A GRID AND GROUP ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANNING

By

KERRI K. WHITE

Bachelor of Science in Education
Secondary Mathematics
Oklahoma Baptist University
Shawnee, Oklahoma
2000

Master of Arts in Educational Leadership
Southern Nazarene University
Bethany, Oklahoma
2004

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Oklahoma State University
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Dissertation Approved:

Dr. Edward Harris

Dissertation Adviser

Dr. Kerri Kearney

Dr. Susan Stansberry

Dr. Juliana Utley

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"No one who achieves success does so without acknowledging the help of others. The wise and confident acknowledge this help with gratitude."
~ Alfred North Whitehead

"Gratitude is when memory is stored in the heart and not in the mind."
~ Lionel Hampton

Completion of a doctoral degree program is nothing if not a string of once-in-a-lifetime memories, both exhilarating and exasperating. The past four and a half years have been marked by late night study sessions, crazy classroom stories, marathon writing weekends, statewide travels, and days upon days locked in a room with a stack of textbooks that must be read from cover to cover. Interspersed between these educational experiences have been a plethora of life events that will forever be connected to "when I was working on my doctorate."

- When I was working on my doctorate, my best friend got married!
- When I was working on my doctorate, I changed jobs twice – and I wrote an ESEA Flexibility Request (with a team, of course)!
- When I was working on my doctorate, I learned how to skim text.
- When I was working on my doctorate, I had to turn my guest room into the "clean clothes room" because I never had time to hang up my clothes.
- When I was working on my doctorate, my pastor actually told me not to come to church for as many weeks as it took to get it all done.
- When I was working on my doctorate, I had to buy three different laptops because I kept dropping them on the floor and losing all of my files.
- When I was working on my doctorate, each Wednesday, I came into work at 7:00 so that I could leave at 3:30 and make it to class on time. After class ended at 10:00, I would stay and talk to my friends in the parking lot, go home, watch Criminal Minds on my DVR with my roommate, try to get my brain to stop thinking, and eventually fall asleep a few short hours before the alarm went off on Thursday morning.

But these memories are not memories solely of the mind; they are memories of the heart. It is truly with gratitude that I acknowledge the tremendous support provided to me by my family, my friends, my church, my colleagues, my classmates, and my professors.

To my family and my friends who are as close as family – To say "I could never have done this without you" is more than an understatement. In fact, I would have never tried.

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Cara, my best girl friend forever – Not only did you provide tangible supports (like fixing dinners, doing my laundry, cleaning the house, mowing my yard, and taking my dog for walks while I was bunkered in for a full day of studying, analyzing, or writing) but you also provided emotional and spiritual support every time I was about to give up because school, work, life, and even church were just too overwhelming. You reminded me regularly that God gifted me for each undertaking He placed in front of me. You gave me courage to face each challenge. You are my rock and my prayer warrior. Words cannot express how impossible this task would have been without you by my side. I love you. More than you'll ever know. Cara, William, Cody, Tom, and Barbara – You are as much a part of my family as anyone else. Thank you for including me in yours.

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Most importantly, my incredible gratitude goes to my Father. He designed me for this good work. He brought me to this place for such a time as this. He created me to do more than I could dare to imagine. To Him be praise, and glory, and honor, forever and ever, throughout all generations.

ABSTRACT

Name: KERRI K. WHITE

Date of Degree: MAY 2013

Title of Study: A GRID AND GROUP ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANNING

Major Field: EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP STUDIES, SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

Abstract: This study used purposeful sampling to select two Oklahoma public schools for qualitative case studies. The two schools had previously been identified as Schools in Need of Improvement and had shown progress since identification. Data were collected over the course of one academic year, using interviews, observations, surveys, artifacts, and document reviews.

Using Douglas's (1982, 1986) Grid and Group Typology as a theoretical frame, the two schools were described, and their experiences with the School Improvement Planning Process were compared and contrasted in order to better understand how successful schools create and implement School Improvement Plans (SIPs).

- Both schools thoroughly assessed their current realities, reviewed research-based practices that were likely to improve student achievement, implemented those strategies with fidelity, and monitored the implementation and progress of students throughout the process.
- Both schools focused on teacher collaboration and stakeholder buy-in.
- Both schools reported increased communication among faculty members and between schools and communities, continuous professional learning of teachers and administrators, and improved student achievement as a result of the School Improvement Planning Process.
- Buchanan Elementary School's SIP was narrowly focused on reading and math achievement, but Adams High School's SIP was not narrowly focused.
- Adams High School's SIP was more successfully implemented after new leadership disconnected improvement strategies from outside mandates.
- Both schools adapted the School Improvement Planning Process to meet the needs of teachers, counselors, administrators, students, families, and community stakeholders who contribute to the school's culture. Many of these adaptations could be understood in terms of grid and group descriptions of the school.
- Both schools having a strong group culture often explained similarities between the schools' processes. Adams High School having a strong-grid culture and Buchanan Elementary School having a weak-grid culture often explained differences between the schools' processes.
- There were realities outside of grid and group contexts, such as state and federal requirements, motivation, demographics, and the larger contexts in which each school operated, that impacted attitudes and actions taken toward the SIP.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

State and federal accountability systems are designed to incentivize continuous improvement in all schools while enforcing consequences on underperforming schools that are not improving rapidly. Federal accountability systems began with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), followed by its reauthorization as the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (IASA) and as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). Looking toward another reauthorization of ESEA, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced in 2011 that the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) would grant flexibility to states in implementing the accountability system outlined in NCLB, but only if the state had a more rigorous Differentiated Recognition, Accountability, and Support System in place.

Oklahoma, like most other states, also has a state accountability system. Oklahoma's accountability system was based on an Academic Performance Index in reading, mathematics, attendance, graduation rate, and other factors – much of which was also used for federal accountability – until a new state law in 2011 changed the state's accountability system to an A-F School Grading System with broader components (Oklahoma Statutes, 2011b).

The state's accountability system, like the federal system, includes both incentives and consequences. Schools with high achievement or significant improvement in achievement are rewarded financially and with public recognition (Oklahoma Statutes, 2010). Underperforming schools that are not making rapid improvement must develop and implement plans leading to improved student achievement. Schools that are persistently low achieving must, according to state law, implement one of four restructuring options or face the possibility of state intervention (Oklahoma Statutes, 2011a).

With the flexibility offered to states through the USDE's *ESEA Flexibility* waiver package, Oklahoma received approval on August 16, 2012, to begin using the A-F School Grading System as the basis for meeting the federal requirements of a Differentiated Recognition, Accountability, and Support System. Like ESEA, the state's new accountability system will hold schools responsible for the success of individual children, groups of children based on their population demographics, and whole school improvement. The new system was intended to build off of the useful components of previous state and federal accountability systems, while eliminating the burden on districts and schools to continue implementing unsuccessful components; therefore, it is valuable to learn from the most comprehensive federal accountability system in the history of the United States, namely No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

Among the requirements of NCLB were directives requiring each state to establish grade-level academic expectations; to create assessments for every child to measure progress toward attainment of those academic expectations; to develop a system of accountability for schools based on those assessments, graduation rates, and other

academic indicators; and to provide systems of support that would assist schools in providing a high-quality education (NCLB, 2002). NCLB also directed each school to meet annual targets of student performance in the All Students group, as well as in a variety of student groups based on ethnicity, poverty, mobility, and disability (NCLB, 2002). Movement toward these annual targets was identified as Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

Schools that did not make AYP in each student group for two consecutive years were required to write an annual plan, known as the School Improvement Plan (SIP). In addition, under certain criteria, they were required to set aside significant portions of their federal funds to provide more options for parents and federally specified interventions for students who were not achieving the state standards. NCLB sanctioned schools that showed a lack of progress over a number of years, including mandatory school closure in some circumstances (NCLB, 2002).

In 2004, Oklahoma had 142 schools on the School Improvement List based on two or more years of not making Adequate Yearly Progress (Oklahoma State Department of Education [OSDE], 2004). By 2009, that list had dwindled to only 42 schools statewide, approximately 3% of the schools in the state, with only a few schools receiving corrective action or restructuring designations for showing a lack of progress over a significant number of years (OSDE, 2009). Figure 1 shows a comparison of the number of schools in each designation of school improvement, corrective action, and restructuring for 2004 and 2009. All of the schools in corrective action and restructuring status in 2004 came off of the School Improvement List by 2009. Only fourteen of the schools identified for school improvement in 2004 were on the list in 2009, seven of

which had made enough improvement to come off the list sometime after 2004 but had returned by 2009.

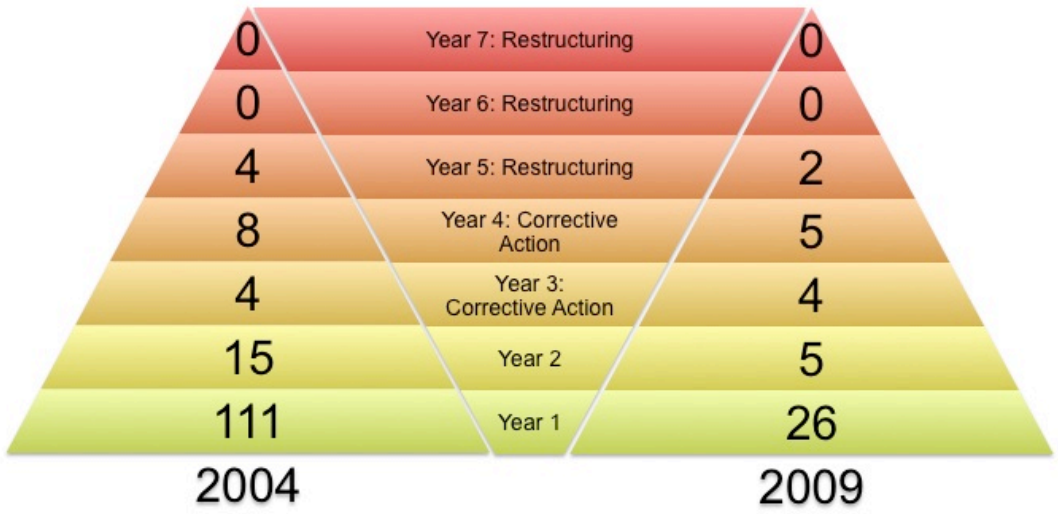

Figure 1: Comparison between 2004 and 2009 of the number of Oklahoma public schools not making Adequate Yearly Progress for at least two consecutive years. These schools were identified for the School Improvement List in the following categories: School Improvement (Year 1 and Year 2), Corrective Action (Year 3 and Year 4), and Restructuring (Year 5 and above). Data for this figure comes from the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE, 2004, 2009).

Then, in 2010 and 2011, a larger number of schools, 90 and 227 schools respectively, were identified for school improvement, corrective action, and restructuring (OSDE, 2010, 2011), as shown in Figures 2 and 3. This resulted in a need to dedicate additional resources and supports to underperforming schools, while also reconsidering the benefits and burdens associated with the federal accountability system prior to the offering of the *ESEA Flexibility* waiver package.

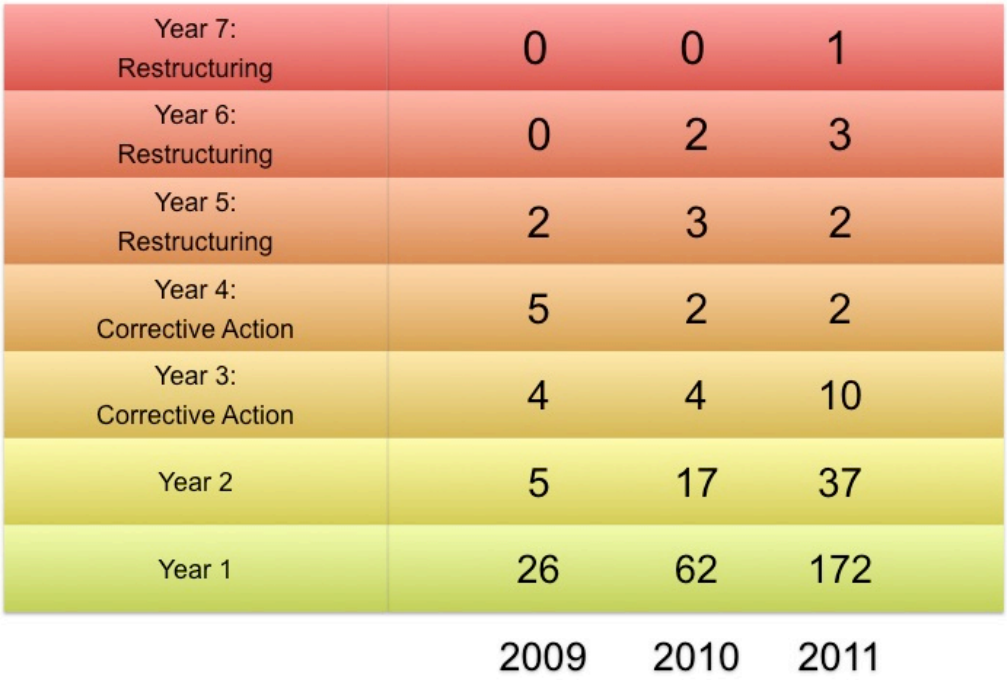

Figure 2: Comparison between 2009, 2010, and 2011 of the number of Oklahoma public schools not making Adequate Yearly Progress for at least two consecutive years. These schools were identified for the School Improvement List in the following categories: School Improvement (Year 1 and Year 2), Corrective Action (Year 3 and Year 4), and Restructuring (Year 5 and above). Data for this figure comes from the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE, 2009, 2010, 2011).

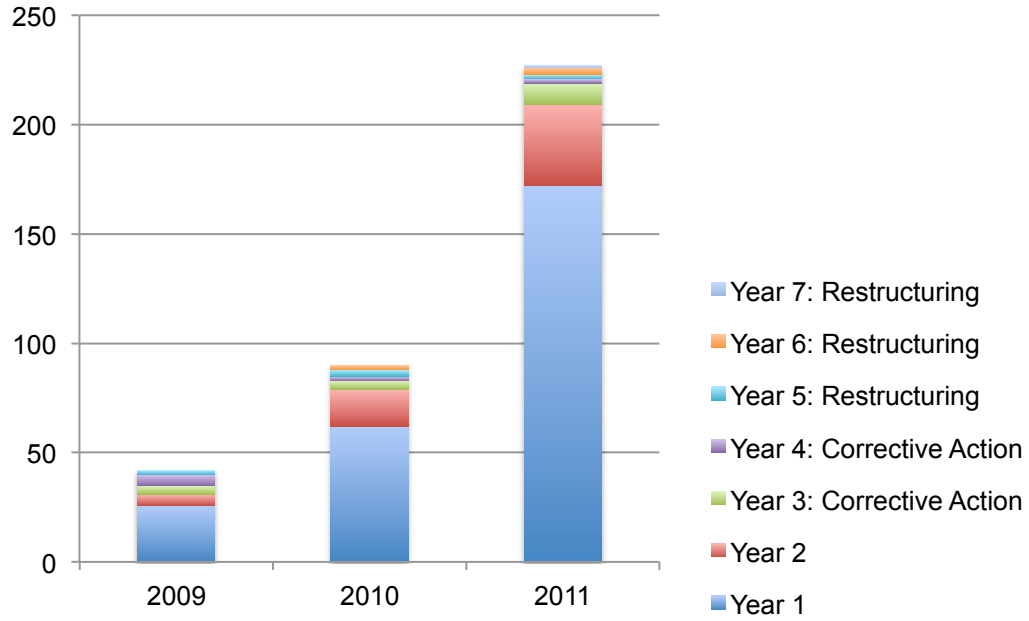

Figure 3: Comparison between 2009, 2010, and 2011 of the number of Oklahoma public schools not making Adequate Yearly Progress for at least two consecutive years. These schools were identified for the School Improvement List in the following categories: School Improvement (Year 1 and Year 2), Corrective Action (Year 3 and Year 4), and Restructuring (Year 5 and above). Data for this figure comes from the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE, 2009, 2010, 2011).

Statement of the Problem

Oklahoma schools are held accountable to state and federal accountability systems that require underperforming schools to create and implement an annual School Improvement Plan (SIP). The federal ESEA also requires districts and state agencies to assist school improvement teams in developing and implementing a plan tailored to the specific needs of the school. Even with the flexibility afforded through the USDE's *ESEA Flexibility* waiver package, these requirements remain in Oklahoma. The purpose of the SIP is to assess strengths and weaknesses within the current conditions of the school, identify research-based strategies that will improve student performance on state assessments in reading and mathematics as well as graduation rate and other academic

factors, and establish processes for implementing those strategies so that all students reach desired academic outcomes within two years.

Since the implementation of these requirements, the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) has consulted with school leaders, offered intensive professional development institutes, established collaborative networks, granted incentives for improvement, modeled success through the stories of schools that made significant change, and provided school support teams and educational leadership coaches to enable schools to implement their high quality plans for improvement. In 2010, the OSDE introduced an online tool and training on use of the tool to all Oklahoma schools on the School Improvement List. The online tool, known as Ways to Improve School Effectiveness (WISE), was designed to integrate all elements of the School Improvement Planning Process to assist schools with assessing current conditions; planning for improvement; monitoring implementation of the plan; and receiving feedback, coaching, and support from an outside educator (Corbett, 2011).

With the support of the OSDE and use of the WISE Tool, schools have seen various degrees of success in planning for and implementing strategies likely to improve the school (C. L. Koss, personal communication, January 14, 2011). Some schools have made significant progress to improve student achievement and have been removed from the School Improvement List (OSDE, 2009, 2010, 2011). While some schools have seen almost immediate turnaround in student performance, personnel attitudes, and systems cohesion, a few other schools have perpetually demonstrated poor performance and a lack of progress over a number of years, despite the School Improvement Planning Process (OSDE, 2009, 2010, 2011). These schools continue to have additional

requirements and sanctions placed upon them through both the state and federal accountability systems.

Explanations for this variation in improvement planning effectiveness include:

- preconceived notions that identification on the School Improvement List is a death-sentence or that everyone will have to be on board if any change has a chance of being successful (Fixsen, Blasé, Horner, & Sugai, 2009; Public Education Network, 2004; Reeves, 2006);
- comfort with and access to online technology for faculty collaboration and decision-making (Barab, 2003; Dikkers, Hughes, & McLeod, 2005; Quellmalz et al., 1995);
- quality of components included in the SIP and then implemented, such as whether the components are research-based, are likely to produce change, and are proven to increase student achievement in schools similar to the identified school (Cawelti, 1999; Goodwin, 2008; Marzano, 2003; Reeves, 2006);
- fidelity to the School Improvement Planning Process, including monitoring and making adjustments to the plan when unanticipated circumstances arise (Achievement Gap Initiative Conference Report, 2010; Fixsen, et al., 2009; Spiro, 2009); and
- school culture, including the prevalence of a vision for high student achievement and the perception of how urgent the need for change is (Fixsen, et al., 2009; Harris, 2005; Protheroe, Shellard, & Turner as cited in Protheroe, 2011; Schwahn & Spady, 1998).

Although the WISE Tool has enabled some schools that have not previously been successful in the School Improvement Planning Process to plan for and implement change, many of the plausible explanations for variation in effectiveness remain.

Harris (2005) provided an explanation for why schools, even with tools like WISE that are designed to catapult change, may not be successful in implementation of improvement plans. Using Mary Douglas's typology of grid and group, Harris explained that a school's culture could either inhibit or promote positive change. Douglas (1982, 1986) posited that there are four types of school cultures: bureaucratic, corporate, individualist, and collectivist. These four types of schools represent various school cultures. According to Harris, in order for schools to be successful at implementing any change, they must adapt the strategy in accordance with their school environment or classification.

Based on this theory, it would seem that in order for schools to be successful at implementing their SIPs and to see marked growth in student achievement, they must adapt the School Improvement Planning Process, as well as the training and tools they receive from the Oklahoma State Department of Education, their districts, and other sources to mesh with their unique school cultures. In other words, those schools that have cultural norms consistent with the expectations of the WISE Tool creators and OSDE trainers, as well as those schools that have been able to adapt the process, training, and tools to align with their cultural expectations, are the schools that have been able to implement change. The theory would support the argument that those schools that have not been successful in implementing change are those that have not been able to adapt the School Improvement Planning Process and tools for their school environments, norms,

and expectations; therefore, they have not been able to maximize the effectiveness of the School Improvement Planning Process. For these reasons, Douglas's typology demonstrates the most likely explanation for the variation between schools' effectiveness in planning for and implementing change through the School Improvement Planning Process.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore the connections between school culture and improved student achievement as underperforming schools developed and implemented their School Improvement Plans through the WISE Tool.

Research Questions

The study was guided by one overarching researching question: In schools that showed improvement, how was the School Improvement Plan created and implemented?

The following subquestions provided more detail:

1. How was the WISE Tool implemented in schools that showed improvement?
2. What were the differences, if any, in the implementation between schools?
3. In terms of grid and group, how did the schools adapt implementation strategies in accordance with their school culture?
4. How useful was Douglas's Grid and Group Theory in explaining these implementation variations?
5. What other realities existed outside of grid and group cultural assessment?

Theoretical Framework

The study was grounded in culture theory. While looking to Deal and Peterson (1999, 2002), Reeves (2006), and Thacker, Bell, and Schargel (2009) to provide insight

into school culture in general, the study focused on the seminal work of Douglas (1982, 1986, 1989) and the application of her grid and group typology to public schools as explained by Harris (2005). In the grid and group typology, Douglas (1982, 1986) provided a two-dimensional matrix, separating schools into four types: bureaucratic, corporate, individualist, and collectivist.

In this matrix, the grid dimension describes "the degree to which an individual's choices are constrained within a social system by imposed prescriptions such as role expectations, rules, and procedures" (Harris, 2005, p. 34). When teachers and administrators in a school are controlled by rules and regulations, are given very little autonomy or decision-making power, and are clearly separated by job duties and levels of authority, the school is said to have a strong-grid environment. On the other hand, when teachers and administrators have a great deal of freedom, make most of their own choices, and do not experience major role distinctions, the school is said to have a weak-grid environment.

The group dimension of Douglas's matrix describes "the degree to which people value collective relationships and the extent to which they are committed to the larger social unit" (Harris, 2005, p. 36). When teachers and administrators have a holistic view of their connection to the organization, when goals and objectives are set for the entire organization and responsibility for reaching them is owned by all members, when there is pressure by the group to conform to the norms of the culture, and when the survival of the group is more important than the survival of each individual, the school is said to have a strong-group environment. On the opposite end of the group scale, when the focus of relationships is to enhance the individual's status or quality of life, when there is no

expectation that individuals conform to social norms of the group, when individual goals and objectives outweigh the group goals and objectives, and when the group exists only to the extent that it increases the survival rates of its members, the school is said to have a weak-group environment.

Figure 4 provides a visual explanation of Douglas's grid and group matrix as explained by Harris (2005), showing the four types of schools:

- Bureaucratic: weak group, strong grid;
- Corporate: strong group, strong grid;
- Individualist: weak group, weak grid; and
- Collectivist: strong group, weak grid.

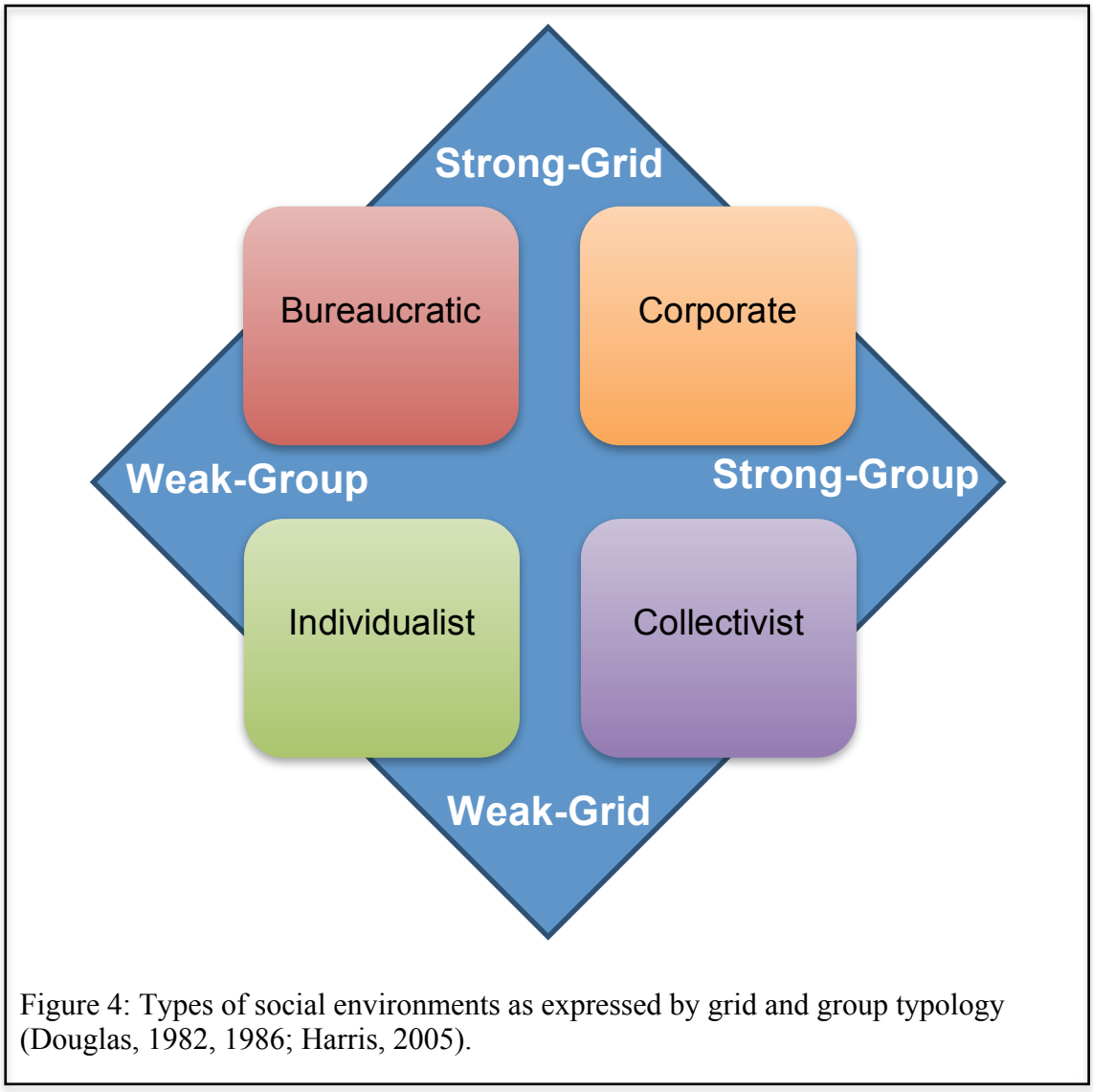

Figure 4: Types of social environments as expressed by grid and group typology (Douglas, 1982, 1986; Harris, 2005).

Procedures

The guiding paradigm for this study was qualitative methods (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002) with a naturalistic inquiry design strategy (Patton, 2002). Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined naturalistic inquiry as investigation where "first, no manipulation on the part of the inquirer is implied, and, second, the inquirer imposes no a priori units on the outcome" (p. 8). Guided by naturalistic inquiry strategies, I capitalized on emergent design flexibility to the greatest extent possible within the logistical constraints afforded

by the study and constructed information-rich cases studies (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002).

This study was conducted using purposeful sampling, as recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985), specifically maximum variation sampling (Patton, 2002) to identify two cases. In each of the two cases, I gathered data from a variety of sources over the course of one academic year, using interviews, observations, surveys, artifacts, and document reviews (Erlandson et al., 1993).

Collected data were analyzed using methods of data triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As explained in Chapter III, theory was used *a priori* to guide research design, as well as to provide terminology and a lens for understanding the phenomenon during data analysis. Final case studies contain thick, rich descriptions of the schools' cultures and experiences with school improvement planning as well as results following the implementation of the plan. Comparisons and contrasts between the case studies are also reported. Analysis was rich enough to allow for transferability to similar schools, depending on likeness of receiving contexts (Erlandson et. al., 1993), in Oklahoma or in similar states across the nation.

Significance of the Study

The case study analysis of underperforming schools that showed improvement provided insight into how school culture and activities of the school improvement planning teams led to positive changes in the school. The study has implications for research, theory, and practice.

Research

The study contributed to the body of literature on the School Improvement Planning Process by explaining the differences in cultural expectations, planning activities, and adaptation of implementation strategies between schools that have been successful in making progress through the School Improvement Planning Process and those that have not.

Theory

Grid and group theory was used to explain the differences in implementation of the School Improvement Planning Process in two schools. This study added to the usefulness in application of the theory in public schools. In addition, realities of implementation that could not be explained by grid and group theory were explored, providing additional information to the application of the theory in the School Improvement Planning Process.

Practice

While the results from the two cases cannot be generalized for the entire population of underperforming schools across the nation, they are transferable to schools that use a similar School Improvement Planning Process, including schools in the 26 states that utilize Indistar® from which the WISE Tool was adapted. In addition, the results illuminated themes, patterns, and processes that could be replicated by school improvement teams as high-probability strategies for success. The Oklahoma State Department of Education will be able to use the results of this study to improve the professional development and technical assistance provided to underperforming schools in order to assist them in adapting the SIP requirements to their cultural contexts.

Additionally, as Oklahoma and other states seek to implement the newly approved Differentiated Recognition, Accountability, and Support Systems authorized by the USDE's *ESEA Flexibility* waiver package, this study delivers implications for underperforming schools identified as Priority and Focus Schools required to use the WISE Tool to plan for implementation of interventions under the new system.

Definition of Terms

Academic Performance Index (API) – Oklahoma's accountability measurement prior to 2012, on a scale of 0-1500, and based on student achievement in mathematics on state-administered tests in grades 3-8 and Algebra I, student achievement in reading on state-administered tests in grades 3-8 and English II, participation in assessments, and attendance and/or graduation rate. For state accountability purposes, other factors were included in a school's API, but those factors are not included in federal adequate yearly progress determinations.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) – The accountability measures used for all schools, districts, and the State prior to 2012, which includes student achievement in mathematics, student achievement in reading, participation in assessments, and attendance and/or graduation rate. In Oklahoma, AYP was determined by API benchmarks. The benchmarks for mathematics and reading were set on a trajectory beginning with 2002 baseline state averages and ending at 1500 in 2014 as shown in Table 1. The benchmark for participation in assessments was 95%. The benchmark for attendance rate was 91.2% and is used for elementary and middle schools. The benchmark for graduation rate through 2010 was 67.8%. Graduation rate was used for high schools only. Both attendance rate and

graduation rate were used for districts and for the State. As a result of approval of Oklahoma's ESEA Flexibility waiver package, AYP will not be calculated in 2012 or succeeding years.

Table 1

Academic Performance Index (API) Benchmarks for Oklahoma Schools and Districts

	Academic Performance Index (API)	
Year	Mathematics	Reading
2002	648	622
2003	648	622
2004	790	768
2005	790	768
2006	790	768
2007	932	914
2008	932	914
2009	932	914
2010	1074	1060
2011	1074	1060
2012	1216	1206
2013	1358	1352
2014	1500	1500

Note. Academic Performance Index (API) Benchmarks are used to determine Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Data for this table is from the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE, 2002).

Corrective Action – A designation given to schools in Year 3 and Year 4 of identification on the School Improvement List under No Child Left Behind. In addition to writing a School Improvement Plan, schools in corrective action were required to plan for and implement radical actions that would increase substantially the likelihood that all students would meet or exceed the state's definition of proficient achievement (OSDE, n.d., "Corrective Action Addendum").

Culture – A complex connection between shared purpose and vision; rituals, traditions, and ceremonies; norms, values, beliefs, and assumptions; history and stories; architecture, artifacts, and symbols; special language and phrasing; and expectations for change and learning that make up the unwritten rules about how to think, act, and feel in an organization (Harris, 2005; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Peterson & Deal, 2002).

Culture of Candor – An organizational culture that values honest assessment of reality and frankness in offering suggestions for needed change.

Grid and Group – "Mary Douglas's typology of grid and group is a theoretical frame that assists in understanding school culture by providing a matrix for classification" (Ellis, 2006, p. 13).

Restructuring – A designation given to schools in Year 5 and beyond of identification on the School Improvement List under No Child Left Behind. In addition to writing a School Improvement Plan, schools in restructuring were required to plan for and implement intensive and far-reaching interventions to revamp completely the operational structure and governance of the school (OSDE, n.d., "Restructuring Addendum").

School Improvement – A designation given to schools that had not made AYP in the same target area (mathematics, reading, graduation rate, attendance, or participation) for at least two consecutive years. This designation was used for Year 1 and Year 2 of identification on the School Improvement List under No Child Left Behind.

School Improvement List – The list of underperforming schools identified for school improvement, corrective action, or restructuring under No Child Left Behind.

School Improvement Grant (SIG) – A three-year grant for the State's persistently lowest achieving schools, originally funded through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), requiring recipients to follow one of four models for rapid improvement: transformation, turnaround, restart, or closure.

School Improvement Plan (SIP) – The two-year plan submitted by each school identified for school improvement, corrective action, or restructuring including the required components identified in NCLB, or the plan submitted by each underperforming school identified through the State's Differentiated Recognition, Accountability, and Support System including the components identified in NCLB that are likely to be the most successful in the school.

Ways to Improve School Effectiveness (WISE) tool – An online tool adapted from Indistar®, which was created by the Center on Innovation and Improvement for use by states, districts, and schools to guide the School Improvement Planning Process. The tool includes assessment of current reality, development of a vision for the future, creation of action steps for achieving the vision, progress monitoring components, and peer coaching.

Summary

Chapter I described the need for a research study that explored the connections between school culture and improved student achievement as schools on the School Improvement List develop and implement their School Improvement Plans through the WISE Tool. This chapter also described the theoretical framework known as Grid and Group (Harris, 2005) that was used to analyze the implementation of the School Improvement Planning Process in two different schools, as well as the general procedures used for this study based on a naturalistic inquiry approach to qualitative research (Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Chapter II will review the literature relevant to this topic, and Chapter III will provide a detailed explanation of the methods used for the study. The two cases will be presented in Chapter IV; data will be analyzed in Chapter V in terms of Grid and Group; and conclusions and recommendations will be offered in Chapter VI.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Chapter I provided an overview of the proposed research study. This chapter highlights the literature available relevant to the School Improvement Planning Process. The chapter is outlined in three sections: (a) school improvement plans, which includes both a historical view of the continuous school improvement process, as well as the specific requirements of School Improvement Plans (SIPs) under No Child Left Behind and USDE's *ESEA Flexibility* waiver package for Oklahoma; (b) components of successful planning, which incorporates critical elements to the process of planning in addition to explanation of the Creative Tension Model, a framework for implementing those components; and (c) organizational culture, which examines school culture in general as well as Douglas's Grid and Group Typology.

School Improvement Plans

Even before passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002), which was the first federal accountability system to require underperforming schools to develop an improvement plan, schools and districts across the nation developed and implemented plans for continuous improvement. Beginning with the Correlates of Effective Schools (Lezotte, 1991), researchers sought to determine the characteristics of

schools that were successful in implementing significant change processes so that other schools might be able to replicate those conditions and navigate the complex world of school improvement (Harris, 2005; Hopkins, 2005; Protheroe, 2011).

Historical Strategies for Improvement

The educational system in the United States has a history of expanding opportunities for its citizenry. In the early part of the 20th Century, the number of secondary schools increased, allowing more students access to advanced education (U.S. Department of Education [USDE], n.d.). In the 1950s and 1960s, a focus on aeronautics, The Space Race, and military intelligence that could win the Cold War brought about an emphasis on improving and expanding mathematics and science curricula (USDE, n.d.). At the same time, landmark court cases including *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) brought attention to the need for improving the equality of education offered to minority students, particularly in low-income communities. The end of the 20th Century marked a shift toward standards-based instruction and student learner outcomes. Each of these educational advancements offered the promise of better education for America's children.

Globally, the past several decades have brought increasing levels of demand for change on educational institutions (Hargreaves, Lieberman, Fullan, & Hopkins, 2005). According to Hopkins (2005), too many school improvement strategies only tinkered at the edges of reform; therefore, research on school improvement had to expand to include the change process that schools, districts, states, and nations underwent; structural, managerial, and policy changes that influence student achievement; and classroom practices. Hopkins defined school improvement as "a distinct approach to educational change that enhances student outcomes *as well as* strengthening the school's capacity for

managing change" (p. 2-3). Hargreaves et al. noted this continuous improvement process as "multiple, complex and sometimes contradictory" (p. x). No longer did schools approach implementation of one strategy at a time; rather, they worked to incorporate multiple improvement strategies at once.

Researchers involved in the Effective Schools initiative formalized principles on which many of the school improvement efforts since have been founded. Lezotte (1991) identified seven Correlates of Effective Schools and provided both first- and second-generation implementation practices of each to show that "school improvement is an endless journey" (p. 2). The Correlates of Effective Schools are:

1. Safe and Orderly Environment,
2. Climate of High Expectations for Success,
3. Instructional Leadership,
4. Clear and Focused Mission,
5. Opportunity to Learn and Student Time on Task,
6. Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress, and
7. Home-School Relations.

Although the wording may not be identical, the Correlates of Effective Schools were the foundation for requirements in many state and federal accountability systems and educational reform programs.

Since that time, some researchers of school improvement have focused more on the processes necessary for improvement, while others have focused more on the classroom strategies that should be implemented. For example, the National Association for Secondary School Principals (2004) focused on the roles that principals must play and

the attitudes that teachers must have in order for improvements to be rooted and sustainable throughout a school building or district. On the other hand, Marzano (2003) provided a list of research-based instructional practices that, when implemented in the right conditions, are likely to result in greater learning in any individual classroom.

Reform research revealed a need to focus on results in order to provide feedback to teachers and leaders for continuous improvement (Schlechty, 2002; Schmoker, 1999). Results of student learning should include both standardized test scores (Schmoker, 1999) and other forms of student achievement data, such as performance on classroom assignments (Schlechty, 2002). Schlechty showed that collaborative teams of teachers and administrators who looked at completed student work and analyzed what students actually did on the work were able to improve their classroom instruction more rapidly than those teachers who looked at summative, cumulative, and aggregated classroom grades and standardized test scores.

Collaboration is a theme that runs through the research on school improvement. Not only should teachers collaborate on development of assignments and assessments (Schlechty, 2002), but teachers should also collaborate on development of school goals (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004), activities that will result in achieving school goals (Marzano, 2007), instructional strategies that improve student achievement (DuFour et al., 2004; Marzano, 2003), support systems and interventions for struggling learners (DuFour et al., 2004), support systems and interventions for struggling teachers (Marzano, 2007), and implementation of schoolwide improvement plans and reform strategies (DuFour et al., 2004). Collaborative groups, also known as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), need to include teachers across classrooms, departments,

and grade levels (DuFour et al., 2004). PLCs provide an opportunity for teachers to become learners again, along with their colleagues, by opening up conversations about best practices. PLCs assist schools in moving beyond "Islands of Excellence," where individual teachers or small groups find incredible success but schoolwide achievement is low (Reeves, 2006).

Collaboration provides the springboard for development of a common language of instruction among all faculty members in a school by incorporating proven classroom practices with proven systemic practices necessary for sustainable growth (Marzano, 2007). A common language of instruction is based in research-proven instructional strategies and teacher behaviors that impact student results (Marzano, 2003). Marzano (2003) provided a list of research-based instructional practices that were likely to result in greater student learning based on a meta-analysis of research on classroom experiences. As will be seen later in this chapter, this list became even more important for schools not making AYP under No Child Left Behind because of the requirement that their SIPs must include research-based instructional strategies.

In order to incorporate research-based instructional strategies systematically across a school, building and district leaders are critical (Marzano & Waters, 2009; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Reeves, 2006, 2009; Sizer, 2004). Reeves (2006, 2009) explained that there are four types of leaders: losing, lucky, learning, and leading. He showed that in order to lead improvement in the school, the principal must have an understanding of what causes results; otherwise, replication of success will be unlikely. A leading principal can learn from the "Islands of Excellence" and use the influence of position to replicate those practices into systematic improvement processes schoolwide.

Reeves's research was supported by two meta-analyses, one of 69 studies (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005) and the other of 27 studies (Marzano & Waters, 2009) spanning 35 years. The first study found that school leadership teams had direct and indirect impact on student achievement. The second study determined that district leadership teams had direct and indirect impact on student achievement. In both cases, they reported on the characteristics, behaviors, and actions that leaders should implement to receive the highest student achievement gains.

School Improvement Requirements Under No Child Left Behind

At the turn of the 21st Century, the American education system faced yet another opportunity for growth. In the face of declining international comparisons, inequities and budgetary disparities in school systems across the country, a rising dropout rate, and the need for a more educated workforce in a technological economy, the Bush administration ushered in reform through reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002). Heralded as the mechanism requiring all schools to provide a high-quality education for every child (USDE, n.d.), NCLB established both incentives for improvement and sanctions when improvement did not occur.

NCLB offered a promise to American citizens that the public education system could "close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind" (NCLB, 2002). This legislation had the express purpose of ensuring "that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments" (NCLB, 2002). In conjunction

with legislation that targeted specific student groups, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA), NCLB provided a blueprint for establishing a high-quality education for every child, regardless of the school the child attended.

With the passage of NCLB (2002), the voluntary improvement process became mandatory for schools on each state's School Improvement List. The thorough research that began with Lezotte's Correlates of Effective Schools (1991) and continued through Reeves's leadership analysis (2009) began to shift its focus from voluntary improvement strategies to those required by law. According to NCLB (2002), each school must develop a School Improvement Plan (SIP). The SIP must be developed in consultation with parents, school staff, district personnel, and outside experts; be completed within three months of being identified; cover at least a two-year period; and:

1. incorporate strategies based on scientifically based research that will strengthen the core academic subjects in the school and address the specific academic issues that caused the school to be identified for school improvement, and may include a strategy for the implementation of a comprehensive school reform model;
2. adopt policies and practices concerning the school's core academic subjects that have the greatest likelihood of ensuring that all groups of students enrolled in the school will meet the State's proficient level of achievement on the State academic assessment by the end of the 2013-2014 school year;
3. provide an assurance that the school will spend not less than 10 percent of its Title I funds for each fiscal year that the school is in school improvement

status, for the purpose of providing to the school's teachers and principal high-quality professional development that —

a. directly addresses the academic achievement problem that caused the school to be identified for school improvement;
b. meets the requirements for professional development activities; and
c. is provided in a manner that affords increased opportunity for participating in that professional development;

4. specify how the Title I professional development funds will be used to remove the school from school improvement status;
5. establish specific annual, measurable objectives, also known as SMART goals, for continuous and substantial progress by each group of students enrolled in the school that will ensure that all such groups of students will, in accordance with adequate yearly progress, meet the State's proficient level of achievement on the State academic assessment by the end of the 2013-2014 school year;
6. describe how the school will provide written notice about the identification to parents of each student enrolled in such school, in a format and, to the extent practicable, in a language that the parents can understand;
7. specify the responsibilities of the school, the district, and the State Department of Education, including the technical assistance to be provided by the district;
8. include strategies to promote effective parental involvement in the school;
9. incorporate, as appropriate, activities before school, after school, during the summer, and during any extension of the school year; and

10. incorporate a teacher mentoring program.

This SIP structure was designed to assist school leadership in assessing strengths and weaknesses within the current conditions of the school; identifying research-based strategies to improve student performance in reading, mathematics, graduation rate, and other academic factors; and establishing processes for implementing those strategies so that all students reach desired academic outcomes.

The prescriptive nature of SIPs under NCLB was intended to lead to improved student achievement (Cepela, 2007). Several case studies (Achievement Gap Initiative [AGI] Conference Report, 2010; Beam, 2008; Buckley, 2007; Cepela, 2007; Furrow, 2008; Ishibashi, 2008; Parker-Moore, 2006) and quantitative analyses of hundreds of schools (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Pritchett, 2007; Reeves, 2006; Oberman & Symonds, 2005 as cited in Reeves, 2006), brought to light the unintended consequences of prescriptive requirements of SIPs. Not only do the NCLB requirements lead to similarly structured and formatted SIPs across many schools (Cepela, 2007; Reeves, 2006), but the SIPs tend to be narrowly focused on mathematics and reading (Cepela, 2007; Furrow, 2008), to limit the potential reforms implemented in a school (Beam, 2008; Cepela, 2007; Furrow, 2008; Parker-Moore, 2006), and to be less thoroughly implemented when prescribed by the law or an outside entity (Beam, 2008; Parker-Moore, 2006; Pritchett, 2007; Reeves, 2006).

The Achievement Gap Initiative (AGI) Conference Report (2010) demonstrated the change process that 15 exemplary high schools underwent. The report noted that exemplary schools did not replicate prepackaged programs, but instead, leadership teams studied successful programs and applied the practices and principles in new ways to fit

the unique needs of the school. Yet, because schools are required to implement their SIPs with fidelity, Furrow (2008) found that few schools attempted innovative strategies if they had not previously been entered into the SIP and approved. Of those strategies included in a SIP, Pritchett (2007) discovered that the level of implementation was based on teachers' perceptions of which strategies were most likely to raise student achievement. Often, specific interventions or reform strategies are required to be included in a school's SIP, either by the district, state, or NCLB itself. In these cases, the required components are less likely to be perceived as effective than SIP components that are included based on teacher and local administrator choice (Beam, 2008). Beam also found that teachers did not attribute any improvement in curriculum and instruction to those components of the plan that were mandated by the state or outside consultants. Similarly, Parker-Moore (2006) found that teachers believed these requirements devalued their experience and expertise as teachers, forcing them to focus on only a limited amount of content and pedagogy in order to forge the way toward Adequate Yearly Progress.

Positively, the prescriptive nature of SIPs has also led to focused attention on low achieving and underserved subgroups of students, such as English language learners, students with disabilities, students in poverty, and minority students, all of which had previously not had the same educational experiences as other students (AGI, 2010; Cepela, 2007; Parker-Moore, 2006). In addition, many schools have found the NCLB requirements to result in continuous analysis of data and data-driven decision-making (Buckley, 2007; Cepela, 2007; Parker-Moore, 2006); increased communication among faculty members and between schools and communities (Buckley, 2007); continuous

professional learning of teachers and administrators (Buckley, 2007; Reeves, 2006); and improved student achievement (Cepela, 2007; Reeves, 2006).

Reeves (2006) found that the contents and format of school improvement plans have little impact on student achievement. In the Planning, Implementation, and Monitoring (PIM) Study, the "prettiness" or completeness of SIPs was inversely related to student achievement. "Messy" plans were more likely to result in improved student achievement. The critical factors in improving student achievement were the ideals and beliefs of school leaders, monitoring of student achievement and evaluation of plan implementation, and application of research-based strategies.

Goodwin (2008) explained, "What is in your plan is probably less important—as long as it focuses on using research-based strategies to address student needs—than how well your staff implements it" (p.1). Research has found, however, that it is important to ensure that the components of a SIP are grounded in research-based strategies that are likely to increase student achievement (Marzano, 2003, 2007). These strategies include instructional improvement practices as well as systemic improvement strategies, such as (a) increased instructional time in math and reading, (b) common planning time for teams of teachers, (c) instructional coaches to model effective strategies, (d) collaborative meetings focused on data analysis, (e) using student data to create interventions for specific students, and (f) implementing standards-aligned instruction (Capela, 2007).

NCLB does not include a requirement to prepare for unforeseen circumstances and allow for plan adaptation with mid-course corrections, which has been found to be critical (Buckley, 2007; Ishibashi, 2008; Spiro, 2009). In fact, the NCLB requirements for SIP approval by district and state staff members make it very difficult for schools to

modify their plans once they have been approved. In order to implement appropriate modifications to SIPs, schools must collect and analyze data on a consistent basis (Buckley, 2007; Reeves, 2006). One Maryland middle school that was able to make AYP for two consecutive years, and hence come off of the School Improvement List, continuously collected and analyzed data in order to know where to focus improvement initiatives. While "reading became a clear instructional focus for all teachers and students" (Buckley, 2007, p. 89), the survey data were used to make changes to the SIP to accommodate the needed shifts in focus over time. Unfortunately, Ishibashi (2008) found that few schools in the district that she studied had the skills and building leadership necessary to analyze the data as required. In fact, the district personnel placed a low priority on providing training to school staff on the use of data and assessment technology needed to do such analysis and curriculum improvement consistently.

Statewide System of Support, Including the WISE Tool

State education agencies are required by NCLB (2002) to provide support to schools receiving Title I funds, and in particular, schools that are on School Improvement Lists. Redding (2009) suggested that Statewide Systems of Support (SSOS) must include a balance of providing incentives to stimulate action, building capacity to increase competency and self-efficacy, and offering opportunities to increase willingness and innovation. When state education agencies balance these three components with one another, Redding found that they led to improved student achievement in the schools being supported. Oklahoma's Statewide System of Support (OSDE, 2010b) provides this balance and adheres to the requirement of NCLB to include the following approaches:

1. Establishing school support teams for assignment to, and working in, schools that are in school improvement, corrective action, or restructuring status;
2. Providing such support in order to ensure the effectiveness of such teams;
3. Designating and using distinguished teachers and principals who are chosen from Title I schools that have been especially successful in improving academic achievement; and
4. Devising additional approaches to providing the assistance, such as providing assistance through institutions of higher education or other local consortia and private providers of scientifically based technical assistance.

The OSDE is able to use a portion of the Title I School Improvement Funds to provide ongoing assistance to schools through School Support Teams, professional development conferences, research studies, and contributions to schools' professional libraries.

In anticipation of a larger number of schools being identified for the School Improvement Lists in 2010 and 2011 as a result of changes to Oklahoma's accountability system and increased annual targets under NCLB, the OSDE acquired the WISE Tool to assist in the School Improvement Planning Process as discussed in Chapter I. The performance indicators included in the WISE Tool encompass all of the required elements of SIPs as defined in NCLB and are based on research regarding continuous and rapid school improvement.

One of the interesting observations of former OSDE staff (J. W. Watson, personal communication, February 22, 2011) and Cepela (2007) is the discrepancy between the requirements and supports for Title I and non-Title I schools in School Improvement. While the Statewide System of Support was intended to provide resources and support

structures for all schools regardless of Title I status, funding and sanctions for School Improvement are much more closely associated with Title I schools. This often leaves non-Title I schools searching for support outside of formal structures provided by the state education agency for developing and implementing their SIPs.

Lack of Progress in Some Schools

Throughout the years since implementation of NCLB, some Oklahoma schools have been unable to make significant progress in all academic areas. These schools have continued to be on the School Improvement List for many years without seeing major change, despite the support provided by the OSDE and the School Improvement Planning Process.

Oklahoma schools are not unique in this behavior. The PEN Hearings (Public Education Network, 2004) showed that students are often the most keenly aware of the lack of progress being made in their schools. Most poignantly, students explained how marking a school as a failing school, especially when funding in some states is cut for those schools labeled as failing schools, may be one of the greatest reasons it is still a failing school. Students explained how parents of high performing students refuse to have their children attend failing schools, how successful teachers no longer want to teach in failing schools, and how funding follows innovative and successful programs in schools that are not failing. These conditions make improvement even more challenging.

Schools reaching their sixth year of not making Adequate Yearly Progress are required by NCLB to restructure. Restructuring options are limited, forcing schools to select strategies that will make a rapid change in student achievement. The Center on Education Policy (2009) found that schools that made progress through restructuring:

- used multiple, coordinated strategies, which they revised over time;
- used data frequently to make decisions about instruction and regroup students by skill level;
- replaced staff, which in many cases led to improvement but sometimes had unintended negative consequences; and
- were able to overcome setbacks and use the timelines provided to make change.

Schools that did not make progress through restructuring implemented similar processes but were unable to overcome obstacles within given timelines.

In 2010, the U.S. Department of Education provided additional funding through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) to assist schools that have become persistently low-achieving schools. The competitive School Improvement Grant (SIG) required schools to implement comprehensive reform strategies, following four models approved by the U.S. Department of Education. In each case, schools had to revise their current SIP to accommodate the comprehensive school reform strategies. Research on the effectiveness of the comprehensive school reform strategies in conjunction with SIPs in SIG schools is just beginning (Brinson, Kowal, & Hassel, 2008; Walberg, 2007; S. Redding, personal communication, February 13, 2011; R. Fish, personal communication, June 17, 2011).

Components of Successful Planning

The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement issued a policy brief for schools related to the School Improvement Planning Process (Jerald, 2005). In it, they stated that schools must incorporate four distinct stages of SIP implementation in

a collaborative schoolwide process in order to be effective. These four stages are: (1) organizing for improvement, (2) planning for improvement, (3) implementing improvement plans, and (4) sustaining improvement efforts.

Research has shown that the following components of the planning process are necessary for successful implementation:

- Honest assessment of current reality is a critical starting point.
- School staff must have a shared vision for an attainable but aspirational future.
- Completed plans begin with specific action steps and realistic timelines that are monitored for implementation and desired outcomes.
- Successful planning is composed of widespread stakeholder buy-in.

Research supporting each of these components, as well as a model for implementing these components in a systematic framework, will be discussed in this section.

Assessment, Vision, Action Plans, and Stakeholder Engagement

Before any change can begin, leaders must establish a readiness for change among staff members (Fixsen, 2009). Part of the readiness for change is an understanding or recognition that change is needed (Buckley, 2007; Fixsen, 2009), which can be established through honest assessment of current conditions (Beam, 2008; Fixsen, 2009; Galpin & Whittington, 2009). Honest assessment must come from both internal staff (Buckley, 2007; Hoachlander & Mandel, 1998) and external evaluators (Beam, 2008). Mixed messages and whitewashed analyses only lead to confusion and lack of improvement. Although some people would assume that identification on the School Improvement List is enough awareness that change is needed, that is often not the case. Buckley (2007) found that faculty members might not be concerned by School

Improvement designations. The principal had to "establish a need for change that the faculty understood and could buy into" (p. 52). School leaders must allow staff members to see the needed change for themselves prior to implementing a SIP.

Honest assessment from internal staff requires a culture of candor where it is safe to share perceptions of reality that are not pristine (Galpin & Whittington, 2009). Hoachlander and Mandel (1998) describe the value of this culture:

> A school that is willing to examine itself critically is one that will increase the odds that its students will succeed. . . . The availability of such information can lead to a new and healthy conversation among the faculty—one that promotes reflection on practice, healthy skepticism about trendy ideas, and a school culture that values professional knowledge and expertise and finds ways to channel and use it to yield the greatest good for the greatest number. (p. iv)

Honest assessment of current reality can then lead to a shared vision for the future and action steps to attain that vision.

Buckley (2007) described a school's vision for the future as the "idea of what a school should look like and how a school should function" (p. 89). Schools that are successful in implementing change place great importance on developing a shared vision (Lasseter, 2007; Myhr, 2008) and developing a SIP with specific action steps that align with that vision (Myhr, 2008). As key change agents, successful building principals develop professional communities seeking to achieve building-wide educational standards for their students (Myhr, 2008), establish expectations that all staff members participate in the development and implementation of the SIP (Buckley, 2007), and

empower teachers to implement SIP strategies that will lead to improved student achievement and teacher self-efficacy (Lasseter, 2007).

Creative Tension Model

More than two decades ago, Fritz (1989) provided research that incorporates these components and offered strategies for implementing plans that result in organizational improvement over time. He defined structural tension and organizational creation to explain why organizations cannot reach their desired outcomes. Fritz's explanation has been used to improve governmental organizations (Coe, 1997), military units (Yin & Lee, 2006), large businesses and non-profit organizations (Senge, 2003), corporations undergoing mergers (Large, 1994), medical laboratories (Kolins, 2009), the creative and fine arts (Fritz, 1989), environmental resources (Coe, 1999), transformational leadership (Yin & Lee, 2006; Senge, 2003), personal aspirations (Fritz, 1989), computer interfaces (Graham, 1997), and public education (Burrello, Hoffman, & Murray, 2005).

Kim (2006) formalized the work of Fritz (1989) into the Creative Tension Model to show organizations that they cannot make sustainable, productive change unless they have first honestly assessed their current conditions and set a vision for the future that is significantly different from their current reality. The ability of school personnel to honestly describe their school's current reality requires a culture of candor where there is freedom and safety to admit shortcomings (Collins, 2001; Fritz, 1989; Kim, 2006; Senge, 1994; Welch, 2005). The ability of school personnel to establish a high-quality vision for the future requires a culture of excellence where there is a collaborative focus on student achievement and an expectation of success (Fritz, 1989; Kim, 2006; Senge, 1994). Kim's

model has been used in major corporations and has recently been introduced to education through the Council of Chief State School Officers' assistance to states (CCSSO, 2011).

The Creative Tension Model, as shown in Figure 5, explains that a gap develops when an organization holds a vision for its future that is different from its current reality. When the gap is significantly wide, it generates structural tension that needs to be resolved. In the same way that a stretched rubber band holds tension that desires to be released, significant structural tension creates a desire for change. For the tension to be great enough to inspire creative change, the vision for the future must be something that the organization truly cares about, and the current reality must be described with brutal honesty (Fritz, 1989; Kim, 2006).

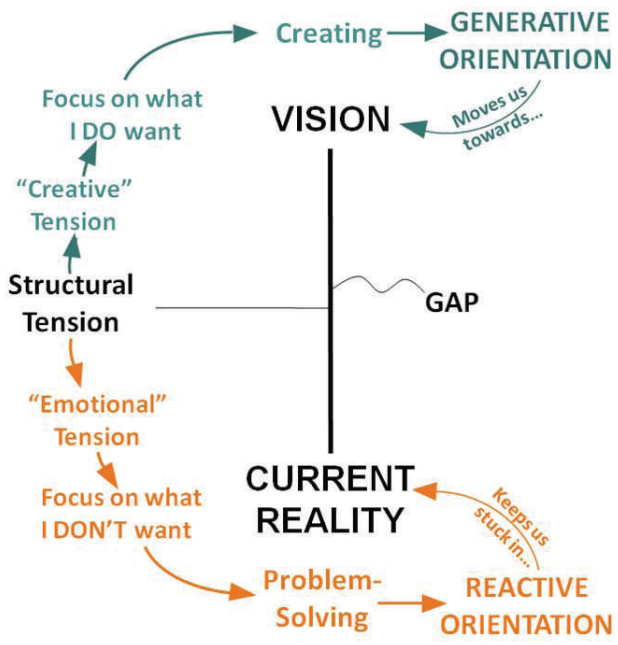

Figure 5: Creative Tension Model. From Kim (2006).

When the organization focuses on the vision, a generative orientation ensues and creativity abounds, leading the organization to realize its vision. When the organization focuses on the current reality or when the structural tension is not strong enough, a reactive orientation ensues and the organization is stuck in its current reality (Fritz, 1989; Kim, 2006). The wider the gap between the current reality and the vision for the future is, the greater the structural tension will be, making available more creative energy that can be channeled toward reaching the organization's vision (Moyer and Scheerer, n.d.).

Organizational Culture

Reeves (2009) defined culture as "the way we do things around here" (p. 37). Organizational culture has been shown to impact implementation of improvement efforts in a variety of settings. In education, it is clear that the culture of the school has a direct impact on the effectiveness of implementation of School Improvement Plans. This section reviews the research on the role of school culture in the change process and the use of Douglas's (1982, 1986) grid and group typology to analyze school cultures and to adapt research-based strategies for improvement in various types of schools.

The Role of Culture in the Change Process

Restructuring a school is not enough to produce student achievement success (Newman & Associates as cited in Deal & Peterson, 1999). "The greatest effect we have on student achievement is created by establishing a school with a positive climate . . . in which no one wants to let others down" (Thacker, Bell, & Schargel, 2009, p. 69). Student achievement is predicated upon a culture that expects that all children will learn; an environment that provides the conditions so that all children can learn; and a climate that allows teachers the freedom to focus on teaching children rather than on other

distractions to the teaching and learning process (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Thacker et al., 2009). Successful schools exhibit an "ethos of caring, sharing, and mutual help among staff, and between staff and students, based on respect, trust, and shared power relations among staff" (Deal & Peterson, 1999, p. 7).

Deal and Peterson (1999) identified six functions and impacts of culture, one of which is: "Culture fosters successful change and improvement efforts" (p. 8). The other functions of culture include:

- fostering effectiveness and productivity;
- improving collegial relationships and collaboration between staff members so that better communication and problem-solving practices can take hold;
- building commitment and a shared identity for all adults and children;
- amplifying the life – energy, motivation, and vitality – of the school and its community; and
- increasing the focus of all actions and decisions on those things that are most important.

Deal and Peterson noted that there is great pressure for the education system to become more like successful businesses. Successful businesses have a shared culture, leading their employees to be dedicated to their work and driven to continuous improvement of the company (Collins, 2001). This is the attitude that is required of schools in order to have continuous improvement; there must be a shared culture.

Because culture is such a critical component of school improvement, it is important to understand what elements comprise culture. A school's vision and corporate values are the bedrock of culture (Deal & Peterson, 1999). These are established through

mission and purpose statements as well as values, beliefs, assumptions, and norms. On top of this foundation, schools put their cultures into practice through rituals, traditions, ceremonies, and celebrations. Often, school cultures are shaped by myths, folklore, stories, and community and historical roots dating back several generations. Symbols and signs, including logos, mascots, architectural elements, posters, and even living legends, shape the way people view the culture of the school on a daily, and sometimes subconscious, level. School leaders have the ability to manipulate the school culture to some degree over time (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Peterson & Deal, 2002). This means that the culture can be changed to create conditions that are ripe for school improvement. Reeves (2009) reported on four imperatives of cultural change:

1. School leadership must determine what will not and cannot change. Often, these are the deeply held beliefs and practices that are not worth the effort of removing, or if removed will cause harm to the system. Stability is important in the change process.
2. School leadership will shape school culture through their actions, not just with speeches, announcements, and posters. It takes time for teachers, students, parents, and community members to understand a change in culture, but repeated actions from senior leadership supporting the changed culture will underscore the verbal expression of mission statements.
3. School leadership must understand the culture well enough to select the right tools to change it. Some cultures can be changed with subtle improvements to the building grounds; others will need major overhauls that disrupt the day-to-

day operations. Overkill in cultural change can be just as damaging as allowing toxic cultures to continue uninterrupted.

4. School leadership must be willing to get their hands dirty doing the work of school improvement everyday over an extended period of time. Doing what Reeves terms "scut work" will show school staff and students that the leadership believes what they say.

Reeves showed that these strategies could be implemented in order to lead a cultural change that will allow for school improvement.

In some instances, however, there is not enough time to wait for the culture to change so that school improvements can take root. In those instances, school leaders must understand the role of the school culture in order to work within it while leading drastic school improvement efforts (Harris, 2005).

Grid and Group

"Mary Douglas's typology of grid and group is a theoretical frame that assists in understanding school culture by providing a matrix for classification" (Ellis, 2006, p. 13). Douglas's matrix (1982, 1986) consists of the vertical dimension, grid, and the horizontal dimension, group, which separate the matrix into four quadrants. While the exact descriptions of the organizational prototypes represented by each quadrant have evolved over time (Douglas, 1989), the two dimensions paint a picture of continual variation along both dimensions with the classifications providing descriptors of organizations falling within the range of each quadrant.

As explained in Chapter I, the grid dimension describes "the degree to which an individual's choices are constrained within a social system by imposed prescriptions such

as role expectations, rules, and procedures" (Harris, 2005, p. 34). When teachers and administrators are controlled by rules and regulations, are given very little autonomy or decision-making power, and are clearly separated by job duties and levels of authority, the school is said to have a strong-grid environment. On the other hand, when teachers and administrators have a great deal of freedom, make most of their own choices, and do not experience major role distinctions, the school is said to have a weak-grid environment.

The group dimension of Douglas's matrix describes "the degree to which people value collective relationships and the extent to which they are committed to the larger social unit" (Harris, 2005, p. 36). When teachers and administrators have a holistic view of their connection to the organization, when goals and objectives are set for the entire organization and responsibility for reaching them is owned by all members, when there is pressure by the group to conform to the norms of the culture, and when the survival of the group is more important than the survival of each individual, the school is said to have a strong-group environment. On the opposite end of the group scale, when the focus of relationships is to enhance the individual's status or quality of life, when there is no expectation that individuals conform to social norms of the group, when individual goals and objectives outweigh the group goals and objectives, and when the group exists only to the extent that it increases the survival rates of its members, the school is said to have a weak-group environment.

Douglas's matrix provides an opportunity to typologize two interactions in one framework. Both action and thought are conveyed in the grid and group dimensions. Figure 6 provides a visual explanation of Douglas's grid and group matrix, combining the

terms provided by Harris (2005) and the descriptors provided by Douglas (1999), for each of the four types of schools:

- Bureaucratic: weak group, strong grid;
- Corporate: strong group, strong grid;
- Individualist: weak group, weak grid; and
- Collectivist: strong group, weak grid.

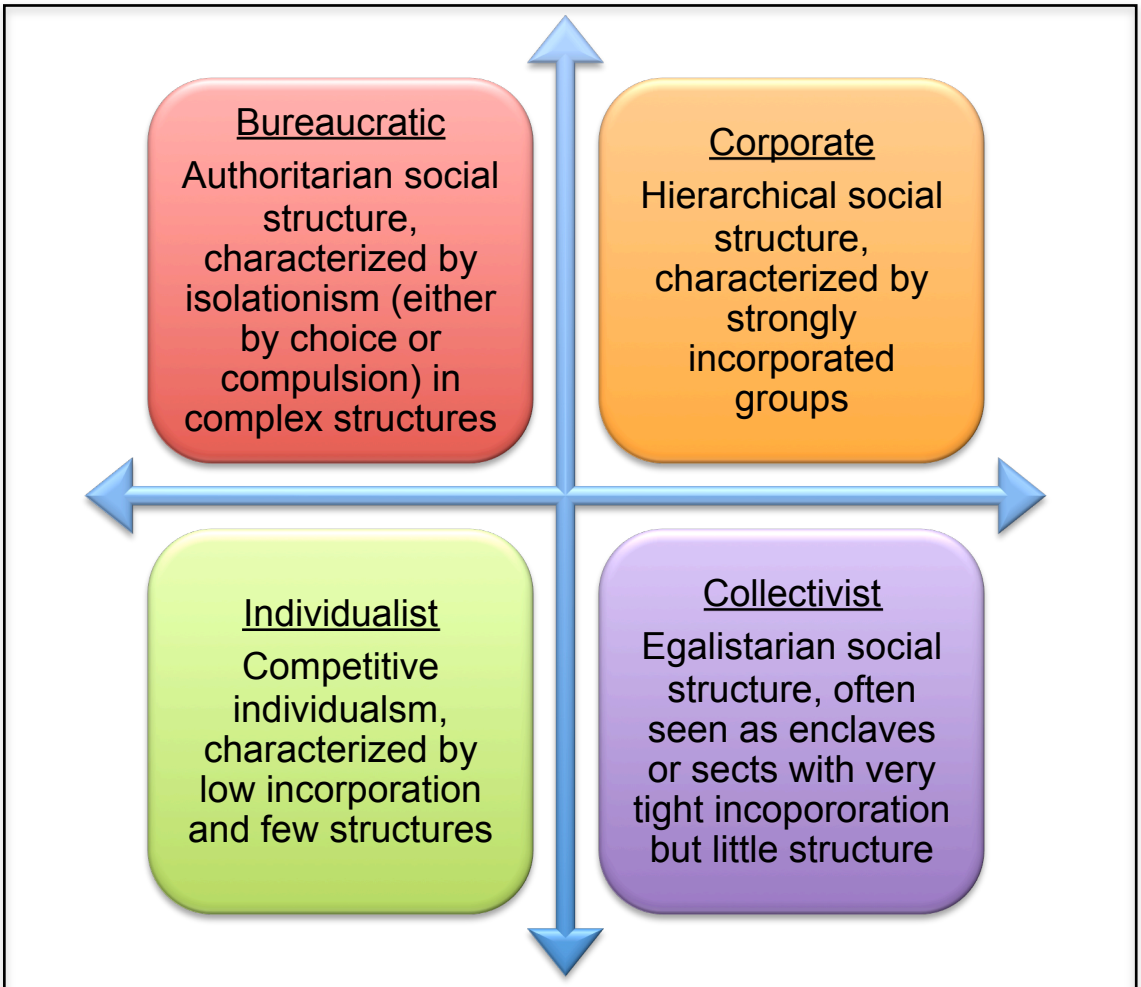

Figure 6: Descriptions of social environments as expressed by grid and group typology in Douglas (1999) and Harris (2005).

Harris (2005) argued that initiatives, programs, and practices that are highly successful in one type of school might not be successful in another type of school because the grid and group (structure and incorporation) may not adapt to the new idea. Harris stated that school leaders must understand the grid and group dimensions of their school sites and adapt new ideas to the existing culture. In his study of school restructuring through decentralization, site-based management, shared decision-making, teacher empowerment, and schools as communities, Harris found that some schools easily implemented such models of authority and control while others could not or would not.

The difference was not in the quality of training received; rather, it was in the implementation of the change based on the school culture. Schools that would be classified somewhere in the collectivist quadrant could easily adapt to shared decision-making and collaborative leadership without needing to change any of the practices they were taught. Unlike collectivist schools, schools that would be classified somewhere in the bureaucratic quadrant could not accept changing roles and values to the degree that was taught in professional workshops on teacher empowerment. In these schools, leaders had to modify the strategy to fit within the cultural expectations of the school or choose not to implement the strategy at all.

This understanding of adapting strategies to the school type is supported by the AGI Conference Report (2010) discussed earlier in this chapter. The report noted that all 15 exemplary high schools in the study did not replicate prepackaged programs, but instead, leadership teams studied successful programs and applied the practices and principles in new ways to fit the unique needs of the school.

Research at Oklahoma State University for more than a decade has used Douglas's grid and group typology to understand these phenomena. The remainder of this section discusses how this research has been used: (a) to describe various educational settings as well as individuals, (b) to explain similarities between settings based on cultural classifications, and (c) to explain differences between levels of program implementation. Lastly, a limitation of the typology will be revealed.

Describe educational settings. Douglas's (1982) grid and group typology has been used to provide insight into the thought-patterns and behaviors within various educational settings, including an alternative school, with a "revolving door" approach to enrollment (Ellis, 2006); four short-term, undergraduate, online courses (Case, 2010); and four successful, rural schools (Diel, 1998). The alternative school had low-group and low-grid characteristics, which allowed the researcher to understand the successes and failures of the school (Ellis, 2006). The four online courses had low-group and high-grid characteristics, which opposed other research indicating that community engagement was critical for online course completion (Case, 2010). The four rural schools all exhibited the characteristics described by Sergiovani as successful schools, but each fell in a different quadrant of Douglas's grid and group typology; therefore, grid and group can be used to give specificity to distinguish between schools with similar experiences (Diel, 1998). It is also clear that none of the school types in Douglas's model is worse than any other because all educational settings can be successful when strategies match the school environment (Diel, 1998; Case, 2010).

Describe individuals. When describing students and educators, grid and group was found to be helpful in understanding the preferences of individuals (Kautz, 2008;

Purvis, 1998). Educational preferences are likely to be based more on societal culture or past experience than on race (Kautz, 2008; Purvis, 1998), gender (Purvis, 1998), or school grade configuration (Purvis, 1998). Kautz (2008) studied 15 international students and professors from countries all over the world. Thirteen responded in ways that classified them as high-group, showing a preference for group cohesion and support for survival rather than individual competition in educational experiences. Purvis (1998) interviewed 12 teachers from several schools. There were no patterns to their classification based on ethnicity (white versus non-white) or gender, and there were only slight patterns based on school type (elementary or secondary).

Explain similarities. Balensiefen (2004) and Chastain (2005) both used Douglas's (1982) typology to understand a phenomenon occurring in similar schools. When schools were similar in culture, they exhibited the same phenomenon. Balensiefen found that leaders in collectivist organizations tend to have longer than average tenures because the leadership style of the superintendent enhanced community norms and feelings of common goals in the low-grid, high-group environments. These leaders viewed themselves as part of the group working toward those common goals rather than as outsiders imposing rules and regulations on those in the hierarchy functioning underneath them. Chastain found that school improvement strategies were successful in corporate (high-grid, high-group) high schools when teacher buy-in and principal leadership supported the improvement efforts. More than just "granting permission" to implement a strategy, principals in high-grid environments needed to provide strong support for strategies they believed should be implemented.

Explain differences in implementation of site-based management. Cultural characteristics of schools influenced the implementation of district-required or state-required, site-based management approaches (Barnes, 1998; Boettger, 1997; Kanaly, 2002; Morris, 1997). "The cultural climates produced specific grid and group characteristics which acted upon individual teachers and principals, influencing the successful implementation of site-based management" (Boettger, 1997, p. 106). Despite the fact that schools in the same district or state were given the same instructions and requirements, implementation varied greatly. Specifically, low-grid environments encouraged teacher voice in curriculum, staffing, and budget decisions, while high-grid environments discouraged teacher voice regardless of mandates (Morris, 1997). Further, low-grid environments involved newcomer teachers, while veterans dominated decision-making in high-grid environments, expecting newcomers to wait their turn to have decision-making authority (Kanaly, 2002). In some cases, however, the requirements forced the schools to act more similarly than they would have if left to their own choosing based on their grid placement (Barnes, 1998).

Explain differences in implementation of instructional technology. Instructional technology (IT) was also found to have differences of implementation based on the cultural contexts of the schools as explained by grid and group theory (Limwudhikraijirath, 2009; Spitzer, 2004; Stansberry, 2001). In individualist (low-grid, low-group) environments, a wide variation in teacher implementation of technology existed, whereas corporate (high-grid, high-group) environments were more consistent with very little IT implementation throughout the school (Spitzer, 2004). This aligns with the notion that teachers in individualist cultures have much autonomy to make their

own curricular and instructional decisions, while the control of administrators over budget, curriculum, and instruction decisions in corporate cultures leave teachers with little choice about greater implementation if administrators do not see IT as a priority.

Although Limwudhikraijirath (2009) found Douglas's typology could explain why participants in a Thailand-based study did or did not prefer computer-aided instruction, Stansberry (2001) found that grid and group was not completely predictive of IT use. General patterns tended to be shaped by the grid and group categorization of the educational setting, but individuals within the setting diverted from the norm of their culture to employ IT when needed. Stansberry believed that the stage of change regarding IT use could have an impact on the variation. She speculated that when the colleges she studied were in a more static stage of IT implementation, there would be more consistency between faculty members on their frequency and type of IT use.

Explain differences in implementation of professional growth strategies. Douglas's (1982) grid and group theory was used to explain variations in faculty mentoring (Murer, 2002) and professional development reform (Chitapong, 2005). While grid and group did not explain different behaviors related to faculty mentoring, it did explain different rationales for the same behavior (Murer, 2002). Very little faculty mentoring occurred in three university departments studied. In departments with high-group characteristics, individual mentorship was not portrayed as being for the good of the group; therefore, it was not given a priority. In low-group departments, mentors did not see the relationship as benefiting them; therefore, they did not make it a high priority. In low-grid environments, female faculty members were not required to participate in mentoring newer faculty members, so they chose not to. And in high-grid environments,

department chairs did not see the value in mentorship, so they did not require or encourage the practice.

Chitapong (2005) found that two schools in Thailand had different preferences for professional development programs, which could be explained by their grid and group analysis. Both schools were low-grid, but one was high-group and the other was low-group. The high-group school had been trained in traditional professional development programs and did not wish to change this approach. The low-group school had various experiences in professional development programs and had individual views on what they preferred for the future. This individualist school expressed their individual preferences for training, exemplifying Douglas's school type quite well.

Limitation. The English as a Foreign Language department at a Thai university can be characterized as bureaucratic (high-grid, low-group) in teaching practices (Waelateh, 2009). Those same instructors who utilize the bureaucratic approach responded that their preference would be classrooms that are collectivist (low-grid, high-group). Waelateh concluded that there were conditions that could not be explained by Douglas's grid and group typology, namely that the instructors wanted to change traditional practices, but they did not know how. She concluded:

> The theory does not explain explicitly how to move from one culture to another. No clear steps are illustrated. In this case, for example, there are no step-by-step guidelines on how to change from a bureaucratic to collectivist culture, or from a teacher-centered to learner-centered curriculum. (p. 141)

This conclusion showed the limitations of an analytical theory like Douglas's typology.

Collective analysis. The research base of Douglas's (1982) grid and group typology shows its usefulness in a variety of educational settings to describe, compare, contrast, and understand implementation of educational reform strategies. The findings of these studies have implications for future research in understanding how educational reform strategies, school improvement requirements, plans, policies, and procedures might have to be altered in order to be effective in a given school culture.

Summary

This chapter highlighted the key literature related to school improvement, both voluntary school improvement throughout recent history and mandatory school improvement planning under the requirements of state and federal accountability systems. In addition to reviewing the important strategies that should be implemented in order to lead to school improvement, the literature discussed the processes that schools should use in developing and implementing School Improvement Plans in order to ensure their sustained success. Lastly, the chapter considered the literature on school culture, particularly as it relates to implementation of school improvement processes and strategies. The chapter ended with a discussion of Douglas's grid and group typology for understanding school cultures and the requirement that schools adapt school improvement strategies to match the context of the school. Chapter III will discuss the methodology of the research study being proposed to better understand the relationship between School Improvement Plans and school culture.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative methods were used in this study, with a naturalistic inquiry design strategy, capitalizing on emergent design flexibility. The study used purposeful sampling to select information-rich cases to research (Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, observations, and reviews of documents and artifacts. Data were analyzed using methods of triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) both during and following data collection (Erlandson et al., 1993). Analysis was completed by applying Douglas's (1982) typology of grid and group in order to explain the School Improvement Planning Process in two different school cultures.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore the connections between school culture and improved student achievement as underperforming schools developed and implemented their School Improvement Plans through the WISE Tool.

Research Questions

In order to explore the connections between school culture and improved student achievement as schools developed and implemented their SIPs through the WISE Tool, one overarching research question was established: In schools that showed improvement,

how was the School Improvement Plan created and implemented?

The following subquestions provided more detail:

1. How was the WISE Tool implemented in schools that showed improvement?
2. What were the differences, if any, in the implementation between schools?
3. In terms of grid and group, how did the schools adapt implementation strategies in accordance with their school culture?
4. How useful was Douglas's Grid and Group Theory in explaining these implementation variations?
5. What other realities existed outside of grid and group cultural assessment?

These questions guided the selection of participants, questionnaire elements, interview questions, observed activities, and documents. More importantly, these questions guided the data analysis process by providing concrete divisions among topics of analysis.

Information About the Researcher

I have spent my entire life in education. As a child of two lifelong educators, I spent my childhood as well as my adult years discussing educational issues with my parents. After earning a Bachelor's degree in Secondary Mathematics Education, I began teaching middle school and high school mathematics, primarily in a very successful school. After spending a short time teaching in a school that was not as successful and earning a Master's degree in Educational Leadership, I took a position at the Oklahoma State Department of Education to lead mathematics education and, later, high school reform initiatives for the State. I am currently the Assistant State Superintendent of Educational Support for the Oklahoma State Department of Education where I work closely with schools on the School Improvement List and with implementation of the

State's new Differentiated Recognition, Accountability, and Support System authorized by USDE's *ESEA Flexibility* waiver package, including identification and support of Priority and Focus Schools. In addition to providing support to schools required to implement School Improvement Plans, I also provide support to schools that are moderately or highly successful in demonstrating student achievement. While conducting the research for this study, I continued my daily work of supporting all Oklahoma public schools and assisting schools on the School Improvement List to plan for and implement strategies with a high probability of success in improving student achievement levels.

My bias toward the subject of school improvement planning is two-fold: (1) I have a belief that many schools needing to implement significant changes do only the minimum of what is required. In these schools, leaders often make excuses for why these schools were incorrectly placed on the School Improvement List rather than identifying the needs of the school and seeking improvement. This bias could have caused me to establish an inappropriate lens through which to view the results of my study. In order to minimize this bias, I chose to study schools that had successfully made progress in order to identify models of success rather than attempt to explain lack of success. (2) I have been the provider of training related to the requirements of the SIP and WISE. Expecting all schools to implement the School Improvement Planning Process exactly as instructed could have been a hindrance to my research; however, I allowed for the expectation that each school would have a different experience in implementing the School Improvement Planning Process and that consistency with the training our team provided in previous years was not more or less valuable than innovation in the process.

Study Design

Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined naturalistic inquiry as investigation where "first, no manipulation on the part of the inquirer is implied, and, second, the inquirer imposes no a priori units on the outcome" (p. 8). Naturalistic inquiry seeks to understand a phenomenon by observing its occurrence in the natural environment without interference from the observer. As opposed to controlled experimental inquiry, the researcher makes no *a priori* judgments about the potential outcomes of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Guided by naturalistic inquiry strategies, I capitalized on emergent design flexibility to the greatest extent possible within the logistical constraints afforded by the study (Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). Because naturalistic inquiry seeks to observe the phenomenon unfold in real-time, real-world environments, it was impossible to predetermine each course of action needed to understand the observed phenomenon. For this study, I established a general set of data collection procedures, as described below, with the intent of following the experiences of the observed phenomenon and making in-the-field, on-the-spot decisions when necessary and within the bounds of the approved study criteria. Creswell (2009) gave examples of modifications that may be made to a qualitative study, including data collection approaches, individuals to be studied, interview questions, and documents collected.

Participants

Patton describes 16 different approaches to purposeful sampling of participants, including, but not limited to, extreme or deviant case (outlier) sampling, intensity sampling, maximum variation sampling, typical case sampling, confirming and disconfirming cases, and combination or mixed purposeful sampling. This study was

conducted using purposeful sampling, as recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985), specifically maximum variation sampling (Patton, 2002) to identify two cases. In maximum variation sampling, the researcher identifies cases that are different from one another based on one or more important characteristics. In addition to describing uniquenesses of each case, the researcher "would also look for common themes across sites. Any such themes take on added importance precisely because they emerge out of great variation" (p. 235). Maximum variation samples result in two types of findings: (1) thick, rich descriptions of each case, and (2) meaningful patterns and commonalities that are shared between the divergent cases. As will be discussed in detail later in this section, the two cases for this study were selected to provide the greatest amount of information possible regarding the phenomenon of improving student achievement through the School Improvement Planning Process by describing both uniquenesses of the two cases and common themes shared between them.

Both case study schools were required to complete a SIP in the fall of 2010 through the WISE Tool because of their identification for school improvement, corrective action, or restructuring or as a School Improvement Grant (SIG) school. Based on this requirement, the schools received the same training on use of the WISE Tool and used the WISE Tool to assess their current realities, write visions for the future, and establish plans for change.

In order to select two schools with different cultural profiles, all 43 schools that were required to write a SIP in 2010 because they were identified for school improvement, corrective action, or restructuring or were selected for a SIG that also showed enough improvement in student achievement to make AYP or at least meet the

benchmark in the area of identification (reading, mathematics, attendance, or graduation rate) in 2011 were invited to participate in assessment. Nine schools accepted the invitation to participate. These schools were assessed using the Grid and Group Assessment Tool (Harris, 2005). The Grid and Group Assessment Tool is provided as Appendix A. The assessment tool was delivered online, and the unit of analysis was a school site. For the results to be considered valid, a minimum of one administrator and five teachers in each participating school needed to complete the survey. Six schools met that requirement. Scores from each participant were plotted on a grid for the school site. Each grid was stored electronically on my computer and backed up on an external hard drive.

I classified each school into one of the four types of schools as shown previously in Figure 4: (a) Bureaucratic, (b) Corporate, (c) Individualist, or (d) Collectivist.

Figure 4: Types of social environments as expressed by grid and group typology (Douglas, 1982, 1986; Harris, 2005).

Based on the resulting cultural profiles of each school respective to Douglas's grid and group typology, two schools were selected. The two schools did not have the same social environment. I knew that the ideal situation would be for the schools to represent either the bureaucratic and collectivist prototypes or the corporate and individualist prototypes described by Douglas, meaning that they would come from opposite quadrants of Douglas's typology (Harris, 2005); however, this was not possible.

Of the six schools that met the minimum N-size for the survey, five were classified as corporate and one as collectivist. Selecting the school with the strongest corporate profile and the school matching the collectivist profile capitalized on the maximum variation case study sampling approach. These two cases showed the most uniqueness from one another based on the grid and group analysis. Descriptions of their uniquenesses and identification of commonalities between them make studying these two divergent schools meaningful in understanding the phenomenon of school improvement planning.

Data Collection

In each of the two case study schools, I gathered data from a variety of sources. I surveyed teachers and administrators, conducted interviews, made observations, and reviewed documents and artifacts (Erlandson et al., 1993). Specifically, I: (a) interviewed teachers, counselors, building administrators, district administrators (when willing to participate), and school improvement coaches (when available); (b) conducted observations of faculty meetings, planning sessions, and classroom instruction; (c) surveyed teachers, counselors, administrators, and outside consultants (when willing to participate) regarding their perceptions of the school improvement process, the WISE Tool, and the school culture; (d) reviewed documents specific to the school improvement plan including the school handbook, school improvement plan, agendas and minutes for meetings, school support team reports, and other relevant resources, as available; and (e) reviewed school documents and cultural artifacts, including mission statements, vision statements, creeds, mottos, decorations, and mascots. Included in the interviews and surveys were questions about the culture of the school, candor, stakeholder participation in school improvement planning, and the school's vision for the future as it related

specifically to characteristics measured by AYP. This collection took place over the course of one academic year.

Questionnaire

Labuschagne (2003) reminds us that the purpose and use of questionnaires and open-ended survey questions in qualitative research is different from those for quantitative research. In qualitative research, questionnaires can be useful in gathering background information; selecting key individuals for follow-up, in-depth interviews; and corroborating perceptions of a limited number of individuals gained during interviews and observations by comparing them to the perceptions of a larger sample. Stansberry (2001) found that questionnaires sent to the entire population of educators being studied resulted in a number of individuals requesting follow-up interviews. While Silverman (2005) explained that questionnaires are not the most ideal method for qualitative research because they limit emergent flexibility, he conceded that the most efficient method for acquiring some forms of qualitative data may be to pose open-ended questions via questionnaires.

For this study, a questionnaire was provided to teachers, counselors, site administrators, district administrators, school improvement coaches, and outside consultants. The questionnaire was delivered in an online format with an option to complete the questionnaire in hard copy. The questionnaire that was sent to all teachers, counselors, and site administrators in the two case study schools is included as Appendix B. The questionnaire that was sent to district administrators, school improvement coaches, and outside consultants serving the two schools is included as Appendix C. The

open-ended questions included in the questionnaire were based on the legal requirements for a SIP and the training provided to schools on use of the WISE Tool.

In the corporate school, 12 individuals completed the site-level questionnaire and 4 completed the district-level questionnaire about the school. In the collectivist school, 13 individuals completed the site-level questionnaire, and one began but did not complete the district-level questionnaire about the school. The responses to the questionnaires were stored on my computer as an Excel Spreadsheet, backed up on an external hard drive, and were not connected with respondents' names or identifying information. Data were coded as described later in this chapter.

Interviews

Interview questions in qualitative research represent a spectrum of approaches to gathering information. According to Patton (2002), on one extreme is something similar to quantitative interviewing where response options are fixed but respondents may be able to explain their rationale in making their selection. On the other extreme are informal conversational interviews where the researcher and the respondent have a conversation that is primarily on the topic of the research study and is shaped by the immediate context of the situation. In between these two approaches are standardized open-ended interviews and semi-structured interviews that rely on interview guides. The information gained by each of these approaches is different and results from a different philosophy or goal of the research study. In addition, methods can be combined in different components of a study.

This study used semi-structured interviews for the majority of the interviews, as encouraged by Erlandson et al. (1993). Semi-structured interviews employ a "well-

organized plan, built around the central questions and issues that the interviewer wishes to explore" (p. 90). This plan is often referred to as an interview guide. The interview guide is shaped by a small number of primary questions or topics, but the exact wording of the questions may be changed from one interview to another (Patton, 2002). The interview guide also includes potential probes that may be necessary in order to get more detailed information from the interviewees, but other open-ended probing questions may also be asked as part of the interview. Interview guides allow researchers to appropriate a conversational tone during the interview, to follow leads and parenthetical information by asking probing questions, and to acquire information within the same basic categories from each respondent (Erlandson et al.). This provides consistency for data analysis purposes, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

The interviews were scheduled at locations that were most comfortable for the interviewees. They lasted approximately one hour in length and were based on the interview guide available in Appendix D. Although I sought to conduct approximately 10 interviews for each school, I was able to complete only five interviews in the collectivist school as will be discussed in Chapter V. I completed nine semi-structured interviews in the corporate school. Interviewees included teachers, counselors, administrators, and school improvement coaches.

In addition, a few informal, conversational interviews were conducted. These interviews happened when circumstances arose that were unexpected and when additional clarification was needed to understand the phenomenon. These interviews occurred as small focus groups and one-on-one conversations following observations or document reviews.

Each semi-structured interview was recorded using a digital audio recording device. The digital file was stored on my computer and backed up on an external hard drive until a transcription could be made. I transcribed each interview as a Word Document not connected with the interviewee's name or identifying information. The Word Document was stored on my computer and backed up on an external hard drive. Data were coded as discussed later in this chapter.

Observation

While interviews allow the respondent to move back and forth in time while answering questions, "a major advantage of direct observation, on the other hand, is that it provides here-and-now experience in depth" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In other words, field observations add depth to a qualitative study. Patton (2002) explained that having direct, personal contact with the individuals and the setting of events has several advantages: (1) the researcher can better understand the context, which is essential to a holistic perspective on the phenomenon; (2) the researcher can be more open to understanding the phenomenon without having to rely on preconceived notions of the setting and experiences of the participants; (3) the researcher can observe aspects of the phenomenon of which the participants may not be aware, such as cultural norms and common behaviors that the participants may overlook as important; (4) the researcher can gain information about topics that participants might be unwilling to talk about in interviews; (5) the researcher can gain various people's perceptions, including the researcher's perceptions, in addition to those of interviewees; and (6) the researcher can draw on personal experience during data analysis.

I conducted observations of planning meetings, faculty meetings, department-level meetings, professional learning community meetings, classroom instruction, and other relevant experiences where the School Improvement Plan was discussed, revised, or implemented in each school.

Naturalistic observations take place in the natural setting, or field; therefore, detailed notes of the observation experience are termed field notes. Based on the earlier work of Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Erlandson et al. (1993), Creswell (2009) advised qualitative researchers to have a specific observation protocol or field note template. The template should include space for demographic information, including the time, date, location, and persons present for the observation; experiential notes, recounting the events, dialogue, and experiences of the activity observed; descriptive notes as explained below; and reflective notes, such as the researcher's personal thoughts, feelings, impressions, and considerations for future analytical categories. The basic observation template used for this study can be found in Appendix E.

Patton (2002) argued, "The quality of observational reports is judged by the extent to which that observation permits the reader to enter into and understand the situation described" (p. 262). Using the descriptive portraiture technique of Lightfoot (1983), I used detailed observation field notes to recreate each school's atmosphere, personality, and experiences for the reader. For this reason, the template I designed includes sufficient space for copious descriptive notes on the sights, sounds, smells, and impressions of the setting.

Some field notes were taken on paper while conducting an observation. Other comments were added shortly after completion of the observation in order to capture any

experiences, impressions, or thoughts that could not be captured while in the field (Erlandson et al., 1993). The post-observation field notes were added to the observation template on paper or recorded on a digital audio recording device and later added to the observation template when all field notes were captured electronically in a Word Document on my computer and backed up on an external hard drive. Data were coded as discussed later in this chapter.

Documents

Lincoln and Guba (1985) discussed document and record reviews as extensions of observations. In essence, the researcher is observing the documents produced by the participants or their organizations at some point in the past. Creswell (2009) provided examples of public documents – newspapers, minutes of meetings, and official reports; private documents – journals, letters, and email messages; and audio-visual materials – photographs, art objects, videotapes, and recordings.

Document review allows the researcher to gain a historical perspective on the phenomenon. In addition, the researcher can gather evidence of the public message, official stance, or paper trail created by the experience, as well as the cultural subtleties that participants may not be consciously aware exist.

For this study, I collected information from each school's website, front office brochures, newsletters, publications, accreditation reports, School Support Team Reports, meeting agendas and minutes, and of course, the school's School Improvement Plan. Additional documents were requested following interviews, questionnaire responses, or observations as part of the naturalistic inquiry approach.

Observational notes were taken on each document, including specific data elements from the documents. These notes were recorded on an observation template and transferred to a Word Document on my computer and backed up on an external hard drive. Data were coded as discussed later in this chapter.

Artifacts

Erlandson et al. (1993) distinguished between documents and artifacts. Material artifacts of the research setting "give insight into the culture's technology, social interaction, and physical environment" (p. 100). Because culture serves as the theoretical framework for understanding the School Improvement Plan phenomenon, cultural artifacts were essential to distinguishing between the two school sites.

For this study, I gathered information from cultural artifacts apparent in each building such as mission statements, vision statements, creeds, mottos, and decorations that could be found in hallways, offices, classrooms, and communal gathering spaces. In addition, cultural artifacts included building architecture, floor plans, colors, mascots, trophies, and other sources that explained the inner-workings of the school and the relationships between its members.

Observational notes, and in some cases photographs, were taken on each cultural artifact. These notes were recorded on an observation template and transferred to a Word Document on my computer and backed up on an external hard drive. Data were coded as discussed later in this chapter.

Data Analysis

Collected data were analyzed using methods of data triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation is the process of gathering data from a variety of sources in

order to corroborate findings for richer understanding of the phenomenon. Triangulation adds to the probability that findings and conclusions will be credible (Lincoln & Guba). This study used questionnaires, interviews, observation, and document and artifact reviews to compare the results from one source with the others.

Erlandson et al. (1993) explained the two-fold nature of data analysis in naturalistic inquiry. First, data is analyzed in the field because data collection and data analysis have an inseparable relationship in naturalistic inquiry. Analysis of data in the field results in fine-tuning the data collection process. Second, data is analyzed away from the site following a period of data collection. This does not mean that the second type of data analysis happens only after all data have been collected, but rather that this type of data analysis happens between periods of data collection as well as after all data has been collected.

Erlandson et al. (1993) continued by providing four elements of the data analysis process: (1) unitizing data, (2) emergent category designation, (3) negative case analysis, and (4) bridging, extending, and surfacing data. Unitizing data can be understood as breaking the data down into the smallest pieces of information that can stand alone without changing the meaning of the data. Units of data can then be categorized based on similarities and differences with category titles and descriptive sentences to explain the comparisons. While this process will likely be repeated several times with some categories dissipating and others emerging in their place, each round of emergent category designation is critical to understanding the data as a whole. This process will also bring to light negative cases, in which one viewpoint or source contradicts others. When viable, Erlandson et al. recommended that these be presented as dissenting

opinions to the rest of the data. When this analysis leads to a need for additional data to be collected, it may come in the form of a "missing link" that will bridge the data, additional information to extend the data, or more evidence of an emerging reality in the confines of the existing data boundaries. This step of analysis will lead the researcher back into the field for additional periods of data collection.

For this study, all collected data were stored electronically as Word Documents or Excel Spreadsheets on my computer and backed up on an external hard drive as discussed in the previous section.

I analyzed questionnaire responses, verbatim transcripts of interviews, field notes from observations, and observational notes from document and artifact reviews. This analysis took place by hand-coding each piece of unitized data gathered based on emergent categories (Erlandson et al., 1993), which are general themes, patterns, and processes that were observed during the data collection and initial analysis phases. Douglas's (1982, 1986, 1989) grid and group typology served as a lens for determining initial codes, sorting data, and analyzing patterns, as discussed later in this chapter.

A coding schema was developed for ease of analysis with large amounts of data. For each piece of data, a data number was assigned. Data were entered into an Excel Spreadsheet along with the data number, source information, location of data collection, type of respondent, the event, and the initial code assigned to the data from the coding schema. The Excel Spreadsheet was stored on my computer and backed up on an external hard drive.

Coded data and associated information were printed on labels and affixed to colored index cards, with one set of colors representing each initial code. Index cards

were sorted based on the determination of whether the "content has the same tacit feel" as other pieces of data (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 118). Cards were resorted and reclassified repeatedly throughout the data collection and data analysis process until categories for reporting were clearly established for each research question being studied.

In order to bring to life the information inherent in the cases, I drew upon the genre of narrative portraiture (Lightfoot, 1983). Narrative portraiture is a methodology that relies on empirical as well as aesthetic observation. It uses stories and descriptions that capture all of the senses to explain the underlying meaning behind an experience. For this study, I used descriptive text to paint the broad, background strokes on which the exact experiences of school improvement planning were painted in the foreground.

Final case studies contain thick, rich descriptions of the schools' cultures and experiences with school improvement planning as well as results following the implementation of the plan. Comparisons and contrasts between the case studies are also reported based on the analysis of data in the various reporting categories that emerged. Analysis was rich enough to allow for transferability to similar schools, depending on likeness of receiving contexts (Erlandson et. al., 1993), in Oklahoma or in similar states across the nation.

Use of Theoretical Frame

Douglas's (1982) typology of grid and group was used in an *a priori* manner. I was introduced to Douglas's grid and group typology in 2008 during a course on school culture and leadership. As stated in Chapter I, Douglas's typology demonstrated the most likely explanation for the variation between schools' effectiveness in planning for and

implementing change through the School Improvement Planning Process; therefore, the theory was used to guide the research design, data collection, and data analysis.

Specifically, the theory was used to shape the research questions and to select two cases that were culturally dissimilar through the use of the Grid and Group Assessment Tool (Harris, 2005). The field inquiry was not determined, led, or controlled by preestablished expectations of the results based on the theory because, in part, the theory is not designed for deterministic causation. Grid and Group Theory "is not deterministic or linear in its approaches" to understanding or predicting the "causal relationships among culture, behavior, and thought patterns" (Harris, 2006, p. 140).

After data collection, grid and group theory served as a lens to understand and interpret the behaviors and phenomenon observed in the schools. Douglas (1982) and Harris (2005) provided vernacular to explain similarities and differences in the School Improvement Planning Process implemented at each school. These terms were used to classify and categorize the collected data based on emerging themes and patterns in order to compare the experiences of the two cases.

Lastly, I analyzed the usefulness of Douglas's (1982) typology in understanding the relationship between school culture and the School Improvement Planning Process. I analyzed the role of grid and group as a theoretical lens, and I evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of the theory in explaining the WISE implementation variations between the two schools. This process allowed me to explore the aspects of the phenomenon that could not be understood in terms of grid and group.

Trustworthiness

As opposed to the conventional criteria for trustworthiness, which are internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity, trustworthiness in naturalistic inquiry is established using similar but more appropriate criteria (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Table 2 exemplifies the techniques that were used to establish trustworthiness of the study in the criterion of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Erlandson et al., 1993).

Table 2

Trustworthiness Criteria, Techniques, and Explanations

Criterion	Technique	Explanation
Credibility	Prolonged Engagement	I was in the field repeatedly during the last two months of the 2011-2012 school year.
	Persistent Observation	I attended regular meetings of the PLCs, faculty meetings, and additional meetings and work sessions pertaining to the SIP.
	Triangulation	Data were collected and analyzed using questionnaires, interviews, observations, and documents/artifacts.
	Referential Adequacy	Documents and artifacts in the school, such as mission statements, vision statements, creeds, mottos, decorations, and mascots, were analyzed for reference against other cultural data.
	Peer Debriefing	Data and conclusions were discussed with the dissertation advisor and colleagues to acquire outsider perspective. All confidentiality agreements were preserved.

	Member Checks	At the conclusion of interviews and observations, informal discussions allowed stakeholders to review accuracy of field notes. School stakeholders reviewed sections of case descriptions throughout the data collection and analysis process.
	Reflexive Journal	My reflexive journal documented my decisions and conclusions throughout the collection and analysis process.
Transferability	Thick Description	Thick descriptions of each case are provided so that the reader may determine the settings, individuals, and situations to which the findings might be transferred.
	Purposive Sampling	Case studies were selected using maximum variation sampling so that the conditions being analyzed would be apparent without being extreme.
	Reflexive Journal	My reflexive journal documented my decisions and conclusions throughout the collection and analysis process.
Dependability	Dependability Audit	Interview guides, notes, documents, transcripts, recordings, note cards, peer debriefing notes, and journal entries created an audit trail.
	Reflexive Journal	My reflexive journal documented my decisions and conclusions throughout the collection and analysis process.
Confirmability	Confirmability Audit	Interview guides, notes, documents, transcripts, recordings, note cards, peer debriefing notes, and journal entries created an audit trail.
	Reflexive Journal	My reflexive journal documented my decisions and conclusions throughout the collection and analysis process.

Summary

This chapter described the methodology used in the study. The study was based on naturalistic inquiry practices, using purposeful sampling to identify information-rich cases (Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Two schools with different cultural profiles were selected as case studies. Data from questionnaires, interviews, observations, and reviews of documents and artifacts were analyzed using Douglas's (1982, 1986) grid and group typology as a cultural lens. Analysis included thick, rich descriptions of each school as well as comparisons of the two schools in order to answer the research questions and make a contribution to research, theory, and practice. The results of this analysis will be shared in Chapters IV and V, with conclusions presented in Chapter VI.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF CASES

Using the methodology discussed in Chapter III, two cases were identified for this study. Adams High School and Buchanan Elementary School are presented in this chapter using thick, rich description in order to explain the historical and current realities of the two schools. Both cases include demographic and geographic contexts, as well as descriptions of physical characteristics, people and relationships, academics, and climate. Additionally, cases include why the school was identified for School Improvement and a description of the School Improvement Planning Process as adapted for each school. The School Improvement Planning Process involves the creation of the SIP, implementation of the SIP, use of the WISE Tool, improvement strategies included in the SIP, success of the SIP, and desires for future growth and development.

Adams High School

Adams High School was first identified for School Improvement because it did not reach the graduation rate Academic Performance Index target of 67.8% in 2008 or 2009; therefore, it did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as defined in Chapter I for two consecutive years. It is a moderately large high school, serving approximately 1,500 students in Grades 9-12 with a staff of 125 certified faculty plus support personnel.

The only high school in its small town in rural Oklahoma, the school serves students from a variety of backgrounds and educational experiences.

Structure and Architecture

Originally built in the early Twentieth Century, the central structure is now joined by several additions and nearby buildings that comprise the high school campus. Upon entering the building through the new main entrance, I was struck by the juxtaposition of old and new. In fact, I cannot remember a school with such unique combinations of architecture, fixtures, designs, and decorations. What were five separate buildings only a few years ago have now been consolidated into two through additions and hallways that connect the plethora of architectural structures on the sprawling campus. Architectural elements, such as wooden and marble staircases, attest to the centurion age of the original structure that has recently been joined to modern classrooms, cafeterias, and meeting rooms.

The main entryway houses spirit banners, murals, benches donated by alumni, floor tile designs, trophy cases, and the school mission statement, each attesting to the role of tradition in this school that is attempting to reinvent itself. Moving past classrooms where slate boards have been replaced with electronic white boards and basement storage rooms that have been converted into a state-of-the-art media center, I noticed the intricate woodwork and gold-painted plaster moldings in the ceilings that have withstood the test of time. Exiting the old structure, I found myself in a new addition of bright colors, sleek designs, and floods of natural light through walls of windows. As I walked through the passageway designed to link the main building to the new additions, smells of fried foods engulfed my nostrils while sounds of pop culture and

lively chatter perked my ears. In one new and one renovated cafeteria, students were sampling from a pasta bar, coffee cart, fast food café, outdoor grill, and several other meal options, while watching music videos displayed on numerous flat screen televisions and connecting with their fellow classmates. In these modern eating rooms, hundreds of teenagers were positioned in multiple levels of seating areas, all easily monitored from a few critical vantage points.

Adjacent to the new cafeteria is a large meeting room designed for class meetings, faculty gatherings, performances, and assemblies. Hallways leading to newly adjoined structures and recent additions give testimony to the time periods in which each building was first erected. In one addition, known to the students as the A-building, colored tiles on the walls indicate the 1962 design, while walls painted in neutral colors accented with school colors of navy and red reveal the contemporary youth of the C-building. Nestled between them, the old gymnasium's lobby and locker rooms have been converted into critical classrooms for career-themed courses. Nearby, and connected by a covered walkway, a small building houses the fine arts classes. Hallways lined with plaques, trophies, and banners attest to the years of success known by the drama, vocal, instrumental, and visual arts programs of the school.

Throughout the school, the leadership's desire to re-instill pride in the school is evident. The mission statement is posted at least once in every building:

> *The MISSION for Adams High School is to be a collaborative learning community that develops citizens committed to lifelong learning, academic achievement, and personal excellence.*

The vision statement can also be found in highly visible locations, reminding students and faculty members of the ultimate goal of the school:

> *The VISION of Adams High School is a collaborative community of responsible, productive citizens committed to learning and to excellence.*

Almost every hallway is marked with "COUGAR PRIDE" on posters, banners, and bulletin boards. Adding to the sense of tradition and community is a bulletin board dedicated to honoring current and previous servicemen who attended or who are now employees of Adams High School.

Spread across four square blocks, Adams High School's academic buildings are surrounded by a vast front lawn that is landscaped to draw attention to the architecture of the original front entrance; two, large parking lots for faculty and students; and athletics facilities that include baseball and softball fields, practice fields, a gymnasium, weight rooms, locker rooms, and a football stadium that includes a walking track used by the entire community. Immediately across the street from the front lawn is a city-owned performing arts facility and park that includes tennis courts and recreation facilities, all of which are available for use by the school as needed.

People and Relationships

Relationships are a central focus of Adams High School. Administrators, teachers, students, parents, and community members are all seen as critical players in the success of the school.

District. Adams High School sits geographically in the center of a school district that consists of seven elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. The district has been recognized by the state and several professional organizations for its

innovative approaches to education. One high school teacher described the risk-taking approach of the district, "We're cutting-edge here. We are trendsetters. We're not afraid to go out on a limb. We're going to do something quickly, and if it doesn't work, we're going to quit doing it and try something else that's new." Further, the district has a reputation for providing an excellent education and for setting high expectations for its students and educators.

In 2010, learning that the district had several schools suddenly not making AYP, the district superintendent approached the school board with a plan to hire a full-time employee at the district office to work with all schools to implement district-wide improvement processes. Upon review of the level of implementation of the district initiatives, the School Improvement Specialist concluded that the district was functioning as "a district of schools rather than a school district." Desiring to change that mentality, the superintendent established several non-negotiables for the schools.

While the administration of Adams High School expressed the relationship between the district office and the school as extremely supportive, teachers had a mixed view of the relationship. Some teachers seemed to believe that the district office had taken away all autonomy from the school administration, "tying their hands." Others voiced frustration and a feeling of being overwhelmed by improvement directives from "downtown." When the district's School Improvement Specialist was hired, it took over a year for her to earn the respect of some members of Adams High School faculty, simply because her background was in elementary education and she worked for the central office. For example, one department at the high school resisted implementation of Building Academic Vocabulary, a strategy required by the district. Because the School

Improvement Specialist providing training on the strategy was a former elementary school principal, the department members assumed the strategy was too basic for their students. It was not until a respected member of the department found success with the strategy and spoke to its value that others in the department were willing to attempt it. With its success came the right for the School Improvement Specialist to wield authority over other instructional strategies used in the department. Despite this concern about involvement from the district, the site administrators and most teachers still described the governance structure as site-based with direction and leadership from the district administrators.

School leadership. The administrative team at Adams consists of a head principal and four assistant principals. In past years, the school also had a curriculum specialist who was part of the leadership team. Adams has had three head principals in the past four years. While all three of the most recent principals have been promoted from assistant principalships at the school, the inconsistency of administrators has impacted the cohesiveness of the faculty and implementation of improvement initiatives. One administrator described the first of the past three head principals as ineffective, waiting to retire. During his tenure, the school showed few outward signs of improvement and, in fact, had shown significant decline, which could be attributed to several factors in addition to the lack of leadership. Administrators and teachers described the middle of the three most recent principals with mixed feelings. He was the kind of administrator who was not afraid to have tough conversations with teachers who were at the school only to collect a paycheck. Under his leadership, many teachers came to realize that they had an obligation to give the best possible education to the children of

the town. While most faculty attributed significant student achievement and changes in faculty attitudes toward students to his style of no-nonsense leadership, many also described the "secrets," "closed-door decisions," and "unwillingness to listen" as reasons that faculty morale was struggling prior to this school year.

The current principal, Mr. Dawson, is seen in a very different light by the faculty and other administrators. Every adult whom I encountered during my time in the school talked about the positive change associated with the hiring of Mr. Dawson. An outside consultant for the district observed that Mr. Dawson "has a passion for all students and is willing to learn how to sharpen his leadership skills to lead the school to excellence."

Mr. Dawson has the respect and trust of the faculty. He focuses on building relationships with all adults in the school as well as with students. Faculty members know that he, along with all of the administrators in the building, has an open door policy. He will listen to the faculty and is willing to consider what others think, "but he's still going to do what he feels like is best for the kids."

With an ability to show the staff the reason for needed changes, Mr. Dawson is able to lead his staff to make positive decisions for students. In one faculty meeting I observed, Mr. Dawson stood at the front of the large meeting room in the high school addressing approximately100 faculty members. Pointing to the data he had written on the white board behind him before the meeting started, Mr. Dawson congratulated the staff on the continuous academic improvement of the school. He pointed to rising EOI scores, consistently high ACT scores, and an impressive senior year graduation rate. After recognizing them for the fruits of their labor, he quickly drew their attention to other statistics that were much less positive, including an overall graduation rate that was still

struggling and a low participation rate in college preparatory courses. In a matter of five minutes, Mr. Dawson had challenged his entire staff to get behind a "college-going culture" change, where all students are encouraged to participate in challenging coursework and are given the support to meet high expectations.

Mr. Dawson's consistent look at the data has been noted by district administrators who see that he does not make excuses for past performance, but rather he acknowledges the reality of achievement and looks for potential solutions for improvement. They also noted that he presents all improvement efforts as "really good ideas for our kids" rather than as requirements from the district, state, or federal government, whenever possible. Mr. Dawson admits that his strength is not in curriculum and instruction. He desires to learn more and to become an instructional leader; however, he has worked to establish an administrative team with strengths that complement each other. Therefore, he has some discipline-oriented administrators, some management-oriented administrators, and some academic-oriented administrators. Mr. Dawson focuses on allowing each administrator to excel in his or her areas of strength. He has embraced the district initiatives and leads the administrative team, counselors, and teachers to implement all school improvement strategies with fidelity.

The faculty members describe the leadership team as proactive, hardworking, available, kind, and focused on changing the culture in the school. Further, in discussing relationships between faculty members and the expectation that everyone be treated with respect, one counselor said that Mr. Dawson "does an excellent job of just really leading the way and setting that example of how he wants his staff to treat each other."

Faculty. Attributed to the contentious relationships among administrators, teachers, and staff in past years, a negative attitude of pushback from faculty members is now beginning to change. In the past, administrators often felt that every improvement effort was met with strong resistance. "It was like hitting a brick wall with them," according to one administrator. Teachers responded to directives and plans with comments like, "You can't do that," "You can't make us do that," and "It's not in our contract." By providing teachers a voice in decisions, the current administration believes that those walls are slowly being broken down.

District administrators have also noticed this attitude change, and although they note that it has been a gradual change, they also acknowledge that it has been a monumental change. "Just their demeanor, the way they treat each other – it's with respect." Rather than divisive behaviors between staff members and expressions of "I'm here because I have to be here," most teachers have a welcoming presentation toward one another.

The district's outside consultant wrote, "Teachers and staff enjoy working at the school, are proud of the school's history and tradition, and most appear to be trying to comply with school improvement directives." Faculty members and administrators have similar analyses for the most part. One school administrator exclaimed, "Ninety percent of our teachers are excellent teachers!" Both teachers and counselors were described by their colleagues as "work horses," going above and beyond to do what's best for kids. Because so many of the faculty members have chosen to be at Adams High School to support the students, many were devastated to learn that their graduation rate and achievement scores were low enough to cause them to be identified for School

Improvement. They have worked to stay positive and to show patience with students, while embracing the urgency for improved instruction and support systems for struggling learners.

The old attitude has not completely disappeared, and negativity – like positivity – is contagious. In response to an online questionnaire, two teachers described how faculty members relate to one another. One respondent wrote, "A faculty divided only serves to slow any forward progress if not bring it to a complete stop. It is frustrating for new teachers to encounter individuals who insist on denigrating the process at least, or refusing to comply at most." The other respondent echoed the sentiment, "I think the differences in input, experience, and collaboration has produced a staff full of teachers doing their own thing with no common goal." Some teachers have very strong personalities that have sometimes been interpreted as bullying of other teachers. One faculty member commented, "If we're not allowing that among the kids, and we're really standing firm on that, then why are we allowing that among our colleagues? … We're at the high school, but we don't have to act like high schoolers." This negativity is also displayed in attitudes toward students by a few teachers who "teach the ones that want to be taught and don't mess with the ones that don't."

The leadership of the school, both administrators and department heads, are trying to change the go-your-own-way style from previous years. One department head exclaimed, "The ninth grade teachers' approach of 'Do whatever the hell we want' has to stop!" In order to combat those attitudes, the administration has established professional learning communities (PLCs) that focus on curriculum development, content mastery, common assessments, student-level interventions, and collegial relationships. Every

teacher is assigned to a PLC or virtual PLC for his or her content area, participates in department meetings, and provides additional supports to students. These opportunities occur through "Late Start Wednesdays," where students arrive later in the morning allowing teachers time for collaboration, and "MUST Periods," where students receive additional tutoring during Mandatory Uninterrupted Study Time and groups of teachers meet according to a regular schedule.

While these PLCs are in the beginning stages of implementation, the professional dialogue has contributed to the changes in attitudes toward one another and toward students. It is also in these PLCs that teachers' and administrators' desires to demonstrate lifelong learning principles are most evident. PLCs have responsibility for working together to solve problems through reading professional literature, conducting action research, and observing best practices of one another. One administrator described the building as functioning like a body, where each part has different functions and some parts come together to perform certain duties and then other parts work together to perform other duties. Mr. Dawson has really worked to put together a team of professionals who feed off of one another in a positive way, sharing ideas and working together to get the school where it needs to go.

Students. The clientele of the district has changed significantly over the past two decades as a major corporation has slowly reduced its presence in the town and ultimately has moved all of the high-paying engineers, accountants, lawyers, and researchers to headquarters and branches in other cities and states. Not one interview I conducted excluded acknowledgement of the change in student population since the corporation left, taking the children of well-educated employees with it. In its stead, the town has

remained alive through recruiting industries with skilled labor and larger workforces. The majority of the students in Adams High School come from families of blue-collar workers and low-wage employment.

According to both teachers and administrators, previously, students were self-motivated or motivated by their families. The majority of students entered elementary school intending to go to college. Heavy emphasis was placed on STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) courses and college preparatory programs such as Advanced Placement (AP). One administrator described the former clientele, "Those kids were going to learn in spite of what those classroom teachers did. They came prepared. They had a goal. And there was an expectation from home that they would do well."

With the change in clientele, the instructional practices of the school did not change immediately. Some educators and community members are still unwilling to accept that the student body is different from what it was ten years ago. One teacher commented that some teachers want to continue to teach the current population in the same way they taught the "white, rich kids." But today's students at Adams High School come from rougher backgrounds. In many of the students' homes, school is not valued, children are not expected to go to college or to acquire high-salaried careers, and motivation to pursue excellence is not common. One teacher discussed the new need to hug students' necks and pat them on the back just for coming to school. Some high school students are expected to get themselves out of bed; to hold down part-time jobs that support the family; and to take care of younger siblings, their own children, or the

adults in their lives. School becomes secondary or even completely unimportant for many of these students.

In addition to the change in clientele due to industry, Adams High School also has two cohorts of students (the Classes of 2014 and 2015) that are unusually apathetic toward school. They have little to no desire to work hard in order to achieve excellence. Further, the changes in clientele have resulted in three academic tiers of students in the school – (a) high achievers, or the ones referred to as preps by the other students, (b) the average or middle achieving students, and (3) the low performers. These tiers are set against the backdrop of a wide variety of racial and ethnic cultures or subcultures operating in the school. The school has a significant population of Native American students, Hispanic students, and Black students. Each culture functions almost independently, and almost all of them have representatives of all tiers of academic performance. Yet, the middle group, or average student group, is decreasing in size. One administrator said that almost all students are either high performing or low performing.

There is a distinct difference between students who choose to participate in extracurricular activities such as fine arts, student council, or athletics and those students who do not. Teachers have noted that discipline issues are significantly fewer among students in extracurricular programs, academic achievement is higher, and general motivation is greater. Both the fine arts and athletic programs reported having high expectations of their students and establishing those expectations and support systems early, some as early as middle school, and continuing them throughout the high school experience. Students who are not involved in such programs have a more lackadaisical attitude toward school altogether. Neither threats nor rewards seem to motivate some of

these students, and without an adult pushing them to remain eligible for competition, many of these students are not succeeding. Further, some teachers are concerned that even those who are self-motivated sometimes have difficulty making the necessary grades and getting help from their teachers without an adult advocating on their behalf.

Adjusting to the changing clientele has been difficult for the educators in the district and particularly for educators in the high school. Keeping the tradition of excellence in the midst of lowered expectations of families and of the community has created stress on classroom teachers. Most importantly, providing necessary supports for underperforming students and pathways to success for all students has caused significant changes in school schedules, daily operations, course offerings, and professional conversations.

Parents. Even during the years when the majority of parents were well educated with high-salaried careers, parents have had little involvement with the academic aspects of the high school. According to one administrator, in years past, parents were very engaged in booster clubs, prom committees, and fundraisers, but rarely did parent advocacy groups offer suggestions on how the instructional program of the school should be run. In the past decade, parental involvement even in the more superficial and extracurricular components of the school has declined. In the past couple of years though, the school's Parent Coalition has seen some resurgence in participation. The Parent Coalition's website indicates that the organization has not met actively since early in the 2010-2011 school year, but school administrators were aware of meetings and decisions of the organization since that time. The Parent Coalition operates outside the purview of the school administration, but both teachers and administrators have sought

parental involvement in additional school activities. Teachers and administrators are working to reach out to parents, providing connections between the school and families and entertaining feedback from parents about the successes and challenges of the school.

Academics

As discussed in the previous section, the clientele of the school has been changing over the past two decades. The instructional practices did not change at the same rate as the change in student backgrounds, and the school's test scores and graduation rates dropped almost without warning. The state accountability system first identified the school for School Improvement based on the graduation rate, and then also for lack of improvement in academics within certain subgroups. One district administrator said, "We got caught, and we should have. Because we weren't doing what we should have."

At first, many of the teachers and administrators thought that the identification was only about a clerical error of a former employee. In fact, the initial identification of the school was the result of a low graduation rate for two consecutive years (65.6% in 2008 and 62.9% in 2009) . The school was identified for a second year of school improvement in 2010 because of a clerical error in reporting the graduation rate (reported at 3.2%) in the third school year, but the school also did not make AYP in reading or math. So much attention was drawn to the clerical error that most of the involved educators did not look further into the data to determine whether the school was on track regardless of the graduation rate calculation mistake. Very few teachers looked at their data to notice that the failure rate of gateway courses such as Algebra I and English II hovered around 50%, that several subgroups had not made AYP in reading

and/or mathematics, and that the school had a graduation rate (64% in 2011) significantly lower than other schools, even when calculated and reported correctly.

Once both district and school administrators began taking the School Improvement process seriously, almost all of the teachers, counselors, and administrators began to examine their data and to reconsider their roles in improving the academic climate of the school. "It really forced us to step back and look at what we're doing, why we're doing it, and change how we're teaching. The high school is becoming a more student-focused school."

Accountability comparisons between 2010 and 2011 provide evidence of improvements that have been made in the school's academic programming, particularly for low-achieving students. Mr. Dawson highlighted for the faculty improved test scores and an incredibly high senior year graduation rate (98%), but he also explained that the low four-year graduation rate tells them that they "are losing them between the sophomore and junior years, and it's primarily with our Native American and Hispanic populations." This analysis of the data led to the conclusion that if they can get their students to the junior level, they can lead them to graduation at a high rate, so they are beginning to focus more attention on ensuring that freshmen and sophomores earn the requisite number of credits and are connected to the school in such a way that they are more likely to persist to their junior year.

Despite identification for School Improvement, the school has maintained an ACT Composite Score average of 21.8, low college remediation rates, large per-student college scholarship rates, high college completion rates, and approximately 25% of students participating in honors or college-credit-bearing courses in high school. This

deeper look at the data shows that the high school is continuing to produce successful students at the top end, even though they are struggling to see the same successes with students at the low end.

Variation in instructional practices. Instructional practices of faculty members mirror the building architecture with a unique mingling of traditional methodologies and fresh approaches to engaging instruction. Interestingly, this does not seem to be consistent based on the number of years the teacher has served in the school, or even in the profession, but rather, there is an unusual co-existence that does not seem to be predictable based on any teacher or subject characteristic.

While visiting classrooms, I felt as though I saw a lot of wasted time and poor classroom management in some rooms. In one classroom, assignments that took a range of time frames to complete based on student expertise were given to the entire group of students at once. Most students were waiting for others to be ready to move on to the next task. In another classroom, most students had finished a quiz given by the teacher and had begun engaging in a variety of non-academic activities, such as eating breakfast, talking to their friends, and even painting each other's fingernails. A third classroom showed similar structures of wasted time while the teacher spent a lengthy period working with one student who was struggling to complete the assigned task. Students who had finished the task were staring into space, completing homework for other classes, and coloring notes to pass in the hallway. This same classroom was led by a teacher who spent the majority of my visit at her desk talking to students one at a time from across the room without getting up until just before the end of class. It is very

possible she was unaware that students were not working on the assigned task since she was unable to see what was on their desks.

Yet, maximizing student interest and class time was not a problem in all classes. In a physics class, students were working in small groups to build catapults that would accomplish a required task. The catapults demonstrated the students' knowledge of physics properties of propulsion as well as the mathematical modeling of the effects of angles on overall distance. An English classroom I visited was using technology to assess student learning at the end of a unit. The teacher was using an interactive white board and student response system to gather feedback from students through a traditional unit test. Students were quick to complete their task and commented on how much more they enjoy responding with their "clickers" than on paper. Upon completion of the test, students had an assignment designed to introduce them to the next unit that could be completed at their own pace as they were ready to move on.

Adams High School is transitioning into a 1:1 School, where each student will have continuous access to a laptop for all coursework. The 1:1 Laptop Initiative began with eighth grade students two years ago and has moved up with students into the high school. At the time of my observations in the school, ninth-grade teachers had all been trained in the use of technology to maximize learning and upper-grade teachers were preparing for training over the summer before receiving sophomores into their classes who were accustomed to using the laptops on a daily basis.

Changing the academic culture. Mr. Dawson, the administrative team, the counselors, and many of the teachers are working to change the academic culture of the school. Both academic and behavioral supports have been implemented – although each

needs to be more effective, according to the district's outside consultant – through a tiered intervention structure, which includes a Mandatory Uninterrupted Study Time (MUST) period for students struggling to meet expectations. Hallways are lined with posters and flyers advertising afterschool tutoring, summer academies, and guided study hall sessions during the school day.

While some students are still demonstrating apathy toward their education, in part due to home cultures that do not push students to succeed in school, teachers estimate that approximately three-fourths of students are showing signs of taking their coursework seriously. In advanced courses, nearly all students are demonstrating a desire to push themselves toward college preparation. One example of how pupils are demonstrating their intentions to succeed is how they are approaching the end-of-instruction tests (EOIs). Test monitors estimate that no more than 5% of students "blew off" the state-mandated tests, either by not showing up or by randomly guessing on each question without reading the prompt. Teachers, counselors, and administrators underscored for students how the tests can impact their lives:

> You go to apply for a job and your employer looks at your high school transcript, and they see that you didn't pass these tests or you just blew them off, they're going to assume that that's what you're going to do as an employee. So we really tried to go at it from that standpoint. It's important to you, not just for today or not just so you can get your high school diploma, but in the future, when employers look at this.

Students are beginning to understand that the state tests are important to them and to their futures, whether they want to go to college, postsecondary career training, or directly into the workforce.

As evidence of establishing a college-going culture, the counseling office has been completely decorated in college pendants from schools across the state and the country. The counseling staff has worked to support the school's drive for encouraging all students to attend postsecondary education after successful completion of high school in four years.

Climate

Discipline. When Mr. Dawson became an administrator at Adams High School, he was concerned by the attitudes of students and the lack of respect they displayed for adults and for one another. He gave the example of how it was not uncommon for a teacher to be "M.F.'ed" for asking a student to remove his hat in the hallway. He described students who would be called into an administrator's office, unwilling to respond to questions, and then not show back up to school for days or weeks without explanation. He described the public displays of affection that were inappropriate for school or school-sponsored social events. Mr. Dawson believed that it was the responsibility of the school to teach students that these actions and attitudes are not acceptable. So he led an effort to change the culture of the school.

A counselor described the change through use of the lunch period as an example. She explained that lunch used to be a "free for all." Students would roam around the entire campus, leaving trash and cigarette butts behind, and often getting into fights in unsupervised locations. The counselors and the administrative team decided to "take the

school back" by only allowing students access to certain parts of the campus during unstructured times. This allowed for more supervision and an opportunity to overtly teach students proper behaviors.

Discipline procedures and proper behaviors were included in the student handbook, a comprehensive document, detailing the rules, processes, and procedures students must follow in order to reach high school graduation. Particular sections of the student handbook used strong language, indicating that exceptions to the rules would not be made. For example, the Final Exam Bell Schedule was followed by the statement:

> UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES WILL STUDENTS BE ALLOWED IN THE HALLS DURING LUNCH OR DURING TESTING WITHOUT A PRINCIPAL'S APPROVAL**.**

Consequences for failing to comply with school rules were also clearly identified in multiple steps. In total, there were 45 offenses listed for which a student may be suspended.

Some students continued to report issues of bullying and not feeling safe, and the staff members were aware of certain pockets of drug use and fighting. Both teachers and counselors believed that the administrators were fair in their dealings with students on discipline issues, but several members of the staff were concerned about consistency and lack of communication with teachers when discipline decisions were made. On the flip side, administrators were also concerned about consistency of discipline in teachers' classrooms. With approximately 100 teachers on staff, there were approximately 100 different classroom discipline policies; therefore, the building leadership team determined to establish a coherent discipline policy for implementation in the 2012-2013 school year.

While the faculty clearly identified discipline issues, I never once felt unsafe in the school. As I walked through the halls at the close of the 2011-2012 school year, I was impressed by the respectfulness of students who opened doors for me, who offered me directions, who showed appropriate displays of affection to friends and significant others, and who calmly talked to one another on their way to classes. Even in large areas of no supervision, students were very well behaved. During the time of some of my visits, the school was administering state tests. During that period, school bells had been turned off to accommodate the testing environment. Without bells, the halls seemed to clear on cue, ensuring that students arrived to their classes on time. One faculty member hoped that the bells would remain off the following year because the staff found that students stayed more focused at the end of class and came to class and started working more quickly without them.

School spirit. Adams High School has determined to use school pride and student involvement as one method for reducing discipline issues and improving the school climate. Presently, the student body has lost pride in the school. School spirit is minimal at best. Although the adopted school values, student creed, school song, and victory chant all support the school's vision and encourage school pride, the lack of success in athletic programs, as well as some other extracurricular activities, has led to a decline in school spirit.

The new athletic director and band director have joined forces to combat the issue. They understand, as do the coaches and many other members of the faculty, that winning teams produce school spirit, and school spirit can be translated into fewer discipline issues and higher academic achievement. Staff members also acknowledge

that many students only come to school because of athletics or fine arts programs, so it is important for those programs to be successful and, in turn, encourage continued academic excellence. For example, many of the band members in the 2011-2012 school year were not the top tier students, and yet the band earned top marks at contest for the first time in several years. This success is expected to encourage students to work harder in all subject areas as part of an overall goal of academic excellence.

Other teachers, however, have not seen a close connection between school spirit and academic achievement; therefore, some are fighting against using class time for activities that would encourage school spirit, such as pep assemblies, class contests, and schoolwide programs.

Mr. Dawson, the administrative team, and the school counselors are also working to build school spirit among the faculty. Where the faculty used to celebrate only individual accomplishments, now faculty meetings include opportunities to acknowledge group successes and team recognitions. For example, during the faculty meeting I attended, one math teacher was awarded the "Testing Head Hunter Award" for tracking down students who did not show up for their required end-of-instruction tests. But this individual award was immediately followed by a group celebration of all the teachers, counselors, and administrators who contributed to making the testing window a huge success for the school. The celebration was a rendition of a popular country song, written and sung by the counselors and administrators, with the entire faculty joining in on the chorus, "Testing is over; Let's have a party!"

Communication. One aspect of school climate that nearly everyone I spoke with agreed needed to improve is communication. Internal and external communications are a

challenge for Adams High School. Internally, the size of the school makes it difficult for information to flow multi-directionally. Administrators are often left to use email as the primary mode of communication, which does not always communicate vision, goals, and strategies cohesively and positively. Externally, the diversity within the community makes it difficult for school officials to communicate with parents and families as well as with other community stakeholders. Both language and means of communication are challenging with some critical stakeholders. Teachers and administrators rely heavily on the school website or classroom webpages to communicate with parents, not all of whom have consistent access to the Internet. When asked about one thing they would change in the school, teachers and administrators consistently echoed the words of one teacher, "Primarily, it would be the communication between teachers and administrators. I don't think they've found a way yet to communicate with us effectively."

Implementation of the School Improvement Planning Process

Adams High School met all state and federal requirements for schools identified on the School Improvement List. The school complied with all requirements of posting notifications and sending letters to parents regarding designation for school improvement. That being said, the letters contained a tone of protectiveness. There was a slight tone of making excuses for the poor designation, but more importantly, the letters outlined the plethora of strategies the school and district would employ to make improvement. The tone instilled confidence in the school officials to do what was best for kids in the future despite the identification for school improvement in the past.

Creation of the SIP. Over the years since identification, the staff of Adams High School took a variety of approaches to School Improvement Planning. In 2009-2010, the

school created a SIP following the basic template provided by the State Department of Education, which included all state and federal requirements. They included district leadership in the process, but primarily focused on a small group within their own staff to create the plan.

In 2010-2011, not only was the school required to write a SIP using the WISE Tool, but the district was also required to write a District Improvement Plan (DIP). District administrators needed to show improvement across the district, particularly in relation to the high school graduation rate. Leadership at the district level more heavily influenced the process of writing and implementing the SIP in 2010-2011. Many educators at Adams High School regularly spoke of the plans as if they were the same plan or substituted the elements of the DIP for the SIP in conversation. There did not seem to be a clear understanding of the differences in the two nor in the process that was used at the district level versus the process used at the site level for writing and implementing the plan.

The superintendent set clear expectations for serious change. He removed autonomy from principals across the district who refused to implement the district reform initiatives or only paid "lip-service" to the expectations outlined in the DIP. That attitude transferred from the superintendent to the building administrators at Adams High School. They set expectations that all teachers would implement the improvement strategies adopted by the district or the building leadership team because those were the strategies that were best for kids. The administrators' open door policy, willingness to listen to all faculty members' suggestions, visibility in classrooms and hallways, and honest caring for teachers and staff members exemplified the sincerity of the administrative team to

lead the school to new heights. When comparing current conditions to those rumored about from previous years, a new teacher in the building said, "I think the administration's done a remarkable job in getting things turned around."

When asked directly about the process of writing and implementing the SIP, many teachers made comments about a "top-down approach," being told what to do by administrators, and implementing "predetermined tasks set forth by administration." However, when asked about the process of decision-making and determining what changes were needed in the school, almost all teachers discussed committees, building level team representation, giving input through department chairs, sharing opinions at faculty meetings, and open conversations with the principals in the school. "There was a coordinated effort between the administrators and the teachers. The administration was proactive and positive in their approach." One teacher said that with each year, "We've incorporated more teacher input into policy." Another said, "They've let the teachers have more of a say-so, which is what teachers wanted." In part, the differences in these two points of view could be explained by the confusion over the DIP and SIP as two separate plans but often referred to as the same plan.

One district administrator who had watched the process at Adams High School evolve over several years explained even further why there might be different viewpoints. Initially, the principal and the curriculum specialist in the school wrote the SIP and gave directives to the staff about what to do. Over time, they realized that they needed the involvement of other stakeholders, so they brought in the chairs of the EOI professional learning communities (PLCs). When Mr. Dawson became the head principal in 2011-2012, he stopped referencing the SIP as the rationale for initiatives and instead revealed

to faculty members the need for specific changes, one at a time, in order to meet the academic and social needs of students in the school.

The new approach brought about buy-in among most teachers in the building. Improvement strategies were implemented with more fidelity and confidence in their ability to improve Adams High School. Various groups, departments, and grade-level teams began to take on their own challenges, suggesting solutions to long-standing problems and assuming leadership roles in tackling issues and experimenting with new strategies. Teachers began to say, "We can get this done."

This most recent approach appeared more systematic. At the district level, additional staff and outside consultants were hired to address specific concerns, provide professional development, offer support, and monitor implementation of improvement strategies. At the building level, a long-range plan was developed, incorporating ideas from other successful schools and based on the needs revealed by student data; however, not all elements of the long-range plan were formally added into the required SIP. The plan was designed to be "teacher-friendly," in that it revolved around the results teachers would want to see in their classrooms. Mr. Dawson commented that one of the challenges was staying focused on the current-year reforms and not jumping ahead to years three, four, and five of the long-range plan. Taking on too many challenges, changes, and initiatives at once could lead to ineffective implementation and faculty burnout, so the administrative teams at both the building and district levels have been conscientious of keeping the load manageable for teachers each year.

Three different faculty members explained that this new approach to school improvement was more about evaluating processes and procedures than in years past.

"We're going to do something, but it might not be perfect right away. Be patient with it, and we'll make it better as we go." They discussed the "tinkering and tweaking" that had become common in the reform process. Faculty members consistently analyzed practices by asking, "Is it working? If it's not working, why do we continue to do it?" One teacher said that sometimes ideas that are tried get "dumped," but usually plans are just rewritten because one part needs to change, not the whole improvement strategy. These faculty members also pointed out that it is usually faculty input into the process that leads to recognition of a needed change and that administrators are quick to allow teachers to suggest alternative routes to implementation.

Implementation of the SIP. The administrators and teacher leaders made significant changes in communication channels and consistency. These changes led to a new cultural dynamic where teachers were expected to participate in improvement efforts and professional growth opportunities as part of the overall school improvement process.

Formal communication strategies, such as faculty meetings and department chair meetings, increased providing teachers with an overall picture of the direction of the school. Electronic communication was relied upon heavily for insignificant as well as major news. Due to the size of the school faculty, formal structures were required for sharing information consistently; however, both representative forms of communication, like department chair meetings, and mass communication, like e-mail, rely on users for transmitting or acquiring critical information. One administrator discussed the difficulty in getting some teachers to read their email in a timely manner, but the alternative of expecting department chairs to share information face-to-face meant inconsistent messaging.

Informal communication within the building still seemed to be the primary delivery method for awareness about new instructional techniques for the majority of the faculty. As a few teachers were instructed in a new strategy, they informally shared with their colleagues how it worked, so all teachers became vaguely aware of new techniques. Since not all teachers were expected to use all techniques, it was not required that all teachers be formally notified of changes, but the informality of communication seemed to leave holes in understanding coherence between reform initiatives. One teacher commented that it was very hard for her to understand the big picture of the reform strategies because bits and pieces of information came through on individual emails, in a variety of meetings, and in informal conversations, without connecting initiatives to one another.

In trying to improve communication, the administrative team began meeting weekly. It became apparent to faculty members that the principal and the assistant principals were all on the same page. In the past, teachers were known for going to one principal, and if they did not get the answer they wanted, they would go ask another one. They would keep asking different principals until they got the answer they wanted because there was no consistency in communication. The new administration became known for consistency, so teachers knew, "It's going to be the exact same answer because everybody's on the same page."

The consistency was not just in messaging. Several teachers and administrators discussed increased consistency over the past year in resolving discipline issues (although the building level team planned to work on furthering consistency for the future, as will be discussed later), instructional expectations, engagement of students in the classroom,

and cultural norms. Weekly professional development and professional collaboration time was one of the new norms implemented by the new administrative team in conjunction with district administrators. Teachers and administrators who attended professional development outside of the district were expected to share their learning with teachers and administrators who were unable to attend. Successful strategies implemented in one classroom were expected to be shared, observed, and replicated in other classrooms. Strategies included in the SIP or DIP were explicitly taught through professional development sessions and monitored for consistent implementation.

When the school was first identified for School Improvement, the climate of the school declined. One teacher said that the stress of the identification hurt teacher-student relationships because it felt like "a lack of faith in the teachers' ability to do their jobs." Over time, as the process led to results, attitudes changed. Teachers started exhibiting less negativity toward the process and began embracing the changes. Several teachers commented that there was less "bitching" about the initiatives, about the administrators, and about each other than there used to be. Students began to see the changes in teacher attitudes, both toward each other and toward the students. The cultural change of collaboration and cooperatively working toward improvement was evident to me in the meetings I observed as well as through conversations with teachers and administrators alike.

Use of the WISE Tool. Primarily two individuals of the leadership team and a small, select group of teachers at Adams High School were familiar with the WISE Tool. The principal at the time the school was required to write the SIP in WISE gave the assignment to one individual to be the process manager for WISE. Other educators

involved in the process were only aware of their role or assignment and did not participate at other levels of the development. The school did not utilize the optional features of the WISE Tool, such as developing meeting agendas, keeping minutes, or receiving Coaching Comments from an outside resource.

Assessing. To assess current school performance against the performance indicators in the WISE Tool, the school primarily focused on state assessment data in Algebra I and in English II. The school also relied on other quantitative data, such as ACT scores and student grades, to determine areas of weakness. In addition, the school administered a survey to teachers on each of the performance indicators to get teacher perceptions regarding each area, but the small group writing the SIP made many of the final judgments about strengths and weaknesses. Progress toward previous improvement goals was used to some degree as a guide in assessing what to include in the SIP.

Planning. The former school principal wrote, "As principal, myself, our curriculum specialist, and a hand-select group of teachers wrote a plan that would fit our student needs as well as being conducive for our teachers, staff, and administration." The small group of teachers was comprised of PLC leaders of the tested courses. They wrote the plan and entered their action steps into WISE. Sometimes, this was accomplished by projecting the WISE Tool onto a screen for the committee to review and edit. The plan was then presented to the staff at a faculty meeting and a link was sent to them so they could all read the plan. No one I interviewed or surveyed, other than the small group of teachers and administrators who had directly worked with the WISE Tool through the committee, had actually followed the link and read the SIP. Although there is a perception by some that all teachers' input was solicited for the plan, many teachers

responded that they were not in any way involved in the development of the plan, were unfamiliar with the term WISE, and felt as though they were just being told what to do by someone at the top. One teacher commented that, to her knowledge, no teachers were involved in the writing of the SIP. Regardless of perception, no one denies that very few people were responsible for actually formulating and ensuring implementation of the action steps that comprise the plan in the WISE Tool.

Monitoring. Each of the PLC leaders and others who served on the small committee to write the plan in the WISE Tool had a portion of the plan to monitor. They had formal meetings to review their progress toward meeting the plan in the first year it was written. In the following school year, more informal approaches to monitoring improvement were used, so very little was inputted into the WISE Tool after the 2010-2011 school year. During the 2011-2012 school year, focus was on monitoring progress toward SMART goals within each PLC and subject-specific team, as well as on use of improvement strategies in the long-range plan that had not formally been added to the SIP.

Improvement strategies included in the SIP. Adams High School implemented a variety of research-based improvement strategies before, during, and after the time the school was identified for School Improvement. When asked about the strategies that were most successful, teachers and administrators often identified the same strategies and sometimes identified additional ones. One stakeholder listed the following strategies as a list of what contributed to the improvement: "Implementation of research-based instructional strategies, focus on data to make instructional decisions, improved instructional feedback by supervising principals, maximizing student engagement and

academic learning time, fidelity to the Data Retreat and PLC process, and student interventions." Many of these were the same strategies identified by a variety of stakeholders. The large number of systematically implemented strategies aimed at one common goal is fitting for a strong-grid, strong-group culture. Only one teacher responded that it would have been better for the administration to set the outcome expectation and then let each teacher determine the best way to reach it independently; others commented on the value of consistency and cohesion in implementation.

Student relationships. Although there were still a few teachers who had either too low or too high expectations for their students, the majority of the faculty members had developed strong enough relationships with their students to know them well and to set rigorous but achievable goals for them, both academically and behaviorally. The teachers and administrators adopted the philosophy that personal relationships between adults and students directly impact academic achievement, leading to each teacher mentoring an "at-risk" student at Adams. The administrators had been "after our teachers for two or three years now: build relationships, build relationships." One administrator noted the importance of letting students feel that teachers and administrators care about them, that the students matter, and that their lives are important. In prior years, students often felt that teachers were only at the school for a paycheck, not because they cared whether or not the students were successful. As teachers made a concerted effort to know their students and express concern for their lives, problem students started to "let their walls down," behave better, and "achieve a little better." Palpable to me from my previous experiences with Adams High School was a shift in attitude regarding willingness to help students who did not understand when first taught a new skill or

concept. In previous years, some teachers had been referred to as the "Professors of the University of Adams High School" who taught it and hoped students got it. With the new focus on student relationships, these same teachers were known for providing additional learning opportunities for students to ensure that all students were successful.

Administrative restructuring. Not only did the district hire a new full-time employee to focus on implementation of improvement strategies across the district, they allowed Adams High School to hire additional administrative and support staff and to reorganize duties to focus attention where needed. A new faculty member's sole focus was on improving attendance by building relationships with students and following up with families immediately when students were late or absent. Adding an assistant principal and restructuring the duties of the rest allowed one assistant principal to spend all of her time on curricular and instructional issues. She had the freedom to observe classroom teachers daily, meet with PLCs, provide professional development, and monitor intervention strategies that might need adjustment. As a whole, the administrative team increased their capacity to give constructive feedback to teachers in a formative manner throughout the year in addition to required evaluations.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Without a doubt, the most discussed reform strategy at Adams High School was the newly restructured PLC program. Adams had been employing the use of PLCs for a small group of teachers in critical courses for a number of years, but in the 2011-2012 school year, Adams added PLCs and virtual PLCs for all teachers. In order to provide collaboration time during the workday, Adams began Late Start Wednesdays. Each Wednesday, students arrived later than on other days of the week, allowing teachers time to collaborate according to a

specified schedule each month. Some teachers also participated in subject-specific groups, for example Algebra I teachers, that met weekly during common planning times to develop common assessments, review student achievement, discuss instructional strategies, and align curriculum. Also new in the 2011-2012 school year was a district-wide requirement for teachers to participate in Instructional Rounds during at least one planning period each quarter. Instructional Rounds provide teachers with the opportunity to observe other teachers and to discuss strengths and weaknesses of the lesson, classroom management, and student engagement with colleagues who have observed the same classroom experience. Teachers have realized that all of these collaboration experiences have made their jobs easier and that they get better results. "They're not having to work as hard as they were having to work when they were working in isolation."

Interventions. One of the first strategies implemented as part of the SIP was a Mandatory Uninterrupted Study Time (MUST) period each day. The use of MUST was tweaked every year and sometimes mid-year to maximize the effectiveness of this time. The primary purpose of MUST was to provide immediate intervention for students who were struggling in one or more classes. It also provided time for students to make up tests or missing work, receive peer tutoring, or get a lesson retaught. The success of MUST led the school to begin thinking about ways to provide even more opportunities for struggling learners throughout the school day, including the use of E2020, the school's supplemental online course provider. The school offered students the opportunity to retake courses or get ahead in coursework through online curriculum. Prior to state tests, the assistant principal that focuses on instruction created a short-term

class on E2020 during MUST for students who were likely to be unsuccessful on the EOI without intervention. In addition, the school offered several programs for students who were behind in credits, unable to function in a traditional setting, or had unusual circumstances that caused them to need a different instructional environment. All of these interventions for students led to positive results. One administrator described the intervention culture shift this way:

> We're beginning now to talk about prevention instead of intervention and remediation. They are now beginning to understand that if we catch these kids before they fail, that our success rate is much greater than after they fail. And that's been kind of a big shift for them this year.

Learning technologies. Adams High School worked to become a leader in the state for implementation of learning technologies. One teacher said that the access to technology has made "teaching easier, and it's made learning more accessible." Each classroom is equipped with Promethean whiteboards and a great deal of professional development and collaboration has been offered on how to use them effectively. One teacher offered what seemed to be the only dissenting opinion when she said, "Realistically, we could teach just as well with old chalkboards as we can with our Promethean Boards." Immediately, other teachers in her Instructional Round group began to discuss how posting lessons online, using resources like Khan Academy, utilizing teacher websites, accessing the tools available from Promethean Planet, and requiring students to use the Promethean Boards to demonstrate their learning has changed the landscape of instruction. They discussed the value for students who are absent to get caught up more quickly and for differentiating instruction for students of

various learning speeds and abilities. Those teachers who were implementing the 1:1 Laptop Initiative were forced out of their comfort zones, recognizing that students often knew more about the technology than the teachers did. One administrator commented that teachers were "guiding, directing, the learning of those students" and were "being more creative" in their teaching practices. In addition, Adams offered online courses for students who prefered a virtual learning environment or who were unable to work desired courses into their schedules. Teachers and administrators remained cautiously optimistic as they acknowledged the power of online courses for some students while wanting to ensure that online courses were appropriately preparing students for EOIs and future coursework.

Non-fiction writing. "One of the things we've seen a lot of success with at the high school is using non-fiction writing daily." The superintendent of the district had been talking about using non-fiction writing in all classes for years, but teachers did not widely embrace the technique until the 2011-2012 school year when it was monitored for implementation. Each teacher was required to have some form of non-fiction writing assignment for their students a few times each week. Samples were submitted to the administration and used during professional learning conversations. The non-fiction writing experience allowed students to express their knowledge and for teachers to monitor student growth over the course of the year.

Student assessment. Non-fiction writing was one of several new forms of student assessment implemented at Adams High School. While the school continued to look toward EOI results, PLAN and ACT test scores, and AP exam scores as indicators of student learning, they also began to use a variety of other assessments of student

knowledge. In addition to traditional quizzes and tests, PLC teams developed common formative assessments (CFAs). CFAs provided feedback for instructional purposes across several teachers who taught the same course. The CFAs were used at Adams in EOI subjects as well as other courses to ensure consistency from teacher to teacher. In addition, teachers compared results and learned from one another about resources and curricula available to teach various topics. Informal demonstrations of knowledge and student assessment also increased at Adams. "Students are talking to each other more about their learning." They created presentations and showcased their work for their peers. One administrator commented that the variety of "opportunities that those kids are given to demonstrate their knowledge" grew and developed during the course of the School Improvement Process.

Involvement of elective teachers. While not all instructional strategies are designed for implementation in non-core courses, the administration and curriculum specialists worked to incorporate elective teachers into the instructional reform whenever possible. Elective teachers participated in PLCs, Instructional Rounds, non-fiction writing, student assessment, interventions, and learning technologies. This established consistency across the building and also brought cohesiveness to the staff. Two elective teachers commented that they did not always understand what all of the core teachers were doing with data or to improve test scores, but they did have a general understanding of the instructional direction of the school and incorporated appropriate strategies into their classes. They also commented that it helped them when they worked with the students in their athletic and fine arts programs because they knew more about what the students were expected to do in their core classes.

Other strategies. A plethora of other strategies was implemented at Adams; however, they did not all have the same level of intentionality or widespread implementation.

- Vertically aligning curriculum within the building and with the middle school provided coherence for student tasks.
- Moving from a data-rich culture to an information-rich culture where data informs instructional practice offered new opportunities to meet students' needs through intervention.
- Tracking students' course completion and checking for graduation readiness beginning in the ninth grade eliminated unnecessary gaps and overlaps in course-taking patterns and improved the on-time graduation rate.
- Involving support staff as a first line of offense led to several positive outcomes for at-risk students, including changing student behaviors, getting kids back on task, and improving grade point averages.
- Making the school more parent-friendly and informing parents of their opportunities to assist their children academically improved relationships with parents and impacted student performance.
- Reconsidering grading practices – such as allowing students to retake tests, to demonstrate mastery of content in a variety of ways, and separating behavioral monitoring from academic monitoring – led to fewer ineligible students and more students confident in their ability to graduate on time.

- Co-teaching provided equal access to content for students with and without disabilities, raising achievement levels and setting higher expectations for the future.

Success of the SIP. In general, district and school faculty believed the School Improvement Planning Process had been productive. "It made us really look at areas, particularly subgroups, that we had not looked at before." Building on successes in previous years, the faculty took on more and more challenges for improvement. Mr. Dawson pointed to the many different interventions that have been adopted in the school as the reason the school scored above the state average on state tests in 2010-2011. "Learning has improved. Learning has increased. And if we can continue to increase that on a yearly basis, then eventually we'll get there." Teachers and administrators regularly commented on increased math scores and increased history scores, in addition to improvements in English and in science, as testimony to the work that had been accomplished in the school since identification for School Improvement. One teacher praised the scores as the reason that "the majority of the kids are buying into it and believing in what they're doing. Because it tells on their scores." While most teachers and administrators were eagerly awaiting the results of the 2011-2012 EOI scores in order to prove the worth of the improvement efforts during that school year, at least one teacher did not believe the scores would improve because she said that the improvement efforts were disjointed and inconsistently implemented without any follow-up. Faculty members were delighted when they received their scores for the 2011-2012 school year and saw increases worthy of celebration.

Future growth and development. Although Adams High School saw significant growth during the time they were identified for School Improvement, no one expressed contentment with current performance. Mr. Dawson said, "We've made some good strides over the last few years, and if we can continue to make those, we'll climb out. We'll get to where we need to be on a consistent basis." He was concerned about making sure that the continuous improvement efforts did not "abuse" the staff, meaning that their desire to improve was so sincere that they were willing to put in the incredible number of hours needed to see results. That type of time commitment could cause burnout in the long-term if teachers were not protected. In the words of one teacher, "I feel like we're onward and upward, and basically, we all feel like the sky's the limit."

When asked specifically about future improvement strategies that the school would like to focus on, several ideas were mentioned, always in one of two categories: school culture and instruction.

School culture. With such a heavy emphasis on building relationships with students over the previous year, it is no surprise that many teachers and administrators discussed shoring up that particular role of teachers across the building. In addition to the informal teacher-student relationships developed in each classroom, the school desires to add counseling staff and to broaden the role of teachers as counselors. Through E2020, Ready by 21, Ombudsmen, and volunteer programs, the administration is looking to provide small group mentoring for the most at-risk students, particularly in the freshman and sophomore years. One hope is that these programs will lead to better student attitudes and reduced bullying. Both faculty and students have expressed a desire to reduce bullying through specific initiatives in future years. One of those initiatives is

Students for Change, which will be run by lower-achieving and at-risk students, partnered with the Student Council to develop school assemblies, encourage school citizenship, and provide peer mentoring. In addition, teachers, through the school's Building Level Team, are working to improve consistency in behavior and discipline. The new plan will focus on teacher empowerment, logical consequences, and consistent implementation across the building.

Instruction. Because "success breeds success," one administrator is confident that instruction will continue to improve in future years. As teachers employ new strategies, they will find them to be effective and will seek to improve their craft as instructors. With full implementation of the Common Core State Standards and the district's 1:1 Laptop Initiative, teachers and administrators anticipate more use of technology in the classroom and more opportunities for students to think critically, discuss their learning, and demonstrate their knowledge. In terms of teacher development, administrators and teachers want to see some tweaks in the PLCs, maximizing teachers' time to learn and share professionally. They anticipate modifying existing and developing new CFAs with more of a focus on student writing, particularly in mathematics where the emphasis on demonstrating understanding with Common Core is significantly greater than with current state assessments. Using the data from state and local assessments will also likely be an emphasis in coming years as teachers rely more on the data to develop student interventions. Administrators want to find a way to keep students from being able to opt out of needed interventions. MUST will continue to be revamped and revitalized, although many of the intended changes will not occur until at least 2013-2014 because the school intends to stick to its long-term plan. One of the

visions for MUST is to increase the enrichment opportunities for students who do not need personalized remediation so that interventions can occur with a smaller student-teacher ratio.

Study Participation

The principal, Mr. Dawson, was very interested in my study. His email to his faculty members letting them know about the study indicated to the faculty that they were encouraged to participate but were not required to do so. At every turn, I encountered teachers, counselors, and administrators willing to share the story of Adams High School with me. The administrators invited me to participate in more professional development, collaborative planning meetings, schoolwide faculty meetings, and course-specific data reviews than I could schedule during my time of study. Documents were gathered and sent to me unsolicited, although most had already been publicly displayed on the school's website as examples of the open nature of the school to engage their community. Numerous administrators and teachers completed the follow-up questionnaire and volunteered to participate in interviews. The administrators also gave me a list of teachers who might be willing to participate in interviews, including those who would tell the "not-so-great" side of the story. Of those teachers and administrators contacted, only one chose not to participate in an interview. There was an overwhelming sense of openness about sharing the successes and challenges of the school.

Summary

Adams High School is a school in the midst of major change. The juxtaposition of old and new architecture is symbolic of the combination of instructional approaches, attitudes, communication strategies, student motivations, and academic outcomes in the

school. Groups of teachers with different approaches to instruction sit next to each other in faculty meetings the same way buildings from different eras sit next to each other on the expansive lot. Students representing a variety of subcultures meld into one student body the same way structures with completely different purposes meld into one campus. The changes in the physical arrangement of classrooms and buildings over time illustrate the changes in educational philosophy, instructional strategies, and organizational order apparent in the school.

Just as the decades-old buildings bring historical perspective to the culture of the school, so do educators and community members who have decades of personal connection to the tradition of excellence for which the school is known. The majority of faculty members have bought into the belief that the school can return to its days of academic excellence – for all students, regardless of background – and they appear to be working diligently to determine how to pull off such a challenging feat. They have adapted the School Improvement Planning Process to help them accomplish this task. Administrators, both at the site level and at the district level, demonstrate a commitment to growth and an unrelenting approach to caring for students and their futures. The school is proud of its successes in recent years, but faculty members are dedicated to continuous improvement in years to come.

Buchanan Elementary School

Buchanan Elementary School was identified for School Improvement because it did not reach the mathematics Academic Performance Index targets in 2009 or 2010 (932 and 1074, respectively); therefore, it did not make AYP as defined in Chapter I for two consecutive years. Although it is accredited as one elementary school, Buchanan

Elementary School functions as two almost separate entities: a Lower Elementary serving Grades PK-2 with approximately 350 students, and an Upper Elementary serving Grades 3-5 with approximately 300 students. Combined, the school has approximately 45 certified faculty and additional support staff. Buchanan Elementary is joined by one middle school and one high school to comprise the Buchanan Public School District in rural Oklahoma. The small town has fewer than 3,000 residents and covers less than 30 square miles, almost all of which is farm land or residences.

Location and Physical Structure

The rural-ness of the school is striking. Following the directions of my GPS Navigation System, I turned south off of I-40, which runs through the center of Oklahoma, and I found myself driving on sometimes paved and sometimes gravel county roads toward the school. Barns, homes, and a smattering of small businesses were the only structures visible for miles. Cattle, horses, and other farm animals were regularly noticeable from the road. I later learned that my GPS had steered me the wrong direction on that first journey, so future visits to the school included only paved roads, but the beauty of the countryside was always around me.

Sitting on one of the benches that lined the front entry of the Lower Elementary upon my arrival, I found the relative quiet of country living that surrounded the school to be palpable. There were no honking horns or beeping construction vehicles, no rush of traffic or hum of machinery. The only sounds were a harmony of chirping birds that came from the line of trees on the opposite side of the street, joining a circus of children's laughter and yelling (the kind that accompanies raucous play) coming from the common

play area around the corner of the building. The stillness of the surrounding countryside highlighted the liveliness of the school itself, the heartbeat of the community.

The entire school district lies on a few square blocks on the northeast corner of one intersection. As the community and the school district have grown over the past several decades, buildings have been added to accommodate more students, and the district's central office has moved off campus just north of the school complex. The original school structures now house the middle school and high school, and new buildings have been built for the elementary and some athletic and other co-curricular activities. The Lower Elementary was built in 2003 with an addition in 2009, designed to reflect, without exactly mirroring, the red brick with blue trim architecture of the original structures. The Upper Elementary is comprised of three metal buildings, one for each grade level served in the school. Between and around the Lower Elementary and Upper Elementary are common buildings – one for the cafeteria and music room, one for the computer lab and media center, and one for physical education classes.

Inside the Upper Elementary buildings, dim lighting, dark colors, metal lockers, and low ceilings seem to dampen the natural energy of students and faculty members alike. However, inside the Lower Elementary, natural light, long hallways, bright colors, and student work add to the energy of the young students and excited faculty. The Lower Elementary extends in two directions from the office suite and lobby. The office suite houses the principal and counselor as well as a small waiting room. Meetings of small groups of teachers regularly occur in the principal's office or a classroom, due to lack of conference room space when classes are in session.

Classrooms throughout the Lower and Upper Elementary Schools vary greatly from one another, reflecting the content taught and the personalities of the teachers. Classroom furniture arrangements ranged from neatly structured rows of desk/chair combinations to clusters of small tables with several chairs, and from long rows of chairs to large floor seating areas. Rooms were furnished and equipped based on the needs of students, and rooms were decorated, at least in part, to reflect personalities of teachers. Relationships between students and teachers seemed to be valued in the way each classroom I visited had personal mementos, pictures, and reflections of the teacher's personal life, as well as the teacher's connection to former students. Pictures of alumni and trophies attesting to years of success in competition connected current students to the traditions of alumni.

Both the music room and the gymnasium had very traditional arrangements for the courses being taught, but both appeared to be lacking in the quantity of resources needed for the variety of content taught throughout the course of a school year. In the music room, several mallet instruments were available for the current unit on rhythm, but other instruments, books, sheet music, and audio-visual equipment were noticeably absent. The teacher used a voice amplifier to be heard over the instruments and student voices while singing. Conversely, in the P.E. building, the teacher had difficulty being heard over the yelling and ball-bouncing of the students, and there was no furniture available for neatly arranging student's jackets, shoes, and lunches that accompanied them to class.

Resources did not seem to be lacking in the core classrooms. Each classroom I visited had a wealth of instructional materials, paper, crayons, hands-on activities,

manipulatives, and equipment. I was struck by the juxtaposition of two kindergarten classrooms I visited that both seemed to have all the resources necessary for successful instruction, but those resources were arranged in amazingly different ways. One classroom had four small tables with three-to-five chairs at each table. Student cubbies and all cabinets were straight and incredibly organized. Colorful curtains covered each open cabinet, softening the room while keeping the atmosphere very open and neat. A large, well-defined seating area faced the bulletin board and SmartBoard for classroom discussion and direct instruction time. Next door, another kindergarten classroom also had small group tables and a carpeted seating area, but also had some desks, some chairs, a reading nook, a computer station, tables with chairs stacked on top, and a swing. Marker boards, bulletin boards, a SmartBoard, and every wall were covered with student work, posters, quotes, and knick-knacks, with additional work and learning resources hanging from the ceiling. Nooks and shelves were overly full with years' worth of successful instructional resources at the teacher's fingertips, and countertops were stacked with recently used books and manipulatives as well as student projects and classroom tools. While the two classrooms were vastly different in physical layout and structure, the outcome for students in both classrooms was having teachers with exactly what they needed for instructional purposes at any moment.

People and Relationships

Highly relational individuals. The faculty and staff of Buchanan Elementary School, as well as the community members with whom they interact, are highly relational individuals. From their meetings to their communications and from their academic

program to their playground conversations, it is clear that relationships are one of the most important aspects to the working lives of these educators.

When asked what makes the school what it is, one teacher exclaimed, "The people are amazing! The staff, the parents, which means the students… people were just so gracious, so willing to help… It was just unreal, like nothing I've ever experienced." She went on to discuss the camaraderie and overall positive morale of the staff as unique compared to both smaller and larger school districts with which she had experience.

Students, parents, and faculty take pride in the school. Many of the staff members are alumni of the district, "so they want to make sure that it is successful." They want a positive image of the school for the public, and they want to be highly engaged in leading to successes that reflect well on the school. When the school began offering parent nights to inform parents of instructional changes in the school and to offer parents an opportunity to be involved in the academic growth of their children, families (parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins) responded with enthusiasm, showing up in volumes that were completely unpredicted. I even experienced students showing off for me when they realized a visitor was in the classroom. One young lady kept looking at me with a huge grin on her face every time she answered a question correctly.

Administration. Due in part to the small size of the district, the teachers had regular opportunities to engage with others from all schools as well as with the central office staff. The superintendent of the school showed his desire for building relationships directly with teachers by hosting an Excellence Committee, comprised of teacher volunteers from each building in the district, giving them an opportunity to voice their concerns, ideas, suggestions, and praises for the school. He requested their involvement

on development of the school calendar, resource needs, instructional goals, community engagement, and "on everything" according to one member of the committee. He also used the Excellence Committee as a vehicle for disseminating information with the teachers and keeping them apprised of the direction of the school board and major initiatives in the community. This open line of communication directly between the central office and the teachers minimized gossip, which is a common problem in small districts, and helped the teachers to feel valued by the administration.

The principal of the Lower Elementary, Mrs. Easton, has a very unique relationship with the district and with her faculty. Mrs. Easton is a graduate of Buchanan Public Schools. She taught in the elementary before it split into the two sites and became principal three years ago. Her statement, "I know not to make too many changes your first three years of being a principal," explains many of the approaches she used during the time the school was identified for School Improvement. She is an organized manager, keeping the school functioning on track, and she loves each student as if he were her own child. "I've written every plan the district probably has that pertains to elementary, so I know about how we're supposed to do just about everything. So, I follow the book."

When Mrs. Easton holds a meeting, she ensures that the work gets done, but she does it in a way that causes the teachers to feel valued. In close succession to one another, I witnessed three grade level team meetings in Mrs. Easton's office. These meetings were focused on making recommendations for student-teacher assignments for the upcoming school year. Before these meetings began, teachers had been given the opportunity to select their own family's teachers. The remaining slots in each classroom

were filled based on recommendations of their current teacher, the counselor, and Mrs. Easton. Each meeting included several minutes of getting organized, locating enough writing utensils for the teachers who did not bring one with them, and laughing about the frustrations and normal occurrences of the day. Mrs. Easton responded to each group of teachers very differently, allowing their personalities to drive the meeting processes and outcomes. For the highly organized, task-oriented group, Mrs. Easton encouraged them to "round-robin" their suggestions until each had completed their list of requests. For the often off-task group, Mrs. Easton shared her own funny stories and then brought them back to the task at hand. There was little structure for ensuring each teacher had equal participation. My observation notes read: "First teacher to speak up 'wins.'" For the highly heterogeneous group, Mrs. Easton played to each teacher's strengths, calling on each as needed to solicit the desired results. One teacher even commented on how well the principal adjusted to each group's different approaches every time they met.

The Upper Elementary administration had a very different dynamic. Mr. Fanning, had been the principal of the elementary school for many years. When the school split into the Upper and Lower Elementary Schools, he assumed the role of the Upper Elementary School Principal. Toward the end of the 2011-2012 school year, he was appointed to become the middle school and high school assistant principal and athletic director for the ensuing school year. His duties and focus were split between the two job assignments for the few months in which I was conducting my research. After repeated emails and phone calls, I was unable to connect with him. Without his support behind the research study, it was also difficult to connect with his staff members. I was able to meet with one of the Upper Elementary teachers and the school counselor. The counselor,

Mrs. Grayson, was named as the new principal just after school ended. By the time I met with her, she was serving as both the Upper Elementary School counselor and acting principal.

One school, two sites. One of the most unique aspects of Buchanan Elementary School is its structure of being one school functioning as two almost separate sites. Except for a few commonly shared facilities and commonly shared specials teachers, including the music teacher and the P.E. teacher, the schools operate independently. Until five years ago, the school was unified. Due to the size of the student population and faculty, the district administration determined to split the school to be more in line with the sizes of the middle school and the high school. "We are not as cohesive as we used to be [with] two separate principals, two separate secretaries, two separate counselors." Planning teams are chosen separately but work together to produce one plan for activities such as School Improvement; Safe, Healthy, and Fit School Advisory Committee; and Reading Sufficiency Act. The principals take turns leading various efforts. For example, although the test scores from Grades 3-5 were what led the school to identification, Mrs. Easton led the School Improvement Planning Process for the entire PK-5, using staff from both the Upper and Lower Elementary Schools. Due to their physical location and the shared services, faculty members regularly interact with one another and seem collegial in almost all cases. The one obvious exception is the very apparent tension between Mrs. Easton and Mr. Fanning.

At one grade level team meeting, the second grade teachers at the Lower Elementary were making suggestions for third grade class assignments as the students were preparing to move to the Upper Elementary. The teachers asked why they had

never done this before, and Mrs. Easton explained that she thought their suggestions might be considered this year since someone else would be named the principal of the Upper Elementary. She did remind them that they were only making suggestions that may or may not be used by the new principal, but she believed they might be since she thought she knew who might be named as the principal. When Mrs. Grayson was named as the new principal, the suggestions for class assignments were accepted with gratitude and used in the development of class rosters.

Mrs. Grayson explained that she believed the former tension was a result of "everybody's plate gets a little full," but she also stated that "[Mrs. Easton] and I get along well. We've worked real well together the last few weeks in terms of scheduling and planning and different things like that." Regardless of the reason for the previous tension, administrators and teachers from both the Upper and Lower Elementary Schools seem to be excited about the possibility of working more closely with the other school in the future. One teacher who works with both schools said, "I do feel like I'm in the middle at times, but that's a great place for me to be… because it's a great way to kinda bring both sides together into the equation… Now that we're going to have better communication, I think, that isolation feeling won't be there as much."

Climate

As discussed previously, students, parents, and faculty take pride in Buchanan Elementary School. The school has a reputation for being one of the best schools in the county and is regularly featured in the local newspaper for excellence in education. The school website boasts: "Welcome to the Buchanan Public School website. We are extremely proud of our students, staff, and community. Through their magnificent

collective efforts, we have continued our long success rate as one of the finest scholastic and extra-curricular public school institutions in Oklahoma."

"The innocence… and the small school atmosphere and the country atmosphere is still here," one teacher said. The small, country school atmosphere has led to a very trusting school climate. Although a posting on the school door stated otherwise, it was my experience that visitors were allowed to move around the campus uninhibited. On one of my visits, I sat in a parking lot reserved for faculty at the end of a road marked private and watched students milling about the campus. No one expressed concern by my disobedience of the privacy and reserved markings. I was amazed at how "open" the campus was. Young people were everywhere, moving between buildings and across parking lots. Students were not even separated by grade levels. Kindergarten through high school students mingled on the playground, calling each other by name with older children taking care of younger ones (although the administration was surprised to learn of this occurrence). As I moved around the campus, no one stopped me to ask who I was, what I was doing, or even why I was taking pictures of their kids! Several people greeted me or smiled as they passed, but not once did I have to explain my presence to this very trusting group of people. I stopped in the Lower Elementary and Upper Elementary offices to sign in or announce myself, but in both places, secretaries acted as though it were odd that I did so, despite the signs on the door requiring it.

It appeared that most adults in the school were unaware of how different this climate was from other schools, even in a nearby town. Those who were aware of the uniqueness of this school's climate spoke of the differences in very positive terms. "I'm pretty biased to this school, but it's just [pause] we expect more." The teacher discussed

how the school has more discipline than surrounding schools, and the administration and the parents back the teachers in enforcing discipline as well as academic expectations. "I am extremely thankful to be at this school. I see what a good thing I have here, and I would love to stay here for the rest of my career."

Academics

High expectations. In terms of academic expectations, the district expects to be among the best. Having a school identified for School Improvement was shocking. Initial reaction was almost one of denial. It seemed to teachers and administrators that it must not be true because the school is too good to have that type of designation. In actuality, the school's low mathematics performance in 2009 was only of their students with disabilities, but in 2010, the scores of several student groups dropped while the scores of students with disabilities increased significantly. During the first year of identification (2010-2011), the school focused so much on mathematics that they saw their reading scores fall. When the school improvement designation persisted into 2011-2012, the school took serious action to right any wrongs that may have led to lower than acceptable levels of student performance.

That being said, academics are defined broadly at Buchanan. At both the Upper and Lower Elementary Schools, there was an apparent focus on helping students develop in a well-rounded way. I observed teachers at the Upper Elementary mentoring students as they prepared for a talent show. The instruction was less on refining talent than it was on helping students to prepare to present themselves in front of their classmates in a professional manner, to accept any possible criticism they might face, and to improve their confidence and self-images. At the Lower Elementary, teachers discussed the

importance of teaching children to follow rules, to be organized, to treat one another with respect, and to hold high expectations for themselves. These attributes were considered just as important to the teachers as the ability to read, write, solve problems, compute, and study science and history.

Autonomy. In my observations of classrooms, I noted, "Each classroom is SO different! There doesn't seem to be any consistency in expectations, processes, activities, or rules. This isn't necessarily a bad thing – just very different." Teachers notice the variation as well, although they said it is easier to see the variation within the grade level team than between teams. One teacher explained the variation:

> We each expect different things. Like I'm very big on structure, and on handwriting, and on expectations, and manners and things, and to where some are more into centers and more free time and not exactly on curriculum tasks… Some people are going to expect a whole lot more and other people are going to be okay with a child up out of their seat all of the time.

Rather than force teachers to have consistent classrooms, great care was taken to match students' personalities and needs with teachers' personalities and expectations. When asked how they know which students will be a good fit with which teachers the following school year, one teacher said, "We can tell – even from their work out in the hallway."

The expectation was somewhat different curricularly. When the district adopted and purchased a curriculum, all teachers were expected to use that curriculum; however, without formal processes for monitoring implementation except in reading and in mathematics, teachers may have chosen not to teach the expected content in all subject matters. For example, Mrs. Easton discovered at the end of the 2011-2012 school year

that one of her second grade teachers had been using the district adopted phonics curriculum only as a supplement for at least three years. Mr. Fanning had never monitored for implementation before the Elementary School split and neither had Mrs. Easton, so the assumption that all of the teachers were teaching the expected phonics curriculum was not accurate. Teachers may have unintentionally been given more autonomy over their curriculum than the administration even realized, but Mrs. Easton was confident that all teachers used the reading and mathematics curriculum selected for the district. One teacher, who did not have the responsibility of teaching reading or mathematics, observed that the freedom to choose her own curriculum resources and select her own priorities for instruction was a good thing for her because she made good choices, but she also commented that it could be a bad thing for other teachers who might not choose the best content. I wondered how many other teachers would say the exact same thing about their own choices.

Students, too, were given a great deal of autonomy in some classrooms. In P.E., students were given the choice of whether to participate in activities. In one math class, students were allowed to select from a variety of different learning activities that had the same learning goal. In one reading class, students were encouraged to select a book about a topic that interested them.

Structured for learning. The school faculty exhibited a "do whatever it takes" attitude. For example, the music program was lacking in resources, particularly in owning sheet music needed for programs. While the teacher focused on vocabulary and used singing as the vehicle to teach students about rhythm, chords, and music theory, she desperately needed to purchase sheet music to advance the program. Knowing that the

budget would be a struggle, she requested to make the purchases anyway. Mr. Fanning responded to the request with the solution of holding a fundraiser. Pulling the school together, the music program raised thousands of dollars to purchase the needed sheet music and other resources to raise the program to the expected level of instruction.

The same attitude led to the decision to departmentalize upper elementary grades, although this practice did not last for an extended number of years. After reviewing test data, the administrators and teachers came to the conclusion that not all of the teachers had the same strengths, so they restructured the school schedule to allow one teacher to focus only on mathematics and others to focus on their strengths.

Similarly, students expressed an attitude of putting learning first. I watched students from kindergarten through fifth grade working independently as expected by their teachers. Each classroom I visited had been structured for learning to occur, through direct instruction, small group work, or independent practice. Students were leading others in learning activities, relying on resources available throughout the classroom, and all were actively engaged.

Celebrating and intervening. Buchanan Elementary provided regular opportunities to celebrate the successes of its students and to intervene when students were not successful. From free periods to extra recesses, students were honored for their hard work at the conclusion of a nine-week grading period, a challenging unit, or a period of excellent behavior. Mrs. Easton established regular celebrations when students met reading and math goals. Each grading period, she would extend a challenge to her students and would follow through with some sort of dare when they were successful.

Students, teachers, and administrators regularly discussed these as great memories on which to build future goals.

When children were not successful at reaching goals – either behaviorally or academically – interventions were deployed. The school used a Response to Intervention approach for students who were struggling with learning concepts. They provided tutoring after school, one-on-one reading assistance, pullout programs, and high school mentors for struggling readers. Similarly, behavior plans were established for students who were struggling to meet procedural and relational expectations to correct poor behavior. At the end of the year, because of their high expectations, both academically and behaviorally, if interventions had been unsuccessful in closing the gaps for a student, the teacher may recommend that a committee consisting of the teacher, principal, counselor, and parents consider retention in order to ensure that the student has a greater opportunity for success in the future.

Implementation of the School Improvement Planning Process

Buchanan Elementary School met all state and federal requirements for schools identified on the School Improvement List. The school complied with all requirements of posting notifications and sending letters to parents regarding designation for school improvement. The letter included all required components and focused on how the school was working to improve the academic conditions for students.

Creation of the SIP. The district set up district-wide committees to assist with the ongoing process of school improvement. Teachers were included on these committees, and participants rotated every two years, "so we're not stuck on one committee or so other people have the opportunity to be on." These committees fed into

and aligned with the work of the School Improvement Committee that was focused on the requirements placed on the Upper and Lower Elementary Schools as a result of identification on the School Improvement List. It appeared that the district used the opportunity of Buchanan Elementary School being placed on the list as a springboard for improvements across the district.

"We had been trying to align our curriculum to get everybody from kindergarten all the way up to high school all on the same levels." Working groups of Lower Elementary, Upper Elementary, Middle School, and High School teachers from Buchanan divided by subject matter to align the curriculum. They analyzed their instructional materials, resources, and test scores to determine areas of weakness and to place focus on those at every appropriate grade level.

Specifically at the Upper Elementary School, state testing results were analyzed at the grade and teacher levels to identify strengths and weaknesses. Curriculum resources were scrutinized to determine if they complemented the teacher's strengths and weaknesses or if gaps in materials needed to be filled. Subgroups of students were compared to one another by using test data, but it became evident that weaknesses in student performance spanned most of the subgroups or were overly apparent in large subgroups, such as males.

At the Lower Elementary School, grade level teams reviewed classroom assessments and instructional materials to set expectations and determine where students were not meeting those expectations.

Once strengths and weaknesses were identified through committee participation, a plan was established that met state and federal requirements and addressed the areas of

greatest need. Mrs. Easton, the Lower Elementary principal, was identified as the point person for writing and implementing the plan. She ensured that the plan components were included in the WISE Tool and that progress toward implementing the plan was noted accordingly.

Implementation of the SIP. The SIP set some high expectations for Buchanan Elementary School. Children were expected to know a lot more than in years past. A Lower Elementary School teacher said, "When you expect something out of a child and you follow-up with what you're supposed to as a teacher, they can do it." She discussed the high standards set for Buchanan students and how everyone had to work together to push students toward those expectations. Every educator was seen as an equal in helping children reach these high expectations.

Almost every teacher who responded to the online survey or participated in an interview discussed their participation in the School Improvement Plan implementation in terms of serving on committees, helping with implementation of specific improvement strategies, and preparing their students. Teachers were very knowledgeable about the SIP, or at least about the new activities that were being conducted in the school with the purpose of improving student achievement on state tests. One Lower Elementary School teacher did comment that she expected that the Upper Elementary School teachers were affected more by the designation and the plan than she was because all of the state testing occurred at the Upper Elementary School.

Participation in implementing the plan was seen not only among teachers, but also with administrators and even parents. "We also encourage parent involvement in helping each student to be the best that they can be." One teacher shared her experience of

following students' parents on Facebook. Several parents posted comments about making sure their children were ready to "take state tests tomorrow." The teacher appeared pleased that parents were aware that state tests were taking place and that they were willing to assist in preparation.

Teachers discussed being more aware of Mrs. Easton's presence than they had been in the past. She was making more classroom visits "just to see how things are going." Teachers praised administrators for identifying needs and fixing them. They also discussed being more aware of each other's work and collaborating more with other teachers. "We've just worked together, I think, a whole lot more." One survey noted that the educators at Buchanan all work together as a team to "encourage our students to do their best" and "to help them achieve their goals." Dedication and hard work were common themes among survey responses regarding why the school saw success in such a short period of time.

Although the school functions in most cases as two separate buildings, for the School Improvement Plan implementation, they acted "as one site to do that. They don't have theirs and we have ours. We do it all together." Several commented that the School Improvement Plan helped get everyone on the same page and working toward the same goals. It provided consistency and communication among the teachers and administrators.

It was apparent in the grade level team meetings I observed that teacher participation in decision-making was ever-increasing in the school. Although the teams functioned very differently from one another, the expertise of the teachers at each grade

level was valued and relied upon as decisions were being made for the upcoming school year.

In addition to the expectation that everyone participate in school improvement activities, there was an expectation that all teachers reflect on their practice and work toward continuous growth as professionals. "We try to show teachers the need for whatever change, and it's a process," Mrs. Easton said. By bringing in professional development and an outside consultant to examine test data, the district provided teachers with resources to understand their current reality in comparison to where they could be. Because the school was already "doing a lot of really good things," they looked at the School Improvement Process in terms of "small changes here and there." Those small changes, though, caused many teachers to "be a lot more introspective about what they're teaching." Rather than pulling out years-old lesson plans and the curriculum resources that are on the shelf without thought, teachers examined whether those activities would lead them to where they wanted to go.

Use of the WISE Tool. Mrs. Easton was the only person in the school district who accessed the WISE Tool; however, several of the educators in the Upper and Lower Elementary Schools were familiar with the tool and how Mrs. Easton used it for writing and monitoring the SIP. Only one individual commented that more teachers should have been involved in the process because everyone else commented that they felt they were part of the process. Mrs. Easton commented that she appreciated having the WISE Tool because it served as a template of what was needed and how to move forward. She used some of the optional features of the tool to stay organized during implementation, but she

chose not to use the Coaching Comments feature to receive feedback from an outside resource.

Assessing. School counselors were responsible for providing the necessary student achievement data to assess Buchanan's needs. In addition, SIP Committee members sought feedback from their grade-level peers about the school's strengths and weaknesses. This data was used to assess the school against the performance indicators in WISE and to determine which areas needed the most focus.

Planning. Writing the SIP at Buchanan was a lengthy process, "meeting after meeting… brainstorming ideas." Teachers were invited to serve as representatives on the SIP Committee, and all other teachers were expected to give their input through their representative. Nearly every educator who responded to the questionnaire or participated in an interview discussed whether they served on the committee or gave their input on specific ideas to be included in the plan; however, none of them discussed using the read-only access available to them in order to actually read the SIP through the WISE Tool. Mrs. Easton's extreme organization then led the committee to split up the action steps, or tasks, so that everyone had some level of responsibility for implementing the plan. "We actually gave tasks to teachers that weren't even on the committee… So, it wasn't just the committee, the School Improvement Committee, that was responsible for things." A spreadsheet of assigned tasks with deadlines was generated regularly from the WISE Tool and provided to everyone who had responsibility for implementing a portion of the plan.

Monitoring. Because so many teachers had different tasks for which they were responsible, they understood the importance of completing the work and reporting back

to Mrs. Easton so that she could input completion dates in the WISE Tool. Mrs. Easton's philosophy was that fulfilling the plan was more important than updating the computer on deadlines, so the WISE Tool was not always as up-to-date as she might have preferred, but the work was being completed and she was ensuring that assignments were not being overlooked. One surprise to Mrs. Easton was the requirement to document that an objective was fully met after all of the tasks were complete or to add additional tasks if the completion of the original plan did not meet the desired outcome. She did not expect this as part of the monitoring process in the WISE Tool.

Improvement strategies included in the SIP. Buchanan focused their improvement efforts around a small number of strategies that they believed were likely to lead to improvement. Other improvement strategies were used in individual grade levels and classrooms with a great deal of autonomy on how to best implement them, but the schoolwide approach to a few common activities brought more cohesion to the process.

Family Nights. By far, the most discussed improvement strategy implemented in Buchanan Elementary School was the institution of Family Literacy Nights and Family Math Nights. The purpose of the Family Nights was to get parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles involved in the education of their children. According to Mrs. Grayson, who had served as the counselor of the Upper Elementary School during the time of implementation:

> It gets the parent into the school. I think it really helps with parental involvement… There's more accountability with homework and better teacher relations because they see what they do. The more involved they are, the better the success of the child.

One survey response echoed this sentiment: "Parents are more involved in their child's education. I think they feel more connected to the school by attending the family night activities." This statement was connected to "I feel like our younger students have a solid foundation in math and reading." There seems to be a connection between parental involvement and foundational skills in the minds of the educators at Buchanan.

Family Literacy Nights had different themes. The Dr. Seuss Night included serving green eggs and ham. "We had four or five hundred people here that we did not expect… It was a huge success." Faculty members read Dr. Seuss books and some even dressed in costume. The community's response was so overwhelming that the plan for the next Family Literacy Night went outdoors to accommodate additional participants. With a campout theme, the school served hotdogs and invited families to bring their own lawn chairs and blankets. Little groups formed on the playground as if gathered around campfires while teachers and administrators read stories dressed like the characters.

Family Math Night was set up differently at the Upper Elementary School. Each teacher's classroom had different math activities that families could participate in together. Activities were designed to teach parents what they could do at home that would increase student math skills and still feel like a game to the children.

While the Family Nights were considered by some to create a financial hardship due to the food and activities provided, the return was found to be worth the costs. In fact, Mrs. Easton commented that she considered them to be fairly inexpensive, even with the cost of food included. Other community engagement activities built on the success of the Family Nights. The school offered Breakfast with Dad and Breakfast with Mom. They already had plans to do Breakfast with Grandparents for the 2012-2013 school year

in addition to Moms and Dads. "Just finding any way that doesn't cost a whole lot of money to get people up here and get the community involved."

Daily structure reorganization. Classroom time was reorganized to focus time during the day on reading and math instruction. Increasing time during the day and putting more emphasis on those two topics improved test scores. In addition, some grade levels experimented with departmentalizing instruction so teachers were focused on fewer topics. By fifth grade, students rotated for each class period, allowing the math teacher to specialize in only one subject and allow other teachers to focus on their strengths. Teachers began experimenting with student groups based on skill needs. "This seemed to help tremendously," according to one teacher. Even the morning Rise & Shine assembly at the Lower Elementary School was restructured to ensure that focus was placed on math and reading daily.

On the other hand, this reorganization left some teachers questioning whether students were being provided a well-rounded education. One teacher commented that leveling, or identifying specific needs and organizing classes around those needs, was very effective, but she was concerned that students would be good in only a couple of subjects, rather than in all content areas.

Reading and math instruction. After analyzing student needs and curriculum resource alignment, teachers began to change their instructional practices with reading and math. Teachers began studying the Common Core State Standards and discussing how these new standards would need to impact their instructional activities. They began implementing these new strategies immediately. For example, one kindergarten teacher had her students read a series of books with similar structure. After reading the books

together as a class and questioning students for vocabulary attainment, decoding skills, and comprehension, the teacher led the students through writing their own book with similar structure to give to their mothers on Mother's Day.

In mathematics, two major needs were identified: fluency with math facts and real world problem solving. The Lower Elementary School focused on basic addition and subtraction ensuring that students had a solid foundation before moving to third grade. Upper Elementary teachers noticed that students were doing much better with this new focus. At third and fourth grade, teachers focused on basic multiplication and division facts. In addition, all teachers began drawing attention to problem-solving techniques. One teacher talked about the challenge students had with transferring from one situation to the next because they did not spend enough time talking about how students arrived at an answer.

> In the real world, and on the test for that matter, there's not that many times that it's just a computation problem. They have to know what operation you're going to use, and that's where I think our kids were having a difficult time.

The focus had been so much on getting the right answer that students learned how to get the right answer for a common situation, but they could not transfer that to a new situation. The new emphasis on math – and reading – instruction was designed to fix this problem.

Teacher evaluation. Although the evaluation instrument changed before the writing of the SIP, the plan identified new evaluation procedures as part of the improvement process. "It's better for us to see what's expected of us. They have certain

points they have to see us meet in our classroom." The specificity of teacher evaluation components led to targeted feedback and professional growth.

Student assessment. In addition to the state assessments in mathematics and reading, the school began to analyze student responses on other types of assessments. The music teacher was amazed that more than 90% of her students passed The Arts PASS Skills Test in April. "For me to test them on what I taught them, I knew they had, at least for that year, conquered that concept." This process of intentional instruction followed by rigorous assessment was mirrored across Buchanan Elementary School. Teachers created benchmark assessments to measure student growth throughout the year and to adjust instruction accordingly.

One of the major changes in student assessment was changing the assessment used to meet state Reading Sufficiency requirements. Districts have the option of one of three assessments to measure student reading ability in kindergarten through third grade. These results are reported to the State at the beginning of each school year and individual reading plans are created for students scoring below grade level. The district had been using an approved assessment that Mrs. Easton believed to be a weak assessment. Almost all students were considered on grade level according to the Reading Sufficiency assessment, but students were not meeting expectations at the end of third grade on the state reading test. So the district changed to a more rigorous assessment on the approved list that also included benchmarks throughout the year. When teachers saw how many of their students were performing below grade level according to the new assessment, all teachers began to buy in to the need for reading instruction change.

Success of the SIP. Teachers and administrators at Buchanan Elementary School found the School Improvement Process to be beneficial. "I honestly think that this has completely improved our school," said one teacher. "That's what this whole process is about – finding out what you're good at and what you need to work on. And it made us dig really, really, really deep." Although the administration does not like the label of being on the list, they recognize that it "gave us some opportunities to reflect and change some things."

Almost everyone commented on the hard work that the staff had put in during School Improvement. When asked, "What do you think have been the things that have made the greatest impact on student learning since this process began?" Mrs. Grayson said, "Collaboration. Working together." The other four people interviewed echoed this sentiment. "It was very committee-driven, as far as teacher-driven." One teacher commented that School Improvement was a lengthy process. They acknowledged that it was not an easy process, but the educators saw the fruits of their labor. "We definitely have improvements. And teachers, with using Literacy First this year, have been able to see growth in their students on Reading Sufficiency. And I've been able to chart it."

Future growth and development. As Buchanan Elementary School looks to the future of improvement strategies, they acknowledged that they could always get better. They want to continue to collaborate about what has improved and how to build on those successes to see even more improvement in the future. Two major themes emerged in regard to continuous improvement goals: getting on the same page and involving the community more.

Consistency. To get on the same page, Mrs. Easton and Mrs. Grayson want to see more collaboration and communication at their level as well as among the teachers. Within each building, the principals want to see how grade level teams can learn from one another. Neither principal discussed trying to make the grade level teams function similarly or to change in order to look like one another, but they do want teachers to learn from one another across grade level teams. One example is scheduling at the Upper Elementary School. In the past, the third grade established their schedule, the fourth grade theirs, and the fifth grade theirs. Mrs. Grayson, the new Upper Elementary principal, would like to see them learn from one another and determine the best scheduling practices that might be more consistent from grade to grade.

Community. In terms of involving the community, the school has had such success with including parents in the education of their children that they want to see that expand in the future. While more parents participated in the school's Family Literacy and Family Math Nights than expected, there are still some parents who "do not take responsibility and participate in their child's educational success." While the SIP required the Family Nights, many in the school want to continue and expand those nights even though they are no longer required to implement the SIP. "This has really shown a lot of people what we can do and what we're capable of doing with just a little bit of work."

Study Participation

Mrs. Easton was interested in my study and willing to help. She encouraged the faculty of both schools to participate, but there was no requirement – stated or implied – that anyone do so. She sent two different email requests to the teachers in both the Upper

and Lower Elementary Schools asking them to complete the online surveys and to participate in interviews if they were interested. One teacher in her building volunteered for an interview, and one teacher who was shared between the two buildings agreed when directly asked for an interview. The principal of the Upper Elementary School, Mr. Fanning, did not participate at all in the study, even after repeated contacts and requests. One teacher in his building and Mrs. Grayson, who was the counselor at that time, agreed to an interview, but others directly declined to participate or did not respond to requests. The superintendent did not respond to repeated emails and phone call requests to participate in the study.

After repeated cancelled appointments and emails and phone calls that were not returned, I was forced to end my extended time in the school, with fewer than desired interviews and observations. Although I was allowed to observe any meetings at the Lower Elementary that I wanted, there were very few scheduled. I participated in three grade level team meetings, but there were no schoolwide faculty meetings scheduled during the last month of school or in the early summer. I was denied the opportunity to participate in a meeting with an outside consultant and all administrators in the district, and the outside consultant did not respond to emails or phone calls soliciting her input on the study.

Only two documents were available on the district website for review: the student handbook and the federally required letter to parents regarding School Improvement Status. The website also included a monthly update of events, reminders, and parent information for each school in the district, but these were not archived on the website for

historical analysis in the study. No other documents, newsletters, letters, pamphlets, etc. were available in the school offices.

Summary

Buchanan Elementary School is unique in its approach to separation with commonality. The Upper and Lower Elementary Schools in many ways function as two separate entities, but educators in both buildings seem to be finding that collaboration across those lines can lead to greater successes. Both buildings' principals appear to understand the culture of their school, particularly in terms of teacher preferences for decision-making strategies and participatory involvement. The school adapted the School Improvement Planning Process for their culture and teacher preferences, and they found it to be valuable in reaching their goals. High expectations of students and self have led faculty members to seek continuous improvement strategies that will likely propel the school forward in years to come.

Commonalities

Adams High School and Buchanan Elementary School are very different in many ways – demographics, geography, structure, and interpersonal relationships; however, underlying commonalities of the two schools can be identified.

Both Adams High School and Buchanan Elementary School express a "small town feel" in terms of taking ownership for students and caring about their futures. They both demonstrate a common desire to improve the school across essentially all administrators, teachers, faculty members, students, families, and community stakeholders, even though they used different methodologies for accomplishing that task. Both schools discussed a "do whatever it takes" or "get 'er done" approach to meeting

goals. Faculty and staff from both schools expressed pride in their schools, and they were devastated by identification for School Improvement. The initial response to the negative status was one of embarrassment; therefore, identification was often justified as a mistake or part of an unfair system.

Since initial identification, however, both schools have embraced components of the School Improvement Planning Process and are planning to use those aspects that were most helpful to continue their successes in future years.

Summary

The cases presented in Chapter IV explained the historical and current realities of Adams High School and Buchanan Elementary School, including their approaches to the School Improvement Planning Process. Chapter V will analyze the two schools and how they implemented the School Improvement Planning Process through the lens of Douglas's grid and group typology.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Chapter IV provided an in-depth look at the two schools used in this study, providing a backdrop for the analysis of how the school approached the School Improvement Planning Process. This chapter compares the two schools' approaches in terms of Douglas's (1982, 1986) typology of grid and group. First, the chapter shows how Adams High School and Buchanan Elementary School were identified as corporate and collectivist, respectively. Then, we will see how those cultures manifested themselves in the two schools in general. Lastly, the chapter explores how the culture impacted the implementation of school improvement practices.

Grid and Group Analysis

As discussed in depth in Chapter 2, "Mary Douglas's typology of grid and group is a theoretical frame that assists in understanding school culture by providing a matrix for classification" (Ellis, 2006, p. 13).

Adams High School: Corporate

Using the Grid and Group Assessment Tool (Harris, 2005), I categorized Adams High School as demonstrating characteristics of Douglas's corporate prototype. The questionnaires, observations, interviews, document reviews, and artifact reviews supported this analysis. Even Mr. Dawson, the principal, realized that the description of

the corporate school matched his experiences and those of teachers and other administrators in the school. "You gave me the graph that showed that we were a corporate school, and I was sharing it with … a couple other people. They said, 'You know what? That's it.'"

Figure 7 shows that Adams High School could be identified as a corporate school based on the responses of 29 teachers, counselors, and administrators in the school.

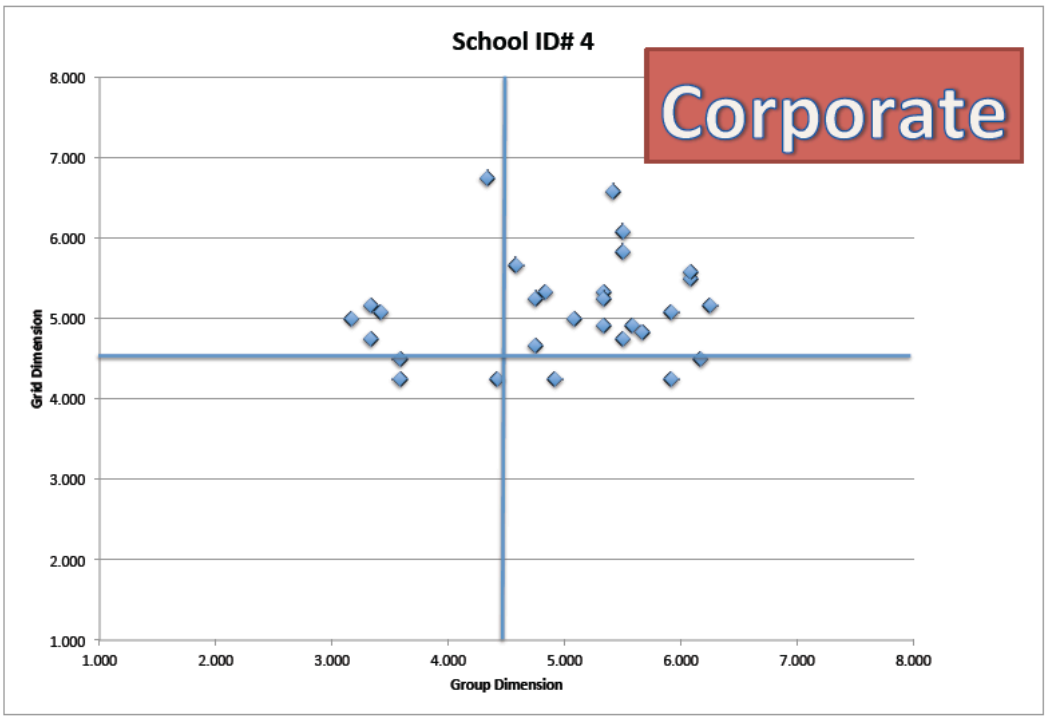

Figure 7: Results of the Grid and Group Assessment Tool (Harris, 2005) for Adams High School: Corporate.

Responses to the Gird and Group Assessment Tool range from 1 to 8 for each question, and responses for the 12 questions regarding the same dimension are averaged for each participant. This results in each participant being represented by an ordered pair (X_{group}, Y_{grid}). A point on the neutral dividers' intersection (4.5, 4.5) would indicate that

the respondent had no strong feelings about the grid or group characteristics of the school.

The survey responses for Adams High School report that the school has very strong grid tendencies. Although the average response surpasses the neutral divider by only 0.621 on the grid dimension, there are very few responses that indicate the school could possibly have a weak-grid classification. The range of responses on the grid dimension is 4.25 to 6.75, a difference of 2.5, with a standard deviation of only 0.641. These statistics indicate that most respondents had similar perspectives of the grid characteristics of the school.

There is much more variation in faculty perceptions of the group dimension than of the grid dimension. The group dimension responses range from 3.167 to 6.25, a difference of 3.038, with a standard deviation of 0.954. Not only is there less consensus about the group dynamic of the school, the average response is not far past the neutral divider at 4.954.

Buchanan Elementary School: Collectivist

Using the Grid and Group Assessment Tool (Harris, 2005), I categorized Buchanan Elementary School as demonstrating characteristics of Douglas's collectivist prototype. The questionnaires, observations, interviews, document reviews, and artifact reviews supported this analysis.

Figure 8 shows that Buchanan Elementary School could be identified as a collectivist school based on the responses of 23 teachers, counselors, and administrators in the school.

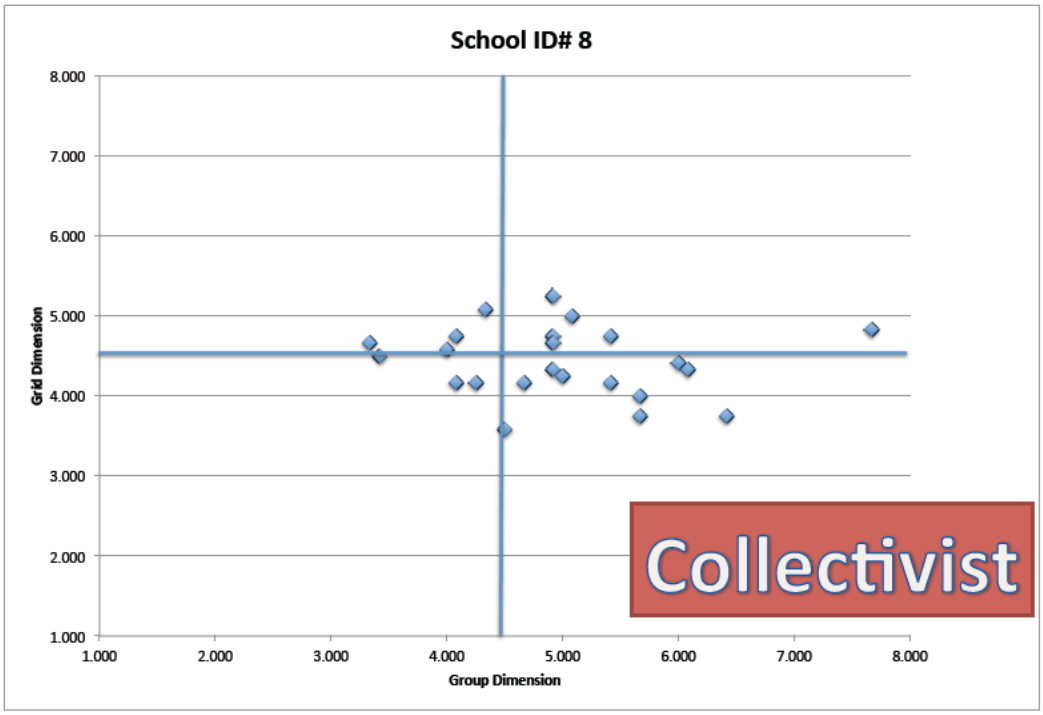

Figure 8: Results of the Grid and Group Assessment Tool (Harris, 2005) for Buchanan Elementary School: Collectivist.

Responses to the Gird and Group Assessment Tool range from 1 to 8 for each question, and responses for the 12 questions regarding the same dimension are averaged for each participant. This results in each participant being represented by an ordered pair (X_{group}, Y_{grid}). A point on the neutral dividers' intersection (4.5, 4.5) would indicate that the respondent had no strong feelings about the grid or group characteristics of the school.

The survey responses for Buchanan Elementary School report that the school has strong group tendencies. Although the average response surpasses the neutral divider by only 0.489 on the group dimension, there are very few responses that indicate the school could possibly have a weak group classification. The range of responses on the group dimension is wide, from 3.333 to 7.667, a difference of 4.334, with a standard deviation

of 0.998, but the majority of responses lean toward strong group classification, with no respondents reporting a very weak group dynamic.

There is much less variation in faculty perceptions of the grid dimension than of the group dimension, but the perceptions of the grid dimension hover around the neutral divider. The grid dimension responses range from 3.583 to 5.250, a difference of 1.667, with a standard deviation of 0.436. Not only is there more consensus about the grid dynamic of the school, the average response is just barely under the neutral divider at 4.431. These responses indicate that while the school overall may be classified as weak grid, it is not extremely weak.

Manifestations of Culture

Manifestations of Corporate Culture in Adams High School

Participation and openness. My experience in gathering data in the school supported the analysis of corporate structure. Almost universally, teachers, counselors, and administrators were willing to participate, especially with the encouragement of Mr. Dawson to do so, which is consistent with strong-grid environments. The nature of the study to examine how the school gained success offered the strong-group school an opportunity to celebrate their collective win.

Bureaucratic to corporate. Teachers and administrators discussed the change that the school has undergone in the past few years with new leadership. Previous head principals have focused less on developing relationships and cultivating the group dynamic of the school. As such, many of the conversations around previous years in the school would support a classification of bureaucratic rather than corporate. For example, under previous administration, teachers had very little input in the School Improvement

Plan (SIP). The SIP was written by the head principal and curriculum specialist whose role was to ensure academic improvement. Because the teachers did not have input into what activities would be added to the plan, they often implemented only at a compliance level, sometimes doubting the likelihood of success. As Harris (2005) explains, teachers and students often feel "the results will be the same whether we participate or not" (p. 117) in bureaucratic environments. This approach to the SIP left teachers doing their own things rather than moving as a cohesive unit.

While this attitude is starting to change, teachers do not yet all describe the school as being on the strong-group side of the neutral divider. As discussed previously, classrooms are structured very differently from one another. Some are highly engaging, while others are not. Some seem to challenge students, while others do not. Teachers indicate that the faculty is not always going in the same direction, despite the leadership's efforts to move them toward cohesiveness.

Using strong-grid characteristics to strengthen group. There is evidence that the school is strengthening its group dynamics. This may be in part due to the use of strong-grid structures to establish commonality. Starting with a mission, vision, and supporting statements, the authors articulated a common goal for the individual members of the school community. Publicly displaying these statements throughout the school and printing them in all major documents, including the student handbook, uses the role-based authority of the administration to continually focus the teachers and students toward one purpose. A willingness to re-examine the mission in a collaborative manner shows that the school sets goals as a group, but printing it shows that once adopted, the mission and vision are expectations of the school administration and must be enforced.

The administrators have used their roles as authorities to establish a school day schedule that not only allows for but also requires teacher collaboration. Through the development of Professional Learning Communities, department meetings, and faculty meetings, teachers are forced to interact with one another, increasing the sense of community. Recently, the administration implemented Late Start Wednesdays, which provides an hour each Wednesday for faculty collaboration. With shared expectations for how small-group time must be spent each week, faculty members are engaging in dialogue around student data, instructional strategies, discipline procedures, and academic interventions. The school has a structure that allows for strengthening the group characteristics of the school in a methodical way.

The culture change that Mr. Dawson is working to establish is pushing the faculty members toward stronger group dynamics. Teachers have more input into decisions through the building leadership team, the department heads, various surveys and polls, and Mr. Dawson's open door policy. Mr. Dawson has established a relationship with the teachers that has led them to trust him and to follow his lead. They also know they can share their opinions, ask questions, and challenge decisions respectfully, but "there's a point where you're expected either to get on board or have a good reason why you shouldn't get on board." He will tell the faculty, "This is the direction we're going and this is why we are doing this. This is how we're going to get there, and I need your help." Mr. Dawson is using his position of authority to deepen relationships and strengthen the group dynamics in the school.

Lastly, Mr. Dawson has encouraged his team of administrators and counselors to use their roles as authority figures to change the traditions of the school. This includes

student activities, honors, recognitions, and even faculty celebrations, such as the "Testing is over; Let's have a party!" song.

Role of authority. As is typical in corporate structures, authority is earned. Because of the close-knit relationships and commonly held beliefs, outsiders must earn the right to express authority over insiders. This is evident in the way teachers describe administrators from "downtown" as not knowing what is needed in their school. Experts at the central office often have to prove, through the use of inside allies, that the strategies they suggest or require are likely to be effective.

In order to avoid any unnecessary backlash against outsiders' suggestions, recommendations, or requirements, Mr. Dawson has chosen to present most new initiatives in terms of how they will benefit the students and teachers of Adams High School, rather than as requirements of others. This is most evident in that few teachers could identify even one Oklahoma State Department of Education or U.S. Department of Education requirement for school improvement. All requirements that were successfully being implemented had been presented to the teachers and counselors as "really good ideas for our kids," rather than as requirements from the State or the Feds. The few requirements that were identified by teachers as state-led or federally-led were described as ineffective hoops to jump through.

Rules and procedures. The authoritarian nature of the school is evident in several ways through the use of rules and procedures. First, the school has complied with all state and federal requirements, including posting notifications and sending letters to parents regarding designation for school improvement. The school follows the rules set by others.

Second, the course catalogue and student handbook are comprehensive documents. The complex, hierarchical structure of the 119 sections contained in the 86-page student handbook supports the role-based permissions students will encounter throughout high school. Particular sections use strong language, indicating that exceptions to the rules will not be made. The processes and procedures for many activities are intricate. There exists a three-level appeal process for dissatisfaction with grades; there are eight specific reasons for why a student may drop a class; and there are 45 offenses for which a student may be suspended. These are just examples of how the documents presented to students indicate the specific roles that are expected of each individual in the school system.

Third, parent involvement has specific practices and expectations of its own. The Parent Coalition operates outside the purview of the school administration,, and its page on the school website is outdated. Although the Parent Coalition has a stated mission that parents and community members make a difference in the public school, a parent who is not "in the know" might assume from the inactivity of the website that their input through the Parent Coalition committee members, if current members can be identified, is not desired. This seems to indicate that parents may have a less important role or may have more difficulty understanding their role in the strong-grid environment where the administrators have the final decision-making authority and family participation is not as formalized or procedural as other aspects of the school's operations. There is some indication that the Parent Coalition has its own set of rules that is separate and apart from Adams High School, which could make it difficult for parents to navigate their role in the school without explicit guidance from school faculty.

Size. School size is a critical component in analyzing the culture. Throughout the process of interacting with individuals at Adams High School and at the district's central office, I found myself wondering if it is possible to have a low-grid successful school of that size. The nature of the size of the faculty seems to force the school to use hierarchical structures like principal – assistant principals – department heads – teachers to communicate with so many individuals. Harris (2005) explains the vertical and horizontal relationships in a corporate environment as almost pyramidal in that information flows up and down through the hierarchical, vertical communication chains, but collaboration happens between and amongst teachers, between and amongst department heads, between and amongst assistant principals, and even between and amongst principals at a district level. The lateral conversations at each level of the hierarchical chain create a pyramid of relationships that is amplified as the grid characteristics become more complex and the group characteristics become more cohesive.

Manifestations of Collectivist Culture in Buchanan Elementary School

Lack of participation. My experience in gathering data in the school supported the analysis of collectivist structure. Some individuals were interested in the study and chose to participate, while others were not interested and did not see a need to inconvenience themselves to be included. Although the nature of the study to examine how the school gained success offered the strong group school an opportunity to celebrate their collective win, the apparent invasion of an outsider was treated as a nuisance by several. The variation in desire to participate and be included in the study supported the collectivist culture of autonomy.

Lack of structure for consistency. Evidence of the weak grid environment was most notable in the lack of structured procedures and protocols. There was little to no formality, few overt rules, and few enforced procedures in the interactions among adults as well as between adults and students. Being a visitor allowed to walk around campus without any identification or notification to other adults is just one example of a procedure that was not enforced. The student handbook posted on the district's website was full of rules and procedures, but there was little evidence that these were strictly followed. Perhaps the need did not exist to follow the rules strictly because of the strong relationships that existed with families and with one another.

I saw no evidence of a common language of instruction by which educators discussed expectations, instructional strategies, or academic learning goals. There were no scheduled meetings at the end of the year to review data, monitor progress, or adjust plans for the upcoming school year. The communication structures were not formalized in ways that produced consistent information sharing, particularly between the Lower and Upper Elementary Schools. Teachers' schedules were not designed in ways to produce teaming outside of grade level teams, and levels of collaboration within grade level teams differed from one grade to the next. For example, specials teachers were not given formal opportunities to collaborate with grade level teachers because specials teachers were always used to create planning times for grade level teachers. This left specials teachers to find time outside of the school day to seek volunteers of teachers willing to collaborate on curriculum development to support core instruction.

None of these examples means that collaborative practices did not take place. Rather, the structures were not in place to ensure building-wide participation or

consistency in implementation of these practices. The success of the school to make improvements indicated that the school did implement quality practices, but the lack of procedure to do so supports the weak grid analysis.

Interestingly, patterns of teacher participation seemed also to flow to student participation in some classroom instruction. In one of the grade level meetings I observed, there was little structure for ensuring each teacher had equal participation. My observation notes read: "First teacher to speak up 'wins.'" The same pattern was noticed in some classrooms, where student volunteers were given the opportunity to play instruments, help the teacher, or answer questions without a formal method to ensure fairness in participation opportunities or to guarantee everyone participated.

The student handbook also contained a mission statement for the district, but no separate mission, vision, creed, or motto for the school. None of these types of formalized unifiers was observed in the school building, but Mrs. Easton did tell me that the Lower Elementary School faculty and students recite a creed daily. Although the faculty seemed very unified in their goals and desires for students to excel, they did not use the same language or point to the same message to explain that vision.

Role definition. The principal of the Lower Elementary School is a former teacher in the building who became a leader among the faculty and then was promoted into the principalship. She said she thought of herself as "one of them." The teachers, too, approached Mrs. Easton as a leader who was part of the group. This lack of definition between roles and levels of authority supported a weak grid analysis. Perhaps, this was part of the reason for the similarities between classroom instructional practices and leadership practices. Mrs. Easton provided excellent managerial processes, in part by

allowing each teacher or team to function as they functioned best without consistent procedures throughout the building. Mrs. Easton identified herself as not being the instructional leader she would like to be. Because she did not model formal structures for her faculty, many of them did not implement formal structures in the classroom.

The one area that clearly differed from all of the others in formality and procedural implementation was the development and implementation of required plans and reports. The SIP of the school was developed according to procedure, implemented as written, and monitored for implementation. Similarly, Reading Sufficiency Act Plans, Accreditation Reports, and financial reports were written and processed with very specific attention to detail. Mrs. Easton was very organized and intentional about meeting the letter and intent of every law and every requirement, ensuring that each individual involved completed assigned tasks and reported back appropriately. It did seem, however, that the formality of these tasks was imposed by the requiring body, such as the district office or state officials.

Autonomy. As stated previously, each team in the school operated differently. The variation from one grade level team to the next was exacerbated by variation within teams from one teacher to the next. One teacher explained the variation in terms of each teacher expecting different things. Rather than force teachers to have consistent classrooms, great care was taken to match students' personalities and needs with teachers' personalities and expectations. Although the administration expected teachers to be consistent in use of the district curriculum, in actuality, many teachers felt a great deal of autonomy over their curricular resources and academic content. This translated to student autonomy in several classes where students were given many choices about their

own academic pursuits. The autonomy provided to students and teachers showed the value of equality of individuals that is common in weak grid contexts.

Group harmony. It was very important to both Mrs. Easton and Mrs. Grayson that all teachers feel as if they have a good relationship with the principal. Mrs. Easton said, "I care about the teachers and the students. We have a good relationship." Mrs. Grayson said, "I have a good relationship with those teachers… I think it will help me to be able to have some rapport." These among other comments about not "rocking the boat" made it clear that group harmony was a high priority of the school faculty. Teachers discussed the "spirit of unity" and "doing functions together" as important components of the improvement efforts of the school.

The district even sought strategies for giving perks to the teachers. One of those perks that I witnessed personally was teachers having the opportunity to pick their own children's teachers. Before any other students were assigned to classrooms, teachers signed up their children for the teacher they wanted. Teachers did identify this as a perk and a way to keep everyone in the school happy with one another.

Contribution. All teachers in the district, as well as families, students, and administrators, were expected to contribute to the work of improvement. When asked, "What do you think have been the things that have made the greatest impact on student learning since this process began?" Mrs. Grayson said, "Collaboration. Working together." The other four people interviewed echoed this sentiment. "It was very committee-driven, as far as teacher-driven." The formal SIP committee included representatives from grade level teams, but all teachers were encouraged to give their

input to their representative and to contribute to the improvement efforts through their regular job duties.

The required letter to parents explaining the school's identification for School Improvement expressed that the teachers and administrators would fix the problem of low achievement in math, but they were requesting assistance from parents and the community in order for the school to make progress. The tone of the letter supported the strong group characteristics of common goals for students and cooperative participation to reach them. Teachers felt that same tone in dealings with the administrators. They felt confidence that the problems would be addressed in a collective manner. Administrators had a similar respect for the teachers' willingness to contribute. One teacher noticed that her colleagues wanted to be involved: "The teachers were really good about not just depending on the administration, saying, 'Tell us what to do.' They wanted to be a part of that." Almost everyone interviewed shared that it took everyone in the community to have success. "The collaboration of teachers, and administration, and the community was really, really amazing!"

Manifestations of Culture Through the School Improvement Planning Process

The corporate and collectivist cultures of Adams High School and Buchanan Elementary School, respectively, impacted their approaches to the School Improvement Planning Process. Levels of participation, organization, and communication varied in the two schools as evidenced in their processes for planning and implementing their SIPs. The schools understood the requirements of the School Improvement Planning Process, and both schools adapted that process in order to be successful within their school cultures.

In general, both Adams High School and Buchanan Elementary School showed positivity toward the School Improvement Planning Process, or at least to the outcomes produced during the process. While the schools approached the idea of stakeholder participation in the process differently, both schools found that a variety of stakeholders needed to be engaged in order for the school improvement strategies to have the desired results. In both cases, the administration credited the teachers and staff for the improvements that had occurred in the school. "It's the people" and "It's the team" were common anthems of the rationale for success. This is consistent with the ideals of strong-group cultures.

Adams High School. The strong-grid environment of the corporate prototype was seen through the process of creating and implementing the SIP at Adams High School. During the initial process of creating the SIP, a small group of individuals held full responsibility. These individuals were selected based on their job duties and specific leadership roles within the school. In order to implement the SIP, the corporate values of formal processes, roles, expectations, and delegated authority were employed. Only those teachers and administrators who needed to be informed of changes were, and oftentimes, this communication came through formal channels such as department meetings and PLCs.

Upon realization that more stakeholders should be involved in the process, new leadership under the direction of Mr. Dawson incorporated more teacher participation in the consideration of changes to the SIP. Mr. Dawson's open door policy and the resurgence of the Building Leadership Team made it clear that the leadership sought input from everyone, regardless of their formal roles. Mr. Dawson also worked on

developing more stakeholder engagement in the implementation phase of the SIP by expressing the need for each improvement strategy that was being implemented within the context of the school setting. The collective buy-in to common goals and improvement strategies was evidence of a strong-group environment.

Buchanan Elementary School. The collectivist approach of banding together for the purposes of school improvement was evidence that this school also had a strong-group environment. The collectivist value of cooperation was clearly present in the planning process used in Buchanan, in that committees of teachers worked together to identify needs and propose solutions to their problems. Participation through representation or direct involvement was expected from everyone in this strong-group environment. The SIP focused the school's improvement efforts around a small number of strategies that were likely to lead to improvement and on which everyone could agree. These few strategies brought the educators together for a common purpose, which is indicative of a strong-group setting.

Also exemplified in the school's collectivist approach was the idea of everyone's contribution to the SIP implementation process. All teachers, administrators, support staff, families, and community members had a part to play in the improvement efforts, particularly the Family Nights. Information was shared widely with all stakeholders to keep every interested party informed of the plans and progress of the school. This is indicative of a weak-grid environment in that no one was left out of the process because of a formal job title or position within society.

Summary

This chapter used Douglas's (1982, 1986) grid and group typology to analyze two schools, including their adaptations of the School Improvement Planning Process. Using Harris's (2005) Grid and Group Assessment Tool, Adams High School was classified as a corporate school with strong-grid and strong-group tendencies. Buchanan Elementary School was classified as a collectivist school with weak-grid and strong-group tendencies. Commonalities between the schools' approaches to School Improvement can often be seen because they both have strong-group environments, while differences in strategies and procedures also exist, in part because of Adams' strong-grid and Buchanan's weak-grid structures.

At Adams High School, administrators have begun to find strategies for capitalizing on the strong-grid characteristics of the school in order to enhance and strengthen the group dynamics, moving the school from what used to be very bureaucratic into what is becoming quite corporate. Administrators have learned that improvement efforts are more successful when not connected to outsiders' requirements on the school. They have worked to demonstrate the need for improvement efforts based on student experiences and site-based data. While almost the entire faculty acknowledges that the school has experienced a great deal of success, they are not content to remain unchanged. The improvement effort continues.

At Buchanan Elementary School, administrators give teachers as much autonomy as they can while seeking to provide consistency for students, especially in terms of high expectations. Educators at Buchanan found the School Improvement Planning Process to be beneficial in that they examined their strengths and weaknesses honestly and

intentionally sought to improve on their weaknesses. In the coming years, Buchanan does not want the lessons learned during the School Improvement Planning Process to disappear; however, the educators are thrilled to be leaving the label of the list behind.

Chapter VI will offer conclusions to the research questions of this study and recommendations for the future based on the cases presented in Chapter IV and the data analyzed in Chapter V.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND COMMENTS

During a time of increasing school accountability, it is imperative to understand what accountability requirements produce improved student performance. One of the accountability requirements on underperforming schools in Oklahoma and many other states is an annual School Improvement Plan (SIP). The purpose of the SIP is to assess strengths and weaknesses within the current conditions of the school, identify research-based strategies that will improve student performance on state assessments in reading and mathematics as well as graduation rate and other academic factors, and establish processes for implementing those strategies so that all students reach desired academic outcomes within two years. In 2010, the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) introduced the WISE Tool to assist schools in integration of all elements of the School Improvement Planning Process. Of the 90 schools on the School Improvement List in 2010, 43 made progress in the area of identification through the School Improvement Planning Process.

Harris (2005) provided an explanation for why schools see varying degrees of success in implementation of improvement plans. Using Mary Douglas's typology of grid and group, Harris explained that a school's culture could either inhibit or promote

positive change. The purpose of the study was to explore the connections between school culture and improved student achievement as underperforming schools developed and implemented their SIPs through the WISE Tool.

Using Harris's Grid and Group Assessment Tool (2005), the six schools that had made enough progress in 2010-2011 to qualify for this study and had enough participation for data analysis to occur were classified into one of four types identified by Douglas (1982, 1986) as described in Chapter III. These four types of schools were shown previously in Figure 4: (a) Bureaucratic, (b) Corporate, (c) Individualist, or (d) Collectivist. Based on the resulting cultural profiles of each school respective to Douglas's grid and group typology, two schools were selected for further study: Adams High School (Corporate) and Buchanan Elementary School (Collectivist). Figure 9 shows these identifications.

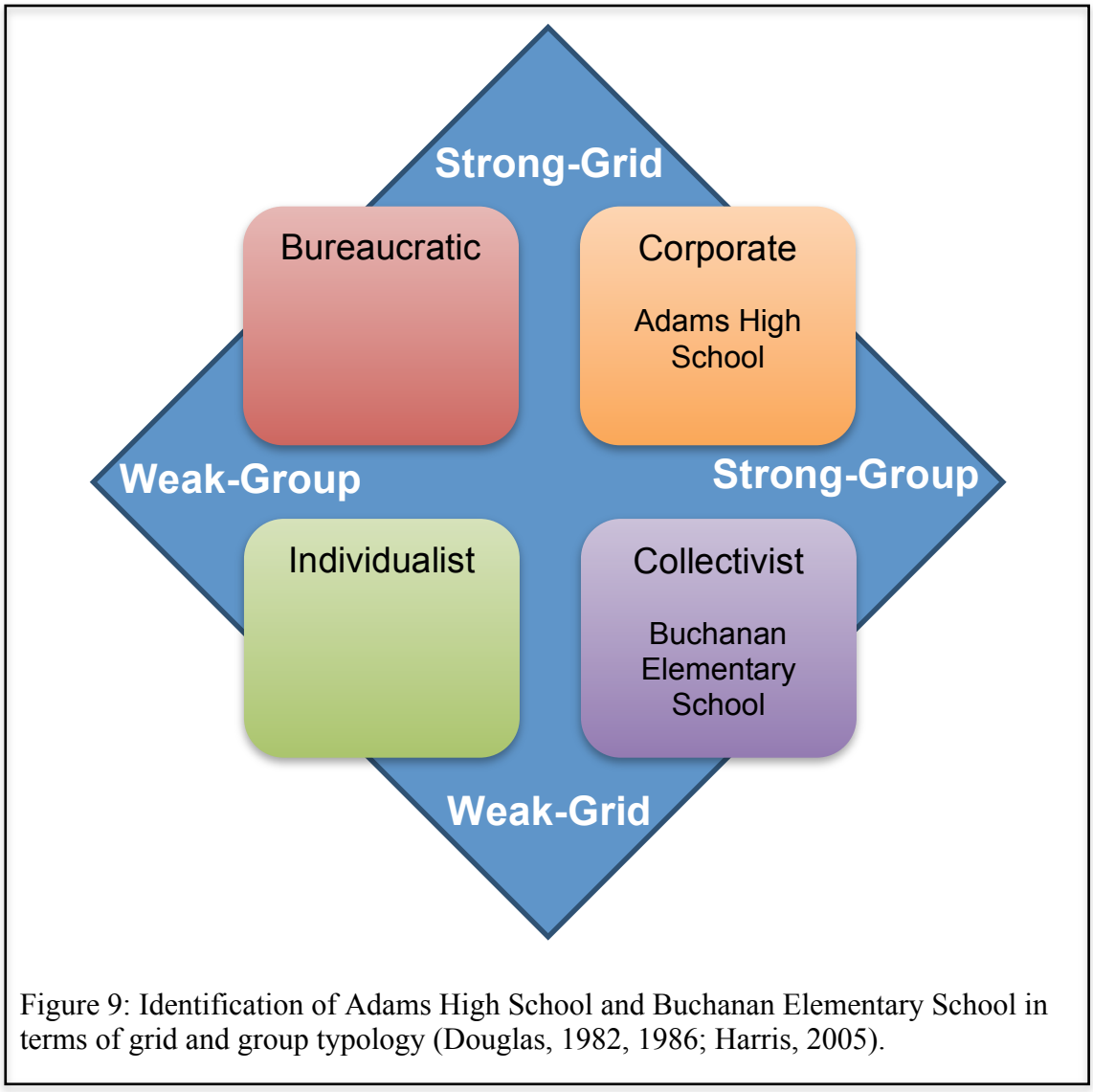

Figure 9: Identification of Adams High School and Buchanan Elementary School in terms of grid and group typology (Douglas, 1982, 1986; Harris, 2005).

Data were collected from a variety of sources over the course of one academic year, using interviews, observations, surveys, artifacts, and document reviews (Erlandson et al., 1993). Collected data were analyzed using methods of data triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Final case studies presented in Chapter IV contain thick, rich descriptions of the schools' cultures and experiences with school improvement planning, as well as results following the implementation of the plan. Analysis of the data was provided in Chapter V using the grid and group matrix as a framework for understanding

the data. As explained in Chapter III, Douglas's theory was used in an *a priori* manner for designing the study, collecting the data, and analyzing the data.

Findings

The purpose of the study was to explore the connections between school culture and improved student achievement as underperforming schools developed and implemented their School Improvement Plans through the WISE Tool. The study was guided by one overarching researching question: In schools that showed improvement, how was the School Improvement Plan created and implemented?

The following subquestions provided more detail:

1. How was the WISE Tool implemented in schools that showed improvement?
2. What were the differences, if any, in the implementation between schools?
3. In terms of grid and group, how did the schools adapt implementation strategies in accordance with their school culture?
4. How useful was Douglas's Grid and Group Theory in explaining these implementation variations?
5. What other realities existed outside of grid and group cultural assessment?

Based on the cases presented in Chapter IV and the data analyzed in Chapter V, these research questions are answered below.

Question 1: How was the WISE Tool implemented in schools that showed improvement?

Both Adams High School and Buchanan Elementary School used the WISE Tool as required by the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) to write and submit their SIPs. Both schools involved stakeholders to some degree in development,

implementation, and monitoring of their SIPs, but both schools assigned only one or two people to be the actual users of the WISE Tool. Both schools shared an electronic version of the plan created in the WISE Tool with other participants and stakeholders, and while individuals at both schools mentioned "a link" that they received so they could review the plan online as guests in the WISE Tool, no one I interviewed or surveyed other than the assigned users in each school had actually followed the link. Both schools updated the WISE Tool with completion dates and monitoring protocols, but neither school did so consistently and regularly as a means of accountability. Neither school used the optional Coaching Comments feature consistently to receive feedback and support from an outside party.

At Adams High School, the WISE Tool was used much more consistently in the year that it was required by the OSDE, 2010-2011, than in the following school years, 2011-2012 or 2012-2013, after the school had been removed from the School Improvement List. The WISE Tool was seen primarily as a requirement of the OSDE, rather than as a tool for continuous improvement and assistance in organizing the school's improvement processes. The principal of the school in 2010-2011 and the curriculum specialist who had been assigned as the process manager for the WISE Tool that year were the only ones who logged into the WISE Tool to input information or review progress. They did, however, in many of their meetings that year project the tool onto a screen for the entire committee to review, revise, and monitor implementation. In that sense, there were more stakeholders involved in use of the WISE Tool. Other uses of the tool that may not have been recognized by stakeholders as connected to the WISE Tool included development of an online survey using the performance indicators

embedded in the tool in order to get perception data from teachers, creating a PDF of the final SIP and posting it on the school's website, assigning responsibility for completion of tasks in the plan to committee members, and celebrating achievements of completed tasks with the SIP committee and entire faculty.

Buchanan Elementary School relied much more heavily on the assistance of the WISE Tool and took advantage of the optional features, including reports, meeting organizers, agendas, and handouts. While only Mrs. Easton was familiar with the WISE Tool, other teachers throughout the school were very aware of the processes being implemented. Several individuals commented on how organized Mrs. Easton was in making sure that assignments in the plan were completed on time by the responsible teachers or other stakeholders and how she kept very detailed spreadsheets, minutes, and agendas for SIP committee meetings. They were unaware that these were features of the WISE Tool of which Mrs. Easton took advantage, but the use of these features was apparent to stakeholders in both the planning and implementation of the SIP. Mrs. Easton continued to use the WISE Tool following removal from the School Improvement List as a way of monitoring the school's progress in implementing various components of their plan.

Question 1 assisted in answering the overarching research question, "In schools that showed improvement, how was the School Improvement Plan created and implemented?" At Adams High School, the WISE Tool was used as an integral part of the creation of the SIP, but was not a critical component of the implementation of the plan, particularly in the years after removal from the School Improvement List. At Buchanan Elementary School, the WISE Tool was used as an integral part of both the

creation and implementation of the SIP. Mrs. Easton viewed the WISE Tool in terms of assisting her with organizing the process, ensuring that all required components were included, and keeping her team focused on the critical elements of their SIP that were likely to lead to improved student achievement. Adams High School accomplished improved student achievement through implementation of school improvement strategies, but they did so with little reliance on the WISE Tool.

Question 2: What were the differences, if any, in the implementation between schools?

Adams High School had one major difference in implementation of the School Improvement Planning Process from Buchanan Elementary School. Adams High School had a full time curriculum specialist dedicated to school improvement, curriculum development, and professional growth. In addition, Adams Public School District had a staff member dedicated to implementation of school improvement strategies across the district. Buchanan Elementary School relied on their Upper and Lower Elementary principals and counselors as well as lead teachers to share these responsibilities.

I noted three other differences in the schools' approaches to planning and implementation. (1) Adams had a complex, detailed, five-year plan that covered a variety of topics and improvement strategies, whereas Buchanan wrote a simple, straightforward, two-year plan with specific focus on reading and mathematics instruction. (2) Adams High School had developed a common language of instruction built around the work of Marzano (2003, 2007) that permeated the conversation with teachers, building administrators, and district administrators. Buchanan teachers and administrators each used their own vocabulary in discussing their instructional strategies and improvement

practices. (3) While determining which instructional strategies to include in their plan, Adams sought input from multiple sources, both internal and external to the school system, while Buchanan primarily focused their attention on the expertise within the Upper and Lower Elementary Schools.

Additional and subtler differences between the schools' implementation processes include data sources analyzed during assessment of needs, participation of stakeholders during planning, awareness of the process by stakeholders, and long-term impact of the process on participants.

Data sources analyzed. Adams High School used a greater variety of data sources when assessing school needs. In addition to state testing data and graduation rates (a data source used for state and federal accountability), the school analyzed economic situations of students, behavior reports, professional development participation, student achievement on college entrance exams, teacher-developed benchmark scores, teacher perceptions, and district improvement processes. This wide array of data led the school to a broad and comprehensive SIP that covered many more areas of improvement outside of Algebra I, English II, and Graduation Rate, which are the only components for which the school was held accountable at a federal level. Buchanan Elementary School narrowed their data analysis to reading and math state test scores, which allowed them to focus their improvement strategies on those activities that would have the most impact on accountability measures.

Participation of stakeholders. Both schools used a representative approach to participation of all stakeholders in the School Improvement Planning Process, but it took longer for Adams High School to develop that strategy. Adams began by using only the

principal and curriculum specialist to write the plan. When they realized they needed more input, they expanded their SIP committee to include PLC chairs, but only EOI tested subjects had PLCs at that time. Other teachers were invited to give their opinions through surveys, and PLC chairs led discussions about the process and gleaned feedback during regular PLC meetings. Ultimately, Mr. Dawson, the new principal, determined to include more representatives on the decision-making committees and all teachers were assigned to a PLC, but many teachers were not consciously aware of their line of representation to the SIP. Awareness of representation was much more clear at Buchanan Elementary School, where each teacher knew who from their grade level was representing their interests on the SIP committee and how to express their desires for improvement, even if they were not directly serving on the committee. Buchanan also focused on bringing in the community to the school to participate in the ongoing improvement efforts through Parent Nights and other family and community engagement strategies.

Awareness of the process. Teachers at Adams High School rarely knew about the School Improvement Planning Process or the WISE Tool. In some instances, the SIP was confused with the District Improvement Plan (DIP) and the committee used to develop the improvement strategies for the district as a whole. At Buchanan Elementary School, every teacher, counselor, and administrator who participated in an interview or the online questionnaire was aware of the School Improvement Planning Process and where the school stood in terms of implementing the strategies in the plan. Very few were familiar with the WISE Tool, but they could describe in detail the process used to write the SIP, implement strategies, and monitor successes.

Long-term impact. Teachers, counselors, and administrators at Adams High School appeared to have internalized ongoing improvement practices. Everything from school bells and announcements to student engagement, and from schedules for professional development to curriculum resources and instructional strategies were analyzed for effectiveness and efficiency. Teachers had a reflective attitude with a desire for strong metrics to assess progress. At Buchanan Elementary School, the focus seemed to continue on reading and math improvement strategies with a desire to continually increase collaboration and student achievement around these topics.

These differences helped in answering the overarching research question by highlighting that there are multiple approaches that can be successful in both planning and implementing improvement strategies. There is no one right way to create or implement a SIP.

Question 3: In terms of grid and group, how did the schools adapt implementation strategies in accordance with their school culture?

The OSDE training on School Improvement included information about how to write a plan; how to implement a plan; how to use the WISE Tool to assess current conditions, plan for improvement, and monitor implementation; what strategies should be considered for inclusion in a plan; and how to increase stakeholder buy-in. Some state and federal requirements were detailed, and many suggestions or options for implementation were provided. For example, in regard to stakeholder buy-in, a few different suggestions were offered, including increasing the size of the committee beyond minimum federal requirements, providing guest logins to the WISE Tool for read-only access to the plan and monitoring checkpoints, using surveys to get stakeholder

perceptions regarding the assessment of performance indicators embedded in the tool, and holding collaborative brainstorming and review sessions before determining which strategies to include in the plan. OSDE trainers articulated that school leaders would need to make decisions on different aspects of the process before proceeding as well as throughout the improvement process.

Adams High School completed all state and federal requirements of School Improvement and adapted the processes and optional components to meet the needs of the school. Because Adams had a strong-grid environment, the roles of the principal, assistant principals, curriculum specialist, PLC and department chairs, other teachers, and district administrators were distinct throughout the School Improvement Planning Process. Teachers often discussed the process as "top-down" or "handed to us," but they also mentioned being "listened to" and "represented" in the process. It was clear that the final authority on inclusion of components in the plan was the school principal but that others were able to give their input at appropriately determined levels. Adams also had a strong-group culture, so the process was designed to incorporate as many stakeholder perceptions as possible. There was a desire to achieve buy-in, even if it may not have been found in all instances.

In terms of assessing current conditions, the Adams SIP committee received a lot of teacher perceptions and then filtered them through the lens of the committee members. In terms of writing the plan, the committee collaborated on which components to include with ideas from PLC and department members, but ultimately selected those strategies that were supported by the district and site administrators. In terms of implementing the plan, leaders chose to share pieces of the plan with faculty members one at a time on a

need-to-know basis. Over the past three years as the school shifted more from a bureaucratic environment to a corporate environment, the implementation approach changed. Previously, administrators had used an authoritarian rationale for why teachers must make changes in their classrooms. Under new leadership and in the new culture, the most common methodology used was making teachers aware of the need for change based on data and student experiences and then offering a component of the SIP as a possible solution for the problem. Lastly, in terms of monitoring implementation of the plan, individuals were assigned particular pieces of the plan to monitor based on their roles within the building, and they each reported back to the SIP committee when tasks were accomplished.

Buchanan Elementary School also completed all state and federal requirements of School Improvement and also adapted the processes and optional components to meet the needs of the school. Because Buchanan and Adams both have strong-group natures, there were some similarly structured adjustments to the process. For example, Buchanan also sought to include a wide variety of stakeholder perceptions and to increase buy-in for the plan. Both schools praised the collaborative work of the people involved as the reason the schools were successful. Although there were some similarities, the weak-grid environment of Buchanan led to some adaptations to the process that were very different for Buchanan. These differences included allowing teachers within their individual classrooms to use the instructional strategies they felt best led them to overall goals of improved mathematics and reading achievement.

In terms of assessing current conditions, Buchanan relied on the representatives serving on the SIP committee to express the school data as well as the opinions of the

entire faculty. In terms of writing the plan, committee members sought input from their grade-level teams and collaborated on which components would most likely lead to improvement. Each member of the committee had equal voice in final decisions of what to include in the plan. In terms of implementing the plan, strategies were summarized and shared collectively with all staff members. All staff members were given a copy of the plan and the committee members presented the entire plan to ensure that everyone on staff understood the overall goals and component pieces of the plan. The tasks within the plan were focused on a few common activities that all faculty members could identify and in which everyone could participate. Lastly, in terms of monitoring the implementation of the plan, Mrs. Easton, independently, was able to mark as complete every task because of the visibility and widespread participation in each activity. Tasks were not completed in isolation; therefore, she was aware when the group had accomplished the established tasks.

Question 3 provided answers to the overarching research question by showing that differences in approaches to successfully creating and implementing a SIP were often understandable in terms of grid and group characteristics of each school.

Question 4: How useful was Douglas's Grid and Group Theory in explaining these implementation variations?

Douglas's (1982, 1986) grid and group typology was beneficial in explaining most of the variation that occurred between and among Adams High School, Buchanan Elementary School, and the directions from the OSDE. By examining the grid dimension of each school, differences in assigned roles, organization and structure of the process, participation and representation, and use of the WISE Tool could be explained. By

examining the group dimension of each school, many of the similarities in stakeholder buy-in, goal cohesion, collaboration, and praise of people for successes could be explained. With further analysis of Adams High School's history as it transitioned from more of a bureaucratic culture to a corporate culture, even some of the differences in previous years between Adams High School's older approaches and their newer approaches could be explained by group dimension characteristics. Both schools adapted the directions from the OSDE. The success of these adaptations could be explained by the Grid and Group Theory in that the adaptations aligned with the schools' cultural preferences.

Question 4 offered insight into the overarching research question by providing explanation for the differences in how each successful school created and implemented a SIP. Table 3 summarizes the similarities and differences between Adams High School and Buchanan Elementary School that can be explained by Douglas's Grid and Group Theory.

Table 3

Similarities and Differences of Actions and Attitudes Between Adams High School and Buchanan Elementary School

School Improvement Planning Process Components	Adams High School (Corporate)	Buchanan Elementary School (Collectivist)
General Approach	Completed state and federal requirements to write SIP in the WISE Tool	Completed state and federal requirements to write SIP in the WISE Tool and used optional tools for ongoing support
	Viewed process primarily as a requirement due to previous identification	Viewed process as a catapult for continuous improvement

	Employed a full-time curriculum specialist dedicated to school improvement strategies	
	Initially developed by a small number of individuals, but ultimately incorporated a variety of stakeholder perceptions to increase buy-in	Incorporated a variety of stakeholder perceptions through representative committees to increase buy-in
	Resulted in limited awareness of SIP process among faculty members	Resulted in widespread awareness of SIP process among faculty members
Creation of SIP	Assessed performance indicators using a variety of data sources	Assessed performance indicators within laser-like focus of reading and mathematics achievement
	Sought expertise both internally and externally	Relied primarily on internal expertise
	Principal held final authority on inclusion of components in SIP	Representative committee collaboratively determined components for inclusion in SIP
	Resulted in a complex, detailed, five-year plan with many foci	Resulted in a simple, straightforward, two-year plan focused on reading and mathematics instruction
Implementation of SIP	Principal shared pieces of SIP with faculty one at a time	Committee members presented entire SIP to faculty in its entirety
	Developed a common language of instruction	Allowed for variation in terminology used in discussing instructional strategies and improvement practices

Shifted from authoritarian rationale to needs-based rationale when communicating why improvement strategies were chosen	Provided teacher autonomy in selection of specific instructional strategies aligned to goals
Shared responsibility among committee members for completion of the plan	Resulted in a collaborative approach with widespread participation in completing tasks
Collectively celebrated achievements	Collectively celebrated achievements
	Utilized the WISE Tool as an organizing resource for implementation, ongoing focus, and progress monitoring

Question 5: What other realities existed outside of grid and group cultural assessment?

There were a number of realities that existed outside of grid and group cultural assessment that should be considered when trying to understand the differences and similarities in how two successful schools created and implemented their SIPs.

First, both schools sat within larger cultural environments of a school district. If the unit of analysis for Harris's (2005) Grid and Group Assessment Tool had been Adams Public School District or Buchanan Public School District, different dynamics may have emerged. For example, Adams Public School District was also designated as a District in Need of Improvement; therefore, the district was required to write a District Improvement Plan (DIP). This reality led to confusion at the school level in distinguishing between the requirements of the SIP and the DIP. Teachers at the high school often felt that the plan had been "handed to them" from "the top-down" or that

their administrators had been given directives from "the downtown office." They may not have had this feeling if the district had not been under federal requirements to implement improvement strategies as well. This reality seemed to have impacted the creation and implementation process of the SIP at the site level in ways that cannot be explained by the site's cultural profile.

Second, requirements of federal and state governments did not always allow for adjustment based on school culture. Administrators at both schools mentioned the requirements of "The State," and sometimes indicated that these requirements were not beneficial to the school. Teachers at Adams High School discussed the mandates of the Oklahoma State Department of Education or No Child Left Behind to a much greater extent than did the teachers of Buchanan Elementary School. This difference can be explained to some degree by the cultural analysis of the two schools, but the approaches to including state and federal requirements in the plan appeared to be less a function of culture and more of a function of individual principal personality in terms of complying with authority.

Third, the actual identification for School Improvement happened in different ways in the two schools and continued for a different number of years. Adams High School was originally identified due to a reporting error on the part of the school related to graduation rate, which minimized their motivation for making changes in the building. While the school then had two additional years of poor academic performance and low graduation rates that continued their identification on the School Improvement List, the nature of the original identification shaped much of the thought process about the SIP and other improvement requirements. Buchanan Elementary School, on the other hand, was

shocked into reality when they were first identified for School Improvement based on student performance on state math tests. They were motivated to make immediate changes, primarily in academic expectations and parental involvement

Fourth, both schools had relatively new leadership. Mrs. Easton, the principal at Buchanan Lower Elementary School, said, "I know not to make too many changes your first three years of being a principal." She was in her third year at the time of this statement and about to embark on some needed reforms that she had previously decided to leave alone. At the same time, Mr. Fanning, the principal of the Upper Elementary School was being replaced with the school's counselor, Mrs. Grayson. Adams High School, too, had experienced several changes in leadership over the past few years. Those administrators did not wait to make changes, but implemented new approaches and reforms almost immediately. One district administrator spoke of the different principals' leadership styles within the district by saying, "I really think that the leadership and the style of the leader has a tremendous amount to do with the way and the speed of change in the school." These two approaches to leadership appeared to be more a philosophical difference, perhaps by whom the educators were trained, than a difference of the culture within which they led. Further, these differences almost seemed to shape the culture rather than be a function of the culture.

Lastly, demographic and geographic differences influenced the school culture as well as actions that may not be consistent with the internal culture of the faculty, staff, and students in these two schools. The structure and academic expectations on high schools are different from those on elementary schools. The personality types that are drawn to elementary school professions are vastly different from the personality types

that are drawn to high school professions. The size of a 6A high school with 125 faculty and staff members dictates actions and processes not needed in an elementary school with 45 faculty and staff members. For example, communication structures in the high school may have been a function of size and organization of content-based departments more than of cultural preference. The size of the school and the district of Adams High School also allowed for full-time staff to focus on curriculum issues, which was a luxury unavailable to the smaller Buchanan Elementary School. Additionally, the districts were part of larger communities that varied greatly from one another. While both communities were identified as rural Oklahoma, Adams High School was in the middle of a small town, and Buchanan Elementary School was in the middle of the country. These two different communities shape the school culture and the approach to improvement.

Question 5 contributed to understanding the overall research question by analyzing the differences in the creation and implementation of the SIPs in two successful schools outside of the reality of grid and group analysis. Larger contexts, state and federal requirements, motivation, leadership, and demographics all played a role in determining how the schools implemented the School Improvement Planning Process, regardless of their grid and group cultural profiles.

Conclusions

The findings in this study indicate that there are some similarities and some differences in how schools that showed improvement created and implemented their School Improvement Plans (SIPs). The two cases studied provided two different cultural contexts. Adams High School was a Corporate culture (strong-grid, strong-group); Buchanan Elementary School was a Collectivist culture (weak-grid, strong-group).

The findings suggest patterns in how the two schools created and implemented their SIPs as well as positive outcomes of the process. Both schools thoroughly assessed their current realities, reviewed research-based practices that were likely to improve student achievement, implemented those strategies with fidelity, and monitored the implementation and progress of students throughout the process. These findings support previous research (Buckley, 2007; Corbett, 2011; Fixen, 2009; Goodwin, 2008; Marzano, 2003; Schlechty, 2002; Schmoker, 1999). Further, both schools focused on teacher collaboration and stakeholder buy-in, which are also supportive of previous research (Buckley, 2007; DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004; Lasseter, 2007; Marzano, 2003, 2007; Reeves, 2006). Buchanan Elementary School's SIP was narrowly focused on reading and math achievement, which is consistent with the findings of Cepela (2007) and Furrow (2008), but Adams High School's SIP was not narrowly focused. Adams High School's SIP was more successfully implemented after new leadership disconnected improvement strategies from outside mandates, which is consistent with the findings of several studies (Beam, 2008; Parker-Moore, 2006; Pritchett, 2007; Reeves, 2006). Both Adams High School and Buchanan Elementary School reported results of the School Improvement Planning Process that are consistent with previous findings, including increased communication among faculty members and between schools and communities (Buckley, 2007), continuous professional learning of teachers and administrators (Buckley, 2007; Reeves, 2006), and improved student achievement (Cepela, 2007; Reeves, 2006).

In terms of cultural adjustments, both schools adjusted the School Improvement Planning Process to meet the needs of teachers, counselors, administrators, students,

families, and community stakeholders who contribute to the school's culture. Both schools having a strong group culture often explained similarities between the schools' processes, and Adams High School having a strong-grid culture whereas Buchanan Elementary School had a weak-grid culture often explained differences between the schools' processes. This finding is supportive of previous research connected with Douglas's (1982, 1986) grid and group typology (Balensiefen, 2004; Barnes, 1998; Boettger, 1997; Chastain, 2005; Chitapong, 2005; Harris, 2005; Kanaly, 2002; Limwudhikraijirath, 2009; Morris, 1997; Murer, 2002; Spitzer, 2004; Stansberry, 2001).

This study also indicated that there were realities outside of grid and group contexts that impacted attitudes and actions taken toward the SIP. This is a similar finding to Waelateh's (2009) study that showed that some actions do not match the desired approaches or cultural contexts of a school setting when outside forces or other phenomena are also present.

Implications

The findings from this study have implications for research, theory, and practice.

Research

Planning for and implementing school improvement strategies had been a topic of research for many years; however, in this time of accountability and required SIPs, studying the conditions under which schools were able to make progress through the School Improvement Planning Process was critical. The findings of this study supported findings from previous research regarding the actions that lead to successful creation and implementation of SIPs.

Using Douglas's (1982, 1986) grid and group typology as the theoretical framework for this study expanded the research base on SIP to include cultural context as a rationale for why some schools find success through the School Improvement Planning Process and others do not. The finding of this study showed that the two schools adjusted the instruction provided to them in order to implement the School Improvement Planning Process based on their cultural contexts. This finding expanded what was known about the School Improvement Planning Process.

Theory

Douglas's (1982, 1986) grid and group typology was used to describe the two schools in the study. Douglas's matrix had been used in the past to describe individuals, groups, and organizations. Using the matrix to describe the two schools provided a method of transferability of the findings to other schools with similar cultural contexts.

This study contributed to the theory by applying the typology to the School Improvement Planning Process, which had not been done previously. This study showed how the theory can be useful in explaining both similarities and differences in successful school improvement planning approaches, but this study also showed the limitation of the theory, in that there were realities beyond grid and group cultural profiles that impacted the actions and attitudes of faculty and staff in the two schools.

This study also demonstrated a need for developing the Grid and Group Assessment Tool (Harris, 2005) questionnaire into a school-administered cultural inventory, much like the Myers-Brigg Type Indicator (MBTI) used in personality assessment. Like the MBTI, the school culture inventory would designate cultural

preference as well as outline explicitly how schools can best adapt strategies based on their unique cultural type.

Practice

This study provided insight for three types of practicing educators: (1) school leaders, (2) district leaders, and (3) state education agencies, school improvement specialists, and university program faculty. Further, the study provided insight for professionals outside the field of education.

School leaders. Leaders in schools that are required to create and implement a SIP can learn from this study how to adapt state and federal requirements, instructions and suggestions from school improvement specialists, and best practices implemented in successful schools across the country to their own specific cultural contexts. This study showed that there is no one right way to implement the School Improvement Planning Process, rather school leaders should use their knowledge of their school cultures to implement the required activities of accountability systems.

The professional task required of school leaders is to know their audiences – the administrators, teachers, students, families, and community leaders – that comprise their school culture. Then, rather than expecting to follow a step-by-step set of directions or to imitate exactly another school's processes, professional school leaders can adapt successful strategies and the requirements of School Improvement to meet the needs of those stakeholders. The better school leaders know their audiences, the better they will be able to meet their varied needs.

Therefore, the first step in any School Improvement Planning Process should be ensuring that the school leader knows the context within which the school exists and is

poised for improvement. Whether that leader invites the school's educators to complete the Grid and Group Assessment Tool (Harris, 2005) or another school culture inventory, the leader needs an opportunity to dig deep into the culture of the school with an assessment tool that has predictive validity regarding the success of improvement strategies within various school environments. Critical components of that analysis, as found in this study, are communication structures, roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder, levels of interest and participation, and expectations on individuals from others in the group as well as expectations on the group from various individuals.

Following this analysis, when a school leader attends training, meetings, workshops, conferences, and other school site visits, the leader will have a context with which to evaluate each best practice and requirement presented. The leader should take note of what is being expected of the school that is likely not going to be successful within the cultural expectations of the school. When conflicts are noted, the leader should determine how that best practice or requirement could be adapted to meet the needs of the school's stakeholders. If the requirement is something that cannot be changed, the leader is armed with specific information about the school's culture in order to press against authorities to seek flexibility in implementing the requirement.

Knowing that stakeholder buy-in and communication are critical to the success of any improvement process, as reinforced by this study, school leaders should use the findings of their cultural analysis to determine the best processes through their communication structures to achieve buy-in from all stakeholders. Finally, as school leaders are spearheading the School Improvement Planning Process components of

creating and implementing a SIP, they should keep the cultures of their schools first and foremost in their minds.

District leaders. Leaders in districts that are seeking to implement continuous improvement practices can learn from this study. Whether the improvement initiatives are beyond the requirements of state and federal accountability systems or as a result of identification, district leaders can learn from this study to allow flexibility within their school systems so that each school can implement district improvement initiatives based on individual school cultures. The finding that there is no single effective strategy for school improvement should provide freedom to district leaders who are seeking to provide consistency across districts without forcing ineffective imitation. District leaders should encourage school leaders to assess their current realities and cultural contexts before embarking on journeys of change. District leaders should be the first to understand their audiences as described in the previous section.

State education agencies, school improvement specialists, and university program faculty. Educators whose focus is to train teachers and administrators can learn from this study how to advise school leaders in establishing processes for school improvement, whether required or voluntary. As both the researcher and a member of the Oklahoma State Department of Education staff, I intend to share the findings of this study with other staff members in order to improve the training offered by the OSDE to schools in the School Improvement Planning Process. Ideally, schools would utilize tools such as the Grid and Group Assessment Tool (Harris, 2005) to determine the cultural context within which they operate. Results of this assessment should inform the creation and implementation processes used in schools that are seeking to improve student

achievement. Per the implications for theory above, a research team is working to develop a school culture inventory, which would allow for school self-assessment and delineate process activities.

Professionals outside the field of education. Although the units of study for this research project were school sites, the implications of the findings have import to professionals outside the field of education. All organizations undergo change and improvement processes, either forced or voluntary. In order to be most efficient and effective, these change processes should be aligned with an organization's culture. Communication structures, levels of participation, and expectations on individuals need to align with the norms of the organization and the preferences of the individuals within the organization in order to lead to successful implementation. Before beginning an improvement initiative, organizational leaders – in business, industry, public, private, and non-profit sectors – should learn from this study the value of first analyzing the organizational environment. Douglas's (1982, 1986) Grid and Group Theory can provide a framework for that analysis. Although the Grid and Group Assessment Tool (Harris, 2005) used for this study is specific to school contexts, grid and group analysis is generalizable to a much wider audience of contexts.

Recommendations

The following six recommendations for further research and future development are provided as potential extensions of this research study.

Further Research

One, in this time of changing accountability systems as many states are taking advantage of federal flexibility, study of SIP creation and implementation requirements in

various states within the context of grid and group typology would be valuable. Some states have completely removed the requirement for SIPs, others have changed the required components, and others are continuing with the original federal requirements for SIPs. Studying the influence of grid and group typology in schools in different state contexts could be beneficial for understanding what flexibilities states might want to include in their processes in the future.

Two, this study began with the 43 schools that made improvement in their identified areas after implementing a SIP. Of the nine that volunteered, all had strong-group cultural contexts. Additional study on successful schools would be valuable in understanding whether all schools that are successful in the School Improvement Planning Process have strong-group environments. It is possible that the volunteering aspect is more closely related to strong-group environments than success in the School Improvement Planning Process. This would be valuable for future study.

Three, because this study focused only on the 43 schools that made improvement in their identified areas after implementing a SIP, a future study on cultural contexts of schools that were unsuccessful in implementing a SIP would provide instruction for further guidance and direction of schools.

Four, this study focused only on schools that were required to write and implement a SIP due to prior poor achievement. Research on the cultural contexts of schools that voluntarily choose to write and implement a SIP would also be of value. Because there are many more schools across the nation that are not required to implement SIPs than those that are, study of voluntary processes could have a potentially wider audience.

Five, this study included one elementary school and one high school. As noted in the findings and conclusions, this was a reality outside the scope of Grid and Group Theory that may have influenced the school's approaches to the School Improvement Planning Process. Future studies comparing elementary schools to one another, middle schools to one another, and high schools to one another when their culture types differ could help isolate which differences in approaches are related to culture type and which difference are related to grade level.

Future Development

As a result of the findings of this study, it is my recommendation that the School Improvement Planning Process be expanded to include an assessment of the school's culture type as the first step in the process. Either through an enhancement to the WISE Tool or as a supplemental resource, schools need access to the school culture inventory discussed previously that would designate cultural preference as well as outline explicitly how schools can best adapt improvement strategies and School Improvement requirements based on their unique cultural type.

Comments

Throughout my time working at the Oklahoma State Department of Education, I have been directly involved with the formal process known as School Improvement, initially only with non-Title I schools and ultimately with both Title I and non-Title I schools. I often found myself asking why some schools perpetually stayed on the School Improvement List and why others were able to make changes and come off of the list in such a short period of time. While my natural instinct led me to the conclusion that it was somehow related to the culture of the school, my assumption was that it had to do

with ingrained cultural elements that would not allow for change or improvement. My bias gave me internal phrases like "generational low performance" and "culturally accepted underachievement."

As I began to study the literature on school culture and school improvement, I began to wonder if there was more to it than that. I began to wonder, as did Harris (2005) and others, if perhaps it had more to do with an inability or unwillingness to match proven school improvement strategies to the cultural context of the school. Rather than an inability to improve, perhaps it was an inability to adapt.

Throughout this process, I sought to understand, without any pre-determined bias, if successful schools were implementing the improvement strategies and best practices as recommended, or if they were able to adapt them while still implementing with fidelity. I was pleased to learn that schools were able to use the information provided through training and others' experiences, while molding those practices to meet their needs. I was also surprised to find how little of the basic training was changed or not implemented as instructed, when so much more could have been changed or adapted from one school to another.

Also important to my journey in this process was hearing from teachers, counselors, and administrators in the field, some of whom were not fully cognizant of the integral role I personally played in decision-making for the State. Although I clearly explained my title and role at the OSDE, several of the people I interviewed did not seem to understand how many of the decisions they were concerned about had been, at least in part, my responsibility. This allowed me to understand creation and implementation of a School Improvement Plan from their perspective, which is not in isolation from other

initiatives, strategies, and requirements. I learned from those I met that the School Improvement Planning Process had to be viewed in terms of everything else that was occurring in the school. Many teachers, counselors, and administrators, when talking about the SIP, discussed Oklahoma's Achieving Classroom Excellence Act (ACE) which requires students to pass content area tests in order to graduate high school; Oklahoma's Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Evaluation System (TLE), which increased the rigor of teacher and principal evaluations by including qualitative and quantitative components designed to provide actionable feedback for continuous professional growth; the new state accountability system, an A-F School Report Card; and the more rigorous Common Core State Standards and PARCC assessments. Not only did these educators often have incorrect or incomplete information, their biases for or against these initiatives also impacted their feelings toward the SIPs implemented in their schools.

Probably the most meaningful thing I learned by being in the schools for so many days listening to so many educators was the need to take more time to listen to those who are working their hearts out every day for the children in their classrooms and in their buildings. They are experts with much to share if given enough information to connect all of the pieces together and enough time to pass on their experiences.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Grid and Group Assessment Tool

Preliminary Information

Position (please check one)

☐ Teacher (specify position title) _____

☐ Support Staff (specify position title) _____

☐ Administrator (specify position title) _____

☐ Other (please explain) _____

Years of Service

Total years of service at this school site _____

Instructions

While completing this instrument, keep in mind the entire school site, but do not focus on characteristics of the district that differ from your school site. Below are 24 pairs of statements. For each pair:

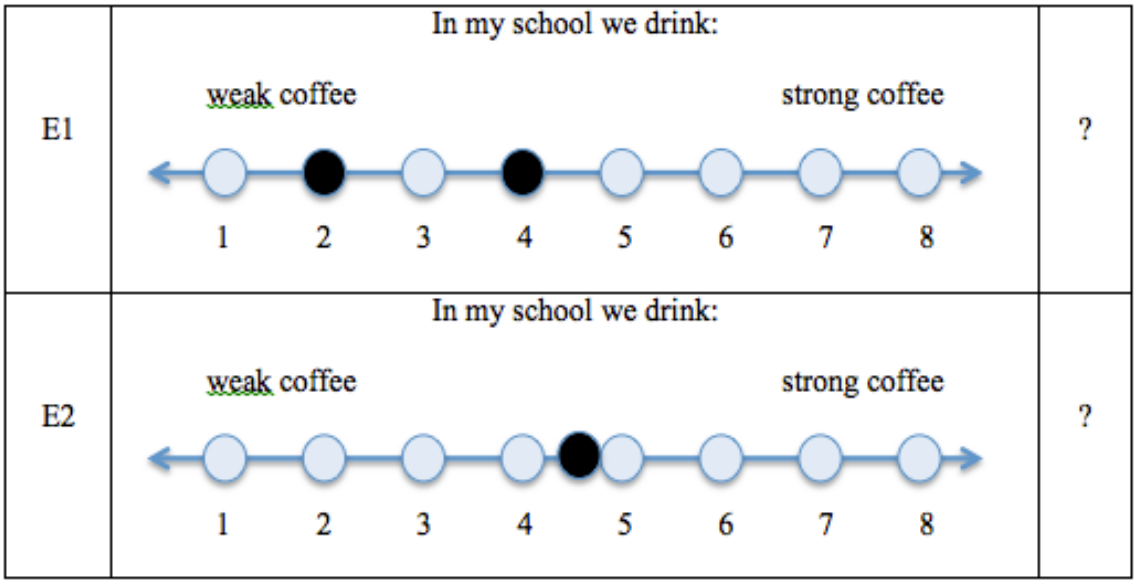
- Choose the statement that you think *best* represents the school site under study, and
- On a continuum, mark the bubble that represents the degree to which the statement best applies to the school site under study.

The bubbles on the continuum are numbered 1 through 8. Numbers 1 and 8 represent the extreme poles of the continuum. The intermediate numbers (2-7) provide a continuous scale between those extremes.

Mark only one bubble for each item. (Note: In the statements below, the term *administrator* refers to administration at any level in the building, including principal, assistant principal, counselor, or anyone assigned with formal administrative responsibility and title.)

Example Items

Incorrect procedure. The following is the incorrect way to complete the questionnaire. In the first sample item (E1), more than one circle is marked. In item number two (E2), a mark is made between two numbers on the continuum. In both cases, it is not possible to score the item. *Don't* do it this way!

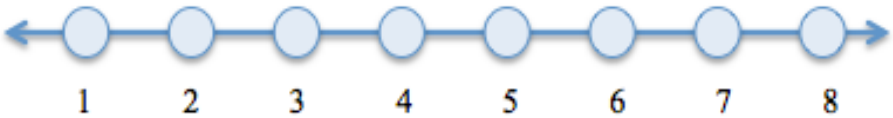
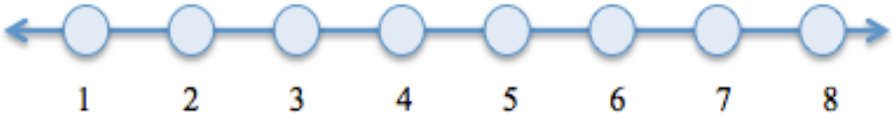


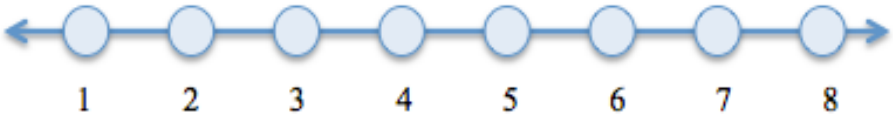
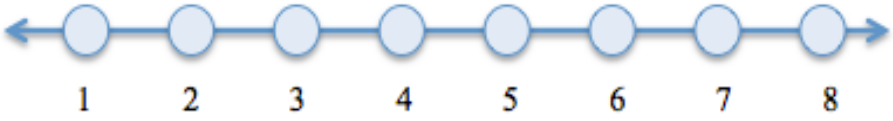
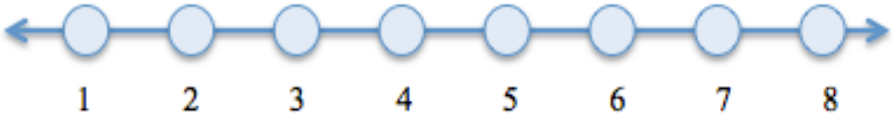
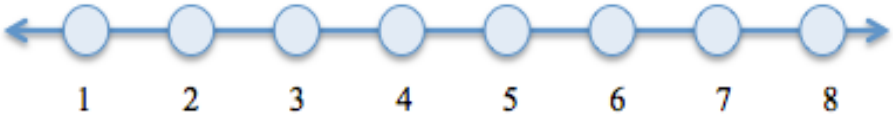
Correct Procedure. Example E3 below is the correct way to complete each item in the questionnaire. One and only one circle is marked. The score for this item would be 6, as indicated in the score column. *Do it this way!*

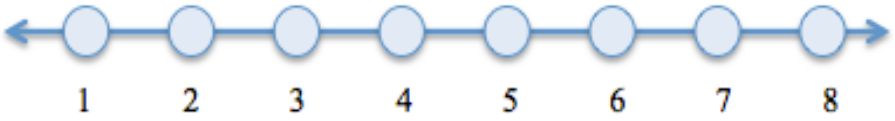
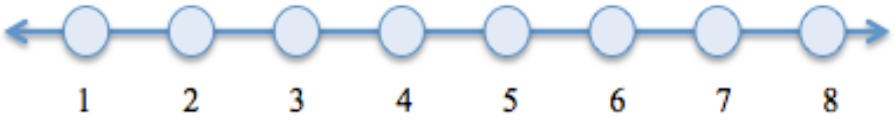
E3	In my school we drink: weak coffee — strong coffee  1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	6

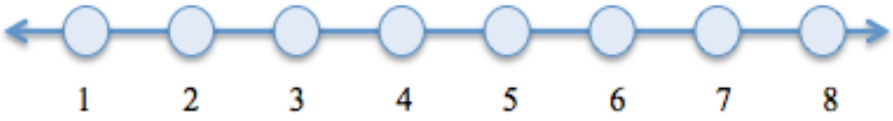
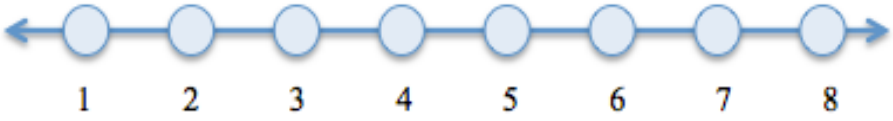
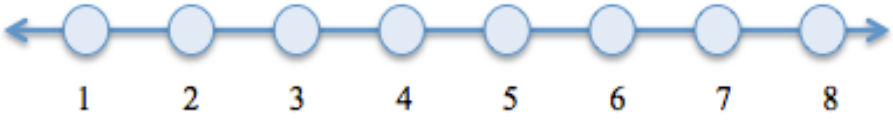
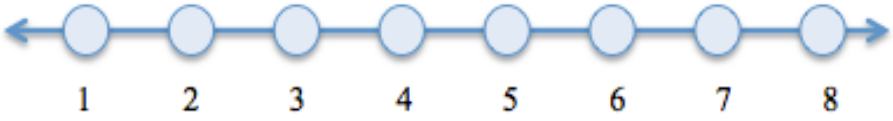
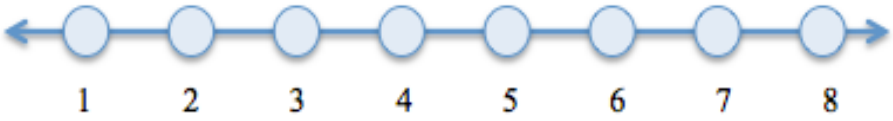
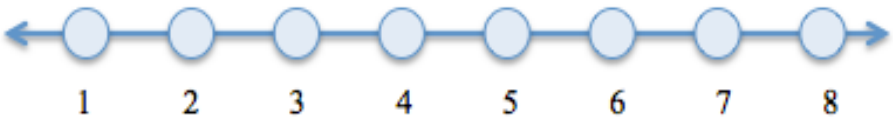
Questionnaire

Item	Grid Considerations	Score
1	Authority structures are: Decentralized/ Nonhierarchical — Centralized/ Hierarchical  1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	
2	Roles are: Nonspecialized/ no explicit job descriptions — Specialized/ explicit job descriptions  1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	
3	Individual teachers have: Full autonomy in textbook selection — No autonomy in textbook selection  1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	

4	Individual teachers have: Full autonomy in generating educational goals for their classrooms — No autonomy in generating educational goals for their classrooms  1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	
5	Individual teachers have: Full autonomy in selecting instructional methods/ strategies — No autonomy in selecting instructional methods/ strategies  1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	
6	Students are: Encouraged to participate in and take ownership of their education — Discouraged from participating in and taking ownership of their education  1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	
7	Teachers obtain instructional resources (i.e., technology, manipulatives, materials, and tools) through: Individual competition/ negotiation — Administrative allotment/ allocation  1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	
8	Instruction is: Individualized/ personalized for each student — Not individualized/ personalized for each student  1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	

9	Individual teachers are motivated by: Intrinsic/ self-defined interests — Extrinsic/ institutional rewards  	
10	Hiring decisions are: Decentralized/ controlled by teachers — Centralized/ controlled by administrators  	
11	Class schedules are determined through: Individual teacher negotiation — Institutional rules/ routines  	
12	Rules and procedures are: Few/implicit — Numerous/explicit  	
	Sum of grid scores: _____ Average of grid scores (sum/12): _____	

Item	Group Considerations	Score
1	Instructional activities are initiated/planned by: Individual teachers working alone — All educators working collaboratively  	
2	Educators' socialization and work are: Separate/ dichotomous activities — Incorporated/ united activities  	
3	Extrinsic rewards primarily benefit: The individual — Everyone at the school site  	
4	Teaching and learning are planned/organized around: Individual teacher goals/interests — Group goals/ interests  	
5	Teaching performance is evaluated according to: Individual teacher goals, priorities, and criteria — Group goals, priorities, and criteria  	

6	Members work: In isolation towards goals and objectives — Collaboratively towards goals and objectives  	
7	Curricular goals are generated: Individually — Collaboratively  	
8	Communication flows primarily through: Individual, informal networks — Corporate, formal networks  	
9	Instructional resources are controlled/owned: Individually — Collaboratively  	
10	Educators and students have: No allegiance/ loyalty to the school — Much allegiance/ loyalty to the school  	
11	Responsibilities of teachers and administrators are: Ambiguous/ fragmented with no accountability — Clear/communal with much accountability  	

12	Most decisions are made: Privately by factions or independent verdict — Corporately by consensus or group approval  	
	Sum of group scores: _____ Average of group scores (sum/12): _____	

Appendix B

Questionnaire of Teachers, Counselors, and Site Administrators

Instructions: Please complete each open-ended question below related to your involvement with writing and implementing the School Improvement Plan through the WISE Tool.

School Site: _____

Position (for example, teacher, assistant principal): _____

1. How long have you worked in this school site? _____
2. Have you been directly involved with writing the School Improvement Plan? _____
3. If so, how? _____

   _____

   _____
4. If not, why do you think you were not directly involved? _____

   _____

   _____

   Were you indirectly involved? _____ Please explain. _____

   _____

   _____

5. How much participation have you had in implementing the School Improvement Plan? Please explain. _____

_____

6. Describe your familiarity with the WISE Tool. _____

_____

_____

7. Your school made AYP in 2011 or you met the benchmark area for which your school was originally identified for School Improvement. To what do you attribute that improvement? _____

_____

8. What differences, if any, did you experience in writing and/or implementing your School Improvement Plan at your site in 2010-2011 and/or 2011-2012 than in prior years? _____

_____

9. How do you think these differences affected your student achievement? _____

_____

_____

10. What else would you like to share about the process of writing and implementing your School Improvement Plan? _____

_____

If you are interested in the possibility of being contacted for a follow-up interview or focus group participation, please provide your name and email address.

Name: _____ Email: _____

Appendix C

Questionnaire of District Administrators and School Improvement Coaches

Instructions: Please complete each open-ended question below related to the School Improvement Plan process, including the use of the WISE Tool, implemented at _____ school.

Position (for example, assistant superintendent, school support team leader):

_____

1. How long have you worked with this school site? _____
2. Have you been directly involved with writing or implementing the School Improvement Plan at this site? _____ If so, how? _____

   _____

   _____
3. How would you describe the level of participation of school site faculty in the writing of the School Improvement Plan? _____

   _____

   _____
4. How would you describe the level of participation of school site faculty in implementing the School Improvement Plan? _____

   _____

   _____

5. Describe the use of the WISE Tool at this school site. _____

_____

6. This school made AYP in 2011 or you met the benchmark area for which your school was originally identified for School Improvement. To what do you attribute that improvement? _____

_____

7. What differences, if any, did you notice in the process used for writing and/or implementing the School Improvement Plan at this site in 2010-2011 and/or 2011-2012 than in prior years? _____

_____

8. How do you think these differences affected student achievement? _____

_____

9. To what extent would you say that the school followed instruction and guidance from the Oklahoma State Department of Education, school district personnel, school improvement coaches, and other consultants during the School Improvement Planning Process? _____

_____

10. What else would you like to share about the process of writing and implementing the School Improvement Plan at this site? _____

_____

If you are interested in the possibility of being contacted for a follow-up interview or focus group participation, please provide your name and email address.

Name: _____ Email: _____

Appendix D

Interview Guide with Potential Probes

1. Describe the process your school used to write the School Improvement Plan in 2010.
    a. How were the school's strengths and needs assessed?
    b. How were the steps for improvement (tasks) determined?
2. Describe the process your school used to implement the School Improvement Plan during the 2010-2011 school year.
    a. How were faculty members and other stakeholders made aware of the plan?
    b. How was it determined if the plan was being implemented well?
3. Describe the relationship between your School Improvement Plan and your school's academic improvement.
4. How was your school's School Improvement Planning Process different in 2010-2011 than in previous years?
5. How was your school's School Improvement Planning Process different than other schools' processes?

Appendix E

Observation Template

Observation # _____ Date _____/_____/_____ Time _____

Location/Event _____

Persons Present _____

_____

Descriptive Notes	
Experiential Notes	**Reflective Notes**

Experiential Notes (continued)	Reflective Notes (continued)
Summary	

Appendix F

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board Approval

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Wednesday, April 11, 2012

IRB Application No ED1263

Proposal Title: A Grid and Group Analysis of the Role of Culture in School Improvement Planning

Reviewed and Processed as: Expedited

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved **Protocol Expires: 4/10/2013**

Principal Investigator(s):

Kerri White
1921 NW 177th Street
Edmond, OK 73012

Edward Harris
308 Willard
Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

[X] The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

The reviewer(s) had these comments:
Because this dissertation research will be presented in a document that will be available to the general public, great care must be taken not to directly or indirectly identify schools or participants in the research discussion.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Beth McTernan in 219 Cordell North(phone: 405-744-5700, beth.mcternan@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Shelia H. Kennison

Shelia Kennison, Chair
Institutional Review Board

Initial Email to Faculty and Staff

My name is Kerri White. I am conducting research for my doctoral dissertation. My topic is School Improvement Planning. Your school has been chosen because you made significant improvement after developing and implementing a School Improvement Plan in 2010-2011. I am interested in learning about what made your school successful. I have been given permission from _____(superintendent) and _____ (principal) to request your input on a completely voluntary basis.

Below is a link to an online survey. This is a 24 question survey that should take no more than 10-15 minutes to complete. You will be asked to describe the culture of your school on a scale of 1-8 between two points.

Your survey results will be collected through Oklahoma State University in a secure manner that cannot be traced back to the participant. I will receive an Excel® Spreadsheet of the group responses only.

(link)

If you have any questions, you may contact me via reply email.

Thank you for your participation.

Principal to Teachers & Staff
E-mail Script

I wanted to let you know that Kerri White, a Doctorial Candidate from OSU is using our school for a research project concerning School Improvement Planning. She will be sending out more information and requesting you to complete a questionnaire. Your participation is completely voluntary, and your responses will be submitted anonymously. Again, this is not a requirement or a request from me. I am just letting you know that it has been approved for her to request this information.

Email Message to Principals and Superintendents Requesting Participation

My name is Kerri White. I am a Doctoral Candidate at Oklahoma State University, working on a research project for my dissertation. My topic is School Improvement Planning. Your school made significant improvement after developing and implementing a School Improvement Plan in 2010-2011. I am interested in learning about what made your school successful.

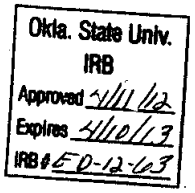
If you are willing to assist with my research, I will be asking you to forward a 24 question survey to your faculty and staff that will provide me with information about the culture of your school. Based on the cultural profile of your school, you may be selected to participate in a case study. If you are asked to participate in the case study, that process would involve interviews with approximately 10 members of the school faculty, staff, or educational consultants that work with your school; observations of a faculty meeting or some committee meetings; and reviews of your School Improvement Plan and other documents you have publicly available.

All identifying information related to the research will be kept confidential. The interviews will be recorded, but all recordings will be kept secure and erased after the research is complete. All names or identifying information will be changed to a pseudonym. There will be consent forms to sign at the time of the interviews.

It is also important for you to know that this research is not connected with my role as an employee of the Oklahoma State Department of Education; however, officials in the Oklahoma State Department of Education are aware of this research project and are supportive of the process. Confidential information acquired during this research project will be in no way communicated to the Oklahoma State Department of Education.

If you are willing to assist in this research project, please respond to this email by _____. If you have any questions, you may contact me via reply email or by phone at (405) 285-7443.

Thank you, I look forward to working with you.



Email Message to Principals and Superintendents Selecting for Case Study

My name is Kerri White. As you may remember from an earlier email, I am conducting research for my doctoral dissertation. My topic is School Improvement Planning. Thank you for your school's earlier participation in this project. Based on the culture of your school, you have been selected to participate in a more involved level of my research. I would like to conduct a case study analysis of your school.

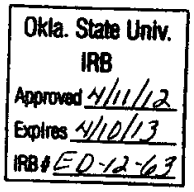
The case study process involves interviews with approximately 10 members of the school faculty, staff, or educational consultants that work with your school; observations of a faculty meeting or some committee meetings; and reviews of your School Improvement Plan and other documents you have publicly available.

All identifying information related to the research will be kept confidential. The interviews will be recorded, but all recordings will be kept secure and erased after the research is complete. All names or identifying information will be changed to a pseudonym. There will be consent forms to sign at the time of the interviews.

It is also important for you to know that this research is not connected with my role as an employee of the Oklahoma State Department of Education; however, officials in the Oklahoma State Department of Education are aware of this research project and are supportive of the process. Confidential information acquired during this research project will be in no way communicated to the Oklahoma State Department of Education.

If you are willing to participate in the case study component of this research project, please respond to this email by _____. If you have any questions, you may contact me via reply email or by phone at (405) 285-7443.

Thank you, I look forward to working with you.



Follow-Up Email to Faculty and Staff in Selected Case Study Schools

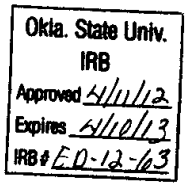
My name is Kerri White. As you may remember from an earlier email, I am conducting research for my doctoral dissertation. My topic is School Improvement Planning. Based on your school's earlier participation about the culture of your school, you have been selected to participate in a more involved level of my research. I will be conducting a case study analysis of your school.

Below is a link to an online questionnaire. This questionnaire contains 10 questions, requesting your explanation or description of the School Improvement Planning Process in your school. Following the last question, there is an optional opportunity for you to share your name and email address if you are interested in participating in a follow-up interview or focus group. If you do not provide your name and email address, your responses will not be able to be traced back to you. I will receive an Excel® Spreadsheet of the group responses only and a list of individuals who are willing to participate in follow-up interviews and focus groups.

(link)

If you have any questions, you may contact me via reply email.

Thank you for your participation.



Email to District Faculty and Educational Consultants Associated with Selected Case Study Schools

My name is Kerri White. I am a Doctoral Candidate at Oklahoma State University, working on a research project for my dissertation. My topic is School Improvement Planning. It is my understanding that you have direct involvement with _____ (school) as a district administrator or educational consultant. This school has been selected to participate in a case study analysis of the success of the school because the school made significant progress after developing and implementing a School Improvement Plan in 2010-2011.

Below is a link to an online questionnaire. This questionnaire contains 10 questions, requesting your explanation or description of the School Improvement Planning Process in this school. Following the last question, there is an optional opportunity for you to share your name and email address if you are interested in participating in a follow-up interview or focus group. If you do not provide your name and email address, your responses will not be able to be traced back to you. I will receive an Excel® Spreadsheet of the group responses only and a list of individuals who are willing to participate in follow-up interviews and focus groups.

(link)

If you have any questions, you may contact me via reply email.

Thank you for your participation.

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Project Title: A Grid and Group Analysis of the Role of Culture in School Improvement Planning

Investigator: Kerri White, Doctoral Candidate, Oklahoma State University

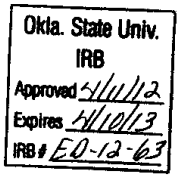
Purpose: This study is designed to explore the connections between school culture and improved student achievement as underperforming schools developed and implemented their School Improvement Plans through the Ways to Improve School Effectiveness (WISE) tool. Because the school where you work made significant improvement after developing and implementing a School Improvement Plan in 2010-2011, I am interviewing employees at your school. Interviews are based on approximately five, pre-determined questions with follow-up and clarification questions as needed. The purpose of the interview is to record your experiences and perceptions during the School Improvement Planning process.

Procedures: Prior to the interview, you were asked if you would prefer to conduct the interview on or off campus, and if you would prefer to be part of a focus group rather than an individual interview. These arrangements have been made. You have also been asked to complete a demographic page and to bring it with you to this interview. During the interview, you will be asked to describe expectations, concerns, and experiences during the planning process. This interview will be recorded with a digital audio recording device for the purpose of protecting the integrity of the responses.

Risks of Participation: There are no known risks associated with this project which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. There is a possibility that you will share information during this interview that you would not otherwise share with your colleagues, supervisor, or the public. Your responses will be reported in such a way to protect your privacy. For example, the final report might state, "A teacher who has served in the school for many years said..." as opposed to "A mathematics teacher who has served in the school for 27 years said..." As described below, any identifying information will be stored in such a way as to keep it from being easily associated with your responses.

Benefits: There are no benefits to the participants in this research other than contributing to the knowledge base of School Improvement Planning for the betterment of educational practices.

Confidentiality: Interview recordings will be stored on a secure, password-protected mobile storage device only accessible by the researcher. Transcriptions and reporting will use pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants. Demographic pages will be coded to match interviews numerically not by name. Demographic pages, researcher notes, and transcriptions will be stored in a locking file cabinet. Any report made to the public will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. It is possible that the consent process and data collection will be observed by research oversight staff responsible for safeguarding the rights and wellbeing of people who participate in research.



Compensation: None

Contacts: If you have any questions regarding the project, please contact the principal investigator or the committee chair:

Principal Investigator
Kerri White
Doctorial Candidate
Oklahoma State University
kerri.white@okstate.edu
405-285-7443

Committee Chair
Dr. Ed Harris
Professor
Oklahoma State University
ed.harris@okstate.edu
405-744-7932

If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact Dr. Shelia Kennison, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu.

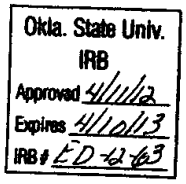
Participant Rights: Your participation is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without reprisal, prejudice, penalty or consequences of any kind.

Signatures:
I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form has been given to me.

_____ _____
Signature of Participant Date

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it.

_____ _____
Signature of Researcher Date



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION
OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

Title: A Grid and Group Analysis of the Role of Culture in School Improvement Planning

Investigator(s): Kerri White, OSU Doctorial Candidate

Purpose: This study is designed to explore the connections between school culture and improved student achievement as underperforming schools developed and implemented their School Improvement Plans through the Ways to Improve School Effectiveness (WISE) Tool. Because the school where you work made significant improvement after developing and implementing a School Improvement Plan in 2010-2011, I am interested in learning about what made your school successful during the School Improvement Planning process.

What to Expect: This portion of the research study is administered online. Participation will involve the completion of 24 questions. You must complete each question before moving on to the next. It should take you about 15 minutes to complete.

Risks: There are no risks associated with this project which are expected to be greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

Benefits: There are no benefits to the participants in this research other than contributing to the knowledge base of School Improvement Planning for the betterment of educational practices.

Compensation: None

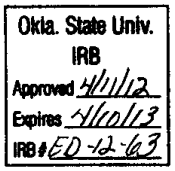
Your Rights and Confidentiality: Your participation in this research is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and you are free to withdraw your consent and participation in this project at any time, without penalty.

Confidentiality: You will not be identified individually; data will be presented as a group rather than individually. As a researcher, I will only receive an Excel® document with responses for each question. The responses you provide will only be associated with your title (i.e., teacher, support staff, administrator, or other) and the number of years you have served at this school. This information will not be reported in any way other than aggregate numbers. For example, the final report might state, "Five teachers, two support staff members, and one administrator responded to the survey. Together, they have 45 years of combined experience in this school site."

Contacts: You may contact any of the researchers at the following addresses and phone numbers, should you desire to discuss your participation in the study and/or request information about the results of the study:

Principal Investigator
Kerri White
Doctorial Candidate
Oklahoma State University

Committee Chair
Dr. Ed Harris
Professor
Oklahoma State University



kerri.white@okstate.edu
405-285-7443

ed.harris@okstate.edu
405-744-7932

If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact Dr. Shelia Kennison, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu

If you choose to participate: Please, click NEXT if you choose to participate. By clicking NEXT, you are indicating that you freely and voluntarily and agree to participate in this study and you also acknowledge that you are at least 18 years of age.
It is recommended that you print a copy of this consent page for your records before you begin the study by clicking below.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION
OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

Title: A Grid and Group Analysis of the Role of Culture in School Improvement Planning

Investigator(s): Kerri White, OSU Doctorial Candidate

Purpose: This study is designed to explore the connections between school culture and improved student achievement as underperforming schools developed and implemented their School Improvement Plans through the Ways to Improve School Effectiveness (WISE) tool. Because the school where you work made significant improvement after developing and implementing a School Improvement Plan in 2010-2011, I am interested in learning about what made your school successful during the School Improvement Planning process.

What to Expect: This portion of the research study is administered online. Participation will involve the completion of 10 open-ended questions. You do not have to complete each question before moving on to the next. It should take you between 20 and 30 minutes to complete, depending on how much detail you choose to provide.

Risks: There are no risks associated with this project which are expected to be greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

Benefits: There are no benefits to the participants in this research other than contributing to the knowledge base of School Improvement Planning for the betterment of educational practices.

Compensation: None

Your Rights and Confidentiality: Your participation in this research is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and you are free to withdraw your consent and participation in this project at any time, without penalty.

Confidentiality: You will not be identified individually; data will be presented as a group rather than individually. Any pertinent responses that need to be reported individually will be done so without the use of names or identifying information. You will have an opportunity to provide your name and email address at the end of the questionnaire if you are interested in participating in a follow-up interview or focus group. If you choose to provide this information, it will not be stored in connection to your questionnaire responses, but will be kept in a separate file.

Contacts: You may contact any of the researchers at the following addresses and phone numbers, should you desire to discuss your participation in the study and/or request information about the results of the study:

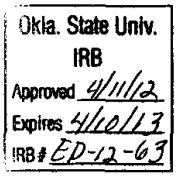
Principal Investigator
Kerri White
Doctorial Candidate
Oklahoma State University
kerri.white@okstate.edu

Committee Chair
Dr. Ed Harris
Professor
Oklahoma State University
ed.harris@okstate.edu

405-285-7443 405-744-7932

If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact Dr. Shelia Kennison, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu

If you choose to participate: Please, click NEXT if you choose to participate. By clicking NEXT, you are indicating that you freely and voluntarily and agree to participate in this study and you also acknowledge that you are at least 18 years of age.
It is recommended that you print a copy of this consent page for your records before you begin the study by clicking below.



Appendix G

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board Modification Approval

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date:	Monday, May 07, 2012	Protocol Expires:	4/10/2013
IRB Application No:	ED1263		
Proposal Title:	A Grid and Group Analysis of the Role of Culture in School Improvement Planning		
Reviewed and Processed as:	Expedited **Modification**		

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s) **Approved**

Principal Investigator(s):

Kerri White
1921 NW 177th Street
Edmond, OK 73012

Edward Harris
308 Willard
Stillwater, OK 74078

The requested modification to this IRB protocol has been approved. Please note that the original expiration date of the protocol has not changed. The IRB office MUST be notified in writing when a project is complete. All approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB.

☒ The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

The reviewer(s) had these comments:

The modification request transmitting the principals' approvals for the school to participate in the case study component of the research is approved.

Signature :

Shelia Kennison, Chair, Institutional Review Board

Monday, May 07, 2012
Date

VITA

Kerri K. White

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: A GRID AND GROUP ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANNING

Major Field: Educational Leadership Studies, School Administration

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership Studies, School Administration at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May 2013.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Arts in Educational Leadership at Southern Nazarene University, Bethany, Oklahoma in 2004.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Education, Secondary Mathematics at Oklahoma Baptist University, Shawnee, Oklahoma in 2000.

Experience:

Assistant State Superintendent, Office of Educational Support; Executive Director of High School Reform; Director of Mathematics Education at the Oklahoma State Department of Education, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 2004-2013

Mathematics Teacher at Putnam City Public Schools, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 2004; and at Deer Creek Public Schools, Edmond, Oklahoma, 2001-2004

Professional Memberships:

American Evaluation Association
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
Cooperative Council of Oklahoma School Administrators
Phi Kappa Phi Honors Society