing it, if kids are doing well on the assessments, I’m not going to say, you should be using the core more” (Superintendent interview, winter 2007). In a DAIT cabinet meeting in November 2006 when the team discussed school visit observations she reminded the group,

When you teach for a long time with a diverse population some teachers give up good practices because they feel that they can’t use them with the new program. Our message should be that data should drive the instruction and that the good instruction should continue to be used. (Superintendent, DAIT cabinet meeting, 11-27-06)

However, there is concern expressed by other central office leaders that the district needs to be more aggressive in holding principals and teachers accountable for standardizing instruction revolving around pacing calendars, a common core curriculum, and common assessments. One central office administrator noted that there are teachers who “retreat behind closed doors” and that, “no matter how many times you have staff development … they still do what they want to do” (Central office leader (6) interview, winter 2007). According to another central office leader, the end result is “Experimentation where instead of using what the state has deemed as the curriculum which has met the standards, you create your own version of whatever you’re doing … and when something is found to be not so great, then it is thrown out and something else put in it’s place” (Central office leader (9) interview, winter 2007). Another central office administrator agreed, noting, “It’s the curriculum, not the instruction … we don’t analyze the instruction …
[we] get another program or make the pacing calendar longer.” (Central office leader (6) interview, winter 2007) Other central office leaders concur and express some frustration that the district cannot just mandate that teachers will teach the core in the manner that the district directs. There is not a culture of “non-negotiables” in the district, “Things still have to be processed and negotiated … so we move much slower than we would like” (Central office leader (7) interview, winter 2007). Based on these comments, there appears to be a variation in the views and expectations of central office leaders that may lead to an inconsistent messages relayed regarding the adopted curriculum and pacing calendars, which would constrain rather than support pacing calendars as a structural linkage between the district and schools in achieving district goals.

Finally, central office leaders believe that teacher leaders are very involved in the “development and revisions of pacing guides … they work on the development of study guides and differentiated instruction during the summer and this curriculum is distributed to district teachers district-wide as a result.” The principal from School A concurred, stating, “Every school is invited to send a representative or two or three … and teachers do have a lot of say not only in the pacing calendars … and also of course in curriculum that is adopted—they pilot it—so teachers have a lot of power in our district in helping to determine the route we are going to take.” However, very few school leadership team members interviewed commented about participating in the development or revision of pacing guides, which suggests that teacher leaders working on pacing guides may not necessarily be members of their site’s school leadership teams. As will be shown in a latter section of this chapter, school leadership teams are beginning to be viewed by central office leaders, principals, and team members as vehicles for communicating
within and across grade levels. This brings into question how teacher leaders who participate in district-level committees charged with the development and revision of pacing calendars communicate within a school and across schools. Table 4.4 illustrates that many school leadership team members feel powerless to engage in instruction that they feel meets the learning styles of their students. A comment by the principal of School E seemed to capture where teachers, principals, and central office leaders are at this point in the reform when she stated;

I think that if I were to characterize it I would think, right now, maybe not the majority, but certainly enough that I think it’s significant to mention, probably view the District as imposing things on them, like assessments and site visits, and they haven’t quite made the connection that those things are in place to improve student achievement. And while I work on that I don’t know that I’ve changed that perception … things are imposed on them; pacing calendars are imposed on them, they don’t understand how that’s to improve their instruction and what they teach. Even though we’ve read articles and we’ve talked about it … it still feels imposed on them a little bit. And again, I’m not sure it’s the majority, but its enough that I think it’s a significant thing to mention. I think … we’re evolving or I’m hoping to evolve us into understanding how those things that we’re being asked to do at the District level are really in place to support our goal of maximum student achievement but I’m not sure everybody’s made that connection. (School E Principal interview, spring 2007)

The perspective of teachers as to what district expectations are regarding pacing guides was best captured in a comment made by a school leadership team member when she stated;

There’s kind of a mixed message from the district. There’s the pacing calendar, you’ll be here and you’ll be here and you’ll be here. And then there’s also the message, look at your data every six weeks, every 12 weeks, and let that drive your instruction. And those don’t necessarily work together all the time. (School E focus group interview, spring 2007)

As shown in Table 4.4, there is both a convergence and divergence of perceptions among key participants regarding pacing calendars. Although administrators see the need
for a standardized curriculum, they differ as to how rigidly teachers need to adhere to the pacing calendars versus the need to use the pacing calendars as a means to drive collaborative discussions, which focus on examining instructional practices. By the same token, some school leadership team members view pacing calendars as a benefit to assure that they are preparing students for end-of-year standardized testing, while others view pacing calendars as merely exposing students to the curriculum without the intent of mastery, stifling creativity of both teachers and students, and ignoring developmental levels. This divergence in perceptions may weaken pacing calendars as a supportive structural linkage between the central office and schools to achieve the goal of providing a cohesive, coherent, and equitable instructional program for all students in the district. Rather than focusing on changing or improving instructional practices to meet student needs, many teachers are focusing on their frustration with pacing calendars.
Table 4.4: Pacing Calendars

| Central Office Leaders  
n=10 | Principals  
n=5 | School Leadership Team Members  
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<td>Pacing calendars provide a coherent, cohesive focus and are aligned to standards.</td>
<td>And also of course teachers have say in curriculum that is being adopted—they pilot it—so teachers have a lot of power in our district in helping determine the route that we are going to take (School A principal interview, spring 2007).</td>
<td>Some teachers believe pacing calendars provide a coherent, cohesive focus and are aligned to standards.</td>
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<td>Well, we’ve done some alignment. We were careful in our benchmarks to choose to at least start with the publisher assessments, that according to them we’re aligned to CST, and then we’ve done our own alignment analysis, and there were pretty strong correlations. So, I only wanted to assess what teachers were expected to be teaching. In other words, that it went along with the Pacing Guide and that there would be alignment with CST (Superintendent interview, winter 2007).</td>
<td>We all recognize that these are the things that we need to teach. This is where we need to be at a certain time, like the end of the year. I think that that’s helped focus our teaching. I think we waste less time with things that aren’t as valuable and we spend more time on things that are really going to focus on skills the children need to, the content standards they need to master (School E focus group interview, spring 2007).</td>
<td>I think definitely everybody should be teaching the same curriculum on the same page and these are the goals for 1st grade and this is what you should be doing and this is where they should be and how else are you gonna monitor them? So, you need the standards and</td>
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<td>I think what happens is we’re making strides not as quickly as we probably need it as a program improvement district but and I think the tool that we’re using is we’re trying to develop some systems that have not been in place and</td>
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Table 4.4: (cont.)

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<td><strong>we’re trying to standardize our instruction, that would evolve around pacing calendars and common assessments and a common core curriculum</strong> (Central office leader (6), winter 2007).</td>
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<td><strong>We have district Leadership teams … they work on the development of study guides and differentiated instruction during the summer. This curriculum then is distributed to district teachers, district wide as a result. And these pacing calendars drive how they deliver the instruction and when they give the assessments. So they are directly involved in terms of the planning and development of the curriculum and the guides and the documents that help us keep on the same path so that when Johnny goes from one school to the next, hopefully he is having the same access and the same opportunities</strong> (Central office leader (6) interview, winter 2007).</td>
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<td><strong>Central office leaders have differing views as to how rigidly teachers must</strong></td>
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| Principals  
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<td><strong>you need the curriculum and then within that curriculum, each teacher has things they do differently or things they add to it, but you have that same foundation which I think is really important</strong> (School C 1st grade teacher interview, fall 2006).</td>
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<td><strong>There is a positive part of the pacing guide. We have to give our state test after about 80% of the school year, right?... If we didn’t have pacing guide that we were trying to adhere to my bet is that we wouldn’t be all as uniform at being to the same point when those state test come around … the overall effect of the pacing guides is good in that it tends to keep the teachers aligned to a schedule related to the state test</strong> (School B focus group interview, spring 2007).</td>
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<td><strong>Many teachers express concern about rigid timelines and lack of control over instruction.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>We’re trying to force information or knowledge or skills on boys and girls who are not ready. Therefore they don’t</strong></td>
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Table 4.4: (cont.)

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<td>adhere to the pacing guides</td>
<td>retain it or they don’t understand it with the depth that they need to … I feel very pressured in what I have to teach and when it has to be taught (School A 1st grade teacher interview, fall 2006).</td>
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Teachers can tell you what good instruction is. When you teach for a long time with a diverse population some teachers give up good practices because they feel that they can’t use them with the new program. Our message should be that data should drive the instruction and that the good instruction should continue to be used (Superintendent comments, DAIT meeting field notes, 11-27-06).

We’re bothered by incorrect attributions indicating the reasons for the low performance and we are also very concerned with the experimentation where instead of using what the State has deemed as the curriculum which has met the specs of the standards, when you create your own version of whatever you’re doing there is more room for it being loose and spinning out of control then when you try to stay with everybody agreeing that this will the bulk of our instruction. So that’s why we don’t think the data has been well
Table 4.4: (cont.)

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executed...We don’t have an in-house R and D shop that would say you know this many kids are being taught this way by these teachers and this is the outcome (Central office leader (9) interview, winter 2007).

What I would love to see is that yeah we have a benchmark for the district ... but in the interim ... we’re gonna give this assessment because we’re on this pacing guide, everybody’s done this, let’s look and see what our kids have done (Central office leader interview (1), winter 2007).

And we still have teachers that no matter how many times you put that pacing calendar out there, no matter how many times you have your staff development and it’s trickled down to the site level they still will do what they want to do So ... we need to be more empowered, I think we’re moving in that direction but what I would see in terms of that utopia district would be that the teachers really have grasped and become the torch bearers of what we’re trying to do

block, use excellent literature, use the same strategies that the Houghton Mifflin book says, but ... let us use a different story that would do the exact same thing, but expand the kids’ horizon on literature ... So, the confinement of not being able to utilize other literature in the language arts block is the thing that bothers us the most” (School E Kdg teacher interview, fall 2006).

The children right now have no time for mastery, it exposes them to it, if they don’t get it go on hopefully they’ll do ok, that’s just not real teaching ... I’m kind of a robot (School A 5th grade teacher interview, fall 2006).

We have a population of kids who generally speaking are not read to at home…. Well, these kids need to hear the rich literature that is available and these are the very kids that have missed out on that. And so … we try to squeeze it in where we can, but sometimes we just feel that with the Houghton Mifflin program and ... I mean, we love the
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<td>(Central office leader (6) interview, winter 2007). We don’t have a culture where we have non-negotiables about here is what will happen. And let’s just move on. I think there’s still a lot of stuff that needs to be processed and negotiated every time there is a big change (Central office leader (7) interview, winter 2007).</td>
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<td>Houghton Mifflin book instruction, I think it’s very good, but we just would like to be able to expand and use rich literature beyond that and because of the pacing guides and the structure of the whole thing, we’re pretty much bound on that (School D Kdg teacher interview, fall 2006).</td>
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Assessment and data analysis. Assessment and data analysis are structural linkages between Evergreen School District and its schools designed with the intent that schools will systematically assess student learning, review data, and adjust instructional strategies accordingly. Over the past three years, in addition to adopting pacing calendars, the district has worked with teachers to develop benchmark assessments in reading, language arts, mathematics, and English-language development. Teachers are required to administer these assessments at 6- and 12-week intervals at Reading First schools and at 12-week intervals at all other schools in the district. As a result of the district’s participation in DAIT, beginning in January 2007, all schools were required to administer benchmark assessments at 6- and 12-week intervals. Table 4.5 illustrates perspectives of central office leaders, principals, and school leadership team members regarding their perceptions of the impact that assessment and data analysis have had on teaching and learning.

Central office leaders believe that supportive structures are in place and that the district has a “very articulated message” regarding the importance of regular assessment and data analysis in order to improve teaching and learning. As shown in Table 4.5, the district expectation is that principals and teachers engage in collaborative teams to analyze instruction based on assessment results. The superintendent explained, “I expect principals to share the data. I expect teachers and groups of teachers and the school as a whole to look at their progress now with DAIT every six weeks, and to monitor and adjust their instruction with Grade Level Action Plans” (Superintendent interview, winter 2007). As can be seen in Table 4.5, principals and school leadership team members clearly understand the district expectations regarding assessment and data analysis.
Principals expect that grade level teams “decipher the data and … plot their course of action,” while SLT members at each school talk about “collaboratively planning“ and using data to “modify or enhance instruction.”

However, as with pacing calendars, data suggest there is divergence among central office leaders, principals, and school leadership team members as to whether assessment and data analysis structures in place are linkages that support or constrain the district goal of using data from assessments to inform instruction and ultimately to improve teaching and learning. As illustrated in Table 4.5, central office leaders recognize that though progress has been made in using data to inform instruction, “We’re not at that point yet.” They express an understanding that although they would like to move faster, there must be buy-in by staff and it is important to provide the support necessary to bring people along (DAIT meeting field notes, 11-27-06). One central office administrator expressed the following view,

Is everyone on the same level? No, not by any means. Is everyone doing things exactly they way they should be? No, there is still a lot of growth. But I think that the structures are in place and we are getting there, we are taking steps to get there. I think is going to happen. (Central office leader (2) interview, winter 2007)

Findings suggest that overall there is an understanding by central office leaders that the culture of the district is undergoing a significant change, which is captured in the following statement,

I think we’re evolving out of a very passive culture, passive in the sense that people do whatever they want behind closed doors. And I would much rather see them more aggressive in terms of coming out and saying “Okay, we’ll sit down and work with you on this.” But I think what happens is we’re making strides not as quickly as we probably need to as a program improvement district, but I think the tool we’re using is we’re trying to develop some system that have not been in place and we’re trying to standardize our instruction, that would evolve around
pacing calendars and common assessments and a common core curriculum. (Central office leader (6) interview, winter 2007)

As noted earlier, school leadership team members across schools understand that accountability is important. Principals and school leadership team members at each school spoke of meeting in the fall of each year to examine CST data, analyze strengths and weaknesses of student performance, and make changes in their curriculum as necessary. The process was explained by a School B school leadership team member, “It’s our report card to kind of see how did we do and we look at it very seriously and reflect on what strengths showed up and what weaknesses.” However, there appears to be less agreement among school leadership team members regarding the benefits of benchmark assessments to inform instruction. While a School B leadership team member noted, “The whole design of the benchmark program whether I agree with the way it’s assigned or not…. [The district] has made an effort to create some agreed upon tests, some agreed upon rubrics,” other school leadership team members expressed concern that they had simply become “test administrators.” As can be seen in Table 4.5, with the exception of school leadership team members at School D, the Reading First school, school leadership team members at each school express concern that benchmark assessments do not inform their instruction. A teacher from School A expressed a view shared by many when she stated, “I’m concerned right now that we are doing testing just to produce numbers … it doesn’t inform my teaching.” School leadership team members from other schools expressed concern that due to the test administration timelines they were not able to individualize instruction to student needs. A School B teacher explained, “So you back up from where the test is … not where are you at student, it’s where do I
have to put you at because in order to get the class forward, we need to cover this now, whether you are ready or not.”

In addition, more than half the school leadership team members in schools A, B, C, and E expressed concerns that district mandates for the increase in administration of benchmark assessments throughout the year have taken away from instructional time and not allowed them the time to accurately reflect and reteach. A School E teacher commented, “Right now the amount of testing and assessment that we have to do is too much … it is directly impacting the amount of quality time in the classroom.” In contrast School D’s team which had been doing assessments at 6-week intervals for 3 years in grades K-3 did not express concerns about assessments and are using 6-week assessments to collaboratively analyze student performance and revise instructional strategies. With respect to using the data to really change instructional practices—School D is a work in progress—though it appears to be much farther along than the other schools. The Reading First coach notes that in data analysis meetings she works on asking guiding questions to move the teachers from organizational planning to cognitive planning. The superintendent views Reading First schools as more “evolved” but recognizes where most schools in the district are in the process, noting,

As to what I’m not confident about yet, is that they’re actually changing any practice based on the data. They may be changing a focus a little bit, “Well then I’m going to spend more time on my writing structures during UA with this group of ten kids,” but what I’ve come to realize is, it may not, we may be shooting ourselves in the foot just focusing on those ten kids, [instead of] well tell me about your overall writing program or how you make sure, or how you piece out the teaching and learning, and then, eventually aggregate it, or put it all together. So, we’re not at that point yet. A few of our schools are at that reflective point. So, the whole data piece, in order for that to be fulfilling, the site leadership teams and the grade level teams are going to have to design their own short term measurement of what they determine was so important to get across to kids. And
that kind of empowerment from the data and the assessments isn’t there yet. (Superintendent interview, winter 2007)

Central office leaders express an understanding that the benchmarks are a work in progress and believe that there are structures in place to involve teachers in modifying assessments to provide more accurate data. They explain that personnel in the education services department have “spent a lot of time, this is not top down, working with district committees in get input on how we should do this.” Interestingly, with the exception of one school leadership team member at School B who discussed her participation in a district math committee, school leadership team members at Schools A, B, C, and E indicate that they do not feel empowered, as reflected in the following statement,

As far as the District goes … you need to listen to the classroom teachers…. We give a more realistic viewpoint as far as these assessments go…. I don’t know that there is what you would call support. I know that there are directives. And I will say we do, we really try and honor their directive to really look at this data and make decisions. (School A teacher interview, fall 2006)

As can be seen in Table 4.5, principals perceive that central office leaders, specifically the superintendent and assistant superintendent of educational services, are very open to listening to teacher concerns regarding the benchmark assessments. The School A principal explained, “Teachers will share their concerns and I never get the feeling that there is someone in the district saying, “oh we will deal with that two years from now”… the district is going to listen and they are going to act appropriately.”

Data presented in Table 4.5 shows that principals have differing opinions as to whether the benchmark assessments are giving teachers relevant data to inform their instruction. The principal from School B expressed concern that the assessments focus on theme tests and chapter tests rather than being standards based while the principals from School A
and E see the data as relevant. The School A principal explained, “You are using the theme tests and summative tests on a curriculum you are teaching.” As shown in Table 4.5, with the exception of the principal at School D, the Reading First school, principals at the other four schools recognize that teachers feel assessments are interfering with instruction rather than informing instruction. The School B principal explained, “It’s very frustrating to teachers … they’re really ending up feeling like they’re teaching to the test rather than they’re teaching standards.” Principals also differ on their perception of support they and the teachers receive from the district in learning how to use data. One principal expressed that the district “sort of dumped this data on the teachers” while another principal explained that through summer workshops the district “shows you how to use the assessment … the curriculum … and then how to plan.”

The district and its schools utilize Edusoft, a data management system, to monitor student progress in core instruction. Teachers are required to input the data into Edusoft and then Edusoft has the capability of manipulating the data into a variety of reports that principals and school leadership teams can utilize as they analyze student assessment results and plan instruction. However, as can be seen in Table 4.5, school leadership team members have varying levels of comfort with Edusoft. Although, according to the superintendent, the district has provided a technology resource teacher at each school to assist teachers in learning the program and has prepared detailed videos to walk teachers through the Edusoft program, some teachers express concern that they are not adept in using the technology or that the data from Edusoft is inaccurate. A School A leadership team member commented, “I don’t know what I can get from it [Edusoft] … I just keep hearing you can run those tests, great but I don’t know how to do that.” Another School
A leadership team member commented, “Everyone hates that machine. It’s looked upon as . . . you just despise it because it’s down or it’s not reading the data correctly.” The principal at School A also expressed concerns regarding the accuracy of Edusoft noting that her teachers “…don’t trust it.” Principals at other schools did not express this concern. In contrast, another school leadership team member spoke highly of Edusoft, noting, “We get to put their [student] data in the computer and up a report and boom, you could see your class right away … the principal can see how a whole grade level is doing, how the school is doing.”
Table 4.5: Assessment and Data Analysis

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<tr>
<td>District expectation is for principals and teachers to use the data from benchmark assessments to inform instruction.</td>
<td>Principals understand and communicate the district expectation regarding assessment and data analysis.</td>
<td>School leadership team members understand the district expectation regarding assessment and data analysis.</td>
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<td>I expect principals to share the data. I expect teachers and groups of teachers and the school as a whole to look at their progress now with DAIT every six weeks, and to monitor and adjust their intentions with Grade Level Action Plans (Superintendent interview, winter 2007).</td>
<td>I want them [look at data] as a grade level group—so that information that they have will go back to their grade level groups and then they will make judgments and they will look at patterns and they will really decipher the data and then they will plot their course of action based on that (School A principal interview, spring 2007).</td>
<td>Well, we do district mandated benchmarks several times a trimester. We use that data to modify or enhance instruction to our own individual students (School B 4th grade teacher interview, fall 2006).</td>
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<td>I think that our expectation is that [teachers] look at it, they analyze, what are the strengths, what areas do they still need to work on and that’s driving instruction…. With the benchmark we can look at instruction in a short period of time to see what the kids know, how do we revamp or modify the way we’re teaching or what we’re teaching (Central office leader interview (3), winter 2007).</td>
<td>Every six weeks we have a data analysis meeting and throughout that meeting we discuss the skills that are challenging and come up with solutions that will help the kids improve on those skills. The grade level team comes up with an action plan and, for the next six weeks, and through that action plan, the meetings or the lessons are being planned (School D Principal interview, spring 2007).</td>
<td>We usually have our little collegial conferences and those just started a few years ago with the principal. Sometimes we go individually or with our team and we show the data and say look this is what we need. We need some ideas to get this score up (School C teacher interview, fall 2006).</td>
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<td>When you go through those particular sites [Reading First schools] you go through what they are doing, assessment</td>
<td>I think the districts focus is to get the</td>
<td>The whole design of the benchmark program, whether I agree with the way it’s designed or not, I mean they have made an effort to create a...some...agreed upon test, some agreed upon rubrics for the writing assessment, things like that</td>
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Table 4.5: (cont.)

| Central Office Leaders  
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<td>wise, and how that is tied to what they are doing in the classrooms, it’s a well-oiled machine ... those teachers are understanding it and are doing that. As we are continuing to expand to DAIT and others aspects of it I want to see that everywhere, I want to see that piece (Central office leader interview (2), winter 2007).</td>
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<td>We want it reflected in their grade level meeting minutes with an instructional focus and what am I gonna do with these intensive and strategic students (Central Office leader interview (1), winter 2007).</td>
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<td>The idea, the hope was that they will look at the data and realize “Oh gosh we really need to work on this,” or “look this program is successful” (Central office leader (8) interview, winter 2007).</td>
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<td>I think that it’s important that the teachers learn to use their own data … I think we have tried to develop a culture of data driven instruction…. That’s how we operate as professionals at this time</td>
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| Principals  
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<td>principals to be comfortable working with the data so that they can guide their staff to look at data effectively and really make some systematic changes in the way that instruction is delivered (School B principal interview, fall 2006).</td>
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<td>How we’re getting at that maximum achievement is careful attention to data and looking at certain data points throughout the year and certain … certain assessments that we’ve given to learn how our students are doing and then plan instruction based on that (School E principal interview, spring 2007).</td>
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<td>And that’s the reason we have that release date that’s coming up at the end of November when all their benchmark data is placed into, cause the district data will be in, our CST’s we’ll be revisiting, and … we can use [the data] to fine tune why these kids did what they did … and you know, what can we do? (School C principal interview, fall 2006).</td>
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| School Leadership Team Members  
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<td>(School C 4th grade teacher interview, fall 2006).</td>
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<td>We use our periodic data …. and we look at the scores and we talk about collaboratively planning what it is we can do to … you know look at our lowest area, where did we do well, and we kind of just use it to guide our instruction or planning (School D 2nd grade teacher interview, fall 2006).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Some teachers routinely use assessment data to drive instruction.</td>
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<td>We go over it in staff meetings, and then they go over it in grade level meetings. And, we use it to drive curriculum, and then of course, in Reading First schools, we have extra assessments that some of the other schools might not have. And we use that like every 6 weeks, I think it is. There are some types of assessments going on and then we have grade level meetings and we analyze the data (School D Kdg teacher interview, fall 2006).</td>
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| Central Office Leaders  
|-------------------------| Principals  
| n=10                    | n=5                  | School Leadership Team Members  
| (Central office leader (7) interview, winter 2007). Central office leaders are open to teacher input regarding changing and modifying assessments | Principals feel the district is open to teacher concerns regarding data and assessment. ... you know teachers will share their concerns and I never get the feeling that there is someone in the district saying “oh we will deal with that 2 years from now.” It is looked at and they are very responsive. Now it may not always go the way that teachers think it should go, but if there is data, if there is information provided—that really supports why this should be changed—the district is going to listen and they are going to act appropriately (School A principal interview, spring 2007). Really, [the superintendent and assistant superintendent of educational services] have been very open to listening… concerns with timing or concerns with the pacing calendar for these assessments. They’ve been very open to listening to what we have to say about the concerns that the teachers have (School B principal interview, spring | And I think assessing your own program as a teacher is one of the effective ways of using that data because you can really tell over a period of time if kids are moving up in general, what’s the general trend. Is your math program stronger than your language arts program, are you more effective in that area, are you doing something differently for math than you’re doing for language arts, I don’t mean as far as teaching the subject but in the types of approaches that you’re using (School C 4th grade teacher interview, fall 2006). Each grade level meets … And we go over the results of those assessments and compare it to how our kids did previously…. We look at all those different areas and we see where the improvement has been, where we still need to do some other work, and we take a new focus…. We’ll discuss, well, how did your kids do on the benchmark, how did they do on this chapter test. And so as a grade level…. If the kids are... |
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<td>specific on addressing the standards at those grade levels and those subject areas because of the process of how they were selected. They utilized resources that gave them that information. So I think that the data is doing the job but I think it’s something that constantly needs revision (Central office leader interview (2), winter 2007).</td>
<td>2007). Principals differ as to whether assessments are giving teachers relevant data. We as a District are a work in progress in terms of choosing those assessments. What assessment are we giving in Language Arts and Math mid-trimester and at the end of each trimester and how is that data of use to us? (School E Principal interview, spring 2007). And that’s another story about those assessments because on the outside they may look standards based but they’re really focused on theme tests and chapter tests. So, the teachers have to get through this material because the kids aren’t gonna know this so its much more test oriented now rather than standards oriented (School B principal interview, spring 2007).</td>
<td>struggling in a particular area, then we’ll discuss how we can best meet the needs of the kids (School D 3rd grade teacher interview, fall 2006). With the exception of School D, a Reading First school, many SLT members express concern that benchmark assessments do not inform their teaching. I mean I know that as teachers we have a hard time, you know there’s a gap … we have more assessments all the time. We put them into the computer. But then the point of it is to have the information out and actually use it in the classroom. At that we’re not so good … a lot of teachers do informal assessing and we all walk around the classroom and that’s really the assessment that we use to drive instruction. The district assessments … my perception is that we don’t do a good job of using those assessments (School E 2nd grade teacher interview, fall 2006). It’s all data, data, data, as if everything</td>
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<td>From an in-services perspective they’ve spent a lot of time, this is not top-down, working with district committees in getting input on how should we do this. You’ve got leadership within there working with assistant supers, coordinators on “This is what we think should be part of the benchmark assessment” or “These are issues, inputs that we are seeing.” So I would say that as a district … there is a lot of give and take as far as: you tell us what you are seeing, what are the issues (Central office leader interview (2), winter 2007).</td>
<td>[We get] lots of feedback about our benchmarks. And I mentioned that was</td>
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<td>[We get] lots of feedback about our benchmarks. And I mentioned that was</td>
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kind of a political thing…. They thought that they were already doing assessments, they thought they knew their kids, and they thought … there was alignment issue … and so we’re refining that, and we’re responding to that. We don’t just sit on that and say, “Oh well, that’s what we’re going to be using.” So we rewrite them and there’s a committee that kind of comes back and takes the feedback …We would never want them to feel like they didn’t have the right information to make the right decisions about [instruction] (Central office leader interview, winter 2007).

So, although our assessments can be improved and we’re really open every summer to adjusting those and adding to them, I’m pretty confident about that approach (Superintendent interview, winter 2007).

So I think the whole benchmark assessment piece that [the current superintendent] has instituted, people didn’t like it very much in the beginning.

you are teaching them Harcourt curriculum and so the assessment comes right from there so I don’t know how you would argue that and the same with Houghton Mifflin—you are using the theme tests and the summative tests on a curriculum that you are teaching (School A principal interview, spring 2007).

Principals recognize that teachers are feeling that assessments are interfering with instruction rather than informing instruction.

The teachers are really balking at that, it’s like, “when am I going to have time to teach if I’m assessing every four weeks?” (School B principal interview, spring 2007).

There’s definitely been obviously a push for more and more assessment and I know that from a teacher’s standpoint right now, that’s frustrating because I’m sure that teachers are feeling like I have to assess more than I teach (School E principal interview, fall 2006).

can be measured by a standardized test. I’m sorry, that’s the big assumption that I cannot get on board with. No, I don’t believe that this truly shows what children know, just because they can’t find their answer in formal sentences with one word underlined each time (School C ELL facilitator interview, fall 2006).

I am concerned right now that we are doing testing just to produce numbers … it doesn’t inform my teaching. I’m not sure that it’s used in a valuable way. Particularly in the lower grades (School A 1st grade teacher interview, fall 2006).

And this year I tried to do it all. I tried to do all the benchmarks and the summative even if it wasn’t required…. And you know what I discovered? I have less time to teach, to fine-tune their reading. And so on their very last test I don’t feel like they did as well as they could have. Had I been able to use the time that I was giving extra tests, if I’d been able to use that time in instruction, I
Table 4.5: (cont.)

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<td>but they are accepting it now and understanding it. It’s that whole piece of: “Ok this is what you taught and you are on a timeline because we have to get through the curriculum. Here is the data. Is the data showing that they have acquired what you have set out to get them to learn?”. So I think teachers are on a learning curve right now of really trying to fine tune that process and I think that’s where we are as a district (Central office leader (2) interview, winter 2007).</td>
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<td>They [the district] are expecting the teachers to effectively be able to disaggregate and look at the data and decide where students need remediation or need more in-depth instruction and to change their instruction so that that child will, on the next assessment, be improved. But that’s easier said than done. It’s too much. It really is (School B principal interview, spring 2007).</td>
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<td>think they could have done better (School A Focus Group, spring 2007).</td>
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<td>I would think for right now, it’s the right data, it may not necessarily be the best…. But I think right now, for what … for where we are, that the benchmark data that we’re looking at is probably the best that we can do at this point (Central office leader interview (1), winter 2007).</td>
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<td>I understand that the assessments are necessary but just the frequency that they’re requiring—it’s very frustrating to teachers … they’re really ending up feeling like they’re teaching to the test rather than they’re teaching standards … we have to figure out a way to get these assessments to be truly a measure of how our kids are progressing and they need to be at regular intervals but at manageable regular intervals, ’cause right now they are not manageable (School B principal interview, spring 2007).</td>
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<td>Fitting them in, being fair to the students, in terms of how much learning time, how much practice time and mastery time, and how much assessment. It’s really a challenge, I mean … you don’t teach to the test, but you teach to a test date. By next week I need to finish XYZ. Okay well if I need to give the assessment next week I have to give a little review. So that means I have to finish this week…. So you back up from when the test is…. Not where are you at student, it’s where do I have to put you at, because in order to get the class forward we need to cover this now, whether you’re ready or no” (School B 3rd grade teacher interview, fall 2006).</td>
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<td>Central office leaders see Edusoft as a tool to assist teachers in planning appropriate instruction.</td>
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<td>[Referring to principal workshops]: The</td>
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<td>Principals differ on their perception of</td>
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<td>And we analyze the information but then</td>
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<td>one last month they spent a huge amount of time looking at English Language Learner data and what our programs are intended to do, and what the data shows us they’re actually producing, and as a team, how can we affect greater change or greater improvement. We’ve done a lot of training with them on looking at data and reports out of Edusoft (Superintendent interview, winter 2007). I would say probably with all of the schools, we’ve supported them in the fact that when we began this DAIT process, one of the things we talked about was having them have actually access the data for their teams, so that’s something they don’t have to do. So you access the data for them off Edusoft, have that ready for them when you come into your grade level conversations (Central office leader interview (1), winter 2007). So we may say, “We need you to do flexible grouping or if you don’t know support they and teachers receive from district in learning how to analyze data. And, you know, really we’ve been pretty much left to our own devices as far as how we look at, apply, manage and use that data to inform instruction (School B principal interview, spring 2007). They [referring to the district] sort of dumped this data on the teachers without really training them on how to look at it with a critical eye and to sort it effectively. And it’s sort of like they just assumed that they were going to be able to disaggregate their data. And disaggregation of data is a very complex task and it requires training to learn how to disaggregate it effectively. And I don’t think that’s happened (School B principal interview, spring 2007). They [referring to summer workshops] show you how to use the assessment, they show you how to use the curriculum, so, and then how to plan so when you come in you have to apply that sometimes we don’t have time to act on it … we don’t get the time to go back and reteach because we have to follow a pacing guide, and you have to be here at the end of the month, so if you go back and reteach something, then, you’re not gonna have the time to finish everything that you are supposed to do (School C 2nd grade teacher interview, fall 2006). On one hand the information that we get from the assessments is very valuable…. On the other hand … right now how we are in a situation in which there’s so much assessment that we are having to shut down instruction time to deal with assessments (School E 5th grade teacher interview, fall 2006). So there’s an issue of how much time are the kids getting instruction, how much time are they being tested. And what is the balance point where you’re actually defeating the purpose by spending more time in assessment. That’s a big district issue (School C 4th grade teacher interview, fall 2006).</td>
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<td>what is flexible grouping then let us show you on Edusoft how you could sort your kids by question strand, so that you know what kids know what, and that would be one means of looking at that data to put your kids in flexible groups” (Central office leader (7) interview, winter 2007).</td>
<td>and then through your data, you read it and then you plan so it, they teach you those, through that, through those inservices (School D principal interview, spring 2007). Not all principals see Edusoft as a tool for making data analysis easier. I know of two teachers that put the assessment data into Edusoft because that is what is required from the district. However, they will hand score the tests themselves—they don’t trust it—they have not received accurate results and that’s unfortunate because they are not able to really disaggregate … they can’t do item analysis (School A principal interview, spring 2007). I think that my concern whether or not students are learning goes back to how reliable the data is. That’s a huge, huge concern at our school … teachers are getting their results out of Edusoft and… some teachers really look at that information based on classroom trends.</td>
<td>The benchmark assessment should be integrated into what we do on a regular basis. And it should not be a halt in the instruction; it should be a part of the instruction program (School C 4th grade teacher interview, fall 2006). The fact remains that right now the amount of testing and assessments that we have to do is too much. And it is directly impacting the amount of quality time in the classroom (School E 5th grade teacher interview, fall 2006). Well I think the general feeling amongst myself and all the teachers is that we’re losing instructional time for the sake of all the assessments (School B 4th grade teacher interview, fall 2006). Well, I have massive concerns about the number of assessments…. When are we going to fit UA, when is EL, when is PE, when is art (School B 3rd grade teacher interview, fall 2006).</td>
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<td>or on individual students and they will design their instruction accordingly. Other teachers will use other measures to determine whether or not student learning has taken place [because they are not trusting of Edusoft] (School A principal interview, spring 2007).</td>
<td>School leadership team members across sites have contrasting views of the usefulness of Edusoft as a tool to help in data analysis, with some seeing it as a support to data management and analysis and some seeing it as a constraint. A big support is the fact that we have a pretty good database system, Edusoft. I mean, I’m a GATE coordinator and I was able to go in and get scores for students that are being referred for GATE testing right off the Edusoft system, which was quite convenient….The district database system is proving to be quite helpful (School B 4th grade teacher interview, fall 2006). What’s really nice is that we have that new Edusoft so we get to put their [student] data into the computer and pull up a report and boom, you could see your class right away. The principals can go in and pull a grade level, boom and see how a whole grade level is doing, how the school is doing (School C</td>
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teacher interview, fall 2006).

Having to report out in certain ways and put them into Edusoft machines and things that seem easy but really take a long time. It’s taking away from classroom instruction and classroom planning (School E ELL specialist interview, fall 2006).

We have all these math tests that we have to feed into Edusoft but there’s no program that coalesces all the scores….What would really be helpful is to be able to put multiple tests together and then look at numbers. But we can’t do that yet with the computer model (School E 2nd grade teacher interview, fall 2006).

We have this system called Edusoft where you can go and run the data … everyone hates that machine. It’s looked upon as … you just despise it because it’s down or it’s not reading the data correctly (School A 3rd grade teacher interview, fall 2006).
Summary

To summarize, pacing guides, benchmark assessments, and data analysis are structures in place that link the district with its schools. However, with the exception of School D, the linkages appear to be more of a constraint rather than a support to improving teaching and learning. Central office leaders recognize that the implementation of these structures has created a cultural shift for principals and teachers. Central office leaders express that they solicit input for revisions and perceive that training and support is ongoing. School leadership team members express that pacing guides have been beneficial in that they provide a consistent focus, but express concern that the timelines may be too rigid and don’t account for individual student needs.

The district mandate for the increase in the number of benchmark assessments created a high degree of tension between the district office and the schools with principals caught between the district and the schools. Central office leaders expect that teachers will use these benchmark assessments to not only monitor progress of their students, but also to inform their instruction. However, from the perspective of school leadership team members at four of the five schools, these benchmark assessments take time away from instruction and do not inform instruction. Principals at these four schools recognize the frustration of their teachers and many times see themselves as playing a mediating role in working with their staff to implement district directives. In contrast, the principal and school leadership team at School D, a Reading First school, are faithful to the pacing guides and regularly engage in collaborative data analysis meetings to review data and plan instruction accordingly.
The district’s data management tool, Edusoft, allows for the disaggregation of data in a number of different ways, but there are varying degrees of comfort with the system by principals and school leadership team members. This suggests that Edusoft can be both a support and a constraint to assisting teachers in monitoring student learning and planning instruction.

Communication Linkages

In the previous section, I discussed structural linkages in place in Evergreen School District, which represent the framework for advancing the district’s reform agenda. In this section, I discuss formal and informal communication within the district regarding school reform efforts, another linkage identified by Lasky (2004). This linkage has the potential to build the human and social capacities identified by Spillane and Thompson (1997) and the intellectual capital (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998) needed for successful school reform. Findings suggest that central office leaders in Evergreen School District view both formal and informal communication across the district as critical to move the district’s reform agenda forward. The superintendent states that one of her major roles is delivering a “disciplined message” regarding improving teaching and learning not only to district staff but to the community in general. She expects central office leaders to be open to principal and teacher input and to “design their work” around school needs by making sure that they are constantly asking the question “How does this support a school school’s work or is it going to detract them away from that?” (Superintendent interview, winter 2007) As with the other linkages identified by Lasky, findings suggest that communication between the central office and schools in Evergreen
School District is a linkage that sometimes supports and may sometimes constrain the district’s efforts to move reform efforts forward.

As a way of examining the ways in which communication between the central office and schools both support and constrain school reform efforts, I organize the findings into three broad categories. I first present findings as to the central office communication mechanisms in place in the district. The perceptions of central office leaders, principals, and school leadership team members regarding the clarity and content of central office communication are presented next. Finally, I present the perceptions of central office leaders, principals, and school leadership team members regarding the accessibility and responsiveness of the central office leaders.

Communication Mechanisms

As illustrated in Table 4.6, there are a variety of communication mechanisms in the district that serve as channels to link the central office with its schools. As stated previously, communicating a disciplined message regarding the district focus on improving teaching and learning is viewed by the superintendent as a critical part of her role. She explains,

That’s my role to really communicate and bring awareness to the work in what I communicate outward from this office. So, my monthly staff updates, my Chamber of Commerce article, my School News Newspaper article, all the times I’m asked to speak in the community or speak at the schools—that’s got to be all that disciplined message about we’re working on replicating the very best instructional practices we know that make a difference for kids. (Superintendent interview, winter 2007)

As the quote illustrates, the superintendent uses a number of mechanisms to communicate the district message to staff. Central office leaders, principals, and school leadership team members agree, consistently referring to her use of e-mails, newsletters, and podcasts as
her primary methods for communicating with district staff as a whole. Central office leaders perceive that through conversations with staff they listen, “…looking to see what we could do to support schools.” Another central office leader explains that he prefers to “go to the school and talk to the staff” as opposed to a “lot of memos that would go in people’s mailbox.” However, as shown in Table 4.6, although school leadership team members list a variety of mechanisms used by the central office to communicate, the communication is generally perceived as one way from the central office to schools rather than a two-way dialogue. Team members describe being “kept apprised of what we need to know,” receiving “updates all the time in our email, what’s going on, what changes are happening within the district,” and district committee representatives “…getting information … and then they come back to the school and share that information.”

In the following sections, I present data regarding the key communication mechanisms in Evergreen School District, principals, email, and district level committees, which serve to link the district and schools in a communication web.
Table 4.6: Communication Mechanisms—Central Office

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<td>And so it’s through those conversations that you begin to, it’s like you get little nuggets or seeds if you hear it enough, you know that’s something we need to be looking at, so I think it was as a result of that, looking to see what we could do to support [schools] (Central office leader (1) interview, winter 2007).</td>
<td>We have monthly, sometimes more frequent meeting with our district level folks (School B principal interview, spring 2007). We meet twice a month for principal meetings and then we have site support meetings ... I also get a lot of information via email, personal calls, other memos that are written to me. And then we have a number of teachers that are involved on different committees in the district so they will represent School A and bring back information to me (School A principal interview, fall 2006). Well there’s a variety of ways, I mean, obviously the most forward way is they send e-mails to us about the specific concerns and activities that go on. On a monthly basis, we have these principal meetings and then we have these site support meetings (School C principal interview, fall 2006). We get a trimester or bimonthly report from our Superintendent. Our assistant superintendent just sent us some more information the other day just telling us what we needed to report on and not. A lot of open communication, we have had in the past few years with our Superintendent and the past one, they are really pro-teacher. They are, these teachers are the trenches, and they need to know what is going on. They are very good about letting us know, and then of course, through our principal and through staff meetings. And if they have to a memo, but right now it’s a lot of emails (School B 1st grade teacher interview, fall 2006). Well, we sometimes have people from the district come and talk to us at staff meetings; we get emails from the Superintendent, the Assistant-Superintendent, through the Principal (School C Kdg teacher interview, fall 2006).</td>
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<td>We started to help organize all of the</td>
<td>The district communicates with teachers</td>
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<td>communication that goes out from this department. We do that only one day a week … on Monday. It’s a highlight of everything that we need to remind the site, pretty much the principal that needs to be happening (Central office leader (7) interview, winter 2007).</td>
<td>through the staff development (School B principal interview, fall 2006).</td>
<td>We get updates all the time in our email, what’s going on, what changes are happening within the district, but then, you know, we have like curriculum council we have a couple representatives from the school which I think is definitely important because just like with us you know, we have a small group of people who are getting information and working together and then they come back to the site and share that information (School E 3rd grade teacher interview, fall 2006).</td>
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<td>We have things set in place like the [curriculum] advisory committee—advisory in the ways that we [have it] structured, we do have representatives that come from each school to get information to send back (Central office leader (3) interview, spring 2007).</td>
<td>And we have a very active Curriculum Advisory Committee which is about 40 new teachers that meets … once a month. So, one or two of them represents each of the schools and they go back and get on their staff meeting agenda or notes or somehow share information back to the sites about everything from Board Focus Goals to the new textbook that we’re going to adopt to all of those things (Superintendent interview, winter</td>
<td>And then we also have all these district committees and people are supposed to serve on committees and they pass on information from the district to [their staff] (School E 2nd grade teacher interview, fall 2006).</td>
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<td>And we have a very active Curriculum Advisory Committee which is about 40 new teachers that meets … once a month. So, one or two of them represents each of the schools and they go back and get on their staff meeting agenda or notes or somehow share information back to the sites about everything from Board Focus Goals to the new textbook that we’re going to adopt to all of those things (Superintendent interview, winter</td>
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<td>And then we also have all these district committees and people are supposed to serve on committees and they pass on information from the district to [their staff] (School E 2nd grade teacher interview, fall 2006).</td>
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| We have what we call the curriculum council, where the assistant superintendent meets with representatives and some of the principals around the district. And, we have, each school has a representative….
Table 4.6: (cont.)

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<th>Central Office Leaders</th>
<th>Principals</th>
<th>School Leadership Team Members</th>
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<td>n=10</td>
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2007).

The district communicates through the various the job-alike meetings that we have. We have principal meetings, we have assistant principal meetings, we have officer manager meetings and we have the teacher, coach, facilitator meetings and so we will use those groups who represent various aspects for communication (Central office leader (5) interview, winter 2007).

We do have those collegial conversations also. So … every three months the principals are supposedly having a conversation with a group of teachers by grade level or by department or individual teachers around what the goal should be to raise achievement so that it can hopefully fulfill the over arching goal (Central office leader (9) interview, winter 2007).

They’re representative from each of the sites. Middle school usually we have a representative from every grade level, We also, of course, have the principals letting us know what’s going on. And, we have a reading coach … and she also is at a variety of coaching meetings and … she keeps us apprised of what we need to know (School D Kdg teacher interview, fall 2006).

[Referring to communication mechanisms in the district], there’s a variety of...there’s seminars, there are staff meetings, there are Leadership meetings, there are grade level meetings. Then we also have a weekly telephone cast that our principal does. And there’s also a superintendent pod cast. And so you know we’re able to really keep everyone in the loop. It’s really been fantastic (School E 5th grade teacher interview, fall 2006).
Table 4.6: (cont.)

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<th>Central Office Leaders  n=10</th>
<th>Principals  n=5</th>
<th>School Leadership Team Members  n=45</th>
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<td>Elementary we have usually either a primary, intermediate, we have a district writing committee going on right now in terms of looking at our district writing assessments. There are standing committees that just continue our work to improve instruction (Central office leader interview (6), winter 2007). Then of course, everything that goes to teachers goes through a Teacher Committee. So, every school has a math teacher rep, or a reading, language arts rep, or we have the meetings of the Reading First Coaches and the Support Coaches every month (Central office leader (4) interview, winter 2007).</td>
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The principal as the primary conduit of information. Findings across all groups suggest that principals are viewed as the primary conduit for communicating the district’s reform agenda. As shown in Table 4.7, central office leaders report that principals are expected “to pass on information to their sites and filter it based on their site’s needs” (Central office leader interview, winter 2007). All five principals expressed an understanding that their role is to communicate the district’s message in a manner that is appropriate to the needs of their staff. One principal’s comment captured the view of other principals when she stated, “Our central office really communicates very well with me as principal and I’m quite certain my role is a liaison to the staff, to do that communicating to the staff” (School E principal Interview, fall, 2006). The School B principal referred to her responsibility to filter information, noting, “Basically, it’s the principal’s responsibility to communicate in whatever fashion they feel is appropriate for the staff.” As illustrated in Table 4.7, across all schools, school leadership teams were unanimous in their understanding that the principal serves as the primary channel for communicating and filtering district information. For example, referring to how the district communicates to teachers, a School E leadership team member stated, “Most of the time they talk to the principal and the principal tells us.” A School B leadership team member described how her previous principal had filtered information, “He knew what was important to pass on and have us do and the things he could just say, ‘Yeah, we did that’.”

Findings suggest that principals understand the district’s reform agenda and that their role is to “implement” the district goals. Interestingly, the central office expectation of the school principal as the primary communicator and filterer of information is
perceived by four of the five principals interviewed as empowering principals to “decide on things at the site level” (School E principal interview, spring 2007). These same four principals expressed that though they get “directives” from the district office, as explained by the School D principal, they receive the latitude to “mold it to what benefits our demographics.” A comment from the School E principal supported this perception when she stated, “Whatever reform we want to impose, I feel, pretty much we can advocate for it and make it happen.” The School A principal explained, “It is not uncommon for me to call the central office … I show how it will help student achievement and it is not unusual for that to be granted.” The School B principal further supported this perception of empowerment when she noted that she has been able to “customize” some directives that she felt were too burdensome for her staff and she was never questioned about it by central office leaders. In contrast, the School C principal, although describing how he filters information, “I give them stuff and sometimes I don’t give them stuff,” views himself as “just the deliverer of information and enforcing that these things get done.”
### Table 4.7: Communication Mechanisms—The Principal as Primary Conduit of Information

| Central Office Leaders  
|------------------------| Principals  
| n=10                   | n=5         | School Leadership Team Members  
|                        |            | n=45                   |
| We expect the principals to take key things back to their staff (Superintendent interview, winter 2007). | Basically it’s the principal’s responsibility to communicate in whatever fashion they feel is appropriate for the staff (School B principal interview, fall 2006). | Of course, through our principal and through staff meetings (School B 1st grade teacher interview, fall 2006). |
| We count on the principals to deliver the message (Central office leader (7) interview, winter 2007). | For the most part it probably comes through me (School A principal interview, fall 2006). | Our principal talked to them about, we really wanted to make sure that the students that started kindergarten here were prepared. So you know I think the district listened (School D SLT focus group 2, spring 2007). |
| Everything is directly shared with them and basically the expectation is that they will share information with their school site staff (Central office leader (5) interview, winter 2007). | So they are, our central office really communicates with us very well with me as principal and I’m quite certain my role is a liaison to the staff (Principal Interview School E, spring 2007). | My experience has been that a lot of the issues are communicated with us through our principal (School A 5th grade teacher interview, fall 2007). |
| I see the principal as a filter and they know their staff, they know their personalities, so they have that opportunity to filter the information (Central office leader (1) interview, winter 2007). | You know, it’s like, how do I filter it?… So, I give them stuff, and sometimes I don’t give them stuff (School C principal interview, fall 2006). | The district communicates … directly somewhat but most of it comes through the principal (School E 2nd grade teacher interview, fall 2006). |
| We rely on principals to filter the information and inform the teachers of what needs to be done and what the priorities are. Sometimes it doesn’t filter through correctly (Central office leader (8) interview, winter 2007). | It gives us that opportunity of being open-minded and trying new things that really works for our school and not something that you know “you have to do this because that’s what we want” (School D principal interview, spring 2007). | [Referring to how her previous principal filtered information]: He knew what was important to pass on and have us do and the things that he could just say, “Yeah we did that” (School C 4th grade teacher interview, fall 2006). |
E-mail as a communication mechanism. E-mail is a relatively new communication mechanism between the central office and schools with one School B leadership team member explaining, “That’s only been the last few years that teachers were part of the e-mail loop; before it was administrators and people in other kinds of positions.” E-mail was mentioned by leadership team members across all schools as a major communication mechanism used not only by the superintendent but by the central office to get information out to schools as evidenced by comments such as, “We get updates all the time in our e-mail, what’s going on, what changes are happening within the district” (School E 3rd grade teacher interview, fall 2006). Findings suggest that e-mail serves as a supportive linkage between the central office and schools because all staff can receive the same information on a regular basis, keeping “everyone in the loop” (School E School leadership team member, fall 2006). However, findings also indicate e-mail may also constrain communication between the central office and schools. Some school leadership team members express that e-mail as a communication mechanism can result in an overload of information. For example, a School E leadership team member commented “Sometimes it almost seems like too much … I mean I’m sure there’s people that the issues help, so for others of us sometimes we’re just like ok, click.” Other teachers may not be taking the time to read e-mails on a regular basis which would suggest that although the central office is sending out information, it may not be received in a consistent manner. One School B leadership team member explained that although teachers are asked to “use it and check it out … some are … but some are lagging a little bit.” The lack of clarity and content of e-mails from the central office stymies teachers sometimes. A School C leadership team member in referring to an e-mail communication
explained, “If you send out a memo, explain what you mean … you add up all the time of people reading something and saying, ‘What did they mean by that?’ … That type of stuff just wears people out…. So the district could be much better at just simple communication.” Finally, a School D leadership team member expressed that “E-mail is great. It’s the best thing that’s happened in a long time, but there are also some flaws to it because we’re not able to meet face-to-face and be able to understand and communicate to the other person.”

E-mail can consolidate information sent out to principals from the Educational Services Division. The superintendent is clear in her message that central office leaders design their work around “the school’s data and their needs.” Under the leadership of the new assistant superintendent, a former principal in the district, the Educational Services Division has consolidated information from each of their departments into a Monday update that is sent by e-mail to principals each Monday afternoon. Referring to Monday updates, the superintendent explains, “As opposed to 12 e-mails going out during the week and driving people nuts, that’s helped us focus and be far more aware of just how much we’re asking sites to do in addition to their site work.” All five principals expressed appreciation of this effort to consolidate the many pieces of information that come from the central office. The School E principal noted that the new assistant superintendent of educational services has an understanding of “how information coming at us at the rapid pace … needed to become more succinct.” She expressed that changes this year have resulted in better support for principals explaining, “We’re asking people to manage way more information. If we want them to be good conduits of information and be effective communicators, we have to look at how we are communicating to them.” A review of a
sample of Monday update documents as part of this study, however, revealed that the Monday updates consisted of a series of attachments of memos from various departments rather than being a succinct, coherent message from the central office leadership team.

To summarize, findings regarding the use of e-mail as a communication mechanism to principals and staff would suggest there is progress in providing a cohesive message from the central office to schools suggesting that it has the potential to be a supportive communication linkage. However, findings also indicate that work is still needed to make sure that central office leaders are sending out concise and coherent messages. Data indicate that some school leadership team members view e-mail as a supportive communication link as it provides direct communication between central office leaders and staff. However, other team members expressed frustration with e-mail, indicating that it can constrain communication between the central office and staff because it lacks clarity or is difficult to access. Most importantly, team members expressed that e-mail should not take the place of face-to-face communication between central office leaders and schools. As shown in the DAIT section and as will be shown in a latter part of this section, face-to-face communication with central office leaders has been viewed positively by school leadership teams involved in DAIT and provides a supportive linkage between the central office and schools.

*District level committees as a communication mechanism.* Central office leaders, principals, and school leadership team members mention district level committees such as the Curriculum Advisory Council (CAC), District English Language Advisory Committee (DELAC), and committees specific to language arts, English-language development, math, science, social studies, and other curriculum areas as another
mechanism for the central office leaders to engage in communication with teacher leaders regarding the district’s reform agenda.

According to central office leaders and principals, district level committees consist of teacher representatives from schools throughout the district and the expectation is that participants will bring information from the committee back to their school. Central office leaders view district level committees as a way for teachers to meet face-to-face with central office leaders to give their input regarding curriculum and assessment and relay any concerns they may have. The superintendent explains that these committees provide an opportunity for teachers to “be involved and interface with the district” (Superintendent interview, winter 2007). Referring to district committees as a communication mechanism between the central office and schools, the School A principal noted that she has “a number of teachers that are involved on different committees in the district. So they will represent School A and bring back information to me” (School A principal interview, fall 2006).

School leadership team members also mentioned district level committees as a communication mechanism, with one school leadership team explaining, “We have curriculum committees [at the district level], and have a couple of representatives from the school which I think is definitely important … and they come back to the site and share that information” (School E 3rd grade teacher interview, fall 2006). However, this same school leadership team member expressed concern that “sometimes maybe the person in that position is not necessarily the best person … sometimes I feel like I am lacking information,” which suggests that information is not always brought back to the school in a consistent manner. As mentioned in the structural linkages section, teacher
leaders who serve on district committees are not necessarily members of school leadership teams. From data collected, it is not clear how teacher leaders are selected to participate on district level committees and how they communicate back to the school, suggesting that communication may not be consistent. For example, a school leadership team member expressed that she was not sure how to get on a district committee, commenting that she thought people were “invited,” but she was not sure how that occurred. A School E school leadership team member reported that being on a committee can be a “frustrating process” noting that “you are allowed to say what you would like to say, you will have your input, but the bottom line is [referring to the district] we’re just going to have to get through this way.” Interestingly, this message also came across in a district-wide professional development training for the district’s new English-language development program. School A leadership team members expressed frustration at how district office personnel responded to teacher concerns about the addition of “one more responsibility to an already jam-packed day,”

The district office personnel who were there … said “The district hears you. They feel for you,” but they didn’t have any solution for us about how to make it work in the day when you are supposed to add 30 minutes for just this program for 2nd language learners and have EO kids doing something else. And the district’s position at our meeting was “Your site principal will have to help you figure that out.” And the feeling in the room was that you felt all tied up again. You are supposed to have this many minutes of fitness and this many minutes of this and this and this and there is not enough. And the personnel from the district office said - short of adding minutes to the school day—or lengthening the school year we don’t really know how to solve that problem. (School A SLT focus group, spring 2007)

In contrast, a School D leadership team member relayed her experience on the Curriculum Council as positive, by allowing teachers to give input on agenda items and providing an opportunity for teachers to bring issues “that may be pertinent to your
school or maybe a sister school who is in the same demographic type of area.” A School B teacher spoke positively of the committee work accomplished by teacher representatives in organizing the math curriculum to cover essential standards. These contrasting views suggest that teacher participation on district-level committees has in some cases provided a supportive communication linkage between the district and schools allowing for some two-way communication. Other times it has been viewed as not as effective as it could be, which speaks to the content and clarity of district communication, the topic of the next section.

Content and Clarity of Central Office Communication

As noted earlier, Evergreen School District has not always had clear and cohesive communication between the central office leaders, principals, and teachers. One central office leader referred to his tenure as principal several years ago, noting that “the sites were kind of on their own.” Another central office leader noted that when she came to the district several years ago as a teacher, “I didn’t have a clue what other schools were doing or what the district office was doing.” Data reveal that most central office leaders perceive that the clarity and content of communication between the central office and the principals has improved over the last few years and some believe the communication with teachers has improved as well. One central office leader’s comment represents the overall perception of central office leaders, “There’s more of a unifying philosophy about what we’re doing as a district.” Central office leaders expressed an understanding that getting “buy-in” from principals and from teachers requires “Good communication—why are we going this direction or why is it our wish to go this direction.” The superintendent explained that it is important to be clear in her message to staff and the community about
the district focus to improve teaching and learning, noting, “You know, it’s very important for me, not that I explain the whole accountability system to people, but that [I explain] achievement gains have been consistently being made because of our laser like focus on what we’re targeting and that it is making a difference. And if need be, being very forthright and frank about where our challenges are” (Superintendent interview, winter 2007). As shown in Table 4.8, central office leaders report that communication regarding student achievement is a “multilayered” and “constant” message. One central office leader explained, “There isn’t a time when student achievement isn’t at the forefront of a conversation.” Another central office leader discussed the district focus on English learners and special education students commenting, “We consistently refer to that in terms of our staff development programs in the district as to why we need to focus on particular areas of teaching.” Although as noted in previous sections, teachers clearly understand that the district message is to improve student learning, particularly for English-language learners, as can be seen in Table 4.8, there is a perception by school leadership team members that communication consists of “directives” and “mandates” with little explanation as to why.
Table 4.8: Communication Linkages—Content of Communication

| Central Office Leaders  
n=10 | Principals  
n=5 | School Leadership Team Members  
n=45 |
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<td>I would say 90% of the time the conversation is student achievement, what is it that you need to do to be successful to move students to that next level of achievement? (Central office leader (2) interview, winter 2007).</td>
<td>They want us to collaborate, they want us to do grade level planning, they want the teachers to be looking at data, they want them to be using the assessments to inform their instruction, they want them to be you know discussing strategies and interventions and you know detailed kinds of things they can do with students (School B principal interview, spring 2007).</td>
<td>Pretty much … directives I guess is the way you describe it. This is the new schedule, this is the new assessment plan, these are the new curriculum expectations, this is your new principal (School C 4th grade teacher interview, fall 2006).</td>
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<td>[The superintendent] does quarterly or more often, a newsletter where she’ll give a brief state of affairs from the district: This is where we are at; this is what we are working on right now. She’ll talk about testing and Second Language Learners. And then she has added highlighting great things that have happened here (Central office leader (2) interview, winter 2007).</td>
<td>We get directives from our administrators at the district level and then what happens is that we come back and then we share those with the SLT and then from there we take it back to the grade level teams and then we bring it back to the SLT community forum and that’s how we implement those, those new goals or objectives (School D principal interview, spring 2007).</td>
<td>Basically, this is our policy and this is what we will all go by. As I said earlier, it’s pretty much scripted. This is what you’re going to do, and there’s no grey area (School A 5th grade teacher interview, fall 2007).</td>
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<td>We mention the particular sub groups that are keeping us in this program, which are English Learners and our Special Ed so we consistently refer to that in terms of our staff development programs in the district as to why do we need to focus on particular areas of teaching and Language Arts to be able to improve student achievement and of course our board</td>
<td>You know a lot of these are veteran staff, so now they are reading board minutes, now they are reading the responses that everybody is sending from the District and they are seeing that it is not just the</td>
<td>I won’t say that we interact with them [referring to communication with the district] they kind of just tell us what they except from us or what they want us to do (School C 2nd grade teacher interview, fall 2006).</td>
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<td>I don’t know that there is training. I don’t know that there is what you would call support. I know that there are directives. And I will say … we really try and honor their directive to</td>
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Table 4.8: (cont.)

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<td>focus goals emphasize those as well (Central office leader (6) interview, winter 2007). Whenever I’m doing the visitations with the principals I’m inevitably giving some communication about how are things going data wise or what we see is going on instructionally so it’s the district objective of having cohesion, coherence and some fidelity to the materials we have been providing (Central office leader (9) interview, winter 2007).</td>
<td>principal that is doing this—he is just basically the deliverer of information and enforcing that these things get done. Versus like ok it is more of a top down thing-not just a middle management idea (School C Principal interview, spring 2007).</td>
<td>really look at this data and make decisions (School A ELL/Reading Facilitator Interview, fall 2006).</td>
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Even though communication between the central office and principals may have improved, central office leaders expressed that principals do not always understand the message and so do not always clearly communicate the district message to their staff. One central office leader explained that the message from principals to their staff does not always “filter through correctly.” In referring to how some veteran principals deliver the district message to their staff, another central office leader noted, “I think that they’re still going back with a message of, “Well, they told us to do this,“ and so the ‘me’ and the ‘them.’” Still another central office leader noted that he had seen instances where the district administration’s idea of how specific curriculum was to be implemented “got filtered down to some inconsistencies at the classroom level” and it was “clear to me that [teachers] were hearing from their principals different messages of what they were supposed to be doing.” Given that the principal is seen as the primary communication link between the central office and schools, as illustrated in Table 4.9, central office leaders have engaged in efforts to help principals understand the message and have the tools necessary to effectively communicate with their staff. The superintendent has taken a proactive role in assisting principals in their communication role, explaining, “I can’t assume that because we adopt something new that my principals are always going to know how to implement it. So, the ‘how to implement it or how to go back to your school team and communicate it’ is just as important.” According to the superintendent, monthly principal meetings are no longer viewed simply as a mechanism for passing along information to principals which is in turn passed along to staff. A strategy implemented by the new assistant superintendent during the 2006-2007 school year is for one or two principals to present what is working at their school in terms of communication and
monitoring practices at monthly principal meetings. This sharing of ideas has resulted in what one central office leader described as a more “collaborative role … I think we feel like we are all in it together.” Another central office leader commented that she too is seeing a shift, “I think that a lot of our new principals are saying ‘No this is the “we” that we have to do.’”

As illustrated in Table 4.9, there are contrasting views among central office leaders as well as among school leadership team members regarding the clarity of communication between the central office and teachers. One central office leader described communication with staff from the central office, “I think it’s—by intent—it’s very minimal. The district relies on site administration to do the communication.” She noted however, “When it’s decided that it is important to have direct communication, then it’s good and that would once again come from the superintendent to all certificated staff.” She explained that it “goes out to every single teacher … so the teachers should be totally up to date. There’s nothing that we haven’t shared with them, good news and bad news.” Another central office leader commented that there is “very good and very strong” ongoing formal and informal communication between the employee group leadership and the central office regarding school issues. He expressed, “You may ask someone who might say: I never hear about things. So in my mind I would question: why is that?” In contrast, the assistant superintendent had the following to say about communication between the central office and teachers,

I would probably say that the average teacher in the classroom ... may not think that it’s that good. They probably don’t know how much communication is going on ... even though you’re talking with the principals all the time. It would be interesting to see. I’m really not sure about that…. If I had to rate it on a scale from 1-10, it’s based on what I would say the average teacher in the classroom in
terms of communication from the district to them, it’s probably like a 5. It’s kind of in the middle. (Assistant superintendent interview, winter 2007)

As illustrated in Table 4.9, her perception is supported by some school leadership team members across schools who express concern that communication from the central office is not always clear and cohesive. One School A leadership team member commented, “Communication as to what is expected curriculum-wise does not seem to be cut and dry with the district.” A School E leadership team member described what she perceived to be a mixed message regarding report card markings, noting, “It’s like we can’t get a straight answer, so as far as you know, all being on the same page as a district, sometimes I think the communication kind of falls apart.” A School C leadership team member stated, “Chaos and confusion has really been a hallmark in the past.” In describing his perception of how the central office operates, this same teacher explained,

One of the problems with the district is there’s a lot of different branches out there all trying to bear fruit. And they all have their program and they’re all saying, “Okay, here’s what we need you to do, here’s what we need you to do,” and by the time it gets to us, we’re being inundated with all these different things and there’s not a lot of coordination, there not a lot of wariness from one part of the district to another, from different branches of the district office.

Another School E school leadership team member noted, “We get some information from the district saying we have to do this, but sometimes there’s no rhyme or reason to it.”

Summing up how many teachers at her school feel, a School C leadership team member said, “We’re uninformed.” In contrast, school leadership team members from School D, the Reading First school in the study, were more positive in their comments regarding the clarity and content of central office communication. One school leadership team member describing her participation in a district level committee stated, “The things that are
talked [about] during principals’ meetings … are also discussed with teachers to bring back to school.”
Table 4.9: Communication Linkages—Clarity of Communication

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[Referring to Monday Updates]: So, that has been a very helpful tool because otherwise, it was just every which way, and with so many people needing so many things, it was also a way for us to communicate just within the department—which is just as important (Central office leader (7) interview, winter 2007).

I think that it’s good. It’s regular, we’re not sending out something one time and saying “Okay, this is, remember it now, remember it.” So, between the administrators and the district office I think the communication is good (Central Office Leader (4) interview, spring 2007).

I think it’s high quality communication. I think that it could be improved…. I mean we do an excellent job … considering the amount of time that we have, but I’d say if I were to give us a score, I would give a 70% in 100% and it’s because of the time that we don’t have (Central Office Leader (4) interview, winter 2007).

I think we’re evolving or I’m hoping to evolve us into understanding how those things that we’re being asked to do at the District level are really in place to support our goal of maximum student achievement but I’m not sure everybody’s made that connection (School E principal interview, spring 2007).

I really think that sometimes our district leadership, they think about these goals or these objectives that they want school leaders, school administrators to manage and have their teachers complete—but I don’t think that they think it all the way through and I don’t think that they really realize how much time or energy is going to be put into that activity in order to get it completed (School B principal interview, spring 2007).

In some ways I feel that the communication and what is expected is not clear … for example … curriculum and what is understood in curriculum. And so the communication as to what is expected curriculum-wise does not seem to be cut and dry with the district (School A 3rd grade teacher interview, fall 2006).

So, sometimes that’s a concern that people don’t really know where this is coming from and understand how it came about (School C ELL facilitator interview, fall 2006).

An example would be … our grade book program that they’re incorporating and it pretty much is almost a mandate, you know, they’ll plug it out for a couple to start piloting and then before you know it, we’re being mandated to incorporate it before the next trimester (School E 4th grade teacher interview, fall 2006).

I think some of the issues as a whole that I’ve discussed with other teachers is we
Table 4.9: (cont.)

| Central Office Leaders  
n=10 | Principals  
n=5 | School Leadership Team Members  
n=45 |
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<td>office leader (5) interview, winter 2007).</td>
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<td>get some information from the district saying that we have to do this, but there’s no, sometimes there’s no rhyme or reason to it (School E 3rd grade teacher interview, fall 2006).</td>
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<td>Central office leaders work with principals to help them deliver the district message.</td>
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<td>You know I’m not saying they don’t support us.… I know they probably give support, but they don’t always tell us, you know, well, this and this and this…. I do know that they give the commands that we have to do this, this or this, and we do it, you know (School C sped teacher interview, fall 2006).</td>
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<td>I think … that the district tries to give, to keep the administrators informed about everything to the weekly updates; sometimes I think we could improve the timeliness of it at times. I’m not sure, if they understand or are clear in the priorities, and for instance we’ve had some issues with still, I got a phone call from a principal that said: “Do we really have to do these assessments, we’re not a DAIT school” just a week ago. So something didn’t click there (Central office leader (8) interview, winter 2007).</td>
<td></td>
<td>I can’t think of any sort of open communication that we have with the district. Usually them saying, “Okay, we’ve got these new requirements and this is how you’re going to meet them.” And so we usually have to go to more meetings, we have to make time for whatever requirements and it’s not really an open communication. They don’t sort of let us know what’s going on. They tell us, and we take it (School A 2nd grade teacher interview, fall 2006).</td>
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<td>And they are given these questions is to how, if certain things, you know how to time things, things like that. The intent is for everybody in the district to know about the major emphasis (Central office leader (5) interview, winter 2007).</td>
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Central Office Leaders  
n=10  

I feel strongly that if there are things that we perceive are going to be hot topic … we bring principals together and say: This is the issue. What can you do to communicate best this with your staff? (Central office leader (2) interview, winter 2007).

We have Principal Meetings regularly, curriculum is pretty much the focus of all of those … sharing with the principals what needs to be happening at the school site and wanting them to go back, talk to their Leadership Teams, talk to their staff at a staff meeting, and share the information (Central office leader (7) interview, winter 2007).

| Central Office Leaders | Principals  
n=5 | School Leadership Team Members  
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<td>What I find from our District is not starting from where, maybe, their purpose is. We seem to get what they want at the end and … and so then, and I’ll just speak for me personally, then I have to go, “Well, where did this come from,” and the District might have a very valid, very researched based whatever reason that they want this goal, but I sometimes don’t hear it from them and so I feel sometimes we’re put in the position that, “Well, they told us we have to have this done by this day,” … having been at the District Office, they do have a reason for what they do, but … but its not always communicated to each classroom teacher (School A Focus Group interview, spring 2007).</td>
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<td>With DAIT, they start off with some requirement, and they gave us a list of things that are going to be required on certain dates, that changed after we had made our plans for the year. Midway through the year, second trimester, we were rearranging our entire schedule,</td>
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Table 4.9: (cont.)

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<td>which I have never had to do before…. It’s frustrating (School A SLT focus group interview, spring 2007).</td>
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Accessibility and Responsiveness of Central Office Leaders

As can be seen in Table 4.10, central office leaders view themselves as listening and being responsive to principals. Communication is “open” and central office leaders view themselves as “very accessible” by phone or email to principals. Comments by central office leaders include, “We listen and act on concerns expressed” and “Most of our communication is that good two-way interactive discussions.” Findings suggest that principals at four of the five schools do feel supported by central office leaders with comments such as, “You know they’re always there for you” and “It is clear to me as a site leader that folks in different departments at the district are here to support my needs.” Another principal, referring to the superintendent and assistant superintendent explained, “They’ve been very open to listen to what we have to say about the concerns that teachers have.”

Central office leaders view themselves as soliciting input from principals as to how to move ahead with reforms with one central office leader explaining, “We will bring an idea out there, we will talk to them at meetings, we’ll get input through e-mails. So there’s a lot of communication before decisions are made…. They are able to say, ‘My teachers are not going to go for that, we just can’t pull this off anymore.’” In contrast, the one principal new to the district did not feel the support and open communication that other principals described. He shared a story from a principals’ meeting in which input was solicited but he felt the decision had already been made and asking the question was not really intended as a way to get input from the principals (field notes, spring 2007). Another principal commented that though strides had been made in the last year in terms of the central office staff coordinating efforts, she felt that
for the most part, “these directives come down and I am just looking at the mountain of work involved [for teachers].” She expressed a desire for central office leaders to “…just poll a group of principals: ‘we’re thinking about doing this’ and they have done this from time to time, I have gotten phone calls, ‘we’re talking about asking you and the teachers to do this—what do you think?’”

As shown in Table 4.10 central office leaders believe that teacher input is solicited, valued, and an important aspect of the district’s effort to move forward in improving teaching and learning. The superintendent reported that “To the extent that teachers want to be involved and interface with the district there are a lot of opportunities.” They are encouraged to participate on district level committees and have the opportunity to be “involved in every assessment selection, every benchmark change.” The superintendent explained that communication has improved significantly stating that in the past “communication was not intended to be a discourse, it wasn’t intended to be open-ended.” As an example, she referred to how the district’s Curriculum Advisory Committee now operates,

> When I stopped doing Curriculum Advisory last year because [the new assistant superintendent] was taking over, I told that group, “I remember when I was the only person that spoke at these meetings. Now, by the end of each meeting you create your next agenda, you tell me what you want to hear about, what you heard some other school was doing, is it true, why do we have to do this, how about the new report card or whatever.” So, it’s not input from just one direction, and it actually is a place where teacher leaders can dialogue. (Superintendent interview, winter 2007)

As shown in Table 4.10, other central office leaders also see themselves as listening and working collaboratively with teachers. One central office leader explained, “It’s more of a collaborative role. I think that we feel like we are all in it together.” Another central
office leader, in referring to how the educational services department works with committees, stated, “They’ve spent a lot of time, this is not top down, working with district committees in getting input on how should we do this … so I would say as a district…there is a lot of give and take … so I think that helps because people do feel like they are being listened to” (Central office leader (2) interview, winter 2007).

Findings indicate that school leadership team members are mixed in their view as to whether the central office really uses input from teachers. As stated previously and as can be seen in Table 4.10, data indicate that some school leadership team members view communication from the central office as “mandates” or “directives.” They express concern that the district is out of touch with what is happening in the classrooms—partially due to the tremendous pressure from federal and state mandates. As one school leadership team member stated when asked what things the district can do to support schools in meeting their goals,

They can listen to the teachers. As a support person I’ve attended meetings and I’ve heard teachers attend meetings and they really try to articulate as best they can what’s happening at the sites, in the schools, and the district says okay, thank you very much, and then seems to go ahead and do what they want anyway. And I don’t mean to say that they aren’t listening. I just feel that they feel like they’re under tremendous amount of pressure. But that’s what the district can do, is listen and change things. (School A ELL Coach interview, fall, 2006)

Other school leadership team members across schools confirm that communication is viewed by many as “top down” and one directional rather than the “two-way” communication as described by many central office leaders. The central office is not seen as working in what a School E leadership team member termed a “participatory” manner with teachers. As shown in Table 4.10, this same view was reflected in comments from School A, B, and C leadership team members such as, “I won’t say that we interact with
them, they just kind of tell us what they expect” (School C 2nd grade teacher interview, fall 2006). In contrast, School D school leadership team members had very little to say about central office communication, which may be attributed to the fact that as a Reading First school they are frequently in contact with central office leaders and as noted earlier have more frequent and consistent communication with central office leaders just as a part of their normal practices.

This direct access to central office leaders on a more frequent basis was perceived by some school leadership team members as being a supportive link between the central office and schools. For example, school leadership team members who serve as district literacy trainers or coaches appeared to have a better understanding of the district perspective evidenced by comments such as, “Having been at the district office, they do have a reason for what they do, but it’s not always communicated to each classroom teacher” (School A ELL facilitator, spring 2007) and “I’m a little more in the loop on how that’s developed and come about and that it wasn’t just made up at the top and sent down to them. [The district] actually got a lot of teacher input” (School C ELL facilitator, fall 2006). This understanding may come as a result of the weekly district level meetings held with coaches and facilitators, which allows for direct communication between central office leaders and school personnel other than principals.

There is also some evidence that school leadership team members see a change in the accessibility and responsiveness of the central office to teacher concerns possibly due to the ES21 school leadership team training. In an interview in the fall of 2006, one school leadership team member from School C commented, “I don’t really think there’s much of an interchange … a mutual exchange between the schools and the district. It’s
pretty much the district top down, boom, here it is.” In an interview conducted in the spring of 2007, this same school leadership team member commented at how pleased he was that the assistant superintendent of educational services had taken time early in the year to sit with his group during an ES21 training. He commented that she seemed to really listen to concerns by the team that the district–to-school communication was “one directional, from the district to us.” His reflection in the spring of 2007 was that prior to the ES21 trainings, the district had “no interest in wanting feedback,” but that he now thinks that “some of the improvements in the process are coming from [the assistant superintendent] listening to what teachers are saying.” School leadership team members at Schools A and E also made comments about ES21 giving them more “access to the district”: “It’s changed a little bit of our perspective … now we’ve changed our focus [from working on nuts and bolts to working on instructional practices] and the district is supporting us in changing the focus” (School A SLT focus group, spring 2007). A School E leadership team member referred to discussing a difficult benchmark assessment with the assistant superintendent at an ES21 training noting that the assistant superintendent responded, “I am so glad that I got this opportunity to talk with you. [Your principal] brought this to my attention already. It will never happen again.” The teacher’s comment regarding this interchange was “I instantly felt like they care, they understand, they listen. And it was wonderful” (School E SLT focus group, spring 2007).
Table 4.10: Communication Linkages—Central Office Accessibility and Responsiveness to Staff

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<td>From an in-services perspective we’ve spent a lot of time, this is not top-down, working with district committees in getting input on how should we do this. You’ve got leadership within their working with assistant supers, coordinators on “This is what we think should be part of the benchmark assessment.”... So I would say that as a district ... there is a lot of give and take as far as: you tell us what you are seeing, what are the issues, what are things that are there (Central office leader (2) interview, winter 2007).</td>
<td>I’m very lucky to be here and I’ve been in other districts but what I see here is that, you know, they’re always there for you ... there’s a number of administrators that are willing to support you, willing to find the answer for you and we also have other colleagues that, you know, participate in that role, you know, as mentors (School D principal interview, spring 2007). You know teachers will share their concerns and I never get the feeling that there is someone in the district saying “oh we will deal with those 2 years from now” It is looked at and they are very responsive. Now it may not always go the way that teachers think that it should go, but if there is data, if there is information provided—that really supports why this should be changed—the district is going to listen and they are going to act appropriately (School A principal interview, spring 2007). Having [the new assistant superintendent] in Ed Services</td>
<td>The district will make decisions about pacing plans, about guidelines. I will say this. They will open it up, saying we’re having a meeting about how we’re going to schedule our math next year. We’re going to have a meeting about how we’re going to do this.... So, the district wants people and they want them to be on committees, they want them to do this, this, and this. But it can be a frustrating process (School A ELL facilitator interview, fall 2006). We don’t always necessarily agree with them and that can cause some dissention.... [It] makes people feel like we have our opinions and sometimes it’s not very valuable as far as the whole is concerned (School E 3rd grade teacher interview, fall 2006). It’s like they’re there, we’re here. And that’s what a lot of people say. They give the commands and we follow them out. That’s how it’s traditionally been in this district (School C sped teacher interview, fall 2006).</td>
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[Referring to communication with principals]: It’s a two-way street. If they...
Table 4.10: (cont.)

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n=10 | Principals  
n=5 | School Leadership Team Members  
n=45 |
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<td>have concerns or issues, they communicate that to us and we address that (Central office leader (1) interview, winter 2007).</td>
<td>understanding how information coming at us at the rapid pace … it needed to become more succinct for … us to be able to process it more efficiently (Principal School E interview, spring 2007).</td>
<td>I’d like them to see a little bit more of what I do on a daily basis rather than just come through and say “oh, she’s happy. Good job. Keep it up.” We all have smiles on our faces because we like teaching not because our job is easy (School A SLT focus group, spring 2007).</td>
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<td>They [referring to principals] appreciate [having time to meet and really discuss issues] a lot. And I mean most of our communication is that good two-way interactive discussions (Central office leader (5), winter 2007).</td>
<td>But for the most part, these directives come down and I am just looking at the mountain of work involved and I am like and they have to teach, plan and teach their lessons and they have to supervise their students and they have to deal with behavior problems in their classroom, and they have to be on this adjunct duty and they have this district committee and I am like ok, guys we’ve got to coordinate here (School B principal interview, spring 2007).</td>
<td>[Referring to a site visit by the assistant superintendent]: It was wonderful to see her in the classroom. And she had a chance to see what fifth grade is doing in terms of helping to support social studies. … the plan that we have is… helping to increase that communication and facilitating between the district levels and the staff level. There are so many different things as teachers that we have to do every day. It’s very very easy to get overwhelmed. And by helping to keep the communication open and consistent it really decreases that stress load and anxiety level in terms of trying to handle the amount of paperwork that is a daily requirement (School E 5th</td>
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<td>Principals can call me up or come in and see me, or I’ll go to a breakfast meeting, and they’ll tell me what’s not working or what’s really frustrating for them, or how maybe my perception is different than how it really is out there (Superintendent interview, winter 2007).</td>
<td>I think people feel comfortable about coming to talk to people here on an individual basis … I would say that is a very big district but we really try to keep it personal. I don’t want people to feel like they need to go through barriers to get to me. People email me all the time, understanding how information coming at us at the rapid pace … it needed to become more succinct for … us to be able to process it more efficiently (Principal School E interview, spring 2007).</td>
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<td>I think that if I were to characterize it I would think, right now, maybe not the majority, but certainly enough that I think it’s significant to mention, um, probably view the District as imposing things on them (School E principal interview, spring 2007).</td>
<td>But for the most part, these directives come down and I am just looking at the mountain of work involved and I am like and they have to teach, plan and teach their lessons and they have to supervise their students and they have to deal with behavior problems in their classroom, and they have to be on this adjunct duty and they have this district committee and I am like ok, guys we’ve got to coordinate here (School B principal interview, spring 2007).</td>
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Table 4.10: (cont.)

| Central Office Leaders  
|---------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|-----------------|
| n=10                      | Principals          | n=5                    | School Leadership Team Members  
|                           |                     |                       | n=45             |
| “Can I meet with you to talk about.” Sure (Central office leader (2) interview, winter 2007). | I think one of our major issues right now is our lack of communication. Even though people say we e-mail, we do all these things, lack of communication is that regardless of what I do or say, they’re not hearing me or seeing me, because they’ll just give you a lip service and go back to the room and do whatever they want to do (School C principal interview, fall 2006). | grade teacher interview, fall 2007). |
| [Referring to communication with staff]: Again I think it’s good, I think we have good relationship with the union (Central office leader (3) interview, winter 2007). | Well, I feel a little bit more empowered than [teachers] do, just because I have had conversations and I guess I feel that support more because I have been able to communicate and to be communicated with. I think my teachers do not feel very much support (School B principal interview, spring 2007). | But what I found with the current administration [is that the superintendent] is very open. When we’ve had concerns and we felt like things needed to be modified … she was very open to listening, very open to seeing about making the changes. But I think that before [the former superintendent] it wouldn’t have happened. So just depends on who the administrator is (School E SLT focus group interview, spring 2007). |
| And so, we’ve done a lot to establish open-communication about the most important things. Teachers are involved in every assessment selection, every benchmark change, and people email us and say “Question 14 isn’t clear, if you change the language to this, kids will know what it is you’re asking” (Superintendent interview, winter 2007). | Talking about our staff—they are very optimistic about the support we receive from the district…. And so we just all work together (School A principal interview, spring 2007). | But. Maybe more of an appearance that they’re showing that they’re supporting us. Not just supporting us through e-mail. E-mail is great. It’s the best thing that’s happened in a long time, but there’s also some flaws to it because we’re not able to meet face to face and be able to understand or communicate to the other person because we’ve never seen them before (School D RSP interview, fall 2006). |
| I try to encourage those principals when we have opportunities, you know, to really ask a teacher, you know, “Would you consider representing our school on this facet? We could give our input and I just think it would make a difference for our school” (Superintendent interview, winter 2007). | | |
Table 4.10: (cont.)

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<td>They’ve spent a lot of time; this is not top-down, working with district committees in getting input on how we should do this. You’ve got leadership within there working with assistant sups, coordinators on “This is what we think should be part of the benchmark assessment” or “These are issues, inputs that we are seeing.” So I would say that as a district I think that we give ... there is a lot of give and take as far as: you tell us what you are seeing, what are the issues, what are things that are there (Central office leader interview (2), winter 2007).</td>
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<td>So, we have groups where we actually talk to lead teachers directly. And give them training. And give them information to come back to their teachers (Central office leader (4) interview, winter 2007).</td>
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<td>My impression is that the communication is very good and very strong. We meet with the employee</td>
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<td>I would say the biggest support is just the people in the district office—they are very knowledgeable and I’ve never waited till the next day to get a phone call returned ... and to me that has to be the major support that a site is receiving because we don’t know all the answers at the site and with the experience we are able to bounce off ideas and just really talk our way through....This is a pretty large district and it is unusual to have that accessibility (School A principal interview, spring 2007).</td>
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<td>Really, [the superintendent and assistant superintendent] have been very open to listening, like, just concerns with timing, or concerns with the pacing calendar for these assessments. They’ve been very open to listening to what we have to say about the concerns that the teachers have (School B principal interview, spring 2007).</td>
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<td>You know basically everyone who works at the district office, I mean if you have a question or if you need some</td>
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<td>Well ... just this last Friday we were having our Effective Schools celebration and our superintendent sat down with our school and spent almost the entire event with us. I think we have a good superintendent who is trying very hard to be open and receptive and encouraging. And I think she has a good relationship with our staff and our school and our principal (School A SLT interview, spring 2007).</td>
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<td>She [referring to the assistant superintendent of Ed Services] sent us an email [a few weeks ago], and I think every employee in the district, all the teachers, she sent us an email saying that she was taking away parts of the assessments in English and English Language Development that every teacher had to do, and she endeared herself. I think she has opened up communication amazingly. I think she’s very sensitive to the teacher needs and understands the time the assessments take from instruction, and I emailed her back and I never emailed an</td>
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<td>group leadership on a regular basis, informally, formally. Here are issues that are at the sites. So that kind of open communication (Central office leader (2) interview, spring 2007).</td>
<td>information, most everyone is very accommodating … specifically for administrators … it is pretty much an open door policy over there. I mean if you need help, or you have a question, everybody is very open and very good about offering help (School B principal interview, spring 2007).</td>
<td>administrator back before (School E 2nd grade teacher, fall 2006).</td>
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<td>Well, I think from the emails I get, I think that the teachers are very comfortable giving their opinions, and asking questions and asking for guidance…. I think that they feel that they have access up here and they can get information (Central office leader (4) interview, winter 2007).</td>
<td>[Referring to a conversation between the SLT and the assistant superintendent of educational services]: One of the things that was expressed to her was that ... the communication from the district is pretty directive, it’s one directional. It’s from the district to us. And she said she wants to change that. So I don’t know the specifics of the plan for communication, but I truly believe she’s committed to doing it. And I think she wants to stay in touch with the schools, and for instance, I told her what I felt about the benchmark assessments that they’re very inefficient, really overkill, a lot more time is spent gathering data to be equally valid with a much shorter assessment, a much more focused assessment (School C 4th grade teacher interview, fall, 2006).</td>
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<td>From my viewpoint, our relationship is, is a positive one. We feel like we’re here to help them … that’s our role. And, we try to communicate that, “Tell us what you need, we’re going to try to help you do it, whatever it is.” And so, I hope that they have that same perspective, and then they may not ... I don’t hear as much about the district, you know. I don’t hear that as much anymore (Central office leader (7) interview, winter 2007).</td>
<td>[Referring to a conversation between the SLT and the assistant superintendent of educational services]: One of the things that was expressed to her was that ... the communication from the district is pretty directive, it’s one directional. It’s from the district to us. And she said she wants to change that. So I don’t know the specifics of the plan for communication, but I truly believe she’s committed to doing it. And I think she wants to stay in touch with the schools, and for instance, I told her what I felt about the benchmark assessments that they’re very inefficient, really overkill, a lot more time is spent gathering data to be equally valid with a much shorter assessment, a much more focused assessment (School C 4th grade teacher interview, fall, 2006).</td>
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<td>One thing that has changed I think is my perception of the District’s willingness to listen. It seemed pretty clear in my mind that the district was dictating what they</td>
<td>[Referring to a conversation between the SLT and the assistant superintendent of educational services]: One of the things that was expressed to her was that ... the communication from the district is pretty directive, it’s one directional. It’s from the district to us. And she said she wants to change that. So I don’t know the specifics of the plan for communication, but I truly believe she’s committed to doing it. And I think she wants to stay in touch with the schools, and for instance, I told her what I felt about the benchmark assessments that they’re very inefficient, really overkill, a lot more time is spent gathering data to be equally valid with a much shorter assessment, a much more focused assessment (School C 4th grade teacher interview, fall, 2006).</td>
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<td>wanted to do and there was really no interest in wanting feedback—prior to the ES21 trainings—because having Brenda Jones come to the meetings and go around and talk with people. She was really expressing her desire to understand what the problems were with benchmark testing. She was listening … I think some of the improvements in the process are coming from [refers to assistant superintendent] listening to what teachers are saying (School C Focus Group interview, spring 2007). [Referring to ES21 training]: I think it’s given us some access to the district. Whether or not it’s enough … I feel comfortable saying to either [the superintendent and assistant superintendent of educational services], if I had concerns, I feel like I could talk to them openly. I don’t feel constrained by them at all. I do think we had a good relationship with our administrators and it’s just deepened some with the Effective Schools (ES21) (School E SLT focus group, spring 2007).</td>
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This increased direct communication between central office leaders and school leadership team members was also beginning to occur through the DAIT process as evidenced by comments from central office leaders and teachers as noted in the DAIT section of this paper. In discussing the possibility of more direct communication with school leadership teams as part of DAIT visitations, a central office administrator commented,

I think that’s a strong possibility … because we’re trying to be more coordinated and there are so many schools … what’s the best way to effectively impact everybody? And again making it cohesive … so we’re talking about the same thing … actually meeting with the teams, having that conversation to move them forward in terms of really looking at what’s happening with certain intensive and strategic kids and having an instructional focus. (Central office leader (1) interview, winter 2007)

Other central office leaders would agree that in order to move the district forward, the district needs to move from communication where there is merely a “stamp of approval” at the district committee level. As one central office leader explained, “You can have your own agenda, you know the path you want to go, but ultimately it has to evolve out of the constituents that are actually going to be the practitioners in terms of delivering it. And I don’t think that we do that well” (Central office leader (6) interview, winter 2007). As mentioned earlier, central office leaders understand that buy-in is important with this same central office leader, noting that “if you don’t have the buy-in … you don’t have people to deliver the message.” She views leadership team members who participate in district level committees as an avenue for teacher leaders to then go back and be able to respond to a group of 700 teachers. She maintains that it would be impossible for a coordinator to have that level of personal contact. So maintaining those committees and establishing that rapport allows teachers to “truly feel that they have a
voice and that voice is carried from not just this office, but up through to cabinet”
(Central office leader (6) interview, winter 2007). This move to have more direct
communication with teacher leaders in addition to principals suggests that the district
may be undergoing a cultural shift that will have an impact on interactions between the
central office leaders and schools—a linkage to be discussed in another section of this
chapter regarding the ways in which school leadership teams are emerging as a
supportive resource linkage between the central office and the schools. The new assistant
superintendent gave an interesting perspective on how the district culture is changing
when she stated,

It’s a lot of conversations and listening. I think people really feel that we listen.
You know I’ve heard them, people say that I’m a person who really listens. I
think the superintendent ... the whole cabinet is somebody who really
listens...that’s certainly what we’re striving to do - to listen, so that people’s input
is valued ... I think again ... you can have resistance from one or two as you’re
moving through change, because it does up the ante of what you’re asking people
to do. But I’d say overall, the climate, I would say right now is good. (Central
office leader (1) interview, winter 2007)

Summary

Findings suggest that central office communication is viewed by all key
stakeholders as a critical linkage between the central office and schools. Some perceive
that the messages support a cohesive and coherent focus on improving teaching and
learning; others saw the communication often as top-down directives with little regard for
what is really happening in classrooms across the district. Overall communication from
the central office is perceived by many school leadership team members as being one-
way communication from the central office to schools.
The superintendent and central office use a variety of mechanisms. E-mails notably are being used as a means of connecting more directly with teachers. This form of communication offers potential for more direct contact, but still had pitfalls and gaps in terms of how it might serve as a two-way communication tool. The primary means of communication for the district office and schools remains the principal. Recent efforts by the new superintendent and assistant superintendent suggest an effort to engage principals in a stronger two-way communication process and not just as transmitters of information. There is evidence that communication across the district is improving and that central office leaders recognize that it is important to take the time to work with principals regarding communication. The data suggest that leadership teams may be a viable avenue for building staff buy-in, but there is less evidence that they are fully being used as a communication bridge to support school reform. In the following section, I present findings regarding the relational linkages that have developed in the district over the past six years. The data indicate a feeling of trust across the district creating an environment conducive to building a collaborative culture and building leadership capacity is emerging.

Relational Linkages

Lasky (2004) defines relational linkages as robust, trusting professional relationships within and across all levels of the system. Relational linkages are essential to reform efforts (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Stein, Hubbard, & Mehan, 2002). Research regarding reforms in New York’s Community District #2 and San Diego suggest that feelings of trust and respect for people providing professional development or intervention strategies allow teachers to be more receptive to external intervention (Stein...
et al.). As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, archival data from newspapers and interviews with central office leaders paint a picture of Evergreen as a district in turmoil in its superintendency, board relations, and relations between management and the teachers’ union for a number of years preceding the current administration, suggesting that the robust, trusting professional relationships across all levels of the system did not exist. In 1997, the board selected its third superintendent within a 7-year period. However, in May 2000, the board fired the superintendent amid growing concerns regarding his lack of professionalism and cooperation and his poor relationships with administrators and teachers. During this 3-year period, relational linkages among central office leaders and between the central office and schools constrained school reform efforts. Interviews with central office leaders revealed that a feeling of mistrust had permeated the district. Mistrust not only between the central office and schools, but also among administrators within the central office and between central office administrators and principals.

The new superintendent hired subsequent to these events spent a good part of his tenure restoring the trust that had been lost and rebuilding relationships among central office leaders and principals as well as between the central office and schools. During interviews, central office leaders, principals, and school leadership teams spoke highly of his efforts to re-establish positive, trusting relationships in the district commenting on his frequent visits to schools, open communication, and support of teachers. A view of one central office leader captured the view of key stakeholders when she stated:

Our previous superintendent had really worked hard to develop a positive culture, a culture of respect and really trying to let all staff and teachers especially know that we value them. Even through very tough budgeting times, our district still
gave a raise throughout the entire time, didn’t have to lay off teachers, and that was truly a part of the culture that he wanted to develop and show the value and worth and that we really do care. (Central office leader (1) interview, winter 2007)

The current superintendent began her tenure in the district under this new superintendent and experienced first-hand the poor relational linkages, commenting, “When I first came to this district, communication was not intended to be a discourse.” Overall, data suggest that relational linkages have improved, particularly among central office leaders and between the central office and the principals. Findings indicate there is less agreement among the three groups as to how supportive the relational linkages are between the central office and the schools. In the following sections, findings are presented regarding the ways in which relational linkages among central office leaders, between central office leaders and principals, and finally between central office leaders and schools support or constrain the implementation of the district’s reform agenda.

**Relational Linkages Among Central Office Leaders**

Central office leaders express that they work well together as a team: “We’re a very cohesive group. I think we have built a single mindedness about what our work is and that we are a support to the school” (Central office leader (4) interview, winter 2007). Another central office leader, when asked about the relationship among central office leaders, responded: “I think it’s a genuinely caring district with dedicated people who are open and willing to collaborate with each other” (Central office leader (5) interview, winter 2007). Observations of DAIT cabinet meetings confirm an open dialogue among central office leaders regarding how to move the schools forward. During these meetings, the superintendent openly engaged central office leaders in dialogue about how to
facilitate improvements. Central office leaders responded with ideas and strategies, suggesting a feeling of trust and collaboration.

Relational Linkages Between Central Office Leaders and Principals

As illustrated in the Communication and Resource Linkages sections of this chapter, both central office leaders and principals view their relationship as open and supportive suggesting a relational linkage that supports moving the district’s reform efforts forward. Central office leaders characterize the relationship with principals as “very positive.” Other central office leaders referred to how principals have been engaging in more collaborative work with one another and the district through principal meetings and school visitations. They perceive that the relationship between the central office and the principals has improved over the past seven years. As expressed by one central office leader: “We’re coming together.” Principals agree that they feel support from the district office in achieving their goals. The School D principal expressed the predominant view of the other principals when he stated: “They trust me. They have confidence in me. [That] makes my job a lot easier and yet when I need some guidance they’re there for you. So again it really gives me that confidence and that motivation to keep striving to do a lot more because I know … that they’re there.” Other principals view the central office as having an “open door” and there is “good communication.” The School C principal viewed central office leaders as the “biggest support … they are very knowledgeable … we are able to bounce off ideas and just really talk our way through.”

Relational Linkages Between the Central Office and the Schools

The relationship between the central office and the schools is viewed differently by the different stakeholders. Central office leaders express that there is a lot of “give and
take” between the central office and schools with one central office leader characterizing the relationship as “collaborative.” They perceive that the former and current superintendent have developed trusting relationships across the district that have allowed teachers in the district to even be open to having discussions about changes that will move the district forward. Referring to how this has affected the relationship between the district and the schools, one central office leader explained: “And there has been resistance but I think that while we are going to resist and we are going to grumble and we don’t like it, we trust and so we are going to move forward” (Central office leader (2) interview, winter 2007). Another central office leader agreed: “Overall, in the whole district, teachers believe and trust what’s said…. More teachers are accessing the district and reaching out to the district, wanting to be on leadership things” (Central office leader (4) interview, winter 2007).

As described in earlier sections, school leadership team members at Schools A, B, C, and E expressed frustration that district-mandated pacing calendars and assessments infringe on instructional time and what they believe to be good teaching. Comments that the district office doesn’t “value our time” and takes away “any freedom or discretion we have as professionals” from these team members indicate that from the perspective of more than half of the team members, relational linkages between the central office and teachers needs to be strengthened. Findings indicate that although principals view the relationship between the district and schools as very supportive, they are really referring to how the central office supports the school as a single entity. As noted in other sections of this chapter, they recognize that their teachers feel “overwhelmed” with district mandates and do not always understand why the district is “imposing” things on them.
again suggesting the need to build better relational linkages between the central office and the teachers.

Interestingly, many school leadership team members across schools expressed a high regard for the new superintendent as well as the assistant superintendent, describing them as “caring,” “listening,” and “approachable.” As noted in the DAIT section of this chapter, teams from School D and School E also expressed appreciation for the supportive comments from central office leaders regarding instructional practices at their schools as a part of the DAIT visitations suggesting that face-to-face communication with teachers creates a more supportive relational linkage between the central office and teachers.

It would be impossible for the central office to engage in face-to-face communication with all teachers in the district. As will be described in the section regarding Resource Linkages, with professional development, school leadership teams appear to be emerging as a vehicle for communicating the district message to colleagues and providing support to colleagues in improving teaching and learning. ES21 provided training to school leadership teams designed to help each school’s team become a guiding force in what Marzano et al. (2005) call a purposeful community, “one with collective efficacy and capability to develop and use assets to accomplish goals that matter to all community members through agreed-upon processes” (p. 90). An important aspect of the training was the designation of a district liaison who served as a linkage between the central office and the school leadership teams. The School Leadership Team (SLT) Implementation Continuum (UCSB Center for Educational Leadership, 2004) was designed as a rubric to reveal a leadership team’s progress on leadership teamwork. The
SLT Continuum was completed by the five leadership teams in October 2006 at the beginning of the school leadership team training and then completed again at the conclusion of the first year of training (October 2007). Most notable for this study is data collected from leadership team members regarding district/team relations. Table 4.11 presents the potential responses of team members to questions regarding district relations as they pertain to SLT to district communications, district support for the SLT work, and SLT/district accountability.
Table 4.11: SLT Continuum: Team/District Relations Items

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<td>4. SLT to district communications</td>
<td>The district has given written or tacit approval, but there is no communication between district personnel and the SLT about SLT activities.</td>
<td>A district liaison is assigned to the school, but there is limited interaction between the liaison and the SLT.</td>
<td>A district liaison regularly meets with the SLT to assist it and may be an active team member.</td>
<td>The district liaison and SLT work together to resolve issues that may impede the continuous improvement process.</td>
<td>There is regular communication among the liaison, the SLT and the district staff, which ensures coordination and maximizing of improvement efforts.</td>
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<td>7. District support for the SLT work</td>
<td>The SLT feels little support from the district for its work to improve student learning.</td>
<td>The SLT receives financial support to attend SLT seminars.</td>
<td>The SLT and the district are exploring ways for the district to increase its support for the SLT’s work.</td>
<td>The district and the SLT collaborate to identify strategies and resources to improve student learning.</td>
<td>Through the SLT work the district rethinks or develops new policies and practices and allocates resources to facilitate the work.</td>
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<td>8. SLT/District accountability</td>
<td>The SLT operates in compliance with district policies and guidelines, but there is little interaction in relation to district and school goals.</td>
<td>The SLT has discussed the relationship between school and district goals.</td>
<td>The SLT’s action plans, the school’s goals and the district’s goals focus on improving student learning.</td>
<td>The district, school and SLT feel their goals for students are in alignment and there is a growing sense of shared accountability for student learning.</td>
<td>The school, with SLT leadership, and district share equally in their accountability for student learning and work together to achieve the goal of continuous improvement.</td>
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As can be seen in Figure 4.2, there is a significant difference in how school leadership teams perceived relations with the district after the first year of training. The Mean Score for District Relations across teams in October 2006 was 2.38, whereas in October 2007 the score rose to 3.18 (a significant difference at the .05 level), suggesting that these school leadership team members viewed relational linkages with the district as improving. As will be shown in the Resource Linkages section, qualitative data collected in the spring of 2007 confirm that leadership team members perceived an “increased access” to the district allowing them to engage in more two-way communication, particularly with the superintendent and the assistant superintendent who served as the district liaison. Leadership team members spoke of forming channels “that we didn’t have before” and that the district was supporting them in changing their role from disseminating “nuts and bolts information” to focusing on instruction.

Figure 4.2: ESD ES21 Schools SLT Continuum 2006-2007
Summary

Findings indicate that, overall, there are strong supportive relational linkages among central office leaders and between the central office and the principals. School leadership team members express a positive regard for central office leaders, particularly the superintendent and assistant superintendent, suggesting that relational linkages across the district have improved over the past seven years.

However, although central office leaders perceive that supportive relational linkages exist between the central office and the teachers, principals and school leadership team members from Schools A, B, C, and E describe a tension that exists between the central office and teachers around district mandates regarding curriculum and assessment. Teachers express concerns that the district does not value their time and their professionalism, which may constrain the relational linkages necessary to advance the district’s reform agenda.

Data collected from school leadership teams participating in the ES21 school leadership team training suggest that team-district relations improved significantly over the course of the first year of training. An important aspect of the professional development model was the assignment of the assistant superintendent of educational services as the district liaison, which allowed school leadership team members increased access to the central office creating more formal supportive relational linkages between the central office and teachers through school leadership teams.

Resource Linkages

Lasky (2004) defines resource linkages as encompassing material, technological, and human capital brought to the system to enhance reform. Datnow et al. (2006) argue
that increasing evidence suggests the breadth and depth of district-wide reform implementation is more likely when certain core elements are in place. These elements include, (a) clear goals and a focus on improving classroom teaching and student learning, (b) a quality accountability system to include standards and curricula, (c) material and human resources that improve basic school conditions, and (d) high-quality, time-intensive professional development. In previous sections, findings have been presented suggesting that Evergreen has a clear focus on improving teaching and learning and is working to develop an accountability system based on standards-based curriculum and benchmark assessments. In this section, findings are presented regarding key stakeholders perceptions of the ways in which material technological, and human resources support and constrain reform efforts and specifically the ways in which professional development is being used to link the central office and the schools.

**Material and Human Resources**

Interviews with central office leaders and principals confirm that there has been a concerted effort to allocate a variety of resources focusing on the unique needs of the schools. Central office leaders view their role as being a resource and support to schools. According to one central office leader, “[Making] sure our teachers feel supported, it’s a huge goal and not only teachers, I want to say principals too from the district office to make sure our staff feels supported—and that they have the tools to be able to improve student achievement.” As noted in previous sections, overall, principals do feel supported by the central office and empowered to make decisions based on their school’s needs while the perception of many teachers is that the district is imposing things on them with little understanding of what is really happening in the classroom. Findings indicate that
central office leaders believe that focused professional development, collaboration, and the development of leadership capacity in principals and teachers are critical to moving the district’s reform agenda forward. Harnessing human capital through collaborative teamwork is a major emphasis in the district as demonstrated by the second board focus goal, which states:

All adults will work in high-performing collaborative teams at the district level, department level, school level, and teacher level. Teamwork will ensure coherent instructional and behavioral programs to improve student achievement and student-to-school connections. (Evergreen School District Board Focus Goals, Adopted March 21, 2007, Amended April 26, 2007)

Referring to this board focus goal, the superintendent notes:

The second goal talks about all adults in our district will function in high performing collaborative teams. And even though that seems like a no brain thing, this was really my recommendation for a goal. I said [to the board], ‘They need to hear it from you that that’s the expectation. That we don’t have, that it’s not okay or acceptable anymore. I don’t care if it’s in the Maintenance Department or in the Child Nutrition or in the Fourth Grade Team in X School. It’s not okay to be an independent contractor. And they need to see that for the benefit of all kids that the expectation is that we work in teams. How that gets defined and it evolves at each school or each work site is different. (Superintendent interview, winter 2007)

Resource linkages in place in Evergreen School District include district-wide and site-based professional development, initiating learning partnerships by providing coaches for principals and teachers to build capacity for a collaborative culture, strategic use of funds, and utilizing technology to assist schools in accessing student data for decision making. Other resource linkages put in place by the district support principals and teachers, such as accessing Reading First Grants for eligible schools and the agreement to participate in the Effective Schools school leadership team training for five of the elementary schools in the district. In addition, the central office envisions that the Local Education Agency Plan (LEAP) and templates for the Single Site Plans would be
working documents designed to guide schools in meeting their student achievement targets. In the following sections, findings will be presented regarding Evergreen’s efforts to utilize the human, material, and technological resources necessary to build collaborative teams, leadership capacity, and move the district’s reform agenda forward.

**Professional Development and Learning Partnerships**

As noted earlier, professional development is one of the core elements suggested by Datnow et al. (2006) as likely to increase the depth and breadth of a district’s reform implementation. Datnow and her colleagues maintain that both professional development and what they term learning partnerships are areas in which districts need to develop internal capacity to support the improvement of teaching and learning as well as being linkages that create capacity. Over the past few years, Evergreen School District has placed an intense focus on professional development and learning partnerships centered on improving principal and teacher content knowledge and building leadership capacity to guide and coordinate reform. Findings regarding professional development for principals and teachers are presented first followed by findings regarding learning partnerships that have been established in the district.

**Professional development of principals.** As stated earlier, in Evergreen School District, principals are viewed as the primary conduit of information from the central office to schools. The superintendent expresses that the role of the principal can be difficult, “That middle manager position of a principal is tough sometimes when … a goal or a decision has been predetermined from the district level, and it’s the principal’s job to figure out how to facilitate that or make that work” (Superintendent interview, winter 2007). Central office leaders have engaged in a variety of professional
development activities designed not only to develop principal’s content knowledge and skills, but also to encourage a more collaborative culture among principals and assist them in building leadership capacity at their schools.

With respect to content knowledge and skills, according to central office leaders, principals are encouraged, though not required, to attend the same professional development offered to teachers to learn how to implement the district’s adopted curriculum. Central office leaders expressed the importance of this type of training, commenting, “We have to bring principals along. I think the principals and the assistant principals have to be trained with their teachers. You cannot evaluate what you don’t understand” (Central office leader (4) interview, winter 2007). Another central office leader explained, “Well, we train all of our principals. So that by implication says that we would expect the teacher to do these things. We send them to the AB 466 training⁴ so that they know, when they walk in the classroom, if instruction is taking place … from the adopted textbook, and that’s a good place to start” (Central office leader (7) interview, winter 2007). Principals agree that this type of professional development enhances their ability to work with their staff to achieve district goals. For example, the School D principal expressed how these in-services have supported him in using data, “Because … they show you how to use the assessment, they show you how to use the curriculum, and then how to plan.” As discussed in the communication linkages section of this chapter, principals are also supported through principal meetings where the central office has “… very consciously created small chunks of what we call Principal Workshops … I would

⁴ AB 466 training is specific training on how to implement the Houghton Mifflin Reading program.
say at least half of their two hour meeting is a workshop building their capacity on some issue” (Superintendent interview, winter 2007). The School E principal concurred, noting that even if principals do not attend the curriculum and assessment in-services, they are given tools in principal workshops,

   Our staff development department did some … really good, focus reviews of lots of what’s important about Houghton Mifflin and how we can be a better instructional leader of that Houghton Mifflin program. For those principals who weren’t AB 466 trained, I’m sure that was really invaluable information … they were hour-long just about Houghton Mifflin routines … so that we understood those things better and then could give better feedback to our teachers. (School E Principal interview, spring 2007)

   Central office leaders expressed that principal meetings also provide an opportunity for principals to share with one another successful practices that are occurring at their schools, which has encouraged a more collaborative culture among principals and provided them with strategies to build leadership capacity at their schools. Referring to support from the central office comments by the School E principal are reflective of the overall feeling of principals in the study, “I just really think that so much of what is my focus and priority in terms of our working better and stronger in collaborative teams and professional learning communities, our looking at data to help us make god decisions; so many of my priorities are supported on so many different levels at the district.” One central office administrator described how at a recent meeting principals from non-Reading First and Reading First schools did presentations on the results of their DAIT visits and what they were doing as a result to work with their teachers on making the recommended instructional changes. She explained,

   So they were walking their peers through this, which is very smart, because any of us would stand up there and say “Well we could hand them a copy of the report” and they are like, “Oh my gosh, they’re nitpicky!” But, when their peers get up
there and tell them how they got their schools ready for the first visit … they’re taking notes and they’re asking questions. (Central office leader (4) interview, winter 2007)

Another central office leader spoke of how he has seen a more collaborative culture growing among principals. He explained that when the central office began professional development with principals, his perception was that “It is not safe for principals to say they don’t know something … to actually confess that you need help with something.” But now he sees that “as they sort of pulled together to kind of agree on what to do, it has created a new dynamic where you have to be comfortable to be able to request support from someone and not have your expertise be questioned as a principal.” He also attributes this change to the new practice of pulling principals to participate in visitations to other schools in the district, which has “opened the doors for principals to say, ‘oh so-and-so is doing this great thing, how did you get that to happen’” (Central office leader (9) interview, winter 2007). The superintendent has seen a change in principals as they share with one another their “best thinking so far” and engage in reflective dialogues regarding the response of their staff. She perceives this as a strategy that allows principals to learn ways to build leadership capacity at their schools. As an example, she describes the experience of one of her principals who is not from one of the “most evolved schools.”

Because she used to be a principal that was far more controlling, and wouldn’t turn in her site plan until it was perfect. What she realized is that she really needed to empower her grade level groups and although this first year plan wasn’t perfect, she understands the increased level of commitment she had because she was a part of each of those grade level meetings, and yet she didn’t dictate the requirements or content. (Superintendent interview, winter 2007)
Overall, data suggest that both central office leaders and principals view professional development opportunities for principals as a supportive linkage between the central office and schools by helping to build the capacity of principals to work more effectively with one another as well as with their staff in moving the district reform efforts forward.

Professional development for teachers. Determining how to provide a comprehensive and high-quality staff development program for teachers has also been a priority for central office leaders in recent years. Beginning in the 2005-2006 school year, the district decided on a site-based trainer of trainers’ staff development model in order to customize training to individual schools. Referring to professional development for teachers, one central office leader explained,

Professional development is clearly a huge goal for us in our department and … a goal is to develop a product, a district staff wide professional development structure, where every single teacher would be involved in becoming a stronger instructional leader in their classroom. And we’ve come up with the site staff development, we decided that’s how it was going to look. (Central office leader (6) interview, winter 2007)

Implementation of the trainer of trainer model involved a number of strategies. Principals were responsible for selecting teacher leaders from their school to participate in the training. According to central office leaders, once trained, these “facilitators” were expected to then go back and train staff at their schools as a component of staff, department, or grade-level meetings. Facilitators were viewed as a “communication liaison” and were responsible for making sure the teachers at their school “understand all aspects of the delivery of instruction.” Central office leaders viewed this model as a way of developing district “leadership teams” and building capacity explaining,

If you can get a group of teachers at your site at each grade level who really understand the process, understand really where we are trying to go with this,
what our goals are and what we need to do to get there, then you have a hard bit of a change to make it happen. Whereas if you just have the principal out there or the superintendent standing there and saying, ”This is where we’re going to go,” then it is not going to happen. (Central office leader (6) interview, winter 2007)

Another central office leader concurred, noting,

There are only so many coordinators. And obviously, as you can see, we have many, many hats so we can’t be everything for 23 schools. But we can bring them to us and give them some help and some guidance, and we can be there throughout the process. (Central office leader (4) interview, winter 2007)

Findings suggest that just as with principals, central office leaders perceived that although these teachers are given the content to teach, they may not have the skills necessary to deliver the message. One central office leader commented, “Teachers may have teaching strategies and classroom strategies, but they don’t know how to manage their little grade level group” (Central office leader (4) interview, winter 2007). The School B principal concurred, noting, “It can really fall flat … if the training is not handled in a very effective step-by-step [manner] … it is just like you can’t cram it in one day and expect those people to go back and intelligently delineate and deliver that training to their staff.” To assist teachers, central office leaders provided training or arranged for training as a means of supporting them in presenting information to their colleagues. Overall, the superintendent was very pleased with how the training went the first year. Topics included differentiation and vocabulary for English learners and she expressed,

I saw some magnificently different ways of communicating with staff, and it was all determined because they had the content, but how they met that goal at each of their sites was very different…. [Referring to workshop on vocabulary development] And, it was really the first time … that I would say six weeks henceforth to that, I saw vocabulary being worked on at every school. (Superintendent interview, spring 2007)
The School D principal was also pleased with the results explaining, “They come back, they provide guidance to their team and it trickles down all the way from K through fifth grade … and then we also provide in-services within the school site, site based staff development, to continue that practice.”

However, as with principals, teachers are expected, but not required, to participate in training regarding the district’s adopted curriculum as well as instructional strategies that cut across the curriculum. One central office leader explained, “It’s always a challenge for teachers because we are trying not to pull them out of the classroom so when we do it after school, it’s optional in some respects” (Central office leader (2) interview, winter 2007). Interestingly, according to the School C principal and one of the members of the School C leadership team, teachers at School C opted not to participate in the trainings offered during the 2005-2006 school year, and have been “a little out of the loop on some of this stuff” suggesting that allowing professional development to be optional may constrain the district’s efforts to move forward with reforms. To address this issue, the district and teachers’ union agreed to a weekly early release day beginning in the 2007-2008 school year in order to make time in the teacher workday for staff development.

Data suggest that principal and teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of the district’s professional development for teachers vary. As noted in the communication linkages section of this chapter, interviews with school leadership team members indicated that teacher leaders identified as trainers are not necessarily teachers on the school leadership team, which sometimes led to miss-communication or uneven presentation of the information across schools. In addition, as noted earlier, some schools
“opted out” of the training, which left those teachers out of the loop. Many school leadership teams across schools expressed concerns about being out of their classroom which they felt had a negative impact on student learning. A School C leadership team member commented, “Yeah, it is almost too much staff development … I was out of my classroom 10 days this year for the district … and that is too many days to be out… So at some point, staff development, it is too much.” The School B principal concurred noting, “…there are just not enough hours in the day. The amount of training that they are asking teachers to participate in out of their classroom or after school, it’s exhausting!” In contrast, a School E leadership team member stated, “Oftentimes … they don’t give enough training and provide enough workshops, and if they do, they don’t give teachers extra hours of buy-back pay or anything.” A School B leadership team member described how budget constraints have limited the amount of staff development opportunities being offered expressing that she misses the opportunity to “network with other teachers in the district” and “it would be nice to get out and get to other schools.”

In contrast, data from School D, the Reading First school in the study, would suggest that the school is much farther along in embracing the district’s reform agenda. The district has poured a tremendous amount of material, technical, and human resources into the school to support teacher and student learning and it appears to be paying off. One School D leadership team expressed a view that captured the view of other leadership team members at the school when she stated,

We have the Reading First grant…. We were not happy about it when it first came out and our previous principal basically twisted our arms and told us we had to do it. So there was a lot of resentment … I was on the fence and now I see it as a complete advantage. I see our school doing so much more because of the fact that we have the training, we have the coach, we have the ability to sit down and
reflect on our teaching and our collaboration and our curriculum and be able to plan together. And other people who don’t have that funding … and didn’t opt to do this don’t have that opportunity and its something that should be available to everyone. (School D 2nd grade teacher interview, fall 2006)

This data suggest that some view professional development for teachers as a supportive linkage between the central office and the schools, but others view it as a constraint. Although the central office has offered professional development at both the district and the school levels to build teacher knowledge and skills, with the exception of School D, not all teachers are taking advantage of the opportunities and there is a perception by some teachers that the professional development is less than adequate or in some cases too much.

Central office leaders shared that with the introduction of DAIT at the beginning of the 2006-2007 school year, “There were just too many things going on” and so site-based staff development was put on hold. Interestingly—as noted in the ideological linkages section, DAIT section, and communication linkages sections of this chapter—through DAIT, central office leaders have had the opportunity to spend time in classrooms, meet directly with school principals and their school leadership teams, review grade level meeting notes, and dialogue with one another at monthly DAIT cabinet meetings about how schools are interpreting and implementing district goals. Central office leaders are planning professional development for the 2007-2008 school year to “support some of the issues and ideas that we saw with the grade level meeting minutes … again trying to move closer to that coherent focused plan” (Central office leader (1) interview, winter 2007). As will be described in a later section, findings also indicate the professional development provided to school leadership teams through the
Effective Schools project (ES21) has allowed principals, school leadership team participants, and the assistant superintendent, who serves as the district liaison to the ES21, to have interactive communication and engagement regarding improving teaching and learning. Overall, central office leaders see a positive shift in the climate and culture of the district supporting change. As explained by a central office leader, “I think we’re beginning with the help we’ve received from DAIT and Effective Schools. I’ve heard a lot of good things about that. There has been more of a change, more that ever before and it’s focused. I’ve noticed as I’ve gone out at school visitations … teachers are changing” (Central office leader (8) interview, winter 2007).

Learning partnerships. Another resource linkage that is designed to support the district’s reform agenda is coaches. Providing coaches has the potential to develop learning partnerships that foster collaboration and build leadership capacity. The district has hired coaches for principals, one per region for the five regions in the district with each region consisting of a middle school and its elementary feeder schools. The superintendent explains that four of the five coaches used to be administrators in the district so they have a “cultural sensitivity and understanding” and the fifth coach has been with the district for five years so all are “grounded in the community” and “very committed.” According to the superintendent, coaches meet monthly with their region cohort where they can “talk together about common work, interests, frustrations, and whatever.” The coach also visits each of the school principals at their schools once a month to do classroom walk throughs. The superintendent sees the principal coach as a supportive resource to both the central office and to principals. It is through principal coaches that the superintendent and assistant superintendent can “illuminate our
priorities.” Coaches then can support the principals from a “very knowledgeable, but yet neutral perspective.” Referring to principal coaches, another central office leader explained,

[Principals] have somebody who can instruct them … [We realized a few years ago that] our principals didn’t know, and how would they know? And you can tell them, but that’s not the same as showing them. So having somebody that is non-evaluative … doing classroom walk throughs, pointing out things, showing, and having discussions are certainly one way. (Central office leader (7) interview, winter 2007)

Findings reveal that coaches and the regional cohorts are viewed by four of the five principals as a supportive resource linkage with the central office and with one another, suggesting that they are yet another way that the district is using resources to focus on working in collaborative teams and develop leadership capacity in order to move the district’s reform agenda forward. During interviews, principals frequently spoke of the benefits of collaborating with their regional cohort peers and being able to “bounce ideas off” not only their peers, but their coach as well. The School A principal meets with her coach and cohort monthly to “discuss what’s going on in our school, discuss data, and discuss how to move the kids forward.” The School E principal expressed that the coach is there “to help to support us with that instructional leadership piece.” The School B principal stated, “I would have to say that the coach has been the most helpful to me … and what is nice about those region meetings, is the coach runs them and we discuss things that have to do more with the issues that are confronting schools in this region, you know with this population.” In contrast, one principal expressed gaining valuable information from his peers, but does not see the benefits of the coach, a retired administrator in the district.
To support teachers, the district has also committed resources to providing literacy coaches and/or English-language learner (ELL) facilitators at each of the schools in the district. Some ELL facilitators view their role as doing things for teachers that they just don’t have time to do, for example, “…setting up ELD classes so they’re leveled based on benchmark levels and integrated across grade levels.” Another facilitator viewed his role as helping teachers with the changing demographics of their school explaining, “They need to be coached through … strategies and ideas … for working with their English-language learners.” In addition, Reading First schools have a Reading First coach and a central office liaison assigned to them to assist in carrying out the requirements of the Reading First grant. The Reading First coach views her role as providing staff development through demonstration lessons to show teachers “effective instruction.” She then observes teachers explaining, “I do observations of them [teachers] with feedback, getting them to kind of self evaluate -self reflect on their teaching practices.” Central office leaders view coaches and facilitators as beneficial to schools, but recognize that care needs to be taken that coaches are not perceived by teachers as playing an evaluative role. As explained by one central office leader,

The coaching aspect has some real plusses. It has some other issues because of trust factors, “Are they administrative? Are they telling the principal what I am doing in my class?” But to me, having people on site who are curriculum leaders, who are not in the classrooms but have been recently, to really being able to get in there and to work with that leadership team in addition to the principal, to me that would be another layer to add to that. Sites that have that ability because they are categorically funded make a big difference. We have our ELL facilitators; they can be a real asset to that site. (Central office leader (2) interview, winter 2007)

Other central office leaders concur, noting that providing coaches to teachers has “the most significant impact on teachers improving their ability to be good instructors.”
However, they are continuing to work with principals on how to “access and utilize coaches to improve teacher competency,” so that coaches don’t become “middle management over data and performance.”

Strategic Use of Funds.

There has been a concerted effort by the central office to help schools design their site plans to link with the district plan (LEAP). Goals for site plans are to be written based on the school’s data and the principal is given latitude as to how they spend their funds as long as it ties in with their site plan. In referring to the single site plans, one central office leader commented,

So I think that the fact that the site plans have focused on district goals and have translated them into site goals and then making those site plans user-friendly and not just to put on the shelf and the silver fish farm kind of a thing…. This is what we are using to make decisions. So when we want buy things, let’s look at our plan and see what we are going to do. I think sites are really utilizing those more and more in a regular basis so I think that brings that connection together.

(Central office leader (1) interview, winter 2007)

One School E leadership team member explained, “Our district in terms of budget has moved to a lot of site decisions … they have given the principals the latitude to make decisions … that’s probably indirectly a great support for what we want to do.” The School A principal commented that as long as she can support that her requests are to improve achievement, “when I call them up and cry that I don’t have enough money, they seem to find money.” School leadership team members at School D, the Reading First school, express how much they appreciate the funding support they have received, which has allowed them to be paid to attend AB 466 training and has paid for not only the English-language facilitator but the Reading First coach as well.
Comments from central office leaders would support that the central office assists schools with funding whenever possible as evidenced by comments such as, “We are constantly going for any kind of funding resources that are out there.” They recognize, however, that they need to exercise caution so as not to overwhelm people. For example, one school in the district has funding from three different programs and they are considering applying for Quality Education Investment Act (QEIA) funds. Central office leaders see their role as aiding the school to put all the various pieces together, and one explained, “You have all these pieces to support you and how are they cohesive, can we help you with that?” These findings would suggest that the central office is working with principals and schools to carefully allocate funds based on the unique needs of their school, making sure that there is a cohesive plan in place. Overall, the linkage between the central office and the schools is viewed by all key stakeholders as supportive.

Technological Resources

Interestingly, although the district has worked diligently to put a data management system in place and has some online professional development offerings, the School A and B principals and their leadership team members express frustration at the lack of funding at their schools to upgrade technology or to fund personnel to manage the computer labs that they do have in place. As expressed by one School B leadership team member, “It just seems to me that it’s pushing in the opposite direction from where you should be pushing if you really want to become data driven and reach as many different students.

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5 The Quality Education Investment Act (QEIA) provides funding to assist schools with a valid 2005 Academic Performance Index (API) that are ranked in deciles 1 to 2 to increase student achievement (California Department of Education, 2006).
groups as you can. You should be able to walk into the computer lab, sit down with a cluster of EL students and there is software out there that can really help them” (School B teacher interview, fall 2006).

In response to a question asking in what ways the district is supporting teams and schools in using data and technology, one principal commented,

They’re making us do more of it in the requirements to do it. In regards to staff development and providing us some technology to go along with it, they are doing that. But other than that, I think they’re relying more on administration at the site level, to support those things and make sure that the site administrator asks for the things that they need. And that’s kind of hard. I think that’s kind of hard for some of our new principals because they don’t know what their school site needs yet. (School C principal interview, fall 2006)

There is evidence that there may be changes in the coming year. In the spring of 2007, when asked about the level of technological support from the district, the School B principal elaborated,

I think they’re trying. I see beginning levels of support. They’ve surveyed schools to find out what our needs are in that department. But frankly if this DAIT process...had not come down the pike we would not be seeing the level of support, I believe, that we are seeing now. It’s sort of like, ahh! You know, we’ve got to do something! Because we’re asking schools and teachers to input data more frequently, and in doing that there’s got to be a higher level of technical support there. So I see the beginnings of that happening. (School B principal interview, spring 2007)

School Leadership Teams as a Resource Linkage

One of the research questions posed in this study addresses in what ways school leadership teams are serving as a resource linkage between the central office and schools in the reform process. This section presents data suggesting that, with professional development, school leadership teams are emerging as an important bridge between the
central office and its schools and serve as an important linkage needed to build a collaborative culture and develop leadership capacity across the district.

The superintendent believes that “empowering school leadership teams … to strategize in a joint, collaborative way to meet the needs of students” is a way of “moving from the awareness level to actually changing a teacher’s practice” (Superintendent interview, spring 2007). She sees school leadership teams as integral to moving district reforms forward, explaining, “It’s the only way we’re going to get it done.” According to central office leaders, prior to the district’s participation ES21, the district has not had any kind of a formal structure for training or working with school leadership teams. The superintendent noted that a school leadership team’s effectiveness has really been dependent on “great principals who knew how to foster school leadership teams and grade level leaders.” Given her belief in the power of school leadership teams to move the reform agenda forward, the superintendent explains that her decision to participate in ES21 school leadership team training was very strategic: “I can’t assume that just because someone is in a leadership position that they have the capacity or knowledge base to lead in a new arena.”

As described in chapter 3, the five school leadership teams participating in this study have completed the first year of a three-year professional development opportunity based on Effective School’s correlates. The focus of the training is on team development processes and is informed by strengths-based inquiry (Daly & Chrispeels, 2005), high-reliability organizations (Stringfield, 1995), and high–quality, learning-focused grade-level work (Chrispeels, Andrews, & Gonzalez, 2007). The training was designed to help each school leadership team become a guiding force in developing what Marzano et al.
(2005) call a purposeful community able to use assets to accomplish goals. Findings indicate that three critical ways in which school leadership teams participating in the training appear to be emerging as a supportive resource linkage between the central office and schools are in the areas of communication, building a collaborative culture/developing leadership capacity, and providing professional development to colleagues.

Communication

As discussed in the communication linkages section of this chapter, communication between the central office and the schools is viewed as a critical linkage by all key stakeholders. Findings suggest that school leadership teams are emerging as a viable means for building a stronger two-way communication linkage between the central office and schools.

Leithwood et al. (2004) posit that one of the primary tasks of leadership is setting direction. As the words imply, this task involves generating a sense of shared purpose and goals through “creating high performance expectations, monitoring organizational performance, and promoting effective communication throughout the organization” (Leithwood et al., p.9). Across all teams, members unanimously agreed that communication was their primary task. Typical of comments across the five schools regarding the communication role of the team is the following: “It’s … to disseminate information … leadership takes it out to their grade levels and shares the information.” As a second-grade teacher at School D described it: “I see us as the kind of go-between.”

More importantly, some team members recognized and stated that communication needed to be two-way and expressed the connection between communication and setting direction. One School B team member described the team’s role as maintaining open
lines of communication and breaking the isolation of teachers who work alone all day with their students. A fourth-grade teacher from School B phrased it this way: “We’ll communicate what’s going on and get input, so the idea being that it’s less directional and more facilitated.” A third-grade teacher from School E agreed: “The leadership [is] the group that spreads the word and it doesn’t always have to come from our principal. It’s the leadership’s job to get the rest of the staff to buy into…the goal and not saying that we’re forcing it on them.”

Focus group interviews with school leadership teams in the spring of 2007 revealed that they felt ES21 training was also allowing teams to engage in more direct two-way communication with central office leaders. Referring to ES21 training, a School A team member explained, “I think it’s given us some access to the district…. [Referring to superintendent and assistant superintendent] I feel comfortable saying if I had concerns. I don’t feel constrained by them at all.” Another team member from the same school commented,

I think it’s changed a little bit of our perspective. Before we were just a leadership team and we disseminated nuts and bolts information…. Now, we’ve changed our focus and the district is supporting us in changing the focus…. They see that this is valuable … so I think it is going to start turning the corner…. They’re going to be focusing on actual instruction. (School A SLT focus group, spring 2007)

In the spring of 2007, School E focus group members agreed and noted feeling that they had taken on a more “joint role with the administration.” They viewed their role as not only disseminating information, but also getting their grade level teams “on the same page and looking at what our goal is and where we think we need improvement…and [trying] to get buy-in from everyone.” Another team member explained, “It’s formed these channels that we didn’t have before.”
Principals and central office leaders agreed with team members’ perceptions that an important role of the team was as communicators with the rest of the staff. As the principal from School A shared, “The role of the site leadership team … is to get the information out there. Each leader represents their grade level, and they will come back and share information with the other members of the leadership team.” She acknowledged that they were her key people whom she consulted on problems and to check if the school was going in the right direction. Principals at schools D and E also described the critical role the team played in communication with their grade level colleagues. The School B principal highlighted the importance of keeping information flowing and stated that team members felt free to express their concerns.

Interviews with central office leaders indicate that, overall, they view school leadership teams as key communicators at the school level and an important resource to move the district’s reform agenda forward. Central office leaders agree that, as communicators, school leadership teams are instrumental in obtaining buy-in for district goals. They express a belief that school leadership teams serve as a “sounding board for principals to determine how much and what specific information to give to teachers.” One central office leader described how leadership teams “support what we’re trying to do as a district.” She views them as a “communication liaison to teachers in the field” noting, “When it’s voiced by a teacher or a peer it’s more powerful … a top-down effort is not going to have the same impact … a leadership team is building capacity for … not only improving instruction, but also improving leadership skills” (Central office leader (6) interview, winter 2007). Referring to school leadership teams, another central office leader explained, “The leadership have to be the cheerleaders for it … they have to say,
‘Yep, this is what we have to do, our data says that this is going to make a difference if we do it this way.’ And they have to take that out to their grade levels’ (Central office leader (4) interview, winter 2007).

Building a Collaborative Culture and Developing Leadership Capacity

Findings suggest that providing professional development to school leadership teams also appears to be cultivating an important resource linkage between the central office and its schools to meet the district goal of building a collaborative culture and developing leadership capacity. Central office leaders expressed the view that leadership teams are a “natural way of doing that.” An important aspect that created a linkage between the central office and the teams participating in ES21 was the assignment of the assistant superintendent of educational services as the district liaison to the project. As the district liaison, she met with principals and ES21 professional developers prior to each of the six SLT trainings, as well as actively participating in several of the trainings. She acknowledged a shift in her thinking about leadership teams when she stated, “The influence for me has been seeing a greater importance of what school leadership teams can be … having a more rapid impact on change, if you understand how to really facilitate and work with the SLT.” As noted in earlier sections, her participation allowed her to have face-to-face interactions with school leadership teams learning firsthand how teams viewed the district as “top-down” and “directive.” It also gave her an opportunity to communicate directly with teams in a two-way dialogue regarding district issues.

School leadership teams expressed appreciation that she “listened” and, as noted in earlier sections, initiated changes based on concerns she heard. In addition, teams were able to engage in dialogues across schools sharing successes and frustrations. As
described by the School E principal, her team members are beginning to view the bigger picture, as evidenced by her comment,

Hmmm…. I think there are more people that you know walk the halls on a just regular basis that have a better understanding of the big picture. When people understand the big picture better certain things are less frustrating or not worth complaining about or you know that kind of thing. I think it just has helped for a more positive climate because they understand the bigger picture a little bit better. (School E Principal interview, spring 2007)

In addition, this same principal expressed that due to a significant loss of teacher leaders at her school who chose to move to a new school, she established a goal to develop the leadership capacity in her existing staff. She perceives that ES21 is helping her to achieve that goal, explaining,

[I saw] my role as helping people understand their potential for leadership and then developing that potential and ES21 has fit that puzzle piece better than I ever could have imagined…and better than I could have done on my own. They definitely, early on, saw themselves as leaders and … and started taking on responsibilities and communicating with grade level teams in ways they hadn’t before and I’m not sure that … that it wouldn’t have happened as quickly. (School E Principal interview, spring 2007)

Principals and leadership team members at four of the five schools agree and have seen the power of the team in developing a collaborative culture where teachers serve as a resource to one another rather than retreating behind their classroom doors. A School E member elaborated,

One of the problems that teachers really struggle with is we are in a classroom by ourselves all day. And so we get very used to doing things in our own pace, in our own way of doing things … what these Leadership Teams have been able to do is help break through working in the vacuum. One of the biggest problems with working in the vacuum is that when you’re looking at the amount of work that we have to do now, that concept only adds to the stress and the anxiety level. It does not take it away. So even if people are thinking I’m protecting myself by working in a vacuum actually they’re making themselves work about twice as hard, maybe three times as hard. And what these Leadership Teams have been able to do is reach out. What do you need? Who do you need to talk to? How can we help you?
What support can we give you? And it’s also really helped in terms of just keeping the lines of communication open….But when you have a chance to step out of the vacuum and see that there’s really quite a bit of support, you just need to delegate. You need to look around for that support. Then you’ll find actually it keeps the stress level down and it makes things go faster. (School E 5th grade teacher interview, fall 2007)

Professional Development of Colleagues

Although a survey conducted in March 2007 revealed that school leadership team members did not view themselves as coordinators of the professional development provided by the district, findings suggest that as they developed their leadership skills, they began to serve as a resource to their grade levels and one another in moving their school forward in accomplishing the district’s goal to improve teaching and learning. Central office leaders, principals, and school leadership team members agreed that working as a grade-level team was a major leadership task. One central office leader stated: “Their role would be to take information that is coming to them … and work in grade levels.” As the team members across all schools developed their leadership skills, they in turn used these to facilitate grade-level meetings. As one team member from School C stated: “We are facilitators at our grade level.” Another team member from School A said, “The [SLT] team acts as a guide to keep the grade level on target.”

In addition, school leadership teams indicated they led their grade levels to “score writing together,” discuss the “90/90/90 study” (Reeves, 2004) and examine student work to prepare for a lesson study. As summed up by the School A principal: “So they’re working with their colleagues each and every day … sharing ideas and thoughts.” The School B principal added, “Everybody is building capacity in each other and in themselves as a grade level.”
During the spring of 2007, the superintendent, assistant superintendent, ES21 principal investigator, and the county office DAIT team met to discuss the possibility of organizing a leadership team development program for all schools in addition to selecting a district wide instructional focus for professional development for the 2007-2008 school year. In June 2007, central office leaders, principal leaders, school leadership team representatives, ES21 staff, and representatives from the county office DAIT team met to determine an instructional focus for the 2007-2008 school year and to plan how to introduce it to principals and teachers. Building on the goal of working collaboratively and building leadership capacity across the system, principals and school leadership team members will be instrumental in planning and providing training. The creation of a more formal resource linkage between the central office and school leadership teams as well as maintaining a strong communication with principals allows for an increasing opportunity for collective dialogue and greater co-construction of reforms (Datnow et al., 2006; Hubbard et al., 2006).

Summary

Findings indicate Evergreen School District has resource linkages encompassing material, technological, and human capital in the district to move the reform agenda forward. In terms of material resources, key stakeholders agreed that strategic use of funds provides a supportive linkage between the central office and schools, allowing schools to use monies based on school needs. At this time, principals and school leadership team members at three of the schools view technological resource linkages between the central office and schools as a constraint, expressing a frustration at the lack of funding to upgrade technology to meet teacher and student needs.
The development of human capital is a primary resource linkage between the central office and the schools. Overall, data suggest agreement between central office leaders and principals that professional development provided by the central office to principals as well as the provision of coaches for regional cohorts serve as supportive resource linkages. Principals express appreciation for the opportunity to collaborate with their peers, and the central office is working to provide principals with skills and strategies to better lead their schools.

There is more divergence in the perceptions of key stakeholders regarding whether professional development for teachers supports or constrains the linkage between the central office and its schools. Some teachers and principals expressed that there was too much time out of the classroom. The district began a trainer-of-trainer’s model of professional development in the 2005-2006 school year, in which principals selected staff who received training and then returned to train the staff. Although some central office leaders, principals, and school leadership team members expressed that this type of training served as a supportive linkage, other principals and school leadership team members were more ambivalent regarding how supportive the linkage was.

The trainer-of-trainer staff development model was put aside in 2006-2007 due to the demands of DAIT. Interestingly, DAIT required central office leaders to spend more time in schools interacting directly with principals and school leadership teams. This interaction, along with the participation of the district in ES21 schools leadership team training surfaced that school leadership teams, with professional development, could serve as a supportive resource linkage between the central office and schools in facilitating communication, building a collaborative culture, developing leadership
capacity and providing professional development to colleagues. Beginning in the 2007 school year, Evergreen School District began district-wide leadership development training across the district, suggesting that the district is creating a more formal resource linkage (based on benefits observed in the ES21 professional development) between the central office and the school leadership teams. In addition, the district is maintaining a strong communication with principals, and working to enhance their professional development. This has the potential to allow for an increasing opportunity for collective dialogue and greater co-construction of reforms (Datnow et al., 2006; Hubbard et al., 2006).
CHAPTER 5
Discussion

*Introduction*

This chapter presents an overview of the study that includes a statement of the problem, a review of the methodology, and a summary and discussion of the results. Subsequent sections discuss conclusions, implications for practice, and future research.

*Statement of the Problem*

As stated in chapter 1, NCLB has created a more tightly coupled educational policy system with an emphasis on aligned accountability systems and curriculum frameworks as a means of improving student achievement (Clune, 1998). The result has been an increased demand for coordinated communication and distribution of resources across the system. Effective schools and district effectiveness studies have shown that high levels of student achievement are possible and more likely to sustain when a district and its schools coordinate and collaborate in the reform process. The studies, however, tend to document what schools are doing or what the district office does. Much less research has been conducted to understand the linkages between districts and schools that support or constrain principals and school leadership teams as they work to scale up improvements.

Thirty years of research clearly documents effective schools processes that correlate with improved achievement for at-risk students (Brookover et al., 1979; Edmonds, 1979; Levine & Lezotte, 1995; Mortimore et al., 1988; Rutter et al., 1979; Teddlie & Stringfield, 1993; Weber, 1971). However, Chrispeels and Gonzalez (2006) argue that focusing improvement efforts on the individual school often leaves the district
out, ultimately affecting the depth and sustainability of the change efforts. As a result, reform efforts at the school level may be undermined by lack of funds and district practices and policies that may be counter to the school’s improvement goals.

Studies conducted in the last 10 to 15 years document the key role that districts play in mediating state standards for instruction and their potential to lead district-wide school improvement, suggesting that districts matter in scaling up improvements in teaching and learning (Elmore & Burney, 1997; Hightower, 2002; Massell & Goertz, 2002; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003; Murphy & Hallinger, 1988; Skrla et al., 2000; Snipes et al., 2002; Spillane, 1996; Spillane & Thompson, 1997; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Strong leadership distributed across the organization, system-wide implementations of research-based instructional practices, system-wide and school-embedded professional development, and collaborative relationships between a district and its schools can be viewed as vehicles for greater coherence and alignment (Camburn et al., 2003; Copeland, 2003; Elmore, 1999; Elmore & Burney, 1997; Gronn, 2000; Hightower et al., 2002; Snipes et al., 2002; Spillane et al., 2001; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Researchers also suggest that involving teachers in the school improvement process and establishing teams or councils is critical to the development of effective schools and systems that are high performing (Chrispeels, Brown, et al., 2000).

Increasing attention is being given to how parts of the system are connected or linked (Datnow et al., 2006; Lasky, 2004). Taking the lead from the work of Senge (1990) and Spillane and Thompson (1997), Lasky suggests that research examining linkages that connect people, resources, and organizations is needed in order to better understand the interdependence between organizations and individuals involved in
reform efforts. Lasky submits that ideological, structural, communication, relational, and resource linkages exist across systems and provide a bridge that either supports or constrains improvement efforts. In addition, research suggests that the rich levels of human capital, defined by Coleman (1988) as knowledge and skills of individuals in the system, and social capital (social links within and outside the system) interact to produce the high level of human capital that is needed for successful school reform (Spillane & Thompson). Less well-explored in studies of school and district reform is the role of intellectual capital. Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) argue that rich social capital in an organization can be used not only to develop individual knowledge (human capital), but also to build intellectual capital, the collective knowledge of individuals, thus increasing an organization’s productive advantage. In their studies of businesses, they found that when opportunities were created for purposeful, collective interaction that facilitated exchange of knowledge in systems with high social capital, individual human capital was combined to generate new knowledge that led to productive actions and activity that benefited the organization. What is less understood is how linkages may interact and how they can be leveraged across the educational system to support the development of human, social, and intellectual capital to achieve school reform, which was the focus of this study.

The purpose of this study was to explore the linkages among central office leadership, principals, and school leadership teams in a program improvement district. Specifically this study investigated the ways in which these three key stakeholder groups perceived ideological, structural (policies and practices), communication, resource, and relational linkages. In addition, this study explored how these linkages may be supporting
or constraining the district’s efforts to build system capacity and capital in support of reforms focused on improving teaching and learning. The study also provided an opportunity to examine in what ways school leadership teams participating in an effective schools professional development intervention may facilitate district/school efforts to move the district’s reform agenda forward by serving as a linkage between schools and the district.

This study both confirmed and extended the original conceptual framework as illustrated in Figure 4.1. This original framework presented ideological linkages as forming the center of the system with relational, structural, communication, and resource linkages interconnected with one another. The emergence and merging of these linkages suggest a need to reconceptualize the relationship among them and how they may interact to support or constrain district reform and school improvement (see Figure 5.1). As described in Figure 5.1, the ideological linkage of a shared understanding about what constitutes good instruction is at the center of the conceptual framework and is essential to successful reform implementation. A trusting relationship (social capital) between the central office and its schools appears to be a key linkage to supporting structural, communication, and resource linkages between the case district and the schools. By using these linkages as a framework to explore the relationships and interactions in the case district, they serve to illustrate the crucial role that social capital plays in the creation of knowledge (human capital) and ultimately in creating collective knowledge and capabilities (intellectual capital). By creating new networks (DAIT, school leadership teams) that allow schools and central office leaders to engage in purposeful collective interactions around instructional practices, the ideological chasm between the central
office and teachers regarding good teaching, a point of tension between the district and teachers, may be bridged.
Figure 5.1: Reconceptualized Linkages Model
Review of Methodology

The study district is a K-8 district in Southern California characterized as midsized, urban fringe. The district has been designated as year-two program improvement for failing to meet AYP targets for its English-language learners and students with disabilities (California Department of Education, 2006). In this case district, five elementary school leadership teams and their principals are participating in the first year of a three-year national study of an effective schools intervention (ES21) that provides support and training to school leadership teams and their principals. Part of the design of the larger study is to have a district liaison attend the leadership team professional development sessions. This context provided a purposeful site in which to pursue my study.

As an embedded case study, this research incorporated qualitative data sources (interviews, focus groups, observations, field notes, and document reviews), as well as a quantitative source consisting of survey data from the School Leadership Team Implementation Continuum (UCSB Center for Effective Schools, 2004). Together the data offered a robust description of ways in which linkages between a district and its schools interrelate to both support and constrain the district’s efforts to build system capacity and capital to move district reforms forward.

Summary and Discussion of Results

The results of this study answered the following research questions:

1. What are the linkages between the central office and its schools that support and constrain school reform?
a. What are the similarities and differences in perceptions of the linkages among three key stakeholders: central office leaders, principals, and school leadership teams?
b. In what ways is the system using linkages to support school reform?
c. In what ways is the system’s use of linkages constraining school reform?
d. In what ways are school leadership teams serving as a resource linkage between the central office and schools in the reform process?

2. In what ways do the linkages enhance the human, social, and intellectual capacities needed for school reform?

Using the linkages identified by Lasky (2004) as a framework, this section provides a summary and discussion of the results.

*Ideological Linkages*

As shown in Figure 5.1, ideological linkages form the center of the district system, encircled by relational linkages. Ideological linkages represent the degree to which key stakeholders share a common vision and a sense of purpose regarding academic expectations for students, good instructional practices, and beliefs about accountability for student learning (Datnow et al., 2006). They represent the belief systems and mental models (Argyris, 1993) that shape district and teacher willingness and actions to work collaboratively to implement the district’s reform agenda. As shown in Table 2.3, a commonality in the literature regarding effective schools and districts is that they have a clear mission, shared values, shared vision, responsibility and expertise, and stakeholder agreement on reform plans. Datnow et al. also report that creating a shared vision or a common purpose is one of the most commonly cited linkages across
reform stakeholders. This study confirms the importance and centrality of the ideological linkage to district/school reform and that not attending to this linkage may undermine a reform’s successful implementation.

With a shared vision it is less likely there will be undisclosed assumptions and misunderstandings of the same evidence (e.g., needs of English learners) and adopted solutions (Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton, & Kleiner, 2000). Results of this study suggest that the three stakeholder groups agree that Evergreen has clearly articulated a reform agenda focused on improving achievement for English learners and establishing an equitable and coherent educational program. The intention is that this agenda will move the district out of program improvement. The growing recognition in Evergreen of the need to increase the achievement of English learners suggests the emergence of a shared vision and the potential of an ideological linkage with schools that could support the district’s reform agenda.

Although stakeholders agree on the end goal, results indicate that there is a lack of congruence across the groups regarding what constitutes good instruction (or the means). Thus, the data show an undercurrent of tension between the central office and the schools. This lack of congruence creates an ideological chasm between the central office and the schools as to the means for achieving the goals. Central office leaders and principals describe good teaching as providing instruction that is equitable, differentiated, standards-based, and promotes high student engagement. Limited evidence, however, was found that what constitutes good teaching has been discussed and communicated. Although the superintendent expressed that the core curriculum adopted by the district still offers teachers the ability to “do their magic,” teachers at four of the five schools
express that they are merely test proctors and that the adopted curriculum removed their creativity. They express concerns that the district does not value their professional expertise as to how to meet the needs of students, particularly English learners. Even the principal and teachers at School D, a Reading First school that is more comfortable and accepting of the adopted curriculum, recognizes that it excludes some of the things they believe encompass good teaching.

These findings suggest the ideological linkages between the central office and its schools may be constraining the district’s efforts to improve student achievement and exit program improvement. As Leithwood et al. (2004) point out, “Mental models serve as guides to making both big and little decisions, but they also present constraints because they are the first screen through which new information must pass” (p. 76). Differing mental models about what constitutes good teaching are filters through which the central office and teachers are screening and interpreting district reform initiatives. These interpretations are guiding their actions. Without dialogue and discussion, these tensions cannot be easily resolved and the power of the ideological linkage weakens. As Leithwood et al. argue, “The chance of any reform improving student learning is remote unless district and school leaders agree with its purposes and appreciate what is required to make it work” (p. 7).

*Structural Linkages*

Structural linkages in Evergreen School District represent the framework established in the district for advancing the reform agenda. As can be seen in Figure 5.1, they encompass policies and practices from both within and outside the district system. Similar to Datnow et al. (2006), this study illustrates that NCLB and statewide
accountability system mandates form structural linkages with the district. The district has responded to these mandates by initiating a linkage with the state and local county office of education through the district’s participation in the District Assistance and Intervention Team (DAIT) pilot project. Other structures put in place by the district to link with its schools include the adoption of district-wide curriculum and pacing calendars, the district’s development of benchmark assessments and their adoption of a comprehensive data management system. As illustrated in Table 2.2, these structures are commonly found in studies of effective districts.

Findings suggest that all stakeholder groups agree that NCLB and state accountability measures are driving the system toward reform. However, there is disagreement on effectiveness of specific structures (curriculum, pacing calendars, six-week assessments and the data management system) adopted by the district to achieve reform. More than half of the school leadership team members viewed these structures as constraining their ability to implement strategies to improve student achievement. Particularly confusing was the district’s directive to use data to drive instruction, and at the same time, giving the message to adhere to the pacing calendar. In addition, there was considerable concern about the time needed for assessments taking away from time needed for instruction.

However, results indicate that the district’s decision to participate in the DAIT pilot project may represent a significant supportive structural linkage between the central office and its schools. DAIT seemed to be supporting reform in two ways. First, it is requiring central office leaders to collectively and purposefully interact consistently with one another while fully focused on teaching and learning, one of the five action areas
identified by Knapp, Copeland, Ford, et al. (2003) as characteristic of effective districts. Furthermore, this collectivity offers the potential to build intellectual capital. Interviews with central office leaders revealed that DAIT served as a catalyst for changing the culture of the central office from a group of leaders acting as independent contractors of their own programs and departments to a culture of leaders sharing ideas about instruction. As illustrated in Table 2.2, a commitment by central office leaders to a system-wide approach to improvement was a common strategy found in studies of effective districts. One study of reforming districts specifically identified a learning community at the central office as one of the ways these successful districts promoted and invested in learning throughout the district (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003).

Second, the DAIT-required visits to schools are for the first time systematically linking schools with all central office leaders. According to these leaders and school leadership team members from the two schools that participated in the DAIT pilot, the visits provided an opportunity to engage in interactions specifically around district expectations, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and data analysis. The visits promoted a two-way dialogue about good teaching, offering an opportunity to bridge the ideological chasm. Further study will be needed to understand how these visits, which were expanded to all schools in 2007-2008, may be altering teacher perceptions of central office ideas and supports for school improvement.

Clearly, the district is activating structures that, according to research on effective schools and districts, are correlated with improved student achievement. For example, Marzano (2003) in his meta-analysis of what works in schools lists a “guaranteed and viable curriculum” as the school level factor that has the greatest impact on student
achievement (p. 22). Marzano’s meta-analysis suggests the second school level factor correlated with high student achievement is challenging goals and effective feedback. As shown in Table 2.3, along with a consistent aligned curriculum, frequent monitoring of student progress and feedback and use of data for decision making are characteristics of effective schools and districts. The DAIT visits are providing a means for the central office to provide feedback to principals and teachers regarding the instructional program at each school.

Although there is convergence among the three stakeholders regarding the need to improve student achievement, results suggest that the tension among key stakeholders that surrounds these structures may constrain rather than support a linkage between the central office and the schools in moving the district’s reform agenda forward. Since DAIT has brought changes to how central office leaders conduct business with schools, over time there may be increased school understanding of the structures. In addition, central office/school dialogue may bring about changes in the structures to better address the needs of students based on feedback from teachers.

**Communication Linkages**

Districts are responsible for directing and coordinating communication in multiple directions (Datnow et al., 2006). Studies of effective districts document the interdependent relationship between districts and schools and the importance of clear communication regarding the reform process between all individuals and groups involved (Hubbard et al., 2006; Snipes et al., 2002; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Central office leaders in Evergreen view informal and formal communication across the district as a critical linkage to move the district’s reform agenda forward.
Findings suggest central office leaders perceive that communication is open and view themselves as listening, soliciting teacher input, and acting on concerns. Principals, although expressing some reservations about the central office’s depth of understanding about conditions at the school, view central office leaders as highly accessible, listening, and responding to concerns. In contrast, findings suggest that school leadership team members view communication between the central office and schools as primarily one-way communication consisting of directives and mandates.

DAIT initially caused increased stress among principals, teachers, and central office leaders and required a reorganization of school and district priorities. Nevertheless, the process created a new mechanism for communication and, more importantly, led to more face-to-face communication between central office leaders and teachers. Of critical importance to this communication link was that the interactions were around instruction. The DAIT visits seemed to expand the knowledge sharing and exchange between the district and its schools. In addition, the ES21 intervention provided a mechanism for the teams and the district liaison to gain insights into each other’s perceptions of how to improve schools. These findings suggest that continued DAIT visits and school leadership team training over time could increase collective understanding of what constitutes good teaching in this district and create new knowledge about how to improve instruction for students. This focus on specific communication regarding teaching and learning is supported by the research on effective districts. Knapp, Copeland, Ford, et al. (2003) and Knapp, Copeland, and Talbert (2003) suggest that leaders in successful schools and districts create coherence by using inquiry into teaching and learning to plan
for improvement and engaging in persistent communication between schools and the central office about teaching and learning.

Relational Linkages

As illustrated in Figure 5.1, results from this study present the view that relational linkages serve as an important filter for ideological, structural, communication, and resource linkages between the district and its schools. Research indicates that trusting relationships appear to be an essential element to successful reform efforts (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Datnow et al., 2006; Hubbard et al., 2006). In their study of the reforms instituted in San Diego City Schools, Hubbard et al. suggest that the absence of trust can “doom even the most thoughtful and carefully planned curricular reform” (p. 254). They suggest that because school reform is a “messy” process, goodwill, cooperation, and willingness to participate by all individuals involved in the reform are essential to successfully moving reform efforts forward.

This study once again confirms the importance of relationships (social capital) as a key to robust school reform. Evergreen School District has worked tirelessly for the past seven years to repair severely damaged relations between the central office and schools. As shown in chapter 4, four of the five principals expressed a feeling of support from the central office and empowerment in adjusting district mandates to meet the needs of their students. Although expressing frustration with what they perceived to be one-way communication, teachers also expressed high regard for leaders in the central office. The assignment of a district liaison to the ES21 project appears to have been a significant move in establishing a more reciprocal relationship between the central office and schools. School Leadership team members were impressed with her responsiveness to
their concerns. As previously discussed, the DAIT process also seemed to be building more positive relations as central office leaders sat with teachers and discussed curriculum and instruction. These findings indicate that changes in district structures, new patterns of face-to-face communication, and resources are working to build trusting and supportive relational linkages and thus developing the social capital needed to move reform efforts forward.

*Resource Linkages*

As noted in chapter 2, researchers have concluded that the changing needs of educational systems can be met by improvements in leadership-capacity building (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Marzano et al. (2005) argue that the complexity of tasks and the array of leadership skills required to successfully lead a school are beyond the scope of one individual to master. Marzano et al. urge that a first priority for principals is to establish a leadership team that works collaboratively in carrying out the multifaceted roles that their research identified. Research supports their stance, by suggesting that the involvement of teachers in the school improvement process and the establishment of teams are essential to developing effective schools and high performing systems (Larson & LaFasto, 1989, Senge, 1990; Wohlstetter & Smyer; as cited in Chrispeels, Brown, et al. 2000).

Findings indicate that Evergreen has allocated a number of material, technological, and human resources designed to build collaborative teams, develop leadership capacity, and move the district’s reform agenda forward. As with the building of relational linkages (social capital), findings suggest that knowledge creation (human capital) has been a major effort. In Evergreen School District, principals are the primary
conduits of information to schools. Central office leaders recognize that developing their knowledge and skills is critical to moving reform efforts forward. Through principal meetings, coaching, and regional cohort meetings, central office leaders are providing opportunities for principals to work collaboratively to develop skills and strategies to better lead their schools. These activities have not only served to build human capital, but also social capital and intellectual capital in that findings reveal that relationships among principals and central office leaders are perceived as extremely supportive and principals are collectively generating new knowledge.

A significant finding in this study is that with the provision of professional development for the five school leadership teams, they are emerging as a strong resource linkage between the district and schools. The involvement of the district liaison during the leadership team professional development and the implementation of the DAIT visits both added new information channels. Team members became more active with colleagues at grade levels to share not only ideas from the professional development but also information from the district, especially in regard to DAIT and district assessments. In addition, they are actively seeking input from colleagues that is shared at team meetings and with the district liaison and superintendent during team trainings and DAIT visits.

Through observing and participating in the professional development, the central office began to realize that developing leadership teams was a way to foster a collaborative culture and leadership capacity. This led to several changes in the DAIT process. First, the DAIT visit team began meeting with the leadership team to debrief the visit rather than just filing a report with the principal. Second, teachers were added to the
DAIT visit teams. Finally, leadership team professional development for a small core of each school’s leadership team was incorporated into the DAIT process, and beginning in the 2007-2008 school year, offered to all schools in the district. These changes reflect the emergence of new norms for central office and teacher communication and collaboration.

Both DAIT and the leadership team professional development provided many more opportunities for face-to-face contact and discussion about curriculum, instruction, and assessment. These new structures are creating the professional networks that Spillane and Thompson (1997) argue allow individuals in a reform to access and create new knowledge and thus further develop human capital and intellectual capital (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). In addition, these increased interactions seemed to foster stronger trusting relations among team members, across teams, and teams with the district, an essential component of social capital (Coleman, 1988; Spillane & Thompson).

How Do Linkages Enhance Human, Social, and Intellectual Capital?

The second major research question in this study is: In what ways do the linkages enhance the human, social, and intellectual capacities needed for school reform? One of the contributing factors for failing to make adequate progress may be the lack of attention given to developing a system’s social, human, and intellectual capital. As stated in chapter 2, Spillane and Thompson (1997) argue that a district’s capacity to support reform is defined as the capacity to learn the most important ideas of the reform and to then help others in the system to learn these ideas. Most pertinent to this study are their conclusions as to the importance of social and human capital in developing district capacity. Spillane and Thompson refer to work by Coleman (1988) who views social capital as consisting of trust, access to information channels that provide a basis for
action, and norms, and sanctions within a community that promote common good over self-interest. Coleman, in his study of the education of youth, illustrated the crucial role of social capital in the creation of knowledge (human capital) that enables action on an individual level. As applied to districts undergoing reforms, Spillane and Thompson argue that social capital consists of “social links within and outside the district, together with the norms and trust to support open communication” (p. 199). Spillane and Thompson expand on Coleman’s definition of human capital (skills and knowledge acquired by individuals) to include the commitment to reform and the disposition to learn as characterized by individuals in high-capacity districts. They maintain that social capital plays a crucial role in the creation of knowledge (human capital) across a district and that districts rich in social and human capital will in turn develop richer capacity. An important capacity not addressed by Spillane and Thompson is intellectual capital, which Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) define as the “knowledge and knowing capability of a social collectivity, such as an organization, intellectual community or professional practice” (p. 245). From a business management perspective, Nahapiet and Ghoshal have investigated how social capital influences the creation and development of intellectual capital in organizations. Unlike the individual nature of human capital, Nahapiet and Ghoshal define intellectual capital as the knowledge and capabilities of a collective, with potential for collaborative, joint action.

By unpacking and exploring these linkages, it is possible to see how they contribute to building the needed human, social, and intellectual capacities required for effective school reform. Each participant in the system brings important human capital to the table with their own expertise and knowledge. School systems over the years have
focused on continuing to expand that individual capacity through workshops and professional development offerings for teachers. Even with high quality professional (human capital) development, districts and their schools often fail to make required progress in student achievement (Hubbard et al., 2006). Spillane and Thompson (1997), in their study of ambitious math and science reforms, found that successful districts first mobilized individuals who were committed to learning and became knowledgeable about the new math and science reforms thus developing human capital. Districts with high capacity not only developed human capital (knowledge and skills of individuals), they mobilized individual experts into a cadre of individuals working in formal and informal professional networks to achieve the desired reforms. However, they found that having a group of committed, knowledgeable educators was not enough to move the reforms forward. It was necessary to develop the social capital involving norms of trust, collaboration, and a sense of obligation among the individuals to further develop human capital. Findings in this study, however, suggest that while social capital is critical, it may not be sufficient unless there are also increased opportunities for purposeful collective exchange of knowledge and the generation of new knowledge at all levels of the system (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Even with the infusion of literacy and math coaches/experts within schools, teachers still often operate in isolation with few opportunities to exchange and build collective knowledge. In addition, schools function in isolation from each other and from the central office, further minimizing opportunities for building intellectual capital.

As shown in this case study, linkages can be constraining or supportive forces. The degree to which linkages support or constrain appears to relate to the level of social
capital and intellectual capital. For example, in this case district initially communications were perceived as primarily one-way. As the teams (school leadership, central office, DAIT visit teams) began to interact more within the team and across the system with teachers and principals in supportive collective settings, the communication link began to be a stronger support for the district’s reform agenda. A second example that illustrates how social capital and intellectual capital are essential to maximizing the value of a linkage for reform are the structural linkages of pacing calendars, benchmark assessments, and data management systems. Initially, these structural links met with considerable angst and frustration. As processes were put in place (school leadership team training, DAIT), teachers had more opportunity to express their frustrations and to dialogue about them with central office staff. These dialogues could occur because of the relational trust that had been built in the last several years and the new opportunities for collective exchanges of knowledge and information.

A third example involved school leadership teams emerging as a resource linkage between the central office and its schools. School leadership teams participating in the ES21 professional development perceived district/school relations as significantly stronger at the conclusion of the first year of training. By the conclusion of the first year of training, central office leaders, principals, and school leadership team members all viewed the role of teams as communicators. Leadership team members viewed themselves as taking on a joint role with the administration and getting buy-in from staff for district initiatives as they dialogued with and led their colleagues during grade-level meetings. This suggests increasing levels of social and intellectual capital between the central office and schools.
As noted earlier, Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) argue that strong social capital within an organization can enhance its intellectual capital, thus increasing its productive advantage. Findings suggest that Evergreen has invested in building human capital through partnerships with external resources (e.g. Reading First, ES21, DAIT), as well as site-based and district-wide professional development. In addition, social capital is growing as the district works on rebuilding trusting relationships, expanding communication linkages, and developing a collaborative culture and leadership capacity across the district.

Results of this study suggest that growing social capital between the central office and schools appears to be increasing not only human capital, but creating avenues for developing intellectual capital (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). For example, the DAIT cabinet meetings have forced central office leaders to engage in conversations about the district curriculum, pacing calendars, assessments, and data management system. They discuss what they have observed in classrooms during DAIT visits and review student test data. During these conversations, they have had to make explicit their attitudes and beliefs about the reform efforts. They share information with one another about specific programs and debate the benefits and pitfalls of reform strategies. This pooling of knowledge is not only building human capital, but intellectual capital as well. Another example of how the central office is building intellectual capital is through principal meetings. Rather than being an “information dump,” the meetings are geared to develop the collective knowledge of the group. Principals share best practices and further their knowledge about specific curriculum. Principal coaches and regional cohort meetings are yet another way that intellectual capital is being increased.
At the school level, school leadership teams involved in the ES21 professional development expressed that they are moving from discussions about “nuts and bolts” to sharing ideas with one another about instruction. For example, during the ES21 leadership team trainings, teams engaged in discussions around samples of student work by taking a vertical slice across grade levels, building their collective knowledge about how students perform on various academic tasks across grade levels. As a result of the school leadership team training, school leadership team members—though not viewing themselves as district agents of professional development—began to view themselves as developing the skills and abilities of their colleagues. School A’s development of a lesson study promoted deep interactions among the team about instructional strategies necessary to reach all students. With this newfound intellectual capital generated through codesign, coteaching, and collective debriefing of the lesson, the team was able to take collective action with other colleagues in ways that are beginning to impact instruction.

Beginning in the 2007-2008 school year, for the first time the district set an explicit district-wide focus to improve reading comprehension—“Every school, every teacher, every day for every child.” Given a year of team building and collaboration at the school level, data suggest that these five school leadership teams are poised to respond to these new district goals by engaging in collaborative knowledge sharing that will generate new knowledge and lead to collective action. This collective action offers the potential to enhance system coherence, shared purpose, and student learning.
Conclusions and Implications for Practice

The findings of this study suggest several important conclusions and implications for practice. First, significant to this study is the application of the concept of linkages as a method for examining the ways in which a central office and its schools interact as they work to build system capacity and capital in the school improvement process. An important conclusion from this study is the confirmation of the crucial role that social capital plays in building the district’s capacity for reform. The study also illustrates that social capital has to be built from the top down. Central office leaders must be the first to take steps to build trust. A corollary conclusion is that face-to-face communication stimulated by the principal regional networks, the DAIT process, and leadership team professional development proved central to opening up information channels, building trust, and changing norms for interaction. An implication for practice from this conclusion is that districts committed to reform may need to greatly expand opportunities for face-to-face communication, especially between central office and teachers, as a first step in the reform process.

Second, the importance of ideological congruence around what constitutes good teaching cannot be overemphasized as districts strive to improve achievement and meet the growing accountability demands. There is a real need in this case district for all stakeholders to engage in a deep dialogue about good teaching. The superintendent and assistant superintendent understand that good teaching is not just following the pacing calendar, but involves actively engaging students in lessons that are differentiated and creative. Teachers feel that the district expectation is that they adhere to the rigid guidelines of pacing calendars and assessments and forego what they believe to be good
teaching. Given the rising level of social capital in this case district, those discussions could prove beneficial for all stakeholders and would increase intellectual capital needed to advance the district reforms. As an administrator in a neighboring district, the implications for practice are immense. I recognize the value of engaging key stakeholders in discussions about good instruction. Often, we become enamored or traumatized, as the case may be with the stringent accountability measures and curriculum expectations. We forget that as professionals it is our responsibility to collaborate with one another to collectively develop the instructional strategies that assure that all of our students achieve academic excellence. The human capital often exists in districts to solve seemingly intractable problems of student learning but is rarely brought together collectively to develop the needed intellectual capital.

A third conclusion from this study is the central and interactive connection between relational and ideological linkages to the school reform process. Relational linkages among the central office, the principals, and the school leadership teams may present a unique opportunity to bridge the ideological chasms between the district and its schools. Furthermore, findings from this study suggest that if relational and ideological linkages are not attended to, other linkages may become more constrained rather than supportive of enacting a school reform agenda. In a complex hierarchical system, not everyone can have a 1-1 relationship. Traditionally, classroom teachers are the most removed from the central office and from one another. As teachers become more connected through interactions within and across their grade levels, both at their school and across the district, and school leadership teams get networked with one another through structural and resource linkages (such as Reading First, ES21, DAIT), there is an
opportunity to truly build a more collaborative culture. An implication for practice is that school leadership teams and principals need training in order to learn strategies for effectively working with one another, with staff, and with central office leaders. Successful, collaborative relationships do not just “happen.” The strategies from the ES21 professional development that were most promising in developing effective collaborative relationships were beyond the scope of this study and suggest an area for future research.

Fourth, all participants recognized that meeting the needs of English learners is of paramount importance and the biggest challenge facing the district. Yet, there is an inherent tension regarding causes for the challenge and the best way forward. Central office staff expressed the view that teachers need to change their practice. Teachers feel frustrated that the central office does not understand the challenges facing them and their struggles with children that are now in their classrooms. In this era of accountability, blaming another for failure is a logical response but often impedes collectively designing a way forward. Again, an implication for practice from this study suggests the need for more dialogue about how to move from blaming to engaging in much more open discussions about how we are teaching to determine what aspects promote what kinds of learning.

Finally, this study illustrates that while increasing attention is given to the importance of building social capital as a means of ensuring successful implementation of school reform, too little attention is given to building a system’s intellectual capital. Social capital is an important precursor of intellectual capital, but intellectual capital will not necessarily flow from increased social capital. Special attention needs to be given to
creating many more opportunities for purposeful collective interaction. This is a difficult challenge for most hierarchically organized educational systems, which provide minimal time for collective work at the school level, among schools, or between schools and central office. Although the initial intent of the DAIT visits was for monitoring purposes, an unintended positive outcome has been increased face-to-face contact and opportunities for dialogue between teachers and central office. Future studies are needed to explore how these initial visits may enhance the district’s intellectual capital.

Implications for Future Research

Several areas for further research emerged from this study. First, it would be valuable to conduct other case studies of districts using the linkages framework to understand if similar linkages or pathways are used in the process of district reform. Particularly important would be to determine if the hypothesized close relationship between relational and ideological linkages found in this district are similar in other cases. Do other districts struggling to exit from school improvement also find themselves with under-the-surface tensions about effective instruction and good teaching? A related question is how have high-performing districts brought about a shared vision?

A second area that needs further study is: How have successful educational systems created opportunities for collective purposeful interaction that develops the system’s intellectual capital? What role do regularly scheduled grade level meetings that focus on teaching and learning play? If teachers are engaged in lesson study, how is that building the intellectual capital? Does the intellectual capital spread beyond a grade level? How can it support an entire system?
Third, an important finding in this study was the changing culture of the central office as the DAIT process required central office staff to engage with each other around teaching and learning. How have other central offices found ways to change their culture and what has been the impact on schools within the system? How does greater central office collaboration contribute to the intellectual capital of the system?

Finally, more work needs to be done to understand if particular linkage patterns lead to enhanced opportunities for staff and student learning. This study offers a conceptual way of understanding a relationship that emerged among the linkages in this district. Will a similar pattern be found in other districts and, if so, what are the implications for learning?
Peggy Johnson, under the supervision of Dr. Janet Chrispeels, Professor, Education Studies and UCSD Director for the Joint Doctorate in Educational Leadership (UCSD/CSUSM/SDSU) is conducting a research project to explore the relationships and interactions between district leadership and school leadership teams.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
The purpose of this study is to examine linkages and pathways between district leadership and site leadership teams involved in an effective schools reform process. The study will provide insights into how these pathways and linkages support or constrain the work of site leadership teams as they develop and implement strategies to improve teaching and learning.

This study is embedded in a three-year multi-state study in which Escondido Union School District is participating. This larger study is designed to assess the efficacy of a school effects intervention, primarily focused on supporting school leadership teams to implement effective schools research and principles, on student learning outcomes as measured by standardized measures and district benchmarks. The larger study is entitled 21st Century School Effects Study (ES21).

POTENTIAL BENEFITS
Although there may be no immediate personal benefits for the participants in this study, the results of this study will contribute to the district in three ways: (1) by describing how the interactions of district leadership and school leadership support or constrain the work of site leadership teams; (2) by identifying the linkages, pathways, and theories of action that enable districts and school leadership teams to build capacity to improve teaching and learning; and (3) describing how district policies and practices support or constrain the work of site leadership teams as they develop and implement strategies to improve teaching and learning based on an effective schools process.

PROCEDURES
The procedures involve interviews with the five principals and members of the five school leadership teams participating in the ES21 School Leadership Team training. Interviews will also be conducted with the 11 members of the District Leadership team. All interviews will be tape-recorded. You may be asked to participate in face-to-face interview(s), telephone interviews, or a focus group regarding the ES21 training and your perceptions of the linkages and pathways between the district leadership and school leadership teams in working to improve teaching and learning. You may decline to answer any questions and end your participation at any time. Participation in either an
interview or focus group will take approximately 60-90 minutes. We will audiotape your participation in focus groups and interviews. The recordings will be used to produce transcripts for analysis. Observations of school leadership team trainings, site leadership team meetings and district leadership team meetings will also be conducted. The researcher will transcribe notes at the team meetings to increase the accuracy of what transpired. Results from the Effective Schools questionnaire administered to teachers and school staff and the School Leadership Team Implementation Continuum completed by each school leadership team member at the beginning and end of the first year of the ES21 study will also be utilized in the study. Only the researcher and researchers in the larger ES21 study will have access to the data. All data will be kept in a secure location until the completion of the study at which time it will be destroyed.

**RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS AND RISK MANAGEMENT**
Your individual responses to interview questions will not be shared with the district, administrators or staff. Information will not be shared such that any individual can be identified.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**
All information collected in this study is confidential. Responses will be completely confidential through the use of pseudonyms for participants, schools, and anyone mentioned by a participant. Only the researcher and the researchers in the larger ES21 study will have access to the data.

**PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**
You will not be paid for participation in the research.

**FREEDOM TO WITHDRAW AND ASK QUESTIONS**
If you agree to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. Should you choose to withdraw from an interview, recording of that interview will be destroyed and the information you provided prior to your decision to withdraw will not be transcribed or included in subsequent analyses, reports, presentations, or other products resulting from this research. If you do not wish to participate, just let me know at any time.

**RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**
Peggy Johnson has explained this study to you and answered your questions. If you have other questions or research-related problems, you may reach Peggy Johnson at (760) 749-1075 or johnson.pe@vcpusd.net or her advisor, Janet Chrispeels, at (858) 822-4253 or jchrispeels@ucsd.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related problem, you may call the UCSD Human Research Protections Program at (858) 455-5050 or view your rights by going to http://irb.ucsd.edu/guidelines.shtml and selecting “Experimental Subject’s Bill of Rights.”
I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I agree to participate in the proposed research being conducted by the UCSD, CSUSM, and SDSU Joint Doctoral Program student: Peggy Johnson and to be audiotape if applicable.

_______________________________
Name of Participant

_______________________________  ____________________________
Signature of Participant    Date

In my judgment, the subject is voluntarily and knowingly giving informed consent and possesses the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study.

______________________________  ___________________________
Signature of Investigator    Date
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO
AUDIOTAPE RECORDING RELEASE CONSENT FORM

Exploring Relationships and Interactions Between the District Leadership and
School Leadership Teams

As part of this project, an audiotape recording will be made of you during your
participation in this research project. The recordings will be used to produce transcripts
for analysis. Please indicate below the uses of these audiotape recordings to which you
are willing to consent. This is completely voluntary and up to you. In any use of the
audiotapes, your name will not be identified. You may request to stop the taping at any
time or to erase any portion of your taped recording.

1. The transcripts of audiotapes can be studied by the research team for use in
   the research project

   __________
   Initials

2. The transcripts of audiotapes can be used for scientific publications.

   __________
   Initials

You have the right to request that the tape be stopped or erased during the recording.

You have read the above description and give your consent for the use of audiotapes as
indicated above.

________________________________  ____________________________
Signature                        Date

________________________________  ____________________________
Witness                         Date
APPENDIX B

District Leadership Team Interview Protocol

Personal history of respondent
1. Please tell me a little bit about your history in the district.
   a. What is your position and role?
   b. How long have you been in this position?
   c. Prior positions in the district?
   d. How long have you been in the district?
   e. Previous positions before coming to this district?

District context
1. What are the major issues, initiatives, or concerns in this district?
   a. In what ways are these shared with
      i. Site administrators?
      ii. Certificated and classified staff?
      iii. School leadership teams?
   b. In what ways do you think there is agreement and support for these issues
      by school leadership teams? (Coherence)

2. What are the district goals for this school year? (coherence—establishing a focus on
   learning)

3. How were they decided upon? (coherence—establishing a focus on learning-
   communication)
   a. How does the district communicate the goals to
      i. Administrators?
      ii. Certificated and classified staff?
      iii. School leadership teams?
   b. In what ways do schools participate in helping to achieve the district’s goals?
   c. How are district goals aligned with school goals?

4. In what ways (formal and informal) does the district communicate with
   a. Administrators?
   b. Certificated/classified staff
   c. School leadership teams?

5. How would you describe the quality of communication between the district and
   a. Administrators?
   b. Certificated/classified staff?
   c. School leadership teams?

6. Briefly, how would you describe or characterize the climate and culture in this
   district? (Building professional communities, ideological, relationships)
a. How does this climate that you have described support change?

Questions regarding the role of school leadership teams
1. What do you see as the role of school leadership teams in terms of goal setting and in improving student learning? (focus on learning)
2. As you envision district reforms, what should be the place of school leadership teams? (coherence)
3. What is the role of school leadership teams as the district moves into the DAIT process? (acting strategically and sharing leadership, coherence)
4. How would you describe a “peak performing” school leadership team?
5. In what ways do you see the district supporting school leadership teams and the work they do? Are there particular board policies, funding, or practices that support school leadership teams? (structural)
6. Have you participated in any of the ES21 trainings? If so what influence, if any, has your involvement had on your work?
7. What additional support, if any, is the district providing to ES21 experimental sites? (relationships and engaging external environments)

Questions about philosophy regarding instruction (ideological etc)
1. How do you define “good teaching”?
2. Is there a shared perspective in the district regarding what “good teaching” is?
3. How does the district communicate to principals and school leadership teams their perspective of what is “good teaching”?
4. How is the district’s perspective of what is good teaching enacted?
5. In what ways could school leadership teams play a role in enacting the district’s vision of “good teaching”?

District support of schools
1. Could you give me a brief overview of what your district does to support schools in their reform efforts? (e.g. professional development opportunities, technical assistance, funding, waivers from particular policies)?
2. In what ways has the district engaged with external partners to support school improvement (i.e. SDCOE, UCSD/ES21…)
3. How would you describe the relationship between the district and schools?
   a. ES21 schools? Non-ES21 schools?
   b. Is the relationship new or changing?
4. Prior to ES21, has the district provided any type of training to school leadership teams? If yes, who provided it?

Questions regarding data and accountability
Now I would like to get some insights into data and how it is used in your district. I would like to discuss what data you are using and how you are using it.
1. What state and district data are you sharing with the schools?
   a. When you share data with the schools, what do you expect them to do with it?
2. How do you know you are giving schools the right data to improve student achievement and to achieve district goals?

3. If schools don’t perceive the data the district is providing as the right data to assess student learning and to improve instruction, how do they let the district know?

4. How does the district use state, district and school data to make decisions?
   a. How are these data affecting decisions on personnel, curriculum, interventions, programs, etc.

5. Escondido has put a lot of energy designing and developing assessments, how do you know these assessments are effective in assessing student learning and guiding instruction?
   a. What structures are in place to evaluate effectiveness of these assessments in supporting teachers to make instructional improvements?

6. In what ways is the district supporting schools and specifically school leadership teams in using data?
APPENDIX C

School Leadership Team Interview Protocol (Developed as Part of Larger ES21 Study)

Year 1 Questions—Round 1

I. Background
   A. Personal
      1. What is your position and role?
      2. How long have you been in this position?
      3. How did you get selected to be part of the ES 21 team?
   
   B. About the district
      1. Can you give us a sense of the major issues initiatives or concerns in this district? Are they shared by:
         a. School board,
         b. Superintendent,
         c. Teachers and administrators
         d. Parents?
      2. How does the district communicate its issues and concerns to the school?
      3. How about the major issues in your school?
      4. How are data from state and districts assessments used to make decisions?
         a. In the district
         b. In your school
      5. How is your School Leadership Team using data to guide instruction?
      6. In what ways is the district supporting the team and school in using data?

II. Implementation Issues
   A. Adoption
      1. Tell about how you see the role of the School Leadership Team at your school?
      2. How do you see your SLT working with the district liaison, Brenda Jones? Do you have a plan for regular communication?
      3. From the first two sessions, what did you learn? Did it:
         a. Influence your team’s goals?
b. What has been shared with the school staff or grade-level teams?
c. What has been implemented?

4. How are the presenters supporting the team’s learning?

5. Tell us a little about how teachers collaborate at this school to improve learning. How do you see the ES21 PD could enhance collaboration that will support student learning over time?

6. What do you see as the biggest challenges that face your team as it works to implement its goals?

7. What strengths do you think the team has that can help you meet these challenges?

8. What can the team do to involve other teachers in this school in achieving school goals?

9. What support or help will you need from the principal to meet these challenges?

10. What support or help will you need from the district to meet these challenges?

* FINAL QUESTION TO END WITH

11. What are your hopes for your team from participating in ES21? For example, if in two years your team were to receive an award for outstanding performance, for what two or three accomplishments would you want your team to be recognized?

III. About the state

1. Talk to us about how the state and federal accountability systems have supported or constrained your school improvement efforts (API, NCLB, AYP).

2. Does ES21 Professional Development seem to fit with the federal, state, and district accountability goals and policies?

IV. Other questions (if there’s time):

1. Ask principals about how the valued/used the information from Atlanta. (for later questions maybe in February 2007)

2. From the first two sessions, what did you learn from working with
   a. Colleagues on the SLTs
   b. Other SLTs
APPENDIX D

Principal Interview Protocol

School context
1. What are the current school priorities? Has there been a shift in priorities during the year? (coherence; establishing a focus on learning)
2. Describe some of the ways ES21 is influencing (a) your school leadership team and (b) your school change efforts. (ideological; building professional communities; engaging external environments)
3. How do district goals and initiatives align with your school leadership team goals and initiatives? (coherence)

District Support of Schools, School Leadership Teams, and Principals
1. Is there a story that best typifies the relationship between your school and the district? (Probe if the story does not seem to reveal much of a pattern. How would you describe the relationship between this school and the district?) (relational)
2. Is this story typical of all schools in the district, or is your relationship with the district unique? How do you know? (relational)
3. In what ways do you and your school leadership team feel empowered by the district to set direction and engage in school level reform? (relational)
4. We are interested in learning about all the ways in which you feel the district might be supporting your school leadership team in its work. Could you give me a brief overview of what your district does (probe any of these areas)? (structural; resources; building professional communities that value learning)
   a. Staff development
   b. Technical assistance
   c. Funding
   d. Role of Brenda Jones as district liaison to the ES21 project
5. I understand that the district provides a variety of supports to principals (i.e. monthly principal meetings with educational services staff, new principals meet with superintendent, assignment of coaches for principals, the “Monday updates” from educational services). Are there others that you can think of? (communication; coherence)
   a. Which one of these has been most helpful to you in meeting your school goals? In what ways?
   b. Which has been most helpful in your work with your school leadership team?
   c. Have you observed changes in the way the district provides support to you? If so, to what do you attribute those changes? (ideological)

2. In what ways has the relationship between the district and your school changed since your began the ES21 training? (Probe: what was it like before the ES21 training?) (relational)
3. Are there things the district does that constrain your school leadership team’s efforts to improve teaching and learning? (relational)
Questions regarding the role of school leadership teams

1. What do you see as the role of school leadership teams in terms of goal setting and improving student learning? (building professional communities; acting strategically and sharing leadership; establishing a focus on learning; coherence; ideological; relational)

2. As you envision district reforms, what should be the place of school leadership teams? (ideological)

3. In what ways if any do you see the role or work of school leadership teams changing as the district moves into the DAIT process? (establishing a focus on learning; acting strategically and sharing leadership; coherence)

4. How would you describe a “peak performing” school leadership team? (ideological; building professional communities; communication)

5. What additional support, if any, is the district providing to your site specifically and to other ES21 experimental sites?

6. In what ways, if any, has the ES21 school leadership team training based on the effective schools process facilitated the relationship between your site and the district? (relational)

Questions about philosophy regarding instruction (ideological)

1. How do you define “good teaching”?

2. Is there a shared perspective in this school of what is good teaching? What about in the district?

3. How does the district communicate to principals and school leadership teams their perspective of what is “good teaching”?

4. How is the district’s perspective of what is good teaching enacted?

5. In what ways could school leadership teams play a role in enacting the district’s vision of “good teaching”? In enacting its own vision of good teaching?

Questions regarding data and accountability

1. How is your school leadership team using data to guide instruction? Does that include looking at student work? What balance should be given to using standardized test data, benchmark assessments, and student work if teachers want to strengthen instructional practice and assess student learning? (establishing a focus on learning; structural)

2. In what ways is the district supporting schools and specifically school leadership teams in using data? (structural; communication)

3. When the district shares data with the school, what do you expect the leadership team to do with it? What do you expect the grade levels to do with it?

4. Do you think the district is giving you the right data to analyze in order to improve student achievement and to achieve district goals? (communication)
   a. If you don’t perceive the data the district is providing as the right data to assess student learning and improve instruction, how do you let the district know?
   b. Would you involve the school leadership team in that process, if so how?
5. Based on the fact that Escondido is a PI district, do you perceive that district resources and staff are being used differently now to support schools—in other words have there been any changes in how the district operates in an effort to support schools?

6. Escondido has put a lot of energy into designing and developing assessments. How do you know these assessments are effective in assessing student learning and guiding instruction? (structural)
   a. What structures are in place to evaluate the effectiveness of these assessments in supporting teachers to make instructional improvements?

Wrapping up
1. Are there things the district could do to better facilitate the work of your school leadership team to improve teaching and learning? In an ideal world, what would your district do to support your school?
2. Is there anything else I should know about your school leadership team or your district?
APPENDIX E

School Leadership Team Focus Group Interview Protocol

Questions regarding the role of school leadership teams (building professional communities; acting strategically and sharing leadership; ideological)
1. You have been attending the ES21 trainings for over seven months. How has your concept of the role of the school leadership team evolved or changed?
2. Can you tell me a time in which your leadership team as a collective really made a difference for teaching and learning at this school? What was the team doing? What were others in the school doing to help? What conditions seem to be in place that helped you make a difference?
3. As leadership team members you also serve as grade level leaders. We know you have been sharing ES21 information with colleagues. In what ways has the ES21 information made a difference for teaching and learning at your grade levels?

Questions about philosophy regarding instruction (ideological)
1. How has your leadership team used the ES21 information about “good teaching”? 
2. What do you see is the leadership team’s role in strengthening good teaching at your school?
3. What evidence would you collect to show good teaching is in place at your school?
4. How does the district communicate to your principal and your school leadership team its perspective of what is “good teaching”? (communication; coherence)

Questions regarding data and accountability
1. ES21 training has focused on looking at student work as data. In what ways did looking at student work affect how your school leadership team thinks about or uses data? (ideological)
2. In what ways is the district building the team’s capacity to collect and use data to improve teaching and learning?
3. The district is implementing the DAIT process. In what ways has that affected your school leadership team? (engaging external environments that matter for learning)

District Support of Schools
1. Can you tell me a story that might typify this school’s relation with the district? Is this typical of all schools in the district, or is your relationship with the district unique? How do you know? (relational; communication)
2. Has the relationship between the district and your school changed since your began the ES21 training? If so, what was it like before the ES21 training? Or in what ways, if any, has the ES21 school leadership team training based on the effective schools process facilitated the relationship between your site and the district? (communication; relational, ideological)
3. In what ways does the district support your school leadership team in its efforts to improve teacher and student learning (staff development, technical assistance, funding, etc.)? (structural)

4. Are there things the district does that constrain your school leadership team’s efforts to improve teaching and learning? (communication; relational, ideological)

Wrapping up
1. In what other ways could the ES21 project facilitate the work of your leadership team to improve teaching and learning?
2. In what other ways could the district facilitate the work of your school leadership team to improve teaching and learning?
3. As a leadership team what is the one thing your SLT would like to accomplish next year to improve teaching and learning? What will the team need to do to make it possible? (relational; communication; structural; creating coherence)
REFERENCES


