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The Effects of High-stakes Testing on Central Office Organizational Culture: Changes in One School District

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The Effects of High-stakes Testing on Central Office Organizational Culture:

Changes in One School District

by

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Dedication

"It is only with one's heart that one can see clearly. What is essential is invisible to the
eye."

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*

This work is dedicated to my wife, Marcee Champion, and my boys, Alan and Nicholas.
Thank you for your patience, your pushing, and your presence. I particularly thank
Marcee for removing barriers, recognizing when I need a run, and staying awake to read
every word and to hear every thought. My life and heart are full because of you.

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I want to thank my wife and children for their unwavering support in allowing me to give up entire weekends to complete this. I also owe a special thanks to my parents, Syl and LaNell Champion, who proofread this document, sent me relevant articles they found, and originally inspired me to love education, language, and hard work.

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The Effects of High-stakes Testing on Central Office Organizational Culture:

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The purpose of this study was to determine what impact high-stakes testing had on one school district's central office organizational culture, and how changes affected district-wide practices, central office administrators and campus principals. Three research questions guided the study: 1) What changes in the central office organizational culture occurred due to the increased implementation of and pressure from high-stakes testing? 2) How have the changes in the central office culture affected district administrators and campus leaders? 3) How have changes in central office organizational culture affected district-wide practices?

This study utilized a qualitative methodology and a case study approach, focusing on one Texas school district. Three types of data collection methods were used: focus groups, interviews, and document review. The data were coded and analyzed using the constant comparison method in order for themes and propositions to surface. This

resulted in a rich description of the case and provided answers to the three research questions.

The findings of the study revealed that high-stakes testing has affected the central office organizational culture, as well as campus and district administrators, in four distinct ways: It has instilled fear of failure and fear of losing one's job; it has invoked frustration, both because of the narrow focus of the test and the demands of outside stakeholders; it has inhibited freedom, particularly in goal-setting; and it has improved focus by ensuring the use of research-based teaching practices and detailed student achievement data analysis. These changes have led to six alterations in district-wide practices: more precise student data analysis, reactive and targeted intervention for particular grade levels and students, increased discussion about testing throughout the district, improved curriculum alignment in classrooms, research-based professional development, and district support staff members becoming aware of testing demands.

The findings contribute to literature in the field by investigating the connection between two areas of research, high-stakes testing and school district central office organizational culture. The study generated information to assist practitioners as they work to maintain or improve school district organizational culture while implementing high-stakes testing or other high-impact, mandated changes.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

School districts currently live in an age of student, teacher, and school accountability that takes its most apparent form in the guise of high-stakes testing. From the federal government, with its focus on assessment in the No Child Left Behind Act, to the state government, with its emphasis on required student tests, more student achievement mandates are being placed on school systems throughout the country than ever before (Asp, 2000; Center on Educational Policy, 2006; Kober, 2002; American Education Research Association, 2004; McNeil, 2000; Sadowski, 2003; Popham, 2003; Sindelar, 2006). Conventional wisdom holds that student achievement as measured by standardized tests is an efficient means of determining the effectiveness of a school district (Heubert & Houser, 1999). To achieve that goal, some school districts and teachers have resorted to "teaching the test" via worksheets and rote memorization (Kober, 2002; McNeil, 2000; Popham, 2003; Sadowski, 2003; Gordon & Reese, 1997), even though research has shown that other strategies are more effective for long-term student achievement (Reeves, 2003; Marzano, Pickering & Pollock, 2001; Marzano, 2003).

In addition to pedagogical practices, high-stakes testing has also had an effect on classroom and school culture (Gordon & Reese, 1997; Shepard, 2003; Taylor, Shepard, Kinner, & Rosenthal, 2003). A positive, collaborative and empowering culture, whether in a classroom, campus, or district, has been shown to positively influence student success (Wayman, Midgley, & Stringfield, 2005; Hofman, Hofman & Guldemond, 2002; Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001). However, little research has been conducted examining the

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impact high-stakes testing has had on a school district's central office culture. This study will examine how one district's central office culture has been altered by the implementation of high-stakes testing. This introductory chapter to the study will include the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the methodology, the significance of the study, and particular limitations and delimitations of the study.

Statement of Problem

Schools nationwide, and particularly those in Texas, live in an era of high-stakes testing and school district accountability. Forces from the federal government, from the state of Texas, and from local school boards all seem to be asking the same question, "What are the students' test scores?" While research has shown that high-stakes testing may not be the most accurate measure of student success (Asp, 2000; Popham, 1999; Popham, 2001; Popham, 2003; AERA, 2004), school districts still must operate within this environment. In the state of Texas and throughout the nation, high-stakes testing rapidly and radically has changed teaching practices and behaviors in classrooms (Kober, 2002; McNeil, 2000; Popham, 2003; Sadowski, 2003; Gordon & Reese, 1997; Shepard, 2003; Taylor et al., 2003).

Some changes implemented by school districts include a pedagogical shift toward more bureaucratic, rote strategies to teach students so that students will be successful on the high-stakes tests, an administrative shift toward more data-driven decision-making, and a shift toward more focused curriculum. These practices have been viewed

negatively by some researchers, who argue that the creative abilities of teachers have been stifled and that curriculum has been dangerously narrowed (McNeil, 2000; Hoffman, Assaf, & Paris, 2001).

Additionally, studies argue that this lack of teacher empowerment and narrowing of curriculum may negatively impact campus culture (Gordon & Reese, 1997; Shepard, 2003; Taylor et al., 2003), an aspect of schooling that is considered a critical element in successfully educating students (Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001). The literature is rich with studies of school and district organizational culture, and the encouraging effects positive, strong and trusting organizational cultures have on student achievement (Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001; Bonstingl, 2001; Deal & Peterson, 1990; Deming, 1986 & 1993; Fullan, 2000 & 2004; Marshall, Pritchard & Gunderson, 2004; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005; Owens, 1998; Pritchard & Marshall, 2002; Schein, 2004; Sergiovanni, 1992, 2004a, 2004b, 2006).

Virtually nonexistent in the literature, however, is research studying the impact high-stakes testing has had on central office values and norms and the effects those changes have had on central office administrators, on campus leaders, and on district-wide practices. This leads to the question: how has high-stakes testing affected the central office organizational culture?

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study, then, was to determine what impact high-stakes testing has had on one school district's central office organizational culture, and how any

changes affected district-wide practices. Additionally, the study was designed to discover what effects central office organizational cultural changes had on central office administrators and on building level principals.

Research Questions

In order to examine these topics thoroughly, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What changes in the central office organizational culture occurred due to the increased implementation of and pressure from high-stakes testing?

2. How have the reported changes in the central office culture affected district level administrators and campus leaders?

3. How have changes in central office organizational culture affected district-wide practices?

Methodology

The study used a qualitative methodology to investigate how high-stakes testing has changed one school district's culture. A case study approach was utilized. Case studies have been used extensively in research to study a variety of topics (Mertens, 2005), ranging from leadership (Johnson & Hudson, 1996) to cultural change (Serafeimidis & Smithson, 2000).   Smith (1978) argues that the case study approach is useful in studying bounded systems, a single organization that has clear boundaries. In a 1995 work, Stake says a case approach is appropriate when "the case is a specific,

complex, functioning thing" (p. 2). Since a school district's central office organizational culture is a bounded system that is complex in nature, a case study approach was suitable for this study.

Data Collection

FOCUS GROUPS

Three types of data collection, focus groups, interviews, and document review, were utilized. The first of these data collection methods, focus groups, is a useful method of gathering data because of the nature of the conversation that occurs when groups discuss topics (Krueger & Casey, 2000): "The focus group presents a more natural environment than that of an individual interview because participants are influencing and influenced by others—just as they are in life" (p. 11). While Mertens (2005) points out that a number of types of focus groups can be used, two homogeneous groups were used in this study. One group included campus principals, and the other included central office administrators. Both groups were comprised of employees of the school district who remained in the system from before the implementation of high-stakes testing until the current time. Focus groups were a fitting data collection technique for this study, due to the complex nature of a school district culture. By allowing the participants to have a natural conversation with each other, more pertinent information was generated.

INTERVIEWS

  The second data collection tool used was interviewing. According to Merriam and Simpson (2000), interviews are particularly useful when the topic involved is "complex and emotionally loaded" (p. 152). There are three major types of interviews (Yin, 2003), structured, open-ended, and focused. A structured interview is typically used as an extension of a questionnaire, and offers a chance for the researcher to clarify issues and gain explanations that were previously unclear. An open-ended interview is used when the researcher wishes the respondent to share facts and opinions about select events. Open-ended interviews tend to take significant amounts of time and can result in important topics being missed. A focused interview, which was the type used in this study, allows the researcher to follow a set of questions and follow up with relevant probes. In all cases, as Patton (2002) said, "The quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer" (p. 341).

  For this study, interviews were held with a select group of central office administrators who could discuss the history of high-stakes testing and central office culture in the district, including the superintendent, the assistant superintendent for instructional services, and the executive directors for elementary and secondary curriculum. Also, in an attempt to discover if high-stakes testing had an impact on the support areas of the school district, the assistant superintendent for business and operations was interviewed. Interviews were an appropriate tool for this study, since the depth of knowledge the above-mentioned employees possess regarding the topic led to a richer description of the case.

The final data collection method the study utilized was document review. According to Creswell (2003), document review is a data collection method that allows the researcher to "obtain the language and words of participants" by studying information written by people in the organization (p. 187). Documents that were studied included district challenges, campus improvement plans, expectations, requirements of principals, internal informational documents, and electronic correspondence. These documents presented the researcher with a better understanding of the norms and practices of the central office culture, both before and after the implementation of high-stakes testing.

Further information on methodology will be discussed in the third chapter of this proposal. However, to ensure clarity, it is important to now turn to a definition of terms utilized in this study.

Definition of Terms

For purposes of this study, the following definitions apply:

Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS): The data management system used by the state of Texas to report campus and district performance information. Data collected include student performance on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), student dropout rate, demographic information, and financial summaries.

Accountability Rating: The Texas Education Agency (TEA) assigns one of four ratings to every school and district in Texas. The ratings are Academically Unacceptable, Academically Acceptable, Recognized, or Exemplary. To be considered Exemplary,

90% of students in a campus or district must meet the standard for each subject in each subgroup (African American, Hispanic, White, Economically Disadvantaged). To be considered Recognized, students in a campus or district must meet 75% standard for each subject in each subgroup. To be considered Academically Acceptable, a campus or district must meet 65% standard in Reading, Writing, Social Studies, and English/Language Arts; 45% standard in mathematics; and 40% standard in Science. A campus or district falling below the Acceptable requirements is considered Academically Unacceptable (Texas Education Agency, 2007). Campuses or districts must meet completion rate and dropout rate standards, as well, but for the purposes of this study, those requirements are not necessarily applicable.

Accountability System: A state or federal system of standards-based education that includes student expectations, assessments that measure the expectations, instructional programs geared to the expectations, and accountability for teachers and students by tying decisions (such as merit pay for teachers; grade level promotion or graduation for students) to the assessment results.

Central Office and Central Office Administrators: For purposes of this study, central office reflects the administrators in the school district administration who are not assigned to campus leadership positions. This includes administrators in the areas of curriculum and instruction, special education, business, operations, human resources, technology, and also includes the superintendent.

Commended Performance: A measure of a student's performance on the TAKS. In order to achieve commended performance on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and

Skills, a student must achieve a scale score of 2400 or above (out of 2800 to 3200) on the exam (Texas Education Agency, 2006c). The percentage of students achieving this designation is reported by TEA, and is used by Just for the Kids to rank schools and districts.

Criterion-referenced Tests: Tests that assess a student's learning for specific criteria or curriculum standards. The criteria or standards typically have been taught in advance, and the percentage of correct responses is generally the measure of success (Sindelar, 2006). In Texas, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) is a criterion-referenced test.

High-stakes Testing: According to Heubert and Houser (1999), high-stakes testing is the utilization of student assessments to make high-stakes decisions about students. This includes decisions concerning tracking the student's academic level placement, promoting a student to the next grade, and determining if a student will earn a high school diploma. "These policies enjoy widespread public support and are increasingly seen as a means of raising academic standards, holding educators and students accountable for meeting those standards, and boosting public confidence in the schools" (p. 1).

Impact: To have significant effect on a process, resulting in some form of change.

Just for Kids Data: Found on the website www.just4kids.org, student achievement data (percentage of students achieving commended on TAKS) for all campuses in Texas, broken down longitudinally and compared to campuses with similar demographics. Each campus receives one of three symbols for each test given: a green

check, indicating a difference of less than ten percentage points between the school and

the top comparable schools; a yellow circle, indicating a difference of ten to thirty points

between the school and the top comparable schools; or a red x, indicating more than

thirty points difference between the school and the top comparable schools

Low-stakes Tests: Assessments that do not have high-stakes consequences for

students, such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) or the

Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT).

NAEP: Often called "The Nation's Report Card," the National Assessment of

Educational Progress is a federally developed test that has been given in a variety of

subject areas (reading, mathematics, science, writing, history, government, geography,

fine arts) since 1969. NAEP does not report scores by individuals or schools, but does so

in general and by specific populations. Since 1990, State NAEP has been used to report

scores by state and by specific populations within the state. There is some confusion as

to whether NAEP is a norm-referenced or criterion-referenced test. According to Ravitch

(1993), "NAEP tests are criterion-referenced tests that produce national norms" (p. 516).

No Child Left Behind Act: A federal reauthorization of the Elementary and

Secondary Education Act passed in 2001. While the Act included a number of policy

changes, this study generally focused on the federal requirement for state accountability

system that includes 100% of students passing criterion-referenced assessments in a

number of subjects and grade levels by 2014. It is important to note that federal money is

tied to compliance with the Act, and that states have a great deal of discretion on a variety

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of tenets of the Act (such as the type of assessment and the number of students in a subgroup that triggers reporting the test results to the federal government).

Norm-referenced Tests: Tests that compare a student's achievement scores to the scores of a normed group. The normed group is the average score of a random sample of similar students chosen by the test creator (Sindelar, 2006). The Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) is a norm-referenced test.

Organizational Culture: Schein (2004) defines culture as "a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems" (p. 17). These assumptions lead to routines, rules and norms for the employees of the organization to follow, and ultimately become values and beliefs of the organization itself (Schein; Owens, 1998)

Standardized Test: An exam in which the directions, time limits, materials, and scoring procedures are designed to remain constant each time the test is administered in order to ensure comparability of scores. Standardized tests can be either criterion-referenced or norm-referenced. However, since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, almost all states have begun using criterion-referenced tests for their state accountability system (Sindelar, 2006).

Standards: According to Resnick (2006), standards are "common and transparent expectations for what students should know and be able to do upon graduation and at [other] grade levels" (p. 33).

Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS): The criterion-referenced

state assessment given to students in grades three through eleven in Texas. Students must

pass a portion of the exam in grades three and five in order to progress to the next grade,

and must pass the exit exam in grade eleven (or in a subsequent retesting) in order to

graduate high school. In the 2007 – 2008 school year, students in grade eight must pass a

portion of the test to be promoted to ninth grade.

With those definitions in mind, this proposal now turns to the significance of the

study.

Significance of the Study

This study will be significant in a number of ways. First, it will contribute to the

literature in the field of high-stakes testing and district culture, two areas that have been

the foci of many separate studies in the past, but with few connecting the two. This

research will expand existing knowledge in the area of the effects of high-stakes testing, a

topic which has largely been studied only in terms of impact on student achievement and

teaching practice (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000; Kober, 2002; McNeil, 2000;

Popham, 2003; Sadowski, 2003; Gordon & Reese, 1997; Shepard, 2003; Taylor et al.,

2003), and not as often in terms of impact on district culture. Likewise, organizational

culture in education has been studied most often in terms of schools (Sergiovanni, 2004a,

2004b; Maslowski, 2006), central office (MacIver & Farley, 2003; Muller, 2004), and

leadership (Sergiovanni, 1992, 2004b; Deal & Peterson, 1990; Barnett, McCormick &

Conners, 2001; Marshall, Pritchard & Gunderson, 2004), and less from the perspective of

the impact caused by high-stakes testing. Finally, the study will generate information that might assist practitioners as they work to maintain or improve school district central office culture while implementing high-stakes testing.

Limitations

Due to the use of a qualitative paradigm, the study was limited because of its reliance on subjective judgments of the researcher, virtually assuring a lack of objectivity in the study (Hatch, 2002). Also, since the research approach was a single case, results found may not necessarily be generalized to other school districts or other public institutions as a whole.

Additionally, in this particular case, objectivity was further limited, due to the nature of practitioner research, a term used by Anderson and Herr (1999) to describe a research situation in which the researcher is part of the system he or she is studying.   In this case, the researcher was an administrator in the studied district.

Delimitations

The study focused exclusively on how high-stakes testing affected a particular organizational culture in the studied district, and did not address the accountability frameworks that are often attached to high-stakes testing.   Additionally, the research focused only on the values and norms associated with the organizational culture of the central office, and did not examine the organizational culture of individual schools. It is also important to note that the climate of the district or school was not the focus, but

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simply the culture. The research was limited to the perceptions of central office

administrators and campus leaders in the district, and did not include other employees,

teachers, students, parents, school board members, or community members. As the

research was conducted, the researcher utilized a set of assumptions, to which this

proposal now turns.

Assumptions

In conducting the study, it was assumed that people inside the system would

speak freely about the topic. Additionally, it was assumed that employees would be able

to identify ways the district functioned in the past and would be able to recall specific

changes in practice due to high-stakes testing. Finally, the researcher assumed that the

study would be conducted as objectively as possible, and, when the researcher was not

able to put bias completely aside, the researcher would be able to recognize the bias and

identify it for the reader of the research.

Conclusion

This chapter presented an overview of a study that will examine the changes one

district has experienced due to the implementation of high-stakes testing. This

introductory chapter to the study included the statement of the problem, the purpose of

the study, the research questions, the methodology, the significance of the study, and

particular limitations and delimitations of the study. The proposal now turns to the

literature in the fields of high-stakes testing and school district organizational culture, and

will present the historical backgrounds and current research, as well as shortfalls of past

studies in those areas.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

We currently live in an era of unprecedented testing of students' academic achievement. These assessments are often called "high-stakes" because important decisions, such as students' grade level placement or high school graduation, are made based on the results. Further, these measures are used in determining the success or failure of schools and school districts. The state of Texas is considered a leader among the other states in high-stakes testing.   According to a survey by *The Princeton Review*, Texas ranks third in the nation in the area of school accountability and high-stakes testing. The survey evaluated how aligned state-mandated assessments were to curriculum standards, the quality of the assessment instruments, the public availability of the testing program, and the usefulness of the data in leading to student learning (Princeton Review, 2003). The review illustrates that high-stakes testing is affecting every school district in the country. However, the implementation of state testing is being managed differently by each school organization. One reason this difference is occurring is due to variations among the organizational cultures of the respective school district. Every organization, including school campuses and school districts, has a unique organizational culture that influences all aspects of the organization (Deal & Kennedy, 1999; Bolman & Deal, 2003). Because school districts exist in the current climate of high-stakes testing, it is reasonable to assume that high-stakes testing has an impact on

the organizational culture of school districts. This study will examine the intersection

between high-stakes testing and the organizational culture of one particular area of the

school district, the central office. In order to place this research in a historical and

theoretical context, this chapter will review the relevant literature in the fields of high-

stakes testing and in educational organizational culture.

The first section of the literature review sheds light on high-stakes testing, both

from a historical frame and from a research frame. The second section addresses

organizational culture, paying particular attention to the study of organizational culture in

educational settings. The final section discusses the gap in the research that exists at the

intersection between the two. First, however, the chapter offers an account of the

historical background of educational reform and high-stakes testing in Texas.

Historical Background

The United States saw its first program of standardized testing over 150 years

ago, when Horace Mann was Massachusetts' Secretary of the State Board of Education.

Mann implemented a statewide program that was used to evaluate the performance of

schools and to categorize students based on their results. Mann's goals were remarkably

similar to the goals of high-stakes testing today: accountability for school programs,

feedback to teachers, categorization of students, and instructional reform (Asp, 2000).

The United States has continued to struggle with high-stakes testing and the goals Mann

set forth. The accomplishments of Mann's goals were attempted via what Linn (2000)

has termed five waves of educational reform. The roles high-stakes tests took during

these waves included tracking students in the 1950s, providing program accountability in the 1960s, testing for basic competence in the 1970s, providing school and district measurements for accountability in the 1980s, and measuring the standards-based accountability systems in the 1990s. In subsequent works, Linn has added to the research on the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) (Linn, Baker & Betebenner, 2002; Linn, 2004), which will be considered the sixth wave of educational reform for this review.

WAVE ONE: TRACKING STUDENTS IN THE 1950S

The current public thrust for high-stakes testing began with the Soviet Union's *Sputnik* launch of 1957, a United States loss in the first stage of the space race. The Soviet Union reaching space faster than the United States incited widespread public criticism of this country's educational system. As a result, state and federal politicians advocated for assessments to measure student success and school achievement (Clarke, Madaus, Horn & Ramos, 2000; Johnson, 2004). Riding this wave of criticism, James B. Conant's (1953) work in the 1950s gained a great deal of influence (Linn, 2000). Conant advocated for "universal elementary education [and] comprehensive secondary education" (Cremin, 1989, p. 22). Conant argued that tests were critical for his model, both to identify gifted students, and to place students in high schools using appropriate criteria (Linn, 2000). There was technical innovation, as well, that led to standardized testing gaining popularity. Clarke et al. (2000) pointed out "the invention of the high-speed scanner in 1955…coupled with the already popular multiple-choice format, led to increased efficiency and reduced the cost of testing" (p. 164). This efficiency resulted in

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the availability of more test data for a greater population, which led politicians to a wider view of accountability, the focus of educational reform in the next decade.

WAVE TWO: PROGRAM ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE 1960S

In 1965, the United States Congress adopted the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Among other requirements, the act implemented the Title I Evaluation and Reporting System (TIERS), which expanded the utilization of norm-referenced tests (Linn, 2000). TIERS suggested testing students in the fall and spring of each school year, but little was done with the results, save reporting them back to TIERS (Linn, 2000). However, for the first time, the government established test data as a requirement for federal funding, and the era of federal accountability came a step closer to reality.

WAVE THREE: BASIC COMPETENCE IN THE 1970S

Accountability for students became the focus of the 1970s. In that decade, several states began to require students to successfully pass a minimum competency exam prior to graduating high school. Within ten years (1973 – 1983), "the number of states with some form of minimum-competency testing requirement went from two to thirty-four" (Linn, 2000, p. 6). These tests measured basic skills, but even so, academic gains in schools were largely inconsequential (Linn, 2000; Johnson, 2004). Further, there were questions as to the generalizability of any academic gains, leading the public to call for more rigor in tests, which became a focus in the 1980s.

WAVE FOUR: SCHOOL AND DISTRICT MEASURES IN THE 1980S

In 1983, *A Nation at Risk*, a report from the National Commission on Education, ushered in a call for high-stakes exams that went beyond basic skills and instead measured accepted curricular standards (Johnson, 2004). Perhaps not surprisingly, sales of standardized tests soared throughout the 1980s, increasing from approximately $50 million in 1980 to almost $200 million by the decade's end (Clarke et al., 2000). During this time, however, Cannell (1988) published a critique of state testing programs that raised public concerns about the nature of standardized tests. The inquiry found that almost all states reported being above the national average in student achievement when using nationally normed achievement tests, something that was later termed the "Lake Wobegon effect" (Koretz, 1988). With the benefit that comes from a decade of elapsed time, Linn argued in 2000 that the Lake Wobegon effect did exist in the early 1980s. The effect occurred due to four factors: using old norms, repeating the same exam year-to-year, excluding certain students from participating in the tests, and narrowing the curriculum to focus on the skills and questions used on the assessment. The Lake Wobegon effect had a significant impact on the next decade of educational reform, as standards-based accountability systems became the model.

WAVE FIVE: STANDARDS-BASED ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM IN THE 1990S

In the 1990s, the federal government created "Goals 2000", which called for national achievement tests in language arts, math and science, and which were to be based on national standards (U.S. Department of Education, 1991). This call for standards was expanded when, in 1998, "A Nation Still at Risk" (Bennett et al., 1998)

was published, arguing that the country's educational system was producing students who were less competent than ever before. The report argued for a system that held schools and school districts accountable for standard academic results for all students in the school system. It also stated that parents should receive complete information regarding the progress of their students, as well as of the success of their school. Responding to the report, every state but Iowa and Nebraska developed curricular standards and implemented programs of tests to measure student success on reaching the standards (Johnson, 2004). Additionally, more emphasis was placed on including all students in measuring performance and further weight was given to high-stakes accountability systems for districts, schools and teachers (Linn, 2000). This increased accountability carried into our current decade's reform, which is centered on the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

WAVE SIX: NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

In 2001, Congress adopted the reauthorization of the ESEA, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, which requires statewide high-stakes tests in reading, math and science in grades three through eight. The results of the tests are required to be disaggregated and reported by ethnicity, socioeconomic status, English language proficiency, and disability. However, in addition to the testing requirements, the federal government has mandated a target of 100% mastery for all students by 2014 (Linn, Baker & Betebenner, 2002). Currently, all 50 states have a school accountability system in place that uses some form of high-stakes testing (Princeton Review, 2003). With the 2001 passage of NCLB, a nationwide emphasis on high-stakes testing was assured, since

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federal funding to local school districts is tied to having a testing program. Essentially, the act established a federal high-stakes testing program, although the creation of the individual school accountability systems was left to the states (Thomas, 2005).

NCLB has been praised by some, who are encouraged to see the emphasis on students who have traditionally not been "counted" in accountability systems (Linn, 2004). On the other hand, others in the field believe that "expectations for student achievement have been set unrealistically high and, as a consequence, almost all schools will fall short of the adequate yearly progress targets" set by NCLB (Linn, 2004). While the full impact of NCLB on the nation remains to be seen, Texas has been utilizing high-stakes tests for more than 20 years. This review now turns specifically to the Texas exams.

History of High-stakes Tests in Texas

Texas has also had a number of waves of testing, but Cruse and Twing (2000) illustrated the waves in terms of the actual tests that were administered. These tests range from the TABS in the 1970s to the current assessment, the TAKS.

1970s

The first state high-stakes test that was linked to the state-mandated curriculum was the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABS). The assessment was put in place by the 1979 Texas Legislature, and assessed basic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics for students in grades three, five and nine. Due to the lack of a state curriculum, the objectives for TABS were created by the Texas Education Agency and

were merely a sampling of the skills students were learning in the state. While ninth-grade students were not denied graduation if they failed to pass the TABS, they were required to take the test every year. Also, each school and school district had its results released to the public. Cruse and Twing wrote, "The publication of campus and district results regarding specific performance relative to the statewide curriculum represented the beginning of high-stakes accountability for large-scale assessment in Texas" (p. 328).

1980s

The stakes continued to get higher in Texas when the state introduced the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS) in 1984. By moving from basic skills to minimum skills, the assessment became more rigorous. TEAMS, a criterion-referenced test, was given to students in grades one, three, five, seven, nine, and eleven, and passing TEAMS was required in order to graduate high school beginning in 1987.

1990s

Texas raised the standard once more with the introduction of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) in 1990. This test was established due to the State Board of Education expanding the content that was measured on the assessment. Additionally, more of the test was tied to the newly developed state curriculum, termed the Texas Essential Elements. The TAAS was administered to students in grades three, five, seven, nine, and eleven. Once again, passing the assessment was a requirement for graduation. With the TAAS, Cruse and Twing (2000) concluded: "The primary purpose of assessment in Texas had evolved from the collection of school-level information

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(TABS) to assessment of curriculum-specific minimum skills (TEAMS), to school accountability of student performance" (p. 329).

CURRENT

In 2003, the state continued increasing the accountability of Texas schools with the introduction of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). The TAKS is tied to the updated state curriculum, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, and has made the stakes even higher for students, since they now have to pass a test to move from third grade to fourth grade, another to move from fifth grade to sixth grade, and a final exam to graduate (Valencia & Villareal, 2003). Additionally, students now take exams in a multitude of subjects, including reading, math, science, social studies, and writing. The state has developed tests for English Language Learners and special education students, as well (Texas Education Agency, 2005b). Given all of the testing occurring in the states, it is probably not surprising that a large body of research has focused on the topic of high-stakes testing.

Research on High-stakes Testing

While the full impact of NCLB in Texas and throughout the nation remains to be seen, high-stakes testing is already significantly affecting stakeholders in the educational system. In fact, the influence of high-stakes testing is felt even outside of the schoolhouse. For example, in 2001, the Alliance for Childhood, a not-for-profit organization of medical practitioners, stated that the environment of high-stakes testing in schools heightens overall stress for students. This stress can lead to test-related anxiety

and other physical and emotional problems (Mitka, 2001). Of course, it is not only

medical doctors who are concerned with the effects of high-stakes testing. The

evaluation of state and federal accountability systems and the high-stakes testing that

accompanies them has produced its own body of research. The research includes studies

on a wide array of topics. For example, research has been conducted on the effect high-

stakes testing has on arts and physical education (Wilkins, Graham, Parker, Westfall,

Fraser & Tembo, 2003), the correlation between access to highly qualified teachers and

student success on high-stakes tests (Tuerk, 2005), the benefits of the results (Popham,

2003), and the ethical dimensions of federally mandated assessment programs (Torres,

2004). At least one study even suggests that the increased emphasis on high-stakes

testing is less a result of attempts to improve student academics, and more a result of the

exams symbolizing "order and control, desired educational outcomes, and traditional

moral values" (Airasian, 1988, p. 301). As can be seen, the range of studies on high-

stakes testing is broad. Most notably, researchers have examined the impact high-stakes

testing has had on teachers, students and parents. Specifically, this chapter will focus on

four categories of studies on high-stakes testing:

- Teachers' instructional practices and curricular choices,

- Teachers' and principals' perceptions of high-stakes testing,

- Students' learning and motivation, and

- Parents' perceptions of required testing.

TEACHERS' INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES AND CURRICULAR CHOICES

The largest category of high-stakes testing research falls into the category of teachers' instructional practices and curricular choices. Within the category, there were six themes derived from the studies: classroom time, curriculum narrowing, prescriptive teaching, minimizing higher-level thinking skills, positive findings, and suggested practices for success.

Classroom time.

The first theme within this category centers on how high-stakes testing has altered how teachers allocate classroom time. Several studies found that teachers are increasingly using classroom time to teach more test-taking skills. In a case study focusing on the impact of high-stakes testing in two districts, one in Virginia and one in Maryland, the Center on Education Policy (CEP) (2005) found a number of themes related to the impact high-stakes testing has had on teachers and their allocation of classroom time. In both districts teachers reduced the time they spent teaching areas not tested by the exams, and spent more time reviewing information and on test-taking skills. Increased time spent on test-taking strategies was also found by McNeil (2000). This research used case studies to examine the accountability system in Texas, and found that teachers were spending significant amounts of time "practicing bubbling in answers and learning to recognize 'distractor' (obviously wrong) answers" (pp. 730 – 731). This change in teaching practices was also reflected in Kober's (2002) work. In a national survey, the researcher discovered that 79% of teachers said they spent "a great deal" or "somewhat" of classroom time teaching students test-taking skills. Further, 53% stated

that they utilized practice tests from the state a great deal or somewhat, confirming Resnick's (2006) statement, "The higher the stakes, the more educators will teach to the tests" (p. 36).

In an early study of high-stakes testing and classroom time, Gordon & Reese (1997) surveyed Texas teachers, and found that schools spent an inordinate amount of time preparing students for the high-stakes test; that the emphasis on the test is hurting teaching and learning in the state, particularly for at-risk students; and that the heavy emphasis on the exam is contributing to grade-level retention and students dropping out of school.   More recently, Moon, Callahan & Tomlinson (2003) used a nationally stratified random sample and surveyed over 1,000 public school teachers regarding their perceptions of standardized testing. The authors stated, "The use of tests as an accountability mechanism appears to define the curriculum, oftentimes with substantial attention given to the form and format of the questions on the test(s). Regardless of the school's poverty level, a great deal of class time is devoted to reviewing and practicing for state tests, increasing in intensity until testing is completed" (no page). Finally, Smith (2000) found that high-stakes testing is part of a trend that "fragments and erodes instructional time" leading to narrowing curriculum, which is the focus of the next theme found in this category.

Curriculum narrowing.

Curriculum narrowing is defined as a practice by which teachers elect to focus curriculum taught in their classrooms only to those subjects and topics covered by high-stakes testing. This narrowing of the curriculum is also referred to as teachers having

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"skills-based classrooms" (Valencia & Villarreal, 2003; McNeil, 2000). A 2006 case study by CEP found that schools were excluding or minimizing curriculum areas not tested by NCLB, a finding held earlier by Sheldon & Biddle (1998). The authors discovered that the increased focus on high-stakes tests led to teachers adopting overly narrow curriculum, which dampened the interest of students and inhibited critical thinking. In reviewing the literature of high-stakes testing, Gallagher (2000) found that teachers "narrow and often water down the curriculum, placing emphasis on the knowledge and skills that remote outsiders deem most important or at least most easily measured" (p. 504). Also found in this study was that when stakes were high for testing, teachers increased the amount of time devoted to "practice in discrete skills and the transmission of bodies of knowledge" (p. 504). In a later review of the literature surrounding high-stakes testing, Froese-Germain (2001) found that "high-stakes standardized testing encourages 'teaching to the test' rather than teaching for the genuine enhancement of learning. As a result, the curriculum is becoming increasingly test-driven" (p. 114). The research found that many teachers reported being expected to align their teaching with what is tested and reported feeling pressured to raise test scores, even at the expense of educational quality, which was also a finding in an earlier study by Meaghan and Casas (1995).

Classrooms are not the only place curriculum narrowing can occur: the phenomenon also has been found at the school level. For example, an investigation by Moon, Callahan, & Tomlinson (2003) found that subjects that were not tested were being abandoned by schools, and that curriculum was being narrowed, particularly in schools

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with large concentrations of minority and socioeconomically-disadvantaged students. The authors found that teachers believe that they are required to align their classroom instruction to high-stakes tests because so many high-stakes decisions are determined by the test results. Consequently, non-tested curriculum is significantly less emphasized, which narrows the curriculum and results in fewer opportunities for teaching for true student understanding of the curriculum. Curriculum narrowing occurs even though there was no evidence found to support that eliminating non-tested subjects such as fine arts positively affected student achievement. In a study that surveyed 574 Virginia elementary school principals, Wilkins, Graham, Parker, Westfall, Fraser, & Tembo (2003) found "no meaningful relationship between time allocation to art, music, and physical education and school achievement. The findings do not support the notion that a reduced allocation to art, music, and physical education is related to higher test scores" (p. 721). Further, subjects such as fine arts have regularly been found to have positive outcomes on student achievement, according to Froese-Germain (2001). When these types of subjects are excluded from the curriculum in order to concentrate on the tested subjects, Froese-Germain (2001) continues, it is the students who are economically disadvantaged who lose the most, since they cannot compensate for what has vanished from the curriculum.

Prescriptive teaching.

A third theme found within the literature surrounding the impact high-stakes testing has had on teachers' instructional practices and curriculum choices relates to prescriptive teaching. That is, studies have found that school districts that have high-

stakes testing programs are more likely to dictate how curriculum is to be delivered in the classroom. For example, in their case study of 38 geographically diverse districts and 42 schools, CEP (2006) found that schools were becoming more prescriptive regarding teachers' instructional practices, moving away from teacher-guided instruction and toward state- or district-mandated curriculum. This was also found by Gallagher (2000). In a review of the literature the author found that more districts were moving the control of classroom instruction from teachers to "the hands of remote experts, thus alienating teachers (and students) from their work" (p. 504).

Minimizing higher-level thinking skills.

While there have been studies related to prescribed curriculum, other research has shown that high-stakes testing negatively impacts the teaching of higher-level thinking skills. In their 2005 case study, CEP found that teachers were concerned by a perceived decrease on the focus on higher-level thinking skills being taught in schools since the implementation of high-stakes testing programs. Similarly, McNeil (2000) found that teachers believed that in their classrooms, they were not allowed to have students do "intellectual work" such as analyzing poetry and discussing literary themes (pp. 730 – 731), due to the demands of high-stakes tests.   Likewise, Gallagher's (2000) review of the literature found that high-stakes testing focuses schools' attentions "on the least important or useful information about learning ('lower order' skills, mechanical correctness), rather than on those we consider most important ('higher-order' skills, process)" (p. 504). This was echoed by a case study conducted by Rex (2003), who found that, when language arts teachers focused on high-stakes tests in the subject area of

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writing, they were less likely to focus on higher-level thinking skills as they related to writing. The author wrote that teachers had a "well-meaning urgency to clean up [a student's] prose to meet testing expectations" at the cost of student expression (p. 30). Finally, Harlen and Crick (2003) found in their analysis of the high-stakes testing literature that the effects of implementing high-stakes tests included an increased focus on teaching the content of the tests via teaching modes that are sequential or traditional in nature. Also, there is an increased use of practice tests that lead, the authors argue "to students adopting test-taking strategies designed to avoid effort and responsibility and which are detrimental to higher order thinking" (p. 200).

Positive findings.

On the other hand, the literature did not find universally that high-stakes testing always negatively impacted teachers' curricular choices and instructional practices. In their 2005 case study, for example, CEP discovered that the districts studied did mention positive aspects of the testing program, which included "encouraging educators and others to talk about student performance, promoting greater cooperation among teachers, and making resistant teachers actually teach the curriculum" (CEP, 2005, p. 5). In a follow-up study by CEP in 2006, the organization found that high-stakes testing programs nationwide were impacting curriculum and instruction due to a number of factors. Districts were aligning curriculum to state academic standards and assessments and were using test results to monitor and adjust instruction based on students' needs. In a case study of two high school history teachers, Grant (2001) found that while high-stakes testing did influence instruction, its influence on classroom instruction was

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minimal. "While state tests influence [the teachers'] practices, they are not the only influence and, in fact, may not even be the principal influence…The pervading sense that tests drive content, instruction, and the like seems alternately overstated, ill informed, or misplaced" (p. 421). These echoed an earlier study conducted by Firestone, Mayrowetz, and Fairman (1998), who used a case study to look at middle school teachers in five districts in Maine and Maryland. They found that "the effects of state testing on teaching may be overrated by both advocates and opponents of such policies" (p. 95). While they do create a significant amount of focus on the actual test, they can also align subjects taught with the test. It is less successful, however, in changing instructional strategies. These findings are similar to those found by Cimbrica (2002), who found that, while high-stakes testing does influence teachers' practices, many other factors do, as well. As a result, the influence high-stakes testing has on teachers more likely "would seem to depend on how teachers interpret state testing and use it to guide their action. How tests matter is not always clear and simple" (p. 16). Sutton (2004) had similar thoughts. When examining her own effectiveness as a teacher, the author found that "since the implementation of [high-stakes testing], I have altered the assessments, content and teaching methods in my course" (p. 472). However, the author did not experience demoralization. In fact, the author found that the implementation of high-stakes testing provided a "timely catalysis to rethink [her] teaching" (p. 473).

Suggested practices for success.

The final theme found in this category offered suggestions for successfully integrating high-stakes testing into classrooms. In a case study that Williamson, Bondy,

Langley, Mayne (2005) conducted on two teachers and their students, the authors found that "teachers do not have to sacrifice high-quality, child-centered pedagogy that focuses on sense-making and understanding in order to get their students through high-stakes tests" (p. 194). One way this can be accomplished, according to a study conducted by Yeh (2006), is via rapid, low-stakes assessments that quickly give teachers feedback about students' mastery of the curriculum. Yeh interviewed 49 teachers and administrators in a Texas school district that used a program of rapid assessments. Rapidly assessing students in reading and math using standard assessments "allowed teachers to individualize and target instruction; provide more tutoring; reduce drill and practice; and improve student readiness for, and spend more time on, critical thinking activities, resulting in a more balanced curriculum" (p. 621).

TEACHERS' AND PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF AND ATTITUDES REGARDING HIGH-STAKES TESTING

The second category found in the articles reviewed centered on teachers' and principals' perceptions of and attitudes regarding high-stakes testing. Within the category, there were two themes found: the intrusiveness of high-stakes testing, and the validity of high-stakes testing.

Intrusiveness of high-stakes testing.

Three studies highlighted teachers' beliefs that high-stakes testing was intrusive on their teaching. First, Hoffman, Assaf and Paris (2001) surveyed Texas teachers about high-stakes testing. In their survey, they found that teachers believed that by

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emphasizing high-stakes testing the state was undermining effective teaching and learning. Specifically, teachers in the study stated that the high-stakes test in Texas "does not measure what it purports [and] is affecting instruction in negative ways" (p. 490). In short, the authors found that teachers believed that high-stakes testing negatively intruded in the classroom. A second study that found similar results was a study conducted by Flores & Clark (2003). In that qualitative study of teachers, students and preservice teachers, the authors used observational journals and threaded e-journals to find that teachers believe that high-stakes testing is overemphasized throughout education. This overemphasis has caused school districts to be negatively intrusive in regards to decisions made for curriculum and instruction. The study concluded that teachers "challenge notions of whether high-stakes testing are valid measures of students' learning, ability, or potential, and whether test results should be used as an accountability measure" (p. 1). Finally, Assaf's (2006) case study found that teachers abandoned "personal and professional philosophies gleaned from years of experience for a testing curriculum" (p. 164). The author found that the teacher's instruction moved from "rich and authentic discussions…to a quiet, subdued atmosphere of silent reading and mastery of low-level test skills isolated from real reading" (p. 164).

One study found that high-stakes testing was intrusive for campus principals, as well. In a 2005 study, McGhee and Nelson studied three principals who were removed from their campus leadership positions due to poor student results on the state's high-stakes tests. The authors found that all three principals had successful educational administration careers prior to their removals, and that they were all surprised by their

removals. Finally, all three principals stated that they felt a significant amount of isolation immediately prior to and after their removals. The authors argued that the cases present "disturbing evidence that high-stakes accountability systems have negative effects on school leaders. Specifically, these cases illustrate that, regardless of prior success, principals may be removed from their positions solely as a result of accountability test scores" (p. 370). The authors also found that principals of campuses that have higher percentages of socio-economically disadvantaged students are more likely to be removed from their positions.

Validity of high-stakes testing.

The questioning by teachers about the validity of the testing instruments used in accountability programs is the second theme found in this category. In their 2001 survey, Hoffman, Assaf, and Paris found that teachers believed that by emphasizing high-stakes testing the state was undermining effective teaching and learning, and was being used for invalid purposes, such as making high-stakes decisions for students based on one exam. The questioning of high-stakes testing validity was also found by Rigsby & DeMulder (2003). This qualitative study, which examined essays from teachers in a master's degree program, found serious negative consequences of the failure to include dialogue with K-12 teachers in setting standards and especially the creation of assessments to measure performances relative to the standards. "Teachers expressed enthusiasm for the curriculum they had developed. In contrast, a number of teachers have shared horror stories about the curriculum provided by the state and especially with the assessment tied to that curriculum" (p. 24). The authors concluded that teachers needed to be included in

developing assessments. Without this dialogue, teachers are more likely to continue to find high-stakes testing measures invalid.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT AND MOTIVATION

The third category found in the articles reviewed shifted the focus from teachers to students. Specifically, these articles discussed students' achievement and motivation as they relate to high-stakes testing. Within the category, there were five themes found: carryover of high-stakes testing, intrinsic motivation, the achievement gap, time, and positive impacts of high-stakes testing.

Carryover of high-stakes testing.

The first theme in this category centers on the extent to which success on high-stakes tests carries over to success in other areas.   That is, if students are successful on high-stakes tests, many researchers have studied how successful students have been on other measures of student success such as graduation rates and progression rates. Also, they have looked at duplicating success on low-stakes tests, assessments that do not have high-stakes consequences for students. The effect high-stakes testing had on graduation was the focus of Carnoy (2005), who conducted a quantitative investigation of high school completion rates for students who had been in school systems that had implemented high-stakes tests for a number of years. While graduation and progression rates varied significantly among states, there was evidence "that strong state accountability does not systematically raise graduation and progression rates" (p. 29).

The study did find, however, that some states with strong accountability systems do have rising progression and graduation rates, but these data were thought to be anomalies.

The difference between student achievement on high-stakes tests and low-stakes tests has also been studied. For example, Amrein & Berliner (2003) studied students in states that used high-stakes testing and who had significant achievement gains on the state's exams. They found that students did not improve on a number of other measures, including the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the ACT and the SAT. Because it is not used to make high-stakes decisions, such as grade promotion or graduation, the NAEP is considered a low-stakes test. This seemingly incongruous trend of student improvement on high-stakes tests without comparable gain on low-stakes tests is consistent with a number of additional studies (Valencia & Villarreal 2003; Jacob, 2002; Stone, Engel, Nagaoka, and Roderick, 2005). Similar findings were found by Schrag (2000), who studied the student achievement results on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) and compared it to the percentage of students who drop out of high school. The study found that, even though students pass the test, "they are not able to read assignments, to make meaning of literature, to complete reading assignments outside of class, nor to connect reading assignments to other parts of the course" (p. 49). Finally, Smith & Fey (2000) performed a meta-analysis of test preparation. Their study found little evidence that high-stakes testing programs have resulted in success in other areas of school performance. The authors concluded, "Students with intensive test preparation produce higher scores on the particular measure, " but the success is not necessarily replicated in other areas (p. 339).

Achievement gap.

A second theme found within this category centers on how high-stakes testing relates to the achievement gap. The achievement gap is the well-documented (Tuerk, 2005; Uhlenberg & Brown, 2002; Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003) phenomenon in education that has found that a gap exists between white and nonwhite students in regards to student achievement. A more recent study has found that a gap also exists between white and nonwhite students' access to highly qualified teachers (Tuerk, 2005). One stated goal of most high-stakes testing programs is to narrow the achievement gap (Goertz & Duffy, 2003). Inequity in high-stakes testing programs was the focus of a study by Skrla, Scheurich, Johnson, and Koschoreck in 2001. Specifically, the researchers analyzed the results from the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) to determine how high-stakes testing impacted the achievement gap that exists between white students and nonwhite students. The authors discovered that accountability systems and a high-stakes testing program can be leveraged in order to improve student achievement for all students. They wrote: "There is evidence of narrowing of the achievement gap between the performance of children of colour and low-income children and that of their White and more economically advantaged peers" (p. 243) after a high-stakes testing program is implemented. The study pointed to the results of high-stakes tests in Texas and how the achievement gap had narrowed on the state tests, on the NAEP, and on Advanced Placement exams as evidence of this change. Refuting the study by Skrla et al. (2001), Haney (2001) pointed out that the school districts used in Skrla's study as models of equity in education actually had graduation

rates that were below the national average. Also, Haney's analysis examined the number of students Texas "loses" between grade six and high school graduation, and discovered that the state "lost" more students than the national average.

These findings were similar to ones found by Jacob (2002), who reviewed the data from the implementation of the accountability system in Chicago. This research found that "the lowest performing schools increased special education placements for high-risk sixth graders by 50 percent following the introduction of the accountability policy" (p. 36). High-stakes testing programs generally had a negative effect on minority students, according to several studies. In an analysis of student achievement results on the TAAS test in Texas, Valencia & Villareal (2003) found that high-stakes testing reform has had an "adverse impact on minority students [and] negative implications for literacy instruction" (p. 620). Test content bias, which means that a test's content leaves some students at a disadvantage due to unfamiliarity with examples or question wording (Uhlenberg & Brown, 2002), was found by the researchers. Not surprisingly, content test bias is considered to increase the achievement gap. A review of the literature by Froese-Germain (2001) demonstrated that high-stakes standardized testing had a negative impact on students that resulted in furthering educational inequities via test bias and the misuse of test results. Also, Valuenzuela (2000), in a case study of a high school populated with a majority of Latino students in Houston, Texas, found that the high-stakes testing program used in Texas frequently discourages Latino students, particularly immigrant students, from graduating from high school. This discouragement occurred, the author argued, because of the exit level test being offered only in English. The author

concluded, "High-stakes testing is characterized herein as embedded within a larger logic that systematically negates Mexican youths' culture and language" (p. 524).

Intrinsic motivation.

The third theme found in the category of student achievement and motivation relates to the intrinsic motivation of students. A number of studies (Kelleghan, Madaus & Raczek, 1996; Kohn, 1993) have found that, for students to be highly engaged in class and for learning to be most effective, students must be intrinsically motivated to learn. The connection between high-stakes testing programs and student motivation has been the focus of several studies. For example, Sheldon & Biddle (1998) found that the implementation of high-stakes testing in a particular subject negatively affected students' intrinsic interests in that subject. Additionally, there was a negative correlation between implementing high-stakes testing and students' willingness to challenge themselves in learning. This lack of intrinsic motivation and unwillingness to challenge themselves combined to negatively affect students' future learning. This work was echoed by Harlen and Crick (2003), who reviewed a number of studies on high-stakes testing, as well as in a literature review conducted by Amrein & Berliner (2003). Finally, in a review of literature, Gallagher (2000) found that high-stakes testing programs "divert teachers' and students' attention away from the intrinsic rewards of education and toward extrinsic sanctions" (p. 504).

Time.

The impact of more classroom time spent on high-stakes testing skills is another finding related to student achievement. In a study of fourth-grade achievement test results, Cankoy & Tut (2005) found that students who spent more time practicing test-taking skills performed better than those who did not, particularly in basic mathematics items. "However, analysis did indicate that spending too much time on test-taking skills led to memorizing procedures and cuing on surface attributes of a problem" (p. 234). Contrarily, in an earlier study, Tunks (2001) discovered that having students construct test items similar to those on high-stakes testing resulted in no difference on high-stakes testing achievement. On the other hand, students did have a better understanding of test items. Finally, in an analysis of the literature on high-stakes testing, Harlen & Crick (2003) argued that student motivation for learning could be increased if classroom time was used less for teaching test materials or for practicing the high-stakes tests.

Positive impacts of high-stakes testing.

The final theme related to student achievement and motivation focuses on studies that have found that high-stakes testing programs have had positive impacts on student achievement. For example, Stone, Engel, Nagaoka, and Roderick (2005) investigated the student experience within summer school programs that were designed for students who did not pass high-stakes tests in Illinois. Specifically, the study examined Chicago's Summer Bridge program and found that students reported better experiences in the summer program versus the regular school year. The students in the study reported that the positive experience was likely due to the clear focus on new content, the undivided

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attention from teachers, and a positive classroom culture in the summer school program.

Lattimore (2001) also found that high-stakes testing positively impacted students. The

researcher utilized a case study to try and uncover student perceptions regarding high-

stakes tests. In the study, students stated that, while they perceived the tests as barriers to

their education, the pressures associated with the tests increased their commitment to

passing the exams, and thus furthered their education. The issue associated with

increased time on task was reflected in study done by Smith, Roderick & Degener (2005).

That research, a mixed-method study which examined student achievement for

elementary and middle school students, found that programs of high-stakes testing led to

extended time on task for students, resulting in increased student achievement.

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF REQUIRED TESTING

The final category found in the literature regarding high-stakes testing centers on

parents' perceptions of the programs. Newman and Chin (2003) utilized an ethnographic

approach to study the impact high-stakes testing has had on parents involved in moving

from welfare to work. (Both high-stakes testing and welfare to work are largely based on

federal policies.) After studying twelve families over a six-year period, the study

discovered that the two programs are in conflict with each other since parents who are

moving from welfare to work had little to no time to help students with their education.

This lack of time, which is termed "time poverty," resulted in conditions that made the

students' success on a high-stakes test less likely. Thus, parents had to determine if their

work or their child's education was more important to spend time on. Given the potential

negative outcomes of not focusing on work, the parent typically chose work. Parent

beliefs about high-stakes testing were the foci of a study conducted by Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas (2000). Based on parent interviews, the inquiry found that parents believed there is intense stress for students, teachers, and parents surrounding the taking of high-stakes tests. Parents also stated that high-stakes tests undermined meaningful instruction and learning.

SUMMARY OF HIGH-STAKES TESTING STUDIES

After considering all of these studies, there are three major themes across the four groups that emerged from this analysis. First, the majority of the studies reported that high-stakes testing programs have a negative impact on stakeholders in the educational system. Of the 40 articles analyzed, 30 found that high-stakes testing programs negatively impact the educational program. These negative effects include a decrease in teaching higher level thinking skills (Rex, 2003; Harlen & Crick, 2003), a decrease in intrinsic motivation of students (Sheldon & Biddle, 1998; Kelleghan, Madaus & Raczek, 1996; Kohn, 1993), and minimal carryover for student success on other measures (Carnoy, 2005; Amrein & Berliner, 2003; Valencia & Villarreal, 2003; Jacob, 2002; Stone, Engel, Nagaoka & Roderick, 2005). Second, many of the studies found that high-stakes testing programs have shifted how time is used in classrooms throughout the country (Cankoy & Tut, 2005; CEP, 2005; McNeil, 2000; Kober, 2002; Gordon & Reese, 1997; Moon, Callahan & Tomlinson, 2003). This change in curricular and instructional practices will have a long-term impact, since public school high-stakes testing programs are affecting students in every state. Finally, numerous studies found that there is a belief that educational decisions have moved away from the hands of educators and into the

hands of policymakers and others outside the educational system (CEP, 2006; Gallagher, 2000; Rigsby & DeMulder, 2003). The question as to whom should take the lead in establishing educational policy and making educational decisions seems to be one that will be debated for years to come. Thus, the literature on high-stakes testing presented here attempted to determine its effects on students, teachers, and parents. However, less apparent is the effect high-stakes testing has on organizational cultures in schools and school districts, specifically on central office practices.

Organizational Culture in Education

Research has shown that positive organizational culture is a critical feature of successful campuses and districts (Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001; Bonstingl, 2001; Deal & Peterson, 1990; Deming, 1986 & 1993; Fullan, 2000 & 2004; Marshall, Pritchard & Gunderson, 2004; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005; Barth, 2000; Owens, 1998; Pritchard & Marshall, 2002; Schein, 2004; Sergiovanni, 1992, 2004a). The research on organizational culture is a rich body of work. Owens (1998) writes that research on organizational culture came to the forefront in the early years of the 1980s. In 1981 Ouchi published *Theory Z*, which compared Japanese business practices to those in the United States. Ouchi argued that United States businesses needed to move away from focusing on technology to improve effectiveness and move toward focusing on "human relations in the corporate world" (p. 165). Later that decade, Peters and Waterman (1982) wrote *In Search of Excellence*, and Deal and Kennedy (1982) wrote *Corporate Cultures: The Rites and Rituals of Corporate Life*, both books that cemented the

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necessity of businesses focusing on improving organizational culture as a means to corporate success (Owens). Since that time, organizational culture has been a frequent focus in the field of business theory (Owens).

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE DEFINED

The term "organizational culture" refers to "the behavioral norms, assumptions, and beliefs of an organization" (Owens, 1998, p. 165). Culture is a "unique personality built up as people solve problems, cope with tragedies, and celebrate successes…[It] is manifested in people's patterns of behavior, mental maps, and social norms. A simple way of thinking about culture is 'the way we do things around here'" (Peterson & Deal, 2002). The key elements of an organization's culture include:

- A shared sense of purpose and vision
- Norms, values, beliefs, and assumptions
- Rituals, traditions, and ceremonies
- History and stories
- Architecture, artifacts, and symbols (Peterson & Deal, p. 12).

A culture develops and acquires deeper meaning over time as solutions to issues in the organization are consistently solved. The organizational culture serves at least three purposes: providing consistent solutions, establishing a set of norms that guide behavior, and creating values that form the foundation of the organization (Schein, 2004).

Providing solutions.

The first purpose organizational culture serves is to consistently provide solutions to organizational issues. These solutions become assumptions, and the assumptions become the basis for decision-making in the organization. These assumptions are taken for granted and are invisible forces in organizational decision-making and direction (Owens, 1998; Schein, 1985, 2004).

Establishing norms.

The second purpose organizational culture provides, according to Schein (2004), is a "set of structures, routines, rules, and norms that guide and constrain behavior" (p. 1). This set is considered valuable enough by members in the organization to be "taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel" in the organization (p. 17). Schein (2004) refers to these sets of norms as "artifacts" in the organization. They are visible, but not necessarily decipherable.

Creating values.

Finally, Schein (2004) continues, organizational culture provides values and beliefs that constitute the foundation of the organization. These are usually visible as philosophies, strategies or goals of the organization. These values and beliefs are referred to as "espoused justification" (p. 26). Deal and Kennedy (1999) term these "espoused values" that the people in the organization are attempting to achieve.

CULTURE VS. CLIMATE

Organizational culture is not to be confused with organizational climate (Van Houtte, 2005; Anderson, 1982; Maxwell & Ross, 1991). While both are useful in describing organizational character, climate is considered a broader descriptor. For example, Tagiuri and Litwin (1968) divide climate into four dimensions: the physical surroundings, the characteristics of individuals and groups involved with the organization, the relationships between individuals within the organization, and the culture of the organization. By culture, Tagiuri and Litwin mean the values, meanings, beliefs and cognitive structures of the people in the organization. Thus, according to this definition of climate, culture is a subset of the overall climate of an organization.

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE IN EDUCATION

The literature on organizational culture addresses school culture and district culture, as well. As early as 1932, sociologist Willard Waller argued that "every school has a culture of its own, with a set of rituals and folkways and a moral code that shapes behavior and relationships" (Peterson and Deal, 2002, p. 8). While discussion of culture in education began more than 70 years ago, it did not move to the forefront in education until the 1980s, the same time businesses began to focus on the importance of organizational culture. During the 1980s, Fullan (1982) wrote *The Meaning of Educational Change*, which argued that campuses needed to focus on their guiding principles in order to enhance school culture. A year later, Deal and Kennedy (1983) argued that these types of guiding principles were not the standard in schools, but that the culture of the school was critical to the school's success or failure. Soon thereafter,

multiple studies focusing on the importance of positive school culture were conducted (Prosser, 1999). Also, the effective schools movement, which was also occurring in the early 1980s, recognized the importance of organizational culture in schools (Saphier & King, 1985). In fact, in their synthesis on the research surrounding effective schools, Purkey and Smith (1982) argued that "an academically effective school is distinguished by its culture: a structure, process, and climate of values and norms that channel staff and students in the direction of successful teaching and learning" (p. 68). Since that time, a number of studies have been conducted on the importance of culture in education, and these fall largely into the three categories presented in this chapter: the culture of the campus, the culture of the district, and the culture of central office.

CAMPUS CULTURE STUDIES

Campus culture has been shown to exhibit positive results on student learning. For example, using a mixed method approach, Henderson, Buehler, Stein, Dalton, Robinson and Anfara (2005) studied Tennessee middle schools in terms of school health and student achievement. The researchers found that schools that had a culture that included an emphasis on academic excellence via high but achievable goals and an orderly and serious learning environment were more likely to positively impact student academic performance. Similarly, in conducting three case studies of three secondary schools, Deblois and Corriveau (1994) found that a strong school organizational culture was related to student success. In this study, student success was defined as higher academic achievement, lower failure rates, and lower dropout rates. The most successful of the three studied schools was found to have an organizational culture that included

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shared beliefs and goals, strong commitment to students, and a high-degree of teacher participation. This type of culture was also found in a seven-year case study of one Florida high school conducted by Sidener (1995). In that study, the researcher found that a successful organizational culture came as a result of shared decision-making, collaborative teacher work, and a belief that students are active constructors of knowledge.

Strong school cultures versus weak school cultures were differentiated by Saphier and King (1985). They wrote, "If certain norms of school culture are strong, improvements in instruction will be significant, continuous, and widespread; if these norms are weak, improvements will be at best infrequent, random, and slow…In short, good seeds will not grow in weak cultures" (p. 67). They found twelve norms that led to strong campus cultures:

1. Collegiality among the staff.
2. Experimentation to strive for improvement.
3. High expectations for everyone.
4. Trust and confidence in the teachers by outside stakeholders.
5. Tangible support.
6. Reaching out to the knowledge base; that is, basing instructional practices on sound educational research.
7. Appreciation and recognition of teachers and other employees.
8. Caring, celebration, and humor.
9. Involvement in decision-making.

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10. Protection of instructional and planning time.

11. Traditions.

12. Honest and open communication.

Campuses that had in place or that were improving the twelve norms were more academically successful than those that were not.

These findings were later echoed by Van der Westhuizen, Mosoge, Swanepoel, and Coetsee (2005), who conducted an ethnographic study of schools in South Africa. They found that school cultures that included order, discipline, and high expectations led to high student achievement. Conversely, school cultures that were defined by low morale and poor cooperation among staff led to low student achievement. Further, the researchers found a number of ties between school culture and academic achievement:

- There is a relationship between an effective organizational culture and greater educator and learner motivation and achievement.

- An effective organizational culture can lead to a reduction of dropout and failure rates of learners.

- The experienced quality of work life has a direct relationship with the organizational culture and the organizational climate of the school.

- Effective discipline in the school, including elements such as respect toward the educator, regular attendance in school, and punctuality, is a manifestation of the effectiveness of the culture that permeates the school.

- The quality and state of school facilities is a reflection of the nature of the existing school culture.

- Norms and values form an integral part of the organizational culture of a school (p. 92).

Trust in schools.

Typically, one of the most important elements in a positive school culture is trust. In fact, quoting Cunningham and Gresso (1993), Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (1998) argue that trust in schools is the "foundation of school effectiveness" (p. 341). There are a number of building blocks that lead to trust, Bibb and Kourdi (2004) wrote. These include authentic communication, competence in all roles, supportive processes, boundaries that include agreed-upon goals, personal contact, positive intent, and forgiveness. According to Harris (2002), a school culture that includes trust is critical for improving schools, and is implicit in all aspects of establishing a community of learners. Further, the element of trust in the school culture is critical when risks are high or when change is looming.

In their study of Chicago Public Schools, Bryk and Schneider (2002) found that parents, teachers and principals having high levels of trust in each other in schools made it more likely that students will be successful. While trust alone was not enough to solve all academic issues, the absence of trust made poor campus academic performance a guarantee. Sergiovanni (1992, 1994) also discussed this call for trust in schools. In fact, he argued that a positive and trusting school culture is so critical that schools should be considered communities instead of organizations. The theories and metaphors of organizations include hierarchy, legitimacy, and self-interest. Viewing schools as

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communities, however, would mean strengthening relationships among stakeholders, including students, staff, parents, and leaders, thus building a more trusting culture.

Schools that are considered communities include collaboration between and among the parents, teachers, and the principals of schools. In a 900-teacher survey in a large urban school district, Tschannen-Moran (2001) found that a positive collaboration occurred only if each of those groups has a high level of trust in each of the other groups. In an earlier study, the establishment of trust in schools was found largely to be the result of the behaviors of the building level principal and the teachers (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998). For school cultures to be successful, teachers must trust their "colleagues as well as their principal…Faculty trust in both colleagues and the principal has been linked to school effectiveness, as well as to positive school climate, and principal authenticity" (p. 341).

Professional learning communities.

One way collegial trust is encouraged today in schools is via professional learning communities, a term that describes organizing schools for maximizing teacher communication and collaboration, as well as improving student learning. Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson & Wahlstrom (2004) stated that in establishing professional learning communities, it was important that the school culture "makes collaboration expected, inclusive, genuine, ongoing and focused on critically examining practice to improve student outcomes" (p. 66). There are three broad concepts that infuse the literature on professional learning communities and school culture: the culture must be oriented on the client and based on knowledge (Darling-Hammond, 1990); the culture must emphasize

student and teacher learning and place a high value on teacher reflection and inquiry (Toole, 2001); and the culture must have an emphasis on personal connection and relationships within the culture (Louis, Kruse & Raywid, 1995). The research has shown that utilizing professional learning communities in schools has had a powerful impact on classroom practice and student learning (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Pounder, 1999; Scribner, Cockrell, Cockrell and Valentine, 1999; Sergiovanni, 2004b; Wayman, Midgley & Stringfield, 2005; Reeves, 2003; Fullan, Bertani & Quinn, 2004; Leithwood, 2002; DuFour, 2004).

For example, Bryk and Schneider (2002) found a possible link between improved student performance and campuses that include a culture that encourages professional learning communities for teachers to collaborate. On the other hand, Supovitz (2002) conducted a four-year study of schools that were broken into small learning communities. In theory, small learning communities within large schools help to build collaborative and collegial communities of teachers and students. However, Supovitz found that, while simply creating small learning communities does improve the culture of schools for teachers, they are not likely to improve instruction without being focused on instructional methodologies.

SCHOOL DISTRICT CULTURE

A well-defined focus on positive organizational culture has been examined from the district level, as well. Hofman et al. (2002) conducted a multilevel analysis on math achievement and its relation to school district culture. The researchers found that student success in math can at least partly be explained by the coherence among central office

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leaders, school leaders, teachers and parents. This notion was also found by Spillane and Thompson (1997), who studied nine school districts and found that the most successful ones developed social capital, invested in human capital, and allocated financial resources appropriately. In terms of district culture, successful districts developed "norms such as trust, trustworthiness, and collaboration as well as a sense of obligation among individuals" (p. 193). This level of trust was one factor that the researchers found that led to positive gains in reforming math and science programs in the districts.

Trust at the district level.

The importance of a district's culture of trust was also found by Togneri and Anderson (2003). In their examination of five successful high-poverty school districts across the nation, they found a number of recurrent themes. One important aspect of all the districts was a district-wide culture of collaboration and trust. The writers stated that the culture of collaboration and trust did not simply happen in the districts, but "the most collaborative districts in the study worked on working together. They engaged in ongoing dialogue, created cross-role leadership structures to facilitate communication among stakeholders, and intentionally sought tools to facilitate collaboration" (p. 32). This resulted in a framework of support for schools so that the campuses could clearly focus on student learning, a finding supported by Anderson (2003).

Measuring culture.

How a school district would know the health of its organizational culture was the focus of a study conducted by Pritchard & Marshall (2002). The researchers developed a

survey to determine the effectiveness and health of a school district's culture. The survey

is based on Kanter's (1983) work on the Culture of Pride and Climate of Success high-

performing organizations have. According to Pritchard and Marshall, the Culture of

Pride occurs in a school district when there is an "emotional connection and commitment

between the organization and the individual; where the individual has a feeling of

belongingness and a meaningful purpose; and where the individual's values can be

realized while he or she contributes to the endeavors of the organization" (p. 122).

The results of an organizational Culture of Pride are processes and systems that are

integrated and cooperative. These systems also support innovative practices that allow

the school district to adapt to changing situations and thus succeed over time. The study

found that school districts that have high degrees of organizational health are more likely

to engage in practices that benefit culture for teachers and students.   Districts with a low

Culture of Pride, or what the researchers term "unhealthy" districts, make decisions that

focus on survival and have a limited focus on student learning. Using the same survey,

Marshall, Pritchard and Gunderson (2004) found that healthy district cultures also

benefited from implementing Deming's 14 recommendations for continuous

improvement and Total Quality Management (Deming, 1986, 1993; Bonstingl, 2001).

Specifically, all healthy districts they studied incorporated Deming's idea of constancy of

purpose, and focused "on high-quality teaching and student learning" (Marshall,

Pritchard & Gunderson, p. 181). These districts had positive organizational health that

resulted in high student achievement.

The role and contributions of central office culture have received increased attention in recent years. In an article in *Education Week* in 2001, for example, Johnston wrote that central office can be a key player in student achievement. The article discussed how successful central office cultures have improved their service to teachers and schools, both in information systems and personnel systems. These improvements have led to improved campus and district cultures because school district employees "need people [in central office] they can trust" (p. 20), and improving these systems helped establish such a culture. Reactions to Johnston's article brought on a wave of research on the impact central office culture has on student achievement.

Negative views of central office.

Often, thoughts about a school district's central administration were not positive. Muller (2004) pointed out, for example, that studies on central office and central office culture often focus on the negative aspects that can impede positive reform, such as "excess rigidity, over-bureaucratization of work processes, internal politics, [and] weak capacity" (p. 1). These aspects were found in a study of four school districts in the Northwest by Johnson (1996). The researcher discovered that, while school district superintendents wanted their central office administrators to assist campuses so that students would succeed, "more often, these agents of central administration carried with them more obligations than help, requiring the schools to step into line in support of the superintendent's priorities" (p. 256). When there were needs, the assistance from central

office was appreciated. But when the assistance was not based on campus needs or requests, teachers and principals resented the help.

Central office and student achievement.

While criticizing central office bureaucracies continues to be a popular trend (Haberman, 2003), MacIver and Farley (2003) suggested that there is a growing number of studies that highlight the important role school districts and central offices play in creating successful schools and increasing student achievement. Their work echoes Grove, who wrote in 2002, "Central office leaders are effective, in part, because they are invisible, much as the skeleton in the body is invisible" (p. 47). MacIver and Farley (2003) found that district central offices can positively impact student achievement by:

- Advising on good curriculum and instructional practice;
- Recruiting and equipping principals and teachers;
- Helping school staff to analyze data and decide what instructional changes need to be made; and
- Providing administrative support so that good instruction can occur (p. 24).

These tasks can only be accomplished within a district culture that emphasizes student achievement as the primary focus of every staff member in the district. Additionally, central office culture must have the belief that it exists as "a support and service organization for the schools" (p. 25).

This thought was also shared by Grove (2002), who wrote, "The central office provides service and expertise to the schools so that they can fulfill their missions without

distraction" (p. 47). Honig (2003) also paralleled these themes, particularly emphasizing the need for central office to collaborate with other stakeholders within the system.

Central office and school reform.

How central office culture plays a role in school reform has also been the focus of inquiry. Using survey data and case studies of three successfully reforming California school districts, McLaughlin & Talbert (2003) discovered how district offices can best support school reform. Central office culture must include a self-conscious awareness of being a learning organization that engages in district-wide learning, including the central office, the business office, and schools. The unit of change in reforming a school system must be the district as a whole, but central office plays a pivotal role in making the change. A number of popular myths were also invalidated in the study. Regarding school district culture, the myth that teachers and schools do not want a strong central office was debunked. In their study they found that school districts that included a culture of engaging teachers resulted in teachers being proud of working in the district and proud of the high standards the district had for student achievement.

SUMMARY OF REVIEW OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND EDUCATION

This section of the literature review highlighted organizational culture and studies associated with the concept in the school, school district, and central office settings. After considering the research presented in this section, three broad themes can be seen across the literature. First, it seems clear that a strong, positive organizational culture is a necessary component to achieve student success for all levels of the school organization,

from campuses to central offices (Waller, 1932; Peterson and Deal, 2002; Fullan, 1982; Deal and Kennedy, 1983; Prosser, 1999; Saphier & King, 1985; Purkey & Smith, 1982; Henderson, Buehler, Stein, Dalton, Robinson & Anfara, 2005; Deblois & Corriveau, 1994; Sidener, 1995; Coetsee, 2005). Second, many of the studies found that trust is the most critical component to establish when attempting to create a positive organizational culture (Cunningham & Gresso, 1993; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998; Bibb & Kourdi, 2004; Harris, 2002; Bryk & Schneider, 2002 Sergiovanni, 1992, 1994). Finally, it was found that central office organizational culture could have a positive or negative effect on student achievement in a school district (Muller, 2004; Johnson, 1996; Haberman, 2003; MacIver & Farley, 2003; Grove, 2002; Honig, 2003). When taken in conjunction with the earlier review of high-stakes testing, it appears that there is a void in the literature concerning the impact high-stakes testing has on central office practices and organizational culture.

Conclusion: Gap in the Research

An important issue to be addressed by this study is the limited literature on high-stakes testing and its impact on central office organizational culture. As Olivarez (1994) observed, high-stakes testing programs and accountability systems "must strike a balance between the expectations of an increasing number of citizens…who want immediate solutions and the actual conditions at the community and school levels" (p. 48). A study of the balance school districts must strike is needed, according to Firestone and Shipps (2003). In their discussion on the balance between accountability demands and a school

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system's needs, the authors discussed the limited literature in this area. Specifically, they asked how external accountability systems such as high-stakes testing requirements from the federal and state governments "impinge on schools or districts and create pressures for action" (p. 45). Further, they stated that research in this area has focused largely on schools, and they raised the question: What is the impact of external accountability on internal beliefs and practices at the district level? They concluded their recommendations for further studies by arguing that one logical method of addressing the question is by using a case study "in light of the full range of accountabilities impinging on the district" (p. 46).

The questions Firestone and Shipps raised are not answered in the present literature. This study, then, sought to fill that gap by examining how the external accountability system in the guise of required state and federal high-stakes tests affect the central office culture. The research was guided by three questions:

1. What changes in the central office organizational culture occurred due to the increased implementation of and pressure from high-stakes testing?

2. How have the reported changes in the central office culture affected district level administrators and campus leaders?

3. How do changes in central office organizational culture affect district-wide practices?

In order to get answers to these questions and help fill the gap in the research, this proposal now turns to the methodology of the study, which will be discussed in chapter three.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

Introduction and Purpose of the Chapter

The review of the literature presented in chapter two addressed the context for this study on the effect high-stakes testing has on central office organizational culture. In order to conduct this study, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What changes in the central office organizational culture have occurred due to the increased implementation of and pressure from high-stakes testing?

2. How have the reported changes in the central office culture affected district level administrators and campus leaders?

3. How have changes in central office organizational culture affected district-wide practices?

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the methodology and procedures the study will undertake, including the research design, sample descriptions, data collection procedures, and the procedures for data analysis.

Research Design: Qualitative Research

This study utilized a qualitative approach. Qualitative research begins, Merriam and Associates (2002) write, with the assumption that "meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world. The world, or reality, is not the fixed, single, agreed upon, or measurable phenomenon that it is assumed to be in positivist,

quantitative research. Instead, there are multiple constructions and interpretations of reality that are in flux and that change over time" (pp. 3 – 4). A qualitative research study includes a number of unique traits.

TRAITS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative research:

- Occurs in the natural setting, near the studied group (Creswell, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002).

- Utilizes a number of interactive methods in order to engage the participants in data collection (Creswell, 2003).

- Results in a product that is richly descriptive (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003). "Words and pictures rather than numbers are used to convey what the researcher has learned about a phenomenon" (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 5).

- Uses the researcher's interpretation of data to develop descriptions, to analyze the data for categories or themes, and to decode the categories into theory or propositions (Creswell, 2003; Yin, 2003; Merriam, 1998).

- Strives to understand "the meaning people have constructed about their world and their experiences" (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 4).

- Views social events in their totality within a larger context (Creswell, 2003).

- Results in findings that are "highly contextual and case-dependent" (Patton, 2002, p. 563).

Qualitative researchers bring a number of unique traits into play.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCHERS

These traits include:

- Inductive reasoning that is multi-dimensional, repetitious, and simultaneous with data collection (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 1998). "Researchers gather data to build concepts, hypotheses, or theories rather than deductively deriving postulates or hypotheses to be tested" (Merriam and Associates, 2002, p. 5).

- Reflection on his or her personal history and how it affects the study (Creswell, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2003).

- Interest in understanding how participants interpret the world at a specific point in time and within a specific context (Merriam and Associates, 2002; Yin, 2003).

- Understanding that the researcher is the principal instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam and Associates, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998).

Data collection in qualitative research has specific characteristics, as well.

DATA COLLECTION IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

According to Merriam and Simpson (2000), qualitative data comprise a number of items, all of which are open-ended and collected in a natural setting. Among the data collected are "detailed descriptions of situations, events, people, interactions, and observed behaviors; direct quotations from people about their experiences, attitudes,

beliefs, and thoughts; and excerpts or entire passages from documents, correspondence, records, and case histories" (p. 159). The goals of the data are to discover "what people's lives, experiences, and interactions mean to them in their own terms" (p. 159). Also, instead of waiting until all the data is collected to begin analysis, initial analysis occurs "simultaneously with data collection" (Merriam, 1998, p. 162). This simultaneous data collection and analysis is only possible if the researcher is an instrument of research.

Researcher as instrument.

Another trait of qualitative data collection and analysis is that the researcher functions as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 1988). Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that in this role, the researcher responds to the context of the study, processes information, and classifies and summarizes data.

In this particular research, the researcher's involvement in the educational profession as an administrator and teacher for the last fifteen years provided valuable insight into the data analysis. This insight was further sharpened, since the researcher experienced some of the changes high-stakes testing has brought to the central office culture. That stated, however, there were some disadvantages of being an insider. It is possible that principals were reluctant to discuss central office impact with a central office administrator in the district. At times, employees may have suspected some other purpose for collecting the data. Thus, it was critical that subjectivity and rapport were considered throughout the research process. Just as viewing the researcher as the primary instrument of research has distinct advantages and challenges, qualitative research in general has strengths and weaknesses.

QUALITATIVE APPROACH ADVANTAGES

Qualitative analysis has a number of advantages, particularly in organizational cultural research (Cooke and Rousseau, 1988). These advantages include descriptions that allow the examined unit's own terms to describe itself; the rich information that can be obtained from a unit; and the usefulness of the method for research on issues about which little or no information currently exists (Creswell, 2003; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003). However, there are limitations to the qualitative approach, as well.

QUALITATIVE APPROACH LIMITATIONS

According to Patton (2002), there are three limitations that typically occur when using a qualitative research design:

1. Limitations in the situations (critical events or cases) that are sampled for observation (because it is rarely possible to observe all situations even within a single setting);

2. Limitations from the time periods during which observations took place; that is, constraints of temporal sampling; and

3. Limitations based on selectivity in the people who were sampled either for observations or interviews, or selectivity in document sampling (p. 563).

These limitations were important considerations throughout the study. The focus of this chapter now turns to the specific approach that was used within qualitative research, a case study.

Case Study

In order to investigate the research questions of the study, a case study design was adopted. Case studies have been used extensively in research (Mertens, 2005) to study a variety of topics, ranging from leadership (Johnson & Hudson, 1996) to cultural change (Serafeimidis & Smithson, 2000).   Smith (1978) argues that the case study approach is useful in studying a "bounded system," a single unit that has clear boundaries. In a 1995 work, Stake says a case approach is appropriate when "the case is a specific, complex, functioning thing" (p. 2). Yin (2003) defines the case study research method as an empirical method of inquiry that examines a contemporary phenomenon within its actual context. To bring depth to the study, researchers must use a variety of data-gathering methods.

CASE STUDY STRENGTHS

Using a case study has a number of advantages (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003; Merriam, 1998). Because it is based in the current reality of a unit, it has immediate application to real life, bringing a method to help facilitate a better understanding of a complex situation. Merriam (1998) writes, "A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved" (p. 19). Also, case studies offer rich, detailed information about a particular unit that can often reveal "important variables or hypotheses that help structure further research" (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 111). The research questions in this study were designed to obtain a deeper understanding of a complex system's reaction to a radical change within a specific

context. Thus, the case study approach provided the most appropriate means of gathering data in order to reach some manner of understanding, making it an appropriate approach to use in this study.

CASE STUDY LIMITATIONS

Case studies do have some limitations, such as the following, offered by Merriam and Simpson (2000):

- Case studies can be expensive and time consuming.

- Case study narratives tend to be lengthy documents, which policy makers and others have little time to read.

- Findings from case studies cannot be generalized in the same manner as findings from random samples; generalizability is related to what each user is trying to learn from the study (p. 111).

Also, the case study is only as useful as its case (Yin, 2003). Of primary importance in a case study, then, is an appropriate unit of analysis (Yin, 2003).

UNIT OF ANALYSIS

For this study, the unit of analysis was the central office administration of a representative Texas school district. Since the focus of this research was on the effects high-stakes testing has had on central office organizational culture, all departments associated with central office were considered, including the departments of curriculum, administration, business, operations, and human resources.

District size.

The school district itself had to be what Yin (2003) describes as a "representative or typical case," in order to "be informative about the experiences of the average person or institution" (p. 41). Additionally, the district must be large enough to have a clearly bounded central office. That is, the central office must have a stand-alone function in the school district. According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA) (2004), 75% of all schoolchildren in the state are enrolled in districts that have 5,000 students or more in the system. For purposes of this research, only school districts of 5,000 students and greater were considered as potential cases to be studied. In these larger districts, the culture is more comprehensive, based on the fact that more people are employed in the central office, lending a greater separation between central office and campuses. Of the 157 districts that have more than 5,000 students, the average size is 21,000 students. Thus, for roughly 75% of the state, a typical school district in Texas would fall near this size.

Accountability rating.

Additionally, the Texas accountability system rates districts and schools with one of four ratings: Exemplary, Recognized, Academically Acceptable, and Academically Unacceptable. These ratings are based on student test scores, high school dropout rates, and student attendance. According to TEA (2005a), more than 80% of school districts in the state received a rating of Academically Acceptable by the state. Thus, a typical school district in Texas would have received a rating of Academically Acceptable.

Student population growth.

Finally, the United States Census Bureau (2005) has noted that Texas continues to be one of the fastest growing states in the nation. In fact, in an estimate completed in 2005, five states – Florida, Texas, California, Arizona and Georgia – accounted for 52% of the population growth in the nation between 2004 and 2005. A representative school district in Texas, then, would be one that is continuing to increase its student population; is rated Academically Acceptable by TEA; and has approximately 21,000 students enrolled.

CENTRAL OFFICE CRITERIA

Turning to the criteria for a typical central office in a school district, the Texas Education Agency (2006b), in its Commissioner's Rules on State Finance, asserts that central office administrators include the superintendent, assistant superintendents, instructional officers, the athletic director, and the vocational educational coordinator. Having these roles in the central office is the final criterion this study will require for a school district to be considered typical.

LEANDER INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

The Leander Independent School District (LISD) met all of the above criteria. At the time of this study, the school district had over 24,000 students, was rated by TEA as Academically Acceptable, and was experiencing student population growth of approximately nine percent each year. Its central office was comprised of roles mirroring TEA's definition of central office. The central office administration included a

superintendent, an assistant superintendent for instructional services, a secondary

curriculum director, an elementary curriculum director, an athletic director, and a

vocational education director, among other staff. Thus, given the criteria, Leander ISD

represented a typical school district in the state of Texas. As such, it served as an

appropriate unit of analysis for this case study. Data was collected from the school

district using three methods: focus groups, individual interviews, and document review.

This chapter now turns to these data collection methods.

Procedures and Data Collection

Given that this research concerned changes within the central office culture, the

data collection methods utilized searched for rich descriptions of changes within Leander

ISD's central office culture due to high-stakes testing. Before conducting the study, the

researcher obtained the necessary approvals from The University of Texas at Austin,

including approval from the Institutional Review Board. A request for Institutional

Review Board approval was submitted to the university upon advancement to candidacy

before the study was conducted. Also, signed consent was secured from Leander ISD.

Approval from Leander ISD was accomplished via an introductory meeting with the

superintendent of schools. The meeting detailed the purpose of the study, and the

researcher asked permission to conduct it. After granting verbal approval, the

superintendent wrote a letter, formalizing his consent to the study (Appendix).

Once approval was granted from the university and from the school district, three

methods were used to collect data: focus groups, individual interviews, and document

review.   Multiple types of data collection were used in order to provide what Patton

(2002) calls a more detailed picture of the effect of high-stakes testing on central office

culture.

FOCUS GROUPS

The first data collection technique employed was focus groups. According to

Krueger and Casey (2000), focus groups are a useful method of gathering data because of

the nature of the conversation that occurs when groups discuss topics: "The focus group

presents a more natural environment than that of an individual interview because

participants are influencing and influenced by others—just as they are in life" (p. 11).

While Mertens (2005) points out that a number of types of focus groups can be used, only

two homogeneous groups were utilized. One group included central office

administrators, and a second one included school principals.

Focus groups criteria.

Both groups included individuals who remained employed by Leander ISD from

before the implementation of high-stakes testing until the time of the study. Specifically,

the participants had administrative experience in Leander ISD prior to 1999, which is the

first year the state adopted the Student Success Initiative (SSI). Upon its full

implementation in the 2007 – 2008 school year, SSI will require that students in third,

fifth, and eighth grades pass state exams in order to be promoted to the next grade level.

Currently, SSI has been phased in at third and fifth grades. While the state has made

passing a state exam a requirement for graduation since 1987, SSI marked the first time

all levels of students (elementary, middle school and high school) were affected by high-stakes testing. Thus, for purposes of this study, the criteria for participating in a focus group were (1) employment as a central office administrator or as a principal in Leander ISD prior to 1999, as well as (2) not being the subject of an individual interview.

Sample selection.

The focus groups consisted of seven individuals who met the above requirements. Patton (2002) suggests that focus groups be limited to six to ten people, and given the number of eligible individuals, seven is an appropriate number. Selection for the focus group sample was done by simple random selection. The researcher obtained a list of all eligible employees and created a spreadsheet in Microsoft Excel with all the names. Using the random number generator tool in Excel, each name was assigned a random number. The list of random numbers was sorted from least to greatest, and the top seven people were selected. If an individual in the top seven was not able to participate, the next person whose name was on the list was invited. The sample could be considered a purposive sample (Merriam, 1998), as the participants were selected based on their status of work in the school district. The employees were in their typical work environment while participating in this study. Once the group was established, the following procedures were followed.

Focus groups questions.

Since the purpose of focus groups is to "determine deeper levels of meaning, make important connections, and identify subtle nuances in expression and meaning"

(Stewart & Shamdasni, 1998, p. 509), the researcher must use caution when designing the focus group experience, thus the researcher modeled the focus group protocol on suggestions from Krueger and Casey (2000).

Since the study focused on the impact high-stakes testing has had on central office culture, it was possible that the discussions would lead to controversial and difficult conversations. In order for the conversation to be as honest as possible, it was important to provide neutral locations for the participants (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Bickman & Rog, 1998).   Thus, central office administrators met in a conference room in the central office building. Principals met in a middle school lecture hall, near the geographical center of the district, minimizing driving time for participants, and ensuring appropriate distance from central office.

Once the groups gathered, the purpose of the research was explained, and informed consent forms were distributed and signed. The researcher announced that the discussion would be recorded with an audio recording device and that highlights of the discussion would be captured by the researcher using markers and a chart tablet. The recorder was turned on, and the researcher again briefly explained the purpose of the research, the date of the focus group, and the type of group (central office or principal). The ground rules for the discussion were explained, and the first focus group question was asked. The researcher used probes to have the participants clarify and deepen their discussion, and recorded conversational themes on the chart tablet for all participants to see. When the researcher believed the conversation was winding down on the first topic, the researcher verified the captured themes on the chart tablet, and asked the next

question. This procedure was used until all questions had been asked. At the end of the session, the researcher asked for final thoughts and suggested documents to review from the participants, and recorded the time the session ended, stopping the audio recording at that point. The recording was transcribed. Further discussion of the analysis phase of the research will be presented later in this chapter. The data collected from focus groups was used comparatively with the data collected from individual interviews, the topic to which this chapter now turns.

INTERVIEWS

The second means of collecting data for this study was individual interviews. At its most basic, an interview has been called "a conversation with a purpose" (Dexter, 1970, p. 136; as quoted in Merriam, 1998). The purpose of an interview is for the researcher "to enter into the other person's perspective…to find out what is in and on someone else's mind, to gather their stories" (Patton, 2002, p. 341). Also, interviews are useful tools in qualitative case study research, as the researcher attempts to assemble a rich description of the case (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). The interviews in this study were conducted in order to compare and contrast information discovered in the interviews with information found in the focus groups and document review.

Description of interviews.

There are a variety of types of interview to which the qualitative researcher can avail himself or herself. Yin (2003) describes three: open-ended, focused, and structured. Open-ended interviews are used when the researcher wishes the respondent to share facts

and opinions about select events. These interviews typically take significant amounts of time. One way of shortening the time is by using focused interviews, which occur when the researcher follows a set of questions and follows up with relevant probes. The third type of interview involves even more structure, and is akin to a formal survey. For this study, focused interviews were used. Of course, as is true with all methodologies, there are strengths and limitations of using focused interviews.

Interview strengths.

According to Patton (2002), there are at least four reasons to use a focused interview:

1. The exact instrument used in the evaluation is available for inspection by those who will use the findings of the study.

2. Variation among interviewers can be minimized.

3. The interview is highly focused so that interviewee time is used efficiently.

4. Analysis is facilitated by making responses easy to find and compare (p. 346).

For this case study, all of Patton's reasons were valid except for the second, since only one researcher conducted the interviews. Another strength of interviewing is the focused manner in which the questions target the studied topic (Yin, 2003).

Interview limitations.

While there are valid reasons for using interviews to investigate a problem, there are also limitations. First, as Patton (2002) warns, "The quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer" (p. 341). There are other limitations with interviews, as well. Yin (2003) notes that there can be response

bias, where the respondent does not share accurate information, inaccuracies due to limited or weak memory, and "reflexivity, [where] the interviewee gives what the interviewer wants to hear" (p. 86). It is thus of utmost importance that the interview questions be structured, but that the researcher have an idea of when to probe further, when to wait, and when to move on, always cognizant of the goal of getting into the respondent's world.

Interviewee criteria.

In this particular study, the research attempted to discover how central office culture has been altered due to the implementation of high-stakes testing. In order to gather relevant information, interviews were conducted with central office administrators and principals in the district. The criteria for the interviewee were similar to those espoused for focus groups: longevity in a leadership capacity in Leander ISD throughout any possible changes due to high-stakes testing. Interviews were conducted with seven individuals. The superintendent of schools was one interviewee, as was the assistant superintendent for instructional services and the directors of elementary and secondary curriculum. Since changes in school district practices due to high-stakes testing can also affect support departments, the assistant superintendent for business and operations was interviewed. Three principals, one from each level (elementary school, middle school, and high school), also were interviewed. All interviewees met the established criteria.

Interview procedures.

Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes, and was conducted in the offices of the respondents. The researcher began the interview by explaining the purpose of the research and gained the written consent of the respondent. The researcher informed the interviewee that the interview would be recorded and that the researcher would take notes while the interview was being conducted. The researcher then turned on the recording device, noted the time, date, place, and name of the interviewee, and the interview began (Appendix). At the conclusion of the interview, the researcher asked the respondent for any other relevant information, and ended the interview. As with the focus groups, the interview was transcribed, and the researcher used the data to discover themes regarding the research questions. Further details on the data analysis will be discussed later in this chapter.

DOCUMENT REVIEW

The third data collection method this research utilized was document review. Document review includes "a wide range of written, visual, and physical material relevant to the study at hand" (Merriam, 1998, p. 112). Documents can include personal memos, formal policies, photographs, journals, videos, and virtually any other physical embodiment of information. Documents are widely used in qualitative research, since, as Guba and Lincoln (1981) write, "The first and most important injunction to anyone looking for official records is to presume that if an event happened, some record of it exists" (p. 253, quoted in Merriam, 1998).

Document review strengths.

According to Yin (2003), documents have many positive traits as a method of case study research. These include their stability, their unobtrusiveness, their precision, and the long time span they can represent. Merriam (1998) quotes Guba and Lincoln (1981) in pointing out another strength of documents: "This grounding in real-world issues and day-to-day concerns is ultimately what the naturalistic inquiry is working toward" (p. 234).

Document review limitations.

Document review does have some limitations, however. Yin (2003) points out that there exists the possibility of reporting bias, the possible difficulties of retrieval, and the possibility that all relevant documents may not be accessible. Merriam (1998) also reminds researchers to remain cautious since documents may not be constructed in a useful form, or may be incomplete. Finally, researchers may have difficulty establishing documents' authenticity and truthfulness.

Document review in this study.

For purposes of this study, document review began with information produced by the school district in the forms of strategic challenges, campus improvement plans, campus expectations, and requirements of principals from 1999 until the time of the study. The researcher specifically looked for changes in the documents that might reflect a shift in central office culture due to high-stakes testing. Additionally, as the focus groups and interviews were conducted, the researcher was aware of documents that focus

group members and interviewees mentioned, and ensured that such documents were analyzed for the study. All data generated by the three data collection techniques were analyzed according to qualitative research guidelines.

Data Analysis in Qualitative Research

When analyzing the data in qualitative research, Yin (2003) suggests four principles that lead to high quality data analysis. First, the researcher should analyze all of the evidence, resulting in interpretations that account for all of the data and that leave no unanswered questions. Second, the analysis should address all major alternative interpretations of the data. At the very least, the alternative interpretations could be suggested as areas for future study. Third, the researcher should ensure that the most important aspects of the research are addressed. Finally, the researcher should bring his or her own expert knowledge of the case to bear in the analysis. The combination of all of the above results in a more complete analysis. In this study, the analysis included field note memos and the constant comparison method.

FIELD NOTE MEMOS

When using a qualitative method, throughout the research, data analysis occurs concurrently during the collection of data (Merriam, 1998). One method that was used to accomplish this was the field note memo. This was necessary since, as Merriam (1998) warns, "You have undermined your entire project by waiting until after all the data are collected before beginning analysis" (p. 161). Each week during data collection, the researcher wrote a memo that described, among other items, thoughts that occurred to the

researcher, themes that were emerging from the data, and documents that needed to be studied. Once the data were collected, these memos served as an additional data set in the analysis of data. In particular, these memos assisted the researcher in the initial establishment of codes.

DATA ANALYSIS BY CONSTANT COMPARATIVE METHOD

Once all of the data from field note memos, focus groups, interviews, and documents was collected, the researcher began to build categories of possible answers to the research questions, using a "constant comparative method" (Merriam, 1998, p. 179; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). At its most basic form, this type of data analysis can be described as a

> …continuous comparison of incidents, respondents' remarks, and so on, with each other. Units of data – bits of information – are literally sorted into groupings that have something in common. A unit of data is any meaningful…segment of data…[It] can be as small as a word a participant uses to describe a feeling or phenomenon, or as large as several pages of field notes describing a particular incident" (Merriam, 1998, p. 179).

This technique is appropriate in this study, since Creswell (2003) suggests data analysis for a case study includes detailing a "description of the setting…followed by analysis of the data for themes or issues" (p. 191).

Moving to propositions.

In order for the research to be successful in a case study, possible explanations or propositions about the research questions must be built. Another goal is to develop ideas for future study (Yin, 2003). This stage of data analysis has been described by Merriam (1998) as "a period of intensive analysis when tentative findings are substantiated, revised, and reconfigured" (p. 181). The specific steps of the data analysis used in this study will now be discussed.

Step One: The data were prepared. The field notes were typed, interviews and focus groups were transcribed, and relevant documents were collected. (Creswell, 2003)

Step Two: The data were organized and sorted by source. (Creswell, 2003)

Step Three: The researcher briefly read through all the data, "to obtain a general sense of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning. What general ideas are participants saying? What is the tone of the ideas? What is the general impression of the overall depth, credibility, and use of the information?" (Creswell, 2003, p. 191-192).

Step Four: Beginning with one piece of data and reading it through, the researcher annotated items of interest in the margins. "Do not think about the 'substance' of the information but its underlying meaning" (Tesch, 1990, p. 142, as quoted in Creswell, 2003, p. 192). "The notes serve to isolate the initially most striking, if not ultimately most important, aspects of the data" (LeCompte, Preissle, & Tesch, 1993, p. 236, as quoted in Merriam, 1998, p. 181).

Step Five: The notes were added to a list, as well as a memo (Merriam, 1998).

Step Six: The process of reading the data, making notations in the margins, and adding the notes and their corresponding text to a list was repeated (Merriam, 1998). The lists of these notes became codes, which is the way the material was organized into "chunks" (Creswell, 2003). Coding "involves taking text data or pictures, segmenting sentences (or paragraphs) or images into categories, and labeling those categories with a term, often a term based in the actual language of the participant" (Creswell, 2003, p. 192). Codes could include a number of types, such as these suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (1992) (as cited in Creswell, 2003):

- Setting and context codes

- Perspectives held by subjects

- Subjects' ways of thinking about people and objects

- Process codes

- Activity codes

- Strategy codes

- Relationship and social structure codes

- Preassigned coding schemes (pp. 166 – 172).

For this study, the coding technique suggested by Miles and Huberman (1996) was used. Specifically, an initial "start list" (p. 58) of codes was created and included the following:

- Cultural Shift (CS)

- Practice Shift (PS)

- External Context (EC)

- Internal Context (IC)

- Critical Event (CE)

- Emerging Causal Links (ECL)

Step Seven: Once the documents were coded, they were constantly compared as the data were reviewed (Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1996). Also, the information gleaned from the document review was included. Using a format suggested by Miles and Huberman (1996), a document summary form (p. 55) was created for documents used in the study. The form listed the type and summary of the document, and allowed for the researcher to easily link documents to possible themes and established codes.

Step Eight: When all data had been mined in this manner, all the lists were compared, as the researcher looked for possible emergent themes (Creswell, 2003). The topics were clustered into categories or themes (Tesch, 1990; Merriam, 1998), using a matrix as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1996).

Step Nine: The emergent themes were written down as codes on a master list, and the researcher looked for a description of the case as well as categories (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 1998). These categories "should display multiple perspectives from individuals and be supported by diverse quotations and specific evidence" (Creswell, 2003, p. 193). "This master list constitutes a primitive outline or classification system reflecting the recurring regularities or patterns in your study. These patterns and regularities become the categories or themes into which subsequent items are sorted" (Merriam, 1998, p. 181).

Step Ten: All data from focus groups, interviews, document review, and field note memos were reviewed using the established codes, and were added to the margins as appropriate (Tesch, 1990; Merriam, 1998).

Step Eleven: While the original plan called for cutting and pasting the codes onto index cards (Merriam, 1998), the software NVivo 7 was used to assist with coding. All documents were loaded into the program, along with all established codes. The documents were then sorted by code in the software, allowing the researcher to easily search and find possible additional links.

Step Twelve: The categories were mind-mapped, looking for connections and relationships between the codes (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 1998; Miles and Huberman, 1996). These connections and relationships were considered categories. Merriam (1998) offers the following ideas regarding categories of this type:

- Categories should reflect the purpose of the research. In effect, categories are the answers to your research questions.

- Categories should be exhaustive. That is, you should be able to place all data that you decided were important or relevant to the study in a category or subcategory.

- Categories should be mutually exclusive.

- Categories should be sensitizing. The naming of the category should be as sensitive as possible to what is in the data…the more exacting in capturing the meaning of the phenomenon, the better.

- Categories should be conceptually congruent. This means that the same level of abstraction should characterize all categories at the same level (pp. 183 – 184).

The search function in Microsoft Word 2000 was used to assist in establishing these categories.

Step Thirteen: When relationships occurred, they were translated into propositions or possible explanations of the findings (Creswell, 2003; Tesch, 1990; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). The relationships between the categories led to propositions regarding the research questions. Creswell (2003) calls this "making meaning of the data" (p. 195), or stating the lessons learned (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These lessons or propositions may warrant further study or may help explain a phenomenon that is seen to occur in the data. The goal was to richly describe the Leander ISD's central office culture and offer propositions and possible explanations of how the culture has changed due to high-stakes testing. This chapter turns now to how readers of the research will know that the findings of the research are valid.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

As discussed by Glesne (1999) and Yin (2003), in this study the following techniques to enhance trustworthiness and credibility were employed: triangulation of data, peer review, and member checks.

TRIANGULATION

Triangulation of data is defined by Merriam (1998) as "using multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings" (p. 204). In this study, multiple sources of data and multiple methods were used. Data were collected from a number of central office administrators and school principals, and three qualitative methods were used to confirm the findings.

PEER REVIEW

Peer review is the process by which colleagues comment on the findings that emerge from the data (Merriam, 1998; Creswell, 2003). For this inquiry, the researcher used a fellow doctoral student from The University of Texas at Austin and a colleague who just obtained his Doctor of Education degree as peer reviewers. Once every two weeks during the study, the researcher met with at least one peer reviewer to discuss the emergent themes in the research. Some meetings occurred in person; others occurred by telephone; and others occurred via electronic correspondence.

MEMBER CHECKS

In using member checks, the researcher takes data and early interpretations back to the focus group or interviewed subjects in order to verify that the results are reasonable (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002; Creswell, 2003; Yin, 2003). After meeting with each focus group, the researcher emailed initial interpretations and data to the participants and asked for their feedback. Also, after each interview, the researcher met with the subject to ensure the information was plausible.

Dependability and Consistency

By using multiple methods and a variety of data sources, the dependability and consistency of the results were increased (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). The establishment of an audit trail (Merriam, 1998) or chain of evidence (Yin, 2003) and the use of rich, thick description also added to the study's dependability and consistency. In order to establish an audit trail, the researcher "describe[d] in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry" (Merriam, 1998, p. 207). Rich, thick description should provide "enough description so that readers will be able to determine how closely their situations match the research situation, and hence, whether findings can be transferred" (Merriam, 1998, p. 211).

Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the methodology and procedures the study will undertake, including the research design, sample descriptions, data collection procedures, and the procedures for data analysis. The illustrated methodology was used to determine what changes high-stakes testing has made on one school district's central office culture.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction and Purpose of the Chapter

The methodology of the study presented in chapter three addressed how the research attempted to discover the effect high-stakes testing has on central office organizational culture. Using the methods presented in the previous chapter, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What changes in the central office organizational culture occurred due to the increased implementation of and pressure from high-stakes testing?

2. How have the reported changes in the central office culture affected district level administrators and campus leaders?

3. How have changes in central office organizational culture affected district-wide practices?

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings of the study. The chapter will begin with an overview of the case that was studied and then turn to each research question, discussing the findings for each.

Case Studied

For purposes of this study, the central office and campus leadership of Leander Independent School District (LISD), a mid-sized suburban school district in Texas, was studied. As was discussed in the previous chapter, a studied case must be what Yin

(2003) describes as a "representative or typical case," in order to "be informative about the experiences of the average person or institution" (p. 41). Due to the district's size, accountability rating, student growth, and clearly defined central office, Leander ISD is an appropriate unit of study.

LEANDER INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT PROFILE

According to LISD, its vision is, "Every student is encouraged, supported, and challenged to achieve the highest levels of knowledge, skills, and character" (DOC 29). Tied to its vision, the district established a profile of what its graduates should be able to achieve. The document, established approximately 15 years ago, is called the Graduate Profile, and is shown in Figure 1.

GRADUATE PROFILE

*Every LISD graduate is prepared with the knowledge, academic foundation, and life skills to be
a productive learner, an effective communicator, and a responsible citizen, in order to be successful in an ever-changing world.*

To be academically prepared, each LISD graduate:
- has the knowledge in mathematics, science, and social studies necessary for
    problem solving, communicating, and reasoning.
- participates in the literary, visual, and performing arts to enrich his/her daily life.

To be a productive learner, each LISD graduate:
- demonstrates self-discipline, sets goals, uses time wisely, and always tries to improve.
- demonstrates logic, critical thinking skills, creativity, and the ability to solve problems.
- manages information by acquiring and evaluating data, organizing and maintaining
    records, and using technology to find and process information.
- demonstrates skill in managing systems and resources, such as money, materials,
    space, and people.

To be an effective communicator, each LISD graduate:
- reads proficiently from a variety of sources for knowledge and enjoyment.
- listens attentively and critically and responds to speakers appropriately.
- writes and speaks correctly, effectively and fluently, adapting to different
    audiences and purposes.

To be a responsible citizen, each LISD graduate:
- understands the value and rewards of work.
- understands the nature of economics and consumer finance as it applies to
    everyday living.
- contributes to community or school service organizations.
- makes and evaluates decisions based on ethical principles and respect of the law.
- understands and appreciates the benefits of democratic government and
    free enterprise.
- understands world issues and current events, identifies the rights and obligations
    of citizens, and participates in the democratic process.

Each LISD graduate:
- makes wise career decisions based on self-knowledge, educational and occupational
    exploration, and career planning.
- fosters personal health habits and self-worth.
- demonstrates interpersonal skills needed to work effectively in teams,
    manage conflict, lead in community and business, and be an effective parent.
- reads and learns for enjoyment, fulfillment and breadth of knowledge.
- demonstrates ethical behavior - honesty, integrity, promise-keeping, loyalty, concern for
    others, law-abidance/civic duty, respect for others, fairness, pursuit of excellence,
    accountability.

Figure 1. Leander ISD Graduate Profile (DOC 29)

In order to better understand any school district, it is necessary to understand the geographical size, student achievement, and the demographics of the district. Additionally, Leander ISD embodies a number of unique traits, including the rapid growth of the district and the longevity of key district leaders.

Geographical Size

According to Leander ISD demography reports, the district is 198.5 square miles, situated northwest of Austin, Texas (PASA, 2006). The district includes the cities of Leander, Cedar Park and Volente, as well as portions of Georgetown, Austin, Jonestown and Round Rock. It sits in the northwest corner of Travis County and the southwest section of Williamson County.

Over the past 17 years, the district has undergone significant growth. In 1989, the district had 4,876 students (Texas Education Agency, 1988) compared to 21,985 students in 2006 (Texas Education Agency, 2006a), an increase of over 350%. This student growth ranks the district as the second fastest-growing district of 10,000 students or more in the state of Texas (PASA, 2006). Figure 2 reflects the recent changes in student population.

Leander ISD Student Growth 1988-2006

Figure 2. Leander ISD Student Population Growth by Numbers and Percents, 1989 –
2007.

Source: TEA (1989 – 2007).
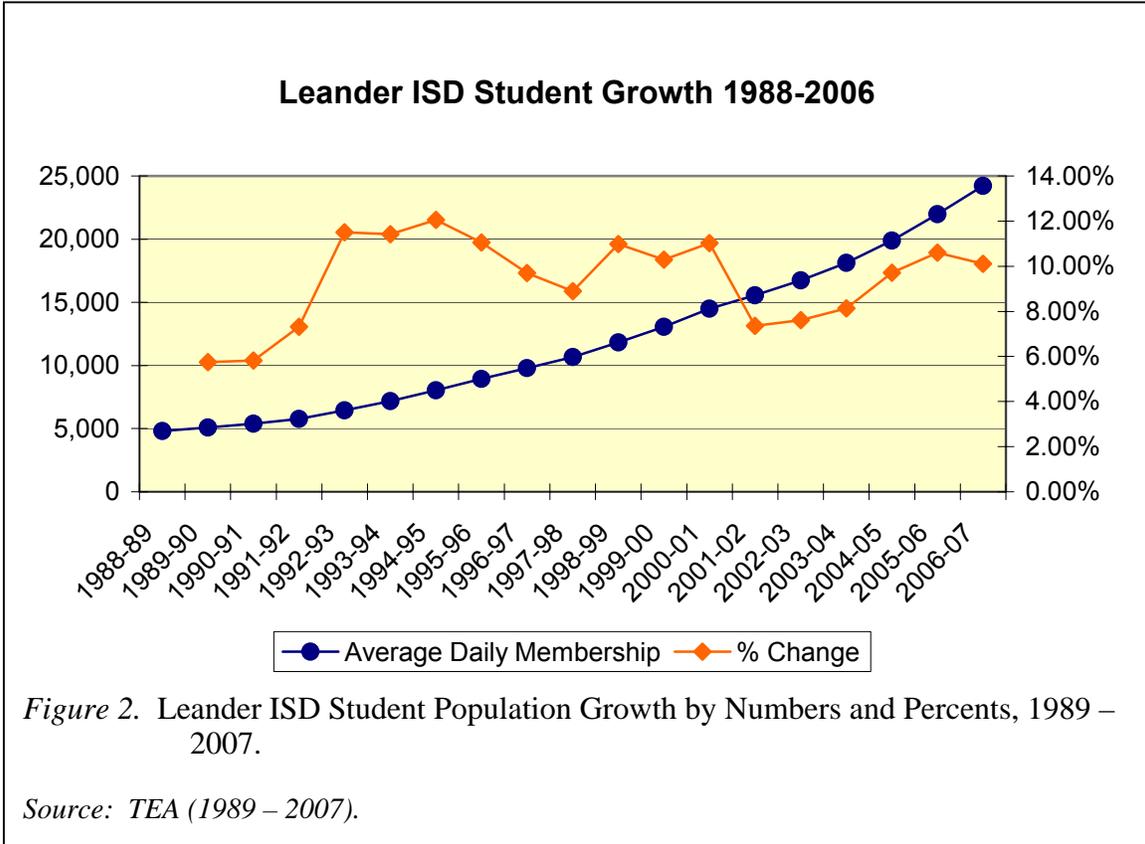
Similarly, the district's budget has increased from around $40,000,000 in 1996 to

approximately $160,000,000 in 2007, an increase of 400% (Figure 3).
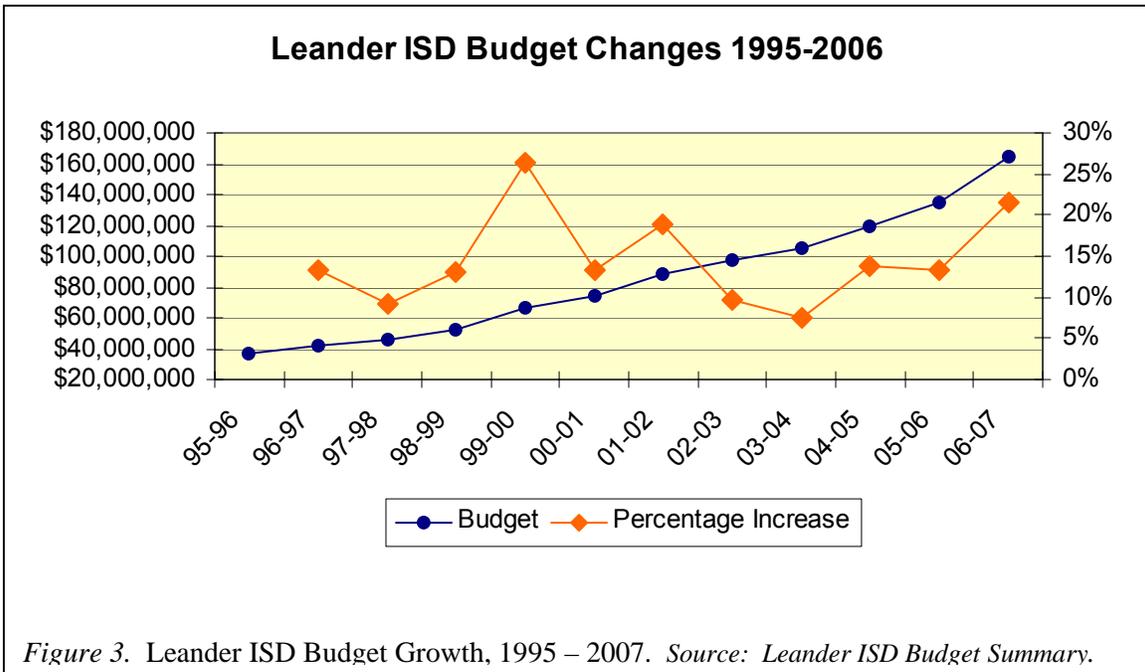
Figure 3. Leander ISD Budget Growth, 1995 – 2007. *Source: Leander ISD Budget Summary.*

LISD Student Performance

As has been true for much of the state, LISD has seen significant improvement of student scores on state assessments. Figure 4 shows results from the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), which was administered statewide from 1994 until 2002. Figure 5 shows results from the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), administered from 2003 until 2006. Figure 6 shows the percentage of students achieving commended status on various TAKS exams. In order to achieve commended status, a student must achieve a scale score of 2400 or above (out of 2800 to 3200) on the exam (Texas Education Agency, 2006c).

Figure 4. Leander ISD Percent Passing TAAS, 1994 - 2002. *Source: TEA (1994 – 2002).*

Figure 5. Leander ISD Percent Passing TAKS, 2003 - 2006. *Source: TEA (2003 – 2006).*

Figure 6. Leander ISD Percent Passing TAAS, 1994 - 2002. *Source: TEA (2003 – 2006).*
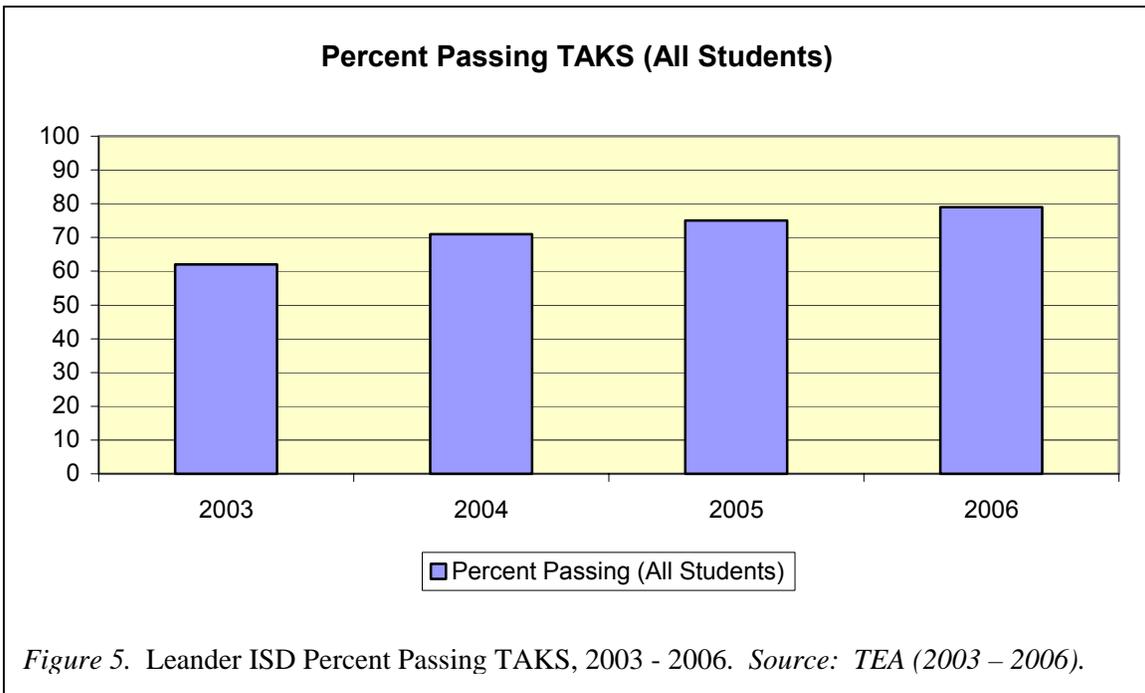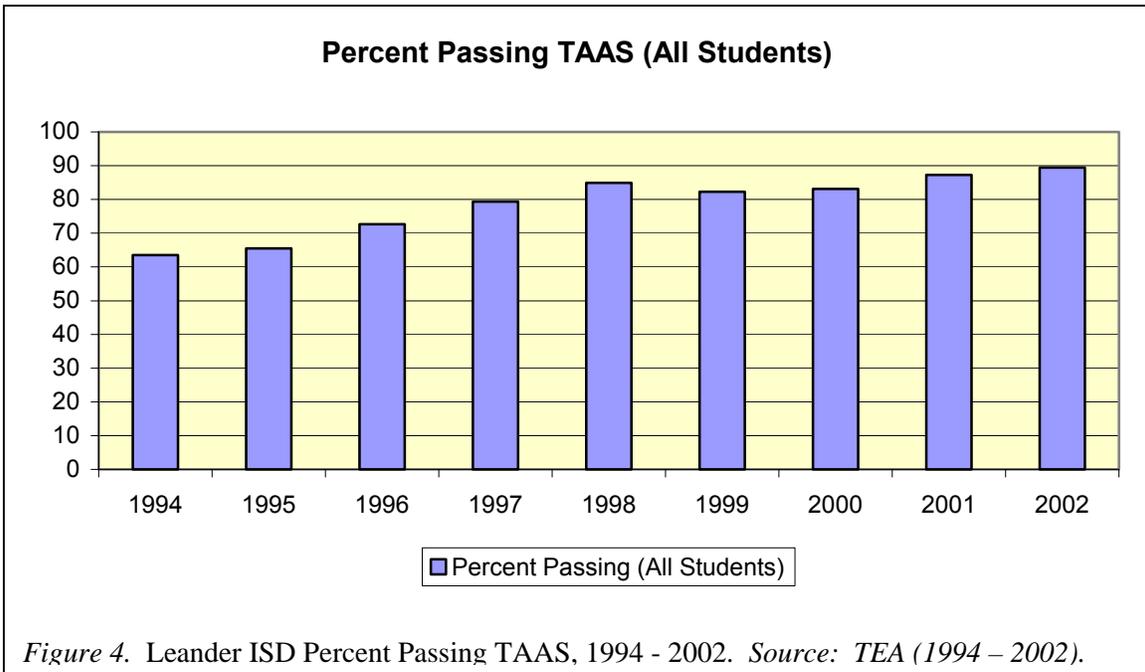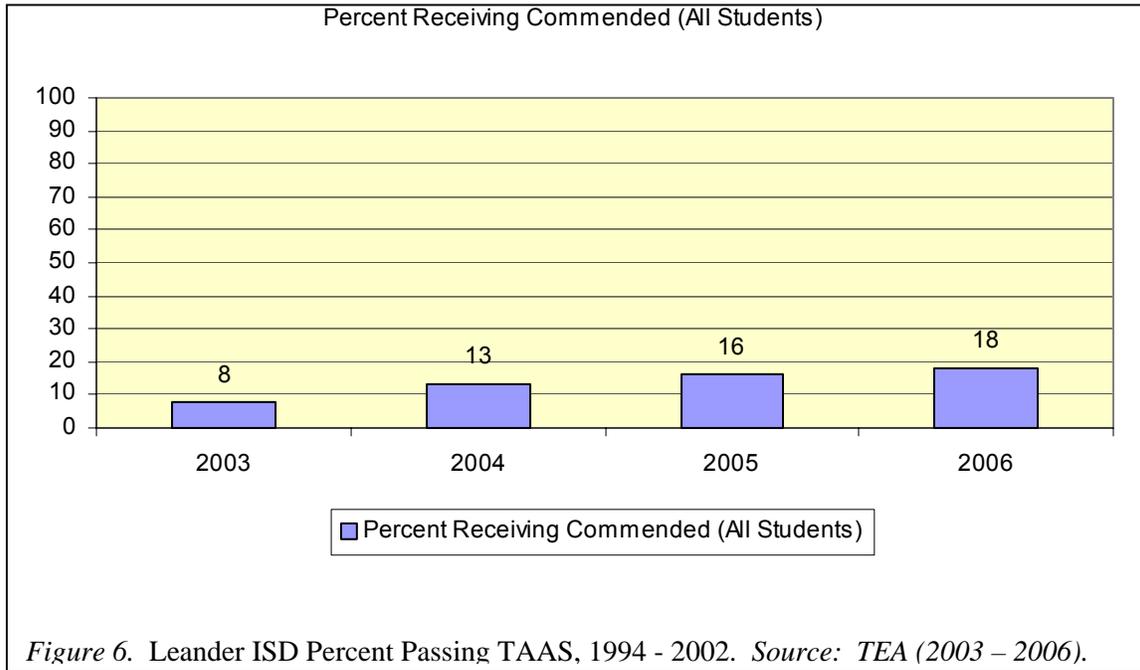
As the figures reflect, the district has continued to improve its student achievement results every year since 1994.

Demographics

In addition to the rapid student growth, the population composition of the district is changing. Figure 7 shows the percentage of students in LISD schools who are listed as African American, Hispanic, White, and Economically Disadvantaged.

Leander ISD Student Population Composition by Percentage of Enrollment

Figure 7. Leander ISD Student Demographics by Percentage of Enrollment, 1994 – 2006. *Source: TEA (1994 – 2006).*
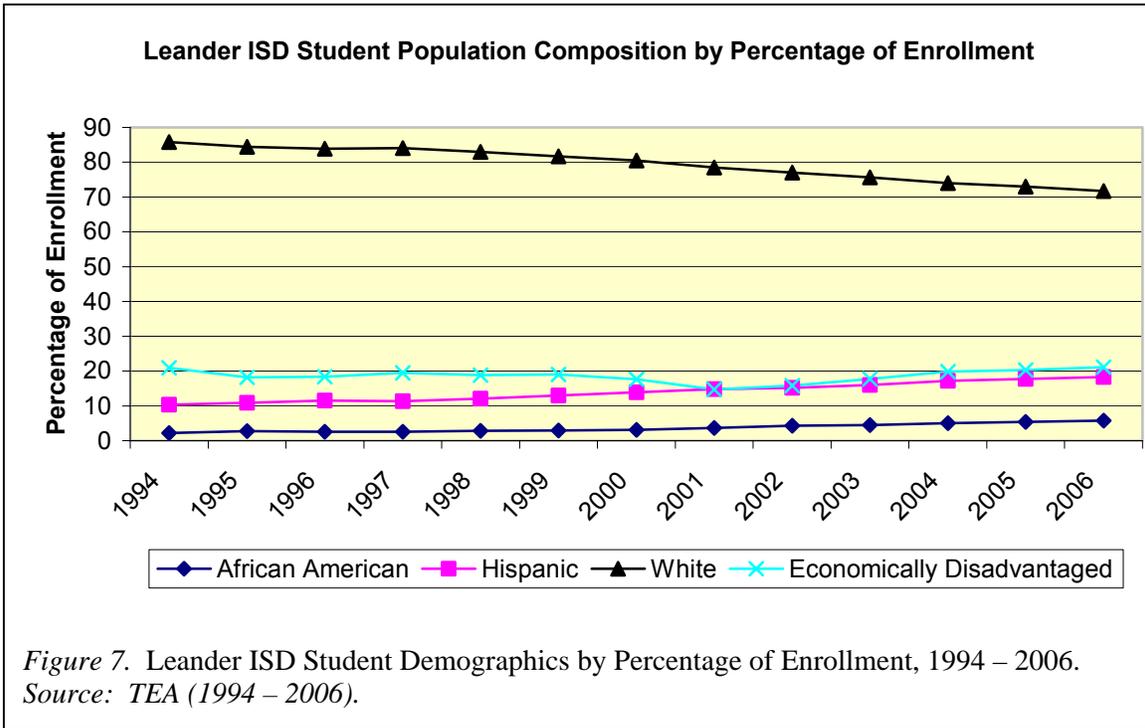
There are differences in the demographics within the district, as well. Texas Farm to Market Road 1431 runs east to west through the heart of the district, and school officials frequently refer to the "south side" or "north side" of the district. The south side of the district, the area south of 1431, borders Lake Travis and includes the majority of the most expensive homes in the district. As Figure 8 reflects, the percentage of socio-economically disadvantaged students is markedly different between the two ends of the district.

Leander ISD Percent Socio-economically Disadvantaged

Figure 8. Leander ISD Percentages SED, North and South Sides.
Source: TEA (2006).
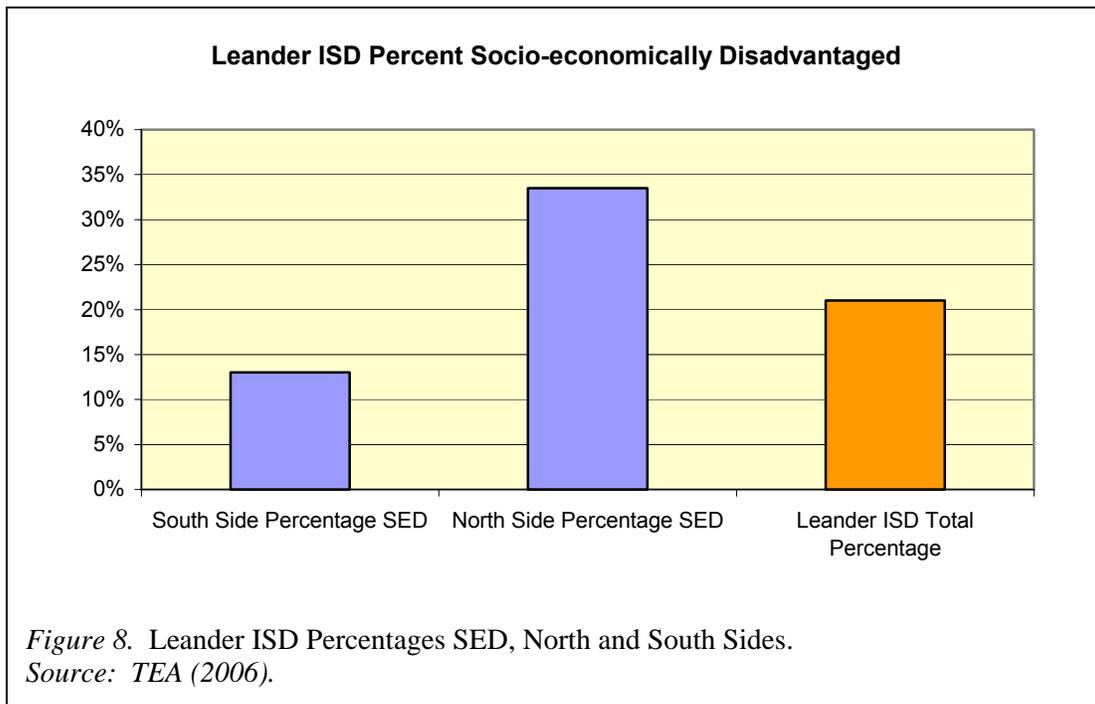
While the percentage throughout the district is lower than the statewide average of

55.6% socio-economically disadvantaged students (Texas Education Agency, 2006a),

several district employees mentioned the difference between the two areas of the district.

For example, when asked about the positive aspects of LISD, the director of elementary

staffing stated, "We really value…students in one campus being able to do the same thing

as another campus. You know, if they were to transfer from Steiner Ranch to Bagdad,

they'd be working on the same types of things" (INT: CO-FG: 24-27). It is important to

note that Steiner Ranch Elementary is in the south end of the district with a socio-

economically disadvantaged (SED) population of less than 5%, while Bagdad Elementary

is in the north end of the district with an SED population of greater than 55%.

Growth

Beyond the typical traits of school districts, Leander ISD has two attributes that consistently were raised in multiple discussions: rapid student population growth and leadership longevity. The growth that the district has seen over the last 15 years is nothing short of phenomenal. In every interview conducted, the participants discussed student population growth. For example, when discussing the current organizational culture of the district's central office, one elementary principal noted that the superintendent has to constantly remind employees to be aware of the culture: "…we're such a fast growth district. I think he does have to continually say, 'The culture…' The area we're talking about, they have to stay ahead of this huge thing that we're all under, and it's the growth thing. A lot of districts don't have that" (INT: PR-FG: 111-114). Furthermore, the growth has affected people personally. For example, when interviewing the assistant superintendent for instructional services, she stated, "There was a time when I knew everybody's name in the district, I mean from custodians to secretaries. I walk on campus now and secretaries don't know who I am" (INT: ASIS: 66-68). The superintendent has seen his role shift because of the growth:

> As you grow bureaucracy and rules and regulations, and get further away from whoever's at the top of an organization, to those people in the field who are responsible for those operations happening, you're going to have more special causes pop up and not be taken care of earlier in the process. Therefore, you have more things that are "problems". More special causes raise their head in terms of the organizational culture than you would have had in a smaller, flatter

organization…I [now] have to deal more with the Board, the community, future

planning and vision, things of that nature. In the past I had much more of a hand

in more [of] the details. I knew more of the intricacies of the operation. I

probably dealt with more situations than I do now (INT: SUP: 67-71; 11-14).

The growth has affected the district in a number ways, including changes in central

office, in administrator meetings, and at campuses.

Formality, Bureaucracy, and Structure

As the superintendent stated above, rapid growth in the district changed central

office by shifting processes from being informal to becoming more formal. This change

is seen both by central office employees and by campus principals.   One middle school

principal described the shift:

The change is because we've grown from a handful of people that could fill a

small room, where you can have a very casual conversation about, "Oh, what are

we going to do next year?" to having processes in place and a very clear line in

staff arrangement about, who do you go to for this? Who do you go to for that?

(INT: MSP: 54-58).

Likewise, the superintendent acknowledged that the system has become more

bureaucratic:

The growth is so exponential that we've had to add bureaucratic structures that

none of us particularly like, but we've had to do that out of a matter of necessity.

We've had to add layers of bureaucracy to cause that system to operate as

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efficiently as it possibly can, and I use efficiently with quotation marks! (INT: SUP: 45-48).

The assistant superintendent for instructional services echoed this move to a more formalized structure: "I think the primary way it's changed has to do with the growth and therefore the complexity of the organization . . . It's forced my role to be more formal in some ways. I've had to establish processes that it was easier to do more informally before" (INT: ASIS: 9-12).

This shift into a more formal structured central office was somewhat anticipated. A neighboring district went through exponential growth a few years ahead of Leander, and LISD has often looked at what the neighboring district did to try and learn from it. The perception in LISD was that the central office in the neighboring district became too bureaucratic at the central office level due to rapid growth. Thus, LISD administrators believed they needed to minimize the negative effects associated with the formalization of central office. The assistant superintendent for instructional services explained:

Growth is the biggest thing in creating structures because we knew from experiences from other fast growth districts that we didn't want to emulate . . . we could see what was coming, that you're going to set up to be more and more authoritative and less involving, and we wanted to capture our small district feel (INT: ASIS: 73-76).

The "small district feel" the district has had in the past included an informal structure at the central office level. The assistant superintendent for business and operations stated that "boundaries in the district were very blended" (INT: ASBO: 52),

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meaning that central office was seen as less bureaucratic in the past. In fact, for years the district did not have a formal organization chart, due in large part to the superintendent's informal leadership style. "I hate org charts" (INT: SUP: 48-49), the superintendent bluntly stated in an interview for this study. An organizational chart was created, however, when school bond agencies required one in order to rate the district for its bond sales. Figure 9 shows the Leander ISD organizational chart for central office administrators as it exists now.

Figure 9. Leander ISD Central Office Organizational Chart.
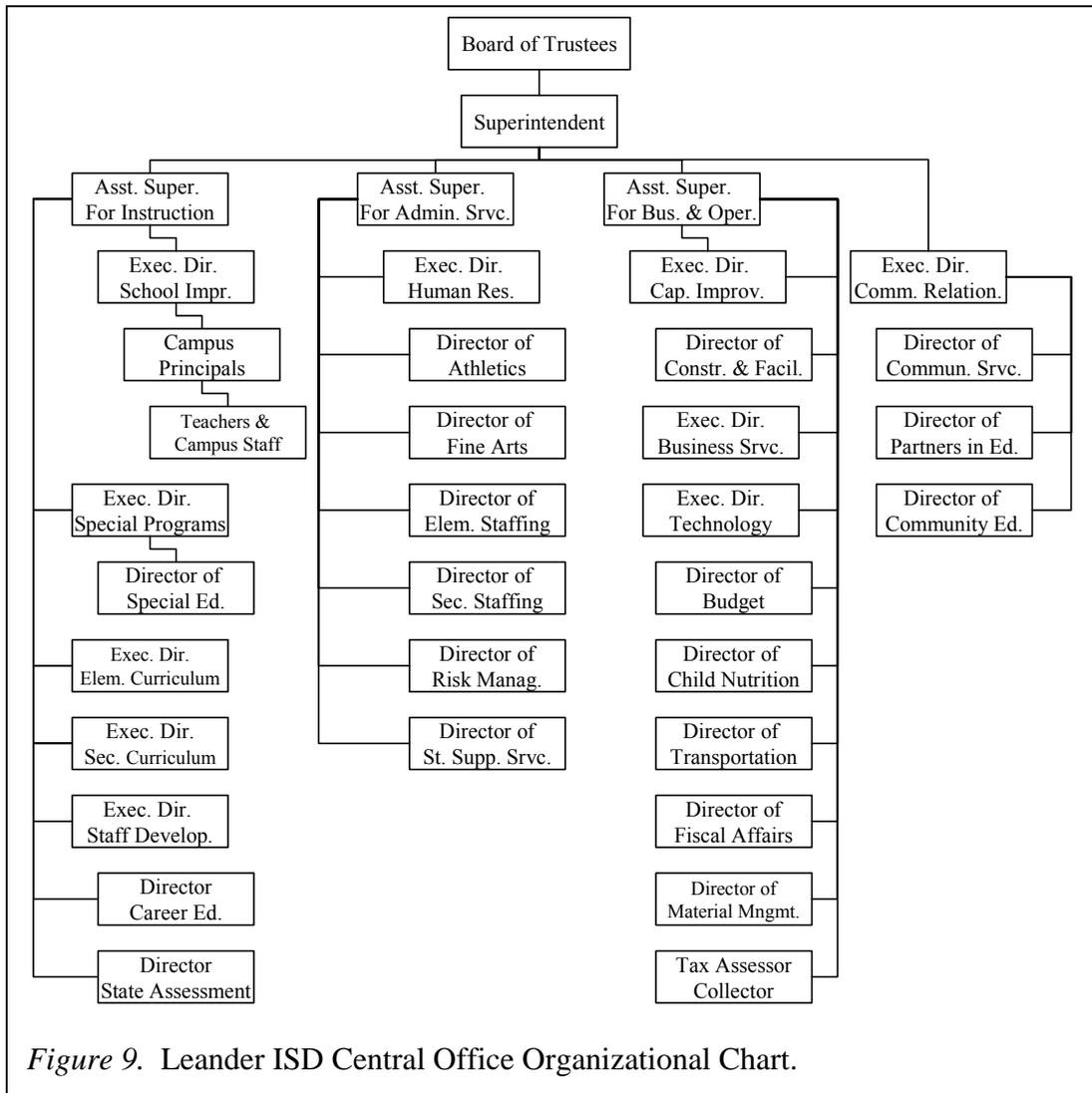
While the district has attempted to retain the "small district feel," apparently the effort has not been completely successful. One high school principal said, "Central office really has not done a great job of reorganizing in light of the growth -- like allocating resources, personnel, and the idea of creating a vision and the support to go with it" (INT: HSP: 96-98). The assistant superintendent for instructional services noted that this might

be a problem when she stated, "I'm still operating from a mentality of being small" (INT: ASIS: 165-166).

Administrator Meetings

One practice the district has maintained throughout this high-growth time has been a weekly meeting of administrators in the district. The meeting takes place every Tuesday morning, and involves all principals, directors, and assistant superintendents. The superintendent facilitates the meetings. Administrators who attend the meeting note that the meeting is important to help build relationships with other administrators in the district. One elementary principal said:

> The weekly administrative meetings with central office, with the campus
>
> principals and campus folks build that relationship…It's all the interaction we
>
> have as teams that make you feel part of the team, so you don't feel it's being
>
> done to you, but with you (INT: PR-FG: 64-67).

The assistant superintendent for business and operations noted that attending the administrators' meeting helps with her job: "My involvement with going to the principals' meetings…[is] very, very beneficial. I've always thought I can't support customers if I don't know what their job is" (INT: ASBO: 6-8).

The district is trying to continue with the meeting, but growth has affected it, as well. Seven years ago, approximately 24 people attended the meeting; now, more than 50 do (DOC 23 and 24). The director of secondary curriculum noted that in the past at administrators' meeting, "Things were more personal…Now there's too many people to be that personal. We used to know everyone really well that came to the admin meetings

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and now I don't really know [that many]" (INT: CO-FG: 142-144). The superintendent
has noticed this change, as well:

>We talk about making sure that we have our administrative meetings as often as
>possible; if possible, weekly. But even those meetings have become so large that
>the interaction is more group speak than individual interaction between higher-
>level administration and principals, going both ways (INT: SUP: 59-62).

The assistant superintendent for instructional services shared this same opinion:

>Ten years ago we were small enough that coming to consensus, making decisions,
>developing shared vision was much easier because you could have the small
>dialogues that were with all the key stakeholders from the superintendent to all
>the principals that was necessary to make those decisions and make sure that we
>understood the purpose behind them. It's just much more "sit-and-get" now
>(INT: ASIS 18-22; 30).

In order to try and keep discussions occurring, the district has moved to smaller
meetings before or after the larger meetings. According to the assistant superintendent
for instructional services, this has resulted in better communication:

>Having the pre-meeting so we could get the group smaller and they could focus
>there on instruction because there were too many people to have useful dialogues.
>And then beyond that, looking at breaking those down further, we realized that
>even with elementary schools, probably when we started we had about 13, that we
>said that's getting too large and starting to break them into pods. I know there's
>probably research, and I remember it from years ago, it was something like five to

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eight people is the most that you can really have a dialogue, a discussion with.

That after that you start breaking off into side groups or it's much easier for

someone to be disengaged, so trying to find ways that we can create those . . .

keep the same conversations going, but it's much more difficult as you get larger

(INT: ASIS: 32-42).

That stated, however, this attempt to ensure strong communication results in some

administrators feeling frustrated. For example, one middle school principal stated:

My Tuesdays are shot: I'm now in meetings all day long. I've got my meeting

with [the director of secondary curriculum] at 8:30, admin after that, a lunch

meeting with tech, and then a vertical meeting after that. Think about it: 20% of

my week is spent at admin in meetings. When am I supposed to do something?

(INT: MSPF: 5-8).

Another elementary principal put it more succinctly: "We're 'meetinged' out" (INT:

ELP: 204).

Campus Leadership Effects

Having to attend multiple meetings is not the only way growth has affected

campus principals, however. Principals noted that central office communications, trust

and supervision have been affected by the growth, as well. One principal stated that with

the growth, communications with central office are sometimes poor: "Since we've been

growing there have been some changes, there are a lot of pockets of poor communication.

More good communication but lots of pockets of people not knowing what's going on"

(INT: PR-FG: 477-479). Central office employees described this alteration in

communication as well. When discussing changes in district practices, one central office administrator who is a former principal, said:

> [In the past] it was very easy to pick up the phone and talk to a principal or an
> assistant principal or a department head or somebody like that and work things
> out and be able to have a dialogue because I knew who they were, they knew who
> I was and we had a trust there that if I called over to transportation and needed
> something they knew I wasn't making some frivolous request and if they said no
> they couldn't do it, I knew it was because they had examined everything and they
> couldn't. Now…you don't have those relationships. You get a phone message
> from somebody, you don't even know who they are and you find out they're an
> assistant principal! (INT: CO-FG: 146-153).

Another growth-affected area is in the way in which principals are supervised. In a focus group, one principal noted:

> It has everything to do with the ratio of principals to support staff. I think.
> Before…[the supervisor of principals was] able to focus on the individual in
> assisting and helping, whereas now, there are several principals that fall under that
> same umbrella. When you make the umbrella so large. . . you lose . . . and this is
> going to make that standardization sound like a bad word, but in order for that
> person to survive who is now serving 10, 12, 14 people versus two or three
> people, they have to focus more on the process or system in which they serve and
> not so much on an individual. So it gives the campus leadership that feel that it's

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not all about me, but I'm not receiving that personalized support or systems or help. It's more of a system support (INT: PR-FG: 794-802).

Interestingly, while communication and supervision were concerns, not all principals see a negative change in trust from central office, however. In a focus group with principals, the following exchange occurred:

Principal A: I would say [the trusting relationship between campuses and central office] has definitely been more positive. The reason why is probably again because of the longevity. I feel like we've had personal relationships with people and there was a time when our superintendent knew every teacher's name, not so much anymore, but there's still that relationship that was formed back then.

Facilitator: Okay, so more positive because of stability in relationships.

Principal A: Right, and the human aspect.

Principal B: And I've got to be almost 180 degree different. I've got to say less positive because the fragmented growth at the top…I did have a relationship…I can use an example . . . I had a relationship with the person that's in business and operations originally but now that person can no longer serve me in that same capacity. There's other people in place now that serve me who I have no relationship with so I have no trust with that person; I don't know that person. That person's going to come and audit me and they don't know me from Adam so I'm just being totally honest with you, that trust factor is less, so moving from the way it used to be to now, and that part of it, less trust.

Principal C: And I would have said neutral. Because some of the factors that we're dealing with just are. I mean, the change is going to happen, the growth is going to happen and to me, that ebb and flow of building trust, losing trust, deciding on trust is not separable from the growth. I mean to me it's intertwined with that the growth piece is going to happen and with that comes that give and take and learning together whether it's positive or negative (INT: PR-FG: 827-850).

The question of trust between central office and campuses was the one area that there was this much widespread disagreement. One possible reason for this disparity could be the longevity shown by people in leadership roles throughout the district, which is another unique aspect of this case.

Leadership Longevity

According to the Texas Association of School Boards and the Texas Association of School Administrators (2006), the years of a superintendent's tenure in an average school district in Texas is 4.2 years.   In Leander ISD, the superintendent began his tenure in 1987, meaning he has been superintendent in the district for 20 years. Figures 10 and 11 note the length of time people in other key positions have been in their positions.

LISD Central Office Tenure

Years of Service

Figure 10. Leander ISD Central Office Tenure.
Source: LISD Employee Data Summary.

LISD Principal Tenure

Years of Service

Figure 11. Leander ISD Principal Tenure
Source: LISD Employee Data Summary.
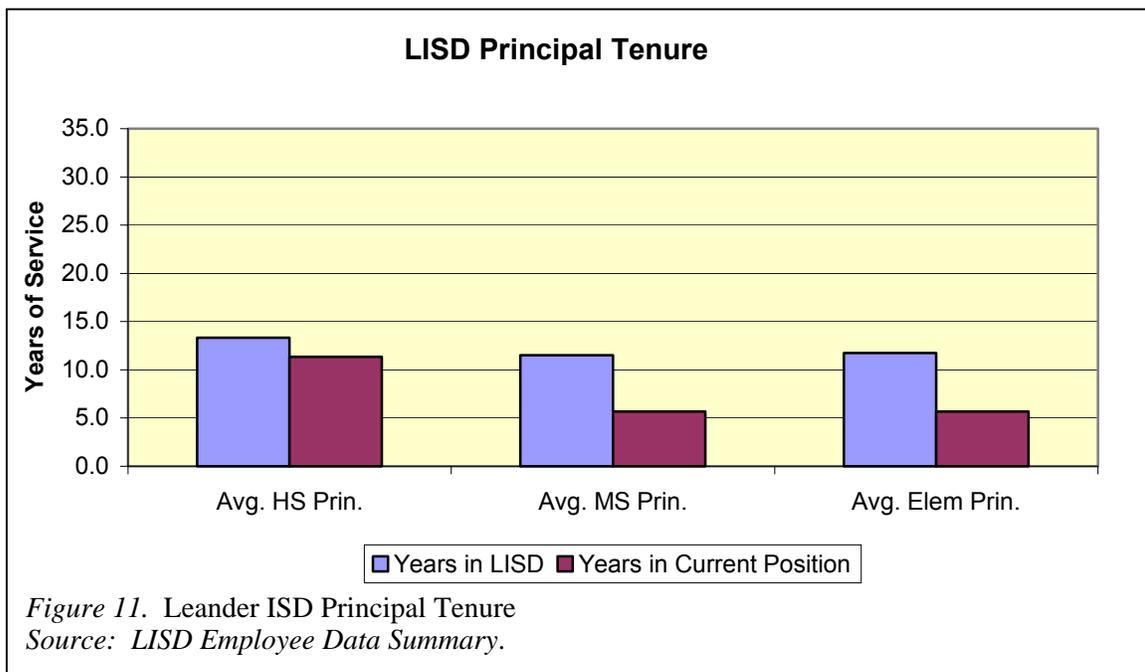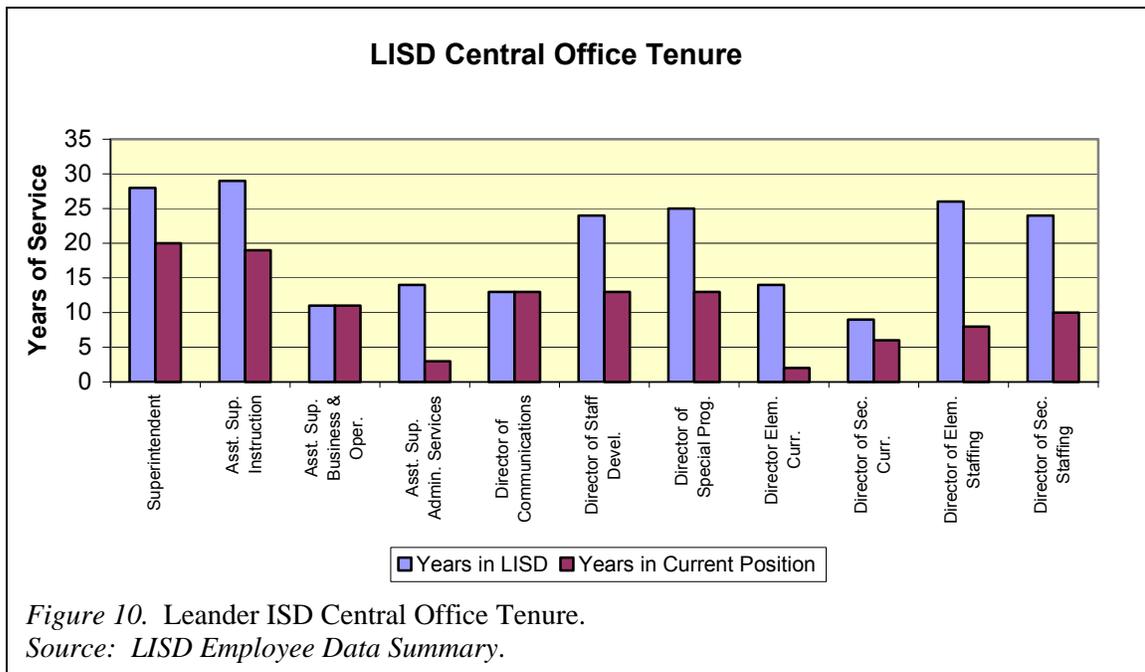
Additionally, a number of school board members have been in place longer than average.

According to a 2002 study (Hess), the average length of tenure for a board member is 6.7

years.

Figure 12. Leander ISD Board Member Tenure with National Average.
Source: LISD Board of Trustees Data Summary.
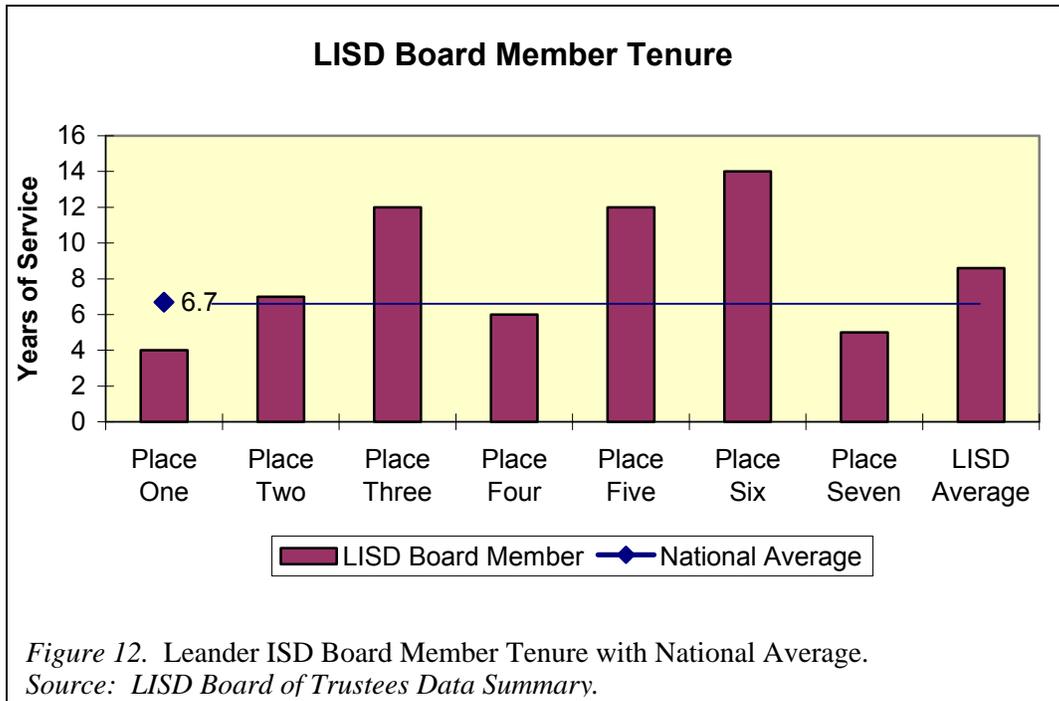
The administrators interviewed generally consider the longevity of all of these

individuals as a favorable factor in central office. They spoke of central office being

well- rounded, and that trust was enhanced due to the relationships that were established.

Also, they felt the institutional knowledge of a long-tenured administrator was positive;

campus principals particularly saw this. A middle school principal stated, "I started

thinking about how many people have been in this district for so many years and have

been in different capacities, so it's more well-rounded in central office. It's not just that

business focus. There have been principals and secretaries and teachers" (INT: PR-FG:

30-33). An elementary principal echoed this: "Longevity is a huge factor. You have a

lot of institutional knowledge and institutional understanding with longevity" (INT: PR-

FG: 92-93).

Administrators who have worked in the district a number of years clearly feel a heightened sense of trust with the district. One administrator described the phenomenon of "growing up" with the school district:

> I feel like I've kind of grown up or out or whatever, with the district because I've been in some kind of an administrative role since 1990, really, in some way or another. But it was little. And I think that probably my relationship with a lot of the people at central office is somewhat different because of that; because I've known them for so long so the trust is very high (INT: PR-FG: 727-731).

While longevity is an important descriptor of the district, it is of equal importance that the district is preparing to go through some major transitions. The superintendent has announced his retirement at the end of 2007, and two of the board members with the longest tenure have chosen not to run in this election cycle. This means that the board will have two new members at the same time for the first time in over ten years, and a new superintendent will lead the district for the first time in 20 years. Perhaps not surprisingly, these upcoming changes concern both central office employees and campus principals. One elementary principal stated:

> In talking to people in other districts where the superintendent may change every two years, and they don't think they have a foothold to any stability. They feel like they're just being shuffled through, and whatever their whim is to try, then they feel like there's not ever this stability or a foundation for them to feel comfortable. That's just a huge factor, and, frankly, it scares me with the changes we have coming up (INT: PR-FG: 116-120).

A high school principal mirrored this sentiment:

> If you look back, it is an evolution because a lot of the same people, the
> institutional knowledge those things have contributed a lot to that, where other
> districts are more or less, I feel like, starting over more frequently because of
> changing administrations …they're doing a lot more of starting over and teachers
> say, "Well, they won't be there, so it'll be changing anyway." You don't have
> that deepened pattern of following trends, that I believe we have because of the
> longevity of leadership. It's not always starting over. You may be changing
> things, but the central theme is consistent. I wonder what it's going to be like
> here in a couple of years (INT: PR-FG: 102-109).

The long tenure of administrators and rapid student growth, then, are two factors that set
Leander ISD apart.

DISTRICT ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Just as the district as a whole has unique qualities, the central office
organizational culture has attributes that distinguish it, as well. Since the purpose of this
study is to determine what impact high-stakes testing has had on LISD's central office
organizational culture, and how any changes have affected district-wide people and
practices, it is first necessary to describe the current central office organizational culture
in Leander ISD. Using interviews with administrators in the district, as well as
documents discovered through the process, seven traits of the district's central office
organizational culture were found: recognition of the importance of organizational
culture, commitment to continuous improvement, belief in involving stakeholders,

awareness of a changing community, being principle/principal-driven, attempt to be

informal, and dedication to data.

Recognition of the importance of organizational culture

   Leander ISD administrators believe their organizational culture is unique. In the

fall of 2000, the superintendent issued four challenges to the school district, shown here

in figure 13.

Leander ISD's Four Challenges

We in Leander ISD will:

  1. Eliminate the link between economic disadvantage and low achievement, while improving overall student performance.

  2. Ensure that all students read at or above grade level.

  3. Increase the percentage of students enrolling in and successfully completing our most challenging courses.

  4. Accomplish the above while maintaining our culture of respect, trust, continuous improvement, and learning.

Figure 13. Leander ISD's Four Challenges.

With the fourth challenge, the superintendent clearly stated that the organizational culture

of Leander ISD is treasured and unique, and in the face of the unparalleled growth,

needed to be maintained. In fact, at an administrators' retreat in 2002, the district leaders

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attempted to define the organizational culture of Leander ISD, terming it "The Leander

Way". It is shown here in Figure 14.

Figure 14: The Leander Way.
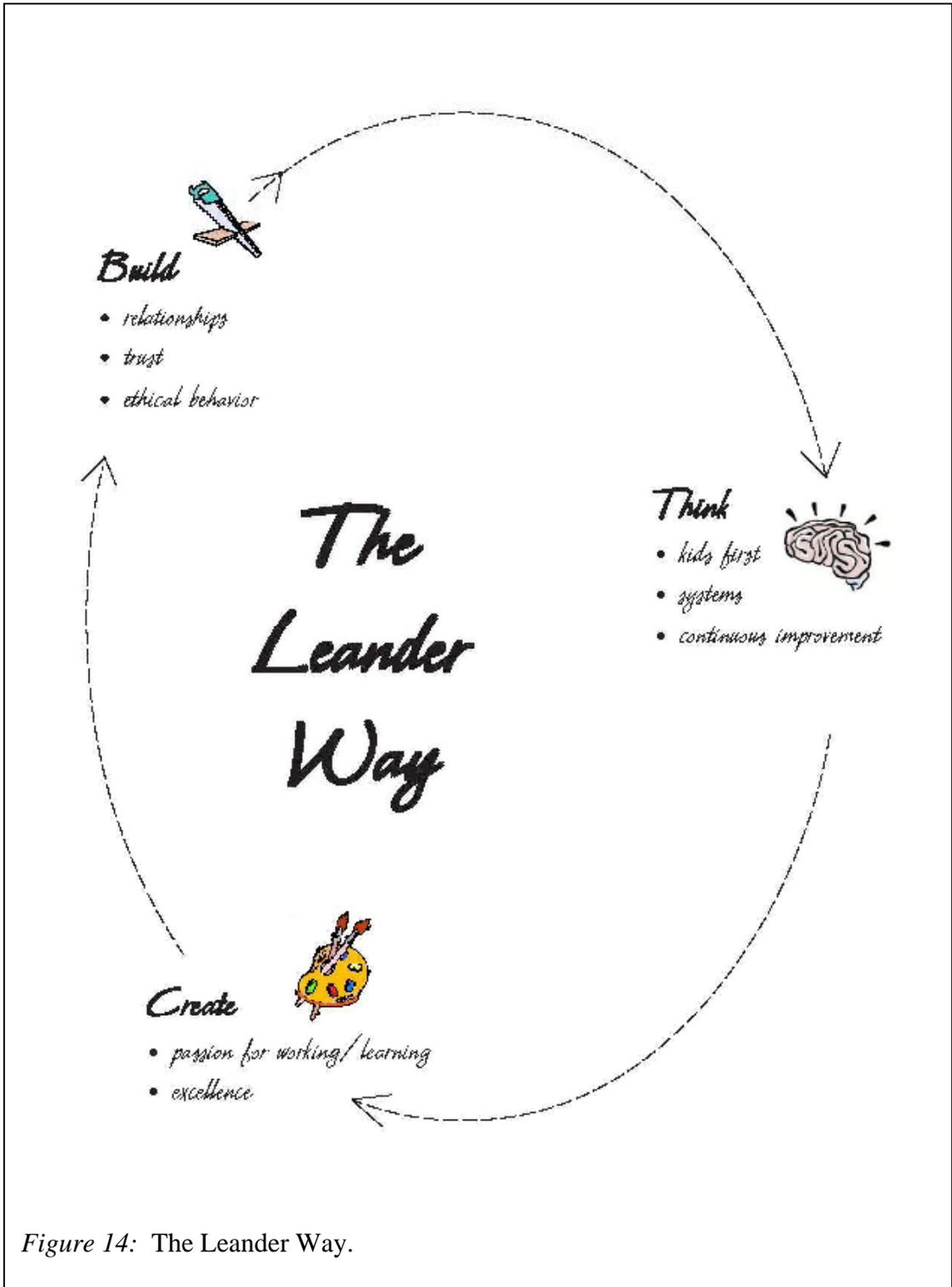
These attempts to focus on and define the organizational culture are not lost on

district administrators. One principal stated that it was "wise" of the district to openly

challenge everyone to maintain the organizational culture:

> We address culture within our four challenges. It's a very powerful statement. At
>
> the time it meant nothing. I was brand new in the administration business, [and]
>
> that fourth challenge seemed stupid to me. Now, I look at that and it's so huge.
>
> But when I was new to the district, I didn't understand how huge that was (INT:
>
> PR-FG: 925-929).

The superintendent stated that the organizational culture of the district is so important to

him that he takes two full days to lead training in the organizational culture with all new

teachers every summer.

Commitment to continuous improvement

In addition to purposefully defining and communicating culture, Leander ISD

administrators say they are committed to continuous improvement (CI). According to the

superintendent, this commitment to CI, or Total Quality Management (TQM), came

about roughly 15 years ago: "Basically, [the assistant superintendent for instructional

services] saw a television program and said, 'We have to look into this.' Later, we

discovered that the man she saw was David Langford" (INT: SUP: 201-203). David

Langford is a TQM consultant, and to this day the district uses his training, most recently

sending 50 administrators to a four-day training in January, and another 50 in June.

Langford is a disciple of TQM guru W. Edwards Deming, whose theory of profound

knowledge includes, among other components, focusing on systems instead of people,

maintaining constancy of purpose, improving constantly, and driving out fear (Deming, 1986).

All of these tenets were heard from various interviewed administrators. A high school principal said, "We work in an environment where we are told, we are trained, to blame systems, not people, so that allows trust to flourish in that environment" (INT: PR-FG: 485-487). Regarding constancy of purpose, the director of staff development noted how important it was to be explicit about the purpose behind decisions: "I know that I need something rather than us just giving stuff out without attaching the real meaning and purpose and why" (INT: CO-FG: 270-271). When describing the organizational culture of the district, a high school principal stated, "…The philosophy of continuous improvement has been a constant" (INT: HSPR: 50). Finally, the assistant superintendent of instructional services even used Deming's name when describing fear that is associated with high-stakes testing:

> So I think it's definitely…it's shifted our conversations and it's made us aware that fear and anxiety creeps into the culture and you have to work very purposefully to drive it out again. Deming talks about driving out fear and I used to wonder why he didn't say build trust and I realize the wisdom of it now is that you can build trust all you want to, but it really is actively that you're fighting that fear that will creep into any system. And the high stakes testing just magnifies that (INT: ASIS: 249-254).

Clearly, much of the vocabulary of the district comes from Deming's work.

"Systems thinking" is another term from Deming that the district uses. LISD attempts to view the district as a system, that is, as a part of a larger community. In so doing, the district has even attempted to graphically illustrate its place in the larger system by creating the document, Leander ISD Viewed as a System, shown here in Figure 15. According to the superintendent, the employees who attend administrator meetings created this document in 2003.

Oct. 2003

The Learning Community
(students – staff – parents – community –
businesses – Board)

Why Are We Here?

LISD
Viewed as a System

Every student is encouraged, supported and challenged to achieve the highest levels of knowledge, skills and character.

Process Improvement Cycles

Strategic Initiatives: Four Challenges

Drivers of Improvement
Review of vision/purpose
Feedback from suppliers
Measures of the system
Best practices/research
Professional growth
Post-graduate research
System analysis
Analysis of management practices
Board initiatives
Process improvement recommendations
Benchmarking
Data analysis
Curriculum revisions

Elementaries → Middle Schools → High Schools

Alternative Learning Campuses

Transitions

Assess students on LISD standards → Analyze Data → Campus/District: to identify processes for improvement | Students: to set learning goals | Classroom: to set priorities to drive instruction

Demonstrate and document student learning

Develop learning plan to meet the needs of each child

Collaborative Data-driven Learning Cycles

Students as partners in learning.

Modify the learning plan to meet the needs of each child

Engage in quality interactions for learning based on best practices

Analyze on-going measures of student performance to monitor progress and guide learning

Parents
Guardians
Daycares
Church schools
Private schools
State schools
Home schools
Other public schools

Partnering | Parent Orientation | Student Orientation

Transitions

Achieve Graduate Profile

Earn Diploma and Passport

Colleges
Tech. schools
Business schools
Employment
Military
Self-employed
Home-makers
Sheltered Workshops

Administrative Services | Instructional Services | Business & Operations | School/ Community Relations

Build
• relationships
• trust
• ethical behavior

Think
• kids first
• systems
• continuous improvement

The Leander Way

Create
• passion for working/learning
• excellence

LISD's Ten Ethical Principles

• Honesty   • Integrity   • Promise-keeping   • Loyalty   • Concern for Others   • Accountability
• Law-abidance/Civic Duty   • Respect for Others   • Fairness   • Pursuit of Excellence

Figure 15. Leander ISD as a System.

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In this document, the reader can see that the district is but one piece within the larger learning community. The Ten Ethical Principles and the Leander Way under gird the entire system, with support departments assisting each other in elevating the system. Inputs, including parents, daycares, home schools, and other public schools are seen entering the system, with colleges, technical schools, and the military, among others, are seen as the output of the system. When someone is within the system, a continuous feedback loop is seen being used, including drivers of improvement, process improvement cycles, and collaborative, data-driven learning cycles. While the Leander ISD system is the focal point of the document, it is clear that the district was attempting to capture where it fit within the larger community, which includes involving stakeholders in decision-making.

Belief in involving stakeholders

Another of Deming's beliefs is to involve all stakeholders in improvement (Deming, 1986). Part of LISD's organizational culture is to maximize stakeholder input when making decisions. The three clearest examples of this belief are administrator meetings, attendance zoning committees, and improvement teams.

As discussed earlier, administrator meetings are significant events for LISD, not only for conveying information, but also for building relationships.
In fact, when discussing the organizational culture of central office, administrator meetings came up with every person or group interviewed. It is clear that even though the district is struggling with finding the best way to have the meetings, they are important to their culture.

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Another area where the district is trying to find the best solution is with school attendance zoning. Since the district typically opens two new campuses every year, it is critical that student attendance zones be carefully monitored. Instead of administrators simply drawing the attendance boundary lines, however, the district enlists the help of all interested stakeholders (see Appendix for example). According to the assistant superintendent for business and operations, the district has had up to 200 parents enlist in helping to draw boundaries to recommend to the school board: "Other districts of our size typically just draw logical boundaries and have public forums to discuss the proposal. In this district, we actually involve the community in drawing the boundaries from the get-go." She continued, "It can get cumbersome, but in the end, the education the parents get about the district, about systems, about complexity, are worth it" (INT: ASBO: 179-185). One elementary principal noted the difficulties associated with the current attendance zoning practice:

> What I was thinking about is what's been in the news lately, and what y'all have had to do with the opening of those two new schools and the attendance zones…We've always involved people, the stakeholders, the community, and it's gotten so big that it's hard to control…(INT: PR-FG: 185-188).

This commitment to stakeholder involvement can also be seen in improvement teams the district assembles. Improvement teams are groups of relevant stakeholders who work collaboratively to improve systems or processes, using the LISD System Improvement Framework, as seen in Figure 16, as a guide.

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LISD System Improvement Framework

Figure 16. Leander ISD System Improvement Framework.
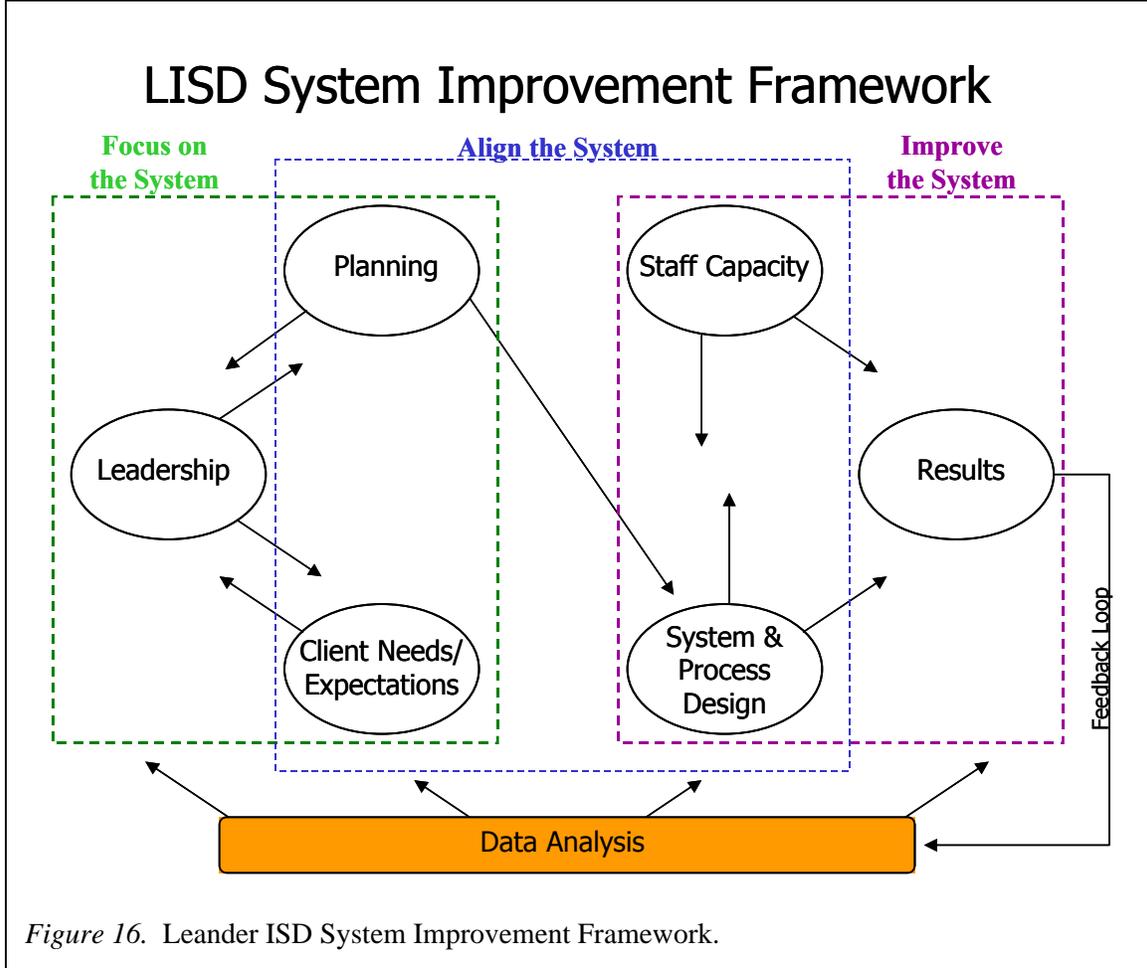
This document is used by district improvement teams to ensure that the teams focus on building staff capacity, system and process design, results, and data analysis. Membership in the teams initially is determined by each team's sponsor, with additional input from team members at the first meeting. It is another attempt by LISD to use systems thinking, and is based on the Baldridge National Quality Program (2007). According to the director of staff development, as of May 2007, there were improvement teams studying the new employee orientation system, the student discipline system in

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transportation, the system the district uses to track and monitor employee leave, the process by which the district teaches science, and the textbook distribution system. A district-trained Process Improvement Facilitator (PIF) leads each of these improvement teams. PIF training includes studying Deming's system of Profound Knowledge, as well as Continuous Improvement Tools, which are group facilitation techniques written and assembled by David Langford (Langford, 2005). In order to have a PIF assigned to an improvement effort, a sponsor must submit a form to the director of staff development, indicating the time frame and the stakeholders involved in the improvement effort. The superintendent stated, "Improvement teams really help us to study the system and make solid improvements, instead of simply tinkering with the system and keeping our fingers crossed" (INT: SUP: 205-208).

Changing Community Expectations

While the district believes in involving stakeholders, it is also aware of a change in the community in which it operates. While many school districts in the state are facing a change in demographics, Leander's change is resulting in higher expectations from parents and community members. The director of special programs described the change this way:

> …Being a school system, we've always had outside influences. That's just the nature of it. But the demands of the outside influences have become broader based. They're coming from many other places. They're coming at us from almost every direction and some of them have gone from outside influences to outside demands and so it's becoming increasingly more difficult…[because] we

also have all of these other things pushing us and so you kind of sometimes get

off on doing something that you're really not sure that it's for the benefit of the

system as much as it's for the benefit of this one entity (INT: CO-FG: 84-92).

The superintendent has also noticed this shift:

I think communities – parents, neighborhoods – tend to rely on global ratings and

rankings in order to make decisions about particular campuses or programs, more

so than they did in the past. And I don't know that that's necessarily a function of

growth, although it may be. I think it's more a function of the publicity given and

that has grown over the last fifteen, ten, seven years. The news coverage it's

given, the hype it's given by realtors and people who are responsible for selling

homes. The weight it's given by individual parents in looking at, or viewing, or

making a judgment about their own schools, or a school that they're thinking

about attending. I see it as much more important to people now than it used to be

(INT: SUP: 75-83).

According to the superintendent, this shift has caused the district to lose some

perspective on high-stakes testing:

I don't think any school district has kept that in perspective. I don't think in our

present educational culture that we're allowed to keep that in perspective. I think

we've probably done better than most, but I think it's all about the test…And I

think it's sad that an educational institution has been forced into a situation where

they have to behave and act and react like a for-profit business, because our

product is not the same as a for-profit business, either in service or in widgets or

in whatever we're producing. The education is so heavily influenced by corporate…and our profit sheet is our AEIS report. It's the TAKS results (INT: SUP: 179-191).

The district has felt the push of community members expecting Exemplary status for schools in their neighborhood, resulting in a greater amount of pressure to do well on the state high-stakes tests. This is similar to Olivarez's (1994) observation that an "accountability system must strike a balance between the expectations of an increasing number of citizens concerned with their tax dollars who want immediate solutions and the actual conditions at the community and school levels" (p. 48.). One middle school principal described it as "branding" schools: "…the community expectations become like a brand name, and so our need to be more aware of what the public is thinking about high-stakes testing in and of itself has taken a lot more resources than it did back then" (INT: MSPF: 20-22). A high school principal characterized the increased pressure this way:

> Our clientele is changing. The stakeholders, the students, the parents that are moving in have an overall belief or desire to set that standard very, very high, so therefore I see our organizational culture changing a bit and trying to meet those standards and that creates some tension there. It creates a discomfort that kind of ripples through the entire district, and we try to be mindful. We try to be purposeful and try to maintain that culture of caring about people and working with people, but we also feel the pressures of getting there now, reaching that goal now (INT: PR-FG: 139-145).

In striving to reach its goals, the district tries to do so by being principle- and principal-driven.

Being principle- and principal-driven

A strong belief in ethics was another constant in the current organizational culture of Leander ISD. When describing how the district conducts business, the superintendent said, "It is friendly. It is ethical. And to some degree driven to do the best that they possibly can for this community and for the children in the community" (INT: SUP: 35-37). The district has gone so far as to define Ten Ethical Principles (Figure 17) by which all district employees and students should live.

Leander ISD's 10 Ethical Principles

❖ Honesty — telling the truth

❖ Integrity — doing the right thing

❖ Promise-keeping — doing what you say you are going to do

❖ Loyalty — supporting someone or something

❖ Concern for Others — caring for and helping others

❖ Law-abidance/Civic Duty — obeying rules and laws/making the world a better
place

❖ Respect for Others — being polite and kind to everyone and everything

❖ Fairness — treating everyone equally

❖ Pursuit of Excellence — doing everything the best you can; looking for ways to
improve

❖ Accountability — admitting to what you do wrong, and taking pride in what you do
right

Figure 17. Leander ISD's Ten Ethical Principles

These were written approximately 15 years ago by a team that consisted of students,

employees, parents, and community members. The superintendent has been adamant that

the district not follow a rote program to teach ethics: "The last thing I wanted was for a

boxed program to be introduced. We need those [Ethical Principles] to be part of

everything we do, not just five minutes over the announcements every morning" (INT:

SUP: 216-219). And the Ethical Principles seem to be embedded in the culture, even

down to the classroom level. The assistant superintendent for instructional services told

this story:

> I was just in a sixth grade social studies classroom where the teacher was leading
>
> a unit on chivalrous deeds, and she asked the students, "Does this seem familiar?
>
> Does it remind you of anything?" And the whole class, hands went up and said,
>
> "The Ten Ethical Principles." That's pretty phenomenal that it's managed to
>
> permeate the whole organization (INT: ASIS: 380-384).

In addition to focusing on principles, the central office culture also focuses on the

needs of campus principals. As the assistant superintendent for business and operations

noted:

> One change here is that largely we work for the principals. In my other places, I
>
> always saw it as supporting the principals, but this is a very principle-driven –
>
> both "le" and "al" – and so it's just a little bit different relationship than when I
>
> was elsewhere (INT: ASBO: 174-176).

Numerous times in interviewing central office personnel, the subject of focusing on

principal training, principal selection, and principal concerns was evident. And while not

every principal interviewed stated that he or she felt the district was principal-driven, one

high school principal noted:

> I really feel supported, and if I needed support of a program, I could turn to
>
> anyone. That is true for money, for staffing, or for other kinds of support. I really

think that central office people trust my judgment. This crosses through from the

cafeteria to transportation (INT: HSP: 68-71).

Informality

One way the district tries to show support in its culture is in attempting to be as

informal as possible. DuFour (2003) argues that central office must be aware of when to

be loose and when to be tight: "The strategy proven most effective, however, is one that

establishes a clear priority and discernible parameters and then provides each school and

department with the autonomy to chart its own course for achieving the objectives" (p.

15). The district struggles to ensure that it is tight on some things, such as establishing

the Four Challenges, and loose on others, such as trying to remain informal. In other

words, they attempt to be what Sergiovanni (2006) calls "culturally tight and structurally

loose" (p. 72). The assistant superintendent for instructional services described it as

follows:

Lately we've been talking about the whole idea of loose and tight and I think . . .

because the superintendent's leadership style is definitely loose and because of

that, I think it creates one of those basic assumptions you were talking about, that,

"You guys get together and you figure it out," kind of thing. It's certainly

informal (INT: ASIS: 80-84).

Part of remaining loose apparently entails not establishing rules. In the same interview,

the assistant superintendent stated:

…You certainly better not establish edicts out there, that we're not here to

establish rules. We're not a rule-driven district in general. As much as possible.

[We're] still relying upon the culture, I think, to have those things happen (INT:

ASIS: 93; 95).

Another way the district has attempted to remain informal is by allowing principals easy

access to the superintendent and other top administrators, something the district calls a

horizontal organizational structure. Having a horizontal organizational structure also

encompasses involving multiple stakeholders in decision-making.

However, due to the growth, district leaders have seen a shift in the informality of

the culture, even though they have attempted to minimize the change. The assistant

superintendent for instructional services expressed the attempt to maintain the

organizational culture this way: "And as we've grown larger, because we are committed

to trying to maintain what we call that family feel, that small district feel, we've had to

come up with ways to create smaller learning communities…"(INT: ASIS: 22-24).

However, the attempt has not always been successful. The superintendent described his

perceptions of the change:

[Over the past seven years] I think [the organizational culture] has become

vertical. I don't like that. I think we've had to cause it to become more vertical.

It's probably not as hierarchical or vertical as many organizations of this size and

complexity, but it has had to become more bureaucratic to a degree than it was

seven years ago, simply because of the size and breadth of it (INT: SUP: 40-43).

The director of special programs also has seen a change in the culture, and distinguished

her perception of the past organizational culture and now:

One of the other changes that I've felt in the last couple of years has gone from a real collaboration, family feeling to a we/them, campus/central office. I used to not feel that and now I hear it, I feel it. There is a real difference. It's, "They tell us we have to do these things. If you want us to do this you need to do. . ." as opposed to the collaboration, the conversations we used to have, the thing of "If you need it, I'll get it to you. What can I do?" that type of thing." (INT: CO-FG: 282-287).

Dedication to data

One area that has not seen a shift in the organizational culture, however, is a dedication to data. The director of secondary curriculum depicted this dedication: "I think we've come to accept and embrace data-driven. In other words you don't walk into a meeting and want people to change without backing it up with data. That's the expectation" (INT: CO-FG: 48-50). Data is used all the way down to the student level. One elementary principal described data use on her campus:

All those things are best practices for instruction. They should take any child forward – student goals, student data notebooks, kids knowing more about their learning and data, allowing the teacher and the student to focus on learning…(INT: ELP: 242-244).

The school board looks at data when making decisions about new programs or personnel. For example, the director of staff development described how the board funded additional science lead teachers:

I think that's where the leadership within instructional services and other places

began to be more and more evident and more and more important and more and

more impactful on the whole system and then we began to be able to go to the

board and say we need two more, four more [lead science teachers] here and here

and [the answer] was, "Yes," because the value had been more than

demonstrated. The data had been there (INT: CO-FG: 276-280).

Principals take individual student data and monitor progress in what is called a

"data room" on campuses. The assistant superintendent for instructional services said,

"There are data rooms all over this district" (INT: ASIS: 409-410). Data rooms, which

will be discussed later in this chapter, are rooms set aside for campuses to break student

achievement data down to the smallest component in order to track the academic progress

of each student. Figure 18 shows data rooms at two Leander ISD campuses.
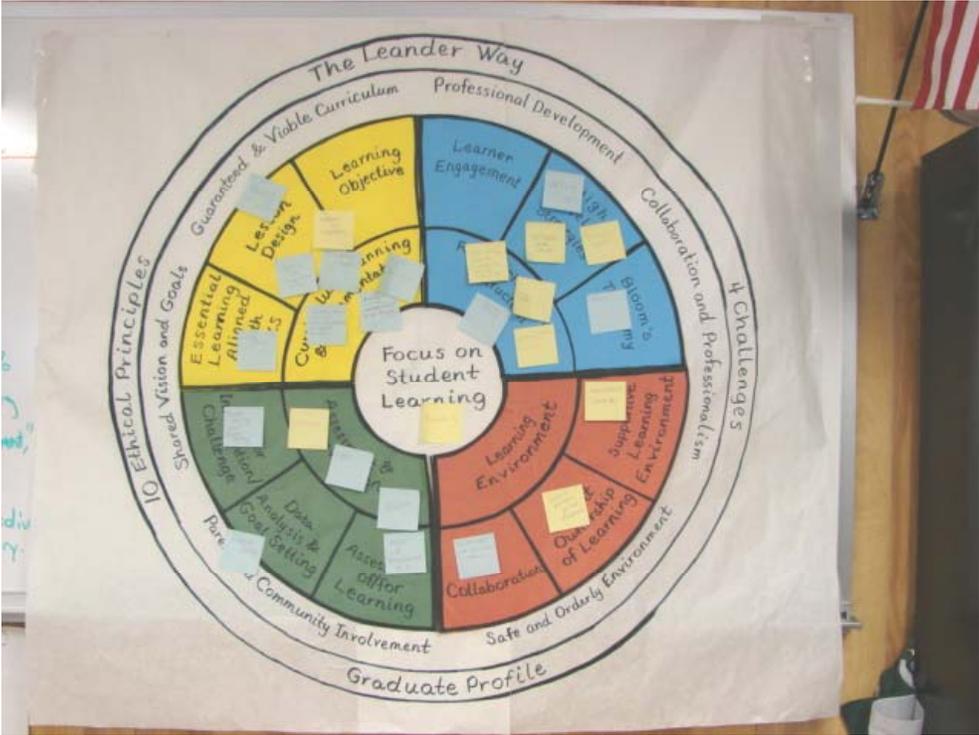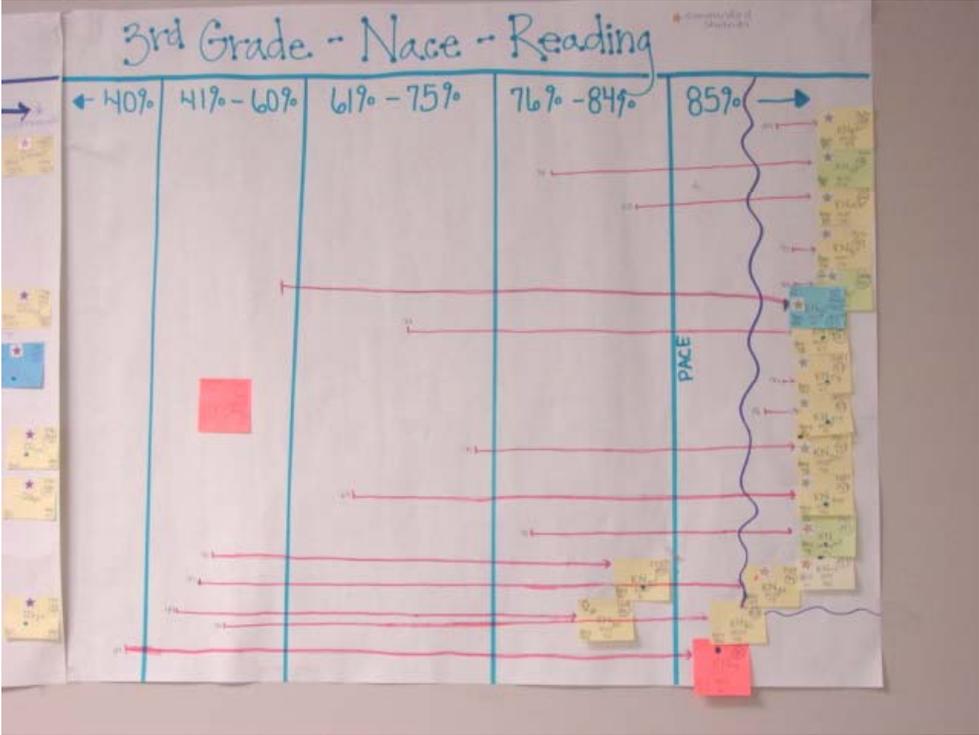
Figure 18. Two Data Rooms in Leander ISD.

And knowing campuses' student assessment information is an expectation for central office administrators. The director of secondary curriculum related, "There's an expectation for knowing the data of each campus" (INT: CO-FG: 839). A high school principal succinctly noted, "We're a data-driven decision-making district" (INT: PR-FG: 487-488). An unfortunate side note to the amount of data that the district generates is data overload. One elementary principal made this phenomenon clear: "…part of the deal is that in our district, we have access to so much data. We're data rich and information poor" (INT: PR-FG: 675-676).

It is apparent from the foregoing discussion, then, that the central office organizational culture is affected by innumerable factors, and is rarely stagnant. The purpose of this research, however, is to try and discern what impact high-stakes testing has had on central office organizational culture of the district, and the changes that have occurred to district staff and to district practice due to the changes.

Research Question One

What changes in central office organizational culture have occurred due to the increased implementation of and pressure from high-stakes testing?

With the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, high-stakes testing has permeated the educational world. In Leander ISD, as in schools across the country, high-stakes testing has become a way of doing business. The assistant superintendent for instructional services described it this way:

What's right for kids has to include high performance on those tests. I think that

it is sad in many ways, and yet, if I had to say has more good or bad come out of

high-stakes testing, I think more good has come out of it than bad, definitely, but I

think we have reached the breaking point, that I don't think it's the school system

that America's going to need to really continue to be prosperous and a leader

(INT: ASIS: 427-422).

In Leander Independent School district, high-stakes testing has changed the central office

organizational culture in four distinct ways. It has instilled fear, invoked frustration,

inhibited freedom, and improved focus.

INSTILLED FEAR

High-stakes testing has instilled a sense of fear in the Leander ISD central office

organizational culture. Fear takes various forms in the culture, but can be seen

particularly in response to the consequences of performing poorly on high-stakes testing.

The director of special programs worried:

When they first came out and said that by the year 2013 – 2014, 100% of students

in all student groups will pass the test or else, and then there's five stages of "or-

elses" and they're all bad. You get down to the last one, and it's bad. You look at

that and you say, '100% of the students in all groups will pass a single assessment

or else…' It's the 'or-elses' and the consequences that are damaging (INT: CO-

FG: 723-727).

District and campus administrators point to two critical events that occurred in the district

that heightened the sense of fear regarding high-stakes testing. At the yearly

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administrator's summer retreat in 2000, the superintendent quoted President John F. Kennedy's 1962 speech regarding reaching the moon:

> We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone and one we intend to win (DOC 1).

The superintendent followed the quote with a challenge: all campuses in Leander ISD would achieve Exemplary or Recognized status within five years. In discussing the objectives, a great deal of fear was expressed, and more than one principal cried. While this direction was eventually abandoned until 2007, it resulted in the establishment of the Four Challenges. But its impact resonates to this day. In fact, administrators call that year's administrator retreat, "the one with tears" (INT: CO-FG: 420).

The second critical event occurred one year later. At the opening convocation for all district staff (including teachers, administrators, and support staff) in the fall of 2001, the superintendent's opening speech included this story:

> Right now I want you travel to the future with me and imagine that it is about two years from now…the spring of 2003. The first group of little eight- and nine-year-olds have been placed in the position of having their future determined by their performance on one state test…We've put into action everything we know to support these children and the results are now in.

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I want you to close your eyes and imagine this scene: Pretend that you are

walking into a third grade classroom in our district. The teacher announces to the

class that 100% of the students have met that challenge. The students are

celebrating, congratulating each other, and dancing a jig…You walk into another

third grade celebration where the teacher has just announced that 96% of the

students have passed…You watch the smiles as the students jump up and down

with relief…And then, in the midst of that class celebration, you see sitting

quietly way in the back of the room the **one**…child in LISD who did not master

the third grade TAAS…the only child who will be retained.

You walk a little closer and you see this quiet eight-year-old boy sitting by

himself—a little boy who has tried his best ever since kindergarten…He's not a

troublemaker…In fact, he's even a pretty good reader. But it's never been easy

for him. Sometimes schools aren't built for young boys who think they will

explode if they can't run and jump and shout from time to time…

You walk closer and you see that one little boy, his head slightly bent, his

eyes lowered. You see him biting his lip, struggling to hold back the tears, as the

whole world seems to be celebrating around him. As you get closer, you put your

hand on his shoulder and he looks up at you and you see his worried, tear-filled

eyes…and you find your eyes beginning to tear up a little too because you see,

that young boy is your son…or your grandson, or your nephew…or maybe it's

not a third grader…maybe it's the one student who won't graduate from high

school…or the one student who can't get into the college she as dreamed of…after all, it's only one child…

I intend to stay dissatisfied until that last boy or that last girl is successful. I am convinced that we **can** meet our challenges and keep our culture alive, using the tools we've learned to help us improve, never forgetting the power of systems thinking and a caring, enthusiastic community of learners.

I do think we've made some phenomenal progress, but I think you'll agree with me that we're not there yet, so as we're beginning this new school year, I'm asking each of us to recommit to addressing those four challenges…I'm asking you to stay dissatisfied…Now let's go get busy and improve something (DOC 2).

One principal who heard the speech remembered it this way: "There was a silence in the room as every teacher and every principal thought about how awful it would be if that kid was my kid. It motivated you, but it scared you a little, too" (INT: MSPF: 92-94)

"Tears and shock"

Reaction to both acts can be heard today. For example, in questioning the equity of the challenge for the north and south sides of the district, the director of school improvement said:

That's part of the tears we had a while back. What happens if I'm the only campus that doesn't get that?. . .Am I doing my job? Did I do a poor job; someone else did a good job? And, is that really fair? Is that goal really fair? You're at [the south end] of the district, I'm at the [north end], and you've set a goal that's

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much harder for me to make than it is for you to make. Is that fair? (INT: CO-

FG: 420-424).

Fear of not meeting the challenges was also discussed by the director of staff

development: "I go back to the retreat where [the superintendent] put out his four

challenges and the tears that came from principals and . . .the shock of 'Oh my gosh.

What am I supposed to do if that's supposed to happen'?" (INT: CO-FG: 267-269). This

fear seems to have increased in the 2006 – 2007 school year, when the superintendent

issued a set of expectations at the summer administrator retreat, as seen in Figure 19.

Expectations

Expectation One: In 2009 every campus is Exemplary or Recognized with a continual

increase in commended students.

Expectation Two: Focus on Student Learning Model:

    Assessment and Intervention: In 2009 LISD students and staff consistently

analyze data, use assessment FOR learning to set and monitor goals, and provide

intervention and challenge.

    Learning Environment: In 2009 LISD students and staff work collaboratively to

ensure student ownership of learning.

Figure 19. Leander ISD Expectations.

"Creeping fear"

According to the administrators interviewed, there has been a significant change in the central office organizational culture due to people's fear of not performing well on high-stakes tests, particularly since it was now expected that each campus should be Recognized or Exemplary. The director of school improvement described the change in the organizational culture as a "big shift" and wondered how much trust the fear would cost:

> What's it going to do to this trust level now that we've decided that our main goal is everybody has to be Recognized on a high stakes test? It seems to me that's a big shift from where we used to be, that we've never [before] come out and said, "Guess what? You're going to be Recognized by this period of time." And what does that do to the trust level on the campuses of those that are going to have a real hard time being Recognized versus those that are Recognized no problem? (INT: CO-FG: 407-412).

According to the assistant superintendent for instructional services, these fears led to additional tightening of the central office organizational culture, particularly in the curricular areas. This tightening then caused more fear to be felt:

> I think there's fear among campuses because of our culture that is very tight in lots of respects . . . I get from principals apologies, you know, they're really very saddened that they have disappointed the culture and that almost hurts more than somebody who is afraid. So I think it's definitely, it's shifted our conversations

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and it's made us aware that fear and anxiety creeps into the culture and you have

to work very purposefully to drive it out again (INT: ASIS: 246-251).

And in a school district that tries to closely adhere to Deming's philosophy of

Profound Knowledge, fear is seen as particularly detrimental. One of Deming's main

tenets is, "Drive out fear" and build trust (Deming, 1986, p. 59). The assistant

superintendent for instructional services explicitly noted this:

> Deming talks about driving out fear and I used to wonder why he didn't say build
>
> trust and I realize the wisdom of it now is that you can build trust all you want to
>
> but it really is actively that you're fighting that fear that will creep into any
>
> system and the high stakes testing just magnifies that. It just creates a form for
>
> that fear and in anything you do, borrowing from performance arts, if you're
>
> tense, you can't perform at your best…It concerns me that if that fear gets so high
>
> I think I might be concerned about the decisions [campuses are] making for kids
>
> because we know that if the stakes are high enough, people are going to do what's
>
> necessary to meet those expectations and those aren't always things that are good
>
> for kids. So it's definitely a creeping fear that we have to deal with and campuses
>
> have to deal with and I think as much as we have not been an authoritarian
>
> district, I think [campuses] have fear when they see those test scores getting
>
> low…(INT: ASIS: 251-265).

In addition to fear of failure on the exam, there is fear of the publicity of not

reaching certain outcomes. For example, principals and district officials are afraid of the

publicity surrounding an investigation by the Texas Education Agency. The director of

school improvement expressed that fear this way: "And that came from, on the news, 'The following campuses in the following districts are still being investigated' and there was a thing of wrongdoing, whether there was any wrongdoing or not. 'The following still remain on that list.' Oh gosh. Don't get on that list" (INT: CO-FG: 831-834).

Campus principals are also afraid of what label will be assigned to their campuses due to high-stakes testing. Although the state assigns one of four ratings – Unacceptable, Acceptable, Recognized, and Exemplary – only one designation, Unacceptable, comes with state intervention. However, campuses are afraid of the publicity and community response should they not achieve a higher rating. The director of special programs put it succinctly, "Acceptable is a dirty name" (INT: CO-FG: 403). This feeling was mirrored by a middle school principal:

> Well, I worry about being, at the very minimum, [Acceptable]. Hopefully Recognized and better than that, but when you think that you have a sub group, whatever the ranking and rating is, that your school is held up in newspapers and on TV that you didn't make the grade, then your community questions whether or not you're doing well … I'm a little scared about that (INT: MSPR: 127-134).

This fear of community and media attention due to the state-assigned rating is not an empty fear in the district. In the spring of 2006, a principal was reassigned for a variety of concerns. However, it was noted in the media that parents were satisfied with the principal because the school was designated Exemplary by the state (Brown, 2006). The director of school improvement was alluding to those events when he said:

We just went through hearing some members of the community saying – no,

judging – whether a principal's good or not based on their rating. Strictly based

on that. "This is a good principal…Those not on that level are bad principals…"

It's in the paper; it's on the radio. It's discussed. All that's based on a rating

from a high-stakes test (INT: CO-FG: 682-685).

"Bottom of people's shoes" and "We goes to me"

One elementary school principal interviewed likened the fear of doing poorly on

high-stakes testing as being put on the "bottom of people's shoes":

Now, that said, do I need to take [high-stakes testing] seriously? Yes, I do. Do I

have a pit in the bottom of my stomach that scores are not going to be what they

need to be and I'm going to get looked at and maybe questioned and I'm going to

end up on the bottom of people's shoes . . . [My secretary] puts people on the

bottom of her shoe when she's mad at them . . . so I [do] worry about [it]… (INT:

ELPR: 175-179).

Being put on the "bottom of people's shoes" extends to a fear of being reassigned

or fired due to not performing well on high-stakes testing. The director of special

programs addressed these concerns: "We've had to trust a whole lot that if somebody

says you're going to reach Recognized and you don't, what's the consequence? Do you

trust not to lose your job? What is going to happen to you? What are the consequences?"

(INT: CO-FG: 431-433). And while it seemed unlikely that a district that prides itself on

stakeholder engagement and being principle- and principal-driven would ever consider

removing a principal due to high-stakes testing scores, such a discussion did occur in the

summer of 2006. The assistant superintendent for instructional services expressed

surprise that Leander was even contemplating such an action:

> You know, we talked about a neighboring district that we did not want to emulate
>
> because of their growth patterns and what happened because of the relationships.
>
> That was one where they said you will be Recognized or Exemplary or I'll find
>
> somebody who can. We have a facilitator whose husband was a principal in [that
>
> district] and was fired because one of the subgroups and the campus ended up
>
> being unacceptable. I remember us all thinking, "Oh, that's awful, how terrible
>
> ..." And not too many years later, we're in the same place. I'm not particularly
>
> proud of that at all. It's taken the choice out of our hands, I think (INT: ASIS:
>
> 305-312).

The possible threat of unemployment is not lost on campus principals, either.

One middle school principal illustrated her concerns when she described central office

trust in relation to high-stakes testing:

> I think that it's a natural consequence of high-stakes, that some trust process is
>
> lost. Because we're all in this together, we're all in this together, we're backing
>
> each other, we're supporting each other, how can we help, what can we do…Oh
>
> no, you didn't do well! I hope you are okay, but you didn't [do well]…And the
>
> "we" goes to "me" in high stakes (INT: PR-FG: 532-536).

In fact, principals have even apologized for their campus results to the assistant

superintendent for instructional services:

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The number of times that I have conversations with principals that I've known for a while, who say, "I'm so sorry about all those red x's." [Red x's are used by Just for the Kids to designate a campus that scores 30 percentage points below similar schools on the number of students achieving commended on the TAKS test.] I mean, you don't have to apologize to me. I know you're working as hard as you can. All of a sudden we have this external standard that's been placed out there (INT: ASIS: 428-431).

But principals still play the "what-if" game when thinking about the repercussions of their campuses performing poorly. One high school principal stated it this way:

More fear starts to seep in because you're starting to think, okay, well what if…? Before I felt secure in who I was as a campus administrator and you start to play the "what-if" game…Well, what if I don't meet that expectation? What's going to happen to me?…Before [high-stakes testing], I felt secure and trustworthy. . . (INT: PR-FG: 522-526).

"Time away from instruction"

Finally, there seems to be a great deal of energy trying not to be fearful about the results of the high-stakes testing. One elementary principal described an attempt to show a proper amount of concern without it becoming fear: "I try not to let it just consume me. There are times when I do walk out with knots in my stomach, but that's not going to help… I do sometimes want to run over there and go, 'Oh my gosh!' but I can't" (INT: ELPR: 220-224; 246-247). The assistant superintendent for instructional services demonstrated the same attempt:

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I don't think I feel that as much as some of the other people. I just work very hard

not to because I don't think it's productive. We do everything we can and to get

upset over things, you did the best you could, all you can do is go forward…I'm

working so hard in my own head to keep that from happening, that doesn't mean

that it is keeping it from happening…I guess it does cause you to have to spend

time away from instruction, making sure that everybody's okay emotionally. The

fact that you even have to have those discussions takes time away from

discussions about instruction (INT: ASIS: 242-244; 426-428; 431-432).

INVOKED FRUSTRATION

In addition to instilling fear, high-stakes testing has changed central office

organizational culture by invoking frustration with high-stakes testing and the practices

that surround it. There is a feeling of frustration regarding support, lack of attention to

the whole child, and a sense of feeling overwhelmed.

Support – Will rising tides raise all ships?

Administrators in LISD stated that the district seemed to have a good idea of what

practices were effective for instructing students, but they were frustrated by a lack of

standardization of those practices. One high school principal portrayed this frustration

this way: "[It] seems that we need a deliberate, intentional approach. Build in ongoing

ways to have essential units of study, and common assessments. Standardize some

things. We have identified areas of success in classrooms, and we have talked about

making them standard. Why not?" (INT: HSPR: 101-104). As someone who is not

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closely tied to the instructional function of the district, the assistant superintendent for business and operations wondered something similar:

> In relation to trust, I guess my trust in the system isn't what it used to be. Because we're talking about things now like guaranteed and viable curriculum, but we had [curriculum consultant] Dennis Doyle come in a few years ago and work with us on world-class curriculum standards. We had the Fenwick English [curriculum] audit. We know what we need to be doing, and I think I've been rather surprised lately to hear how much of it's not in place. It concerns me as we're growing and with high-stakes testing…are we wasting precious time…? (INT: ASBO: 91-100).

These sentiments were echoed by another high school principal, who was particularly frustrated by the reactive feel he received from the district's central office:

> The thing that popped into my head about the testing part of it, I felt like, for a while in this district, we were being proactive by the way we were focusing on instructional strategies and best practices. We were improving across the district, or a campus, moving in the right direction. When we became reactive, when the pressures of high-stakes testing, and the expectations of the society in which we serve caused us to set the bar even higher. Since the bar was set high because of the pressures, it caused us to move from a proactive stance to a reactive stance. Whereas for a while we thought that rising tides would raise all ships, now we get into a reactive mode, where our focus is looking more towards what type of systems of remediation are we going to put in place so that we can get these

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subgroups to this level, so we can get this particular label for our campus or whatever. It's caused us to be more reactive instead of proactive (INT: PR-FG: 220-230).

Lack of focus on whole child

Another area of frustration from Leander ISD administrators came from a shift away from practices that are good for the whole child. Instead, administrators believe there is more of a focus on practices that are good for a narrowed few or for one particular skill set. This can be seen as frustration regarding the narrowing of the curriculum to exclude topics not covered on standardized tests. The superintendent noted this when he expounded on current programs that targeted students who did not do well on high-stakes tests:

> [We have to consider] programs and spending time on programs that might take away from students' performance on the tests: Things such as electives courses, theatre arts, music, physical education. Things that probably are in the best interest of the student over the course of their lifetime, yet we have to evaluate whether we can spend the time on those things, in terms of taking away from how well that student might do on a high-stakes test. Spending money on pulling students away from their regular education to tutor them specifically for high-stakes testing (INT: SUP: 119-126).

Also, there is frustration in not being able to follow some tenets of the philosophy that has guided the district for a number of years. Some administrators believe that

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pressures from high-stakes testing have led the district to practices that are outside the

belief system of the school district. The director for school improvement put it this way:

> There's this big struggle within me and then I see over the years this whole
>
> question of what do I truly believe is truth so I can sit into a discussion about
>
> Deming's fourteen points and go, I believe that's true but then I can give you a
>
> thousand examples of how we're not doing that. How I'm not doing that. So
>
> there's this huge struggle between how much would I say that I have to have
>
> high-stakes testing in order for students to learn. When I boil it all the way down,
>
> do I have to have that in order for students to learn? (INT: CO-FG: 983-989).

Being overwhelmed – "I cannot do one more thing."

Finally, Leander ISD administrators stated that the pressures from high-stakes

testing and the practices surrounding it have led to feelings of being overwhelmed. One

middle school principal stated:

> I think the level of stress or feeling overwhelmed, and we talked about this with
>
> one more layer of stuff, has . . . is greater this year than it was last year or the year
>
> before or the year before because you do have these deadlines…There's a
>
> question about why do we have to do all of these things. And the feeling of I
>
> cannot do one more thing. … So, I don't know if the level of trust has diminished,
>
> I think the feeling of, I am overworked, underappreciated, underpaid, I'm not
>
> treated as a professional [has increased] (INT: MSPR: 302-304; 76-81).

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The technology director for the district concurred: "I'm not sure distracted is the word I'm looking for here, [but we feel] overwhelmed…by the volume and velocity of change …in state expectations" (INT: CO-FG: 61-63).

INHIBITED FREEDOM

The third change in central office organizational culture due to high-stakes testing is the feeling of constraint the state and federal accountability requirements have brought to district administrators. This constraint has led district employees to feel their freedom has been inhibited, particularly in regard to required goals set by agencies outside the local school district, and requirements regarding English Language Learners.

Forces Goals – "Sins of the few"

A number of LISD administrators mentioned that the ability to set goals was removed from them by the federal and state requirements for accountability. One middle school principal distinguished her role before high-stakes testing and now:

> The instructional leadership portion from the principal has expanded. Before, it was more nuts and bolts kinds of things, making sure that the teachers were following more or less the curriculum, preparing kids for the state tests, just keeping the building functioning, parents happy, teachers happy, everything just rockin' and rollin'. The way it looks now is that there are predetermined goals, and they don't start necessarily with the district, they start at the federal level. And it's, what I tell teachers frequently, is because of the sins of the few, the

many are under tighter guidelines. The days of closing your door and it becoming

Mrs. So and So's university are gone (INT: MSPR: 8-16).

The assistant superintendent for instructional services concurred that the determination of

what is and is not a quality school is now outside the school's control: "There's no doubt

that it's a result of the political culture outside the school. It's pushed on the district and

the Just for Kids data saying that you better pay attention to the test, because if not, no

one's going to consider that what you're doing is any good" (INT: ASIS: 297-300).

Another area tied to high-stakes testing in which administrators feel constricted

relates to English Language Learner (ELL) students. The director of special programs

outlined her frustrations:

Everything we're supposed to be doing right now is research based. The whole

premise of testing ELL students is, I think kind of false. I think there's very

positive things that came out of high-stakes testing. For one thing, the

expectations are changing. I mean, look at what we're expecting out of special ed

students now, and they're performing. And that's huge. We've got some real

positive things with increased expectations. You increase the expectations of the

students, you put the supports in, and you're seeing it. It's tremendously exciting.

I've looked at the ELL students, and it's the same thing. Higher expectations, and

that's wonderful, but we have a lot of research that says how long it takes for a

student to learn the academic language. It's a lot longer period of time than we're

giving students. You come in and at the secondary level, you've got a very brief

period of time that you're allowed to come in and learn the language, just

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conversationally. And then you're expected to learn that academic language. It's a disconnect between what is researched and known and what's actually put into practice. Therefore, that's one reason we're feeling the impact. We're expecting students to do something that research says that the majority of the students are not going to be able to do. And we're still pushing and pushing. It's that double-edged sword – the positive is we're raising expectations, but the negative is that it takes some time to do that (INT: CO-FG: 653-669).

IMPROVED FOCUS

The final area of change wrought by high-stakes testing in Leander ISD's central office organizational culture is an improved focus on student learning and achievement. Interestingly, even with the concerns listed above, district administrators see the benefits high-stakes testing has brought to the district. The director of special programs, for example, addressed this:

There's that getting exactly the right amount of attention. Creative tension. I don't think anybody in this district would say, "Let's ditch testing. I just don't think we need to test kids anymore." Because we learn from it, the students learn from it, we design instruction around it, we look at staff development needs because of it, we use it. It's been so beneficial to be able to see and to gauge what's going on. I don't think anyone would say, "We wouldn't want to do this" (INT: CO-FG: 700-703).

In fact, high-stakes testing has led to an increased sense of urgency for improving student achievement at tested grade levels, moving from loose challenges to well-defined

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expectations, and becoming passionate about educational research. The director of staff development put it this way:

> The testing in general, if you look at the level of instruction and the depth of
> learning that has been driven by these state tests from TABS to now, it's an
> incredible leap. What's happening in the classroom, it's really taken the level and
> raised the bar very much higher. Look at what TABS – I'm almost embarrassed
> about what it tested. And even as it grew, it grew gradually, and that's brought
> the whole state up in what we expect students to learn and teachers to teach and
> how they need to do it (INT: CO-FG: 687-693).

As one high school principal succinctly stated, "[Because of high-stakes testing,] there is more a focus on the purpose [of instruction], and a desire for classrooms to be successful" (INT: HSPR: 91).

Increased Sense of Urgency at Tested Grades

After interviewing numerous administrators in Leander ISD, there is little doubt that there is a sense of urgency for students in Student Success Initiative [SSI] grade levels (currently third grade and fifth grade, soon to be eighth grade, as well) to succeed on the state test. Systems are in place to maximize students' success. One elementary principal made this clear: "As different grade levels hit those different tested pieces, that's where the focus has gone" (INT: PR-FG: 261-262). Another elementary principal noted this sentiment, as well:

> First year [of SSI], third grade took the hit. That's the only one that has the
> requirement – state law says, "No pass, no pass." Third grade teachers across the

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district got a letter [of support from the superintendent] because of the stress, recognizing the stress level. I saw veteran teachers throw out good practices because they were scared to death because of the stakes of that test. So they went more for short term, I can guarantee this, versus what they had been doing successfully. It was fear-driven. That pressure in the SSI years, I think we also see a backlash at fourth grade. Across the state we see the drop in fourth grade scores, where kids who made commended in third grade aren't achieving the same level at fourth grade, but then they pull it back up in fifth grade [which is a high-stakes test] (INT: PR-FG: 236-246).

And once they hit fifth grade, the district principal mentor noted, the "scramble" starts again: "And then you're back at the same scramble at fifth grade. 'Oh my goodness, they're starting so below in fifth grade!' That's because we're not supporting them, we're not giving them the same kind of safety net" (INT: CO-FG: 574-576).

Challenges to Expectations

While high-stakes testing has led to a sense of urgency for tested grade levels, there has been increased pressure on campus and district administrators due to the added pressures brought on by the superintendent's recent expectations (Figure 19). According to the superintendent, the expectations are considered supplements to the district's Four Challenges. The first expectation in particular is more direct than the Challenges, in that it states that all campuses should be Recognized or Exemplary by the year 2009. The assistant superintendent for instructional services made clear that the expectations were not put in place to be glamorous:

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I think the expectations are a good example of the "oh-my-gosh" high-stakes

testing. I think that when [the superintendent] and I talk, and I help write those

things, it was the realization that we better lay this out or we're going to be setting

up principals and campuses to take a lot of heat. It's a fact of life we can no

longer ignore. That definitely would not be something that I would consider awe-

inspiring, it's just a fact of life…And I've been surprised. Certainly principals

have taken that seriously, in some ways it's like, "OK, you've given us

permission to say that the TAKS test is important. We don't have to pretend that

it's not anymore" (INT: ASIS: 288-296).

In other words, the superintendent and assistant superintendent for instructional services

believed that laying out the expectations would bring a sense of relief to principals on

some level. And, in fact, that has occurred, at least to one middle school principal:

To me [the expectations are] easier to get your hands around. The challenges are

very theoretical although they sound very concrete. All kids will be able to read

on grade level. I mean, to be against that you'd have to be against mom and apple

pie. They should. Okay. How do I do it? How do I make that happen? We've

got a number of programs that we're doing that teachers are assessing reading

levels and they're doing a good job with that. But I think those things are really

very broad…I don't think they should say, oh, well, we've given up on four

challenges. No. But they're all part of that. It's a capsule (INT: MSPR: 256-

268).

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One reason administrators in central office feel comfortable with the current expectations is that there is a belief that the TAKS test is a well-researched, well-structured exam. The assistant superintendent for instructional services noted:

The good thing about the recent round of testings is that the tests themselves have become better. I think teachers are more willing to give time for kids to do well on that because the test itself – while it's higher expectations – it's worth spending time on…Texas is fortunate in being in that position, that we did look at testing early enough to develop some good tests, so it is worth spending time having kids be able to meet the standard on those items (INT: ASIS 356-362).

Passion for Research

According to several central office administrators, high-stakes testing has caused the district to become insistent on good research. In fact, the director of secondary curriculum went so far as to describe principals being "passionate" about research:

Principals are very passionate about educational research now. I mean, I hear it all the time and sometimes I think I'm in a dream world because I never used to hear that. They are very passionate about what the research says about good instruction and assessment and curriculum and then they want to help us do all of our things, which is good, which is good. I'm not complaining, but it's different, it's a different world than you used to live in. I hear them quoting research in lots of different meetings, and that's very exciting (INT: CO-FG: 359-365).

One area of educational research that all administrators seem passionate about is the Leander Learning Model.

The Leander Learning Model is a model of student instruction and support that the district assembled over three years. As shown in Figure 20, the model is based primarily on the work of three researchers, Marzano, Stiggins, and DuFour, and is an integral part of Leander ISD today.
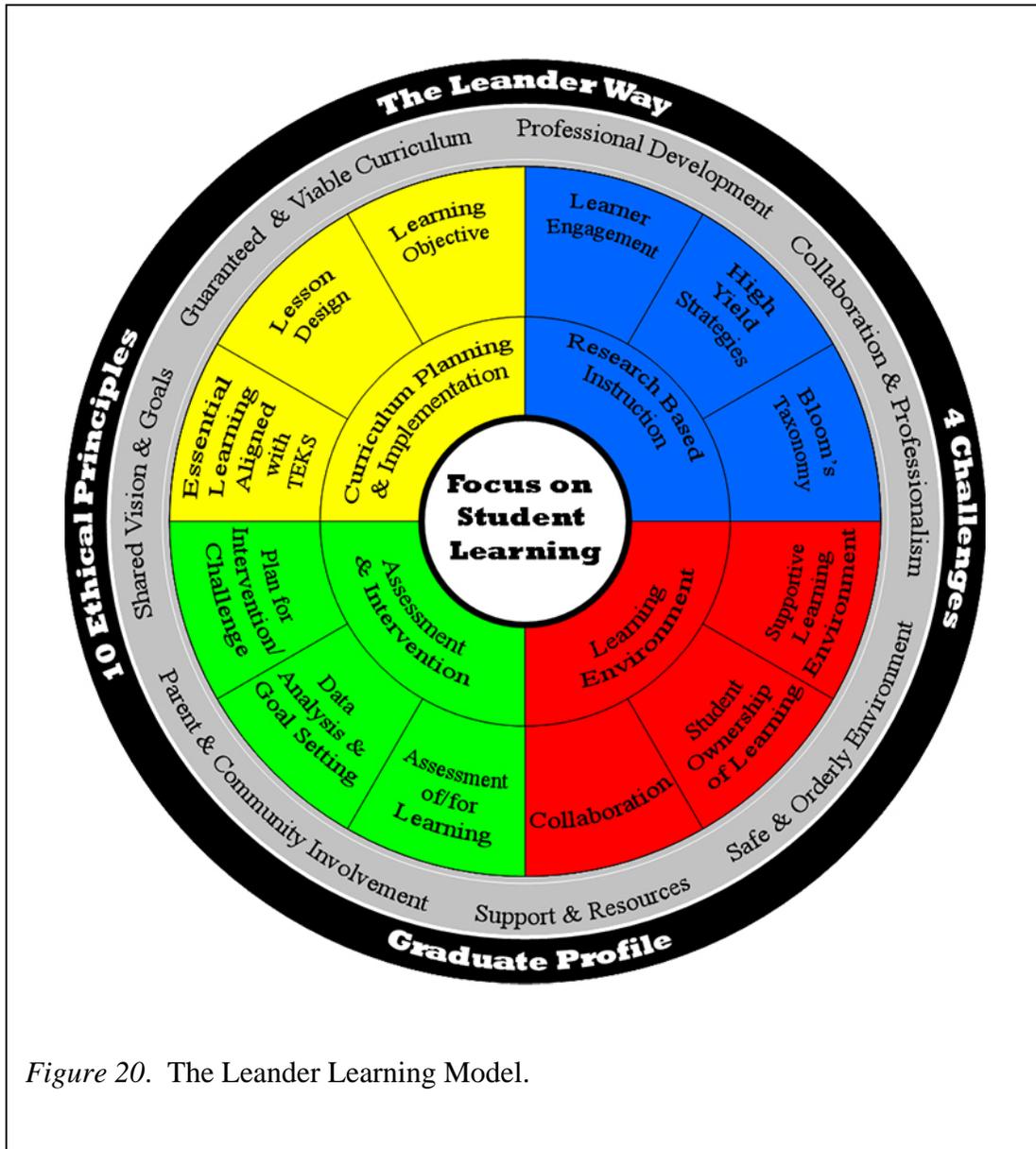
Figure 20. The Leander Learning Model.

The model stands as a research-based synopsis of what district administrators and teachers believe is encompassed in good instruction. One middle school principal stated:

> I like the Learning Model, not only because I worked on it, but I think the learning model is much clearer in terms of what I can do. I can have an intervention program. I can do common assessments. I can develop a social contract, I can have a certain learning environment and I can determine whether kids are responsible for their own learning (INT: MSPR: 252-256).

The Model has led to an expectation of quality instruction, which in turn has led to improved goal-setting, the director of secondary curriculum attested:

> I have to say there's an expectation for learning, learning current research. There's truly an expectation of people in curriculum to know current research. There's an expectation for knowing the data of each campus. And there's an expectation of setting goals that are focused on student achievement. Used to we could set goals on, "Hey, I'm going to get better at Power Point." Now the expectation is focused and we set goals that are focused on student achievement (INT: CO-FG: 837-842).

In considering the first research question, then, high-stakes testing has had some significant effects on the central office organizational culture of Leander ISD. Specifically, high-stakes testing has instilled fear, invoked frustration, inhibited freedom, and improved focus.

Research Question Two

How have reported changes in central office organizational culture affected campus leaders and district-level administrators?

Just as high-stakes testing has changed central office organizational culture, the shifts in the culture have led to alterations in campus leaders and district-level administrators. In this research, central office administrators and campus principals were purposefully interviewed separately, in order to differentiate the effects cultural changes have had on each group. Both groups will be discussed, starting with changes seen in principals.

EFFECTS ON PRINCIPALS

Principals in Leander ISD have been affected by changes in central office organizational culture in ways that parallel the effects high-stakes testing has had on central office organizational culture. That is, the changes in central office organizational culture have instilled internal and external fear, invoked frustration, inhibited freedom, and improved principals' focus on instructional leadership.

Effects on Principals: Instilled Fear

The first change noted in campus principals due to changes in central office organizational culture was the instilling of fear. In the principal focus group, one principal expressed a generalized fear of central office personnel:

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I think if you look at it from the point where whenever I was a brand new

administrator a few years back, you would have this interest from central office

all the time and they would come in, sit down, and discuss with you how things

were going and you really felt that personal support and relationship and the trust

was there. Now, when somebody walks on your campus, honestly, you look up

and say, "What happened?" (INT: PR-FG: 861-866).

This fear from principals could be internal or external. Internal fear took the form of

fearing for their jobs, fearing failure on high-stakes testing, and fearing disappointing

central office. External fears largely took the form of fearing repercussions from the

larger community outside of the school district, should their campuses not perform to the

high community expectations.

Internal Fears – "Pit in the bottom of my stomach"

Principals expressed general fear about high-stakes testing and their student

results. One elementary principal stated:

Do I need to take [high-stakes testing] seriously? Yes, I do. Do I have a pit in the

bottom of my stomach that scores are not going to be what they need to be and

I'm going to get looked at and maybe questioned? … I worry about that but I

think still we have to make decisions on what's best for kids (INT: ELPR: 175-

180).

Interestingly, this principal leads a campus that has been rated Recognized by the state.

Her fear is not the scores themselves, but what will happen to her: "I'm going to get

looked at and maybe questioned…" (INT: ELPR: 176-177).

Fear for Job

This fear takes its most obvious form in principals' fear of losing their jobs. Even central office administrators know that the fear exists. The director of special programs, for example, asked, "We had to trust a whole lot that if somebody says you're going to reach Recognized and you don't…do you trust not to lose your job? … What is going to happen to you? What are the consequences" (INT: CO-FG: 431-433)? Principals mirror this concern. As quoted earlier, one high school principal pointed out that he felt confident in his abilities to lead a campus, but was fearful of the repercussions should he not meet the district expectation of being labeled Recognized or Exemplary:

> More fear starts to seep in because you're starting to think, okay, well what if…?
> Before I felt secure in who I was as a campus administrator and you start to play
> the "what-if" game…Well, what if I don't meet that expectation? What's going
> to happen to me? (INT: PR-FG: 522-525).

In the principal focus group, this question was followed by a middle school principal's expression of fear of the consequences of not succeeding on high-stakes testing:

> I think there used to be more an invested interest in personal success and now
> there's more of a vested interest in campus success or district success and if that
> doesn't include personal success, that's okay….[It] used to be about, "I want you
> to be successful." Now it's, "I want your campus to be successful. I hope you're
> with it, but if you're not, oh well" (INT: PR-FG: 762-764; 772-773).

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Fear of Failure

In addition to a fear of losing their jobs, principals expressed a fear of simply failing. In a discussion with one elementary school principal, she noted, "High-stakes testing isn't just high-stakes for the student, it's high-stakes for the campus, too" (INT: PR-FG: 325). Another principal, this one at the high school level, expressed a fear that he was not improving his scores quickly enough:

> I see our organizational culture changing a bit and trying to meet [very, very high] standards and that creates some tension there. It creates a discomfort that kind of ripples through the entire district, and we try to be mindful. We try to be purposeful and try to maintain that culture of caring about people and working with people, but we also feel the pressures of getting there now, reaching that goal now (INT: PR-FG: 141-145).

Fear of Disappointing Central Office

One fear that has been raised among principals is a fear of disappointing central office. As quoted earlier, the assistant superintendent for instructional services stated that there have been a number of times that principals have approached her and said, "'I'm so sorry about all those red x's.' I mean, you don't have to apologize to me. I know you're working as hard as you can. All of a sudden we have this external standard that's been placed out there" (INT: ASIS: 429-431). In another instance, a seasoned, successful elementary school principal missed a training session that was taught by staff from instructional services. The session was one of three optional sessions offered during a regularly scheduled administrator meeting, and was a review of a method of getting

students involved in analyzing their own TAKS data. Because this particular principal knew the method, she did not attend the session and indicated that she did not think anything of it. In discussing pressure from central office regarding high-stakes testing, however, the principal stated that the first time she had felt pressure was in a follow-up conversation with the assistant superintendent for instructional services regarding the session:

> I didn't go to that session because it was choices and I didn't go, not because I didn't want to go to all three of them, I just chose not to go. And then later [the assistant superintendent for instructional services] wanted to meet with me to give me that information and I felt like, oops, I should have gone to that. And I don't think it was her intent…If it was intended to go to [all three, then they should have said so]… they felt like we'd made the wrong choices of what we were supposed to go to. . . . And I know that wasn't her intent, but it was how I felt (INT: ELPR: 194-204).

External Fears – "Designer jeans"

In addition to fears about success on high-stakes testing within the district, campus leaders also expressed fears about the community reaction to their campuses not achieving success on the TAKS. As noted earlier, the director of school improvement, who supervises the principals, remembered a recent event when there was a large amount of outcry from parents due to the district moving a principal who was in charge of a campus labeled Exemplary:

We just went through hearing some members of the community saying – no,

judging – whether a principal's good or not based on their rating. Strictly based

on that. "This is a good principal…Those not on that level are bad principals…"

It's in the paper; it's on the radio. It's discussed. All that's based on a rating

from a high-stakes test (INT: CO-FG: 682-685).

Principals whose schools already are rated Recognized or Exemplary also expressed fear

about slipping to Acceptable. When asked what repercussions would occur if her campus

did not at least maintain her rating of Recognized, one middle school principal stated:

I think the community will lose faith in the school and probably the direction that

we're taking our curriculum and maybe the leadership at the school. I think you

could have teacher shopping, [where] parents are going to be shopping for the

teacher that gets the best results…Parents don't understand [how the state

rankings are assigned], but they want their school to have a label. It's all about

the label. It's like if you're wearing the designer jeans or whatever the newest

thing is (INT: MSPR: 138-143; 174-175).

In at least some cases, principals feared that the community expectations and

pressures have led to quick fixes instead of long-term solutions. One elementary

principal explained it this way: "As some of our community has changed, and we have

the societal pressure for instant gratification, and instant answers, I think that sometimes

more so than in the past, with that increased pressure, we tend to react and end up doing

more quick fixes in the immediate sense" (INT: PR-FG: 154-157).

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Effects on Principals: Invoked Frustration

In addition to invoking fear, changes in central office organizational culture due to high-stakes testing have led to principals being frustrated with central office, with a lack of direction from central office, and with the type of support central office has offered. In almost every case, administrators expressed frustration with some aspects of the central office organizational culture, while appreciating others. A high school principal, who spoke specifically to this point, may best summarize this:

> Well, actually [the central office organizational culture is] a blessing and a curse. There is a high level of trust, professionalism, and expectation that people will perform if you give them the opportunity. That really works for me. But the frustration comes and that there is no district-wide initiative on how to meet the four challenges and expectations (INT: HSPR: 29-32).

Frustration with Expectation Without Direction

This idea, that central office has issued an expectation that campuses achieve Recognized or Exemplary status by 2009 without appropriate accompanying support was reported by a number of principals interviewed. One high school principal illustrated this point by asking, "And what about the expectation of being Recognized or Exemplary by 2009? The support of that is left to the individual campuses. It's like we are runners running in place, not advancing. Where's the vision of how to get there? It's not that we need a lockstep approach, but some direction" (INT: HSPR: 34-37). This notion was mirrored by an elementary school principal, who expressed frustration at the lack of communication from central office:

What she's saying when she was talking about how we are going to get there, that

piece is not always communicated, or at least, maybe in my perception, I don't

know if all administrators are aware of how we are going to get there. I think our

district does a great job of telling us expectations, challenges, what needs to be in

the forefront. You know, we need to be commended, we need to be Exemplary.

Sometimes I think that the solutions are a little elusive and there are pockets

where things are really working well (INT: PR-FG: 359-365).

Another high school principal noted that trust between central office and

campuses has been compromised because of the lack of assistance central office is giving

to campus. In discussing the expectation of being Recognized by 2009, he stated,

As a campus principal, when I say, by this year, by this certain year, we're going

to be at this level, I'm setting an expectation. Trust leaves the room if I just leave

it at that. … I feel like that, from the central office to the campus level, it is,

"Here's the expectation." And instead of…the next thing being, "And we're

going to get there because we've got the expertise, we've got the resources, we've

got the plans in place and we're going to do it together…", I think the trust factor

would not have deteriorated to this point [if the second part had been there] (INT:

PR-FG: 607-621).

Frustration with Internal Versus External Solutions

The sense of frustration that principals feel because of a perceived lack of

solutions from central office, extends to the introduction of new programs, as well.

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According to two high school principals in the district, the expectation for solutions is placed on campuses, not central office. One high school principal argued,

> Whereas, at the middle school and high school as we fumble and stumble through it we have admin coming to us and saying, "Hey, how can we help?"…without a knowledge base there of helping come up with those solutions. So I feel kind of a backlash back onto the campus principals of, "Y'all come up with solutions now" (INT: PR-FG: 407-411).

Another high school principal told a story about bringing the program AVID to the school district. According to their website (http://www.avidonline.org/), AVID, which stands for Advancement Via Individual Determination, is a system to help middle school and high school students who are in the middle range academically prepare to go to college. The program was developed by a teacher in California in 1980, was first implemented in Texas in San Antonio in 1996, and currently is being used in 240 schools in Texas. Using money provided by House Bill One, which provided additional funds to Texas districts for the purpose of decreasing the high school dropout rate, Leander ISD purchased the program in April 2007. While the principals agreed the program was needed, they were frustrated that it took the district this long to find a program that had been in use in Texas for over ten years. One high school principal stated:

> As a principal, it's hard to know what is out there. It seems like central office should weed out trainings out there that we don't need, and point us to those we do. Right now it's really up to the individual principal's inquiry. Take AVID for example. It is aligned with the four challenges, aligned with House Bill One, and

it's been around for 25 years. It took the initiative of the principal to bring [it]

into the district. A principal saw an overview of it at a conference, got with a

coordinator, and then all the principals went to a conference (INT: HSPR: 39-45).

He summarized his frustration: "Part of the problem with our culture, is that we are

innovative, but we tend to look within versus looking outside our district for solutions."

Frustration with Reactive Central Office

The AVID example is one that feeds directly into the next frustration principals

have felt: that central office has become more reactive and less proactive. The

frustration is that the principals believe that trust is loss when this is the case. One

elementary principal stated, "I think the trust, when we're sensing that we're being

proactive, is higher. When it's a reactive kind of response, that's where my trust is

less…Sometimes I think in the emergency of the situation we make reactive decisions"

(INT: PR-FG: 507-508; 148-149). The interviewed principals left little doubt that central

office behaving more reactively has stemmed directly from the pressure of high-stakes

testing. One high school principal declared:

> I see now, because of high-stakes testing, the administrative level wanting to
>
> come to the campus level and say, "What can we do to help? How can we help
>
> you?" And my response is, "Where were you three, four, five, six, seven, eight
>
> years ago when we were trying to be proactive at the campus and we weren't
>
> getting that?" We were having to come up with our own solutions (INT: PR-FG:
>
> 391-395).

Another high school principal described his frustration with reactive staffing cuts, and the consequences for the long-term:

We went through four, five, six years ago of, cut, cut, cut at the high school level and so if you're starting to cut, cut, cut at the high school level, you can't cut your core subject areas. There are certain electives you've got to have for graduation, so your cuts are made where you have teachers in place that are serving kids in a remediation type environment. So, many of the classes that we had set up that were there to help remediate, to help with learning being the constant, time being the variable, those got cut. So now, high-stakes and we've set higher standards, now, we don't have those in place. Now we have admin coming back going, "Hey, how can we help you or assist you in this?" It's like, I mean I'm glad, I'm appreciative but I'm frustrated because, where was that help five, six years ago which would have helped that rising tide rise faster? (INT: PR-FG: 435-445).

Similarly, another principal expressed frustration with central office's reactive stances:

I felt like, for a while in this district, we were being proactive by the way we were focusing on instructional strategies and best practices. We were improving across the district, or a campus, moving in the right direction. When we became reactive, when the pressures of high-stakes testing, and the expectations … caused us to set the bar even higher. Since the bar was set high because of the pressures, it caused us to move from a proactive stance to a reactive stance (INT: PR-FG: 220-226).

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And some central office administrators agreed that central office has not been as proactive with support as it should have been. The director of secondary curriculum stated:

> I don't think that right now that as far as my office can say that we have done X, Y, and Z in order to get those campuses to Recognized that are not Recognized…I've heard principals say, "What are you going to do to support us?" and I don't think we have as we have in some other areas…At the same time, though, the way [the district expectations] came out it was a surprise to me when I even heard it so I didn't have a plan and I still don't have a plan. What does my office do to support principals so they feel supported? (INT: CO-FG: 597-606).

Frustration with Central Office – "45-minute quiet time"

Principals also expressed frustration with central office's demands on the time of principals. When asked to expound on some frustration expressed in the principal focus group, note this exchange between a middle school principal and an elementary principal:

> Middle school principal: The first thing that falls into my head is that sometimes the people from the [central office] don't understand the instructional end, what's going on at schools, the people business, as the way that people on campuses understand it. They're doing their job, and they're focused, and they're very clinical about what they're doing, and sometimes don't necessarily get what's going on in the building.
>
> Elementary Principal: They don't understand that you don't get a 45-minute quiet work time, uninterrupted on campus (INT: PR-FG: 125-132).

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Some principals also expressed frustration at the lack of expertise available in central office. One example related to master scheduling. Secondary campuses are driven by their master schedule, as it dictates what teachers teach what subjects at what times. Having an effective master schedule should help a campus be more effective presenting curriculum to students, possibly leading to greater success on high-stakes tests. However, central office in Leander ISD does not have anyone with expertise in designing or implementing a master schedule. A middle school principal expressed her frustration about that fact:

> There's a specific example [of effects to principals due to changes in central office organizational culture], and that would be master scheduling. In that sometimes a solution has to be solved through master scheduling. Middle school did solve this a few years ago; you know, we talked about doing some work and our departments working together, high schools working on that. But because the district administration didn't have experts in that area, it really came to us getting together and looking at that master schedule after several years of going, "How the heck are we going to give these teachers time to work as a department?" That would have been a very helpful process to have come from. . .while we're in the depths of trying to figure out what's going on on our campus, if somebody came in and had the master schedule experience to be able to [assist us] (INT: PR-FG: 422-431).

This frustration with central office can also be seen when discussing how bureaucratic central office, in this case the curriculum side of central office, has become.

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The following statement was made by an elementary school principal regarding when her campus could conduct a practice TAKS:

> I think there was a time when we could look at our campus and we could look at our children and where our children were and what was best for our children. That was when we would implement our test. It would also, for our teachers, help them get the information they needed from that practice test. Now there is a bureaucracy that sort of states what we can do, when we can do it, and what instrument you will use (INT: PR-FG: 173-178).

Effects on Principals: Inhibited Freedom

The third effect noted by principals due to changes in central office organizational culture was that the freedom to establish goals and expectations was taken away from them. In place of campus goals, district, state, and federal mandates have come into play. As quoted earlier, in discussing how her role has changed, one middle school principal stated:

> The instructional leadership portion from the principal has expanded. Before, it was more nuts and bolts kinds of things…The way it looks now is that there are predetermined goals, and they don't start necessarily with the district, they start at the federal level (INT: MSPR: 8-13).

The challenges and expectations the district has implemented have likewise lessened a principal's freedom in establishing campus goals. One middle school principal argued that her campus would be overwhelmed if she added campus goals on top of district expectations, state goals, and federal regulations: "If you give me one more model, if

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you give me one more chore, if you tell me one more goal, my head will explode" (INT: MSPR: 78-79)

Finally, one high school principal noted: "[My role has] changed and focusing more on learning, more on student performance, and more of a challenge in meeting high expectations. Through the No Child Left Behind, Adequate Yearly Progress, and the AEIS indicators, expectations have really risen" (INT: HSPR: 8-10).

Effects on Principals: Improved Focus

The final area that has changed for principals due to high-stakes testing is an improved focus on student learning. One high school principal noted this change:

> When I started as principal I was opening a new school. I don't know if it was that or if back then there were just more managerial and operational things to do. There certainly was less instructional focus. Now, I am more focused on instruction (INT: HSPR: 12-17).

Focus on Individual Student – "This kid counts four times"

According to the principals interviewed, central office now expects principals to be aware of high-stakes testing data, down to the individual student level. The state categorizes student testing results in a number of ways, including by student ethnicity, by student economic status, by whether a student is in special education, and by English language proficiency. Because of the emphasis on high-stakes testing results, campus principals know into which categories various students fall. This was witnessed by the assistant superintendent for instructional services:

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[Principals] spend time analyzing, and you'll hear the phrase, "This kid counts four times." You hear that a lot. And that people are aware that not only am I concerned about this because this kid, but that this is a kid that's in four different subgroups that are important to me. I heard principals this week say that of this certain population, we've got to have X number of these kids pass. So tell me the names of the ones that you think are going to pass. That's the big difference. [Principals have] to not only look at kids in general…but have to hammer the subgroups, because of the formula (INT: ASIS: 398-405).

One middle school principal noted that pressures from high-stakes testing keep students in subgroups on her radar:

…For the large majority, you're doing exactly the right thing. We shouldn't ignore those [sub-] groups, of course. They should be on the radar and we should be doing everything to ensure their success (INT: MSPR: 132-134).

Research-based Approaches

In addition to focusing on individual students within subgroups, central office expectations have led principals to examine research-based approaches to learning. One elementary principal shared the following story about how her campus improved science scores:

I think it was that way, and then it narrowed in those particular areas because we realized that we needed to look at best practice…I think it's been a very positive thing in terms of improving instructional practice eventually. Use science for an example. When science first hit and our scores were very low, everybody

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panicked and tried to figure what to do to get by. We looked for the short-term

fix. But then we started looking at what really is best practice.   How do kids

learn the best? What are the long-lived things that serve them best in the long

term? So we began to make those improvements which have helped our scores in

science… So that's an example of being proactive, but starting from reactive

(INT: PR-FG: 281-297).

EFFECTS ON CENTRAL OFFICE ADMINISTRATORS

Principals are not the only employees of Leander ISD who have been affected by

changes in the central office organizational culture. Like principals, central office

administrators' differences parallel those that high-stakes testing has had on central office

organizational culture. That is, the changes in central office organizational culture have

instilled internal and external fear, invoked frustration, inhibited freedom, and improved

central office administrators' focus on instructional leadership.

Effects on Central Office Administrators: Instilled Fear

While there was not as much fear found in central office administrators as there

was found in principals, there was some found. However, most of the fear expressed by

district administrators related to fear of community consequences if success was not

achieved in high-stakes testing. As noted earlier, the director of special programs said:

When they first came out and said that by the year 2013 – 2014, 100% of students

in all student groups will pass the test or else, and then there's five stages of "or-

elses" and they're all bad. You get down to the last one, and it's bad. You look at

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that and you say, "100% of the students in all groups will pass a single assessment

or else…" It's the "or-elses" and the consequences that are damaging (INT: CO-

FG: 723-727).

Much like principals, central office administrators must work to keep the fear at bay, as

seen in this comment from the assistant superintendent for instructional services:

"There's just no doubt that high-stakes testing does affect the fear and the trust level and

I'm sure much more than I even realize, because I'm working so hard in my own head to

keep that from happening, that doesn't mean that it is keeping it from happening" (INT:

ASIS: 421-424).

External Fears – "Pay attention"

The majority of fear expressed by central office administrators related to concerns

about campus employees and students being fearful because of high-stakes testing.

However, there was some discussion of the fear the current expectations in the district

and in the community has caused. In a quotation used earlier, the assistant superintendent

for instructional services illustrated this point:

> There's no doubt that [the fear of poor results on the high-stakes testing] is a
>
> result of the political culture outside the school. It's pushed on the district and the
>
> Just for Kids data saying that you better pay attention to the test, because if not,
>
> no one's going to consider that what you're doing is any good (INT: ASIS 293-
>
> 296).

The assistant superintendent for instructional services noted that in her conversations with the superintendent, the concern from the superintendent about outside pressures due to test results has increased:

> And there's definitely my conversations with [the superintendent] – he's much more upset about [poor test results] than he has been in the past. I think that has to do with its visibility in the paper, the pressure you get – not just from the Board – but from the community. You start to think, "Why shouldn't we be up there?" (INT: ASIS 311-314).

When interviewed, the superintendent also noted this shift in concern. He stated that part of the issue was due to schools being required to focus so much on high-stakes testing:

> We're forced—because of public opinion, public discussion, public assumptions—to probably pay more attention to that high-stakes testing than is good for an overall, well-rounded education…And I think that that, in the long term, is probably detrimental. It has caused some improvements that probably needed to be done to an extent, but it's been overblown to the point where I think it's probably detrimental (INT: SUP: 98-106).

Effects on Central Office Administrators: Invoked Frustration

Some of the frustrations expressed by central office administrators were caused because of the rapid growth; others were caused by other factors, including high-stakes testing and the ramifications it had on central office and campus organizational culture. Clearly, some district administrators were frustrated with a perception that campuses

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were shifting the blame for lack of a higher state ranking to other causes besides the system. For example, the director of staff development stated that she had heard campus principals try to shift blame for changes in practice to the district expectations: "[It] is almost a 'I don't want to take the heat for having it out there so it's easy for me to say, "[The superintendent] said,"' when there's something difficult to do" (INT: CO-FG: 299-301).

This frustration extends to the perception that campuses are blaming certain student subgroups for their lack of success. The director of special programs stated,

There's already the blame of, my school wouldn't look like this if it weren't for these kids. If you were providing more support we would be able to do this and so we're already seeing a split because of that…[Recently] it's intensified and it's broader based. Because the populations now that are impacting it are larger and so there are more of the populations that are impacting it. It used to be the only population that was large enough was special ed so it was, "**Those** special ed kids, **your** special ed kids" kept us from getting this. And so now it's broader based and so now it's into. . .Apartment kids … slum kids and the apartment kids (INT: CO-FG: 520-535) [Emphasis in original].

Effects on Central Office Administrators: Inhibited Freedom

Another effect found in central office administrators relates to the feeling that the freedom to set district-needed goals has been compromised due to the requirements of the state and federal standards. The assistant superintendent for instructional services called the state and federal requirements "external standard[s that have] been placed out

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there…that we have to connect to in some way" (INT: ASIS: 427-428). District leaders seem surprised at the way high-stakes testing has changed their culture and inhibited their freedom. The assistant superintendent for instructional services said:

> The "oh-my-gosh" is that if Leander can be in a place that we feel we have to do that, then it's an "oh-my-gosh" high-stakes testing. If it can permeate our culture and make us pay attention to it to the degree we are, then it's pretty extreme and sad (INT: ASIS: 279-281).

The district's connection to the state requirements, by establishing the expectation that all campuses will be Recognized or Exemplary by 2009, is not without associated frustration. Note the following conversation between two veteran central office administrators:

> A: Why do you think that we in central office felt like it was needed to have a goal tied to high stakes testing in order to get people to do what you're talking about? . . .In order to get them to do that we had to have a goal that said, You better, we're all going to have to be Recognized or above by this period of time. Because that's not continuous improvement.
>
> B: Well, it depends on how you look at it…
>
> A: It's not continuous improvement.
>
> B: Why isn't it continuous improvement?
>
> A: Because Deming says you don't set arbitrary goals like that.
>
> B: That's not an arbitrary goal.

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A: That's very much an arbitrary goal. Why wouldn't you say

everybody's Exemplary? Why wouldn't you say four years? Or even say two

years?

B: So. That's true. We didn't do that (INT: CO-FG: 454-478).

Effects on Central Office Administrators: Improved Focus

Just as high-stakes testing changes in the central office organizational culture

caused principals to focus more on instruction, district administrators have focused more

on student learning. The assistant superintendent for instructional services noted that the

tests themselves were not the problem; it is what is being done with the tests that raises

concern:

I still think the testing itself is a good thing. It's what's done being done with it. I

mean, the test itself is not the evil. Getting people together and deciding the

things that all kids need to know is a good thing. It's given us some real focus

and cohesiveness of instruction. It's the fear that goes along with it because of

what the media and other people have done with it. The tests themselves are

good, valuable information (INT: ASIS: 367-371).

Clearly, the changes brought about by high-stakes testing to the central office

organizational culture have affected district and campus leaders. While there seems to

have been more of an impact on principals, both groups have experienced increased fear,

frustration, and focus, while having some freedom reduced by high-stakes testing.

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Research Question Three

How have changes in the central office organizational culture affected district-wide practices?

Changes wrought in Leander ISD the last several years have been many. While some are clearly due to high-stakes testing, there are others that might be the natural outcomes of district growth and other influences. However, given the changes to district and campus administrators, as well as the changes in central office organizational culture, it should not be surprising that district-wide practices have been altered due to high-stakes testing, as well. All administrators discussed changes that have occurred in the last seven to ten years due to changes in the Leander ISD organizational culture, and all seemed to be searching for some practice that will result in success for all students. The assistant superintendent for instructional services called this the search for "Dumbo's feather": "It's the Dumbo's feather that we think, 'Maybe this will work…'" (INT: ASIS: 273-274). There are six ways the district has attempted to find Dumbo's feather, the magical element that will allow the district to "fly": precise data analysis, reactive and targeted intervention, increased discussions of high-stakes testing, improved district curriculum alignment, research-based professional development, and changes in logistics.

The district has incorporated these six changes while attempting to balance the demands of high-stakes testing with the knowledge of doing what is best for students. At the same time, district officials believe success on high-stakes testing should be expected. A high school principal said, "Overall, I see [high-stakes testing] more as a positive. It

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should be expected that our scores are good" (INT: HSPR: 62). As noted earlier, the

director of special programs described the struggle for balance this way:

> There's that getting exactly the right amount of attention. Creative tension. I
> don't think anybody in this district would say, "Let's ditch testing. I just don't
> think we need to test kids anymore". Because we learn from it, the students learn
> from it, we design instruction around it, we look at staff development needs
> because of it, we use that. It's been so beneficial to be able to see and to gauge
> what's going on. I don't think anyone would say, "We wouldn't want to do this"
> (INT: CO-FG: 700-705).

And while the district struggles with balance, there remains a feeling that the

district has a moral obligation to educate students well, whether high-stakes testing is a

part of the education or not. The director of technology wondered what the district might

have done, should high-stakes testing not have been a part of educating students:

> We've got letterhead from 13 years ago that says, "Every student can learn," or
> "Success spoken here." I mean, I don't see that the high-stakes tests have really
> changed that core philosophy and made us suddenly go, "Well…if they're going
> to put it in the paper, we'd better start doing a good job." And yet at the same
> time…we're seeing these things that didn't used to happen because of it, so it is
> kind of a struggle to grapple with what its effect really is (INT: CO-FG: 1006-
> 1011).

What the district might have done is moot, however, since this is an age of high-stakes

testing. As such, the assistant superintendent for instructional services said, doing the

right thing for students includes ensuring they perform well on the high-stakes tests: "What's right for kids has to include high performance on those tests" (INT: ASIS: 413-414).

CHANGES IN DISTRICT-WIDE PRACTICE: PRECISE DATA-ANALYSIS

One shift in district practice that is a clear result of high-stakes testing is moving to more precise analysis of student data. The assistant superintendent for business and operations noted that there are a number of databases from which the district could draw:

> The high-stakes testing has driven databases at the state level – Just for the Kids and the Texas Honor Roll and Texas Monthly and NAEP – there's a number of places where these are being reported – AYP being another – and yet, they're not measuring the same things from what I can tell. It doesn't trouble me if you're doing great everywhere, it should reveal itself that way. But the fact that we're not makes me think that we are teaching to the test and that we're focusing on the things that are most obviously getting measured by the state (INT: ASBO: 132-139).

Whether the district is focusing only on the topics measured by the state or not, the district clearly uses a lot of data. Note this exchange between two principals:

> A: Well, and part of the deal is that in our district, we have access to so much data. We're data rich and information poor. Because, and we had this conversation this morning at a coffee chat with parents, that the parents are . . . some of my parents are feeling the same way in terms of, they get those profile results home on their kids and it's like, so much stuff.

B: I subscribe to that. We get this stuff home and my [spouse] says, "What does that mean?" and I say, "I have no idea!"

A: And so, and then, so I provide almost everyone with this stack of information, what am I expected to do with that and how do I address the weaknesses, okay? And I think that as a system, we have maybe gone so far into the data driven piece that the analysis and the planning piece is the part that we no longer take time with (INT: 675-687).

Just for the Kids

One program Leander ISD has utilized to assist with the analysis and planning pieces is data from the National Center for Education Accountability's Just for the Kids information. According to their website (2007), Just for the Kids was begun in 1995 by Tom Luce, who argued that longitudinal student achievement data should be analyzed to determine the effectiveness of school campuses across Texas. Just for the Kids also placed schools in categories based on the percentages of socio-economically disadvantaged students and English language learners the campuses had. The organization's website (www.just4kids.org) lists every school in Texas, along with the school's achievement on the TAKS test. The data is broken down longitudinally, and is compared to campuses with similar demographics. Each campus receives one of three symbols for each test given: a green check, indicating a difference of less than ten percentage points between the school and the top comparable schools; a yellow circle, indicating a difference of ten to thirty points between the school and the top comparable schools; or a red x, indicating more than thirty points difference between the school and

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the top comparable schools (see Appendix). In 2003, the Leander ISD Board of Trustees

directed district staff to use Just for the Kids data as the primary measure of campus

success (DOC 5). Later that year, all district administrators attended training in the Just

for the Kids data analysis, training that was again provided in 2007.

In conversations with administrators in Leander ISD, it is clear that this focus on

information from Just for the Kids has permeated the culture and practices of the school

district. For example, in an interview with an elementary school principal, she

spontaneously offered analysis of her Just for the Kids data:

> [I look] at the Just for Kids website more often. There again, I look at data for
>
> what it is. If you go to my site, it looks okay, and then when you click on the
>
> science, which is the struggling area on our campus, we went from 77 to 78 last
>
> year, growing a whole point. There again, that same group of kids has 63%
>
> commended in math, so it's looking at the system and looking at the processes.
>
> Because it was the same kids who weren't as successful in science. I speculated
>
> that they robbed Peter to pay Paul. It's still learning how to get it all into a day,
>
> reasonably. But then if you click on the ten comparable schools, though, some of
>
> them are great in science, but completely crashed in some other subjects. So
>
> sometimes you have to look at all of it to see. My philosophy this year has been,
>
> it is what it is. We're continuing to move forward to ask, "How can we get
>
> better?" If you're always looking to improve, it's a reality of how we're
>
> measured. It has its place in the system (INT: ELPR: 209-221).

Recently, Just for the Kids changed its comparison data to include the percentage of students reaching commended status on the TAKS. According to the Texas Education Agency (2006b), commended performance "refers to the highest performance level on the TAKS, as set by the State Board of Education. Students who achieve Commended Performance have shown a thorough understanding of the knowledge and skills at their grade level…For all subjects and grades, a scale score of 2400 or above is commended" (p. 27).   The assistant superintendent for instructional services indicated her frustration with this shift:

> The Just for Kids information has forced us to say, "It's not just enough for them to meet standard. You're doing too well at that, so we're going to look at commended." That's even sadder, because I don't think parents are going to be happy with a system that has as a primary goal that has a kid miss only one or two items on a test. And that's where we're headed. I mean to make commended, you can't make careless mistakes (INT: ASIS: 320-325).

Data Rooms

One means campus principals have found to carefully monitor student performance data is via the utilization of campus data rooms, rooms set aside for the analysis of campus data. In most of the rooms, each student in the school has his or her name recorded on a sticky note, and the subgroups in which the student falls are coded by a colored dot. With the beginning of year district profile test, an exam given to all students in the district in that grade level, the teachers and the principal track how successfully the student performs on all district and state tests.

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As quoted earlier, the assistant superintendent for instructional services discussed the precise nature of student data now used on campuses, as well as the number of data rooms she has seen:

> The fact that I go on campuses and they realize it's gotten down to the number of times we've heard that somebody missed a good label by one kid on one subtest, people realize that, and they spend time analyzing, and you'll hear the phrase, "This kid counts four times." You hear that a lot. And that people are aware that not only am I concerned about this because this kid, but that this is a kid that's in four different subgroups that are important to me. I heard principals this week say that of this certain population, we've got to have X number of these kids pass. So tell me the names of the ones that you think are going to pass. That's the big difference. We've had to not only look at kids in general in what's best for them, but have to hammer the subgroups, because of the formula…There are data rooms all over this district (INT: ASIS: 396-406).

CHANGES IN DISTRICT-WIDE PRACTICE: REACTIVE AND TARGETED INTERVENTIONS

A second major shift in district practice relates to reactive and targeted interventions for campuses and students who struggle with success on the TAKS. Just this year, the district began offering non-monetary "bonuses" for high school students who achieve commended on the TAKS. The assistant superintendent for instructional services explained the bonuses:

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Due to the focus now not only on the percent of students meeting standards, but also on the percent earning commended status, this year for the first time our high schools are offering "bonuses" to those students who do well on state testing. Many other districts in the past have offered extrinsic rewards such as watches, bikes, etc, but we have not gone there. The rewards were so prevalent that TEA issued some rules that you could not offer incentives but you could look for ways to offer bonuses....and our high school principals discussed and are offering some....I think it's exemptions from finals… (DOC 33).

The district also has used other interventions at struggling campuses.

Reactive and Targeted Intervention: Safety Nets

One particular area Leander ISD has targeted is the support provided to students in the grade levels that must pass the TAKS in order to be promoted to the next grade level. The district calls these SSI grade levels. This support included additional supplemental reading teachers and math tutors in third and fifth grades. The additional assistance raised concern for the grade levels not included in SSI. The following exchange occurred between the director of special programs and a former elementary school principal:

A: And if we were really getting kids on grade level and they were successful and this whole thing were working then when we looked at our fourth grade scores they would look a lot different and I don't know that they're looked on a lot different. It's like we've put in safety nets for the third graders to be able to go on but we're not making a long lasting impact.

B: And then you're back at the same scramble at fifth grade. "Oh my

goodness, they're starting so below in fifth grade!" That's because we're not

supporting them, we're not giving them the same kind of safety net (INT: CO-FG:

568-576).

These concerns paralleled one former elementary principal, who said that the district

needs to ensure safety nets are in place for all grade levels:

I think until everyone is on board and says, "Mastering the curriculum is what it's

all about, and whatever I teach will get there." Until then, it's still left up to those

few that have the high-stakes test at their grade level. They're the ones who are

feeling two times the pressure of the one who doesn't have the testing at the grade

level (INT: CO-FG: 637-641).

Reactive and Targeted Intervention: Time Away From Instruction

While interventions were generally seen as positive programs in the school

district, the superintendent (in a quote used earlier) expressed concern about what

students were missing by having to receive additional support in TAKS-tested subjects:

[We've had to consider] programs and spending times on those programs that

might take away from students' performance on the tests:…Things such as

electives courses, theatre arts, music, physical education. Things that probably

are in the best interest of the student over the course of their lifetime, yet we have

to evaluate whether we can spend the time on those things, in terms of taking

away from how well that student might do on a high-stakes test. Spending money

on pulling students away from their regular education to tutor them specifically

for high-stakes testing (INT: SUP: 118-125).

There were three areas that seemed to impact instructional time: time for teaching test-

taking skills, time for taking a practice TAKS, and time to ensure everyone was

emotionally prepared.

Test-taking Skills

Principals and district administrators appear to concede that in order for the

TAKS to be a true reflection of a student's academic skills, the student must be prepared

to take the test. "It's a fact of life" (INT: ASBO: 146), the assistant superintendent for

business and operations stated. This includes knowing how to take standardized tests.

One middle school principal said, "Sure, we teach them some about how to take a test.

We teach them to underline important information, to mark out unimportant stuff. I

mean, why should they have to figure out those things by themselves" (INT: MSPF: 43-

46)?

TAKS Practice

One specific practice Leander ISD has implemented is in having students take a

TAKS practice test. Campuses administer a released copy of a previous year's TAKS

test, running the school day as if it were the real testing day. The scores are analyzed for

each student who takes the test. A number of central office administrators expressed

concern over the amount of time schools were taking to practice taking the test. The

director of staff development, for example, said:

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And if you look at the impact on instruction, in many areas, they're taking whole

days and days of time, I think especially at the elementary level to do practice

tests in a real test setting. And so there's no instruction happening that will help

you learn what is on the test. I mean it's this vicious [cycle] (INT: CO-FG: 803-

806).

The director of school improvement also stated this concern:

In some cases they're not doing any type of debrief on that practice. They just

took the test just to take the test. Period. That's just the end. We did it so the

kids could have stamina in taking the test…I'm saying in some cases, that's not

all the cases. There's pockets of that sort of thing (INT: CO-FG: 808-811).

At least one principal, however, has decided to eliminate this practice. Finding

that her teachers had moved away from research-based practices and were focusing on

worksheets in order to prepare for the state test, one elementary school principal decided

that good teaching should carry a student to success on the TAKS and eliminated some of

the "drill and kill" TAKS practice:

I've had to pull TAKS practice out of third grade and they're trusting me and they

didn't actually do all the drill and kill. We just, we don't do all the practice tests.

I keep going back to, if you do good instruction in small group reading it's going

to pay off (INT: ELPR: 186-188).

Emotions

Finally, one administrator noted that having to ensure students, teachers, and

principals were emotionally all right about high-stakes testing took time away from

instruction. The assistant superintendent for instructional services said, "…You have to

spend time away from instruction, making sure that everybody's okay emotionally. The

fact that you even have to have those discussions takes time away from discussions about

instruction" (INT: ASIS: 427-430). To emphasize her point, she told this story about a

student she knew:

> I know a kid, not a stellar student, but a solid student. And he failed reading at
>
> fifth grade. And I'm sure it was a stamina issue and the paragraphs are longer,
>
> etc. In our great plans that we do, we go, "Well great, we're going to bring you in
>
> after school, tutorials, etc." To him, that was just mortifying and an incredible
>
> embarrassment. I never thought about a kid seeing that as punishment. I really
>
> hadn't realized how stressed out he was that because of one test that he wouldn't
>
> be able to go on with his peers. Again, he's not a stellar student, but no one had
>
> talked about the fact that it would be a good idea to repeat the grade level or
>
> anything like that. But you talk about central office and the fear this test creates
>
> in kids, that's just awful, just awful (INT: ASIS: 325-334).

Reactive and Targeted Intervention: Staffing/Budgeting at High-needs Campuses

Another way Leander ISD has intervened with struggling campuses is in the

increased support to campuses that have a higher percentage of socio-economically

disadvantaged (SED) students. In reviewing the district's budget documents, campuses

that have student populations of 30% or higher SED students are given an additional

weighting in their campus budgets. According to the director of budgeting, this

additional funding works out to be seven dollars per SED student (DOC 9). Additionally,

these campuses are given additional resources in the form of campus personnel and Title I funds. Knowing that providing different levels of support to campuses might cause unnecessary rivalry between campuses, the superintendent was transparent when approving the increased supports. One middle school principal remembers the announcement:

> I remember when [the superintendent] stood up and said, "The right thing to do is to make sure that campuses are given the support they need." He talked about how support might look different at every campus and even told [the principal of a school on the wealthier side of the district], "You know this means [a school on the other side of the district] will be getting a little more money and some extra help, right?" This brought humor to the situation and made it okay (INT: MSPF: 64-71).

An example of the types of additional support a higher SED campus might receive can be seen in this message from the director of elementary curriculum:

> They have a full time At Risk/Intervention Specialist. They received an additional .5 Intervention Specialist through State Comp Ed funding from Special Programs. They have Kindergarten Supplemental Reading Program (SRP) support (an additional full time SRP teacher). They received $33,000 for literacy and numeracy assistants from the start of the school year. They also received $9595 in SSI funds which they used for a part time SSI assistant and literacy materials. They also receive $1000 for leadership or staff development. We also

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provide funding for their kindergarteners to attend Reading Camp in the summer (DOC 11).

Reactive and Targeted Intervention: Science Focus

One specific curricular area that has seen a significant change due to high-stakes testing is science.   The assistant superintendent for instructional services knew there would be a change once the TAKS began assessing science in fifth grade. She remembered asking the elementary science coordinator about her thoughts:

[The science coordinator] said, "Well, I know it's a mixed blessing. I know we'll get some attention now. We'll get the attention of the people who didn't manage to find the time to teach science in the day. We'll find the time now, and we'll get the resources." And there's been a noticeable positive change in science instruction in elementary (INT: ASIS: 361-364).

Indeed, as the science coordinator predicted, a system for improving elementary science instruction was put in place. In a story related earlier in this research, an elementary school principal described what happened:

When science first hit and our scores were very low, everybody panicked and tried to figure what to do to get by. We looked for the short-term fix. But then we started looking as a district at what really is best practice? How do kids learn the best? What are the long-lived things that serve them best in the long term? So we began to make those improvements which have helped our scores in science…We have been proactive as a district in saying, "Well, what do we need to do? These are the steps we need to take. Let's get a long-term plan in place

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involving all the stakeholders." We've involved everybody from the textbook people, the computer technology, to district instructional folks, to campus instructional folks, teachers, putting a big-term, big picture plan together to move [science] forward. So that's an example of being proactive, but starting from reactive (INT: PR-FG: 285-297).

Science Contrasted With Social Studies and P.E.

The system that the district put in place for science should be differentiated from the system, or lack thereof, for social studies and physical education. An elementary school principal noted: "…Social studies has taken the back seat. As different grade levels hit those different tested pieces, that's where the focus has gone" (INT: PR-FG: 260-263). This analysis is not lost on central office administrators, either. The director of staff development stated: "…we don't teach social studies – or, we don't much – at elementary. I mean, it's the basis of our democracy. But it's not considered valuable in the curriculum because it's not tested" (INT: CO-FG: 644-646).

Another area that was held up as lacking support due to its not being a tested subject was health and physical education (PE). The director of secondary curriculum said:

> [I met] with PE and health teachers who said, "You know what I'm teaching students affects the rest of their life as far as life and death. You know, how they treat their bodies and nutrition and drugs and alcohol and all that. And yet, I don't get to go to training and the district doesn't have a person up here that helps me

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get better and nobody really cares." And yet we sure care about them learning

mathematics (INT: CO-FG: 1013-1018).

The director of school improvement also described this lack of emphasis on physical

education:

> If we're going to be doing inservice then we're going to do PE teachers, then
>
> we're looking for any way those PE teachers can get something to support the
>
> TAKS test and improve our test scores. That's what we tell them that's what we,
>
> we don't say to them, your curriculum, your TEKS. . . It's, can you improve the
>
> language arts scores because we're having trouble with capitalization. Can you
>
> do that in your PE class? Emphasize that too (INT: CO-FG: 1020-1027).

CHANGES IN DISTRICT-WIDE PRACTICE: INCREASED TESTING DISCUSSIONS

The third practice that has changed due to changes in the organizational culture

brought about by high-stakes testing relates to the discussions that occur throughout the

district regarding testing. Increasingly, discussions about education in the district are

test-centered and data-based. The assistant superintendent for business and operations

observed:

> When I first came in the district, it was a badge of honor to say often, "We don't
>
> teach to the test." It was said all the time. I didn't even know the phrase before I
>
> came here. And then the testing stakes became higher and higher and higher, and
>
> testing came to be a part of every conversation (INT: ASBO: 126-129).

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The superintendent agreed with the assistant superintendent for business and operations. In his interview, he mentioned a number of ways high-stakes testing is being discussed in the district:

I think we pay a lot more attention to [high-stakes testing]. We have a lot more conversations and a lot more information dedicated to the results of those tests, and in preparation for programs, activities, things that are directed causing our students to achieve better on those tests. So I think it has dictated to us that we pay a lot more attention to it at central office level, and at the campus level…We spend in our instructional department an inordinate amount of time paying attention to actions, activities that will impact that test, that one, or those few tests to determine the health and well-being of our district and each individual campus (INT: SUP: 93-103).

According to the assistant superintendent for instructional services, sometimes there is so much discussion about high-stakes testing that educators lose sight of what is best for students:

I think . . . what has happened is you spend much more time in testing than you did in the past, there's no doubt about it, [and] the discussions, there's much more discussion about testing and you don't have the luxury of saying, is this good for a child or not? So it definitely affects the discussion (INT: ASIS: 233-237).

The assistant superintendent for business and operations also described an increased amount of discussion about high-stakes testing:

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Testing is a very common conversation now. Very, very common. I'm around it

a lot. So I think what worries me a little bit is that I don't hear, 'teaching to the

test,' but I think we've found other words for what we're doing, and we've sort of

morphed ourselves into thinking we don't do that, but I think everything indicates

we do (INT: ASBO: 139-142).

While the conversations described above related to high-stakes testing, the

director of secondary curriculum remarked that perhaps the discussions were truly about

student learning:

I think that one of the changes I've seen since I've been here is…there's a lot

more conversation among administrators at any level about what's going on in

classrooms. There's a lot more standardization of what's going on in classrooms

and we used to do our training, cross our fingers and off they went and now

there's a little more accountability about what's going on in classes. There's a lot

more conversation about what's going on in classes by our principals, by people

over here, by teachers and so I think that's been a real positive. . . (INT: CO-FG:

184-191).

Increased Discussions: Campus Visits

But changes due to high-stakes testing are not limited to discussions. The past

three years, the superintendent and assistant superintendent for instructional services have

begun to schedule annual campus visits, at which time they discuss with the principals

the campus' progress toward meeting the expectations and challenges. One middle

school principal described her visit with the pair this way:

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I very recently had a visit from the superintendent and the assistant superintendent

and it was [positive]…even though they gave us guidelines to help, which I

appreciate, I want to know the direction a conversation's going to go, but there

was no pressure to perform. It was just, tell me about what's going on based upon

what we established in the summertime in our retreat (INT: MSPR: 44-48).

The superintendent said, "Setting up the expectations and challenges and then following

up by visiting the campuses has really kept us focused on what we're all about in this

school district, student learning" (INT: SUP: 212-214).

Increased Discussions: Vertical Teams and SEEK Visits

Attempting to focus more on student learning is one of the reasons Leander ISD

started SEEK visits for principals this year. SEEK, which stands for Sharing Exciting

Educational Knowledge, allows principals to share best practices with each other at their

home campus. Once per month, during a time previously set aside for the weekly

administrator meeting, principals meet in collaborative teams and focus on a topic that

relates to the Leander Learning Model. The objective is to identify successful practices

at campuses, with the possibility of replicating them on others. One elementary principal

described her experience with SEEK visits:

The SEEK visits provide an avenue for principals to see the behind the scenes

operations of other campus levels. Principals are given the opportunity to see

other campus administrators in action and in their place of business. This

provides an opportunity for questions and answers as well as a time to get to

know your peers in an informal setting. Principals were able to collaborate and

share ideas about specific needs and concerns at campus level….One time,

elementary principals observed a middle school's master scheduling process. This

process can be adjusted and used to streamline the elementary schedule. Processes

for interventions were shared. Administrators were able to see the bigger picture

and how specific campuses impact the next level. It was evident that

subpopulations may be small on an elementary campus, but when combined at the

middle school level these populations increase dramatically…Principals share

specific systems for management, for data analysis, for tracking students with

academic concerns as well as students that should be performing at a commended

level, etc. Touring the building provides a snapshot of how education may be

different in an elementary setting yet very similar to that of middle and high

schools. Improvement processes were shared by observing the campus

storyboard. It is very effective to see the board in a working environment such as

a Science Improvement Story Board displayed in the Science Lab…Elementary

principals collaborated on strategies that were being implemented to improve the

TAKS scores. For example, a choir sang several songs from a musical entitled

"Geology Rocks" that was being used to integrate earth science concepts into fine

arts. Principals shared how to analyze data at strategic points in the year with the

staff in order to adjust instruction and provide intervention strategies…These

meetings have been successful because they are informal avenues to observe

another campus without a strict agenda. The needs of the principals drive the

agenda (DOC 13).

A high school principal shared: "The SEEK visits are very beneficial. Best practices in administration are applicable from an elementary campus to high school. It is also a great opportunity to share challenges and recognize commonalities associated with the different levels of campus administration" (DOC 14).

Increased Discussions: Presentation to Administrators

A final way the district has increased discussions about high-stakes testing is in presentations at administrator's meeting regarding testing and student data. Recently, for example, two trainings were presented in the meeting that showed principals and central office administrators how to get the most information out of the Just for the Kids website. Another presentation was made by the assistant superintendent for instructional services regarding a way for students to monitor their own testing data. The assistant superintendent for instructional services reported that the reaction from principals regarding the presentation was very positive: "[Regarding] the reaction when I did a project study group session, people were just ecstatic, much more than I anticipated. It wasn't I did an incredibly entertaining presentation, it's that it's something we can hold onto" (INT: ASIS: 271-273).

CHANGES IN DISTRICT-WIDE PRACTICE: DISTRICT ALIGNMENT

The fourth change in district practice due to high-stakes testing is a noticeable increase in the attempt to better align the delivery of instruction across the district. According to the administrators interviewed, standardization in some areas is a positive

outcome of high-stakes testing. One former elementary school principal illustrated this improvement:

> You know I was at the campus level when we had TABS and TEAMS and we all did the test and that's all it was. It was just the test and then you moved on. And even when we had that kind of testing we would still get kids from all around the state of Texas when they would come in and check into your school, they were all over the place because…you didn't really work very hard to master everything and then go into the test and say, I'm going to master this. You know, it was just TEAMS. And you got kids from different parts of the state and you just had to work very hard to get them caught up and then when the TAKS came along and then the accountability came into play it only took a couple of years and then you could get kids from all around Texas now, and they're on the same page. They know what those TEKS are, they've had the kind of background and so they're fitting in nicely with our kids in our district and now what's happening is all the kids from outside the state you can really tell the difference when they're coming in from different states, they haven't had that, so that is a good thing that the accountability rating has put on it that everyone in Texas begins to focus on the same things. The kids are beginning to learn the same things so it's not as difficult and now you wish that, is there something nationally that we can do that would get everybody on the same page because you spend so much of your time having to concentrate and build background knowledge for some of these kids that you're ready to move on with others. And it's like, how do you fill all the

gaps in? So that's the good part, that the accountability has brought to the picture

that everybody seems to know what we're supposed to be doing and we're doing

it (INT: CO-FG: 729-749).

In some ways, the district is trying to fine tune the standardization that high-stakes

testing has brought to the state. Specifically, the district is trying to standardize what

occurs in the classroom. The director of secondary curriculum stated: "There's a lot

more standardization of what's going on in classrooms and we used to do our training,

cross our fingers and off they went and now there's a little more accountability about

what's going on in classes" (INT: CO-FG: 187-189). One way the district is aiming to

better align and standardize classroom practices is through its use of curriculum

facilitators.

District Alignment: Facilitators

Curriculum facilitators are lead teachers in specific curriculum areas. Central

office curriculum directors supervise facilitators, and each facilitator is assigned to

approximately three campuses. Facilitators work with teachers to improve instruction in

the classroom by meeting regularly with curricular departments on the sequencing of

curriculum and assessment, by modeling sample lessons, and by providing feedback to

teachers after observing them teach. According to the Leander ISD administrators

interviewed, the role of the facilitator has been modified to help classrooms become more

aligned to district expectations. One former principal interviewed described this change:

But I saw the change happen because for years and years we had facilitators going

into the classrooms, we had all that and then we'd still have principals who

weren't even included on those discussions who didn't have a clue to what was going on in the classroom. The facilitators knew. The change happened when it came from central office. At the district level, starting from the superintendent down, when that came out and it came out to the principals, that elevated everything and that began this whole process of everyone knowing what's going on in the classroom and it became important. And now you can have conversations about it and you can have vertical conversations about it and it's like…it didn't stem from the facilitators doing all that, it stemmed from a group coming and putting that on the table and saying, "This is what we're all about, let's all get on the same page and let's do it" (INT: CO-FG: 223-234).

Another change in the use of facilitators, according to the director of secondary curriculum, is that teachers utilizing facilitators is not optional now. She explained the change this way:

> [Facilitators] are in classrooms on a regular basis, not on an as-needed basis but on a regular basis, big difference, and there's teacher expectation that's coupled with support, you know, for learning. But there is an expectation…and the support is a regular visit from a facilitator. Not as an "I'm going to call them if I have a problem with that," it's, they're in the classrooms, oh, I want to say every…month, two weeks to a month, you're going to have somebody in your classroom either modeling it for you or they're going to be watching you, helping you learn, so it's coupled with support. Not in every area, but in many areas (INT: CO-FG: 200-216).

Principals have noticed a change in the way facilitators are being used, as well. In fact, the facilitators seem to have become extensions of the campus instructional leaders. One middle school principal said,

There's the perfect place where facilitators become an important process. Where the facilitators are managing the [teachers] and the principals are still [trying to be] Vince Young, trying to solve all of the problems on the entire campus by yourself. There's the perfect place where the perfect marriage of a curriculum facilitator would be to be aware of each and every one of those and working with each and every one of those teachers to make sure those teachers are becoming [better instructors] . . . Because it's an overwhelming idea to think a principal would know that in Ms. So and So's class, this child has this score and will affect this subgroup this way…(INT: PR-FG: 570-577).

An elementary principal described the current use of facilitators as being "right on":

From what I've seen this year from my facilitators, the support they're giving the teachers, I think has been right on. There's more TEKS instruction on our campus, and looking at what good instruction is. Part of that is, that if you're teaching the TEKS, you'll benefit on TAKS. It's not just focusing on TAKS skills. We've altered our focus on instruction, with one outcome to be successful on TAKS, but also just to streamline the curriculum they're teaching and how they're teaching it. So the practices of small group instruction, and small groups in math, and reteach, and differentiation, and inclusion…all those things are best

practices for instruction. They should take any child forward – student goals,

student data notebooks, kids knowing more about their learning, focusing on the

Learning Model…(INT: ELPR: 235-244).

One interesting side note is that curriculum facilitators exist for every core

academic area (language arts, math, science and social studies) at both the elementary

and secondary levels except for elementary social studies. In a telling side conversation,

two central office administrators discussed the absence of elementary social studies

facilitators:

A: And we don't have elementary social studies facilitators. Why?

B: Because it's not tested (INT: CO-FG: 648-650).

District Alignment: Learning Model and Expectations

In addition to using facilitators, Leander ISD has also begun to use the Leander

Learning Model (Figure 20) as its focus for aligning campuses to district expectations.

As discussed earlier, the Leander Learning Model is a visual representation of how to

ensure that all staff members focus on student learning. At the 2006 administrator's

retreat, the superintendent placed emphasis on two expectations: that the Learning Model

would be the focus of the district for the foreseeable future, and that all campuses would

be Recognized or Exemplary by 2009. One high school principal interviewed said that

these two foci will help the district improve in the long run:

In the past four years, we have really ramped it up, with a district-wide vision of

exceptional instruction -- The Learning Model, which came out of high school

principals, and is district-wide this year. I think we are really supporting the teachers more in instruction (INT: HSPR: 14-17).

This belief in the Learning Model was also seen by a middle school principal who, in a quote used earlier in this research, appreciated the clarity of the model:

I like the learning model, not only because I worked on it, but I think the learning model is much clearer in terms of what I can do. I can have an intervention program. I can do common assessments. I can develop a social contract, I can have a certain learning environment and I can determine whether kids are responsible for their own learning. To me it's easier to get your hands around it (INT: MSPR: 252-256).

Part of the Learning Model states that students should have access to a guaranteed and viable curriculum. This statement, pulled from Marzano's (2001; 2003) work, means that every student should be given the opportunity to engage in a curriculum that includes essential content and that the "content is sequenced appropriately and can be adequately addressed in the instructional time available" (2003, p. 34). One high school principal remarked that the focus on a guaranteed and viable curriculum has been beneficial to all students: "There is certainly a more vested interest and a guaranteed and viable curriculum. We also now have essential units of study, and are more closely looking at the data to come up with strategies" (INT: HS-PR: 87-89). The director of school improvement agreed that high-stakes testing has caused the district to place more of an emphasis on the curriculum:

Testing causes everyone to examine the TEKS – what are the essential learnings

that all of us need to be on in each grade level. To the extent that it causes that to

happen, and I think that it has caused it to happen, to different levels, different

teachers, that's a real positive (INT: CO-FG: 695-698).

The second expectation, relating to campuses being Recognized or Exemplary by

2009, has been less universally received. As described earlier, some principals are

longing for a more standardized plan on how to achieve the expectation. However, at

least two principals believe that the expectation has helped move the district forward.

One middle school principal remarked, "I just think that the expectations that were laid

out were much more practical. It was something I could get a handle on" (INT: MSPR:

272-273). And a high school principal affirmed this view, while noting the counter

argument, as well:

For the first time we have a definitive and measurable objective for campuses that

is tied to high-stakes testing. This is both positive and negative. On the positive

side, it creates a sense of urgency, and a clear picture of expectations. On the

negative side, we can get caught up in focusing on teaching to the test, and

eliminate good enrichment programs (INT: HSPR: 57-60).

District Alignment: Profile Testing

Another way the district is endeavoring to align district-wide is through its use of

profile testing. Profile tests, district-created low-stakes exams that reveal a snapshot of

where students have mastered curriculum and where they need to improve, have been

administered for at least 12 years in the district. Over the past several years, however,

curriculum department personnel, teachers, and principals have attempted to ensure that

the profiles are more closely aligned to the state high-stakes tests, particularly starting in

third grade. The assistant superintendent for instructional services outlined what the

district was attempting to do with the change in profile testing:

> I think that we've, to some degree, we've helped alleviate [anxiety about high-
>
> stakes testing] by coming up with profile testing, things that we can focus on
>
> instead of the oh-my-gosh testing, that we can focus on – this is learning. We all
>
> agree that it's important, and it's going to prepare kids. So I think we've done
>
> that. I think we've provided them help and reassurance that if we do these certain
>
> things [test results will be all right] (INT: ASIS: 266-270).

District Alignment: Requirements for Administrators

This attempt to standardize and align processes across the district can also be seen

in the requirements outlined for administrators in the summer retreat. Each summer, the

superintendent challenges the principals and central office administrators to improve at

the retreat, but according to the superintendent, these challenges have gotten more

focused as the years have progressed:

> Look over the last five years of the things we've laid out in administrator retreats
>
> as goals, as focal points for administrators to pay attention to on their campuses.
>
> They're much more specific. They're much more documentable. And one of the
>
> things that's existed over the last three years is that I actually go out to the
>
> campuses and force them to show me their documentation, in terms of what

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they've done in terms of those goals and objectives that have been laid out at the retreat (INT: SUP: 160-165).

In reviewing the requirements given to principals at the administrator retreat for the last six years, the superintendent's analysis is correct: the principals in 2006 were required to submit plans that were much more focused than in years past. For example, in 2000 principals were expected to submit to the superintendent answers to the following questions after the retreat:

1. What was your MOST successful improvement effort this past year? How do you know? Prepare a brief overview of the process.

2. What have you chosen as the improvement project for this upcoming year? What was the runner-up project? What determined your choice?

3. What does it mean to complete this project with high quality? Who is the customer for the result? If the customer is asked, will he or she define "high quality" the same way? (DOC 3)

Conversely, after the retreat in the summer of 2006, principals were required to submit a plan to the superintendent that addressed the following:

1. What is your plan to engage students and staff in consistently analyzing their data, including setting and monitoring learning goals?

2. What are you going to do to ensure that teachers consistently use assessment FOR learning to set the above goals?

3. What is your plan to guarantee that students and staff work collaboratively to ensure student ownership of learning?

4. If elementary and middle school campuses are consistently using small group instruction in reading, then you may choose another focus from the Learning Model. If not, then focus on small group instruction. Be prepared to discuss the focus you have chosen and the plan to improve it. (DOC 4)

In comparing the two sets of requirements, it is clear that the 2006 questions are focused on two specific targets, the implementation of the Learning Model and the goal of reaching Recognized or Exemplary by 2009. The 2000 questions are much more open-ended. One middle school principal said, "I remember being given questions that were so broad that you could pick anything, from parent involvement to differentiated instruction…I prefer being given some guidance" (INT: MSPF: 47-49).

District alignment can also be seen in the Leander ISD Principal Learning Matrix, a self-guided rubric that has been assembled by a team of principals and the director of school improvement (Appendix). The team evaluated Leander ISD's guiding documents, including the Ethical Principles, the Graduate Profile, the Leander Way, and the Four Challenges and created a capacity matrix that is aligned to the Leander Learning Model. The Learning Matrix was piloted in the 2006 – 2007 school year, and will be implemented the following year. According to the director of school improvement, the Learning Matrix is "an attempt to distill the most important aspects of the principalship in Leander to something manageable. You know, I hear all the time from new principals, 'What am I supposed to focus on?' This should help" (DOC 35).

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District Alignment: Campus Improvement Plans

A final area in which the district has increased standardization is with the state-required campus improvement plans. According to Texas Education Code 11.251 (a), each campus must develop, review, and revise annually a plan for improving the "performance of students."   In the last seven years, the district has tightened the way these plans are developed, giving training to all campus site-based decision-making members who help review and draft the plan. Three years ago, Leander ISD added a number of required components to the plan, hoping to ensure that the focus remained on student learning. According to the director of special programs, the plans have become "much more standard and useable" district-wide (DOC 12). An analysis of the changes in the campus improvement plans verifies the tightening of focus. For example, here are the goals for one elementary school in the district for the 1999-2000 school year:

1. Students will be taught math with emphasis on problem solving training (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics standards).

2. Students will be afforded extensive real world learning experiences.

3. Teachers and staff will work closely for meeting the needs of diverse learners.

4. Students and their parents will be better prepared for entrance into school at kindergarten level.

5. Curriculum alignment will be emphasized.

6. Student and teacher use and integration of technology in school will increase.

7. By May 2000, 95% of students will pass the TAAS test, including all sub-groups.

8. Investigate implementation of library computer lab for in-depth teaching or research skills.

9. Gifted and academically high achieving students will be afforded extra opportunities for enhancement.

10. Staff development will be focused on best practices, meeting the goals of the CIP, and tied to the staff development statement of the CIP.

11. Community involvement and family orientation will remain high and increase.

12. All students will learn how to set and attain academic and character goals based on data analysis.

13. All students will develop and demonstrate strong character elements as identified in the Ten Ethical Principles adopted by the LISD School Board.

14. Diagnosticians will use the new reevaluation process to complete reevaluation in a timely manner resulting in quality reports, which focus on linking assessment and instruction with the focus of assessment on instruction implications (DOC 6).

Here are the goals for the same elementary school for the 2005 – 2006 school year:

1. Reading: Increase reading proficiency level according to Just 4 Kids – all grades, all subgroups.

2. Reading: Increase percent commended on TAKS.

3. Math: Increase fifth grade math passing rate for all subgroups.

4. Math: Increase math proficiency according to Just 4 Kids – all grades.

5. Math: Increase percent commended on TAKS.

6. Writing: Increase scale score and number of 3's and 4's.

7. Science: Increase scale scores and commended for all subgroups.

8. All students will be educated in learning environments that are safe, drug-free,

and conducive to learning.

9. All parents will be involved in their child's education (DOC 7).

In comparing the two campus improvement plans, the 2000 plan is much more generic in terms of goals relating to student learning on the state developed test. On the other hand, the goals in the 2005 plan are specifically designed to address the high-stakes test. Put another way, seven percent of the 2000 plan revolved around improving TAAS scores; 78% of the 2005 plan did. This finding was discovered in every plan for every examined school. While in 2000 campus goals were very campus-specific, in 2005, each campus had very similar goals, largely centering on improving TAKS scores and improving the percentage of students achieving commended on the TAKS.

Many administrators in the district have observed this attempt at some form of standardization, as evidenced by this simple exchange between the director of staff development and the technology director:

A: Well, and [now] there's just more alignment. . .

B   Yep, more alignment…" (INT: CO-FG: 940-942)

CHANGES IN DISTRICT-WIDE PRACTICE: RESEARCH-BASED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The fifth manner in which the district has modified practices due to high-stakes testing relates to professional development. For many years, Leander ISD's staff

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development has been a model for other districts across the state. For example, each year the district presents a Continuous Improvement Conference in February, in which teachers, district personnel, and outside speakers present staff development to district staff. The conference encompasses two full days, with a campus day afterward so that teachers can process and implement the new learning. Also, each summer the professional development staff presents an extensive number of workshops for teachers and other district employees. (In the summer of 2007, for example, 218 sessions were being presented (DOC 32).)

Professional Development Aligned to Learning Model

With the implementation of the Leander Learning Model, however, staff development has become more aligned with research-based practices that are tied to student learning. According to the director of special programs, high-stakes testing is one reason these changes are being made: "…we learn from [testing], the students learn from it, we design instruction around it, we look at staff development needs because of it, we use that" (INT: CO-FG: 702-704). For example, in the brochure for the summer 2007 workshops, how each session is tied to the Leander Learning Model is delineated in the course description (DOC 8). In order to ensure that the most recent educational research is clearly understood by district employees, Leander ISD has focused particularly on three researchers, Stiggins, Marzano, and DuFour.

Research-based Professional Development: Marzano

By far the most influential researcher studied by Leander ISD is R. J. Marzano. Marzano conducted a meta-analysis of research on instruction in order to identify the instructional practices that have the greatest probability of improving student achievement. His work included more than 100 research studies and over a million research subjects. In his 2001 work (Marzano, Pickering & Pollock), he and his team write that there are nine strategies that teachers can use to most effectively instruct students:

1. Identifying similarities and differences, including comparing, contrasting, and metaphors.

2. Summarizing and note-taking, including analyzing and deleting irrelevant information.

3. Reinforcing effort and providing recognition to students.

4. Using homework and practice designed to deepen understanding and strengthen skills.

5. Utilizing nonlinguistic representations, including graphic representations and physical models.

6. Providing opportunities for cooperative learning, using both informal and formal groupings.

7. Setting objectives and providing specific and timely feedback.

8. Generating and testing hypotheses, including systems analysis, problem solving, and invention.

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9. Employing cues, higher level questions, and advance organizers (p. 7).

In his 2003 work, Marzano moves out of the classroom and presents eleven factors that affect student achievement. The factors are arranged into three categories: school-level factors, teacher-level factors, and student-level factors, shown in Table 1.

Impacts on Student Achievement	
Factor	**Example**
School	Guaranteed and viable curriculum
	Challenging goals and effective feedback
	Parent and community involvement
	Safe and orderly environment
	Collegiality and professionalism
Teacher	Instructional strategies
	Classroom management
	Classroom curriculum design
Student	Home atmosphere
	Learned intelligence and background knowledge
	Motivation

Table 1. Marzano's Factors that Impact Student Achievement.

Source: Marzano (2003).

The district has included Marzano's work in a number of staff development offerings throughout the last three years, including having Marzano himself presenting a workshop via teleconferencing at the 2006 Continuous Improvement Conference (DOC 34). Marzano's influence can also be seen in these elements of the Leander Learning Model: Learner engagement, high-yield strategies, safe and orderly environment, collaboration,

plan for intervention/challenge, guaranteed and viable curriculum, and parent and community involvement.

Research-based Professional Development: Stiggins

Another tie to the Learning Model is Stiggins, Arter, Chappuis and Chappuis's (2004) work on assessment. Put simply, these researchers argue that two themes must drive a teacher's assessments: "assess accurately and use assessment to benefit students, not merely to grade and sort them" (p. 13). To accomplish this, classroom assessments must include the following factors:

1. Arise from and be designed to serve the specific information needs of intended users.

2. Arise from clearly articulated and appropriate achievement targets.

3. Accurately reflect student achievement.

4. Yield results that are effectively communicated to their intended users.

5. Involve students in classroom assessment, record keeping, and communication.

As they did with Marzano, Leander ISD learned directly from Stiggins. A number of administrators attended his conference in 2006 in order to learn how to lead professional development on the topic of classroom assessment. This allowed the directors of elementary and secondary curriculum to become trainers in Stiggins's assessment model, training all administrators in administrator meetings during the 2006 – 2007 school year (DOC 10). The entire assessment and intervention section of the Learning Model is based on the work of Stiggins.

Research-based Professional Development: DuFour

The final primary researcher in whom Leander ISD has invested significant time, money and training recently is R. DuFour. Writing with Eaker, DuFour's 1998 work discussed professional learning communities. The authors define a professional learning community as a group of educators who work and learn together with the goal of ensuring that all students receive a high level of education. The characteristic of a professional learning community includes "a shared mission, vision, and values; collective inquiry; collaborative teams; an orientation toward action and a willingness to experiment; commitment to continuous improvement; and a focus on results" (p. 45). When designing the content to be studied, districts should engage in "organized abandonment" (p. 163), distilling the curriculum down to the most essential elements of study.

DuFour and Eaker's work has become a focus for a number of trainings for the district. In fact, district leadership considered the training so important that it sent a number of teams, including one comprised of 12 business and operations directors, to training in the summer of 2006. In the Learning Model, DuFour and Eaker's work is reflected in the sections regarding essential learning aligned with TEKS, learning objectives, collaboration, and supportive learning environment.

Research-based Professional Development: Classroom Snapshots

A final way in which the district has relied on research-based professional development is in its utilization of classroom snapshots. Classroom snapshots, a training that taught administrators to get a "snapshot" of their campus at a particular time,

followed by teacher self-reflection, were begun in the district in 2004. According to

Learning 24/7 (2002), a snapshot should take no more than two to four minutes, should

not be used for evaluation purposes, and should be only one type of classroom visits used

by principals. There are six steps in the snapshot model:

1. Snapshot of teaching and learning, including the teaching objective, the target grade level, and the level of Bloom's Taxonomy that is in use, and the resources used.

2. Identification of instructional strategies, including what high-yield strategies (according to Marzano) are being used.

3. Student engagement.

4. Survey of the learning environment, including safety.

5. After the walk – analysis of data collected, including checking for alignment of the four monitored areas.

6. Reflection with the teacher, including feedback and prompted feedback.

Leander ISD has implemented classroom snapshots district-wide, even purchasing

handheld computers for all principals and assistant principals to be able to compile data

electronically. These electronic summaries are analyzed at the district level, as well.

There is an expectation that each administrator will engage in enough snapshots

so that each elementary teacher is visited six times a year and each secondary teacher is

visited eight times a year. Central office administrators see snapshots as an example of

support and expectations. The director of staff development stated, "[Snapshots] are

outlined there and they all keep coming up . . .and that's part of that expectation and support" (INT: CO-FG: 236-238).

CHANGES IN DISTRICT-WIDE PRACTICE: LOGISTICAL CHANGES

The final major change in the district caused by high-stakes testing falls into the logistical category, meaning largely having to do with planning and coordination. These logistical changes occurred in the curriculum department, as well as in the support departments.

Logistical Changes in Curriculum Department

In the curriculum department, the logistical changes include managing the state assessments. The director of special programs, whose department includes English language learners as well as special education, stated:

What I've seen in my area is that we spend a lot more time managing assessments. Who gets assessed? When do they get assessed? Getting the materials out there. Getting the people trained. All of that. I've got one person that used to be the person that would go to the campuses, work with the teachers. We really had a good system set up for [the English as a Second Language program] and the program system has degenerated over the years because what she spends her time on is not in the classroom, not on the campuses, but managing the assessment. And in other areas we have had to add personnel to manage that assessment (INT: CO-FG: 772-779).

This degeneration of time and focus to managing assessments was also discovered in the regular education side of instructional services. The director of staff development reported:

I mean if you look back at the beginning of TEAMS into the beginning of TAKS even, one of my hats…was testing. That whole system. And there weren't myriads of people out anywhere. I managed that system along with working with curriculum where it was staff programs and this, that and the other. That was one hat. And then it went to that hat, you know, needed to go someplace else because it began to be almost a full time job. Just managing the system, not anything that went with it, just managing the testing itself and the training of campus people. You know, getting it in, getting it out, promising the state we weren't doing any bad things…Lots of meetings. It just became more and more as they added more and more and then…it outgrew one person who… mostly focused there until it was entirely focused there, and had all of the outgoing people that began to support her because of all the other testing, so just the managing of the state system has been huge (INT: CO-FG: 781-794).

Principals have noted this increased complexity in managing the test, as well. One middle school principal conveyed this complexity:

When I first got into administration and whatever the standardized test was called then, if it was TAAS or TASS or TEAMS, I can't remember, but the handout that we were given was one page long [on] how to administer that test. Now, the handout that I give out with all the nuts and bolts and the security and

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confidentiality is five pages long. Back and front. Then counselors give

something and we have a meeting that lasts about an hour and a half, which is a

very long faculty meeting. And then we go to the teams and we take the

administrator's book and we talk about that. So that looks like a lot, but the

security and confidentiality, the bar has been raised (INT: MSPR: 105-113).

Logistical Changes in Support Departments

This increased complexity with accompanying changes has been felt in the

support departments, as well. The assistant superintendent for business and operations,

who is the administrator over the support departments, noted how much more careful the

departments are when scheduling:

One of the things I can tell you we pay a lot more attention to is what we

schedule. We have to make sure that we're not making major deliveries on

[testing] day. The support staff are very well aware of testing dates now and

trying to be sure we don't do anything that might disrupt a campus, asking for a

meeting. Probably systemically that has way more attention and awareness than

there was years ago (INT: ASBO: 147-152).

Having to pay attention to testing dates has had a positive effect on the support

departments, the director of technology stated:

Other positives is because of the stakes, departments and areas in the district

outside of curriculum have been forced to at least have a much greater

understanding of the curriculum and assessment process. You know, we have to

really understand how to not plan and do things that interfere with the

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assessments whether that be transportation or technology or whatever. Because

there is a stakes on it we've been forced to ask, "Okay, how's this going to

impact..." We have to know the TEKS and things…(INT: CO-FG: 847-853).

Finally, the assistant superintendent for business and operations revealed that

high-stakes testing has caused her staff to not only learn the TEKS, but also to become

more flexible:

> [High-stakes testing has shown us the] need to be agile. I think of that in terms of
>
> copy center, particularly. If a child doesn't do well, they're going to start trying
>
> other ways to have a child learn. Sometimes that can put things in the panic
>
> mode, because the teacher's trying to respond quickly, so it ripples through the
>
> whole system. An entire thing may get laid on that tries to deal with an issue that
>
> looks to be pervasive in the district. And that – I'm delighted about the staff
>
> reaction to that, because, especially in that area, they have always seen themselves
>
> as an extension of the classroom, so they'll move heaven and earth to try and get
>
> what the kids need (INT: ASBO: 155-162).

This attempt to keep things moving well logistically at central office is not lost on

principals. One elementary school principal stated that she knew that high-stakes testing

has caused problems for everyone's calendars:

> I think [high-stakes testing has] probably really bottled up some of their calendar,
>
> their dates, their times, staffing for communicating to campuses and probably all
>
> of their systems because we're testing so frequently. It's got to have a domino
>
> effect on everybody. I don't feel like just the campuses are getting hit but I think

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it's everybody. And that would be all the systems that oversee your volatile

programs, your SPED programs, your staffing for when anybody can go and do

interviews . . .anything. Holding meetings. Staff development. I think they're all

affected by the testing schedule (INT: ELPR: 145-151).

In analyzing this final research question, the district has implemented a number of

changes in trying to master high-stakes testing. Specifically, the district has attempted to

find Dumbo's feather, the magical element that will allow the district to succeed by using

precise data analysis, reactive and targeted intervention, increased discussions of high-

stakes testing, improved district curriculum alignment, research-based professional

development, and changes in logistics.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY

Introduction and Purpose of the Chapter

In this age of student, teacher, and school accountability, high-stakes testing has become a featured part of educating students. In fact, more student achievement mandates are being placed on school systems throughout the country than ever before (Asp, 2000; Center on Educational Policy, 2006; Kober, 2002; American Education Research Association, 2004; McNeil, 2000; Sadowski, 2003; Popham, 2003; Sindelar, 2006). Conventional wisdom holds that student achievement as measured by standardized tests is an efficient means of determining the effectiveness of a school district (Heubert & Houser, 1999). However, there have been a number of studies that argue that the emphasis on high-stakes testing has led to negative practices, such as narrowing curriculum and "teaching to the test" (Kober, 2002; McNeil, 2000; Popham, 2003; Sadowski, 2003; Gordon & Reese, 1997). In addition to pedagogical practices, high-stakes testing has also had an effect on classroom and school culture (Gordon & Reese, 1997; Shepard, 2003; Taylor, Shepard, Kinner, & Rosenthal, 2003). A positive, collaborative and empowering culture, whether in a classroom, campus, or district, has been shown to positively influence student success (Wayman, Midgley, & Stringfield, 2005; Hofman, Hofman & Guldemond, 2002; Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001). However,

little research has been conducted examining the impact high-stakes testing has had on a school district's central office culture.

The purpose of this study was to examine how one district's central office culture has been affected by the implementation of high-stakes testing. The study took into account literature from two broad areas, high-stakes testing and organizational culture. There were three themes found regarding high-stakes testing. First, the majority of the studies reported that high-stakes testing programs have a negative impact on stakeholders in the educational system. These negative effects included a decrease in teaching higher level thinking skills (Rex, 2003; Harlen & Crick, 2003), a decrease in intrinsic motivation of students (Sheldon & Biddle, 1998; Kelleghan, Madaus & Raczek, 1996; Kohn, 1993), and minimal carryover for student success on other measures (Carnoy, 2005; Amrein & Berliner, 2003; Valencia & Villarreal, 2003; Jacob, 2002; Stone, Engel, Nagaoka & Roderick, 2005). Second, many of the studies found that high-stakes testing programs have shifted how time is used in classrooms throughout the country (Cankoy & Tut, 2005; CEP, 2005; McNeil, 2000; Kober, 2002; Gordon & Reese, 1997; Moon, Callahan & Tomlinson, 2003). This change in curricular and instructional practices will have a long-term impact, since public school high-stakes testing programs are affecting students in every state (Princeton Review, 2003). Finally, numerous studies found that there is a belief that educational decisions have moved away from the hands of educators and into the hands of policymakers and others outside the educational system (CEP, 2006; Gallagher, 2000; Rigsby & DeMulder, 2003). Less apparent in the literature was the

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effect high-stakes testing has had on organizational cultures in schools and school districts, specifically on central office practices.

Regarding organizational culture, there were three themes found in the literature. First, it seems clear that a strong, positive organizational culture is a necessary component to achieve student success for all levels of the school organization, from campuses to central offices (Waller, 1932; Peterson and Deal, 2002; Fullan, 1982; Deal and Kennedy, 1983; Prosser, 1999; Saphier & King, 1985; Purkey & Smith, 1982; Henderson, Buehler, Stein, Dalton, Robinson & Anfara, 2005; Deblois & Corriveau, 1994; Sidener, 1995; Coetsee, 2005). Second, many of the studies found that trust is the most critical component to establish when attempting to create a positive organizational culture (Cunningham & Gresso, 1993; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998; Bibb & Kourdi, 2004; Harris, 2002; Bryk & Schneider, 2002 Sergiovanni, 1992, 1994). Finally, it was found that central office organizational culture can have a positive or negative effect on student achievement in a school district (Muller, 2004; Johnson, 1996; Haberman, 2003; MacIver & Farley, 2003; Grove, 2002; Honig, 2003). When taken in conjunction with the earlier review of high-stakes testing, there is a void in the literature concerning the impact high-stakes testing has on central office practices and organizational culture. Such a study is needed, according to Firestone and Shipps (2003). In their discussion on the balance between accountability demands and a school system's needs, the authors discussed the limited literature in this area. Specifically, they asked how external accountability systems such as high-stakes testing requirements from the federal and state governments "impinge on schools or districts and create pressures for action" (p. 45).

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Further, they stated that research in this area has focused largely on schools, and they raised the question: What is the impact of external accountability on internal beliefs and practices at the district level? They concluded their recommendations for further studies by arguing that one logical method of addressing the question is by using a case study "in light of the full range of accountabilities impinging on the district" (p. 46).

The questions Firestone and Shipps raised are not answered in the present literature. This study, then, sought to fill that gap by examining how the external accountability system, in this case, required state and federal high-stakes tests, affected the central office culture in one school district. The research was guided by three questions:

1. What changes in the central office organizational culture occurred due to the increased implementation of and pressure from high-stakes testing?

2. How have the reported changes in the central office culture affected district level administrators and campus leaders?

3. How do changes in central office organizational culture affect district-wide practices?

In order to attempt to find answers to these questions, this study utilized a qualitative methodology and a single case study design.

Methodology

Since a deep and detailed description was being sought, a qualitative methodology and a case study approach were used. The district was selected by a purposive method to

be representative of a fast-growth, Academically Acceptable school district with a student population of approximately 21,000 students, as well as a clearly bounded central office.

Data collection included focus groups, interviews, and document review. The focus group and interview participants were purposefully selected, and had to have been an administrator in the district for at least seven years prior to the current year. For the focus groups, two homogeneous focus groups were utilized. One group included campus principals, and the other included central office administrators. For the individual interviews, focused interviews were held with a select, representative group of central office and campus administrators who could discuss the history of high-stakes testing and central office culture in the district. The interview participants included the superintendent, the assistant superintendent for instructional services, the assistant superintendent for business and operations, and three principals. Documents reviewed included administrative action plans, district goals, campus improvement plan, district guiding documents, as well as a number of other documents.

Once the data were collected, the constant comparison method (Merriam, 1998; Glaser and Strauss, 1967) was used to analyze the data and produce the findings. NVivo software, Microsoft Word search functions, and Miles and Huberman's (1994) suggestions on summarizing documents and coding matrices were used to assist in the analysis. The study followed a number of techniques to enhance trustworthiness and credibility, including the triangulation of data, peer review, and member checks (Merriam, 1998; Glesne, 1999; Yin, 2003). Finally, by using multiple methods, a variety of data sources, the establishment of an audit trail, as well as the use of rich, thick

descriptions, the dependability and consistency of the results were increased (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998).

Insights about the effects high-stakes testing has had on central office organizational culture can be found by analyzing the cultural and practical changes a school district has experienced. The insights gained from this study should broaden the knowledge base and can be shared with educators, policymakers, and researchers to help them understand the impact high-stakes testing has had on central office organizational culture.

Major Findings

High-stakes testing has affected the central office organizational culture, as well as campus and central office administrators, in four distinct ways. It has instilled fear, invoked frustration, inhibited freedom, and improved focus.   These changes in central office organizational culture have led to six specific changes in district-wide practices: more precise student data analysis, reactive and targeted intervention, increased discussion about high-stakes testing, improved curriculum alignment, research-based professional development, as well as logistical changes.

FINDING ONE: INSTILLED FEAR

The first finding of this study was that high-stakes testing has instilled fear in the central office organizational culture. Fear was a common factor among all the district staff members who were interviewed, but it took on a number of forms. Principals and central office administrators expressed fear that their campuses or the district would not

live up to the expectations placed on the district by community members. This fear took its most obvious form in the concern about the rating a campus would receive from the state. This fear of failure on the high-stakes tests even extended to a fear of losing one's job. It is important to note, however, that the majority of people interviewed discussed their belief that testing by itself was not the cause of fear, but that the way the testing was used that created fear. Thus, it seems reasonable to say that the current accountability system may be the driver of fear, instead of testing itself.

FINDING TWO: INVOKED FRUSTRATION

The second finding of this study related to the frustration that has been invoked on the central office organizational culture. Feelings of frustration were found from all study participants. Principals were frustrated with central office because they felt central office administrators focused on internal solutions, were overly reactive, and did not take into account the time demands on principals. Principals were particularly frustrated with high expectations being set out by the district without accompanying direction on how to achieve the expectations. Both groups expressed frustration with high-stakes testing in terms of it focusing only on one aspect of education and not focusing on the whole child. Finally, all participants admitted to feeling overwhelmed with the expectations from the federal government, the state, and the district.

FINDING THREE: INHIBITED FREEDOM

Central office administrators and principals indicated that their freedom to establish unique, individualized goals was inhibited by the demands of high-stakes

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testing. The goals that have been established were considered somewhat arbitrary, as they were focused on campuses achieving a particular rating as issued by the state.

FINDING FOUR: IMPROVED FOCUS

High-stakes testing has brought an improved focus on student learning to the district's central office organizational culture. Throughout the district, there was a sense of urgency for students to achieve, particularly in the grade levels that have high-stakes tests. There was a tightening of expectations throughout the district, with the shift from the Four Challenges (Figure 13) to the Expectations (Figure 19) being the most obvious example. This improved focus caused both central office administrators and principals to become more focused on research-based practices, such as those recommended by Marzano, Stiggins, and DuFour. In fact, there was an expectation in the district that administrators be familiar with the work of all three of these researchers.

FINDING FIVE: PRECISE DATA ANALYSIS

The above changes in central office organizational culture led to alterations in the practices of the school district. One natural outcome of the improved focus in the district was the precision that is now brought to bear in terms of analysis of student achievement data. The district used information from the National Center for Educational Accountability's Just for the Kids, state assessment results, and its own benchmark testing to analyze student data. Campuses established data rooms on their campuses for the purpose of taking the analysis of student data down to the smallest level.

FINDING SIX: REACTIVE AND TARGETED INTERVENTION

Another outcome of changes in the organizational culture was the assistance offered to various campuses, groups, and students in the district. Particular attention was paid to grade levels that have high-stakes tests. This assistance included additional staffing, as well as supplemental tutoring in subject matters and in test-taking strategies. Finally, campuses designated "high needs" received a slightly higher per pupil budgeting amount.

FINDING SEVEN: INCREASED DISCUSSIONS OF TESTING

Due to changes in the organizational culture of central office, testing became a common topic of conversation in the school district. In the words of one central office administrator, "Testing is a very common conversation now" (INT: ASBO: 139). Specifically, conversations that are data-based and test-centered have become regular throughout the district. In addition to this testing dialogue, however, the district set up a number of venues by which principals and central office administrators discussed high-stakes testing and student achievement. These included SEEK visits, vertical teams of principals, and the structured campus visits the superintendent and assistant superintendent made.

FINDING EIGHT: IMPROVED CURRICULUM ALIGNMENT

The improved focus on student achievement led to the district becoming more aligned in curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The campus visits mentioned above also were one of the reasons curriculum expectations and delivery were more aligned in

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the district. Principals were all required to answer a standard set of questions regarding curriculum when they had their campus visit. Also, the district changed the way it used curriculum facilitators, moving to a model that brought standard curriculum delivery techniques to the classrooms. Benchmark or profile testing also became more aligned to the state assessments and standards.

FINDING NINE: RESEARCH-BASED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The curriculum alignment discussed above has to more research-based professional development in the district. With its emphasis on research, the district established the Leander Learning Model that encompasses the research conducted by Marzano, Stiggins, and DuFour. This model was the focus of the majority of the professional development the district offered, including an annual staff conference in February and the professional development offered in the summer.

FINDING TEN: LOGISTICAL CHANGES

Finally, the district experienced logistical changes in the curriculum department and in the support departments due to high-stakes testing. In the curriculum department, there was a great deal of complexity associated with state testing, and a number of new processes and staff were in place to ensure that the administration of the state test and the distribution of the materials were accomplished successfully. Likewise, support departments added processes to ensure that nothing conflicted with testing days. An unanticipated result of this was that the support departments learned more about the TAKS.

Conclusions

Based on this study, a number of conclusions can be drawn.

CONCLUSION ONE: POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EFFECTS

As construed by district leaders, high-stakes testing has led to both positive and negative effects on central office organizational culture. If the purpose of a school district is to "provide for the education of the youth of the community" (Dunklee, 2000, p. 32), then positive effects to the central office organizational culture can be said to move the district towards better educating students. That said, however, simply because a district leader judges an effect to be negative or positive, it could be simply what Fullan (2002) terms an "implementation dip" (p. 17). That is, with the changes brought about by a more stringent accountability system, district leaders could be in an adjustment period, thus feeling that the effects are negative (or, conversely, positive) as they work to adjust to the new system.

At this time, however, district leaders feel the organizational culture of central office in the district has been positively affected by high-stakes testing in at least three areas that impact central office organizational culture: research-based practices, focus on individual students, and district-wide alignment.

Leander ISD expects its administrators, both at the campus and district levels, to be well versed in the most recent educational research. As such, the district has implemented at least two major endeavors to ensure that the research learned is enacted. The first is the Leander Learning Model, which focuses on research practices found to be

most effective by researchers including Marzano, Stiggins, and DuFour. The second is research-based staff development that is based on the Learning Model. By requiring that staff development be tied to the Learning Model, the district is ensuring that good research is being put into practice.

The second positive effect on the central office organizational culture is the focus that is now placed on individual students. This can be seen in that data rooms that are "all over this district," according to the assistant superintendent for instructional services (INT: ASIS: 406). These data rooms allow teachers and administrators to see how effectively students in the school are performing on state and district assessments, and are used to monitor progress through the year. The rooms are the most obvious example of the emphasis currently placed on ensuring that all students, including those in subgroups with small populations, "count".

The third positive effect of high-stakes testing on central office organizational culture is the alignment that is being seen throughout the district. According to Muller (2004), "For a district to effectively lead change and support performance improvement in its schools, it must focus steadfastly on alignment. The administrative structure of a large school system is incredibly complex. Such complexity is not the issue – the congruency of goals, priorities and action is" (p. ii). Marzano (2003) also argues for alignment in school districts, stating that a guaranteed and viable curriculum is the single most important factor a district can implement that will have the most significant impact on student achievement. He states that districts "must identify essential versus supplemental content and ensure that the essential content is sequenced appropriately and can be

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adequately addressed in the instructional time available. Schools must also ensure that teachers cover the essential content…" (p. 34). The district has taken significant steps to improve district-wide curricular alignment, including the establishment of and focus on the Learning Model, the training done on classroom snapshots, the study of the TEKS for district alignment, and the focus on establishing a guaranteed and viable curriculum.

While there have been positive effects on Leander ISD's central office organizational culture, conversely, district leaders expressed that there are three negative effects high-stakes testing has had: increased fear, greater frustration, and the narrowing of curriculum. There is a heightened sense of fear relating to high-stakes testing and the way the results are used in the current state accountability system throughout the district. This fear includes the fear of losing one's job, the fear of the publicity and community disappointment associated with not being successful on high-stakes tests, and the simple fear of failure. This conclusion paralleled the findings of McGhee and Nelson's (2005) study regarding the effects of high-stakes testing on school leaders.

Also, there is an increased sense of frustration in the district. Principals are frustrated with being given expectations for achievement without being given directions on how to get there; administrators are frustrated with high-stakes testing causing campuses to not focus on the needs of the whole child; and all groups have a general sense of being overwhelmed with the state tests and all the requirements, expectations, and programs that accompany it.

A final negative effect on the central office organizational culture due to high-stakes testing is the narrowing of curriculum that is found. While numerous studies have found

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that high-stakes testing has led to curriculum narrowing occurring in classrooms

(Valencia & Villarreal, 2003; McNeil, 2000; CEP, 2006; Sheldon & Biddle, 1998;

Gallagher, 2000; Meaghan & Casas, 1995) and in schools (Moon, Callahan, &

Tomlinson, 2003; Wilkins, Graham, Parker, Westfall, Fraser, & Tembo, 2003; Froese-

Germain, 2001), the same can be seen on the district level, as well. Specifically, there is

increased attention, both in terms of programs and staffing, paid to grade levels that are

tested. Also, there is increased attention to subjects that are tested. The most blatant

example is the district's lack of social studies curriculum facilitators, the one core area at

the elementary level that is not tested by the state.

CONCLUSION TWO: COMMUNICATING EXPECTATIONS AND SUPPORT

A second conclusion that can be drawn from this study relates to communicating

expectations and providing support. It is clear that in order to successfully implement

changes in school districts, clear expectations that are tied to specific support must be

communicated. The consistent thread running through principals' interviews and focus

groups related to the lack of communication from central office regarding pathways to

improve student achievement. That is, when district leadership announced the

expectation that all campuses would be Recognized or Exemplary by 2009, campus

principals believed that the communication was incomplete: there should have been an

expression of precisely how central office and campuses were going to go about

achieving the expectation. This lack of complete communication can be contrasted with

the way science instruction was altered at the elementary level. As described by one

elementary principal, poor student performance on the state's science test led the district

to quick action, including the expectation that science instruction would be improved, coupled with a focused, communicated approach to how science instruction would be delivered. The second example clearly ties expectations and support together, resulting in a more satisfactory outcome for the principals involved.

CONCLUSION THREE: OUTSIDE EXPECTATIONS

The third conclusion from the study relates to outside stakeholders. That is, schools are feeling pressure to improve student performance from the visibility of test results and ratings communicated in the media. These media communications have resulted in increased community expectations and pressures to achieve Recognized or Exemplary status. The ratings system that is used by the state has increased the pressure put on campuses and school districts. Because a campus or district rating is a simple idea to convey, it is widely reported throughout the school district and in the media. Parents and community members desire that their schools have the highest rating available without fully understanding how the rating is achieved, resulting in increased frustration by schools and the district.

Implications

In this era of increased state and federal accountability, there are a number of implications associated with this study. First, districts must engage in dialogue about the fear high-stakes testing (and its associated accountability system) brings to the organizational culture of the district. Given the impact high-stakes testing has, there is little chance the fear will go away. Thus, it is imperative that school districts and

campuses recognize the existence of the fear and discuss it, as well as ways to keep the fear from crippling the organization.

While high-stakes testing is a fact of life, for the negative effects of it to be minimized, school districts must communicate to internal stakeholders, and especially campus principals, not only expectations for the district, but also pathways to achieve the expectations. As stated above, building level principals throughout the district universally affirmed this frustration.

Districts must be cautious not to exclude curriculum in the wake of high-stakes testing. There is an adage in the field of education that states, "You measure what you treasure." In the era of high-stakes, the converse is actually true: School districts treasure what the state measures. School districts must guard against narrowing the curriculum to the point that only the tested subjects are studied by students. While this extreme was not seen in LISD, there was evidence of a decreased emphasis on non-tested subject areas. It is probably most clearly evidenced by the exclusion of social studies support in the district at the elementary level.

Districts must work to communicate openly and often with the community outside the school system. Given how simple it is for the media to report a school's or district's state rating, it is imperative that districts work to educate the community regarding the way the rating is determined. In the absence of information, people will be forced to rely solely on the information they have on hand; in this case, a simple rating from the state.

Finally, fast-growth schools must ensure they staff appropriately. In a fast-growing district, it is difficult to focus on anything but growth. Conducting this research in a

district with rapid student growth led to more complexity than was originally expected. Because of the pervasive nature of increasing student numbers at its current rate, growth affects everything, including central office organizational culture, high-stakes testing implementation, and intervention programs for students. Given how student growth permeates the processes of Leander ISD, it would behoove the district to have some staff dedicated only to growth issues, allowing others to be able to focus on improving the system as a whole. Likewise, as the district continues to grow, it must ensure central office communications continue with campuses as effectively as possible.

Further Research

The literature associated with the effects high-stakes testing has had on central office organizational culture is limited. Since a single case study is, by definition, restricted, it is suggested that the subject of high-stakes testing and its effects on central office organizational culture be studied in other school districts, perhaps utilizing a quantitative methodology. Additionally, there are a number of topics and questions more loosely tied to this study that also are recommended for further study.

Since fear was felt by district and campus leaders due to high-stakes testing, studies are needed to determine how the fear associated with high-stakes testing has affected teachers. Likewise, how has fear felt by adults affected students who are taught by them? Studies should be conducted to determine how student achievement is affected by the pressures teachers, principals, and district-level administrators feel. Another area of research associated with fear that could be studied is tied to the effects leadership has

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on the fear associated with high-stakes testing. Specifically, to what extent does leadership behavior impact fear as it relates to high-stakes testing and the accountability system?

In addition to fear, high-stakes testing and the accountability system seem primed to move the state and nation towards a merit-based pay system. What effects do merit pay compensation systems have on the organizational culture at central office and at the campus levels? Finally, because of the strong influence the outside community has on schools, a study of how community expectations regarding a school's accountability rating affect the organizational culture of the school may be helpful.

In the final analysis, it seems clear that high-stakes testing is a function of the age of accountability in which we live. With the possible reauthorization of No Child Left Behind on the horizon, it seems critical that educators and legislators consider all the effects high-stakes testing has had on the educational environment, including the impact it has had on central office organizational culture. Hopefully, this study can contribute to that discussion.

APPENDICES

LEANDER INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

204 West South Street   Leander, TX 78641-0218   Telephone: (512)434-5000   Fax: (512)434-5252

November 14, 2006

Bret Champion
202 Woods Lane
Cedar Park, TX   78613

Mr. Champion:

This letter is in response to your request to conduct a study related to the impact
high-stakes testing has had on central office organizational culture. Specifically,
you requested to use Leander ISD facilities, such as a middle school lecture hall
and the central office administration building conference room, in order to
conduct interviews and/or focus groups. Additionally, you requested that up to
21 administrators in the district be allowed to be interviewed, either individually
or in a focus group setting.

Your request is approved. I look forward to hearing the final report of your
study.

If I can be of further assistance, please let me know.   Thank you.

Sincerely,
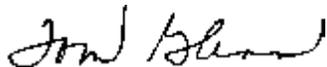
Tom Glenn
Superintendent

Appendix B: IRB Informed Consent Form

IRB APPROVED ON: March 5, 2007   *EXPIRES ON: March 3, 2008*
**The Effects of High-stakes Testing on Central Office Organizational Culture: Changes in
One School District**
IRB PROTOCOL # 2006-10-0149

Conducted By: Bret Alan Champion   Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Ruben Olivarez, (512)
471-7551
Of University of Texas at Austin: *Educational Administration Department*

Telephone: (512) 434-5222; (512) 259-8603; (512) 413-5343
Email Address: bretchampion@gmail.com

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This form provides you with
information about the study. The person in charge of this research will also describe this
study to you and answer all of your questions. Please read the information below and ask
any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to take part. Your
participation is entirely voluntary. You can refuse to participate without penalty or loss
of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You can stop your participation at any
time and your refusal will not impact current or future relationships with UT Austin or
participating sites. To do so simply tell the researcher you wish to stop participation.
The researcher will provide you with a copy of this consent for your records.

The purpose of this study is to determine what impact high-stakes testing has had on
one school district's central office organizational culture, and how the changes have
affected district-wide practices. Three research questions guide the study:
   4. What changes in the central office organizational culture have occurred due to the
       increased implementation of and pressure from high-stakes testing?
   5. How do changes in central office organizational culture affect district-wide
       practices?
   6. How have the reported changes in the central office culture affected district level
       administrators and campus leaders?

The study utilizes a qualitative methodology, and a case study approach, including focus
groups, interviews, and document review, is being used. The interviews and focus
groups include 21 administrative staff members who have been employed with Leander
Independent School District as administrators since 1999.

If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to do the following things:
   • Participate in an interview or focus group regarding the above topic.

Total estimated time to participate in study is one hour to two hours.

Risks of being in the study:
   • Please note that the interviews and focus groups will be recorded (audio only)
     using a digital audio recorder. The recording will be coded so that no personally
     identifiable information is visible. Additionally, the recording will be kept in a

locked filing cabinet within a locked office.   The recording will be heard only for research purposes by the investigator and his associates. Finally, the recording will be erased once it is transcribed.
- This interview may involve risks that are currently unforeseeable. If you wish to discuss the information above or any other risks you may experience, you may ask questions now or call the Principal Investigator listed on the front page of this form.

Benefits of being in the study are that participants will be taking part in a study that will add to the body of literature on high-stakes testing and organizational culture. Additionally, the information might be used by practitioners in the field to minimize any negative impact high-stakes testing may have on their central office culture.

Compensation:
- There is no compensation provided for participating in this study.

Confidentiality and Privacy Protections:
- The information from this study will be kept confidential by password protecting electronic files and locking hard files (including the digital audio recorder and files) in a cabinet that is in a locked office. Further, the data will be shared with no one except for peer reviewers and the graduate advisor until the dissertation is complete. Once the information from the interviews and focus groups is transcribed and coded, it will be destroyed, either by deletion (electronic audio files) or through shredding (hard files).
- The data resulting from your participation may be made available to other researchers in the future for research purposes not detailed within this consent form. In these cases, the data will contain no identifying information that could associate you with it, or with your participation in any study.

The records of this study will be stored securely and kept confidential. Authorized persons from The University of Texas at Austin and members of the Institutional Review Board have the legal right to review your research records and will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law. All publications will exclude any information that will make it possible to identify you as a subject. Throughout the study, the researchers will notify you of new information that may become available and that might affect your decision to remain in the study.

Contacts and Questions:
If you have any questions about the study please ask now. If you have questions later, want additional information, or wish to withdraw your participation call the researcher conducting the study. His name, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses are at the top of this page. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, complaints, concerns, or questions about the research please contact Jody Jensen, Ph.D., Chair of The University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, (512) 232-2685or email: orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu.
>> ***You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.***

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and have sufficient information to make a decision about participating in this study. I understand that the data I provide will be used for other educational purposes and consent to participate in the study.

Signature:_____ Date: _____

_____ Date: _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Signature of Investigator:_____ Date: _____

Appendix C: Leander ISD Documents Cited in This Study

Document 1:   2000 Summer Retreat Speech by Superintendent

Document 2:   2001 Beginning of Year Convocation Speech by Superintendent

Document 3:   Administrator Retreat Requirements, 2000

Document 4:   Administrator Retreat Requirements, 2006

Document 5:   Board Agenda, October 9, 2003

Document 6:   Campus Improvement Plan, Elementary, 1999 – 2000

Document 7:   Campus Improvement Plan, Elementary, 2006 – 2007

Document 8:   Continuous Improvement Conference Agenda 2007

Document 9:   Email from Budget Director, May 29, 2007

Document 10:   Email from Director of Elementary Curriculum, June 4, 2007

Document 11:   Email from Director of Elementary Curriculum, May 7, 2007

Document 12:   Email from Director of Special Programs, May 23, 2007

Document 13:   Email from Elementary Principal, May 21, 2007

Document 14:   Email from High School Principal, May 20, 2007

Document 15:   Leander ISD Board of Trustees Data Summary

Document 16:   Leander ISD Budget Summary

Document 17:   Leander ISD Employee Data Summary

Document 18:   Leander ISD Expectations

Document 19:   Leander ISD Four Challenges

Document 20:   Leander ISD High School Allotment Goals, June 2007

Document 21:   Leander ISD Learning Model

Document 22:   Leander ISD Organizational Chart

Document 23:   Leander ISD Phone List, 1997

Document 24:   Leander ISD Phone List, 2006

Document 25:   Leander ISD Profile Test, Fifth Grade Math, 2006-2007

Document 26:   Leander ISD System Improvement Framework

Document 27:   Leander ISD Ten Ethical Principles

Document 28:   Leander ISD Viewed as a System

Document 29:   Leander ISD Vision and Graduate Profile

Document 30:   Leander Way

Document 31:   Principal Learning Matrix

Document 32:   Summer Professional Development Catalog, 2007

Document 33:   Email from Assistant Superintendent, April 9, 2007

Document 34:   Continuous Improvement Conference Agenda, 2006

Document 35:   Email from Director of School Improvement, May 23, 2007

Appendix D: Focus Group Introduction, Ground Rules, and Questions

[**Researcher** explains that the session will be recorded using a digital recorder, and that highlights of the discussion will be captured on chart paper.]

[Recording begins.]

Researcher: [States time, date & group type (central office administrators or principals). Reviews IRB Consent Form and has participants sign.]

The purpose of this focus group is to explore the effects high-stakes testing has had on central office culture in Leander ISD. Your participation is appreciated and will assist me in examining the questions for this study:

7. What changes in the central office organizational culture have occurred due to the increased implementation of and pressure from high-stakes testing?
8. How do changes in central office organizational culture affect district-wide practices?
9. How have the reported changes in the central office culture affected district level administrators and campus leaders?

Each of you was randomly selected from central office administrators (or principals) who have seven or more years of experience in Leander ISD.

In order to facilitate the discussion, it is important that we all have the same operational definitions of at least three terms.

[Display signs with definitions of high-stakes testing, central office, and organizational culture. The definitions can be found in chapter one of the dissertation proposal.]

During our discussion, we need to keep the following ground rules in mind:

1. Speak from your own experience instead of speaking in generalities.
2. Participate to your fullest ability.
3. Listen actively to other participants.
4. Feel free to respectfully disagree with other participants, but refrain from personal attacks.
5. Information shared in this focus group will not be ascribed to any particular individual but will be identified only as "Principal A" (or "Central Office Administrator A").

With those thoughts in mind, we turn now to our first question.

<center>Focus Group Questions</center>

1. Given the description of organizational culture presented to you, describe the organizational culture of the central office in Leander ISD today.

2. What was the central office culture like seven to ten years ago, before the significant high-stakes testing program was fully integrated? How was it different than now?

3. Describe the level of trust and relationship that exists between central office and campuses today.

4. Seven to ten years ago, how were these levels different?

5. What role did high-stakes testing play in the changes between then and now?

6. Has central office culture changed your role in the organization since the implementation of high-stakes testing? How so?

7. Would you categorize the changes that have occurred in central office culture over the past seven to ten years as positive or negative? Why?

8. Besides high-stakes testing, are there other factors that might have contributed to the changes? What are they?

9. What documents exist that might shed light on the changes in central office culture over the last ten years?

Note: The following probes may be used by the researcher if necessary (from Krueger & Casey, 2000, p. 120):

- Would you explain further?
- Would you give me an example of what you mean?
- Would you say more?
- Tell us more.

- Say more.
- Is there anything else?
- Please describe what you mean.
- I don't understand.

Appendix E: Interview Introduction, Ground Rules, and Questions

[**Researcher** explains that the session will be recorded using a digital recorder, and that highlights of the discussion will be captured on chart paper.]

[Recording begins.]

Researcher: [States time, date and name and title of interviewee. Reviews IRB Consent Form and has participant sign.]

The purpose of this interview is to explore the effects high-stakes testing has had on central office culture in Leander ISD. Your participation is appreciated and will assist me in examining the questions for this study:
- What changes in the central office organizational culture have occurred due to the increased implementation of and pressure from high-stakes testing?
- How do changes in central office organizational culture affect district-wide practices?
- How have the reported changes in the central office culture affected district level administrators and campus leaders?

[If Central Office Personnel:] You were selected because of your role in the formation of and continued work with the central office organizational culture. Additionally, you have spent seven or more years as an administrator in Leander ISD.
[If Principal:] You were selected randomly from principals who have seven or more years of administrative experience in Leander ISD.

In order to facilitate the discussion, it is important that we have the same operational definitions of at least three terms.

[Present and discuss definitions of high-stakes testing, central office, and organizational culture. The definitions can be found in chapter one of the dissertation proposal.]

Before we begin, I'd like to ask that you speak from your own experience instead of speaking in generalities and remember that information shared in this interview will not be ascribed to any particular individual but will be identified only as "Principal A" (or "Central Office Administrator A").

With those thoughts in mind, we turn now to our first question.

Interview Questions

1. Describe your role in the organization of Leander ISD.

2. Has your role changed in the last seven to ten years? How so?

3. To what do you attribute any changes?

4. Describe the central office culture in Leander ISD.

5. Has it changed in the last ten years? How?

6. Describe the level of trust and relationship that exists between central office and

   campuses today.

7. Seven to ten years ago, how were these levels different?

8. What specific changes has the implementation of the state's high-stakes testing

   program made to central office culture?

9. What practices have changed due to this change in culture?

10. What documents exist that might shed light on the changes in central office

    culture over the last ten years?

Note: The following probes may be used by the researcher if necessary (based on
Krueger & Casey, 2000, p. 120):

- Would you explain further?
- Would you give me an example of what you mean?
- Would you say more?
- Tell us more.

- Say more.
- Is there anything else?
- Please describe what you mean.
- I don't understand.

Appendix F: Just for the Kids Sample District Summary

[Leander ISD](#)
2006 Elementary District Profile

Number of Schools:	24	Accountability Rating:	Acad Acc.	Number of Students:	22069
Low Income:	20.98%	English Language Learners:	4.32%	Special Education:	11.16%
African-American:	5.80%	Asian:	3.57%	Caucasian:	71.77%
Hispanic:	18.26%	Native-American:	0.59%		

Opportunity Gap

School	AYP	TEA Rating	%Low Income	%ELL	MATHEMATICS Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	READING Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	SCIENCE Grade 5	WRITING Grade 4
ADA MAE FAUBION EL	Yes	Recog.	24.4	4.3	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	✓	🟡	✗	🟡
BAGDAD ELEMENTARY	Yes	AcadAcc.	56.4	20.5	✗	✗	✗	🟡	🟡	🟡	✗	✗
BLOCK HOUSE CREEK EL	Yes	Recog.	16.4	1.5	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
C C MASON EL	Yes	Recog.	32.5	3.9	✗	✗	✗	✗	🟡	✗	✗	✗
CHARLOTTE COX ELEMENTARY	Yes	Recog.	13.0	5.1	🟡	✗	🟡	🟡	🟡	✗	✗	✗
CYPRESS EL	Yes	Recog.	21.4	4.7	✗	✗	🟡	🟡	✗	🟡	✗	✗
DEER CREEK ELEMENTARY	Yes	Recog.	2.6	3.3	✗	✗	🟡	✗	🟡	🟡	✗	🟡
LAURA WELCH BUSH ELEMENTARY	Yes	Exemp.	5.0	3.3	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡
LOIS F GIDDENS EL	Yes	Recog.	30.2	3.9	✗	✗	✗	🟡	✗	🟡	✗	✗
PATRICIA KNOWLES ELEMENTARY	Yes	AcadAcc.	45.5	21.3	✗	✗	✗	✗	🟡	🟡	✗	✗
PAULINE NAUMANN EL	Yes	Recog.	16.7	5.7	🟡	✗	🟡	✗	✗	🟡	✗	✗
PLEASANT HILL ELEMENTARY	Yes	Recog.	21.6	2.4	🟡	🟡	✗	🟡	🟡	🟡	✗	✗
RUTLEDGE ELEMENTARY	n/a	Recog.	24.1	9.0	✗	🟡	✗	🟡	🟡	✗	✗	✗
STEINER RANCH EL	Yes	Exemp.	4.6	4.4	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	✗	🟡
WHITESTONE EL	Yes	Recog.	37.3	5.6	✗	✗	🟡	🟡	✗	✗	✗	✗

Key:

✓ Indicates Strong Performance (opp gap >= -10)

🟡 Indicates an Area for Additional Attention (opp gap < -10 and > -30)

✗ Indicates an Area of Concern (opp gap <= -30)
? Indicates that insufficient data are available to display an opp gap.

⬛ Indicates no test data are available for that subject/grade.

*Opportunity gaps(opp gap) show how well a school performed compared to the strongest-performing schools in the state serving **equally or more disadvantaged** students.

Appendix G: Attendance Zoning Sample Flyer

Leander ISD
High School Attendance Zone Advisory Committee
Seeking Parents/Community Members!

Did you know that Leander ISD continues to be among the fastest growing school districts with more than 10,000 students in Texas? We grew almost 10% just this past year, and now have almost 24,400 students enrolled.

This type of growth means new classrooms, new buildings, and new attendance boundaries. In fact, we will be opening our 4th high school in August 2008.

We need your help! Leander ISD is currently forming a parent/citizen advisory committee to develop recommendations to the Board for high school attendance boundaries for the 2008 - 2009 and subsequent school years. We need parents and community members from all areas of Leander ISD to participate, since these recommendations often impact the entire District.

Our first scheduled meeting will be held Thursday, March 29th at 7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m. in the Artie L. Henry Middle School Cafeteria, located at 100 N. Vista Ridge Blvd. in Cedar Park, so we are seeking volunteers NOW!

Committee members should expect to meet bi-weekly or weekly through mid-May, with a recommendation due to the School Board by May 17th.

Volunteers will be accepted until March 21st. While more than one person per neighborhood is welcome, there is a limit of one voting member from each "neighborhood code." This is on a first-come, first-serve basis, unless the neighborhood selects another voting representative.

Please register online by going to www.leanderisd.org, where you will find a link that will lead you to the registration form. When you register you will be asked to complete a survey. After the first survey, we will be sending registered members a survey to prioritize most important factors in a good decision. Receipt of this second survey will be your registration confirmation.

If you do not have access to register online, please call Gina Mitschke at 434-5066 (Business & Operations department) to register.

Registration must be complete by March 21, 2007.

Appendix H: SSI Grade Advancement Requirements Sample

**SSI Grade Advancement Requirements
for Students Enrolled in Grade 3
Taking TAKS Reading**

School notifies parents of Student Success Initiative general requirements—start of school year.
See sample SSI Parent Notification Letter and SSI Brochure.

School continues with instructional and evaluation planning and services required by Texas Reading Initiative. School notifies parents of students identified to be at risk of failure on the first administration of the TAKS.

3rd grader takes the TAKS reading test—February 2005.   Passes

Fails / Absent

School notifies parents of student's failure and provides accelerated instruction; the time, date, and type of accelerated instruction to be provided; and information about the child's possible retention.[1]
See sample SSI letters in GPC manual.

Retakes the 3rd grade TAKS reading test—April 2005.   Passes

Fails / Absent

Principal notifies teacher and parents of student's failure. Notice must include a description of the purpose and responsibilities of the GPC[2] and the time and place for the GPC meeting. GPC meets to prescribe appropriate accelerated instruction and determines whether student will take TAKS or an alternate assessment (state approved) in accordance with local policy.
See sample SSI letters in GPC manual.

Parent waives 3rd assessment opportunity.
See sample parent waiver (English or Spanish)

**Retakes the TAKS reading test—June 2005
OR
Takes alternate assessment—June/July 2005.**   Passes

Fails / Absent

Local policy relating to grade advancement is reviewed.

Meets local policy.	Does NOT meet local policy.
Promoted to fourth grade.	Retained in third grade.

The student is retained in the third grade. School must notify parents that the child will be retained and give the parents written notice of their right to appeal.
See sample SSI letters, including parent appeal in GPC manual.

Parent does NOT appeal.

Parent appeals[3].

Student is automatically retained.

GPC may promote student if it concludes by unanimous decision, upon review of all facts and circumstances and in light of local school board standards, that student is likely to perform on grade level given additional accelerated instruction during the next school year.

RETAIN   **PROMOTE[4]**

GPC must meet to develop accelerated instruction plan (AIP) for student whether retained or promoted. In addition to accelerated instruction, the plan shall include interim progress reports to parents and the opportunity for parent consultation with teacher and/or principal as needed. *See sample accelerated instruction plan (AIP). (English or Spanish)*

[1] An accelerated instruction pull-out group may have no higher than a 10 to 1 pupil/teacher ratio.

[2] The grade placement committee consists of principal (or designee), student's parent (or guardian), student's reading teacher. The committee consults with the LPAC for LEP students. The ARD committee determines the plan for acceleration for students served by special education.

[3] Either parent may appeal.

[4] GPC decision to promote is still subject to local policy relating to grade advancement.

Appendix I: Leander ISD Administrator Learning Matrix

Leander ISD Principal Learning Matrix

				Knowledge / Comprehension	Application	Analysis	Synthesis / Evaluation
	Alignment with Guiding Principles: "The Leander Way" Ethical Principles Graduate Profile 4 Challenges			I'm building a foundation of shared knowledge	I'm applying what I've learned from research & successful practices	I'm analyzing feedback and making improvements	I'm ready to support others in their learning process
Aim	Capacity	Priority	Capacity Breakdown				
Focus on Student Learning	Shared Vision and Goals	1	Involves stakeholders in creating shared vision aligned with the distict's vision				
		1	Uses shared vision in decision-making process and setting goals				
	Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum	2	Possesses working knowledge of curriculum for campus				
		1	Supports the development of Essential Outcomes for each subject/grade level aligned with TEKS				
		2	Supports the development and use of effective Lesson Design in every classroom				
		1	Supports the effective communication of learning objectives for every lesson				
		2	Supports Integration of special programs with regular programs				
		3	Provides student activity programs for developmental, social and cultural needs				
		3	Models and supports the integration of technology (EATS)				
	Professional Development	2	Develops a continuous training system with sufficient time/resources based on data/research				
		1	Monitors Professional Development Portfolios of staff				
		1	Stays current and models research based instruction				
		2	Models and ensures the classroom use of higher level thinking skills				
		1	Ensures that students are engaged in learning in every classroom				
		1	Monitors and ensures that instruction is challenging and responsive to learners' needs				
		1	Uses Snapshot data to enhance team reflection on instruction				
		1	Establishes an effective feedback system for improving instruction focused on Learning Model				
	Collaboration / Professionalism	1	Models and supports collaboration with faculty and staff				
		1	Encourages and supports the development of learning communities				
	Safe and Orderly Environment	1	Ensures that expectations are clearly identified, shared and consistently supported				
		1	Uses multiple processes to drive out fear and build a trusting, supportive environment				
		2	Ensures that student ownership in learning is a priority in every classroom				
		1	Ensures that there is a commitment to collaboration in every classroom				
		1	Ensures that emergency and crisis plans are developed, communicated, distributed & enforced				
		2	Ensures that discipline is applied fairly, consistently, and with compassion				
		3	Ensures that conflict resolution skills including crucial conversations are used effectively				

Leander ISD Principal Learning Matrix

				Knowledge / Comprehension	Application	Analysis	Synthesis / Evaluation
	Alignment with Guiding Principles: "The Leander Way" Ethical Principles Graduate Profile 4 Challenges			I'm building a foundation of shared knowledge	I'm applying what I've learned from research & successful practices	I'm analyzing feedback and making improvements	I'm ready to support others in their learning process
Aim	Capacity	Priority	Capacity Breakdown				
Focus on Student Learning	Parent and Community Involvement	2	Uses multiple ways to get parents actively involved				
		1	Ensures that parents / community are well informed				
		3	Uses multiple processes to receive feedback on stakeholder satisfaction				
	Support and Resources	1	Uses effective written / verbal communication skills to keep faculty / staff well informed				
		1	Utilizes an effective process for hiring faculty / staff with desired core values and skills				
		2	Evaluates and provides recommendations concerning faculty / staff employment				
		2	Develops master schedule which maximizes student learning				
		2	Develops a budget which supports the implementation of the learning model				
		1	Monitors state / district required processes (assessments, textbooks, attendance, etc.)				
	Process Improvement	2	Identifies, communicates and uses Measures of the System				
		1	Models and ensures the effective use of assessment of / for learning				
		1	Provides support for staff / students in analyzing data and setting goals				
		2	Develops a Plan for Intervention for all students				
		2	Forms / supports Improvement Teams to understand and improve the system				
		3	Identifies Probletunities aligned with campus / district goals				
		3	Conducts Cause & Effect Analysis to determine root causes				
		3	Creates and implements Plans of Action				
		3	Continues to monitor progress / results through PDSA's				

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Vita

Bret Alan Champion, son of Sylvester Jimmy "S.J." and LaNell Gay Champion, was born in San Angelo, Texas, on January 20, 1969. After graduating from Goldthwaite High School, Goldthwaite, Texas, he attended and earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in English Literature from the University of Houston, Texas, in 1991. He married the former Marcellyn "Marcee" Renee Martin in 1992; they have two children. After serving two years in Teach For America as an elementary school teacher in Houston and Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Bret taught in Leander I.S.D. from 1993 through 1996. Upon earning his Masters of Education degree in Educational Administration at Texas State University, San Marcos, Texas, in 1996, he served as an assistant principal in Leander I.S.D. for three years. In 1999, he became the principal of Ada Mae Faubion Elementary, and in 2000 he became the principal of Leander Middle School. He became the assistant superintendent for administrative services in Leander I.S.D., the position he currently holds, in 2004. In 2004, Bret began his Doctor of Education degree in Educational Administration at the University of Texas at Austin, Texas as part of the Executive Leadership Program.

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