

# Fostering Collaboration

## in the Area of

# Planned Change

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### Purpose of the Study

This study analyzed the ability to foster collaboration in the area of planned change for a school district. School administrators are faced with the critical task of creating opportunities for the organization to collaborate when planning or implementing change. The Advocacy Design Center Model (ADC) (Smith) was applied as the guiding principles to initiate the planned change. We considered the following questions as the basis of the research:

1. How will the leadership team foster collaborative opportunities that will enhance learning for all students?
2. As we plan for change, what specific policies, procedures, and organizational roles will best lead to teacher ownership of the change while fostering collaboration?
3. What elements need to be in place to ensure that planned change can occur, with a shared vision, balanced stakeholder support, and a school community partnership that is transparent and sustains the vision of the district?
4. In planning change, how will data be shared and analyzed to validate prior decisions and to inform future instructional practices?

#### Significance of the Study

This study is of importance for all administrators. In three Long Island school districts, administrators have put forth effort to help foster collaboration amongst educators. The need to

look at collaboration was based on an identified need to create opportunities for collaboration to occur.

### Definitions

**Sustainable Leadership-** Hargreaves and Fink (2006) define sustainable leadership as leadership that sustains improvement, preserves and develops deep learning for all that spreads and lasts, in ways that do no harm and indeed create positive benefit for others around us, now and in the future.

**Collaboration-** Baker, Curtis, Benenson, define collaboration as a social term that describes a special relationship between two or more persons (or agencies) who share a common agenda for concerted action. The term suggests that both sides of the social equation are freely disposed to work together as co-laborers.

**Advocacy Design Center Model(ADC)-** The framework of the Advocacy Design Center was developed by Dr. Frank Smith (1990) and is the tool to analyze the function of each alternative high school. The ADC uses 29 questions that serve as a guide to examine four areas: instruction, organization, governance, and accountability (IOGA). The primary purpose of the ADC Model is community building; strengthening the school's sense of efficacy and its' capacity to be a powerful institution in its' social context.

**Common Planning Time-** According to Jane Belmore, focused and goal-driven collaborative planning time helps teachers become more highly qualified by improving teaching strategies, among other results. These improved strategies, in turn, help to produce better student outcomes. The aforementioned improved strategies are by no means isolated to the methodology behind the

delivery of the curriculum, but rather encompass all of the aspects of teaching that can be discussed mutually among educators.

**Accountability-** Smith defines accountability as the process through which public knowledge about school work is created. Accountability is seen as a continuous process of inquiry by the citizens of the school and then based on the assessment of performance a plan is put into action (Smith). The school should develop an explicit plan for the improvement of student performance one all results are in as they relate to the self-assessment of the instructional program. Wehlage (1989) believes that in successful schools the teachers must believe that they are accountable for the students' success. The teachers and staff members believe that they are personally responsible for helping the student overcome his/her impediments to success. According to Wehlage, the teachers must also promote academic success as well as social and personal competence among their students (1989).

**Stake Holders-** Smith refers to stake holders as the following: "Research indicates that good schools have a community with a shared vision or sense of identity and character. With respect to mathematics, for example, in a high performing school, teachers, parents, students and others share a sense of what it means to know and to teach mathematics."

**Instructional Rounds-** Elmore (2009) defines instructional rounds, which are modeled after medical rounds as: focused walks that involve all district administrators in collecting data on the instructional core focused on academic tasks and then formulating a Theory of Action to guide

the implementation of a three pronged model of change. Action to guide the implementation of a three pronged change:

1. Content-raise the level/rigor
2. Teachers – increase the skill level of the teacher
3. Students –increase student engagement, action, and thinking (p. 113)

**Walkthroughs-** As there are numerous variations of walkthroughs, there are variations on the definition. For the purpose of this paper, the definition used for walkthroughs was developed by ASCD (2007). Classroom walkthroughs are brief visits to classrooms throughout the school, two to five minutes long, conducted on a frequent basis and are informal and non-evaluative, designed to collect patterns of data that can help members of the professional learning community to continually improve their teaching practices.

**Attribution Theory-** For the purpose of this study, the researchers focused on teachers perceptions on attribution theory. Attribution theory is about how people make causal explanations; about how they answer questions beginning with "**why?**" The theory deals with the information they use in making causal inferences, and with what they do with this information to answer causal questions (Platt, Tripp, Fraser, Warnock, Curtis, 2008).

## Chapter II

### Literature Review

We considered the following questions as the basis of the research:

1. How will the leadership team foster collaborative opportunities that will enhance learning for all students?
2. As we plan for change, what specific policies, procedures, and organizational roles will best lead to teacher ownership of the change while fostering collaboration?
3. What elements need to be in place to ensure that planned change can occur, with a shared vision, balanced stakeholder support, and a school community partnership that is transparent and sustains the vision of the district?
4. In planning change, how will data be shared and analyzed to validate prior decisions and to inform future instructional practices?

As we plan for change we need to consider how our decisions continue to foster collaboration and allow for distributive leadership. Traditional roles in what Smith calls “patterns of organization” will need to be analyzed so that “individuals work in a more integrated way (1992, p.9). The sustainability of organization within the learning community will rely heavily on collaborative efforts in a way that is shared and infused in all levels. Decisions involving some of these tasks need to be aligned with the mission or vision of the district. As Elmore states, “Authority is a reciprocal relationship, a grant of legitimacy based on an acknowledged inequality. The grant may be based on threat or reprisal, tradition, respect for

knowledge or competence or formal rule” (Elmore, 1987, p. 66). Similarly, there are characteristics of effective organizations identified by Hargreaves and Fink (2006) such as:

- A framework of common and enduring values, goals, and purposes
  - Possession and development of variability or diversity in skills and talents
  - Processes that promote interaction and cross-pollination of ideas and influences across this variability
  - Permeability to outside influences
  - Emergence of new ideas, structures, and processes as diverse elements interconnect and new ones intrude from the outside
  - Flexibility and adaptability in response to environmental change
- Resilience in the face of and in response to threats and adversity (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006, p.164).

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- A framework of common and enduring values goals and purposes
- Possession and development of variability or diversity in skills and talents



In summary, to foster collaboration in terms of the organization, the entire organization needs to have an established purpose that is clear and communicated to everyone working within the organization.

More and more, policymakers, educators and the public are demanding that schools and districts be held accountable for student performance. In response, schools are developing accountability systems. Some of the data these systems of analyzing include: collecting and utilizing data gathered during walkthroughs and instructional rounds, measuring progress utilizing data, creating an environment where everyone is valued and open and honest feedback is the norm, and being able to ask the tough questions, such as, “was this a good decision/idea/model, and if not, what are we going to do?” (Elmore, 2009, pp 50).

According to Frank Smith, once a plan is developed and put in motion, its’ utility or truthfulness must be determined by observation. One way to do this is by conducting walkthroughs. Classroom walkthroughs offer a coherent structure and interactive process for instructional leaders to gather focused information about instructional strengths and weaknesses at their school, with the goal of raising student achievement (DuFour, 2002; Marzano, Pickering, Pollock, 2001). The purpose of a walkthrough is to focus the participants on improving the core of educational practice. Elmore defines core educational practice as:

- how teachers understand the nature of knowledge
- the students’ role in learning, and how these ideas about knowledge and learning are manifested in teaching and classwork

Classroom walkthroughs are brief visits to classrooms throughout the school, two to five minutes long, conducted on a frequent basis and are informal and non-evaluative, designed to collect patterns of data that can help members of the professional learning community to continually improve their teaching practices (Downey, Steffy, English, Frase 2008). The common elements of walkthroughs are:

- Informal and brief
- Involving the principal and/or other administrators, other instructional leaders, and teachers
- Quick snapshots of classroom activities (particularly instructional and curricular practices)
- NOT intended for formal teacher evaluation purposes
- Focused on “look-fors” that emphasize improvement in teaching and learning
- An opportunity to give feedback to teachers for reflection on their practice
- Having the improvement of student achievement as its ultimate goal. (Kachur, Stout, Edwards, 2010, p. 2).

Another method for instructional leaders to gauge the effectiveness of change is through educational rounds. Educational rounds contribute to changing classrooms, schools, and district cultures (Elmore, 2009). The network culture that is critical to the success of rounds provides a very concrete, experiential model of meaningful ways for adults to work with one another. Rounds show what kinds of time, resources, and organizational structures best support this method of collaborative work. Rounds provide proof that with proper structures and focus, educators and their colleagues can commit to and benefit from collaborative learning.

Instructional rounds offer a set of norms and protocols that support the work by changing or replacing the default culture of isolation, idiosyncratic practice, and self-protection with a shared learning culture. In order for walks and instructional rounds to be effective, they need to be frequent with data being collected and then shared with all interested parties.

A learning organization is an organization skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge and at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights (Gavin, 2008). As teachers are asked to look more closely at their craft they need to be willing to modify their teaching if the data indicates they are not meeting the standards. They need to look at the curriculum, how it is being delivered, student achievement results, and ask themselves whether or not there are gaps in the curriculum? Some things that must be kept in mind and analyzed are:

- Alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment with standards, elements of effective instruction across content areas, deep understanding of district curricular/instructional initiatives, specific strategies to close the achievement gap as well as with English Language Learners (ELL's) and Special Education students.
- Alignment of resources – time, people, professional development, supervision and evaluation, tenure decisions, family, and community engagement.
- Data collection, organization, analysis, and use to inform practice. Student performances data is first priority with other qualitative and quantitative indicators of school performance included as well.

Frank Smith refers to governance as the system by which members of the school identify problems, express preferences, and generate hypotheses about action, and make decisions about

the connection between the ends they desire and the means they intend to use to achieve them (Smith, 1990). This is basically the what and the how. The target item is shared decision making – Bolman and Deal note the elements of the human resource frame:

- Demonstrates high sensitivity and concern for others needs
- Builds trust through open, collaborative relationships
- Is consistently helpful and responsive to other (Bolman and Deal 1990)

Research indicates that good schools have a community with a shared vision or sense of identity and character. Smith states that, With respect to mathematics, for example, in a high performing school, teachers, parents, students and others share a sense of what it means to know and to teach mathematics. In a more general sense, in good schools there is a known school culture or design of the school that serve as a set of belief and practices about what the school is and ought to be” (Smith 1990).

As we plan for change we need to consider how our decisions continue to foster collaboration and allow for distributive leadership. Traditional roles in what Smith calls “patterns of organization” will need to be analyzed so that “individuals work in a more integrated way (Smith, 1992, p.9). The sustainability of organization within the learning community will rely heavily on collaborative efforts in a way that is shared and infused in all levels. Decisions involving some of these tasks need to be aligned with the mission or vision of the district. As Elmore states, “Authority is a reciprocal relationship, a grant of legitimacy based on an acknowledged inequality. The grant may be based on threat or reprisal, tradition, respect for knowledge or competence or formal rule” (Elmore, 1987, p. 66). Similarly, there are characteristics of effective organizations identified by Hargreaves and Fink such as:

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In summary, to foster collaboration in terms of the organization, the entire organization needs to have an established purpose that is clear and communicated to everyone working within the organization.

## Chapter III

### Methodology

The researchers' purpose in this chapter is to examine the capacity of three suburban Long Island high schools ability to foster collaboration and initiate change for the school district.

School district A is comprised of a small educational community serving a diverse mix of students in three schools: Grades K-2, Grades 3-6, and Grades 7-12. The district's 13 square mile boundaries include many hamlets and incorporated villages on the north shore of Long Island. The total population of the school district is approximately 1600 students, K-12. One cultural characteristic of this district is there is strong parental involvement in the school community and in support of education. The graduation rate in this district is 99%.

School district B is comprised of a large educational community serving a diverse mix of students in six school buildings: four elementary building serving students in grades K-5, one middle school servicing students in grades 6-8 and one high school serving grades 9-12. The district's boundary includes three Long Island towns centrally located on the Nassau/Suffolk County boundary line. Total student population in this district is approximately 6500. The community is comprised of middle-class blue-collar families. A characteristic of this particular school community is a zest for music, arts, and athletics. The graduation rate is 97%.

School district C is comprised of a large educational community servicing a predominately minority population. The district has four elementary buildings serving students in grades K-5, one middle school serving students in grades 6-8, and one high school serving

students in grades 9-12. The district is located in southwestern Nassau County. The student population is approximately 5900. The graduation rate is 91%.

In addition to the text studied numerous other theorists on the subject of change in education, including the research of Fullan, Drucker, Lewin, Schein, Smith, Popekewitz, Wehlage, Shakeshaft, Coleman, Elmore, Mann, Stone, and Tabachnick were analyzed. Drawing from Frank Smith's (*Advocacy Design Center*) framework, which advocates using a common language, the research is organized into four elements of school design: Instruction, Organization, Governance, and Accountability (IOGA). The researchers utilized Smith's ADC model, specifically the four frameworks; Instruction, Organization, Governance, Assessment. This was coupled with the researchers' educational leadership experience working in the three aforementioned districts. This study is limited in its lack of verifiable data.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Findings**

Instruction in Frank Smith's Advocacy Design Center (ADC) Model is defined by two related aspects: work and knowing. Work is classified as what students "do" (Smith, 1990). Work involves efforts to attain concepts through reflection and discussion about direct experiences as well as comprehending and defining problems to encourage a deeper understanding. Also, work involves engaging students in focused social interactions so that they learn through more advanced interdependent tasks. Knowing can be described as focusing on the cognitive processes of students. Meaning is made from the learning experiences of the student while engaging them in inquiry and investigative concepts. There are several structures that must be in place in order to foster collaboration throughout a school community. These structures support the growth of all professionals. Collaboration and research builds understanding.

How will the leadership team foster collaborative opportunities that will enhance learning for all students?

There are several ways for skillful leaders to find such time for teams of teachers to work together collaboratively (co-labor) such as: creative scheduling, varied lengths of school day- early dismissal for students, elementary level- grade level meetings- once a week facilitated by the building principals, elementary level- common preparation period daily, middle and high school levels- school based planning periods daily (SBP periods), elementary/middle/ high school levels- small learning teams. Elmore, (2009), suggests that simply putting teachers in



teams to do grade level or content common planning does not necessarily make instruction more coherent across grade levels and schools, unless teachers feel a sense of accountability to themselves, their students, and their colleagues. According to Dufour and Eaker (2004), “In a professional learning community educators create an environment that fosters mutual cooperation, emotional support, and personal growth, as they work together to achieve what they cannot accomplish alone” (Platt, et al., 2008, pp. 29-30).

As we plan for change, what specific policies, procedures, and organizational roles will best lead to teacher ownership of the change while fostering collaboration?

Research indicates correlations between high-functioning professional learning communities and high-performing students (Schmoker, 1999, Dufour, 1998, McLaughlin and Talbert, 2006). As educational leaders we know that collaboration has the potential to spread improvements in instruction and student learning across many classrooms and has the potential to spread planned, effective change (Platt, et al., 2006, p. 243). Perkins (2003) refers to this idea as Pooling Mental Effort.

When teachers generate their own questions, engage in dialogue, and make sense of data, they develop a much deeper understanding of what is going on relative to student learning. They develop ownership of the problems that surface. When clear goals have been established and members of the team are committed to them; when roles have been assigned on the basis of strengths and everyone is clear about their responsibilities and the job they are to do; when unintended obstacles arise and are responded to effectively; when conflict is addressed, and when members work together; team formation and improved performance are underway (Barth, p. 60).

What elements need to be in place to ensure that planned change can occur, with a shared vision, balanced stakeholder support, and a school community partnership that is transparent and sustains the vision of the district?

Wehlage (1989) states that learning, as a result of instruction is seen as a joint exploration of the work in which students are encouraged to contribute their own ideas into ever evolving shared experiences.

Goal of distributive leadership: Sustaining and improving our craft through internal capacity:

- Educational leaders need to focus initial empowerment efforts on those teachers who are willing to be empowered.

Lambert (1998) states, “Leading is a shared endeavor...school change is a collective endeavor...The learning journey must be shared.” The distribution of leadership cannot be forced- it must be accepted voluntarily. Creating a culture of distributive leadership within a school is challenging, but the results validate the effort. Once teachers are comfortable with the idea there is no turning back. Spillane (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006) “Distributive Leadership...sees leadership practice as a product of the interaction of school leaders, followers, and their situation.” Leadership practice involves multiple individuals within and outside formal leadership positions. It is not the actions of individuals, but the interactions among them that matter most in leadership practice. Spillane has found that schools with highly qualified teachers and effective leadership can use targets and achievement results to enhance student achievement and learning. Sustainable and distributed leadership inspires teachers, administrators, parents, and community members to create leadership opportunities that to contribute to deep and

meaningful learning. Collaborative cultures, by which definition have close relationships, are indeed powerful. However, unless they are focusing on the right things they may end up being powerfully wrong (Fullan, 2001).

In planning change, how will data be shared and analyzed to validate prior decisions and to inform future instructional practices?

As we plan for change we need to consider how our decisions continue to foster collaboration and allow for distributive leadership. We want to consider ways that all of the adults can work together based on shared decisions. Traditional roles in what Smith calls “patterns of organization” will need to be analyzed so that “individuals work in a more integrated way (Smith, 1992, p.9). The sustainability of organization within the learning community will rely heavily on collaborative efforts in a way that is shared and infused in all levels. At the core of this notion is that we examine all the ways to plan and decide how to involve the entire school community in the decision making process to ensure meaningful collaboration is embedded in the organization.

Decisions involving some of these tasks need to be aligned with the mission or vision of the district. The consistency of that process will enable personnel at all levels to begin to preface decision making around that vision. As Elmore states, “Authority is a reciprocal relationship, a grant of legitimacy based on an acknowledged inequality. The grant may be based on threat or reprisal, tradition, respect for knowledge or competence or formal rule” (Elmore, 1987, p. 66). Similarly, there are characteristics of effective organizations identified by Hargreaves and Fink such as:

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Examples of these practices are creating opportunities for teachers to learn from each other; using online discussion forums such as a wiki space to share information; teacher-led professional development, and collegial circles

Utilizing data to foster collaboration in the school community is a difficult task. First, teachers need to see the validity of using the data to inform instruction and not be afraid the data will be used to penalize them. Second, administrators need to be open about their goal. If the goal is to increase student performance on standardized tests, the data whether from standardized tests, walkthroughs, or instructional rounds must be shared in an open format with the teachers. Transparency in data collection and utilization will foster collaboration amongst all stakeholders.

In summary, to foster collaboration, the entire organization needs to have an established purpose that is clear and communicated to everyone working within the organization.

## Chapter V

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The conclusions we derived from the studies of Hargreaves and Fink were that change in education is easy to propose, hard to implement, and extraordinarily difficult to sustain. Therefore, our goals as change agents must include a framework of sustainability, which will make our efforts worthwhile and lasting.

There are several structures that should be in place in order to foster collaboration throughout a school community. These structures support the growth of all professionals. After review of the findings the researchers recommend the following changes be implemented to foster collaboration

#### **Organization**

The school works in collaborative teams to continue to discuss and assess best teaching practices and strategies. The school builds and shares knowledge to maximize professional development opportunities in a systematic way.

#### **Instructional**

There are several structures that should be in place in order to foster collaboration throughout a school community. These structures support the growth of all professionals. Collaboration and research builds understanding. One such structure is common planning time. Dufour, Schmoker, Saphier, and Reeves indicate that allocating regular time during the school day is a necessary if not sufficient condition for collaboration (Platt, et al., 2008, p.72). How do skillful leaders find such time for teams of teachers to work together collaboratively (co-labor)? Creative scheduling, such as varying the length of the school day by embedding an early

dismissal for students, is one structure that can be utilized to provide teachers with time at the end of the day to plan, collaborate, and analyze curriculum. At the elementary level, building principals can facilitate weekly grade level meetings. Another way to provide teachers with time to collaborate on the elementary level is to create the master schedule so that teachers on the same grade level have a common planning period daily. At the secondary level, a school based planning period (SBP) can be embedded into each teacher's schedule. Providing time for weekly planning allows for continuity and efficiency in instructional practices. At all levels instructional leaders can institute Small Learning Teams which could take place twice a month, after school. This time could be utilized by teachers to study a new methodology, technology integration, or effective teaching strategies. When teachers generate their own questions, engage in dialogue, and make sense of data, they develop a much deeper understanding of what is going on relative to student learning. They develop ownership of the problems that surface. These are true accountable professional learning communities.

### **Assessment**

Departments should include school-based portfolios or projects, interim or benchmark assessments, as well as mid-term and final examinations. Data should be collected and utilized by all stakeholders. Content area departments, working collaboratively, should provide timely and effective feedback and access to data so that teachers, students, and parents can capture and evaluate student knowledge and skills, plan for future educational programs, and adapt instruction to better meet student needs. The school/individual departments must collect and report longitudinal data to measure short- and long-term student growth for student, teacher, and/or program.

## **Governance**

An effective shared decision model utilizes the talents and expertise of the staff. This could be the school based leadership team, a focus group or a quality review committee. The principal serves as the instructional leader. His/her role is to facilitate the meeting and to reiterate the vision of the school. All roles must be clear and all suggestions must reflect the mission statement of the school. The principal must report all findings to the stakeholders and make adjustments as necessary.

## **Stakeholder Support**

Stakeholder support comes about through accountability. Stakeholders must be informed of school initiatives and motivated to support them. To foster collaboration among stakeholders the school community can incorporate a career day, parent workshops, and school/community partnerships such as work study, community service, and “Principal for a Day” initiatives.

## **Professional Development**

Professional development should address the needs and concerns of the building that hinder academic performance. Professional development it should support the school philosophy, address the needs of the students and stakeholders, and be a continuum of a thematic approach that fosters collaboration. Collaboration can be nurtured through building level quality reviews, brainstorming, and assessment of data. Quality reviews provide a overview of the learning community and ascertaining the instructional needs of the building. In order to foster collaboration within the school community, the instructional leaders must pool resources and compile the data along with staff recommendations to begin to build a professional development



calendar. Professional development must be data driven and goal oriented to ensure the success and relevancy to the mission of the building.

### **School Based Planning Time**

Principals and other administrators must take part in the development of the master schedule. Various types of planning must be considered: departmental, grade level, inter-departmental, clinical, testing, and related services. It is recommended that the schedule allow for as much collaboration as possible. When school based planning time is scheduled, all stakeholders should be held accountable. Professional development can be conducted by the various planning teams for the purpose of turn keying to the entire staff.

### **School Community Partnership**

These are the extended stake holders that are a significant part of the educational community. They can provide grants and other forms of funding. Local businesses can provide mentoring and internships for students.

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