

## ABSTRACT

GARLAND, REBECCA BASS. Getting the Ground Ready to Sow Change: An Ethnographic Case Study of Blewbury Middle School. (Under the direction of Dr. Ken Brinson.)

The purpose of this dissertation study has been to investigate the effects of school culture on reform in a school targeted for improvement. Blewbury Middle School is one of scores of schools in this country that have been impacted by poverty and changing demographics over the last few decades. A declining economic base and immigration have left the school with a majority of its students on free or reduced lunch.

Dr. Maryann Callaghan and Mr. John Gunn requested administrative positions at Blewbury, expecting to find a school at risk. Their objective was to address low student achievement with a stated goal of impacting the school's culture to make it a more positive environment for students. Instead of finding a school in need of refocusing, they found a totally dysfunctional school with all systems broken. Although their first sixteen months were filled with seemingly insurmountable challenges, the new administration shook the status quo and made many needed improvements. The school today is physically more attractive, and it functions more effectively and efficiently. Students move through the building in an orderly fashion, and parents report satisfaction with the changes.

Dr. Callaghan herself would be the first to admit that the school has a long way to go before it becomes an effective middle school. The teaching staff is comprised mainly of lateral entry hires. After two summers there were more than twenty teacher vacancies. It was exceedingly difficult to find enough certified teachers willing to accept the challenges of Blewbury . Effective classroom management is still the most pressing

concern along with improved instructional strategies that invite active student participation in their own learning. The teaching force in the school still finds it difficult to maintain the energy required to make Blewbury work although teachers are more focused than they were in the beginning. Although definitive, observable, positive changes in the climate at Blewbury have occurred, deep seeded cultural changes are yet to materialize.

**GETTING THE GROUND READY TO SOW CHANGE:  
An Ethnographic Case Study of Blewbury Middle School**

**by**

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Chair of Advisory Committee

## **Dedication**

This dissertation study is dedicated to the following members of my family:

To my deceased grandmother, Louise Denning Jernigan, who told me when I was twelve that B's were not an option;

To my mother, Betty Jernigan McLamb, who at age 75 models tenacity and determination;

To my husband, Ronald Lee Garland, who suffers agreeably my independence;

To my son, Robert Brandon Garland, who is following in my footsteps and is so much more insightful about education and life than I ever was at his age; and

To Montana Joe whose constant companionship and warm snuggles kept me going many nights into the wee hours when all others had long since gone on to bed.

To all of you I owe a debt of gratitude, for without you, collectively and individually, I could not have endured.

## **Biography**

Rebecca Bass Garland, a native of Dunn, North Carolina, graduated from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro in 1971 with a major in history and credentials in secondary education. She began her teaching career in the fall of 1971, teaching seventh grade Language Arts and Social Studies at Harnett Middle School. She earned her Master's Degree in Education at Campbell University in 1981, graduating with Distinction and election to Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society.

The next three years were spent out of state with her husband Ron and his job assignments. Between 1984 and 1986 Rebecca spent two years living in Blewbury, England, only a few miles south of Oxford University. This sabbatical allowed for extensive reading and traveling throughout Europe.

Upon return to the United States, Rebecca resumed employment with the Harnett County School System, this time as coordinator for the Program for the Academically Gifted. In 1992 Rebecca accepted a position as instructional consultant with the Department of Public Instruction in Raleigh. During her ten year tenure at DPI, Rebecca served as a lead instructional specialist for low performing schools, the State Consultant for Gifted Education, and the Assistant Director for the State Board of Education. While at DPI, Rebecca joined with other consultants in forming an in-house cohort working toward their doctorates at North Carolina State University.

In January 2002 Rebecca accepted the position of Director of Middle Schools and Arts Education in the Alamance-Burlington School System. In the fall of 2002, the faculty at NCSU elected Rebecca to Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society for her distinguished

academic performance during her doctoral coursework. In the spring of 2003 Rebecca was presented the Distinguished Service Award for lifetime achievement in the field of gifted education.

Rebecca, the daughter of Betty Jernigan McLamb, is married to Ronald Lee Garland and has one son Robert Brandon, age 26, who has chosen education as his profession. Brandon is a 1999 graduate of North Carolina State University and anticipates completing a Master's in Education Degree in 2004, when he and his mom hope to graduate together.

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## **Chapter One**

### **INTRODUCTION**

*While some lament that educational reform is an institutional Bermuda Triangle into which intrepid change agents sail, never to appear again, others argue that public education is too trendy, that entirely too many foolish notions circulate through the system at high velocity. Are schools too resistant to change or too faddish? Viewed over the course of history, they may seem to be both. (Tyack and Cuban, 1995, p. 4)*

### **Background**

"North Carolina - home to a long line of 'education governors' - is no stranger to school reform" (Williams and Scharer, 2000, p. 62). In fact, some critics charge that the state has been almost too willing to try new things, lurching from reform to reform without giving any of them a fair trial to see if they work. "Like a lot of states, we'd jumped on a new reform bandwagon every couple of years - a flavor-of-the-month approach. These changes were frustrating for local school boards, educators, and parents" (Williams and Scharer, 2000, p. 62). For the seventeen years following the publication of a *Nation at Risk* in 1983, until the end of the 20th Century, North Carolinians saw ten legislatively mandated, major reform efforts. Among them were extended day and year pilots, the Basic Education Plan, the Career Ladder pilot, Senate Bill 2 (system-wide, student performance-based accountability program), the Year Round School Movement, Outcome-Based Education pilots, Low-Wealth/Small District funding, Charter Schools, the ABCs of Public Education (Accountability in the Basics with local Control plan – a building-level, student performance-based accountability program), and the Excellent Schools Act. Some of the programs were later subsumed, either by philosophy or extension, into future programs such as the federal No Child Left Behind mandate. Other initiatives simply

died from lack of funding, usually before any reliable data could be generated describing the successes or weaknesses in the efforts.

From attending numerous state meetings and perusing conference agendas, I have surmised that in addition to state-mandated reform efforts, an ever-increasing number of central office personnel and school building leadership are instituting school reform efforts at the school building level. The financial costs of such experiments must be staggering; however, I doubt if anyone really has an estimate of the dollar amounts being spent across the state in such endeavors. In addition, and maybe even more significant, are the time and effort being expended at the building level by the teachers who are trying to meet the demands placed on them in an effort to improve public education.

### **The Current Context of Reform and the Significance of the Issue**

Research studies have focused on scores of failed school improvement initiatives. Despite the best efforts of experts, many curriculum innovations have not been successful (Welch, 1979). Most researchers have concluded that even if the innovation is implemented, it is very difficult to keep it going after the initial attention wanes (Berman and McLaughlin, 1977; Fullan, 1982). Before they will change their behavior, teachers and school leaders must first fit their own core values and beliefs with the principles of the reform effort. If the reform initiative causes teachers and leaders to change the values and norms they hold sacred, the chance for success is almost nil. Schools with fully developed cultural systems are less likely to initiate change that violates established patterns of behavior (Rossman, Corbett and Firestone, 1988).

One state-managed effort in school reform is the Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) Grant Program that is underwritten by federal funds. Comprehensive School Reform was defined by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2001) as an effort designed to "stimulate school-wide change covering virtually all aspects of school operations, rather than a piecemeal, fragmented approach to reform" (p.2). The funding cycle for the 2001 cohort was \$5.5 million, with each qualified school eligible to receive upwards of between \$50,000 and \$100,000 per year for up to three years. The state only approved grants for programs that were research based and ostensibly successful in schools with similar characteristics. Only public schools with a minimum enrollment of 50 students and a composite student performance score of 58% and below were eligible to apply (DPI memo April 2001). A school's composite student performance score is an indication of the percentage of students scoring proficient in reading and mathematics. A student scores proficient in reading and mathematics by scoring Level III, grade level, on End-of-grade tests.

At the beginning of the 2000-2001 school year, evaluators from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, Drs. Andrew and Hathia Hayes (2001), completed an overall evaluation of the first year of implementation of the grant program in sixty schools across the state. They found that the vast majority of schools were not making significant progress toward reform. In their report the evaluators described at least twelve of the schools as "dumping grounds" that were in such a "poor state of organizational health" that the organization couldn't support reform (p.41). The schools were victims of high teacher turnover, large numbers of lateral entry and

novice teachers, veteran teachers with limited knowledge and skills in working with needy students, and ill-prepared leadership.

Rather than observing systemic change, the evaluators witnessed changes in some teacher behaviors, but Hayes and Hayes could not validate that those changes were any more than procedural changes. They reported "teachers in the schools demonstrate little recognition that what probably needs to be reformed are their own capabilities, performances, and ways of working" (p. 41). Rather than accepting that they were the main problem, the teachers attributed the difficulties of the school to forces other than themselves, such as "lack of parent support, low student motivation, class sizes that are too large, not enough computers or lack of support from the principal" (p.41). Although Hayes and Hayes reported that the teachers worked very hard and wanted to do a good job, in most instances the teaching faculties of the schools did not appear to have the technical or professional capacity to do more than survive as classroom teachers. Hayes and Hayes suggested the teachers "demonstrate little capability, energy or experience, or vision for reform" (p.57).

In summarizing their opinions as to why school reform efforts are failing, Hayes and Hayes (2001) opined that "systems-thinking, strategic leadership and data-based decision making do not appear dominant in educational systems," and the sixty schools described in their report were not exceptions to this trend (p.42). In many instances the principals were not knowledgeable enough to provide the instructional leadership necessary to lead the reform effort, and the central office did not provide additional curricular leadership. There also appeared to be no coordinated effort to build instructional capacity – the knowledge and skills among the teachers that the

evaluators found lacking. Staff development in these low-performing schools typically focused on what the teachers were interested in rather than strategies that would have supported the teachers in raising student achievement and having a clearer understanding of the unique needs of children impacted by poverty.

Andrew Halpin (1960), a writer in the field of organizational theory, concluded that authentic behavior among teachers and leaders is important in determining favorable school climate. Robert Evans (1996) described authentic teachers and leaders as “distinguished not by their techniques or styles but by their integrity and their savvy” (p. 184). Authentic teachers and leaders have “consistency between their personal beliefs, organizational aims, and working behavior” as well as “craft knowledge and practical competence” (p. 184). Halpin (1960) argued that for teachers and leaders to behave in an authentic manner, “they must have something to be authentic about” (p.58). Professionals need to be “appropriately skilled to do their jobs and skilled in assessing the quality of their work so they know the degree to which they are doing their jobs well” (p.58). Hayes and Hayes (2001) determined that the teachers and leaders in the CSR programs did not have requisite skills necessary to be authentic in their behavior. Although some seemed to be “going through the motions” of being a reform teacher or leader, they appeared to be more interested in maintaining the notion that they were reforming (p.58).

Hayes and Hayes (2001) recognized that many of the teachers in the study were new to the teaching field and had not yet established a firm set of teaching practices. Close examination of faculties in the most at risk schools revealed that many of the teachers were lateral entry hires. Additionally there were teachers who

were on emergency permits, those who were teaching some subjects out of field for a portion of the day, teachers who had been transferred because of poor performance in other schools, and on many occasions teachers who were actually permanent substitutes.

With this reduced level of capacity among teachers in low performing schools, how can true school reform work? Small improvements will likely occur simply due to focus and the Hawthorne Effect (improved performance due to observation), but the improvement will be short lived. Not only are vast sums of money being wasted that could be used much more effectively, but teachers are also being exposed to high levels of stress when chances for sustained results are minimal.

The North Central Regional Education Laboratory defined an effective school as one that “has a clear story about what it wants students to learn. It focuses single-mindedly on its core purpose and its work is a relentless pursuit of that purpose” (in Hayes and Hayes, 2001, p. 59). Hayes and Hayes concluded that in low performing schools a lack of core purpose and a lack of knowledge base and skills result in a poor school climate or culture. Poor climate and culture had significant consequences in the schools they studied. Because of a lack of authenticity and positive culture among faculties and leaders, the chances for schools to experience systemic school improvement or reform were low.

### **Serendipity and the Site**

According to Fetterman (1989) ethnographic work is not always orderly. Sometimes it involves “serendipity, creativity, and being in the right place at the right

time" (p.12). In my case, that certainly was true in terms of finding a perfect subject for my interest in school reform.

In January 2002, I assumed the role of Director of Middle Schools in a medium-sized (22,000 students) school system in a mid-Atlantic state. The school system has seven middle schools. According to the state's accountability system, five of the schools consistently post scores indicating that over 80% of their students demonstrate proficiency (the percentage of students scoring at/above grade level) on the End-of-Grade tests in reading and mathematics. Three of the five schools are inching very close to the 90% proficiency mark. The five schools were recognized in 2003 as *Schools of Distinction*, a recognition level determined by the Department of Public Instruction as part of the accountability program. In order to be designated a *School of Distinction*, at least 80% of the students must reach proficiency in reading and mathematics, and students must document expected growth in reading and math as determined by a state formula. The other two middle schools have experienced demographic changes in recent years and performance has been more erratic. One of the schools, Blewbury Middle, has danced along the bubble of low performance with proficiency levels dropping below 60%. In the spring of 2002, the superintendent of the system determined that it was time for a change at Blewbury. In selecting the new leader for the school he chose a veteran principal, Dr. Maryann Callaghan, who had been very successful in implementing systemic school reform in an elementary school in the same system. During my orientation interview with Dr. Callaghan, she expressed an interest in addressing Blewbury's culture before selecting a particular

school reform program. Because of Dr. Callaghan's expressed intention to alter the school's culture, I chose Blewbury as the setting for my dissertation.

For my study I completed an ethnographic inquiry addressing the first sixteen months of Dr. Callaghan's administration at Blewbury Middle School – a school that in almost every way mirrors the schools described in the Hayes and Hayes report. In my examination of the school I focused on the culture of the school and the readiness level of the faculty to be authentic and receptive to systemic cultural change, “change at a deep psychological level that involves attitudes, actions, and artifacts” (Vaill, 1989, p. 149). Based on the research cited above, school reform at Blewbury would be doomed to failure if cultural considerations and basic needs were not first addressed.

Preliminary discussions at the implementation of the study revealed that Dr. Callaghan was familiar with current research on school reform. A recent graduate of a doctoral program at a major research institution, she was cognizant of the need to establish a school climate and culture that would support new school improvement initiatives. Her intentions were to spend her first year at Blewbury assessing the capacity of the faculty, examining the data, and establishing a positive student-centered climate. Although Dr. Callaghan possessed the qualifications defined by Hayes and Hayes (2001) and Halpin (1960) as being the foundation on which reform is built, the school proved to be far more resistant to change than she had expected. Even with her vision and knowledge, positive change in the culture was difficult to achieve even though the school experienced remarkable improvements in climate, facilities and processes.

This story of a principal's intentional efforts to reverse a pattern of low performance in a negative culture may provide insights for educators interested in school improvement. Lessons learned could inform other change agents of the future.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided my ethnography:

- What are the characteristics of the school's culture at the end of the study compared to May, 2002 when Dr. Callaghan assumed the principalship? (using cumulative data and document analyses to form a baseline) If any changes have occurred, how did they occur?
- How can the faculty of the school be characterized in terms of ability, skill, and basic norms?
- If there is a vision for the school, what is it and how is it determined and articulated?
- What type of leadership has emerged in the school? Is the leadership being demonstrated consistent with the needs of the school? Is it consistent with the type of leadership preferred by the principal and the other members of the leadership team?
- How do the teachers describe and treat the students?
- How do the members of this school community view Blewbury?

### **Research Limitations**

The purpose of this ethnography was to describe the culture at Blewbury Middle School as it existed after sixteen months of leadership under Dr. Maryann

Callaghan and to compare it to the culture of the school before Dr. Callaghan arrived. In the study I documented changes that occurred in the culture and climate as well as the behaviors, feelings, attitudes, and opinions of those administrators, faculty, staff, and community members who were part of the story.

Although I made every effort to document the story accurately, the accuracy of my story depended on the reliability of my sources. My data came from document analyses, observations, interviews, and surveys. When information was presented in one format, I looked for validations of that data through triangulation methods. I also made every attempt to neutralize any researcher bias that might have been present as a result of my position in the school system.

### **Summary of Chapter One**

School reform efforts - a way of life for administrators, teachers, parents and students- have proven to be very expensive, but ineffective for long-term systemic change. Schools most in need of improvement have tended to be staffed by professionals who lack requisite skills in knowledge and the pedagogy of teaching. Many researchers in school improvement have indicated that for school improvement to be successful, the culture of the school must first be altered. Teacher attitudes, beliefs, and values must align with the intended changes or the changes are doomed to failure.

For my dissertation study I chose Blewbury Middle School, a school characterized by the challenges of negative culture. The new principal, Dr. Maryann Callaghan, made deliberate attempts to alter the culture before

instituting particular school reform efforts. Although positive changes did occur at the school, the culture proved resistant to change. The next chapter provides a review of the literature on the impact of culture upon organizations and schools.

## **Chapter Two**

### **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **Why Study Culture in an Organization, Particularly in a School: An Overview**

Culture in its broadest ethnographical sense refers both to the observable patterns of behavior of a particular social group as well as to the ideas, beliefs and knowledge that characterize that particular group of people (Fetterman, 1989). The prevailing literature on organizational theory maintains that organizations themselves are a cultural phenomenon of society and vary according to the level of a society's development. Not only are organizations a manifestation of culture, they themselves are partially defined and even controlled by their own internal cultures and subcultures (Morgan, 1986, 1989, 1997). In order to understand a complex organization such as a school, it is necessary to analyze and understand the cultural mores that guide behaviors in the school society.

Alan Peshkin (1988) argued in the foreword to *Change and Effectiveness in Schools* that there will never be a “formula that can ensure successful efforts to change schools, but there is lore – knowledge or wisdom gained through experience – that can inform these efforts” (p. vii). He further opined that in each school there is a force that perpetuates the status quo, and that this force is the school’s culture. Even though there may be a degree of discontent with the school, students, parents and educators accept the norms or culture of the school. Peshkin asserted “that to ignore the implications of the fact that a school has a culture in place is to court failure,

notwithstanding the wisdom of the proposed changes and the sincerity of their proposers" (p. vii).

Since culture contributes to success in a school, an ethnographic case study will be significant for educational change agents or transformers as well as to researchers in the field of school improvement. Understanding the relationship of culture to reform and reform to culture is vital to understanding the evolution of a quality achieving school from one that is underachieving. This framework builds a justification for the study by

- Reviewing the literature on education reform and effective schools;
- Tracing organizational theory as it relates to educational administration through the evolution of culture as a focus;
- Examining culture in two ethnographies conducted in schools experiencing school reform;
- Examining school culture and change; and
- Laying out the analytical frameworks of effective culture in a middle school.

These analytical frameworks represent the pieces of the puzzle – the culture – that identify the themes in the story and assist in the organization of the data.

This review of the literature demonstrates the relevance of culture in understanding and changing organizations. The review builds the justification for an ethnographical study of a school where deliberate attempts are being made to effect positive change in the school's culture.

## **An Historical Perspective on Educational Reform**

The fact that civilizations have systems in place to pass along knowledge to their young is a cultural practice itself. For centuries embedded western beliefs have guided what was taught, how it was taught, and how it was learned. Before formal schooling, families, themselves, passed along knowledge they considered important to their children. In addition to family enculturation, religious institutions formalized instruction about cultural norms before the advent of publicly supported schools. With the development of public schools came teacher-centered instruction. This didactic form of teaching involved an authoritarian notion in which someone with influence deemed some knowledge important and passed it along to students who were merely vessels to receive that knowledge. Occasionally over the last 500 years, philosophers would disagree with traditional methodology and espouse that the child rather than the content should be the center of education. Those reform efforts have only gradually gathered support because earlier cultural beliefs were so engrained in a very conservative society (Cuban, 1993).

The Committee of Ten on Secondary School Social Studies in 1893 served as the catalyst for changes in the curriculum that led to expanded studies in English, history, mathematics, science and foreign languages. By the end of World War I, The Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education initiated reform that would lead to the comprehensive high school. The 1930's and 1940's ushered in an even more expanded curriculum that included "life" issues. The 1950's, as a result of Sputnik, was the era in which American educators increased the rigor of school curricula with a focus on science and math. This effort to ensure global technological superiority

continued through the 1960's. The 1970's were plagued by social unrest as schools dealt with the vestiges of the Vietnam War and struggled to integrate students from racially and economically diverse backgrounds. By the end of the 1970's schools re-established a core curriculum dedicated to the basics of reading, writing and mathematics (Chance, 1992).

According to Chance (1992), "The Effective School Movement traces its inception to the work of Edmonds, 1979; Rutter et al. 1979; Brookover & Lezotte 1981; and Lezotte & Bancroft, 1985" (p. 30). The five factors found in effective schools were called correlates because of the nature of their interrelationship. They are:

- Instructional leadership by the principal;
- A safe, orderly school climate;
- An instructional focus on well established academic goals;
- High expectations for student performance and achievement; and
- Frequent, systematic measurement of students to ascertain their level of performance (Chance, 1992, p. 31).

In reviewing school research, it is important to remember that the correlates are not effective if implemented separately; rather, it is the synthesis produced when all five are in place that supports an effective school. Other researchers, Purkey & Smith, 1982; Roueche & Baker, 1986; Stedman, 1987; and Waupon, 1988; have added to the list other characteristics that contribute to school effectiveness. They include:

- A well-designed, school-wide staff development program;
- A high degree of staff input into instruction decisions and training;
- An accepted student-centered focus;
- A climate exemplified by optimism and high expectations;
- A work atmosphere of collegiality and empowerment;
- An extracurricular program that enriches;
- A milieu of student responsibility and growth;
- An academic offering that addresses higher as well as lower order cognitive abilities;
- A well-designed, sequential and incremental curriculum, with excellent teacher delivery systems the norm; and
- An administrator that serves as an instructional leader, understands the curriculum, communicates properly and delegates, empowers, and collaborates with others (Chance, 1992, p. 31).

These correlates and effective school descriptors have proven to have great staying power over the decades since the 1970's. Most studies on quality since the articulation of the correlates have referenced them as a standard for a successful school.

American educational reform had almost a century's worth of history, from the Committee of Ten on Secondary School Social Studies in 1893 through the Effective Schools Movement in the 1970's, when a *Nation at Risk* (The National Commission on Excellence in Education) was published in 1983. Therefore educational reform was not a new phenomenon. However the reform efforts sparked by this and other

similar publications proved more resilient than other movements in the past. Tenets associated with the early 1980's movement included:

- A call for return to the basics;
- Concern about how schools relate to the economy;
- Appeals for better discipline with students;
- A belief that states should lead reform;
- An assertion that the costs of education are too high;
- A conviction that the diverse needs of students should be met by establishing different types of schools with a degree of parental choice; and
- An opinion that students and their schools should be measured for their performance (Chance, 1992, p. 5).

Before these initiatives could even be implemented and evaluated, a second wave of reforms was layered on them in 1986. Although the tenets of the first wave of reform resonated with state leaders and resulted in bureaucratically imposed policy, critics argued that schools were not structured to support such changes. Therefore the second wave of reform focused on the professionalism of teaching and decentralized school management and was the impetus for school-business partnerships, site-based management and teacher empowerment. While the first wave of reform efforts in the early 1980's sought to produce change from the top down, the second wave focused on change from the bottom up. The first wave provided policy and curricular mandates while the second focused on what happened with students and teachers during the process of teaching and learning (Chance, 1992).

Policymakers and educational reform leaders, who were focusing on teachers as catalysts for change, possibly did not recognize the significance of the culture of teaching as they were advocating their initiatives. In 1993 Larry Cuban suggested that schools are conservative institutions that resist change because of the method of teacher socialization into the environment. Teachers are socialized informally into the school setting during the first twelve years of the teacher's own education through his own classroom experiences. This gradual inculcation of the culture of teaching perpetuates stability.

To buffer their incomes, historically many men, and recently a growing number of women, have left the classroom in pursuit of positions in administration. The women and men who remain in the classroom do so, in part, because they are more comfortable with their familiar routines. Also perpetuating the status quo and preserving pedagogy from the past is the skepticism that teachers have in their students' ability to produce acceptable results. Because of this lack of confidence, teachers are hesitant to entrust students with even more responsibility for their own learning. In an age of accountability the teachers already begrudge being dependent on their students whose academic achievement makes the teachers look either effective or ineffective in job performance. Therefore teachers perceive no incentives to turn even more responsibility over to students. Instead, teachers prefer to tinker superficially with their teaching techniques rather than commit to changing fundamental protocols and teaching methodology. Without encouragement or compelling pressure, most teachers will not initiate change (Cuban, 1993).

By the mid 1980's, attention also began to focus on the role and critical importance of the administrator. Schools of education that trained educational administrators expanded their curricula to include courses on motivation, decision-making, organizational climate, and change. Historically programs had concentrated more on budgeting, financing, law, and facilities – tools to increase management techniques. The newer focus on the school as a cultural phenomenon forced modifications in how building administrators were trained (Owens, 1987).

Despite a century of efforts to reform and refocus education, it is apparent that without effective leadership schools are not likely to change. “Top down” and “bottom up” reform attempts were initiated but none of these reform efforts produced the comprehensive, systemic changes that policymakers desired. Ultimately, researchers acknowledged that schools are very complex, conservative, cultural structures and, by nature, maintain the status quo unless they are staffed with effective leaders who serve as change agents. Effective leaders have to be able to read the culture and know how to effect systemic change that will support school improvement (Chance, 1992).

### **Evolution of Relevant Organizational Theory/Leadership Development and Its Application in School Settings**

The origins of classic organizational theory are credited to Frederick Taylor (1911), Henri Fayol (1916) and Max Weber (1921) who authored the concepts of scientific management. Taylor, an engineer at the Midvale and Bethlehem steel companies in the early 1900's, worked to solve practical production problems in factories. His principles included

- Adopting scientific measurements to break a job into a series of small, related tasks;
- Using systematic methods for selecting workers and training them for specific jobs; and
- Establishing the concept that there is a clear division of responsibility between management and workers, with management responsible for goal setting, planning and supervision while workers execute tasks (Owens, 1987)

While Taylor focused on time and motion studies of the worker, Fayol was concerned primarily with executive management. He is credited as the first modern organizational theorist. Fayol defined administration in terms of five functions: planning, organizing, commanding, coordinating and controlling. He wrote in 1916 that administrative ability “can and should be acquired in the same way as technical ability, first at school, later in the workshop” (in Owens, 1987). He suggested that good managers were flexible in applying principles of management, depending on the situation, whereas, Taylor advanced the belief that principles should be applied in a uniform manner.

Max Weber (1921), a German sociologist, produced the first work on bureaucracy. According to Owens (1987), Weber offered the theory that organizations structured around a bureaucracy “would be more impartial and more predictable – more rational – than organizations subject to the whims of powerful individuals” (p. 7). The tenets of this type of management include a hierarchical chain of command with distinct division of labor, clearly defined tasks, well-established rules of behavior and a system of punishments, recruitment on the basis of ability and

knowledge, and expectations that all workers will perform the tasks in the same way since the tasks have been standardized. In the classical organization, all analysis is focused on the formal organizational structure, and little or no attention is paid to the dynamic interaction within the organization or to the subgroups or informal structures within the organization (Chance, 1992).

Max Weber (1921/1968) argued,

From a purely technical point of view, a bureaucracy is capable of attaining the highest degree of efficiency, and is in this sense formally the most rational known means of exercising authority over human beings. It is superior to any other form in precision, in stability, in the stringency of its discipline, and in its reliability. It thus makes possible a particularly high degree of calculability of results for the heads of the organization and for those acting in relation to it. It is finally superior both in intensive efficiency and in the scope of its operations and is formally capable of application to all kinds of administrative tasks. (p. 223)

Many school administrators subscribed to the tenets of scientific management. Ellwood Cubberley, a leading scholar in American education, wrote in a textbook in 1916, that schools were “factories in which the raw materials are to be shaped and fashioned into products to meet the various demands of life” (in Owens, 1987, p.9). Cubberley (1922) opined that school organizations should be bureaucratically designed with clearly articulated roles for each level in the organization.

Chance (1992) offered several principles of management that emerged from the works of classic organizational theorists:

- *Hierarchy* -control that starts at the top (in education, the superintendent) and flows down (to the students in the school);
- *Unity of command* – no one in an organization should receive orders from more than one superior;

- *Division of Labor* – Efficiency can best be attained by subdividing the responsibilities of the organization, and those tasks are not duplicated by others.
- *Span of control* – limiting the number of people reporting to a supervisor or administrator.

In hierarchical schools practicing principles of scientific management, power flows from the principal through his/her assistants, to departmental chairs, to the teacher and finally to the student, with a clear chain of command in place. The task of the administrator in this type of management system is to find “the one best way to accomplish the task of educating students in the least amount of time and with the least amount of effort” (Chance, 1992, p. 17). In general, these administrators are concerned with processes and efficiency, but fail to recognize the social dimensions that people bring to the chemistry of an organization.

Sergiovanni (1995) maintained that in a school setting traditional management theory has its “merits and limitations” (p. 41) and learning how and when to use it can give an administrator an advantage. Classical theory is best suited to situations that can be characterized by linear conditions. Linear conditions are those characterized by stable, predictable environments, discrete goals, structured tasks, and easily measured outcomes with clear lines of authority. Examples of tasks that fit these conditions are routing bus schedules and purchasing textbooks.

However, the vast majority of activities that occur in schools are nonlinear. Nonlinear tasks describe decisions that when made seem appropriate, but as the context changes in future situations, the initial assumptions on which the decision was

made no longer make sense. Under nonlinear conditions, management “resembles following a compass when the position of north changes with each step you take”(Sergiovanni, 1995, p. 42). For example, a principal uses motivation theory to enhance a teacher’s performance. By providing rewards, the principal increases motivation and the teacher’s performance improves, indicating a linear condition. However, increased and prolonged rewards may result in less motivation if the teacher no longer values the rewards or sees them as manipulative. Additionally, each teacher in the school would respond to the rewards differently, indicating a nonlinear condition. Proponents of traditional management theory would expect the consequences of using the same motivational strategies to produce the same results; however, Sergiovanni (1995) maintained that experience in schools demonstrates that people react differently to identical strategies and situations.

Although scientific management theory is not appropriate in all organizational settings, bureaucratic institutions still flourish throughout government and private industry. Many proponents of accountability, management-by-objective, and competency-based programs operate from classical organizational concepts. These newer manifestations of the original theories are known as *neoclassical* or *neoscientific* (Owens, 1987).

In the 1930’s Mary Parker Follett bridged the gap between the scientific management theories and the human relations movement. Follett viewed management as a social process framed by situation. Rather than all decisions flowing down a chain of command, she believed that decisions should be based on the situation itself. Decisions at times could be made by exercise of power, through

compromise, or by bringing the conflict into the open for a mutually acceptable decision. Her work supported opening lines of communication vertically and horizontally across the organization (Owens, 1987).

The Human Relations Movement began in the 1930's and continued until 1950. It began as a result of studies at Western Electric's Hawthorne Plant in the 1920's. The study, completed by a team of researchers from the National Research Council and eventually members of the Harvard Graduate School of Business, most notably Elton Mayo and Fritz Roethlisberger, revealed that human variability was a significant determinant of productivity. Workers in the study did not always function according to scientific principles. The researchers found that workers were more motivated by the way they were treated than by economic incentives, and that quality and interaction in the workplace significantly affected organizational morale and productivity (Campbell, 1987). The study also suggested that organizations, in addition to their formal structure, contained subgroups and norms (culture) that were the most powerful elements within the organization.

In the era of the Human Relations Movement, school administrators became more cognizant of the importance of morale, group dynamics, democratic supervision, personnel relations and behavior concepts of motivation. Extensive work was done during this time in the area of group dynamics. Behavioral psychologists determined that leadership was not just a function of a great individual with formal legal authority but a process involving dynamic interactions with subordinates (Owens, 1987).

Associated with the Human Relations Movement, but preceding it, was the approach to school management known as democratic administration. Unlike the human relations approach that had its origins in industry and social science, democratic administration was developed in reaction to authoritarian supervisory practices in schools in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Another difference was that in the Human Relations Movement management was based on empirical studies while in democratic administration, administration was loosely based on beliefs about democratic rights (Owens, 1987.)

Perhaps the most well known proponent of democratic administration was John Dewey. According to Campbell (1987) Dewey was concerned that industrialization had produced a class structure in America that was counterproductive to political and social equality. Campbell maintained that Dewey was “particularly apprehensive about the introduction of scientific management methods in industry at the expense of human values” (p. 50) and equally concerned about its use in school administration. Dewey felt that giving teachers opportunities for participation would strengthen the school organization and build quality relationships between teachers and administrators.

Campbell (1987) maintained that democratic administration was a popular movement among professors of school management and professional organizations because it addressed “growing concerns about unprecedented problems... related to the management of large...and specialized school staffs” (p. 52). He continued:

Because of the popularity of democratic management, school management professors were receptive to human relations ideas when they began to surface beyond industry in the 1940’s and 50’s. On the surface both approaches

appeared to be similar. Both appeared to be reactions against authoritarian administrative practices associated with scientific management. Both preached a doctrine of management by consensus; both described a new kind of organizational authority; both suggested a new role for managers in steering and facilitating the activities of work groups; and both were apparently concerned with issues of bureaucracy and organizational growth and the problem of worker alienation that size and specialization seemed to promote. Most important, human relations research seemed to confirm empirically what supporters of democratic administration had believed for some time: namely, that organizational morale and productivity could be enhanced by humanistic leadership practices. (p.53)

There are prolific examples of postwar writings that linked human relations management views to school management. Two major studies are particularly illustrative of links that were drawn between industry and school management. The first, Wilbur Yauch's 1949 study, *Improving Human Relations in School Administration*, was the first full-length study that linked human relations research from industry and democratic management from education. Yauch postulated, "If spontaneous, almost unconscious, social organization arises from the relations of workers in industry, it would seem inevitable that social organization of teachers in a school would develop just as naturally." Yauch suggested that the principal's authority should be no greater than the teachers' and that his primary responsibility was to act as an "interpreter" or "executor of the group policy" (in Campbell, 1987, p. 57).

The second study that suggested the relationship between human relations research and education was *Human Relations in Education Administration* by Daniel Griffiths (1959). Motivated by low school staff morale following World War II, Griffith believed that staff morale was related to the kind of leadership operating within the schools. He depicted the effective school administrator as a "resource

person, a recognizer of group talents, and above all a social individual, sensitive to the human needs of those around him" (in Campbell, p. 58). Also significant with this publication was the shift in school management from practical application to human relations management based in social science research.

By the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the focus on democracy in schools was replaced by studies centered on the roles and responsibilities of the administrator. Instead of promoting school reform through social change, human relations managers were interested in using group dynamics as a strategy for decision-making. The focus was on managing and administering schools "rather than loftier notions about what enlightened leadership should accomplish" (Campbell, 1987, p. 60). Human relations writers concentrated on how well school executives understood human behavior in order to bring about organizational changes that were predictable.

While the Human Relations Movement had a significant impact on American education, superintendents maintained their hierarchical control and focused on budgets, politics, and the exercise of power. On the other hand, as a result of this movement supervisors, concerned with curriculum and instruction, placed more emphasis on participation and focused less on formal status and power. These differences in perspectives between administrators and supervisors continued until the 1980's when administrators also embraced a human relations focus (Owens, 1987).

The time frame between the 1950's and the 1970's was marked with political struggles that dominated the educational scene. Civil rights issues changed the landscape of public education during these decades. The focus in many communities was on who should attend a school rather than on how the school should be organized

and managed. The focus in school organization during this time was behavioral science (Owens, 1987).

The groundwork for the behavior science phase of management (1950-1975) was influenced by the publication of Chester Barnard's *The Function of the Executive* in 1938. This study promoted management decisions based on theoretical, empirical research, and extensive analysis of collected descriptive and causal data. One of Barnard's most important contributions was to demonstrate the relationship between the formal and the informal organization. Barnard argued that in addition to focusing on the structure of an organization, an effective executive must also be sensitive to the relationship between the needs of the workers and the needs of the organization (Owens, 1987).

Behavior science theory of organizations is based on the premise that an organization is an open, complex "integrated system of interdependent and dependent structures and functions" (Owens, 1987, p. 55) that operates within the context of its own internal system as well as within the context of its external environment. The systems approach negates the tendency to "ascribe single causes to events" (p. 56).

In 1960 Jacob Getzels and Egon Guba offered their view that schools and school systems are a synthesis of systems involving dimensions of anthropology (culture), institutions (roles), organizational climate (group intentions), personality (individual needs), and biology (the organization as an organism). The Getzels-Guba model described the school as an open social system, with at least two subsystems identified - the institutional or organizational system and the human system. By the

mid 1980's other theorists had offered additional subsystems, suggesting even more complexity (Owens, 1987).

Owens (1987) maintained that the systems theory of organizations evolved even further with the conceptualization of the socio-technical system theory. According to the Owens-Steinhoff Model (1960), this theory suggested that tasks, people, structures, and technologies define an organization. The organization has structure that establishes patterns of authority and communication, thereby determining the mission and how decisions are made. The technological resources include not only hardware but also the processes employed to accomplish goals. The organization also has people – the individuals and groups that act, communicate and decide.

Often roles that people assume are obscured by conflict and ambiguity. In a complex organization such as a school, when a proposed significant change is introduced in one of these variables, the other factors will be affected because of the symbiotic relationship among the many dimensions. For example, a technological change, such as the introduction of comprehensive on line courses in a high school, could instigate significant changes. It could change the goals of the school by making it possible for a student to achieve graduation without physically attending the school, and it could affect the employment of some teachers while forcing technological training for others. Such interdependence among subsystems, this symbiotic interrelationship, accounts for difficulty in managing change within complex organizations such as schools (Owens, 1987).

In 1967, Paul Lawrence and Jay Lorsch examined six business organizations that were dealing with change. They noted that three of the organizations handled change effectively although each of the three dealt with change differently. These different responses led Lawrence and Lorsch to formulate their contingency theory that postulates that an effective organization must deal successfully with its own unique environment. They observed that organizations that function in stable environments can afford rigid internal systems while organizations that exist in a changing environment must remain nimble in order to react quickly.

Contingency theory allows that schools as organizations have different external environments and must modify their internal behavior in order to cope successfully. Historically, schools however have often failed to recognize or have resisted external forces in order to maintain the status quo. Examples include efforts to stall integration, equal rights, and nondiscriminatory practices- even when faced with judicial and legislative mandates. Leaders practicing contingency theory in the administration of schools do not have to be theoretically sophisticated. They do however have to understand the dynamics of the school and be able to analyze what type of structures, technologies, tasks, and staffs work the most effectively in fulfilling the mission of the organization (Owens, 1987).

Other systems theories suggest

- Organizations as anarchies (goals and technology unclear and participation in them is fluid);

- Organizations as loosely coupled systems (schools in a system are loosely structured with considerable autonomy and teachers are loosely supervised); and
- Organizations as dual systems (partially bureaucratic or classically organized – the relationship between the principal and the central agency, including closely monitored organizational process; as well as loosely coupled – the nebulous authority exerted over the teacher in the classroom (Owens, 1987).

In the 1980's organizational culture became the primary focus of management theorists with the publication of William Ouchi's *Theory Z*. Although culture had been cited in the 1930's in the Western Electric studies, it had received little attention. In comparing and contrasting Japanese and American management techniques, Ouchi (1981) emphasized the importance of humanized working conditions and viewing employees as whole individuals. He argued that effective organizations create an environment of trust and interdependence that lead to cohesive groups that can work and solve problems together.

In 1982, Peters and Waterman published *In Search of Excellence*, a description of eight management characteristics that the most successful corporations shared in common. Rather than common procedures and control systems, each of these corporations had strong corporate values and cultures that permeated the organization. They found "stories, myths, and legends" (p. 75) to be very important because they convey the organization's shared values or culture. Without exception,

the dominance and coherence of culture proved to be an essential quality of excellent companies.

In prior studies, according to Owens (1987), attention to organizational culture was resisted because “the human underpinning of organization has long been considered to be soft. Technology is hard; money is hard. Organizational structure, rules and regulations, policy decisions- these are hard, in the lexicon of many administrators and managers. The things that one can measure, quantify, and control are hard” (p. 165). Before *In Search of Excellence* was published, values, beliefs, culture, and behavioral norms were not accepted as powerful tools to employ to develop an effective organization. The study sparked interest in culture as a factor in organizational theory.

Owens (1987) argued that organizational culture is “a system of shared values and beliefs that interacts with an organization’s people, organizational structures, and control systems to produce behavioral norms” (p. 166) Culture defines how people in the organization “perceive, think about, and feel in relation to problems in the organization” (p. 166) Culture develops over time, and the shared beliefs that people feel become “assumptions about the nature of reality” (p. 166) and eventually they become taken for granted. Culture is defined then as “the shared philosophies, ideologies, values, assumptions, beliefs, expectations, attitudes, and norms that knit a community together...it determines how things are done around here...it is the conclusions a group of people draws from its experience...it consists largely of what people believe about what works and what does not” (p. 167).

Edgar Schein (1985) defined organizational culture as “the deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organization, that operate unconsciously, and that define in a basic taken-for-granted fashion an organization’s view of itself and its environment” (p. 6). These powerful, invisible forces exert control over teachers and others within school organizations. Schein (1992) argued that these forces determine “the correct way to perceive, think, and feel” (p. 12) about problems. Rather than power being exerted only through hierarchical authority with formal structures, powerful control is also exercised through more “subtle and indirect means” (p. 29) – through organizational culture. Edgar Schein (1987) suggested that effective leaders are able to create and manage culture – “one of the most complex and artful of human endeavors” (p. 98). A successful principal then is one who can manipulate the culture of the school to embody the characteristics of an effective school.

With the articulation of the five effective school correlates in the 1980’s and the additional characteristics associated with them, elements of healthy school culture began to emerge as the baseline for an effective school. Chance (1992) suggested that schools are most effective when their structure supports an environment in which “people’s behaviors and attitudes, as well as the school’s organizational norms and functions” (p. 32) focus on teaching and learning. Effective school research also emphasized the role of the principal as instructional leader rather than manager, a leader that could focus the energies of the organization toward the mission of the school. Chance expressed reservations regarding the effective school correlates because the essential characteristics lent themselves to a checklist approach rather

than a holistic view of the school culture. Chance worried that a cursory application of the effective school correlates would result in leaders employing a type of scientific management rather than articulating a vision and energizing resources toward that goal.

In the 1980's studies of schools, such as those of Meyer and Rowan (1983), Deal (1984), Lightfoot (1983), Goodlad (1983), and Sizer (1984) lent strong support to the theory that "organizational culture is a fundamental factor in determining the quality of educational organizations" (Owens, 1987, p. 198). In essence, an effective school has a culture that promotes the theory that all students can learn at a high degree of rigor, and student achievement is the purpose of schooling. In an effective school, teachers participate in the decision-making for the school, but the principal sets the vision and direction for the school.

In 1990, Dr. Milbrey McLaughlin completed a study on effective school reform efforts. His findings suggested that needed changes could not necessarily be brought about through policy but only through cultural changes (Cunningham & Cresso, 1993).

Sergiovanni (1995) reinforced the importance of school culture in effective schools with his publication of *The Leadership Forces Hierarchy* in which he identified five types of leadership domains – technical, human, educational, symbolic and cultural. Sergiovanni argued that technical, human, and educational forces are foundational and required for schools to function, while symbolic and cultural forces propel schools to levels of excellence. A brief description of each includes:

- Technical – derived from sound management techniques and knowledge of organization structures. When principals exercise technical force, they are “management engineers” (Sergiovanni, 1995, p. 85) who are emphasizing such concepts as planning and time management. Well-managed organizations are characterized by order, efficiency, reliability, and security. School boards and the public appreciate technical leaders.
- Human – derived from harnessing available social and interpersonal resources. This force is concerned with human aspects of leadership and principals demonstrating it are “human engineers” (Sergiovanni, 1995, p. 85). They provide “support, encouragement, and growth opportunities for teachers and others in the school.” They motivate “students to learn and teachers to teach” (p. 85).
- Educational – derived from excellent knowledge about educational issues. The principal exercising this type of force is assuming the role of “clinical practitioner” (Sergiovanni, 1995, p. 86) and brings expert professional knowledge and bearing to teaching, educational program development, and supervision. The principal is adept at diagnosing educational problems; counseling teachers; providing for supervision, evaluation, and staff development; and developing curriculum. During the 1950’s and 1960’s social science theory emphasized management skills for principals, negating the important function of the principal as the teacher leader. In the 1980’s the principal’s role was again defined as instructional leader.

The first three forces - technical, human, and educational - provide the critical mass necessary for a school to function competently. Without one of them, the critical mass is not adequate and the school will not be effective. The remaining forces are:

- Symbolic – derived from focusing the attention of others on matters of importance to the school. A principal exercising symbolic leadership is the “chief” (Sergiovanni, 1995, p. 89) When expressing symbolic force, a principal is “modeling important goals and behaviors, and signaling to others what is important and valuable in the school”(p.89). He “tours the school, visits in classrooms, seeks out and spends time with students, downplays management concerns in favor of educational concerns, presides over ceremonies and rituals, and provides a unified vision of the school” (p. 89). Principals use symbolic leadership to communicate excitement and to manage sentiments, expectations, commitments and faith in the school (Sergiovanni, 1995).

According to Peter Vaill (1982) an effective leader is responsible for “purposing” (p. 29) Purposing requires “that continuous stream of actions by an organization’s formal leadership which has the effect of inducing clarity, consensus, and commitment regarding the organization’s basic purposes” (p. 29). The purposeful and symbolic leader is successful at communicating to others the meaning of the organization (Sergiovanni, 1995).

- Cultural – derived from building a unique school culture. When a principal exercises cultural leadership he is assuming the role of “high priest” (Sergiovanni, 1995, p. 88). The cultural force involves legacy building,

defining mission, socializing new members to the school, telling stories and reinforcing myths and traditions, and rewarding school members who reflect this culture. The purpose of organizational culture is to bond students, teachers, and others and to bind them to the school, which results in their feeling important and significant with a sense of identity. Cultural life in schools is “constructed reality” (p. 81) and the principal is responsible for constructing it.

The culture of the school consists of norms of behavior, common expectations, and how people think and act. With a vision of a direction in which the school should move, a cultural leader can effect cultural change and as a result can effect change in the status quo (Sergiovanni, 1987). Unless the status quo can be stimulated, the culture will remain stagnant and any effective change will be impossible. The leader who can impact the culture of the school is the type of leader needed when reform efforts are necessary. This is the leader that can cause needed change to happen.

Johnston (1996) suggested the task of the cultural leader is to become one with the culture while maintaining enough distance to keep an objective stance. He maintained that a leader does not acquire culture by “merely collecting a few artifacts nor by listing a set of values, beliefs and symbols...To be perceived as legitimate by the led...the leader must be of the culture”(p. 8). By achieving legitimacy, the leader can influence the members in the organization to search for excellence or effect needed changes.

During the 1990's some schools began experimenting with Total Quality Management (TQM) as a means to bring about school change. TQM involves "teaming, personal/professional training, trusting employees, inspiration and vision, free-flowing information (particularly on performance), long-run emphasis, communication, small starts, modeling appropriate behavior, constant employee innovation, customer emphasis and responsiveness" (Cunningham & Cresso, 1993, p. 259). While TQM is participatory in practice, its focus is on structural processes and systems. It requires a "high level of staff cooperation" (Evans, 1996, p. 177) that may not be present in an organization where significant change is the goal.

The Malcolm Baldrige Management System was also implemented in a limited number of school systems in the 1990's. The system involves leadership that sets the purpose of the organization, data analysis, strategic planning, ongoing professional growth, management of quality processes, results focus, and customer satisfaction (SERVE, 1997). Baldrige was and continues to be popular because its emphasis is business and results-oriented while honoring participatory leadership. Schlechty (1991) opined, however, that for participatory leadership to be effective it must be "directed toward a clear purpose and well-thought-out vision...the purpose...producing results which satisfy all the constituencies...The key to restructuring schools resides in management by values...rather than by programs and the exercise of bureaucratic authority. None of this can happen without the creation of a results-oriented culture" (p. 62).

Cunningham and Cresso (1993) maintained, "Before...any innovation can work, the culture of the school must support the innovation. The culture must set

high expectations for achieving success with the innovation. These achievements are not influenced by structural changes or external pressures and mandate, but are influenced by the cultural and behavioral characteristics of the organization” (p. 260). The culture “must emphasize values that make...a school...display greatness. The culture of excellence emphasizes ...achievement, self-image, skill, knowledge, respect, confidence, identity, worth, personal development, enthusiasm, pride, wisdom, commitment” (p. 260). These attitudes of excellence on the part of teachers and other employees “tend to lift educational efforts to greatness” (p.260).

Leaders in schools with effective cultures are not generally known for exerting control through structure, focusing on long-range planning, issuing reports and memoranda, or evaluating processes, reports and documents. Schools led by remarkable leaders are characterized as “organizations that develop the essence of excellence through enthusiasm, extraordinary individual efforts and celebration. They do not occur by applying bureaucratic authoritarian centralism”...(Cunningham & Cresso, 1993, p. 260). Excellence develops within a school when the people who work in it share commitment to excellence, not from the efforts of one individual at the top, even if that individual is very capable. Michael Fullan (1991) suggested that effective school leaders recognize that their organizations are functions of strong or weak culture. If leaders can influence culture, they have the potential to improve education.

In summary, both the findings from research on school reform efforts and the conclusions drawn from a study of the evolution of organizational theory as it applies to school management/leadership techniques converge on school culture as the major

element in school effectiveness. Whether school reform is directed through legislation or policy mandates outside the school or is directed from within the school by its leader, the change process itself is dependent on the culture of the school in which reform is to occur. Based on this historical perspective and search of available literature, a study of school reform viewed through the lens of its culture is warranted.

### **Ethnological Studies of Culture in Schools**

During the 1980's several studies on school culture were undertaken. Two publications, one by Lightfoot (1983) and another by Rossman, Corbett and Firestone (1988) outline their comparative research conducted at several schools in which they focus on culture and attempted reform. One study from each publication is described below.

#### **Lightfoot's Study at George Washington Carver High School**

A bellwether study of the effects of culture on schools is *The Good High School: Portraits of Character and Culture* by Sara Lawrence Lightfoot (1983). In an effort to study what was good about schools, Lightfoot conducted comparative case study research on six high schools using cultural norms as her thematic basis for analysis. Her findings indicated that not only do school cultural mores determine educational aims of the school but also subgroups within the culture play an important role in determining school direction. In her study Lightfoot postulated that good high schools support cultures that "guard them against...shifting societal intrusions" (p.25), have principals that work with (community) partners, have leaders who redefine the typical male-dominated (hierarchical, traditional) image to one of

nurturing, give teachers an opportunity for expression, and offer students empathetic attention.

At George Washington Carver High School in Atlanta, principal Norris Hogans used his passion and energy to overcome negative historical perceptions and form new images of a school that, before his arrival, was destined for closure. Hogans defined the culture of Carver, a school primarily for disadvantaged youngsters, as a place for students to receive vocational training and adhere to strict discipline policies, to the exclusion of rigorous college preparatory academics. To support Carver's vocational programs, Hogans formed partnerships with influential businesses so that students could participate in apprenticeships in downtown Atlanta.

Even though he was insightful and ground breaking in providing pathways for students in career exploration, Hogans gave his teachers very little leeway for creativity. In fact, the teachers in the school were given very little autonomy. They were treated like the students in that they were required to conform to very strict rules. Ironically, Hogans felt that his job was to protect the teachers. He provided them a cooked breakfast each day and oversaw the return to order and safety in the school environment. Even in this atmosphere of control, students were treated with respect. The researchers documented continuous evidence of a caring and nurturing faculty.

Although the school was significantly better off after Hogans' implemented reforms, student academic achievement was still not a focus at the school. Education at Carver was pragmatic and oriented to training students to fill slots in industry and service occupations. The culture of the school supported the notion that students who

attended Carver did not need rigorous academic offerings. Since the principal leading the reform effort bought into the prevailing culture of low academic achievement for the students at Carver, that culture continued. Even though Hogans received accolades from across the country for his successful school improvement efforts in a challenging urban setting, his rhetoric and slick slide presentation that he carried with him as he made presentations around the country represented the ideal and not the reality. Hogans was hired to save Carver High School, but his vision or view of an appropriate culture for needy students did not include high student achievement. Even though the original purpose of school improvement efforts at Carver was to increase student achievement, cultural mores and beliefs of leaders and subgroups within the population were powerful enough to resist or redirect improvement efforts (Lightfoot, 1983).

## **Commentary**

In measuring the success or failure to achieve school improvement goals at Carver High School, it is helpful to employ Sergiovanni's (1995) forces of leadership. Hogans was skillful at technical, human and symbolic forces of leadership. Through his charisma he was able to involve the influential business community of Atlanta in partnering with the school. He won the loyalty of his faculty and managed an orderly and safe school. However his failure to improve student achievement was due to his ineffectiveness in educational and cultural forces. He lacked the vision that poor students could achieve academic excellence and a college education. Rather than effecting cultural change that supported pursuits of excellence for all students, Hogans bought into the prevailing culture that poor students could not achieve at high levels. The reform effort was sabotaged by his inability to see beyond the culture of low expectations. At Carver there was reform, but the reform effort was altered by the culture of the school

### **Rossmann, Corbett, and Firestone's Study at Monroe High School**

Another study of cultural effect on school improvement was conducted at Monroe High School by Rossmann, Corbett, and Firestone (1988) and chronicled in their publication, *Change and Effectiveness in Schools: A Cultural Perspective*. This school, once composed of middle-class, college-bound students, experienced a gradual shift in demographics that resulted in a student body that reflected a predominance of low-socio economic minorities. Without input from the school faculty, the school system's central office administration redefined the school's

mission from getting students ready for college to one in which the goal was for students to pass the state testing requirements. The curriculum focus and instructional delivery were redirected from a rigorous academic core to basic skills and competency. The core academics teachers voiced their opposition and complied only minimally with the new purpose. Teaching their discipline was a sacred norm for these educators. They believed that making education generally more effective for the students was less important than for the teachers to continue teaching their discipline. Teachers' disciplinary identities were the anchors that defined their places within the school hierarchy. The school improvement effort was unsuccessful in part because it challenged what the teachers held inviolate.

Within Monroe, four groups with varying norms emerged: academic, balanced, vocational and psychological. Among the groups, the academic group was the most opposed to the reform. The academic group perceived themselves at the top of the school hierarchy as they taught the college-bound curriculum. The balanced group, teachers of subjects outside the core but not vocational, were willing to attempt reform because their willingness to cooperate brought them new attention and recognition. The vocational group was less willing because they felt the instructional focus was misplaced. The vocational teachers felt that rather than focusing only on tests, the students should be prepared for the workplace. The psychological group was unwilling to concentrate on test skills, as these teachers were more interested in the students' welfare than their education. Even though the four groups approached school improvement differently, there was no conflict among the teachers. The

school culture supported individual teacher autonomy; therefore, each teacher had the right to exercise his view within his own isolated classroom.

Because there was enough compliance with the mandate, the student scores did improve. However, the culture of the school didn't change. As long as the central office was willing to support the effort through continuous monitoring, the school improvement initiative efforts would continue to succeed. The culture of the school however continued to foster low expectations of achievement for the students, and the faculty continued to complain about the type of students who attended the school. Most of the teachers felt that their purpose was to teach their content specialty at a high school level rather than to teach literacy. Even though teachers recognized that the students who attended Monroe needed literacy remediation, the needs of the students were in direct conflict with the teachers' purposes in teaching, and the teachers were not amenable to change.

The Monroe teachers varied in their perceptions of the students and in their reactions to reform efforts. Some teachers felt that they didn't get the right students, and that students lacked prerequisites for the courses that the teachers taught. Other teachers saw the students only through the students' deviant behavior and lack of discipline. A few teachers felt that their abilities to teach were limited by student behavior. The more teachers were dedicated to their disciplines, the less tolerant they were for the behavioral problems of the students. The teachers dealt with the low abilities of the students by continuing to lower standards and expectations and by inflating grades in order to keep the administration from being critical. Some teachers became so insulated attitudinally from the students, that even when the

students attempted to think and make conceptual connections, the teachers didn't recognize the effort. Other teachers simply got rid of unwanted students by sending them to the office over minor infractions in class.

Although teacher attitudes did not change, their classroom behaviors did. The central office and building administration constantly monitored, and more class time was devoted to drilling for state exams. Because of the extra time spent on literacy, the student scores did improve. However, the relationship between the administration and the teachers became strained, and conditions in factors other than state test performance even became worse. Since systemic cultural change was not the focus of the improvement effort, the program was declared a success. However, if school effectiveness was measured comprehensively and systemically, the effort costs the school more than it gained. At the end of the study, a culture of opposition had actually formed in the school (Rossman et al. 1988).

### **Commentary**

If one analyzes the school reform efforts at Monroe through Sergiovanni's (1995) leadership forces, it is apparent that the central office leadership team failed to impact school culture and also lacked skills in effective symbolic and human leadership. The leadership team was able to use technical and educational skills in order to improve test scores; however, the school suffered as a result of the school reform efforts. The most powerful cultural forces at the school – the informal leadership cadre of academic teachers – acquiesced only due to constant monitoring. Although the study ended relatively soon after the scores improved, there is great

likelihood that as soon as the attention of leadership was redirected to other issues, old behaviors and attitudes again surfaced and literacy efforts were derailed.

### **Summary of Cases**

These two case studies represent the significant effect that culture has on school reform. In both schools culture was so entrenched that efforts to change the culture were not successful. At Carver the principal acquiesced to the pervasive culture of low student achievement. At Monroe the college bound culture was so entrenched that teachers couldn't accept that their student population had changed from college bound students to students who lacked literacy skills. After implementation of the basic skills program, student achievement improved, but teacher compliance with the program was only ensured through constant monitoring.

As a result of the knowledge gained from these and other similar studies, it is apparent that close examination of culture can allow one to predict success or failure in school improvement efforts. A closer scrutiny of how culture and change relate follows. Can school reform efforts affect school culture?

### **Culture and School Change**

Culture is the belief system that “describes the way things are; it interprets events, behaviors, words, and acts – and gives them meaning. Culture also prescribes the way people should act; it normatively regulates appropriate and acceptable behaviors in given situations. Thus culture defines what is true and good” (Rossman, Corbett, and Firestone, 1988, p. 5.) Cultural systems tend to remain stable over time but can change. Major cultural change is most likely to occur when

- Change does not violate core beliefs, or
- External conditions change and cause one to reconsider one's values, or
- Restoration of order resides in new beliefs, or
- People have had an opportunity to accept the subtle changes. (Rossman, Corbett, and Firestone, 1988).

Continuation of programs, before changes have a chance to become acculturated, depends on incentives, time for learning and the institutionalization of rules, procedures and evaluation as mechanisms to promote lasting change (Corbett, Dawson & Firestone, 1984; Huberman & Miles, 1984). Behavior change may be a preliminary to cultural change, but it does not ensure acceptance of new norms.

Although there were changes at Monroe and Carver High Schools, there were no cultural changes. Neither school experienced a shift in the philosophy of the faculty, and leadership in neither school was able to impact cultural change. In fact at Carver, the new principal bought into the prevalent cultural philosophy of the school – one of low expectations for students. At Monroe the culture of a college preparatory school was so strong that the teachers failed to recognize or care that their students were not even literate, much less preparing to attend college. Change only occurred when the Central Office leadership mandated change and constantly monitored teacher behavior to ensure compliance.

Rossman, Corbett, and Firestone (1988) incorporated the metaphors of religion in designating norms that make up a school culture. They categorized those norms as sacred and profane. Sacred norms guide professional behavior, establish meaning in teachers' work lives and give meaning to their purpose for teaching.

Sacred norms are immutable. Profane norms govern the behavior less central to one's professional "raison d'etre." Profane norms are changeable.

The researchers argued that when school improvement efforts only contradict one's profane norms, change is possible. When change will impact the sacred norms of an organization, change is not likely. Effective leaders know the norms of the culture they are attempting to change and gauge the likelihood of success before implementing change (Chance, 1992). Rogers and Shoemaker (1971) also found that changes involving practices that were most compatible with existing norms, values and attitudes were most likely to be accepted in an organization (in Chance, 1992).

Charles Perrow (1967) based his model for explaining organizational effectiveness on the degree of congruence between the structure and the technology of an organization. He also suggested that for technology to be appropriate, it must match in complexity the complexity of the task to be accomplished. Technology refers to the knowledge bases and assumptions one uses to do one's work.

Instructional technology in a school is not stagnant but changes as the knowledge bases of the teachers change. In order for the organization to be effective, the organizational structure must accommodate the needs of the technology to operate. Therefore the schedules, the communication patterns and the resources must align to the needs of the instructional technology. Before a model of reform is selected, leadership should assess the principles, values, beliefs and capacities of the teachers in order to see how much change will be required for the reform to succeed.

In keeping with Sergiovanni's model, the leader must either select a school reform effort that aligns the structure and technology to be chosen with the culture in

place, or he must be able to impact the cultural forces to accommodate the structural and technological changes that he wants to occur. In either event, the ability to recognize and manipulate the cultural forces – either adapt reform to culture or adapt the culture to a particular reform effort – is the most powerful leadership force.

At the *2002 Closing the Gap Conference*, Andrew and Hathia Hayes (2002) reported their findings after conducting evaluations of Comprehensive School Reform grants. They found that low performing schools in North Carolina have become dumping grounds for school systems. Many of the schools with the grants do not have staff with the educational foundation to support reform. They observed that some of the principals in low performing schools do not understand data driven decision-making, nor do they have requisite knowledge about curriculum and instruction. Some schools do not have leaders who understand vision, and some of those who understand do not possess the tools or the ability to communicate that vision to the faculty and community. Some school faculties are composed of entry level and /or inexperienced teachers who are not equipped to deal with reform effectively.

Schools that do not reform the culture but change only teacher instructional practice tend to improve an area of focus but usually at the expense of other areas. Reforms that require altering teacher technology are not as successful in the short term as programs that only require teachers to conduct certain practices or implement specific models. However models that don't require technological changes are less likely to be sustained once the materials and monitoring are gone, or the techniques have changed. Findings suggested that reforming a school requires a change in

culture because of the complexity of the organization. Hayes and Hayes (2001) maintained that an elementary school can improve with just adjustments to the practices that teachers do in their instructional delivery. However they asserted that change in more complex environments, such as high schools (and possibly middle schools) must include cultural changes and are therefore harder to accomplish.

Berman and McLaughlin (1975) found that when innovations are implemented in schools they are often modified to fit the school environment. When Wolcott (1977) tried to apply business-type models of program planning and budgeting to schools, he found that the culture of the school did not respond well to such business practices. From a synthesis of the readings listed in this review, findings suggested that reform efforts that are successful in one environment often fail to be as effective in another, either because the culture differs or the culture adapts the effort to meet its own particular needs. While comprehensive school reform guidelines require leadership to select models that are proven scientifically, the culture of a school has a significant impact on the potential success of school reform.

School improvement efforts usually focus on innovations that, if implemented, should produce improved results. Because the focus is on the innovation, one tends to overlook the impact that the people in the organization have on the change. While much has been written on the skills of the principal and his abilities to communicate vision, teachers also play a pivotal role. Teacher attitudes and skill levels vary from one school to another. Strong leadership may be a

constant, but teacher variances may result in entirely different school cultures (Hayes & Hayes, 2002).

In schools where teachers lack requisite skills, the most expedient school reform model is one that dictates teacher behaviors (Hayes & Hayes, 2002). However in order to create a culture of excellence, such mandated structural programs should be remedies only while staff development builds the capacity of teachers who should eventually assume more responsibility in their own decision-making about curricular issues. In low performing schools the researchers have found that most teachers do not accept that they need to change – they think they need better students, better support from parents, smaller class size (even in schools that have low class size) more materials, more computers, or more assistants. Most often in school reform efforts, teachers do not understand why they are implementing the new practices – they simply comply. Most low performing schools do not have staff with the capacity to perform site-based management because the staff lacks the requisite skills to participate in educational decision-making. Staffs in low performing schools tend to be composed of lateral entry, emergency permit and non-experienced teachers. While staff participation in the decision-making process improves morale and leads to more buy-in, many of the educational decisions to be made require some knowledge of pedagogy that the staff does not have. In many instances there is not a plan for strategic improvement of the staff's capacity, and teachers often want to participate only in staff development that is fun (Hayes & Hayes, 2002).

“Understanding how teachers respond to change is central to the problem of

improving school. Educational change depends on what teachers do and think – it's as simple and complex as that" (Fullan, 1982, p. 107).

Three perspectives on planned change and teachers' contribution to it have evolved over the years: the technical, the political, and the cultural (House, 1981; Tichy, 1983). The technical perspective emphasizes a rational approach to improving professional practices, it rests on the assumption that increased knowledge and technical assistance produce change and that teachers will accept a well-designed product that can be shown to improve instruction.

The political perspective recognizes that this process is infrequently so straightforward and harmonious. It assumes that teachers, administrators, and others have interests that sometime diverge and that all parties use their power and influence to support or resist new programs.

The cultural perspective stresses the importance of shared norms, beliefs, and values among practitioners and the symbolic meanings they attach to efforts toward change – "a tacit, murky, and subjective side of social behavior" (House, 1981, p.28). Johnston (1992) maintained, however, "there is a persistent tendency to treat schools as simple technical-rational systems which lend themselves to managerial manipulation. This approach tends to ignore the changing cultural context within which schools exist...and are imbued with meaning" (p. 3).

The frequent failure of educational innovations stems from the cultural conflicts between teachers and the technocrats who designed and led the implementation of those innovations (Wolcott, 1977). The shift in focus among the perspectives on change has gone "from the innovation (technical focus), to the

innovation in context (political focus), to the context (cultural focus) itself” (House, 1981, p. 28). These findings support Sergiovanni’s claim that the leader who can impact cultural forces is the most powerful leader of all.

Robert Evans (1996) examined the human dimensions associated with change in his publication, *The Human Side of School Change*. Evans, a clinical psychologist, explored change and how it is resisted even when those to be changed readily admit that processes need improvement. Evans maintained that systems theory, which involves goal setting and pursuit of those goals, is a rational approach to improvement. Although logical a systems approach, Evans argued, ignores the dimensions involving emotions, human dynamics, “culture, and other crucial nonrational influences in organizational functioning” (p. 19).

Vaill (1989) defined culture as “a system of attitudes, actions, and artifacts that endures over time and produces among its members a relatively unique common psychology” (p. 147). Evans (1996) opined that basic attitudes and beliefs are deeply seeded because of man’s preference for continuity and patterns, a basically conservative need to maintain the status quo. When the status quo is interrupted and significant change occurs, humans experience stress and loss because they no longer have the ability to predict and make sense of the world around them. Resistance to such a state is natural and should be expected. Evans maintained that organizational culture functions at this “profound level, exerting potent influence over beliefs and behavior to preserve continuity and oppose change” (p. 41).

Bolman and Deal (1991) argued that when change interrupts patterns of behavior, it causes those directly affected to experience a sense of incompetence since

their feeling of effectiveness is threatened. What made sense in the past is no longer acceptable. This state of flux leads to confusion since the predictability of old patterns is shattered. Change also ignites friction between groups, resulting in tension and a lack of cooperation.

Fullan (1991) found that this “neglect of the phenomenology of change” is a basic cause of the “spectacular failure” of most school reform efforts (p. 4). Evans (1966) argued that producing change in schools is even more difficult than in corporations since schools “are by their very nature less entrepreneurial and more bureaucratic...and the gravitational pull of culture is stronger in them” (p. 50).

According to Evans (1996) in order to lead cultural change principals must establish a purpose guided by the vision for the institution that is based on shared attitudes and beliefs that the leader can influence. He argued that change occurs when the leader can enlist members of the organization to want to follow in the endeavor. Evans further asserted that fellowship forms when a leader is able to establish trust based on recognition of his integrity and authenticity that is grounded in solid values. He asserted that humans acquiesce to change when they experience an emotional impact and connect with the leader. Evans described a cultural leader as one who leads change by transmitting ethical, moral, purposeful commitment to excellence and equity. Evans also maintained that compromise in order to further one’s agenda only endangers future reform efforts.

In a book on school change, Michael Fullan (2001) stated that management and leadership qualities are both important and that change agents need both. However, he maintained leadership skills are required when facing problems that

don't have easy answers. He believed that in order for principals to change a school they have to be able to "make a difference in the faculty's sense of moral purpose" (p. 21). He also felt that in order to accomplish effective change, a principal has to understand the change process. Without such understanding Fullan explained, "attempting change will lead to moral martyrdom" (p. 37).

Fullan (2001) recounted the story of Superintendent Negron of Springfield, Massachusetts who tried to reform a school system. Negron reflected that he operated as the Lone Ranger, not building relationships. Ultimately he found that in order to effect change, he had to transform his district into a learning institution. They had to learn together and find what worked best. Change was organically built into the culture, and the change in the culture came when they developed capacity and commitment together.

Fullan (2001) wrote that reculturing is required for effecting positive change. He believed that the leader must create a culture of change that produces the capacity in faculty to "seek, critically assess, and selectively incorporate new ideas and practices" (p. 44). He explained that such change "takes time and never ends. It is constantly dynamic...It doesn't work from a checklist...along a linear path" (p. 44).

Fullan (2001) also reported. "Effective leaders understand the value and role of knowledge creation, they make it a priority and set about establishing and reinforcing habits of knowledge exchange among organization members" (p. 88). He argued that knowledge sharing must be a core value of the organization and that the knowledge had to be within the context of the organization. He stated, "It is one of life's great

ironies: schools (and teachers) are in the business of teaching and learning yet they are terrible at learning from each other” (p. 92).

Fullan (2001) explained that effective leaders make people feel that even the most difficult problems can be tackled productively. He felt that getting people to make internal commitments would ensure long-term improvement. He also felt that “tortoise-like” change with slow learning was most effective in creating positive change (p. 7) In essence, Fullan understood that to effect positive changes in a school, the leader has to be able to impact the school’s culture.

### **Cultural Frameworks in An Effective Middle School**

William Alexander and Paul George (1981) defined a middle school as a school of “some three to five years between the elementary and high school focused on the educational needs of students in these in-between years and designed to promote continuous educational progress for all concerned” (p. 3). In planning for a middle school, leaders need to take into account the physical, intellectual and social/emotional needs of middle grades students. Physically, middle grade students are as diverse as they are similar. During the years they are in middle school, students will grow in height, weight, breadth and depth and develop muscular strength. They will also mature sexually, although at differing rates and degrees. Intellectually there is continuing debate over the “plateau” that middle grade students reach. The most recent studies by Southern Region Educational Board (SREB, 2001) indicated that middle school students need rigor and challenge in their curriculum, with many opportunities for critical thinking and problem solving. Socially and emotionally

students are leaving the safe havens provided by adults and seeking their own identities. They are becoming more interested in members of the opposite sex.

An effective middle school is attuned to the particular needs of the adolescent child. It possesses the following essential characteristics:

- A mission and vision that are based on the educational needs (characteristics listed below) of boys and girls of middle school age and that guide planning and evaluation;
- A plan for school planning and evaluation which involves everyone in the school community;
- A curriculum that provides for continuous academic progress;
- A program of guidance that assures the availability of help for each student from a faculty member well-known to the student;
- An interdisciplinary teacher organization that presents interdisciplinary units;
- Use of methods of student grouping that are multi-age and promote continuous progress;
- Block scheduling to facilitate maximum use of instructional time;
- Flexible use of physical facilities;
- Instruction designed around the unique needs of the learners (hands on, engaging, sensitive to learning styles, academic levels);
- Appropriate roles for various individuals (administrators, teachers, students, parents) to foster dynamic leadership in the middle schools;

- A continuous program of staff development focused on the learning needs of middle school youngsters; and
- Evaluation of student and school progress (Alexander & George, 1981, p. 18 & 19).

If one compares the list of correlates of an effective middle school to the postulates for effective schools identified by Edmonds (1979) and others and the additional characteristics identified by Purkey & Smith (1982) and others, one would discover that the effective middle school characteristics and the characteristics of an effective school organization are the same. In an ethnographical study of a middle school's culture, one would expect to observe and evaluate how the school measures on the characteristics referenced above. The culture of the school will be a reflection of how the disparate groups in the school attend to the responsibilities outlined in the effective school correlates and how these groups interact with each other, the students and the community.

### **Analytical Frameworks for Ethnographic Study**

In order to research the culture of Blewbury Middle School, I will employ the following analytical frameworks in order to collect and organize data.

*Effective Middle School Correlates* - Alexander and George (1981) Figure 1;

*Leadership Forces Hierarchy* - Sergiovanni (1995) Figure 2

*Norms in School Culture* - Rossman (1988) Figure 3; and

*Consistency of Technology and Structure to Goals* - Perrow (1967) Figure 4

These frameworks will inform my study but not limit my data collection.

## **Summary**

In summary, the literature on school reform suggests that school culture and one's ability to affect it has a profound impact on school reform initiatives and their potential effectiveness. In a middle school the culture is a system of relationships - relationships between the leadership and the followers, relationships among the adults, relationships between the adults and the students, relationships between the school and the community, relationships between the curriculum and the teacher's ability to deliver it successfully, relationships between the curriculum and its relevance to the student, relationships between structure and flexibility, relationships between leadership espoused and leadership practiced, to name a few. The synergy among these relationships results in the culture of the school. That culture can become so pervasive and fixed that it takes on a life of its own. It can become resilient enough to fight any efforts to change it, and it can even demonstrate enough strength to change the change effort itself.

Metz (1986) argued that the “atmosphere or feel of the school place needs more concrete referents. It has been little studied in formal research despite... statements of its importance” (p. 3). She continued, “It (culture) is reflected in what participants consider salient in the setting, what they pass over briefly or fail to notice at all, and what they think and talk about at length” (p.3).

By studying the patterns of behavior in a school and getting to know the ideas, beliefs, knowledge, and discourse that characterize the particular group of adults that shape the school – their nuances, euphemisms, contradictions, etc. – a better

understanding of the importance of culture and its role in school improvement emerges.

### **Summary of Chapter Two**

Culture refers both to the observable patterns of behavior of a particular social group as well as to the ideas, beliefs and knowledge that characterize that particular group of people (Fetterman, 1989). The prevailing literature on organizational theory maintains that organizations themselves are a cultural phenomenon of society and vary according to the level of a society's development. In order to understand a complex organization such as a school, it is necessary to analyze and understand the cultural mores that guide behaviors in the school society.

The purpose of Chapter Two was to justify a study of culture through:

- Reviewing the literature on education reform and effective schools;
- Tracing organizational theory as it relates to educational administration through the evolution of culture as a focus;
- Examining culture in two ethnographies conducted in schools experiencing school reform;
- Examining school culture and change; and
- Laying out the analytical frameworks of effective culture in a middle school.

These analytical frameworks represent the pieces of the puzzle – the culture – that identify the themes in the story and assist in the organization of the data.

This review of the literature demonstrates the relevance of culture in understanding and changing organizations. The review builds the justification for an ethnographical study of a school where deliberate attempts are being made to effect

positive change in the school's culture. In Chapter Three the methodology for the ethnographic study will be discussed.

**Figure 1.**

***Effective Middle School Correlates***

Alexander/George/Edmunds/Ruter, et al/Brookover & Lezotte/ Lezotte & Bancroft

	MANIFEST	DESIRED	SUPPORT DATA
Instructional leadership by Principal			
Safe & orderly climate			
Well established goals for instructional focus			
High expectations			
Continuous assessment of student progress			
Well designed, school-wide staff development			
Student centered climate			
Collegial & empowering atmosphere			
Enriching curricular program			
Opportunities for student responsibility			
Differentiated academic offerings			
Effective curriculum offering			
Clearly articulated mission & vision			
Effective student guidance			
Interdisciplinary teaming			
Effective use of time			
Effective grouping schemes			
Effective use of physical facilities			
Continuous monitoring of school progress			

Guiding Question: What evidence shows the elements of an effective middle school are present in this organization? Are the responses of the participants consistent with the observations?

**Figure 2.**  
***Leadership Forces Hierarchy***  
Sergiovanni

FORCE	MANIFEST	DESIRED	SUPPORTING DATA
I. TECHNICAL			
II. HUMAN			
III. EDUCATIONAL			
IV. SYMBOLIC			
V. CULTURAL			

Guiding Question: How does the principal demonstrate skill in each domain? Are her strengths consistent with the leadership needs of the school?

**Figure 3.**

***Norms in School Culture***

Rossmann, Corbett, and Firestone

PROPOSED NORMS	EXISTING NORMS	EXHIBITED BY	SACRED	PROFANE
		Principal		
		Asst. Principal		
		Asst. Principal		
		Guidance Staff		
		Staff Secretary		
		8 <sup>th</sup> Grade ELA		
		8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Math		
		8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Science		
		8 <sup>th</sup> Grade SS		
		Phys. Ed.		
		Art		
		...		
		...		
		...		

Guiding Question: Do the proposed norms conflict with the existing sacred norms? Are the proposed norms consistent with the school's culture?

**Figure 4.**  
*Consistency of Technology and Structure to Goals*  
Perrow

**Guiding Question:** Are the faculty and leadership employing technologies consistent with structure in pursuit of their defined goals?

## **Chapter Three**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

The primary purpose of the study was to conduct ethnographic research in a middle school that had been targeted for school improvement. I studied the organization, using culture as my lens. Research findings referenced in the Conceptual Framework indicated that for school improvement initiatives to sustain over time, certain cultural conditions must first be present. By completing this ethnography, I hoped to add to the body of knowledge concerning culture in schools and how leaders address culture in preparation for school improvement initiatives.

#### **Site Selection**

I conducted this study at a middle school, that for the purposes of this study I called Blewbury Middle School. The school is located in a medium-size county in the central region of a mid-Atlantic state. I serve the school system as Director of Middle Grades Curriculum. Four years ago the county commissioners merged the two school systems in the county – the former county system and a city system. The merger was not necessarily popular among the members of the community. Some citizens felt that merger compromised the quality of the city schools while citizens from the former county system don't feel their schools have been upgraded to the level of the former city schools. Vestiges of discontent surface occasionally during public meetings. Blewbury Middle was one of two middle schools in the former city system.

Currently there are seven middle schools in the school system, and Blewbury is the lowest performing, based on the state's accountability program. The state accountability program for middle grade students includes two measures. The first is a composite performance measure that indicates the percentage of students who score at grade-level, or Level III, on the state's end-of-grade tests in reading and mathematics. The second measure is an annual school designation indicating whether students demonstrated expected growth along a scale score, the formula for which is calculated by the state. Student proficiency (the percentage of students scoring at grade-level) is currently at 68%, up from 56% in 1996 when the state accountability program began.

Approximately 70% of the 789 students that attend the school receive free and reduced-priced lunches, 30% above the state average. Approximately 75% of the students attending the school are minority. There are three major racial populations: Black, 53%; Hispanic, 20%; and White, 25%. The fastest growing subgroup is the Hispanic population, most of whom are identified as English as a Second Language (ESL) students.

The achievement gap at the school is significant. Reading proficiency among White students is 70% while among Blacks it is 51% and among Hispanics it is 50%. Reading proficiencies for Blacks have declined in each of the last three years while Hispanic proficiency has increased. The gap in mathematics is not as profound – 73% for White students, and 63% for both Black and Hispanic students. In Algebra I, 100% of the students scored proficient. It should be noted that the students who take Algebra I in the eighth grade are typically identified as *academically gifted* students.

(Department of Public Instruction Data Analysis). Since the inception of the accountability system, the school has escaped the title of *low-performing*, however, on several occasions it has flirted with the designation. In 2003, Blewbury failed to meet its annual yearly progress goals outlined in No Child Left Behind.

The school's current principal was appointed in May, 2002 when the former principal of six years, a black male from the local community, was transferred to another school. The local scuttlebutt implied that the transfer was forced because of the school's emerging pattern of low student academic performance and excessive reports of disorder. The principal, a white female, for the purposes of this study was named Dr. Maryann Callaghan. Dr. Callaghan is young, compared to her peers – she is in her mid-thirties. A recent doctoral graduate from a major research institution in the state, she is committed to research and study. She was eager for me to document any qualitative changes that occurred during the first year under her administration. She agreed with the notion that without a strong culture, school improvement initiatives would not take hold permanently. Committed to long-term success, she planned to spend the first year as principal of the school seeding the school's culture for change. Through this ethnography, I hoped to capture that evolutionary process and tell the school's story. The site proved to be an excellent study about culture because of the principal's stated intentions to effect change in it. The study demonstrated how resilient and resistant a culture can be even when overt actions are taken to effect change in it.

## **First Impressions**

My first impression of Blewbury Middle School was in December, 2001. I had just agreed to become the Director of Middle Schools in the school system and was taking an orientation tour of the seven schools with the retiring director. We were limited by time and were going at a whirlwind pace through the schools, but Blewbury caught my attention. As we were driving up to the school, I noticed the grounds were unkempt. The building entranceway was filthy and everything in the lobby looked aged. There was a sign on the front door announcing a dance for students that evening. Some of the words were misspelled and the director, who said she was embarrassed, removed it and carried it into the office to be corrected.

As we were walking through the halls of the schools, the rooms were dark. When I asked why the students were sitting in dusk conditions, the retiring director told me that middle school students are easier to control without bright lights. I could not imagine how students could see to read in such dark conditions. In every room there were students with their heads on their desks while teachers spoke from podiums or overheads. When I left the school that day, I remember commenting to the director about the lack of any student activity and the dazed look on the faces of the students.

The duties of a new job kept me from that school except for a few brief visits during the spring of the year. However each subsequent visit only solidified my initial impressions. I observed that teachers spent very little class time teaching the curriculum, and when they did teach they used strategies that didn't engage the students. Students were completely out of control during class changes and lunch

periods. It was obvious that the school environment was deteriorating. By the end of the year I characterized the school as unsafe.

The school was evaluated for accreditation by a team from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) on March 22, 2002. The report completed by Janet King, Peer Review Team Chair, indicated several standards as needing improvement. Recommendations from the report included:

- The staff needs more guidance and support in the areas of teaming, best classroom practices, elevated expectations, and discipline.
- Administration and staff need to use data to drive decisions regarding purchases and allocation of resources and program design.
- Parental input and participation needs to be strengthened.
- Administration should invest in improved communication systems between home and school such as phone master, team newsletters, e-mail, and hotline.
- Instruction should include increased levels of technology including opportunities for students and parents to access technology in the evenings.
- Specific plans should be developed to address poor student academic achievement.
- Strategies to address low teacher morale and high turnover should be developed.

My initial impressions as well as the reactions and comments of others led me to believe that there was a story to be told at Blewbury.

## **The Researcher**

A good qualitative researcher depends on interpersonal skills in order to win the trust of the participants. He/she also understands the politics of the organization and is sensitive to cultural norms in the setting (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). In my role as Director of Middle Schools, I was in a position to stand back from the study and provide etic perspectives. I also acted as a participant observer and provided emic considerations. The teachers in the school knew me and trusted me to demonstrate honesty and integrity in my association with them. Many already confided in me. Because I had already established a relationship with members of the faculty, entering the field for study was not difficult.

To eliminate any potential conflict of interest, I clarified my two roles in the beginning, that of director and that of researcher. During the course of the study I did not have any direct supervisory role with any teacher. I did not participate on any support team as a result of an action plan during the months that I was in the field of study. My ability to work with the administration, teachers, and staff was actually enhanced by my understanding of the school's culture.

My qualifications to conduct the research have been established throughout the last thirty years as I have progressed through the educational system. I was a middle school classroom teacher for 13 years before going into administration. At the central office I was coordinator for the Programs for the Academically Gifted and ultimately became the State Consultant for Gifted Education for the Department of Public Instruction. I also served the Department as a lead consultant in the role of providing technical assistance to low performing school systems.

During my tenure as State Consultant for Gifted Education, the state underwent a revolutionary change in the service delivery model in gifted education. To facilitate the transition, each school system was required to develop a local plan for gifted education. Before such a plan could be developed, the system had to engage in a comprehensive needs assessment. Dr. James Gallagher and Dr. Mary Ruth Coleman from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill developed the model design for the assessments. I partnered with them in the implementation of this project and participated in many local reviews. As part of that process I conducted focus group sessions and interviews with parents, teachers, and students as well as document analyses. In the analysis stage we culled the data for overriding themes, depending on triangulation methods to increase validity of our findings. Although I claim no ownership of the design, I was an active participant in the process and in the presentation of the findings at several state and national conferences. I have also used similar methods of collecting and analyzing qualitative data when conducting program evaluations throughout the state, either in the role of state or private consultant.

### **Research Techniques**

In the study I observed and analyzed the school through the tenets of organizational theory, focusing on the school's cultural context. Using the techniques of participant observation, I employed purposeful sampling to ensure that the school's whole story was told. By using inductive analysis, theory development and deductive analysis, I constantly compared the data throughout the study. According to Patton

(2002) using multiple methods for sampling and analysis lends credibility to the study.

### **Data Collection**

I began observing the school informally in May, 2002 when Dr. Callaghan became principal. These informal observations helped establish a baseline for the study. I entered the school formally as a researcher in April, 2003 upon approval of my proposal. I continued observing and interviewing through October, 2003. My analyses ended in November 2003.

In order to gather data that were rich in detail and authentic in context, I employed the qualitative methodologies of interview, observation, survey, and document analysis. The data are based on twenty-one interviews and twelve observations that included a broad sampling of teachers, administrators, staff, and parents. The sample also included various age, gender, ethnic and subject area representatives. Forty-one faculty members out of sixty completed anonymous surveys on organizational climate and health – the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire Middle (OCDQM) and the Organizational Health Inventory (OHI-M).

During the interviews I used a format that was standard open-ended, but I revised and refocused discussions as issues evolved. During my interviews I used a tape recorder unless the subject asked me to script instead. I employed active listener techniques and was attuned to the body language expressed by the interviewees. At the close of the interviews, I transcribed my tapes or organized my notes and added

any impressions gained during the interviews. These notes were helpful in later data analysis.

In a preliminary discussion with Dr. Callaghan, she indicated that her first-year efforts were focusing on aligning the school to her vision of a quality school environment. She defined a quality school as one that uses data to drive instruction in a culture that is based on high expectations, not only for student achievement but also for teacher performance. Dr. Callaghan recognized that the school needed comprehensive and systemic change in order to improve and that the culture needed to be addressed before it would support a comprehensive school improvement model. I used information from Dr. Callaghan's philosophy of a sound culture to structure my interview questions. I questioned teacher perceptions about quality tools and data driven instruction. I gathered data about how teachers felt about the capacity of at-risk students to learn. My questions reflected the characteristics of an effective middle school that are listed in Chapter 2 of this document.

In addition to Blewbury Middle School personnel, I interviewed school system personnel who had knowledge of and contact with the school. These individuals helped provide historical context to the study. In addition to school personnel, I randomly invited fifteen parents to participate in the study. Out of the fifteen six elected to be interviewed.

Lincoln and Guba (1985, 2002) recommended that sample selection size should be determined by the point at which there is redundancy of information. Patton (2002) maintained that a qualitative design needs "to remain sufficiently open and flexible to permit exploration of the study. The design should remain emergent, even

after data collection begins” (p. 255). In October, 2003 I determined that I had reached a point of data saturation as new interviews were only confirming data that I already had accumulated.

During the data collection process, I used a key informant who was a veteran at the school. Prior to the appointment of a new principal she had requested a transfer from the school, but she decided to stay and work with the new principal. Le Compte and Preissle (1993) maintained “data collected from key informants may add material to the baseline data otherwise inaccessible to the ethnographer because of time constraints in a study” (p.167). They also felt that key informants were often reflective thinkers and could add insight to the study. Stake (1995) agreed that “understanding is greatly facilitated by finding an informant” (p.67). The key informant and I discussed at length the historical context of the school. From her I was able to collect information about informal subgroups that influenced the culture of the school.

To add to the richness of my story and to support validity, I collected other qualitative data through observations and document analysis. Patton (2002) maintained that in order “to absorb the program’s language, to understand nuances of meaning, to appreciate variations in participants’ experiences, and to capture the importance of what happened, nothing (substitutes) for direct experiences” (p.262). Patton further argued that observations serve to allow context and open-ended discovery that leads to inductive reasoning. Observations also allow the researcher to see what participants in the study often overlook as routine. Observations allow the researcher to question participants about events that would never be referenced in an

interview and give the researcher first-hand experience at the time of interpretation of the data.

During my observations I took notes that described the total experience. I have found from completing literally hundreds of observations in the past that most often an observer can accurately assess the attitudes and instructional philosophies of a teacher through direct observation. While in the rooms, I documented the classroom physical environment, student seating arrangements, discourse patterns, questions and tasks asked of students, student responses and instructional materials being used. According to Stake (1995), “there should be some balance (in description that would distinguish) between the uniqueness and the ordinariness of the place”(p. 63). These data served as clues toward the teacher’s attitudes about student abilities and her use of data to drive instruction. I paid particular attention to any indications that the teacher did or did not subscribe to the vision that was articulated by Dr. Callaghan.

To “let the occasion tell its story” (Stake, 1995, p. 62), I refrained from being an active participant in the classroom I wrote down my notes either during the class or as soon as the class was over so that my data were accurate and complete.

In order to elicit possible topics for interviews and to get a feel for prior attitudes at the school, I completed document analyses. One analysis involved 2000-2001 Abingdon School System Parent Survey results and 2001-2002 Abingdon School System Teacher Survey results regarding Blewbury Middle School. These surveys were part of an annual school system assessment that the superintendent conducts, with parents and teachers responding during alternating years. I also

analyzed the report from the 2002 Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) review. The report from that evaluation was particularly instructive in that it was based on perceptions of Blewbury from educators outside the school system. The review of the findings and recommendations from that committee and the survey results were very valuable in documenting a baseline culture from which to observe the changing environment.

In addition to the school system surveys and the SACS report, I analyzed other pertinent documentation pertaining to the school, including Dr. Callaghan's August, 2002 School Improvement Plan. I reviewed letters to parents, PTA minutes, discipline reports, Dr. Callaghan's journal, and other documents relative to the school's functions. Robert Stake (1995) acknowledged that in almost every study there is a need to examine documents. He wrote, "Documents serve as substitutes for records of activity that the researcher could not observe directly" (1995, p. 112).

In addition to interviews, observations, and document analyses, I administered two surveys to assess the health and climate of Blewbury Middle School. These surveys were recommended by my committee and provided to me at no charge by Dr. Wayne Hoy of The Ohio State University. The middle school climate and health measures were constructed in 1996 by Hoy, Barnes, and Sabo and Hoy, Hoffman, Sabo, and Bliss, respectively. In 1997, they were published in *The Road to Open and Healthy Schools* by Dr. Wayne K. Hoy and Dr. C. John Tarter of St. John's University of New York. The surveys measure a school's personality type, along a continuum of open or closed, and help describe the school's health. The surveys are the result of twenty years of research and testing. The measurement tools are the

Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire Middle (OCDQM) and the Organizational Health Inventory (OHI-M). Both surveys are organized into a four-part Likert scale along a continuum of Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The surveys were administered in a faculty meeting, and participation was voluntary. The surveys offered a chance for faculty to participate in the research study anonymously. By offering the survey as an option, principals in the study had an opportunity to voice their opinions without feeling any fear of identification or recrimination, and the data were protected from any bias associated with my position in the school system.

### **Data Analysis**

*Stake (1995) writes of the art of case study research. Van Maanen (1988) emphasizes the storytelling motifs of qualitative writing in his ethnographic book on telling tales. Golden-Biddle and Locke (1997) make story the central theme in their book Composing Qualitative Research. Corrine Glesne (1999), a researcher and a poet, begins with the story analogy, describing qualitative analysis as ‘finding your story,’ then later represents the process as “improvising a song of the world.” Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) call to mind “portraits” in naming their form of qualitative analysis The Art and Science of Portraiture. Brady (2000) explores “anthropological poetics.” Janesick (2000) explores dance in The Choreography of Qualitative Research Design. (Patton, 2002, p. 432)*

Regardless of the techniques employed in the analysis of data, the primary role of the researcher is to bring meaning to the story (Stake, 1995) and make sense of massive amounts of data (Patton, 2002). “Because qualitative inquiry depends, at every stage, on the skills, training, insights, and capabilities of the inquirer, qualitative analysis ultimately depends on the analytical intellect and style of the analyst” (Patton, 2002, p. 433). The process was driven by two factors: the original conceptual framework that guided the study initially and the analytical interpretations that emerged throughout the fieldwork. I made every effort to provide thick

description but to keep it separate from interpretation. Interpretation involved attaching explanations and significance to phenomena.

My initial analysis began in the field as I started to develop theories and ideas about the data. The themes and hypotheses directed my subsequent data collection. According to Patton (2002), early data collection is “generative and emergent” while later stages become more “confirmatory” and “deepen insights into and confirm (or disconfirm) patterns that seem to have appeared” (p. 436).

My first step in analyzing the data was scanning the data for a sense of the whole. This process allowed me to “check the data for completeness” and allowed me to reacquaint myself with the original research questions. The processes I used were “organizing, abstracting, integrating, and synthesizing” (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 236). I looked for patterns and categories that seemed to emerge and sort the data. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) opined, “The process is analogous to assembling a jigsaw puzzle. The edge pieces are located first and assembled to provide a frame of reference...Next the puzzle worker places the assembled parts in their general position within the frame and finally, locates and adds the connecting pieces until no holes remain” (p. 237).

Next I established the narrative or the who, what, where, how and why of the story, and then I turned my attention to the meaning of the story (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Based on a deductive analysis, I confirmed or denied theories that I framed during data collection and organized my data around themes that I generated inductively. Following Lincoln and Guba’s (1981) guidelines for developing themes, I focused on four issues that arose frequently.

After I established the themes, I sorted the data into categories. Finally, I made inferences and speculated about the implications of the data. This construction of knowledge allowed me to “go beyond the data and make guesses about what will happen in the future” (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 247). Even though I conducted a formal analysis of the data at the conclusion of the data collection process, the analysis continued until the writing was complete.

### **Credibility of the Study**

Patton (2002) maintained that the credibility of qualitative inquiry is ensured

- through rigorous methods during fieldwork and analysis,
- by the credibility of the researcher, and
- by philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry (p. 552).

Through the use of a variety of data collection techniques and systematic analytical analyses described earlier in this chapter, I controlled for methodological credibility. By employing negative case selection and searching for any disconfirming cases of the patterns, I strengthened my study. Finding and reporting such negative cases allowed for more robust explanation of the story and provided additional credibility to my study (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993).

In order to address any biases, I was forthcoming in Chapter 1 with any predispositions that I had concerning Blewbury Middle School. The anonymous survey also ensured against bias on the part of the respondents. While I suspected that the school had a fractured and loosely aligned school environment drowning in low expectations, I never discussed my perceptions with any of the faculty while I was conducting my research.

During the study I was eager to discover what the data would tell me about a school that was in trouble. I wanted to hear the story that the participants had to tell, and from their data I extrapolated meaning within the context of organizational theory.

Finally, in addressing Patton's final condition for credibility, the educational field has slowly but surely begun to accept the importance of qualitative inquiry. Dolbert (1983) argued that cultural ethnography is applied education research and that "improving a program may include changing the culture...and that an ethnographic evaluation would both facilitate and assess such change" (in Patton, 2002, p.83).

Patton (2002) suggested that many attributes of program do not lend themselves to counting. School outcomes can be looked at in terms of "quantity of change and quality of change" (p. 150). Based on the number of studies in the literature and the universities that themselves now conduct their own qualitative studies, surely the value of qualitative inquiry has been accepted as credible. Patton in fact maintained that the "validity of qualitative inquiry was never in doubt...now, qualitative methods have ascended to a level of parallel respectability" (p. 585).

To strengthen the internal validity of the study, I employed verification techniques offered by Patton (2002) that were applicable to my study. In order to triangulate my data I did the following:

- First, I employed document analyses on the Abingdon Parent and Teacher Surveys results. These surveys were conducted by the school system. I

compared the survey findings to the findings in my study since both addressed parent and teacher perceptions of the school.

- Second, I triangulated my sources within the context of my qualitative data. Stake (1995) maintained that the researcher cannot triangulate all data because of the large amount of information collected. However, he asserted that contested description data crucial to an assertion and key interpretations need “extra effort toward confirmation” (p. 112). Therefore I was very careful to check the data for recurrence before identifying major themes.
- Third, I cross-checked my observation data and interview data for indications of inconsistencies or confirmation of stories. I compared what participants said publicly with what they told me privately. I scanned the data for consistency over the several months I was in the field, remembering that “change within the environment” was the event I was studying. I anticipated change in participant perceptions but that change was evolutionary and subtle. I recognized and noted the difference between questions answered inconsistently and questions answered differently due to changing perceptions.
- Fourth, my interview schedule included sources from the school building administration, central administration, parents and teachers. Given this variety, Patton’s call for a variety of perspectives about an issue were addressed.
- Fifth, I compared the findings of survey results from the Organization Climate Description Questionnaire for Middle School (OCDQ-RM) (Hoy and Turner,

1997) and the Organizational Health Inventory for Middle School (OHI-M) (Hoy and Turner 1997) with the data collected through interviews and observations.

- Finally, in triangulating within the qualitative data sources, I analyzed information gained from interviews against data gathered from documents, such as the School Improvement Plan (SIP), Parent Teacher Association (PTA) minutes, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) report, and school handbooks.

Although crosschecking these various sources triangulated the data, there were minimal inconsistencies. Patton (2002) argued that inconsistencies however do not devalue the study. Instead, they can strengthen the study if the researcher studies, understands and explains the reasons for the different perceptions. “The fact that observational data produce different results than interview data does not mean that either ...are invalid...It means that different kinds of data have captured different things...data from divergent sources can contribute significantly to the overall credibility of findings” (p. 560.).

### **Generalizations**

*“The trouble with generalizations is that they don’t apply to particulars.” Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.110)*

A final factor in the credibility of the study is the study’s utility for generalization. Shadish (1995a) argued that both qualitative and quantitative inquiry share the problem of being highly localized and therefore difficult to generalize. Stake (2000) argued that the first job of the case study researcher is to focus on the case at hand – to particularization before searching for patterns across cases. Stake

(1995) further maintained that when readers study case studies, they, through vicarious experience, add to the construction of their own knowledge. They form “naturalist generalizations...so well constructed that the person feels as if it happened to themselves...because they are familiar with other cases...they add this one in, thus making a slightly new group from which to generalize, a new opportunity to modify old generalizations” (p. 85) Guba and Lincoln (1981) opined that it is virtually impossible for human behavior not to be affected by context. Therefore they dismiss generalizability and substitute the concepts of “transferability” and “fittingness” in qualitative studies (p.62). Finally, Cronbach and Associates (1980) suggested that instead of generalization, findings should be used to extrapolate possibilities for similar conditions (in Patton, 2002).

In the case of the Blewbury study, I believe that some transferability of the findings is possible. Educators should be able to add to their general body of knowledge of school organization, school culture, school improvement, and change processes. By understanding the situation at Blewbury Middle School, other educators should be able to extrapolate findings from the study that could inform future school improvement efforts at similar troubled schools.

### **Ethical Considerations**

My interest in studying a school through a cultural lens was fueled by the research I have read on school improvement as well as organizational reform in business. Writers from both fields agree that the culture of the organization must be conducive to change before systemic change can occur. Through my research I gained knowledge that can inform the field when reform initiatives are being

considered. I feel comfortable that my purpose for the qualitative case study research was sincere and ethical and that the information gained is useful.

In order to ensure that the process of my research was ethical, I followed the guidelines for human subject research required by North Carolina State University. Ethical considerations articulated in these guidelines required that the subjects in my study had the right of informed consent, with the privilege of withdrawal without penalty. In order to conform to these guidelines, I informed my participants of their rights and treated them with privacy and dignity. I informed them that, despite my best efforts at maintaining their anonymity, the possibility existed that their privacy could be compromised (Glesnee, 1999).

During the course of my study I treated my subjects with respect and told their stories with honesty and integrity. Marshall and Rossman (1999) maintained that studies often depend on the relationships between the researcher and the participant. I have always been successful at establishing rapport with teachers in the field. This ability served to enhance my study and helped allay potential concerns about ethical issues. During the course of my study, no one notified me of any ethical concerns.

### **Summary of Chapter Three**

The purpose of this ethnography was to study the culture of Blewbury Middle School during the first sixteen months of Dr. Maryann Callaghan's principalship. I chose Blewbury as the site for my study because it was targeted for school improvement. Dr. Callaghan had expressed to me her intent to effect cultural change at the school before implementing any organized program for school reform.

During the study I employed qualitative methodology that included interviews, surveys, observations, and document analyses. In the next chapter the findings from the research will be presented.

## **Chapter Four**

### **STUDY FINDINGS**

#### **Introduction**

Alan Peshkin (1988) opined in the foreword to *Change and Effectiveness in Schools* that in each school there is a force that perpetuates the status quo, and that this force is the school's culture (p. vii). Even though there may be a degree of discontent with the school, students, parents and educators accept the norms or culture of the school.

Peshkin's opinion was exemplified at Blewbury Middle School where over several years the school degenerated into turmoil and bedlam. While the majority of the faculty and staff agreed that the school was not effective, this majority did not support changes initiated by a new administration. The cultural status quo at Blewbury was so entrenched before the transition that 83.6% of the parents when surveyed applied a label of *good* or *excellent* to the school, even though central administration, Blewbury and other school system teachers, and outside observers such as those from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools knew the contrary to be true.

While everyone I interviewed acknowledged an awareness of the school's under-performance, no one was aware of the full scope of the dysfunction. Everyone understood there were concerns with his own particular dimension, but no one was aware of the magnitude or complexity of the whole. When Dr. Callaghan and Mr. Gunn arrived on the scene, they too were astounded at the enormity of the neglect. However, they were determined to reverse the cycle of the failing school.

Throughout the inquiry, I focused my interviews, observations, and document analyses on the following research questions:

- What are the characteristics of the school's culture at the beginning and end of the study? If any changes have occurred, how did they occur?
- How can the faculty of the school be characterized in terms of ability, skill, and basic norms?
- If there is a vision for the school, what is it and how is determined and articulated?
- What type of leadership has emerged in the school? Is the leadership being demonstrated consistent with the needs of the school? Is it consistent with the type of leadership preferred by the leadership team?
- How do the teachers describe and treat the students?
- How do the members of this school community view Blewbury?

This chapter is organized into the following four sections:

### **Section 1. Baseline Data.**

In order to describe the pre-transition culture of the school, I performed document analyses on two Abingdon School System surveys, one administered to parents in 2000-2001 and one to teachers in 2001-2002, that provided perspectives on the school under the previous administration. The surveys are conducted annually in order for the superintendent to gain information about the schools. The parent surveys were sent home with students and mailed back to the central office. The teacher surveys were put in teacher mailboxes and returned to central office in sealed envelopes. The findings from these surveys provided background information about

the school prior to Dr. Callaghan's arrival. These data proved to be quite useful in providing background data since the faculty turnover rate was so high.

### **Section 2. Emerging Themes.**

During the transcription and analysis of the interviews, comments from participants converged around four major themes. These themes recurred in almost every interview with rich description. The themes were: The Iceberg Analogy, Teacher and Student Behavior, Lack of Trust, and Lack of Shared Understanding/Vision. These themes will be discussed through the voices of administration, teachers, and parents.

### **Section 3. Analytical Frameworks.**

My observations and interviews also addressed the four analytical frameworks referenced in Chapter Two:

*Effective Middle School Correlates* - Alexander and George (1981)

*Leadership Forces Hierarchy* - Sergiovanni (1995)

*Norms in School Culture* – Rossman, Corbett, and Firestone (1988) Figure 3;

*Consistency of Technology and Structure to Goals* - Perrow (1967)

### **Section 4. Survey Results on School Climate and Health.**

In order to assess the organizational climate and health of Blewbury School at the conclusion of the first year of Dr. Callaghan's principalship (May 2003), I administered two surveys: the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire for Middle School (OCDQ-RM) and the Organizational Health Inventory for Middle School (OHI-M). These surveys were recommended by my committee and provided to me at no charge by Dr. Wayne Hoy of The Ohio State University. The middle

school climate and health measures were constructed in 1996 by Hoy, Barnes, and Sabo and Hoy, Hoffman, Sabo, and Bliss, respectively. In 1997, they were published in *The Road to Open and Healthy Schools* by Dr. Wayne K. Hoy and Dr. C. John Tarter of St. John's University of New York. These surveys provided all faculty and staff an anonymous voice in the research and served to insulate the data from any bias associated with my position in the school system. The surveys served as a member-check and triangulation for staff interviews.

## **Section 1. Baseline Data**

### **Document Analysis**

During the 2000-2001 and 2001-2002 school years, immediately prior to the transition in administration at Blewbury, the superintendent administered two Abingdon School System Surveys, one to parents (2000-2001) and one to faculty and staff (2001-2002), in an effort to gain qualitative information about all the schools in the school system. The surveys were designed by the school system's Accountability Department and solicited information concerning various topics. The surveys were based on a five response Likert Scale ranging from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree*. Categories examined included *Climate, Communication, Curriculum, Discipline, Staff, Parental Involvement, Facilities and Equipment, Funding, School District, and Overall Satisfaction*. Space was also included for staff and parents to make comments. Seventy-one out of 85 faculty and staff at Blewbury returned the survey, an 83.5% return rate. Out of 798 parent surveys that were sent home by students, 177 were returned for a return rate of 22.2%.

The results of the surveys indicated that in *Overall Satisfaction* only 23.6% of the faculty and staff of Blewbury rated their school *Excellent* or *Good* while 57.8% rated the school *Fair* or *Poor*. In comparison, a summary of faculty and staff ratings of all middle schools in the system indicates that 68.3% rated their schools *Excellent* or *Good* while only 22.5% characterized their schools *Fair* or *Poor*.

Parents from Blewbury rated their school more positively in terms of overall satisfaction, with 83.6% rating the school *Excellent* or *Good* while only 32.7% rated it *Fair* or *Poor*. When comparing ratings from Blewbury parents and parents from other middle schools in the system, results are similar. Approximately 80.5% rated their school *Excellent* or *Good* while only 15.4% rated characterized their schools *Fair* or *Poor*.

*Climate.* Seventy-two percent of the Blewbury faculty and staff maintained that the school did not have an atmosphere of mutual trust. Thirty-five percent reported that the school did not show sensitivity to issues of racial and ethnic fairness even though 97% agreed that understanding cultural diversity is important in educating their children. Twenty-seven percent described the school as unsafe and insecure. Thirty-nine percent indicated that they didn't feel that the faculty and staff cooperated in trying to achieve school goals and 52% felt they didn't make important contributions to the school.

Parents offered a different view in terms of climate. Seventy-three percent of the parents perceived that the school did demonstrate an atmosphere of trust among the various stakeholders. Seventy-nine percent felt that the school staff made every

effort to provide a safe environment. Sixty-eight percent felt the school showed sensitivity to issues of racial and ethnic fairness.

In the comments section some parents perceived that Blewbury was not given the same resources as other schools in the system. One parent commented, “The school needs to be more racially balanced, if this means redistricting to be done, so be it.” Another commented, “I don’t see this school or teachers getting the same awards or grants that are given to other middle schools in this same county.”

*Communication.* Staff reported mixed perspectives on the effectiveness of communication in the school. Sixty-seven percent agreed that decisions were made without consideration of staff views. One teacher indicated, “Communication is poor despite e-mail.” Another said, “It is hard to respond or react when we are given so little notice.”

Parents were more positive in the area of communication. On each of the indicators about sixty-five percent of the parents responded that communication was acceptable. However one parent did comment,

I would like more personal interaction with my child’s teachers about her progress or lack thereof before grading becomes an issue. Progress reports are bland at best and offer no solutions for my child’s improvement where she may need it. This is important to her and me in order to assist her.

*Curriculum.* Eighty-five percent of the teachers indicated that they integrated technology into their classroom. Eighty-five percent also agreed that teachers used a variety of strategies. Only 40% felt they had enough instructional supplies. Fifty-five percent felt they had high expectations for the students.

One teacher was very positive about system-wide efforts to improve instruction when she remarked, “Small class sizes help!” Another remarked, “A school is only as good as its principal; and a principal is only as good as his weakest teacher. More supervision of weak and/or new teachers is essential.”

In the area of curriculum parents were not as positive as teachers on some indicators. Thirty percent of the parents responded that homework assigned was not appropriate and clear to students. One parent wrote, “Please let the teachers take more time in making sure the students understand the work before assigning homework.” Another commented, “I know many students struggle with homework.”

Twenty-eight percent reported that their children were not being challenged academically. One parent offered, “Blewbury Middle does not offer opportunity for advancement academically.” Another responded, “Blewbury does not prepare the students for higher education. It is too easy to become lazy.” Another parent complained, “I feel Blewbury is slighted with the majority of kids not performing on grade level. On the Washington, DC trip recently some kids did not know the difference between the Capitol building and the White House.” Another parent replied, “Overall, we feel our child is not being challenged enough and therefore is not reaching his highest potential.”

*Discipline.* Responses indicated that 62% of the teachers felt character education had little impact on the behavior of the students at Blewbury. The majority, 76%, felt that discipline was not consistently enforced, was not administered fairly or appropriately, and was not handled effectively by administration. One teacher commented, “There are students without passes (in the halls) and others leaving out

side doors. We need consistent disciplinary actions for all students. More long term or alternative school suspensions (should be given) for consistently disruptive students.” Another teacher felt that “metal detectors (were needed) for all doorways.”

Forty-nine percent of the parents agreed with teachers that discipline was not being handled fairly at Blewbury. Thirty-seven percent felt that rules were not being consistently enforced while 30% felt the rules were not clear. One parent responded, “I don’t appreciate how certain teachers say they don’t mind my child asking questions but when she does, they fuss or yell or get angry.” Another said, “Some teachers need further training for handling discipline problems.” Another added, “Kids should not be talking when the teacher is teaching. Kids need to learn respect and manners.”

*Staff.* Fifty-seven percent of the staff felt the principal was not highly visible throughout the school. Forty-eight percent did not feel that he set high expectations for staff performance. Forty-nine percent did not feel that the school leadership team functioned effectively. Sixty-one percent of the faculty and staff reported that the principal was not an effective instructional leader in the school.

Parents were not as critical of the principal as teachers and staff. The majority, 61%, of the parents responded that the principal and staff were committed to the school. Seventy-six percent felt that the principal and teachers had high expectations for students. One parent commented, “The administration sincerely cares for the students’ well being.” There were some comments however that did not conform to majority opinion. One parent wrote,

There are several teachers that shouldn't be teaching. I don't think they're concerned about the children. They lack patience. Our children need teachers who care about their well-being and not someone who constantly yells and looks at the clock all day waiting for the dismissal bell to ring.

*Parental Involvement.* Seventy-three percent of the faculty believed that the school offered sufficient opportunities for parents to be involved in the school. The parent survey supported this perspective with 69% in agreement.

*Facilities and Equipment.* The majority of the faculty, 57%, reported that the building was neat, clean and comfortable. Forty-seven percent did not agree that the copiers and printers met their needs.

Parents agreed that the physical plant was sufficient. Seventy-three percent commented that the school was neat, bright and comfortable.

*Funding.* Ninety-one percent of the staff and 56% of the parents did not agree that the county provided sufficient funding for the school. e urve i ot i lu ea ue tio devoted solely to funding issues at the school.

*School District.* Fifty-one percent of the faculty felt that staff development was inadequate and not well organized. Forty-one percent felt the school system was not committed to academic excellence. Forty-two percent felt the central office was unresponsive to their questions and concerns.

Fifty-six of the parents felt the school system was committed to academic excellence. Fifty-eight percent felt the central office was responsive.

In summary, the surveys allude to a lack of faculty and staff confidence in the effectiveness of the administration of the school between the years 2000 and 2002. A lack of camaraderie among faculty, staff and administration was also reported.

Teachers assessed their performance positively however maintaining that they were doing their instructional tasks appropriately.

Conversely, parents tended to give more positive feedback to the administration and lower marks to teachers on their performance. Both parents and teachers/staff agreed that discipline was an area of concern.

These surveys validate my informal observations made in the spring of 2002, my first spring in the school system. The surveys serve as baseline data for my case study at Blewbury. The data represent faculty/staff and parent views of the school and its culture under the prior administration. At the time these surveys were completed, parents and teachers were not aware that a change in administration was eminent. These data should represent perceptions of the culture prior to Dr. Callaghan's appointment, without any bias or nostalgia that might be embedded if someone were asked currently to compare the school now and then.

## **Section 2. Emerging Themes**

### **The Iceberg Analogy**

#### **Administration Voices**

These were first impressions, penned by Dr. Callaghan in her journal.

My first visit to Blewbury Middle caused me to write HOLY SHIT!!! in my journal, and I abhor people who feel they have to curse to express themselves. I could think of no other expression. It was unbelievable! The physical plant was a mess. The floors were filthy. There was trash everywhere. It certainly did not have a professional appearance.

I was walking down the hall with the principal who was being reassigned, a former football player, when a female student walked up to him, grabbed his tie and told him to get the f\_\_\_ out of her way. That was only my first of countless shock reactions. Words could not really describe what I saw and felt.

There were 22 vacancies. After we contacted over 100 applicants for the 22 vacancies, only nine were willing to interview for the positions. The reputation of the school stretched far and wide.

We knew the problems that everyone else knew because they were the tip of the iceberg. But what we found after we got to Blewbury was so much more. It was under the surface, hard to get the whole picture. And it was so much more insidious than what was available for all to see. I really did not think that anyone at the Central Office knew just how bad this school was.

These same sentiments were echoed by all members of the administrative team. In May, 2002 the school was suffering from neglect. The floors had not been stripped in years. Halls and classrooms were dark, sometimes due to teachers keeping lights turned off as a control strategy, more often from lack of attention to burned-out light fixtures. Corners, classroom cabinets, and bathrooms were filled with trash. Bathroom stall doors were hanging on hinges. The reception area in the office was filled with stacks of papers and boxes. It took two days with two people working full time just to clean out the bookroom.

Students were also suffering from neglect. Classroom instruction was minimal, more often consisting of worksheets or students copying from an overhead. Profanity was commonplace in the hallways. Between class-changes students crowded together around locker alleys, hugging and kissing in plain sight. There were rumors of sex and drugs on campus.

“Blewbury was completely dysfunctional when we got here,” commented John Gunn, the assistant principal who had worked with Dr. Callaghan in the elementary school before coming to Blewbury. During the first summer, Mr. Gunn

coined the iceberg analogy for Blewbury. In fact, a print of an iceberg hangs behind his chair in his office. He remembered,

It was a complete mess. I opened a drawer and found \$3,000 worth of stamps. It was not locked, just there. I found a social studies textbook order for \$4,000 for books that were going out of adoption. And the \$4,000 didn't pay for enough books to have a class set for each teacher. Why would anyone spend so much money on obsolete books and not even order enough for class sets, particularly when the books were going to be replaced at the end of the school year?

There also were not enough math books, but \$12,000 was spent on art books that the art teacher said she had never wanted. In addition to poor expenditures on books, athletics purchases had been paid for out of the general fund.

There were also major legal issues that were in disarray. We found 20 exceptional children folders in a filing cabinet. These students had transferred to other schools at least a year ago and their confidential folders were still at Blewbury. We also found just stacked in the library in open view boxes of exceptional children confidential folders that should have been shredded. We discovered that Personal Education Plans (PEPs) had not been completed on approximately thirty students. When these students failed to meet the state promotion requirements at the end of summer school, we were obliged to socially promote the students since we could not document that any interventions or parent notifications had been attempted. There were cumulative folders from the last thirty years that had not been passed along. In summary apparently there was not much thought given to rules and procedures, goals or expenditures.

In contrast, when anyone walks in the entranceway of Blewbury Middle School today, approximately one year after the transition to the new administration, they step on deep blue, hand-painted Bobcat prints into a cheery, bright building with shiny floors. The glass in the foyer is cleaned each day and trash doesn't litter the facility or grounds anymore. The walls have been freshly painted, the lockers that were a constant site of disruption have been removed, and the principal's office has been relocated from the back of the administrative suite to the main hall where she can keep a close eye on movement in the building. These changes, although cosmetic,

were important to the new administrative team. They wanted students, parents and visitors to see a physical difference when they walked into Blewbury after the transition.

These changes, though superficial, weren't simple to accomplish. Dr. Callaghan and Mr. Gunn worked an average of 17 hours a day during their first summer at Blewbury. Mr. Gunn wrote up over 400 work orders for Maintenance to service. The number of work orders in the past several years didn't total 100. Since it was unfeasible to expect that the system could address all the needs, Mr. Gunn painted the walls in the school himself. Mr. Gunn's maintenance work and commitment didn't stop after the first summer. He continued to address plant needs himself, including power washing the building, at the close of the first academic year. If he recognized that a task needed to be done and he couldn't get it accomplished through the normal procedures, he did it himself. During the first year he instituted an inventory so he could account for all materials purchased for the building. He maintained accurate financial, student and discipline records and insisted that teachers follow the procedures as well.

When I asked him why he was willing to sacrifice so much of his life for the school he replied,

"I didn't look at it that painting wasn't my job. The county workers were already doing so much to help us get the school in shape like we wanted it for opening...I knew how to paint and was glad to help them out. I thought if I painted the walls, maybe they would be willing to continue to work here in our building. They would see our commitment and maybe they would be eager to help.

I ask myself all the time if I ever want to do this again...to be the marines, the first wave, the group that has to come in and take control. You know I make

\$35 a day more than a teacher. I have to want to do all of this because I love it. Money certainly is not the incentive. I am putting my life on hold. I am only 27 and not married. If I keep this up, I will never even have a date. But this can't happen without putting in the time. Time is the factor. There is so much to do here and never enough time to get it all done

Upon his arrival to Blewbury, Mr. Gunn discovered that teachers didn't have copies of the Standard Course of Study or teacher editions for their textbooks. There were calculators in the school, but teachers were not allowed to use them for instructional purposes, only testing. The previous administration feared that the calculators would be stolen and not available for the End-of-Grade tests.

There were no math manipulatives or science supplies or equipment in the building. When asked why teachers were not given any materials or supplies, members of the School Improvement Team who were veteran Blewbury teachers recalled that the previous administration felt the new teachers were incompetent to use them so they didn't need the resources. Mr. Gunn also approved the discarding of 10,000 books from the media center. The average copyright date in the discarded books was 1970.

Today, every math classroom has a set of student calculators and manipulatives. Administration is making every effort to get teachers trained in hands-on math instruction. Teachers also have overhead calculators. Classroom dictionaries are being replaced in the English classes, and classroom libraries are being created. Books have been purchased for the English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. These classes have never had books that were appropriate to second Language learners.

While at the school one day in mid-September 2003 for an interview, I met staff in the office filled with excitement and hurrying to the eighth grade hall. The administrative team was on their way to observe the science teachers who were going to do a lab. According to the veteran teachers in the building, science labs had not been attempted in the building for the last ten years. The teachers had expressed a desire to do a lab, and Mr. Gunn had borrowed the necessary equipment from the high school next door. He had already ordered equipment to stock the lab, but it had not arrived yet. He told the teachers, "Even if it is the day before, if you want to do some hands-on, give me a list. I will go to the store and get you what you need, even if I have to buy it with my own money."

Plans are underway for the creation of a teacher resource center. Mr. Gunn has purchased \$10,000 books for literature circles, guided reading, and independent reading on various reading levels. Concerning resource acquisition, Mr. Gunn commented,

We certainly don't have everything we need yet to make this school the way we envision it, but we are working to get it. But teachers do have what they need to teach each day. We just don't have it at a state of the art level yet. But we're going there. We have a lot of need but we now have basics. Teachers are even now making a wish list. Eventually we hope teachers will get their wish lists. We are looking at foundations and grants.

There is now no material excuse why teachers can't do effective instruction in this school except for their receiving appropriate training. Now that they have the materials, we are going to get them the training so they will know how to use the materials effectively. We didn't want to get teachers training and have them sitting there thinking these activities are great, but we don't have materials.

Both Dr. Callaghan and Mr. Gunn worked extremely long hours in order to follow through on procedural issues and to be available to parents at night. The two of them work very closely, a pattern they established while in their prior school. When they were anticipating their move to Blewbury, they expected to find a challenge. But Dr. Callaghan and Mr. Gunn acknowledged that they were shocked to find that every facet of the school was broken. Problems didn't exist just in leadership and student achievement, every function of the school was out of sorts, hence the iceberg analogy. The faculty survey validated that teachers and staff recognized the work ethic of the administrative team and their willingness to spend the time necessary to improve the school.

While there is much left to do, both felt that a lot was accomplished during the first year in establishing a functioning school infrastructure. When queried about cultural change, both indicated that all of their attention in the first year went to stabilizing the physical environment and student/teacher behavior. They hope to be able this academic year to turn their attention to the social and psychological environment.

Two other assistant principals and one administrative intern complete the administrative team currently. Four administrative interns worked in the school during the 2002-2003 school year. None of these individuals was involved administratively at Blewbury at the time of the transition. While all of these players currently have or had important functions, they weren't referenced as often by teachers when I questioned them about the effectiveness of the administration.

Teachers characterized the other members of the administration as functioning in the shadows of Dr. Callaghan and Mr. Gunn.

A third assistant principal, an experienced administrator, was assigned to Blewbury in June, 2003 for the sole purpose of mentoring the inexperienced faculty. Other middle schools in the system have only two assistant principals. She described Blewbury as a “louder environment” than any she has experienced, where “grades don’t motivate and students don’t articulate any goals for their future.” She characterized the culture as being “dominated by the African-American girls who are constantly calling attention to themselves.” She described the student body as “needy and defined by poverty.” She said that “on the outside the students seem so bold and cocky, but under the surface, these students are just not as hard and difficult as they want you to think they are. They are simply starved for attention.” Her comments supported the Iceberg analogy. What appears on the outside is not always what it seems, but more complex and complicated to address.

When I asked her, the newest member of the team, to comment on how the administration functions, she answered, “Dr. Callaghan is not going to ask anyone to do anything she will not do herself. She’s here for the right reasons. She tries to be proactive and not reactive.”

Her first experience with Dr. Callaghan was to sit in on interviews during the summer. At the end of the first academic year under Dr. Callaghan, there were 34 vacancies to fill, and finding teachers consumed the summer. This same situation had faced Dr. Callaghan prior to the 2002 academic school year when she arrived at the school to find 22 vacancies. Because she had faced so many challenges during the

first summer, she found herself “hiring warm bodies” just to fill classrooms. Later upon reflection she felt her poor selection process had precipitated many of the faculty problems she faced during her first year at Blewbury. As a result she was determined to make better choices for the 2003 school year.

The assistant principal described the interview process implemented in the summer of 2003. She said in every interview Dr. Callaghan made every effort to characterize the culture and challenges of Blewbury to the applicants. She didn’t want new teachers to arrive on campus not fully apprised of what they would face. So many new teachers in the past had complained that no one had fully prepared them for the environment. The assistant principal complimented Dr. Callaghan on her honesty and integrity in being forthcoming with the potential candidates. Once informed many applicants said they weren’t willing to take on the challenge. However, Dr. Callaghan didn’t want teachers to arrive on campus and experience the same Iceberg phenomenon that had confronted her. She felt that in order to be successful, teachers had to know up front what to expect. Even with such full disclosure, by October, 2003 and the writing of these findings, five faculty members have already resigned this academic year, citing the job as too overwhelming and demanding for them to continue. The position of science facilitator has turned over twice. Both teachers felt the challenge was too consuming for them given they had home commitments as well.

### **Teacher Voices**

Because of Dr. Callaghan’s reputation as an excellent administrator, one teacher transferred to Blewbury in the fall of 2002. She was familiar with the

successes at the elementary school and wanted to be a part of the transformation. The teacher, who is no longer at the school, commented,

I was surprised that there were no materials there. In other schools it seemed we had supplies and equipment. We didn't have any when we arrived at Blewbury.

I don't know how the money had been spent.

At first I was shocked that expectations weren't more clearly laid out. But then I began to see how overwhelmed Dr. Callaghan and Mr. Gunn were. There was so much to do. There were so many teachers to get on board. The foundation at Blewbury was lacking, in fact, it didn't exist. The teachers at the elementary school had wanted to change and get better, but the teachers who were left at Blewbury were happy with the low performance of the school. They had been able to do and say whatever they wanted.

The administration was always involved somewhere in trying to keep order. There were so many hotspots they couldn't keep up with all of them. It was totally dysfunctional in my estimation.

Working at Blewbury actually made me physically sick. I have never missed that many days of work before but I had never experienced anything like last year. I was so depressed. On Sunday nights I found myself dreading going to work on Mondays. It was so stressful. I hope never to be in that situation again. The school had so many more problems than I expected. I was from this system and I didn't know the shape the school was in. I am sure Dr. Callaghan wasn't prepared for what she found when she got there.

General consensus from faculty and staff was that during the first year of the new administration, the situation at the school was at the least stressful and for many unbearable. "It took so much emotional energy to work there," allowed one teacher.

For the new administration it was more of a learning year rather than an action year. While Dr. Callaghan and Mr. Gunn came to the school with many ideas and sold those ideas to their fellow administrators, they were unable to implement them with the faculty and staff. As one crisis was solved, another would occur.

A few veteran staff that had contemplated leaving the school before they heard there was to be a change were very disappointed with the lack of progress. One teacher observed, “Everyone thought Dr. Callahan would come in and in a few weeks have everything under control. They saw her as the savior. But those people didn’t understand just how out of control, chaotic, and dysfunctional this place had become.”

Another said, “The expectations in the building were so high that she would make a difference. Not only had the building been ignored and allowed to deteriorate over the years, teacher professionalism had deteriorated as well.”

Another teacher noted, “I wanted so badly for the school to be right. I was so disappointed that she didn’t live up to my expectations. I didn’t see what her plan was to fix it, but I do think she cares and is trying.”

Some teachers had benefited from the laxity in the prior administration. One staff member described some of his fellow teachers in this way, “Many staff no longer completed lesson plans. In fact they didn’t meet in grade level or team meetings to plan together. They were accustomed to arriving late, leaving early, and in some cases, leaving during the day.” He continued, “I am sure no one in the Central Office knew how lax the rules were at the school.” Instead of being able to focus energy on improving curriculum and instruction, Dr. Callaghan and Mr. Gunn first had to address the turmoil in the organization itself.

One teacher praised Dr. Callaghan for “attention to detail, follow through and continuous improvement.” The teacher contended that after the principal came to the realization that Blewbury was more complicated than all had realized, she began to

find the resources necessary to address the myriad of problems. The teacher was amazed at the resources focused in the media center, the new books and materials. She explained,

In the past the administration didn't care even when one teacher lost 280 books. This past year Dr. Callaghan held every student and every teacher accountable for what they lost. She even negotiated an extra week of employment before the current school year so we could get ahead with our teaming and planning. No one ever acknowledged before that when a majority of the staff is initially licensed or lateral entry, more time is needed so we can mentor them."

Another teacher acknowledged that teachers in the past few years had not even been observed. She admitted signing an observation form that had been placed in her box describing an observation that never took place. While she didn't defend the actions of the old administration, she did express discontent with the new. She described the school during the first year with Dr. Callaghan as a "quagmire." She believed the administration "didn't realize what the problems were or there were so many they couldn't isolate them to solve them."

Another commented, "So far it is better this year than it was in her first. It is more like a school." Another allowed, "Blewbury is a big ship that was going in the wrong direction for a long time. Now we want it to go in a different direction. I don't think anyone thought about how long it takes to reverse the direction of a ship, particularly a ship with broken systems."

### **Parent Voices**

Based on interviews and surveys the majority of the parents were unaware of, or unwilling to admit to, the dysfunctional state of the school under the previous

administration. When asked to compare the school now to the school before most commented that there were some improvements now but nothing drastic. They commented that the previous principal had been quite friendly and easy to get along with and they didn't want to criticize him.

Two parents were more forthcoming in their criticism of the previous administration. In fact, both commented that had the change in leadership not occurred, they had planned to request a transfer or to send their children to a private school. One parent, who was the most outspoken, characterized the school under the previous administration as "terrible." Another reported that in his neighborhood many of the children did not attend Blewbury. Their parents had been aware of the "out of control" nature of the school and had opted to send their children to charter or private schools. The parent recounted many conversations with other neighborhood parents since the arrival of Dr. Callaghan. He said he had even gotten into arguments with friends because they couldn't believe that Blewbury, a school in a "total state of disrepair," could be such a different place with a new principal.

All of the parents remarked that the physical appearance of the building was vastly improved. One did express some cynicism about how a white, female principal was able to get county workmen on site when the former African American male had been unable to secure services. Parents also commented on improved schedules, orderliness, and a generally positive atmosphere. Several reported that the office seemed to function better during the past year.

## **Student and Teacher Behavior**

### **Administration Voices**

Only a few weeks into her tenure a journal entry states that during an interview Dr. Callaghan was asked by the candidate, a local African-American male who had attended the school himself, why she, a white female was interested in taking on the huge task of reforming Blewbury. Her answer was, “I am at Blewbury because I know that I can make a difference. I know BMS needs a leader with a clear vision...(one) who can discipline, and who can hold people accountable for their actions!” An example cited involved a faculty discussion of excessive student tardies. Although the procedure required students to serve after school detention upon the accumulation of three tardy slips, teachers complained that students were not serving detention. When questioned about the consequences to students when they didn’t serve detention, teachers replied that there were no consequences.

My research and analysis confirms that this “tardy example” only typified the whole approach to consequences at Blewbury. Teachers and students were in the practice of determining their own behaviors, regardless of rules and procedures. Neither students nor teachers were being held accountable for their actions, and neither responded very positively toward Dr. Callaghan and the administration when that accountability was imposed.

Dr. Callaghan’s recounted her first impression of the students at Blewbury, “There were students everywhere. There was no control. No one was in charge.

Students were saying anything they wanted to say and to anyone they wanted to say it. They had total freedom. There was no structure. No system.”

Before the transition some of the teachers at Blewbury were also out of control. They believed that no one would fire them because other teachers wouldn’t work there. In fact the school couldn’t obtain substitutes when teachers were absent. One administrator described the situation, “I don’t think there was a teacher at Blewbury who at the beginning of the year thought they could lose their job. I think teachers thought this is a difficult school with difficult students. They can’t get anyone else. I am working on my license and I passed my drug test.”

Teacher reaction to poor student behavior was to send students to the office. Mr. Gunn described the office as always full of students waiting to see an administrator. After the first few days, Dr. Callaghan and Mr. Gunn implemented a three strategies procedure. Teachers were to document three strategies that they had attempted with the student before an office referral could be written. Even with this procedure in place, office referrals last year totaled 1,249. Mr. Gunn described the discipline situation in this way,

Teachers were upset that Dr. Callaghan and I would not permanently remove students from their classrooms. They thought they could choose whom they wanted to teach. When we told them they had to incorporate behavior strategies of their own they were extremely unhappy. The teachers would have been willing, in fact, happy, to teach only five students if that was the number that would be completely compliant.

During our first year we were fighting this battle every day. We were constantly seeing children in the office, and we couldn’t get into classrooms to support the teachers. It was a vicious cycle. Poor instruction and teacher attitudes feeding discipline issues.

Teachers who disliked our policies left at the end of the first year. Those who remained helped us restructure our procedure so it is working better. Instead of three strategies per teacher, we have adjusted to three strategies per team. This year I am having time to observe more in classes. I am giving feedback and the improved instruction seems to be helping discipline. Teachers whom I talk to now say they are interested in teaching in a way that they can reach everyone. Last year the prevalent attitude was that it's not me, it's the student. They can't learn and they can't behave so get them out of my room. The teachers who are here this year are asking what could I have done differently to help that student succeed.

Another administrator reported that it was not uncommon to hear teachers yelling at students, in the classrooms and in the halls. She believed that teachers provoked students into behaving the way they did. She described an incident in which a student got in trouble at lunch for talking back to a teacher. The student had already placed his tray at a seat and had gone to get a drink. A teacher sat down at the student's place. When the student returned and informed the teacher that he was in the student's seat, the teacher grinned sarcastically at the student and told him that when you move you lose. When the student commented back, the teacher took offense and sent the student to the office.

Another administrator said that the main problem at Blewbury was not the students but the teachers. He alleged, "There were so many teachers who didn't care about all the students. They wanted to teach 10 or 15 and forget about the other students in the classroom." He told of an incident in which a teacher asked a student to come and sit next to her and do an assignment or to "get the hell out of her class." When the student chose to leave, the teacher filled out a referral because the student left her room without permission.

Situations such as this were common occurrences at Blewbury - teachers offering ultimatums and options. When the students made choices other than the behaviors the teachers were after, students would be sent to the office. Dr. Callaghan shared, "Almost every day students in my office would remark that their teachers didn't like them and would 'kick them out' because of it." She continued,

If the teachers would show respect and concern first, the students would react positively. In schools with impoverished students, the most important aspect of eliciting positive student behavior and achievement is forming a relationship with the student. So many of our students have been betrayed by those who are supposed to care about them. When students would enter my office, I always investigated the circumstances. I tried really hard to be fair. I found out that many of our situations were instigated by the teachers. Our teachers would degrade the students and leave them in a position where in order to save face they had to strike back verbally. I tried hard not to punish a student when the incident was started by a teacher. Why should a student have to pay when the teacher didn't?"

Dr. Callaghan shared that on many occasions she would have to suspend students because their behavior was so serious it demanded it whether provoked or not. Records indicate that there were 453 out of school suspensions during 2002-2003. On those occasions when teachers were partially to blame, Dr. Callaghan would share with parents that the teacher had also been at fault. She would assure parents that inappropriate teacher behavior would be addressed; however, students had to learn that regardless of provocation, some behaviors would not be tolerated. She said, "I told them in front of the student and the teacher that I didn't support any mistreatment of children." She continued,

"I would say, for example, if Mr. X said something inappropriate to you then I apologize for him, if he admits it or not, because I will not have students being mistreated in my school. However, that doesn't mean that anything can go. Then I would ask the parent for help in getting the student to be successful in our school for the remainder of the year."

One other administrator summed it up this way,

Our philosophy is that we try to reach every child so they can succeed. We are not willing to let them stay out of class. If you give up on a child you know what the future will be for them. So we don't give up on one.

In addition to teacher behavior toward students, teachers displayed very unprofessional behavior in general. The administrative team shared that there were several teacher cliques at Blewbury. There were the veterans who had been at the school for years. Some of them had stayed because they really had an affinity for at-risk students, others because of the hands-off approach of the previous administration. Then there were the novice and lateral entry teachers that comprised the majority of the staff.

According to one administrator,

Often the veteran teachers would stand in their class doorways and laugh at the young teachers trying to maintain order among the students. They didn't offer support. They talked about them instead. They even joked about what went on in their rooms. They assumed that there would be teachers each year who would be unsuccessful and they just left them alone to fail. They talked horribly about them. They just stood by and watched them come and go.

Another said, "Confidentiality in the school was horrible. Teachers were accustomed to knowing everyone's business. They were blatant about it. They would even ask us for details."

Dr. Callaghan described one unprofessional action after another. In one instance a teacher was disciplined for not turning in money that was collected – a violation of state law. Another situation occurred when the director of the after school program falsified records in order to make the program look successful. In another the

custodian turned in a time sheet with hours duplicated. During summer school a teacher showed up drunk.

Then there were the affairs among the faculty. It was common knowledge among teachers and students that one teacher had a baby by another teacher. And the rumor mill was rampant that students had more than once walked in on faculty in compromising situations. These news items were fodder for conversation among faculty and between faculty and students.

At the end of the year, out of 34 core teachers, 11 left, about a third. Dr. Callaghan admitted,

At my elementary school what bothered me most was having to hold conferences with some nice people who were very bad teachers. It broke my heart to hurt their feelings.

But these teachers at Blewbury were different. I got to the point that I was cold in their conferences. They were so bad. These people were not just bad teachers, they were mean and ugly people. They made inappropriate comments to students. They talked to students in a hateful manner. In some instances they had behaved in an inappropriate manner. They wouldn't change. They wouldn't improve. I could explain it face-to-face. I could send a steady stream of e-mails documenting what they were doing wrong and it didn't matter.

I did manage to encourage some of the worst to leave during the year. But in the spring when I had to conduct conferences with the others, I felt nothing for these adults. I just gave them their options. Even with my mountain of evidence, some of them were clueless. They couldn't believe that I didn't want them back at Blewbury for another year. They thought the teacher shortage was so bad they were insulated.

At the end of the year I made up my mind that if the other administrators and I had to teach classes ourselves, we would not intentionally bring in any teachers we had doubts about.

## **Teacher Voices**

In every teacher interview, teacher observation, or document analysis, if student behavior was mentioned, teachers felt that discipline was a formidable problem. Most teachers generally described the students at Blewbury as difficult. Some of the teachers demonstrated attitudes and body language that implied a negative feeling toward the students. Several teachers connected student behavior to the changing population in the attendance zone. One teacher shared,

In 1979 when I came here, Blewbury was a great middle class school. It had a larger Black population than the other city school, but it was a middle class Black population. That was when we had two major employers in the neighborhood – American Electric and the hospital. Both guaranteed a strong middle class community. Both of these entities left. Now our population has moved west, and a diverse group has moved in. The student body has changed. Our middle class white students have gone.

Teachers blamed student behavior on the fact that a majority of the students live in one-parent homes. One teacher said, “They struggle to be well-behaved. They are not coming from an orderly home environment and they are mostly raising themselves. We have angry students and they are displaying that anger at school by being aggressive.”

Another observed, “I participated in writing a grant with the police department. They found that 70% of the crime in this county occurs in this attendance zone. These kids see this crime. They either live with it or they are the victims of it.” She continued, “Their emotions are so close to the surface. They act on them without thinking.” While all of the teachers verbalized sympathy for the students, they also expressed frustration with dealing with them.

Many teachers expressed frustration because they felt the new administration didn't do enough to support the teachers. While every teacher interviewed admitted that the school was safer and more orderly since Dr. Callaghan arrived, the majority commented that not enough was done to support them individually.

Under the previous principal, during class changes, cafeteria time, before and after school and on the bus bedlam reigned. However, if a teacher called the office for assistance or if a student were sent to the office, that student was removed from the teacher's class. To the teachers, that was the bottom line with discipline. Teachers didn't like the fact that with Dr. Callaghan they were expected to find a way to reach and teach all students.

One teacher commented, "Before Dr. Callaghan the kids were running the school. The halls were noisy. Blewbury was dysfunctional. I was really afraid during the last spring before she came that we were going to have a riot. I was scared. I really hoped for changes." However she continued, "Dr. Callaghan thought she could save each student. She and the other administrators chose to listen to the kids and not to the teachers who had kids in their faces. I decided the best thing for me to do was leave. And I did."

"Their attitude toward discipline was very different than the previous administration" another teacher shared. "With the new administration there was more paperwork - more documentation on why we wanted the students out. She wanted the problem dealt with at the root source. The former principal would come to your room and get the students right away. He would put them out of school if you wanted them gone."

A veteran teacher of many years said, "The students here have always been difficult to deal with. We had to use tough love."

Another observed, "The former principal gave in to teachers to keep the peace. He didn't enforce rules with adults or students. He would take students out of class in order to pacify staff. He was a nice person. As nice a person as you could find. He did appreciate those who did their jobs but he did nothing to those that did not."

One of the support staff commented, "Mr. Gunn and Dr. Callaghan believed in too much counseling. That was their elementary mentality. They should have been much tougher with the kids. The same kids showed up in the office over and over. They should just have punished the students and been done with it."

One of the young lateral entry teachers observed,

Dr. Callaghan brought in a different discipline philosophy than the one we had before. She had a nurturing chances philosophy. Teachers were used to scare tactics. She wanted to see classroom management. The teachers were actually expected to do something. The office had handled all of it before. The new administration actually wanted to keep students in school so they could be taught.

Another of the younger teachers pondered the discipline issue before giving a very insightful response:

I think the disgruntled veteran teachers were comparing Blewbury to the way it used to be. It used to be a great school. They were working at the same levels as other middle schools in the city. They were the unhappiest. They wanted the school that used to be here, not the school that is here now. The students were different. The needs were different. The teachers didn't see a need to change to meet the needs of the students. They wanted the administration to make it the way it used to be and they were angry that it wasn't.

Some of the teachers also expressed concern over the attitudes and behaviors of other teachers. One recalled her experiences last year with a teammate who would not do his job. It was not uncommon for him to stay out of school without securing a substitute. Nor was it uncommon for him to come to school and simply sit in his chair and let the students do whatever they chose. Sometimes he would turn on the television and let students watch, or they would play trash can ball since he hadn't planned any lessons.

Another teacher described the faculty as being as "poorly behaved as the students." Some faculty didn't arrive at the school until after 8:00 when the students did and they beat the students out at dismissal bell. Another said she saw teachers "standing in front of classrooms, yelling, screaming and in a power struggle with the students." She continued, "I heard one teacher one day say to a student, 'Get your big black ass in this room right now.' I couldn't believe I had witnessed that. And the amazing thing was the teacher knew I was listening and she was not in the least concerned that someone had witnessed her behavior."

Another teacher commented, "Some of the teams were non-functional. There was one teacher who shouldn't have been there. He walked out on his students several times. He thought he was God's gift to kids. He was not cut out to teach, he is in the business world now."

"Teachers were into power struggles," observed another teacher. "They would ask the students to do something and give them ten seconds to get it done. When they didn't finish, the teachers would go off on them. They wanted instant obedience, in fact, submission."

One faculty member accused Dr. Callaghan of believing the students instead of the teachers. She recounted a story in which she felt the students ganged up on another teacher, accusing her of behaviors that weren't true. The teacher felt that the administration enabled students in negative behavior. She explained, "I was brought up by my mom that adults always sided with the teacher. I was accustomed to giving the teacher the benefit of the doubt until there was proof. At Blewbury, the students' words were as good as the teachers'. In fact, sometimes the students were believed even more."

Concern over student and teacher behavior dominated Blewbury Middle School during the first year of transition. In fact the attention paid to behavior almost paralyzed the administration. They had little time to devote to anything else. The teachers whose behaviors were the most egregious left the school at the end of the year. When asked if student behavior had improved during the first three months of the second year, the administrative staff and the majority of the teachers reported that discipline was considerably better. One administrator observed, "The referrals we are getting this year are mostly because of incidences occurring in the community that spill over in here or issues that erupt in the halls during transitions. Fewer teachers are having problems in their classes. That is a real improvement." He credited knowledge as the reason for the improvement – students now know what is expected of them, and teachers now know what is expected of them.

### **Parent Voices**

It was obvious from interviews that parents were unaware of some of the internal struggles occurring at Blewbury during the timeframe covered by this study.

No one acknowledged any tension between administration and faculty or among faculty members. One African-American parent did express dissatisfaction with the “too ethnic” way one faculty member spoke to students. She said she would have preferred Standard English and conventional expressions used with her son. She didn’t approve of the “ghetto and street-like” manner in which children were addressed. She also commented on the loud, negative tones that some teachers used with students.

Several of the parents did comment that they felt teachers didn’t take the time to investigate discipline issues thoroughly and that often teachers acted in haste. Several shared that they felt student behavior would be better if teachers knew how to differentiate instruction for students. Many felt that students misbehaved because they were embarrassed by not understanding assignments and teachers didn’t have or take time to work individually with them.

All were complimentary of the administration’s handling of disciplinary issues. They reported that Dr. Callaghan and Mr. Gunn were very respectful of parents and students and went to great lengths to explain how discipline procedures were imposed. They commented that even when Dr. Callaghan had to enforce consequences she did it in a manner respectful of parents and students.

### **Lack of Respect/Trust**

During the first year of new administration at Blewbury there was a serious lack of trust between administrators and teachers, between teacher and teacher, between teachers and students, and between the parents and the school. This lack of trust was manifest in how each perceived that the others performed their jobs.

The administration perceived that most of the teachers were inadequate. The teachers perceived that the administration was good at leading an elementary school but that they were “clueless” when it came to running a middle school. Veteran teachers perceived that young and lateral entry teachers were unskilled and unproven. Teachers felt that parents didn’t care about their children. Parents felt that the teachers “picked on” the students and treated them unfairly. Students felt that the teachers didn’t really care if they learned or not and knew that many of the teachers would leave after one year. To a degree the students and parents mistrusted the school system and felt that Blewbury didn’t receive its fair share of the resources.

### **Administration Voices**

“The Blewbury culture could be described in one word – distrust,” commented one administrator. She continued, “From the teacher perspective, it is us versus them.” She clarified that the “us versus them” characterized how the teachers felt about the students as well as how the teachers viewed administration.

One administrator felt that some of the teachers at Blewbury loved being there while others were there because they couldn’t get hired anywhere else. She believed that the students were starved for attention and wanted to trust the teachers, but that the teachers didn’t understand the students and their special needs and weren’t interested in learning about them. She described the typical classroom as a “teacher’s struggle to keep the students still and quiet in their seats, with very little attention paid to what the students were actually learning.” She said it was not uncommon to walk in and find the teachers yelling and screaming at students. She said when she interviewed students about their poor behavior they would comment that the teachers

had negative attitudes with them so they got one back. The students characterized the teachers to her as “cold, uncaring, and intent on getting through the year so they could go somewhere else away from them”

Another administrator spoke about the distrust that teachers had for one another and for the students. She described situations in which teachers distrusted each other because one perceived the other as getting more attention. She said the school was filled with cynicism and fault finding. She remembered hearing teachers characterize the students as bad and incapable of learning. She said much of the animosity between Dr. Callaghan and the teachers was instigated when teachers made negative comments concerning students. “Dr. Callaghan and Mr. Gunn didn’t want the students criticized and bad-mouthed,” explained the administrator. “If they could have willed better relations between teachers and students it would have happened because they wanted it so badly.”

Mr. Gunn said that during the first year at Blewbury the attitude was “it’s not me it’s the student...they can’t learn and they can’t behave.” He said he had tried to get teachers to contact parents and get them involved in discipline and learning issues. He felt that every parent wants what is best for his/her child and that if you go from that perspective, a trust can be formed.

Another administrator reflected, “When a student was sent to me, the first thing I asked the teacher was if they had contacted the parents. Most of the time the teacher answered that the parents didn’t care.” He felt that the teachers characterized the parents as bad because they thought the students were bad. They didn’t understand that many of the parents lacked parenting skills either because they were

too young, or they hadn't been parented well, or they worked several jobs to support their children. He explained, "It was like they thought these parents intentionally and maliciously allowed their children to misbehave and didn't care." The administrator said he wouldn't get involved with the student until the teacher initiated that parent contact.

Mr. Gunn said he understood why parents were defensive when the school called and criticized a student's behavior. He said the parents viewed those calls as the school's questioning the parent's parenting skills. To counter that reaction he had encouraged teachers to call parents early in the year and establish relationships and trust before students had a chance to misbehave. He felt these calls could provide parents with some positive news from the school before the negative calls came later. While he implemented these strategies himself from the office, he was not aware of teachers who made such efforts to form positive relationships with Blewbury families.

Mr. Gunn felt that the students also had to be encouraged to trust their own abilities. He said the students had been told over the years, even before they came to Blewbury, that they were incapable of learning or behaving. He opined that while it would take a long time before they believed in themselves, that building of trust had to start somewhere, and it would start at Blewbury.

Dr. Callaghan felt that teacher distrust of her began when they thought she was administratively assigned to Blewbury. While she was assigned, she actually had expressed an interest in the school. She observed that many of the faculty had "strong emotional bonds with the former principal." Many of the faculty also felt that the

former assistant principal should have been given the job if the principalship had to change. Dr. Callaghan described several different networks throughout the building, each with its own agenda. One network included the school secretary who had been very close friends with the former principal.

Dr. Callaghan shared that the faculty feelings against her only solidified throughout the first year when her reaction to inappropriate student behavior was so different from the former principal. She described her feelings when she administered the surveys she usually gives twice a year. Last year when she gave them to the staff at Blewbury, the vast majority marked that they were unhappy with her performance. This was the first time a faculty had not supported her leadership. When asked why she thought the faculty was so negative towards her, she commented, “Part of the relationship issue between me and my staff was their resistance to change. I decided not to work too hard to improve the relationship because I knew they were going somewhere else if they felt that what the students were getting here was a fair shake. These students deserve more than that.”

By the end of the first three months of school Dr. Callaghan had identified nineteen teachers that either didn’t have appropriate methodology and knowledge for teaching or disciplining children. Only one of those nineteen teachers returned to Blewbury for the next academic year. When asked why that one came back, Dr. Callaghan replied, “He turned it around and got it together. He was willing to make the effort.” She continued,

Some of the teachers who would have come back this year if I had not encouraged them to leave didn’t need to be here anymore. They needed to be somewhere else. These teachers formed a network throughout the building.

They had been here for years and were not happy with my changes and accountability. I created change. They didn't like it. I was the one to blame for their unhappiness. I didn't mind taking it last year as long as I knew that I didn't have to do it but one year. There was almost hatred expressed toward me. I know that seems like a strong word but it was hatred. Even though I knew the positions would be difficult to fill, I knew it would be better to have new teachers with no experience rather than teachers who would be constantly undermining whatever I tried to do. That was a chance I was willing to take. I preferred the unknown to the known. I tried hard to encourage anyone I saw with potential to stay. I also tried hard to help anyone with potential to see some of that potential used. I told the slackers over and over that if I don't see improvement, you may not be here next year.

In describing Blewbury Dr. Callaghan shared,

We found that the school was not a bad school but a place with poor teachers and poor children. The school really didn't have kid issues. The students really want to learn. But before we can teach them we have to earn their trust. Once that trust is there, they will do anything for you. They are the most compassionate children I have ever seen. I have seen examples of that compassion over the past year. This may not sound like a positive, but if someone made fun of the students in our Multiple Categorical Handicapped Class, the toughest students in our school would hurt the source. They would also protect some of their teachers who have taken the trouble to form relationships with them. Relationships surround the issue of trust. Our students are used to seeing people come and go around them. They see dads and mom's boyfriends come and go. They look at us here in school as if to say, how long are you going to be here for me? They really have issues with trust. If teachers don't establish the trust, they will not get anywhere with our students who are very suspicious of anyone in authority.

Dr. Callaghan also spent a great deal of time building trust with parents. She explained that she knew parents had heard that she had a "no non-sense" attitude. She said she knew urban legend characterized her elementary school as "tougher than a boot camp." However, she said it was important to her that parents understood that even though she had to discipline their children, she still cared about their children. She wanted the parents to trust that she would be fair to the students. She said, "In our community word of mouth is most powerful. Many of our parents don't read the

newspaper, but they see each other out and about, and they spread the news. I wanted them to trust that I would take good care of their children.”

Another administrator commented, “When parents come into our school yelling, we don’t scream or yell or raise our voices. We tell them we will be happy to talk with them but we don’t talk with yelling, cursing.” He recounted one instance of a parent that had been very vocal and aggressive. He described how Dr. Callaghan had diffused the situation and had followed up with the parent several times to strengthen that relationship. He described a subsequent serious situation that involved some very inappropriate teacher behavior toward the child of that parent. When the parent came to the school about the incident, he recalled the parent’s comments to Dr. Callaghan, “I am not going to ask you how you are going to handle the situation with the teacher. I trust you now and know you will take care of my child.” The administrator said, “That is only one parent of 795, but it is comforting to know that some parents have formed a trust with us and know we care about this school and the students who attend it.”

### **Teacher Voices**

“Until Dr. Callaghan arrived the morale at Blewbury was very low among most of the teachers, but we did feel supported because we knew our principal was there for us,” commented one of the veteran teachers whose sentiments were expressed by the majority of the teachers. The low morale was a result of poor student performance, but there was a strong relationship between teachers and administration. Teachers at Blewbury after the transition maintained that Dr. Callaghan blamed them

for the ills of the school. They said that because of her lack of trust in them, they developed no trust in her.

One teacher explained, “We knew we needed some changes. In fact, when we were honest with ourselves, we knew that things at our school had not been right. The old staff cared and wanted to see things better. But Dr. Callaghan gave us the impression she was sent here to take names and clean up the mess. That was hard to accept.” Because of the perception that the new principal was sent to the school to correct them, many teachers took on a defensive attitude and relationships suffered.

A few of the teachers commented that they had looked forward to the change. Based on her reputation they thought she would be the savior of the school. When she arrived they were disappointed in her reaction toward them. They said they were so let down they had to leave at the end of the year.

One teacher commented that Dr. Callaghan was not “cut out to be a middle school principal, that she should have stayed at the elementary school.” She added that Dr. Callaghan “did not give me the feeling that she supported me. She was not personable and not approachable. I didn’t trust that I could go to her. I didn’t feel that I knew her well enough even though she was constantly in my classes.” She continued,

She and the other administrators were always coming in and out of our classes like they didn’t trust that we would be here doing our jobs. At first the students responded positively to the visibility of administration. However after a while they became a distraction and finally they might as well have not come. It was no big deal anymore. It was obvious to us (teachers) that administration didn’t trust us to do our jobs. They were monitoring us just as much if not more than they were our students.

Another teacher shared,

I mistrusted Dr. Callaghan last year. I didn't in the beginning. I did approach her. But she was so much stricter in her faculty reviews. From what I heard from the others and from my own experience, it was shock. We thought we should be getting rewards for working here and she was very hard on us. I was used to working the same as I did with the other administrators. We were not prepared for negative summatives. We couldn't trust her. She was blaming us for the situation at the school. She saw us as the problems, not the students.

One teacher described it this way, "Every observation by Dr. Callaghan had issues surrounding it. I never felt I got a fair observation. In my mind I felt I didn't get a fair shake. I knew I was doing some things that worked, but the administration didn't recognize it. They didn't trust me professionally and I certainly didn't trust them to evaluate me fairly." She did however acknowledge a positive impact of Dr. Callaghan, "When the old administration was here, I didn't feel safe in the school. I often felt at risk. Since Dr. Callaghan has been here I do feel safe. I trust that she is running the school in a manner that ensures my physical safety. I do have to credit her with that."

Several teachers defended Dr. Callaghan and her close monitoring of classrooms. One in particular reflected, "At first she had to assess my ability and talent. Once she saw that I was capable, she gave me more latitude. In fact, she gave me some power and it was scary. But I learned and I became a leader on our hall."

Not only was there distrust between some teachers and administration, there was substantial misgiving among the teachers themselves. Many of the veteran teachers were wary of the new lateral entry teachers. Since many of the novices lacked work and/or teaching experience and education courses, the veterans doubted the new teachers' abilities to perform adequately at the school.

Teachers complained constantly to one another about each other and negativism pervaded the hallways. Some teachers reported that they noticed other faculty becoming “so stressed out they became almost worthless.” One teacher commented, “Students would walk into some teachers’ classrooms to find that the teacher had nothing to say to them and had nothing prepared for them. The students picked up on the fact that the teacher didn’t care about them. There was no trust then among teachers or between teachers and students.”

Some teachers expressed different opinions. Two novice teachers reported that although the school was definitely a challenging place to work, when they did ask for help from other teachers and administrators they got it. One commented, “I had a good relationship with administration. I can’t say that other teachers felt the same way, but maybe they didn’t try. I made a concerted effort to solicit the support of others. When I asked for help it was there. I could trust my colleagues to be there for me.”

Another commented,

“I went every day at the end of the day last year to seek feedback from my assistant principal. I would tell him what had happened during the day and ask how I could have done it better. He was always willing to work with me. I had this intimate, trusting relationship with him. I observed that others didn’t seek help.”

He shared that he had spent his summer thinking about his first year as a teacher. He said he realized that at Blewbury, “Success has to do with how the person reacts with the culture. If you stay in your room sulking or spend your time complaining with the negatives, you will not necessarily get help.”

When asked if he thought the administration didn't respect the opinions of the teachers, this very reflective teacher responded,

In our school, administration was after one goal and the teachers were most often concerned with their own comfort level. Most teachers favored three strikes and you're out. Administration kept reminding us that these are adolescents and we should try to teach better so they won't misbehave as often. As a teacher your goal is to teach so you want the ones preventing you from doing it out of your room. An administrator wants them in school so they can learn. We needed a balance. We needed to understand and respect each other's opinions better.

### **Parent Voices**

Not only did the situation at Blewbury contribute to distrust among the faculty and staff, parents reported that students at Blewbury vocalized their mistrust of the system. Blewbury at one time was one of two middle schools in a city system before the county commissioners merged the county and city systems. The other middle school has thrived because of a parent base with a higher socio-economic and education level. While Blewbury has lapsed into low performance, the other school has constantly maintained a distinctive academic record. Students at Blewbury constantly referred to the kids at the other school as "rich and white" and they perceived that the other school got all the materials and equipment that Blewbury lacked.

Students at Blewbury sensed that they were not valued as much as the students at the other school. In some instances parents agreed that this feeling was also pervasive among adults in the community as well. The items the students referenced as lacking at Blewbury were typically related to athletics because that is where contact between the schools occurred. At games the Blewbury youngsters

observed the students from the sister school with their monogrammed cheerleader bags, matching hair ribbons, and face-painted school emblems on their cheeks. They concluded that the other school had provided those niceties for the students. In actuality, the parent booster organization at the sister school was much more active and affluent than the one at Blewbury, but the students didn't understand the difference. They felt that their school did not value or respect them as much as the other school valued their counterparts. Parents commented about the difference in student achievement at Blewbury and felt that their students didn't have the same high quality teachers.

Parents also commented that they couldn't always trust the teachers to follow-through on procedures. One explained that her son required medical considerations at school. She reported that often modifications were ignored and that the child complained about a lack of caring for his situation.

Another reported failure of teachers to adhere to a communication plan that they had developed in an effort to address performance issues. After agreeing to weekly progress reports, teachers failed to send them home even after parents called with reminders. Several parents shared instances in which they were told their children were doing well only to receive a poor report card. Many expressed a general distrust for some of the teachers in terms of their carrying out their professional duties.

All of the parents commented on the trust they placed in Dr. Callaghan to "look after their children." The parents remarked that they could tell from the principal's behavior that she genuinely cared for the students at Blewbury. They

reported that her actions toward the students matched her words and that they were happy with her as their principal. One shared that he had watched her interact with the students and that it was obvious how much she “loved the students and really wanted them to do well.”

One parent explained that Dr. Callaghan’s reputation had preceded her arrival at Blewbury. After watching her in action for a while, he said he characterized her as the “new sheriff in town” that parents could trust. He said her would recommend Blewbury to other parents if for no other reason than the strong character of the principal.

### **Lack of Shared Values/Vision**

Throughout the interviews it became obvious that the faculty and staff at Blewbury were not united around a common vision, at least not a symbolic vision that was motivating the faculty to work hard for a common purpose. Nevertheless it was apparent that even without a shared articulated vision, returning teachers had conjured up their own images of what a successful Blewbury should be. While their depictions of a successful school were similar, there was no figurative bond fusing the faculty together. There was no shared mantra, no slogan generating energy.

### **Administration Voices**

When asked about her vision for the school Dr. Callaghan was quite succinct,

I will know when the school is where I want it when I can walk up and down the hall and be willing to put my own child if I had one or my nieces and nephews in any classroom and feel good about it. When I walked up and down the halls of the school my first year, there were fewer than half of the classes where I would have allowed them to be members. That is unacceptable. If I couldn’t put my child or loved ones there, no one else should have to either.

When asked if the teachers understood her vision, she concluded that many of the teachers would associate state performance goals with her goals for the school. She made no apologies for her support of the state's school accountability plan – The ABC's of Public Education or the federal No Child Left Behind mandate. She argued that both programs that measured school and student performance were valuable tools in assessing student as well as school performance. She felt that it didn't matter if anyone agreed with performance programs or not. They are the standard by which a school is measured publicly. She commented, "That is the image. For whatever reason, it is important. It measures in the bottom line how successful we are. It doesn't matter if we like it or not. It is the way it is, and fighting it is fighting windmills."

Mr. Gunn was also not at a loss when asked to articulate his vision for the school. His aspirations for Blewbury denote a place where "students want to be; a place where they know they are going to be heard; a place where students feel safe and if they need something they can get it; a place where the staff is here for the benefit of the students and we all are going in the same direction."

Responses about school vision from the other administrators were mixed. When asked if Dr. Callaghan had shared her vision with them, one commented it had never been stated explicitly, but she implicitly understood it.

### **Teacher Voices**

Very different teacher views emerged concerning a school vision. Teachers who left at the end of last year generally reported that they were unsure of Dr.

Callaghan's vision for Blewbury. Most commented that she had been so overwhelmed in the management of the school, particularly with student discipline, that she had been left with little time to devote to crafting a vision.

One veteran teacher who left the school last spring expressed very strong sentiments concerning a vision for Blewbury. She described her disappointment upon not hearing an articulated vision like the one she had understood for the elementary school Dr. Callaghan administered. She described in detail programs that Dr. Callaghan had implemented at the elementary school and that she had expected for Blewbury. The teacher had anticipated new reading and math programs, extra people for remediation, computer instruction, all hallmarks of Dr. Callaghan's reform efforts in the past. She was disillusioned when none of these were put in place for Blewbury. She commented,

I never heard a vision articulated and it really surprised me. At staff meetings I thought we would be dealing with a vision. I thought there would be training on how to raise scores. I thought there would be training on the vision. But it wasn't there. I don't know if there was so much to do at Blewbury that she was overwhelmed. The foundation was not as great. There were so many lateral entry hires. The people at Blewbury didn't want to change. I just couldn't believe she was the same principal that had turned that elementary school around.

Another who left explained, "I was looking forward to changes. I was anticipating good changes. Just hearing their (Dr. Callaghan and Mr. Gunn) backgrounds I was expecting more structure." The teacher shared that a few new procedures were imposed that forced changes in teacher and student behavior; however, no big picture was ever depicted that might have shaped new attitudes.

Teachers who returned for a second year were generally able to describe the administration's goals for the school. Most acknowledged however that they had never heard administration express a vision or mission statement. When asked if they felt united around a common purpose, the returning teachers responded affirmatively, most often in terms of student achievement.

When queried about Dr. Callaghan's vision for Blewbury, one returning veteran teacher commented, "I know what her vision is. What I think she wants is what I want. I want clean, orderly, productive, behaving kids making progress."

When asked if Dr. Callaghan had explained the vision to her, she stated, "Dr. Callaghan leads by example and doesn't need to tell me. I just need to follow her."

Another younger teacher remarked, "Last year I was so overwhelmed with the changes that I never picked up on what Dr. Callaghan's vision for us was. I found it hard to trust her. I think she should work harder on gaining trust. But since the beginning of school this year I have a better idea." These comments were made after the teacher participated in a ropes course that Dr. Callaghan organized over the summer to encourage trust and team building. The teacher continued, "I didn't want to go. I thought it would be a waste of time. But I found myself in Dr. Callaghan's group, and I was forced to trust her. It has changed me. I finally think we can accomplish something in this school and I want to be a part of it."

Another of the younger returning teachers was more skeptical when asked about Dr. Callaghan's vision for the school. He explained,

Teachers at this school have become realists. They are not moved by grandiose visions. Most visions are political goals anyway. What politician could run on a platform of helping all but some. Educators see the world as it

is. We try to help everyone, but every now and then we get one that despite all efforts we can't help. When we do we concentrate on those we can, and unfortunately, we leave one or two behind some time. In a sense administrators have to be political in their vision and goals. Which ones would they say it is o.k. to leave behind?

He opined that Dr. Callaghan sets clear goals for the staff, and he is perplexed that some teachers would remark that her vision was not articulated.

One young teacher leader who returned for a second year explained that not only did Dr. Callaghan have a clear vision for the school, but that the vision was so contagious that she had caught it. She stated that her personal vision was to be like the teacher in the movie *Lean on Me* (John G. Avildsen, director, 1989). She explained in a very emotional way that the kids at Blewbury were so special that they made you want to work that hard. She said that her vision would take a huge commitment, but if realized, would build a culture so strong that people could come and go but the stability would remain.

### **Parent Voices**

When asked if they were aware of a school vision or mission statement that faculty and staff had developed for Blewbury, parents were unsure. Several commented that they knew the new principal wanted the students to achieve better in school. They also mentioned students performing at higher levels on end-of-grade tests. None however mentioned any statement or motto that served as a cohesive around basic values or core beliefs.

### **Section 3. Analytical Frameworks**

#### **Effective Middle School Correlates**

Instructional Leadership by the Principal. Data suggested that because of the demands of staff management and student discipline, Dr. Callaghan was unable to provide adequate instructional leadership during the first year of transition. By her own admission Dr. Callaghan was consumed by the managerial tasks required to administer Blewbury. She spent the better part of each day dealing with student and teacher behavior, which left little time to offer constructive criticism on instructional delivery. While she completed the necessary observations, she admitted she didn't have the time to coach and mentor teachers in the way she would have liked. When asked if she felt teachers viewed her as an instructional leader she answered, "The majority of the staff was unhappy with my performance. (Instead of spending my time leading) I spent my time having parent conferences and ...dealing with student and teacher issues...In the first month I wrote thirty personnel memos." She added, "I couldn't mentor twenty new teachers. They were encouraged to take advantage of their mentors and teammates. I told them I couldn't possibly help each one successfully."

Dr. Callaghan also remarked that she felt as if she had ignored the veteran teachers in her school who were successfully fulfilling their responsibilities. She was very critical of herself for allowing problematic issues to consume her attention to the exclusion of providing leadership to teachers who were doing their jobs.

Teachers did acknowledge instructional support, if not leadership, from the assistant principals. Several teachers were surprised that Mr. Gunn assumed the responsibility for teaching three math classes second semester. When asked why he felt he had to teach, he answered, “I am going to do what it takes to get the job done. I knew what the students needed and I couldn’t put a sub in the class.” Some of the novice teachers also commended other administrators for their constructive criticism of instructional delivery. Teachers always felt they could ask the assistant principals or administrative interns for feedback.

Safe and Orderly Climate. Without exception, every respondent agreed that Blewbury was a safer and more orderly school than it was before the transition. There was more orderliness between classes. Students were responsible for getting to class on time and there were consequences if they didn’t. Faculty members acknowledged that Dr. Callaghan followed through on procedures. She was credited for Saturday School and After-School Detention, both of which were part of a discipline plan. Students were required to have hall passes, and faculty members were required to be in the hall during class changes.

One teacher elaborated about her experiences prior to and after transition. She shared, “Before Dr. Callaghan came I had an outside classroom...I was unhappy and often afraid. On more than one occasion there were fights outside my class and I called the office for help. No one came...before Dr. Callaghan. There were fewer fights after she arrived and things were better. But I knew she would have come if I needed her.”

Well Established Goals for Instructional Focus. Although few teachers acknowledged adequate instructional leadership by the principal, all agreed that there were established goals for instructional focus. Before the academic year began Mr. Gunn provided each teacher with copies of the North Carolina Standard Course of Study and pacing guides. Even the novice faculty understood that they were to teach the North Carolina curriculum although many teachers did not comply.

High Expectations. Dr. Callaghan readily conceded that she “has very high expectations and is competitive.” She admitted that she was puzzled by teachers who were happy with low performance and satisfied with complacency. Many teachers commented that they had never been held to such high teaching standards. Faculty reported receiving lower summative reviews than in the past. One administrator commented about Dr. Callaghan’s expectations, “She is not going to ask anybody to do what she wouldn’t do. She regularly puts in eighteen hours a day at this school. All she asks of others is that they do their jobs.”

Continuous Assessment of Student Progress. Several respondents reported that many of the teachers at Blewbury didn’t ask students to demonstrate any understanding of objectives they had taught. Dr. Callaghan described one teacher’s class she was visiting in this way, “The teacher never really asked the students to do anything related to the lesson. The students had their heads down. They weren’t doing anything. He couldn’t begin to tell if the students had learned what he had just taught. You have to do some assessment to know. All he did was talk at them and ask nothing of them.”

Teachers at Blewbury were also provided with extensive amounts of student performance data. When interviewed only a few teachers could describe how they used student data to inform their instruction. Data confirmed that there was not continuous assessment of student progress at Blewbury by the teachers.

Well Designed, School-Wide Staff Development. There was no school-wide staff development implemented at Blewbury Middle School during the first year of the transition. Several teachers commented that they had expected staff training as part of the reform effort, and they were surprised when it never materialized. Teachers acknowledged that administration did obtain the services of a math specialist to work with lateral entry teachers. The specialist modeled lessons for the teachers and provided resources for the teachers to utilize in their classrooms. One teacher commented, “She went into their classrooms and worked directly with them and their students. The teachers took her materials but refused to do the activities she asked them to do. The students actually begged her to stay in front of one teacher, commenting that he never taught them anything.”

In order to address the significant need for school-wide staff development and monitoring, Dr. Callaghan petitioned Central Support for extra resources. Central Office responded by funding four curriculum facilitators and one extra assistant principal dedicated to curriculum. The curriculum facilitators began providing on site staff development and coaching in each core discipline at the beginning of the current school year.

Student Centered Climate. In all interviews with administrative staff and teachers it was apparent that school leadership put the welfare of the students at Blewbury above

all else. Several of the teacher respondents who returned for the second year even became very emotional when talking about the needy students at Blewbury. They were pleased with Dr. Callaghan's efforts to ensure that the students were respected by the teachers and given appropriate academic opportunities. One administrator reflected that in order to be successful at Blewbury you have to "choose to be there." He said the teachers at Blewbury who make a difference are the teachers who have the "God-given talent to work with the population. He said our good teachers work well with the students because they let them know they love them."

However to some of the teachers, that loyalty to students was the impetus of their unhappiness at the school. Many of the teachers felt that administration supported the students over the teachers. One teacher commented,

It was commonplace for students to gang up on a teacher and administration would believe the students rather than the teacher. I think in one situation they had actually begun action against a teacher and found out what the students said wasn't true. They wanted to be friendly with the students. They felt all fault lay with the teachers.

Collegial and Empowering Climate. Data suggested that the climate was anything but collegial and empowering. Administration and teachers commented about competition, taunting, high stress levels, anger, and even hatred among the adults in the building. One teacher characterized the atmosphere as so stressful the "animosity was even directed toward the students. You could cut the atmosphere in the classes with a knife."

In order to address the lack of camaraderie and cohesion at Blewbury, Dr. Callaghan petitioned Central Support to fund a ropes course immediately preceding the current academic year. Every staff person interviewed commented

about the effectiveness of the program. All reported improved relationships, trust, and understanding among faculty and between faculty and administration. One teacher commented, “We are getting there, we are making progress. The team building did help. I hope that connections were made. It was a good day. Time will tell.” One administrator commented, “We have to convince the teachers that they have to maintain this level of energy and commitment throughout the year. We know that February and March are coming. It takes so much emotional energy to work here.”

Enriching Curricular Program. The curricular program offered at Blewbury could best be described as basic. Since Dr. Callaghan’s arrival administration has encouraged teachers to incorporate hands-on, engaging activities for students. The primary instructional delivery mode favored by teachers was lecture, with limited student participation. Observed instruction was slow-paced and for the most part boring and unchallenging. It was not uncommon to see students with their heads on their desks. Teachers often displayed notes on an overhead, and class consisted of students copying in their notebooks. Technology was rarely incorporated into instruction, and the thinking level was rarely above the literal, recall level.

There were few exceptions to this pattern. However one teacher in particular incorporated groups into her instructional delivery, and students seemed to flourish in her classroom. When asked about her teaching style, she replied,

I am chaotically organized. Kids never know what is coming but they always know what to expect. I am very playful with the students, but I expect them to work hard. I have three or four different things going at one time. You have to let the students purposefully socially construct. You also have to give them the opportunity to talk. They talk themselves to higher levels. You have to let them share opinions. They get deep with each other. They are like Great Dane

puppy dogs. They are all over everywhere while they are growing into themselves.

Opportunities for Student Responsibility. At Blewbury I observed very few opportunities for student responsibility. Outside of the athletics program, few programs were available for student participation. The primary reason given for the lack of offerings was student behavior. Under the previous administration teachers at Blewbury refused to take the students on field trips.

Assembly programs and pep rallies were reinstated after the transition. Dr. Callaghan commented, “We had our first school assembly that had been here in eight years. To have it we had to walk the students to the high school. It was a September 11 presentation and was very patriotic. I was nervous at first. But they filed in and were well behaved.” Dr. Callaghan and the administration plan to incorporate school clubs during this academic year. They are also encouraging the school chorus to enter musical competitions in Georgia for next spring.

Differentiated Academic Offerings. Except for programmed services for English as a Second Language (ESL) students and students with disabilities, there were very few opportunities for differentiated instruction. Except in the classroom described above under “Enriching,” I did not observe any teacher who was modifying instruction to accommodate any differences in student ability, learning style, or interests.

Clearly Articulated Mission and Vision. As stated previously in Section 2, there were mixed opinions among faculty and administration about Dr. Callaghan’s articulation of her vision for Blewbury. Since all members of the faculty could not allude to what

the vision was, I must conclude that it was not clearly articulated in a manner in which all could understand it.

Effective Student Guidance. The Guidance Department at Blewbury consisted of two individuals who conducted classroom guidance sessions as well as individual counseling. One guidance counselor described the culture at Blewbury last year as “disgruntled.” When asked to describe her program she talked about the extensive needs of the students. She characterized the students as “abandoned” children who have very little support from parents. She said that the students didn’t easily trust adults and that teachers had to earn the respect of the students before the students would cooperate with them. She reported that she spent a great deal of her time addressing bullying, sexual situations, drugs, and drinking. When asked if she felt she had the support to have an effective guidance program, she answered that she did.

Interdisciplinary Teaming. Teachers at Blewbury were organized into interdisciplinary teams. Dr. Callaghan required daily team planning, weekly grade level planning and weekly content area team planning. Teachers at Blewbury reported that this type of communication and shared planning did not occur during the previous administration.

Poor student discipline had a negative impact on team planning. Because of the reputation of Blewbury students in the educational community, substitute teachers refused to serve Blewbury. As a result teachers had to be pulled from planning periods to cover classes when teachers were absent.

Effective Use of Time. In my observations at Blewbury I found that time was the commodity mostly needed but rarely used effectively. Teachers complained that they

didn't have enough time to cover material and work with students individually, but when I visited in their classrooms they wasted extensive periods of time on minutiae.

Administrators also complained about the time it took to fulfill their responsibilities. During most weeks Dr. Callaghan and Mr. Gunn spent twelve to eighteen hour workdays at Blewbury. When I questioned them about the time requirements of the job, they both answered that it took that long to get it done. They responded that during the school days they were always meeting with students, parents and teachers and that they never had any time to do their managerial work.

Teachers complained that administration never had time to provide instructional leadership for them because they were always spending it counseling students. One commented, "They lost some good teachers because they had little or no help. They always had students in the office. They could have been tougher with the kids and done less counseling. They were into the elementary mentality and students took advantage of them."

Effective Grouping Schemes. In my observations at Blewbury I saw very little evidence of grouping except for identified students with disabilities or for students who were gifted. When these students were grouped, it was an administrative assignment, not a flexible group initiated by the teacher. Students for the most part worked in whole groups and completed the same assignments.

Effective Use of Facilities. Dr. Callaghan's first objective at Blewbury was to get the building in shape and to examine how it was being used. Teachers, administrators, and parents commented on the improvements, not only in the cleanliness of the facility but also in the attention to details. Several teachers commented on Dr.

Callaghan's moving her office to the front hall where she would be visible. They also gave positive feedback on the removal of lockers that impeded teacher supervision of bathroom facilities. Plans are underway to convert the empty locker space into reading corners or seminar locations.

Continuous Monitoring of School Progress. Dr. Callaghan is committed to accountability. In fact, her dissertation was on the state's ABC's (Accountability in the Basics with local Control) plan – a building-level, student performance-based accountability program. She believes that everyone is accountable for his role in the educational process, and that to do it properly, you constantly assess your progress. Throughout the year she administered two self-made surveys to staff so that they could provide her with feedback of her leadership. She said distributing those surveys was extremely painful since she knew that many of the faculty did not support the changes she was implementing. However she felt it honored the process of continuous assessment.

In addition to monitoring her own progress, she administered a mock student achievement test to all students midway through the school year. She felt that teachers should use that data to refocus their instruction for the spring semester. She also encouraged teachers to provide continuous assessment of their daily instruction. She commented that without some assessment teachers don't know if students are learning. She remarked, "I don't understand how it is that teachers don't feel that they are accountable for doing their jobs...and part of their job is knowing how their students are performing against a standard."

In addition to assessing student progress and her progress, she supported programs that monitor the school's progress. She felt that the accountability program served an important function of communicating to the public how schools were performing. She felt the public had a right to know how their school "stacked up" against others.

### **Sergiovanni's Leadership Forces Hierarchy**

Technical. Dr. Callaghan demonstrated a thorough knowledge of the organizational structure of schools and of management techniques. She established procedures according to educational law and provided for the safety of the students. She instituted equipment and materials inventories and held staff accountable. She initiated systems with procedures for school arrival, school dismissal, lunchtime, discipline, and class changes. She brought order where there had been chaos. A school that had become dysfunctional began to resemble a school again.

One teacher commented, "I can't believe how detail oriented she is. Her follow through is amazing. She stays on top of everything. She runs a very professional school."

A Central Support Staff member commented, "When Dr. Callaghan presents any students at appeals hearings, her documentation is always impeccable. She has every "i" dotted and every "t" crossed. She is very thorough and prepared to make her argument." Data indicated that Dr. Callaghan was an excellent technical administrator.

Human. There was mixed evidence at Blebury to support that Dr. Callaghan was effective in the human aspects of leadership. Many of the teachers interviewed

perceived her as extremely competent but unapproachable. One teacher did comment that she felt Dr. Callaghan was more open than many of the teachers perceived. She explained that often teachers would expect Dr. Callaghan to respond to them immediately. The teacher had found from her own experience that during the day Dr. Callaghan was consumed with managing the school, however if approached after school, Dr. Callaghan was very open and willing to talk.

Some of the teachers felt that Dr. Callaghan was a strong motivator for the students if not for the adults. One teacher perceived that many students trusted Dr. Callaghan and were willing to work harder to achieve their goals because of her commitment to them.

Dr. Callaghan did recognize teacher talent and provided leadership opportunities for those individuals. She promoted Mr. Gunn to assistant principal when he was only twenty-five with just three years of teaching experience. She also selected a third year teacher as one of the new teacher facilitators. In both instances her recognition of talent was confirmed by their stellar performance in their roles.

She is also the principal that administrative interns prefer to be their mentor during their internships. She delegates authority to them once they have proven that they are capable. Even so, she admitted that delegation is difficult for her, but she works to share leadership with those who demonstrate ability.

She commented, “We did have a school leadership team but so many of them were new and they didn’t have the experience they needed to be more independent. They wanted me to make the decisions because they knew they didn’t have the knowledge to make them.” Dr. Callaghan reported that she preferred a shared

leadership style and that she was looking forward to some of the younger teachers taking more responsibilities.

Educational. Dr. Callaghan demonstrated a thorough knowledge of education issues. She was able to diagnose the needs of Blewbury, provide feedback to teachers that she observed, and supervise the staff. Teachers reported that before Dr. Callaghan arrived at Blewbury they went several years without required performance observations. In fact one teacher indicated that for several years a summative report was placed in her box for a signature when in fact no observation had been completed.

Dr. Callaghan did observe in classrooms, and she documented any instructional delivery areas that needed improvement. However, many teachers complained that once deficiencies were documented, there were few suggestions or limited modeling for how to improve instruction. It should be noted that Blewbury had more lateral entry teachers than any other school in the system. At one point last year there were no certified science teachers on staff and only one certified math teacher. At one point the number of probationary teachers topped thirty, but with coming and going of staff throughout the year it was difficult to determine how many were actually in the school at one time. Each probationary teacher required four observations a year. While all of the observations were conducted as required, the instructional leadership suffered due to demand.

Symbolic. During her first year at Blewbury Dr. Callaghan did attempt to reestablish a purpose for the school. All teachers interviewed acknowledged that her goal was for students at the school to perform well academically and for the school to achieve a

positive recognition in the state's ABC's (Accountability in the Basics with local Control) for Public Education Accountability Program. The program consists of student and school accountability and is based on student performance on end-of-grade tests.

She served as a model for others in terms of her work commitment and dedication to children. She was very visible in the halls and spent each day visiting classrooms. Rarely was she in the office unless in a student, teacher or parent conference. She was always out in the building where students and teachers could observe her. She arrived at the school at 6:30 a.m. each morning and was there to greet each student and teacher when they arrived. She was in the halls during each class change and present each day in the cafeteria during serving hours. She made every effort to attend all school functions unless one conflicted with another. She was always the last to leave the building, usually late in the evening.

Dr. Callaghan stated,

Our PTA meets every month but these are executive meetings. Next year we are going to have a PTA update every time we have a ballgame or a cultural performance. That is when parents come. From now on an administrator is going to open every event at this school. We are going to set the tone that we care about kids at this school. Although we have gone to every event in the past, parents who have not been here don't know us. Administration didn't attend in the past. I want parents to know that this administration cares enough to be there.

When I observed Dr. Callaghan throughout the study she was always very upbeat in group or public settings. Although I often was privy to feelings and concerns that were under the surface, the public façade was always optimistic. She made every effort to elicit positive feelings about Blewbury.

While teachers were able to communicate Dr. Callaghan's goals for students, they were not sure about her comprehensive vision for the school. Many expressed concern that she had not had time to develop one. Dr. Callaghan readily shared her vision with me, but she also left me feeling she wasn't yet sure the path she would choose to get it there. She did indicate that she would have to achieve stability in staff before she could move toward her vision.

Cultural. Although Dr. Callaghan expressed a desire to change the culture of Blewbury Middle School, progress in reculturing the school was slow. Negative attitudes and beliefs were demonstrated by many of the faculty.

Even at the beginning of the present school year the school was lacking stability in staff. This past summer there were over thirty vacancies. There were not enough teachers returning to form a critical mass of teachers bonded to the school and its students. So many teachers left that there were too few left to socialize new members into the school.

Negative connotations surrounded Blewbury. Some teachers and students actually admitted they were embarrassed when they acknowledged they were from Blewbury. The constructed reality was that Blewbury was the school that teachers didn't select for a teaching position and where substitutes refused to work.

However the tone of the school is different since the beginning of the new academic year. There have been fewer referrals to the office, and the new teachers are seeking strategies in how to teach students impacted by poverty. Mr. Gunn reported that teachers are asking for supplies to conduct hands-on activities, and the conversation about the students has improved.

This past year students did make a ten-percentage point gain in achievement, from 58% in 2002 to 68% in 2003, indicating that more students performed at grade level on end-of-grade test. In addition the school only missed one out of twenty-nine annual yearly progress goals on the No Child Left Behind Program. Dr. Callaghan made every effort to improve the climate of the school, and students and teachers reported that the school was safer and more orderly.

Some parents did share that they felt their children were being treated fairly and that administration cared about them. Dr. Callaghan's reputation in the community was very positive among parents who trusted her in discipline issues.

Data supported that Dr. Callaghan interrupted and stimulated the status quo at Blewbury Middle School. While significant positive changes occurred, much remains to be accomplished. At this point there are not enough data to support that Dr. Callaghan is a cultural leader at Blewbury although the trends seem to be in that direction.

### **Norms in School Culture**

When Dr. Callaghan and her administrative team assumed leadership of Blewbury Middle School, they expected that the faculty would greet their proposed changes readily. Surveys indicated that a significant number of the faculty and staff rated the school as less than good. Although the administrative team knew there would be discomfort during the transition, they were surprised by the reception they received. In fact, Dr. Callaghan admitted she was not prepared for the resistance she encountered by some of the faculty.

The first sacred norm that Dr. Callaghan tried to change was a pattern of low expectations among the teachers. She said that the low expectations were evident in student achievement, student behavior and the total school environment. She explained that the veteran teachers compared the test scores of their students to those of students in other schools. When they saw theirs were lower, they lowered expectations. She explained, “When you are in one school a long time and this is the only school you have ever taught in, you really don’t know what a school is supposed to be like. The teachers didn’t know what was expected at other schools.”

One veteran teacher commented that prior administrators led teachers to believe that when the school did well in the past it was because teachers “were able to pull magic out of a hat and do wonders with the population we had.” She said that comments like these led teachers to believe that something was wrong with the students. She continued, “We never got the pep talk that all kids could learn. Instead we were the folks who could pull blood out of a turnip.”

Dr. Callaghan explained, “It never occurred to our teachers that some of the problems here were caused by teachers and not students. They never considered that these same students performed successfully at the elementary schools before coming here where the progress stopped.” Dr. Callaghan continued, “The new folks were not a part of those low expectations. It was hard to have so many new folks on staff, but at least they came with only my expectations.”

The second sacred norm that many teachers couldn’t accept was the change in the composition of the school. At one time Blewbury Middle School was a successful middle class school, and many of the teachers remembered those days. After initial

interviews with the staff, one administrator characterized the faculty as “teachers who really didn’t want to teach at Blewbury but were afraid to make a move.” The teachers wouldn’t acknowledge that students of poverty need different strategies to motivate them. Teachers didn’t understand that trust was the first requirement of these students before they would be willing to perform.

One teacher shared an example of another teacher who constantly complained about a child who didn’t do homework. Because she had to get some papers signed she had to do a visit to the child’s home. The child begged her not to go. When she arrived at the house the parent was drunk and the house was filthy. Because the teacher handled the situation so well, the student from that point on would have done anything for the teacher. Her work and attitude made dramatic improvement. The teacher understood that at the child’s home, the student acted in the role of the adult while the mother was the child.

Situations such as these were common among the students at Blewbury. While some teachers acknowledged that these circumstances warranted different approaches to learning, others were not willing to change. Students needed more hands-on, engaging activities and differentiated instruction. Many of the students assumed adult responsibilities at home and needed more independence in learning at school. A young teacher explained,

Many of the veteran teachers were not able to recognize that different students now come here. Some of these students need very different strategies, but the teachers couldn’t change to meet the students’ needs. They couldn’t bring themselves to believe that some students need different treatment. That would be anathema to them. They were trained differently. Somehow they see it as unequal to treat students differently when I see it as unequal to treat them all the same.

The third sacred norm that teachers couldn't concede was how student behavior should be managed and how discipline was handled. One administrator characterized Blewbury as louder than many schools. She credited the more "energetic atmosphere" to the African-American student body whose culture, she said "has a tendency to be slightly louder and somewhat more aggressive."

Many of the teachers, however, most of whom were white, expected silence, instant obedience, and even submission. Some of the students weren't inclined to give it to them. While some of the teachers developed strategies to engage the students productively, others became more aggressive themselves. In many instances the teachers actually challenged the students and escalated situations into confrontation. When these situations would reach the office, Dr. Callaghan recognized that both parties shared fault. When she refused to "serve up the student's head on a silver platter" word spread throughout the school that she favored students over teachers.

More than any other change that some teachers would not accept, how discipline was handled was their crucial disagreement with the new administration. It was a sacred norm to them that students and not teachers were responsible for poor student behavior. They expected students who could not conform to their rules to be removed from their classrooms. On this point there was never any reconciliation.

### **Consistency of Technology and Structure to Goals**

At Blewbury Middle School leadership made every effort to align technologies and structures to the goal of raising student achievement and making Blewbury an effective middle school. According to Charles Perrow (1967, 1970) the

effectiveness of the organization is dependent on the degree of congruence between the goals and the structure and technologies employed to achieve them.

While the structure of the school supported an effective middle school, the technologies employed by the teachers did not. Since the attitudes and the behaviors of the teachers impacted their instructional strategies, their technologies were a major part of the problem at Blewbury. Consequently there was no consistency between technology and goals. Since change at the school couldn't happen without a major shift in teacher attitudes, either the values and beliefs of the teachers had to change to accommodate the needed technologies or the teaching staff itself had to change.

At the end of the year there were over thirty vacancies at Blewbury Middle School. Out of the core staff of thirty-four teachers, eleven left. Some left on their own. Others left because they were asked to leave.

Dr. Callaghan commented,

When we interviewed this summer (for the second year) we laid it out for our new teachers. We didn't paint a rose picture. We told the new applicants the hard facts. I asked if they wanted to be a part of our new picture. I laid out the expectations and explained how any conceptions of teaching they might have had in the past might not work at Blewbury.

She expected the attitudes and behaviors of these new teachers to be more congruent with her goals for an effective middle school.

#### **Section 4. Survey Results on School Climate and Health**

In order to assess the organizational climate and health of Blewbury School at the conclusion of the first year of Dr. Callaghan's principalship (May, 2003), I administered two surveys: the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire for Middle School (OCDQ-RM) and the Organizational Health Inventory for Middle

School (OHI-M). These surveys provided an opportunity for all faculty in the school to offer their perspectives about the school anonymously, thereby serving as a member-check and triangulation for staff interviews.

The OCDQ-RM , developed along a personality metaphor, provides information about how a faculty perceives a school, its principals and each other in terms of open and closed school climates. The OHI-M, developed along a health metaphor, offers information about the academic integrity and interpersonal relations within the schools. Both surveys are described in Chapter Three – Methodology.

The OCDQ-M has been standardized so that the average score is 500 with a standard deviation of 100. The scale is used to rate six indicators of behavior that affect school climate – Principal behavior as Supportive, Directive, and Restrictive; and Teacher behavior as Collegial, Committed, and Disengaged – so school climate can be compared with other middle schools. The break out of the scale is as follows:

Above 600	Very high
551-600	High
525-550	Above average
511-524	Slightly above average
490-510	Average
476-489	Slightly below average
450-475	Below average
400-449	Low
Below 400	Very low

The findings of the survey administered to the staff at the end of last year indicated that Dr. Callaghan was not perceived by the teachers as being supportive, scoring Low (432) in this category. While teachers conceded that she did offer constructive criticism and was available after school to help teachers, faculty did not feel that she accepted or implemented their ideas. She discouraged autonomy and did

not treat the teachers as equals. Dr. Callaghan's highest positive feedback came in the area of setting an example by working hard herself.

The survey also indicated that Dr. Callaghan exhibited very strong directive behavior, scoring in the Very high (607) range. She supervised teachers closely, monitoring their behavior and activities.

Additionally, the survey rated Dr. Callaghan Very high (690) in Restrictive behavior. Teachers reported that they were burdened by administrative busywork, unnecessary paperwork, and excessive non-teaching duties.

Teachers rated their own behavior with and among their peers Low (424) in collegial behavior. Most teachers reported that they did not socialize with each other although they did report support for fellow staff members who had personal problems. The survey indicated that teachers did not support or respect each other professionally. Interactions between teams were not characterized as cooperative.

In the Committed category, teachers scored in the Below average (451) range, the most positive results on the survey. Teachers respond that they "go the extra mile" with their students. They reported that they are committed to helping their students and that they do it on their own time. However teachers reported that they do not volunteer to sponsor after-school activities.

The survey indicated that teachers score in the Very high (645) range on Disengagement. This score indicated that the teachers at Blewbury lacked professionalism. They were working their required time and were often critical of each other.

The OCDQ-RM results for Blewbury Middle School described a school that was *closed* (788 on Total Openness; any score below 850 is closed). Principal Openness fell in the Very low category (378; below 400 is Very Low) and Teacher Openness scored in the Low category (410; 400 – 449 is Low). The data suggested that the environment at Blewbury was not very professional. Teachers were not typically engaged in meaningful activities. Although teachers professed a commitment to their students, they were not committed to the school or to each other to ensure success for all. The principal controlled the teachers tightly and provided them little autonomy. In short, Blewbury was not a positive environment in which to work.

The OHI-M was also administered in May 2003 to the faculty of Blewbury Middle School. This instrument assesses the climate of a school and describes the interpersonal relations among students, teachers, administrators and the community. The instrument is designed to measure how well a school is able to deal with internal and external pressures, remain cohesive and stay on task to achieve its mission.

The instrument provides information along six indicators of school health: Institutional Integrity; Administrative Level which includes Collegial leadership, Principal Influence and Resource Support; and Teacher Level which includes Teacher Affiliation and Academic Emphasis. If these indicators are positive the school demonstrates a harmonious relationship and has the characteristics of a healthy organization.

The OHI-M has been standardized so the average score is 500 with the standard deviation being 100. The scale may be used to compare the health of the

target school with the health of other middle schools. The break out of the scale is as follows

Above 600	Very high
551-600	High
525-551	Above average
511-525	Slightly above average
490-511	Average
476-490	Slightly below average
450-476	Below average
400-450	Low
Below 400	Very low

The findings of the survey indicated that Blewbury Middle had a High (564) level of Institutional Integrity. Teachers perceived that the school was not vulnerable to outside pressures and that the local board did not give in to the whims of parents. Scores did indicate however that even though teachers felt that the school was not vulnerable to public opinion, individual teachers did not share this same insulation. Teachers reported that they were not protected from unreasonable parent demands.

The survey reported that Dr. Callaghan scored Low (411) in Collegial Leadership. The faculty perceived that she did not view them as equals and did not solicit input concerning classroom issues. They felt that she quashed their opinions and did not treat everyone the same. They did acknowledge that she clearly articulated what was expected of them.

Results of the survey indicated that the faculty rated the principal High (572) in Principal Influence. Teachers perceived that Dr. Callaghan has strong support from the superintendent.

With a rating of Low (418) on Resource Support, the survey indicated that teachers did not feel that they had the necessary tools to be successful at Blewbury School. Teachers indicated that they did not have adequate classroom supplies, supplementary materials, or instructional resources.

Teacher affiliation indicators combined for a score of 227, Very low, the lowest indicator on both surveys. As evidenced in the OCDQ-RM, the OHI-M added support to the finding that teachers at Blewbury didn't like each other. Teachers reported that they were not enthusiastic and didn't act particularly friendly at work. They acted aloof with one another and were not supportive. Opinions on these indicators were mixed as to whether teachers were truly committed to their students.

Academic emphasis in the school was Slightly below average (484) when compared with other middle schools. Teachers reported that students frequently neglected homework, were dubious about the value of good grades, and sometimes ridiculed peers who were academically oriented. Teachers questioned if the students in the school had the ability to be successful academically.

The six indicators of school health measured together indicated that Blewbury rated Low (444) in organizational health. It was typical of other middle schools in its relationship to its community and had a principal who was supported by Central Administration. However, the faculty did not connect with the principal whom they didn't think was open to their suggestions or input. Teachers felt that they did not get the resources they needed and that students wouldn't take advantage of them anyway. The school was struggling with a lack of purpose, vision, and cohesiveness.

## **Summary**

When examining the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire Middle (OCDQM) (Hoy and Turner, 1997) and the Organizational Health Inventory (OHI-M) (Hoy and Turner, 1997) findings in light of data collected during observations, interviews and document analyses, the survey results supported the conclusions outlined in the themes and analytical frameworks.

At the end of the first academic year evidence suggested that the status quo at Blewbury had been interrupted. The school experienced improved safety and order even though student discipline continued to be a major concern. Where major problems had transpired on the grounds and in the hallways in the past, those areas were more controlled. Classroom efficiency suffered however because teachers were expected to develop teaching and management strategies that included all students...not just the ones who were compliant. The discord over how discipline was handled proved to be an obstacle that couldn't be overcome. It caused a schism between many of the faculty and administration. As a result administration grew intolerant of some teachers and found ways to force them out while some faculty gave up on administration and left the school.

Many of the teachers did not identify positively with Dr. Callaghan. They did not perceive her as an effective leader who motivated, united or inspired them. Rather than empowering them, a majority of the teachers perceived that Dr. Callaghan created rules and procedures that served as roadblocks to their success. The

climate, rather than collegial and enabling, was stifling. Teachers felt that they were unfairly scrutinized and powerless.

Teachers reported that they did not work together collegially; consequently, they were not teaming effectively as middle school concept requires. Their lack of professionalism and motivation suggested that they were going through the motions of doing their jobs, but they were not stimulated to excellence by their peers or leadership.

Conflicting results on the two surveys indicated that there is a question about the level of teacher commitment to the students. Given that an effective middle school functions around shared information and support for students, the surveys suggested that Blewbury Middle School was not succeeding in its mission at the end of the first year of the new administration.

In terms of Sergiovanni's Leadership Forces (1995) the surveys suggested that Dr. Callaghan was providing capable management in technical areas and was knowledgeable in educational issues. She controlled the functions of the school and monitored activities and behaviors with close scrutiny. The teachers acknowledged that she and other members of the administration provided feedback on their instructional practices, even though they reported there was more telling than showing. They credited her for her willingness to remain after school and for modeling a work ethic.

However she was not viewed as personable and therefore was weak in human leadership. She was not able to motivate the faculty through any symbolic gestures. Given the disparate views, lack of professionalism, and closed nature of the

environment, evidence suggested that the culture of the school did not improve significantly. Teacher behaviors may have changed, but evidence suggested that without constant supervision and monitoring, old practices would resurface. The teachers and staff did not unite around any shared beliefs and vision. After one school year, the survey indicated that the culture of Blewbury Middle School was still one demonstrative of low-performing, at-risk schools.

### **Summary of Chapter Four**

Chapter Four was devoted to the findings of the ethnographic study at Blewbury Middle School. The findings were presented in four sections:

- The first, Baseline Data, was derived from document analyses of two Abingdon School System surveys administered by the superintendent.
- The second, Emerging Themes: The Iceberg Analogy, Teacher and Student Behavior, Lack of Trust, and Lack of Shared Understanding/Vision - were induced and deduced through analysis of observations and interviews.
- The third section: Analytical Frameworks, involved filtering data through the *Effective Middle School Correlates* (Alexander and George, 1981), *Sergiovanni's Leadership Forces Hierarchy* (1995), *Norms in School Culture* (Rossman, Corbett, and Firestone, 1988) and Perrow's *Consistency of Technology and Structure to Goals* (1967).
- The fourth section: Survey Results on School Climate and Health, included findings from the Organization Climate Description Questionnaire for Middle School (OCDQ-RM) (Hoy and Turner, 1997) and the Organizational Health Inventory for Middle School (OHI-M) (Hoy and Turner 1997).

The findings from each data group indicated that Blewbury Middle School was almost dysfunctional at the time of transition in the spring of 2002. Students were not achieving academically, discipline was out of control, and the facility and procedures were in a state of disrepair. Almost everyone interviewed referenced the fact that the school was in even more trouble than was apparent on the surface.

The climate at Blewbury Middle School did improve after the arrival of Dr. Maryann Callaghan and her staff. However there were serious tensions between faculty and administration and among faculty themselves regarding how the discipline plan was organized. An atmosphere of distrust permeated the building, and many teachers left at the end of the year.

Some teachers indicated that they were not aware of a vision for the school. Others suggested that Dr. Callaghan was so immersed in dealing with the myriad of problems at the school that all of her time had been devoted to management of the many details.

In the next chapter the findings, along with implications for future study, will be discussed. The chapter will end with personal reflections of the researcher.

## **Chapter Five**

### **DISCUSSION and IMPLICATIONS**

The principal purpose of this dissertation ethnography is to inform the educational field about the complexity of school reform even when it is undertaken by a principal intimately familiar with and adept at the change process. This final chapter includes a review of the research problem and methodology as well as a discussion of the results and their implications. The study will conclude with researcher reflections.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

The North Central Regional Education Laboratory (2001) defines an effective school as one that “has a clear story about what it wants students to learn. It focuses single-mindedly on its core purpose and its work is a relentless pursuit of that purpose” (p. 59). Hayes and Hayes (2001) conclude that a lack of core purpose and a lack of knowledge base and skills result in a poor school climate or culture.

Schools are a manifestation of culture, they themselves are partially defined and even controlled by their own internal cultures and subcultures (Morgan, 1986, 1989, 1997). In order to understand a complex organization such as a school, it is necessary to analyze and understand the cultural mores that guide behaviors in the school society.

Alan Peshkin (1998) noted in the Foreword of *Change and Effectiveness in Schools* that there will never be a “formula that can ensure successful efforts to change schools, but there is lore – knowledge or wisdom gained through experience – that can inform these efforts” (p. vii). He further pointed out that in each school there is

force that perpetuates the status quo, and that this force is the school's culture. Peshkin states "that to ignore the implications of the fact that a school has a culture in place is to court failure, notwithstanding the wisdom of the proposed changes and the sincerity of their proposers" (p. vii).

In July, 2002, Dr. Maryann Callaghan, a veteran administrator who was successful at shaping climate and leading reform, assumed the principalship of Blewbury Middle School. Her goal was to make a positive impact on the school's culture and implement sustained, systemic school reform. The purpose of this dissertation study is to chronicle the events of Dr. Callaghan's first sixteen months at Blewbury Middle School. The study documents changes that occurred in the school by recounting and describing the behaviors, feelings, attitudes, and opinions of those administrators, faculty, staff, and community members who were part of the story.

### **Review of the Methodology**

In order to establish a narrative quality to the events at Blewbury, I chose ethnography as my mode of study. I was an informal observer in the school for one year prior to my entry to the site as a researcher for six months.

To gather data that was rich in detail and authentic in context, I employed the qualitative methodologies of interview, observation, survey, and document analysis. The data in the study were based on twenty-one individual interviews and twelve observations that included a broad sampling of teachers, administrators, staff, and parents. Forty-one faculty members out of 60 completed anonymous surveys on organizational climate and health. Documents analyzed included reports from

Southern Association, the Department of Public Instruction, the principal's journal, previous surveys of climate, and other pertinent artifacts.

During the interviews I used a format that was standard open-ended, but I revised and refocused discussions as issues evolved. During the interviews that lasted from 45 minutes to two hours, I used a tape recorder unless the subject asked me to script instead. I employed active listener techniques and was attuned to the body language expressed by the interviewees. At the close of the interviews, I transcribed my tapes or organized my notes and added any impressions gained during the interviews. I continued adding to the pool of respondents until information gained from inquiry tended to be repetitive of what I already knew. To ensure the credibility of the study, I only included data that I triangulated.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The discussion of the findings of the study will be organized around the major themes that emerged during the study. They were The Iceberg Theory; Student and Teacher Behavior; Respect/Trust; and a Lack of Shared Vision. Discussion of the findings from the analytical frameworks and the anonymous surveys will be imbedded in the theme discussions as well as in the summary.

#### **The Iceberg Analogy**

The challenges that Dr. Callaghan and her administrative team expected were minuscule when compared to the actual challenges they faced. While they anticipated having to overcome negative attitudes, low expectations, and a generally dysfunctional state of "routine teaching and learning," they were not prepared to deal with the enormity of infrastructure problems such as fiscal issues, facility

deterioration, and a paucity of textbooks/materials. However, their main surprise was the overwhelming lack of professionalism among some adults whose individual behaviors were more challenging than student behavior. All of these problems combined and compounded demanded fire fighting tactics just to keep the school operational. The time and energy required to address these daily malfunctions drained the energy from the faculty and caused the administration to lose focus on the underlying, major causal problems.

Throughout the interviews the most consistent comment offered by administrators and teachers alike focused on the notion of a “completely dysfunctional” school. Almost without exception respondents reported that Dr. Callaghan was so consumed with the avalanche of problems at Blewbury, that she was unable to propose or sustain any plan for the revitalization of the school culture. They explained that before Dr. Callaghan’s arrival, not only had the visible state of the school deteriorated, the invisible systems that served as adhesive for the organization were broken. Respondents described the staff as incompetent or at the least disengaged from their professional assignment.

Even though many of the teachers recognized this state of disarray, they lost patience with new administration as new rules and procedures were put into place. While teachers admitted that the school was in a quagmire, staff members were not willing to change their own instructional or disciplinary practices. A majority of the staff responded in surveys that the school was not effective and needed a complete overhaul, but no one wanted to implement personal change. Everyone assumed he or she was not part of the problem. Consequently the administration was overwhelmed

fixing the problems that were obvious and convincing a defensive faculty that they shared a role in the breakdown. This plethora of problems resulted in the administration's getting lost in the minutiae of managing the school while their ability to lead change suffered.

Before Dr. Callaghan arrived at Blewbury she deliberately planned to focus her efforts on changing the culture of the school. During her first meetings with the faculty at Blewbury she outlined her goals for the school and expressed confidence that by working as a team they could meet those expectations. She introduced new procedures, providing rationales, and expected the faculty to "buy-in" since she considered these new processes logically designed to produce desired outcomes. Instead of embracing a well-structured pattern for an improved school, the veteran faculty resisted and throughout the year became increasingly oppositional. While Dr. Callaghan was inundated with facility problems, a student body that was trying its new administration, and a high number of lateral entry hires, the veteran faculty "piled it on" and this led to the sense of overwhelming problems that permeated the school.

Even though Dr. Callaghan was committed to cultural change, the complexities she faced led her to assume the role of structural leader rather than cultural leader. While she had the enthusiasm, commitment, authority, and expertise to implement reform at Blewbury, her imposition of new ideas resulted in resistance.

While Dr. Callaghan had the authority to mandate new procedures, she was only able to enforce them by constantly monitoring the faculty. She had not influenced the staff's underlying assumptions about how for example discipline in a

school should be handled. By imposing rules she was only able to influence “watched” behaviors of faculty, she didn’t change their sacred norms or core values. Robert Evans (1996) states, “Innovation is almost certain to encounter problems when its implementation is defined according to one reality (its creator’s)” (p. 16). Fullan (1991) opined, “When change agents assume they have the right answer, they can be as authoritarian as the staunchest defenders of the status quo” (p. 36). Both of these suppositions were obvious at Blewbury.

Dr. Callaghan began the school year at Blewbury with an action plan that she and Mr. Gunn developed. They designed that plan according to their assumptions about how the school should function, not taking into account the attitudes and beliefs of the teachers at the school. Therefore many of the long working hours that she and Mr. Gunn spent in the evenings were a result of the paperwork emanating from disciplinary actions against teachers who failed to follow the procedures. As the opposition grew, a greater sense of overpowering problems grew. Dr. Callaghan and her staff drowned in the details.

Dr. Callaghan and her administration experienced first-hand the complexities involved in change and the reactions of those expected to implement it. According to Evans (1996), “The key factor in change is what it means to those who must implement it, and that its primary meanings encourage resistance” (p. 21) Real change in an organization results from “building fellowship” – a condition not in existence at Blewbury when change processes began (p. 18). If her goal was to effect cultural change at Blewbury, Dr. Callaghan would have been wise to start the process by building commitment from staff to share in her vision. It is easy to understand how

the “crisis mode” of the school compelled the administration to act quickly to address structural changes; however, resistance might have been reduced if the participants in the process had shared in a sense of purpose. Given the nature of the evolution of change however, it is doubtful that tension could have been avoided. Additionally, the circumstances at Blewbury were so dismal that evolutionary change was not an option.

Upon examination of Dr. Callaghan’s leadership skills during her first year at Blewbury according to Sergiovanni’s *Leadership Forces* (1995), it became obvious that she demonstrated sound technical, educational, and symbolic techniques. Her ability to implement needed changes in infrastructure, improve efficiencies in schedules, bring order to class changes, recognize sound or unsound educational practices, and be accepted as the “chief” of Blewbury served as proof of her skills in these areas.

However in the areas of human and cultural leadership Dr. Callaghan was not as successful during her first year at Blewbury. According to Evans (1996), in order for targets of change to accept new ideas, they must first let go of the status quo. In order for this to occur the changers need attention from and access to the change agent. Rather than being out front to lead the change and allay staff fears, Dr. Callaghan was constantly closeted with problems. Although she made every effort to be visible during the school day, she was unable to spend quality time with the teachers vocalizing how the suggested changes would enhance teacher and student success at Blewbury. The overwhelming number of problems that Dr. Callaghan faced kept her from the teachers. She was unable to provide necessary

encouragement, support, motivation, and knowledge. As a consequence teachers became contemptuous of the administration and morale suffered. Dr. Callaghan's failure to engage the human capital at Blewbury limited her ability to effect significant cultural change. There is no doubt that positive change did occur at Blewbury. However the changes that occurred were more superficial, more indicative of an improved climate – not cultural changes in core attitudes and beliefs.

### **Adult and Student Behavior**

Change “provokes loss, challenges competence, creates confusion, and causes conflict”(Evans 1996, p. 21). The atmosphere at Blewbury during the first year under new administration is captured by Evans’ description. Under the new discipline plan teachers at Blewbury were for the most part expected to handle student behavior within their own classrooms unless the student actions were persistent or a threat to safety. Dr. Callaghan surmised that unless students are in classes being taught they will never improve in their academic performance. She presented this rational explanation to her faculty and expected them to understand how this new approach to discipline would positively impact the school’s goal to improve student achievement.

When school started and students began pushing the limits of the rules, teachers were outraged that they were expected to keep misbehaving students in their classrooms. Although rationally teachers knew that student performance couldn’t increase without instruction, faculty indignation grew because teachers felt their competence had been compromised. Even the most incompetent teachers understood that their job was to impart information to the students. Student disruption prevented

them from fulfilling that purpose, and teachers were frustrated. While dissatisfaction was directed at Dr. Callaghan, teachers were most annoyed with themselves for having no skills for dealing with non-compliant students. The only recourse for teachers in the past had been ejecting students from the classroom; consequently, the faculty had no strategies for getting students to behave. As teachers became more discontented, their personal behaviors toward one another and the students deteriorated.

The change in discipline procedures at Blewbury undermined the structural stability of the school. Even when most teachers in the school recognized that discipline was a major problem, unrest resulted when Dr. Callaghan enacted a new approach. According to Evans (1996), “Whatever improvement change may promise, it almost always increases confusion and unpredictability. Even when the elements to be changed are heartily disliked by a majority of the staff...the change itself commonly provokes more upset and distress than anyone anticipated” (p. 35).

In addition to different disciplinary requirements, the new administration also expected teachers to implement instructional strategies that would engage all students. Administration questioned a steady diet of lecture and note-taking and encouraged teachers to incorporate more hands-on and student-centered instruction into their lesson delivery. Even though many teachers knew that their instructional methodology was ineffective for many of their students, they resented the insinuation, though unspoken, that they were incompetent. It was especially upsetting to them that many of the teachers more adept at newer pedagogy were the younger and less experienced teachers in the school. Cliques of teachers formed – those supporting the

administration and those that didn't. Feelings were hurt and stress increased. In their interviews many of the teachers expressed the attitude that Dr. Callaghan was sent to Blewbury to accomplish political goals. From their perspective they were the victims of a large and insensitive system.

Although the majority of the teachers interviewed during the study acknowledged that discipline and instruction were problematic, only a few directly acknowledged that they needed to change their approach. Evans (1996) asserts, "Too often we approach innovation with a powerful double standard: we see the value of change by other people. Change that we seek from others we understand in the positive terms associated with growth; change that others seek from us we experience in the negative" (p. 38).

For teachers to embrace changes in how they deal with discipline and how they teach their classes, they must first accept different ways of "conceptualizing learning and teaching" (Evans, 1996, p. 58) For change to occur teachers need to be able to connect the old to the new and work their way through the new processes. At Blewbury a sense of urgency by the administration short-circuited the process. Teachers were being asked to change their basic assumptions about how they viewed their classrooms. They were being asked to make a significant cultural change, one in basic beliefs and values. Change "cannot be hurried, and each person must do it for himself. Efforts to jump-start change, to preempt opposition or conflict by thorough planning and rational explanation, are likely to be futile" (Evans, 1996, p. 60).

In order to alleviate some of the confusion associated with change, staff must be given opportunities to acquire new skills and knowledge crucial to the new

paradigm. The teachers at Blewbury did not possess the technologies that they needed in order to implement the strategies being required by the new administration.

Although Dr. Callaghan acknowledged the need for comprehensive staff training, she expressed a hesitancy to commit until she stabilized the school faculty. She felt that the benefit to be gained was not worth the cost of training a developing faculty.

In actuality, the cost in human toil was much more expensive than the training would have been. Some of the basic fears of the faculty would have been allayed had they been exposed to the concepts of classroom management that the administration expected. The training would have given them basic tools for survival in the new environment, an opportunity to integrate the new ideas with their traditional routines, and finally time to reflect and accept that these new practices really made them better teachers. Even superficial change requires a process of sorting through these stages. Changes in basic assumptions and values such as the ones being forced at Blewbury could not occur without the organization's learning.

Even though all the evidence collected for this study suggests that the pain teachers experienced was real, it was absolutely necessary for the administration to enforce the new procedures. According to Fullan (1991), "changes in behavior lead to, as well as flow from, changes in belief" (p. 91). The basic assumption at Blewbury prior to the arrival of Dr. Callaghan was that the students there were bad and that they couldn't learn like other students. Without pressure to change their assumptions and beliefs, it is doubtful that even rational explanation could have accomplished a new set of core values. Dr. Callaghan's only chance to lead change was to force the change in behavior, hoping that a committed few would experience success and

influence others. Her misjudgment was to delay staff training. Fullan (1991) opines, “Pressure without support leads to resistance and alienation; support without pressure leads to drift or waste of resources” (p. 91). Pressure was applied at Blewbury, but moral support and training were lacking.

### **Lack of Respect/Trust**

Evans (1996) maintains, “Reform can only be built on a platform of trust and consensus. A sufficient level of trust within a school and between it and its community is an essential prerequisite for innovation...If faculty doubt their principal’s sincerity and commitment ...to them, there is little point in his trying real reform” (p. 126). At Blewbury an aura of mistrust permeated the atmosphere. That mistrust existed between administration and faculty, between teacher cliques, between students and faculty, and between the faculty and parents.

Evident from interviews and observations there was a tendency for stakeholders at Blewbury to place blame on others for the shortcomings of the school. Teachers blamed the parents in the community for not setting appropriate expectations at home. Parents blamed teachers for not treating students with respect and therefore instigating most of the behavior issues within classrooms. Teachers blamed each other for not adequately monitoring student behavior and thus adversely affecting each other’s ability to control students. The administration blamed the teachers for not practicing effective classroom management and for inappropriate instructional delivery techniques that increased poor student behavior. Teachers blamed the administration for failing to handle student behavior effectively. Blewbury was consumed with blame that fueled mistrust. The blame actually resulted

from frustrated stakeholders who were not prepared to deal with the deluge of problems that accumulated at the school.

The culture of the school prior to Dr. Callaghan's arrival was driven by survival, not education. It was common for students to be removed from class and sent home if they didn't comply with the rules. The new administration valued education over survival; therefore, they were insistent that teachers initiate behavioral strategies that would keep students in an instructional setting. These changes were imposed from administration without input from faculty or the possibility of compromise. Dr. Callaghan was adamant that students would be in classrooms where they could learn. The impasse between faculty and administration over this mandate could accurately be described as an abyss. Faculty resented an administration they saw as unreasonable on this issue, and administration characterized faculty competence based on their ability to handle student behavior. Evans (1996) maintains that compromise over issues that impact core values only "saps a leader's integrity" (p. 278). Having students in class was a fundamental assumption for Dr. Callaghan, one she wouldn't concede. Had communication between the faculty and administration been more effective and Dr. Callaghan's vision more contagious, the faculty might have bought in to her emotional allegiance to this precept.

Dr. Callaghan frequently spoke to faculty about the way teachers spoke to and about students. She constantly reminded teachers that in order to command respect you first have to earn it. Many of the faculty commented that while Dr. Callaghan expected the faculty to give and earn respect with students, she was not willing to exchange respect with the faculty members. Evans (1996) asserts, "When leaders do

not model the values they assert or the goals they proclaim, they breed cynicism and resistance. A leader may be sincere about his goal and be unaware that his behavior is contradictory” (p. 196). Dr. Callaghan’s commitment to the students inadvertently placed her in an adversarial relationship with many of the teachers whom she saw as inept in the classroom. Without reservation, Dr. Callaghan’s staff commended her for her firm work ethic, strong self-discipline, and fairness with students. But some faculty questioned her ability to lead adults, and a few questioned her fairness with staff.

An effective cultural leader is characterized by Evans (1996) as possessing “strong personal ethics, vision, and belief in others” (p. 188). Dr. Callaghan’s strong personal ethics were obvious in her passion for the welfare of the students at Blewbury. Her passion made it impossible for her to tolerate adults who weren’t willing to change to improve the prospects for the students. She was not embarrassed or apologetic for her commitment to children. Unfortunately Dr. Callaghan was not able to motivate many of the teachers through her passion, and the teachers’ lack of motivation to change their practices to benefit the children resulted in Dr. Callaghan’s lack of belief in the teachers. The impasse never resolved, and many of the teachers left at the end of the year. As new teachers were interviewed for the current year, Dr. Callaghan was meticulous in laying out her expectations for managing students. This clarity led to improved relations and stronger trust between administration and staff during the beginning of the second school year. Although replacing the majority of the core teachers proved to be a daunting task that consumed most of the summer, it

is doubtful that the original faculty and Dr. Callaghan would have ever resolved their differences and trusted each other again.

In reflecting on the overwhelming situation at Blewbury , I remembered an analogous personal experience. The morning after Hurricane Fran struck Raleigh, I arrived home from a trip to find forty-five trees down in my backyard. My husband was outside with a chainsaw cutting and stacking limbs that were no wider than six inches in diameter, basically kindling wood. From my vantage point I realized that the enormity of the damage had caused him to lose his perspective and grasp of the situation. I recognized immediately that we would need a bulldozer and trained individuals to remove the storm damage. Feeling responsibility for the yard, my husband had immediately begun addressing the problem without thinking through what would be the best course of action to alleviate the problem.

When the new administration arrived at Blewbury, they were overwhelmed at the damage that had to be addressed. As a result they began tackling problems but lost sight of the big picture. Some of the issues they faced might not have surfaced or could have been less traumatic if they had assessed the whole picture and chosen better strategies for school improvement. Many of their decisions however were driven by moral principles about how children should be treated. On these issues compromise and consensus were not an option. The changes that were forced resulted in conflict. In this instance that conflict was inevitable.

### **Lack of Shared Values/Vision**

According to International Business Machines (IBM) chairman Louis Gerstner, vision is “not something you do by writing memos. You’ve got to appeal to

people's emotions. They've got to buy in with their hearts and their bellies and not just their minds" (in Lohr, 1994, p. 1). Evans (1996) says of vision, "What matters most about a vision is how much it matters. A vision's main function is to inspire people and to concentrate their efforts on the pursuit of a meaningful common agenda" (p. 207). Perhaps the most important missing link at Blewbury for significant cultural change was a lack of shared vision.

When asked to explain the vision for Blewbury the majority of teacher and parent respondents answered that they were unsure of Dr. Callaghan's vision. They did report however that Dr. Callaghan wanted the students at Blewbury to score proficient on state tests and the school to achieve *School of Distinction* status. It was interesting that these goals were expressed as Dr. Callaghan's goals and not the school community's goals. These ambivalent responses were a clear indication that the school community had no "buy-in" for the goals of the new administration.

Because of the serious dysfunctional state of Blewbury, it was crucial that the school community come together emotionally around a vision for the school. Given the multitude of problems they had to face, the faculty and administration needed a common purpose, a shared agenda, to bond them together. While Dr. Callaghan and Mr. Gunn were firmly committed to personal visions they could easily espouse, their visions though similar were not the same. Dr. Callaghan envisioned a school where she would feel comfortable educating her nieces and nephews. Mr. Gunn envisioned a school where students would be happy and feel safe, and everyone would be headed in the same direction. With such principled, personal, and emotional expectations for the school, it is distressing that these sentiments weren't transmitted to faculty

members who at times expressed skepticism over Dr. Callaghan's real desire to be a part of Blewbury.

It is understandable that Dr. Callaghan didn't have the luxury of time for the faculty to go through the stages of collaborative vision building. Blewbury was infested with challenges that needed quick attention. However, teachers did need a clearly defined and often repeated anchor that could resonate and serve as a "touchstone" for faculty and students alike (Evans, 1996, p. 212). A common motto could have given the Blewbury school community a purpose and adhesive to keep them focused - not an external focus such as an accountability agenda, but an enunciated purpose based on ethical principles of what is right for children.

When unpopular political goals are identified as driving a school's agenda, teachers become cynical and negative emotion is generated. If teachers are asked to examine their core values about children and to commit to equity of opportunity for disadvantaged students, a different scenario occurs. Teachers are reminded of their initial motivation to enter the profession; old idealism resurfaces and teachers are emotionally charged.

This energy of purpose and commitment was missing at Blewbury. Dr. Callaghan could get quite emotionally agitated when talking about situations in which she found the students. But her strong emotions did not infect others in the school. The school faculty suffered from a lack of significant and emotionally charged purpose. People will not alter their values and beliefs to meet a political agenda. People will search their consciousness however when ethically and morally driven to

do so. Blewbury desperately needed inspiration and integrity infused into its social conscience. Evans (1996) opines,

The value of a vision is not just to clarify goals and plot a strategy but to inspire followers. To change, people must be moved. This requires not just an idea but an advocate. Change begins not just with a goal but with a leader who communicates, enlisting the organization's members in the pursuit of a compelling agenda. (p. 201).

If Dr. Callaghan is going to be successful in effecting cultural change at Blewbury, she will have to impact faculty beliefs and assumptions about equity and excellence for the students and clearly communicate the teachers' roles in ensuring their attainment. If she could find a way to infect the faculty with her emotional commitment to the students there, a strong likelihood exists that a core group would follow.

### **Summary**

Blewbury Middle School is one of scores of schools in this country that have been impacted by poverty and changing demographics over the last few decades. A declining economic base and immigration have left the school with a majority of its students on free or reduced lunch along with the challenges associated with low wealth. Many students are being raised by young, single mothers that have to work two jobs to make ends meet. Crime and drugs pervade the neighborhood, and students are not immune to these negative societal issues. In the past the school's plight was overlooked by the local boards of education, but accountability measures with threats of sanctions have focused new attention on the Blewbury situation.

Dr. Maryann Callaghan and Mr. John Gunn requested administrative positions at Blewbury, expecting to find a school at risk. Their objective was to address low achievement with a stated goal of impacting the school's culture to make it a more positive environment for students. Instead of finding a school in need of refocusing, they found a totally dysfunctional school with all systems broken. Although their first sixteen months were filled with seemingly insurmountable challenges, the new administration shook the status quo and made many needed improvements. The school today is physically more attractive, and it functions more effectively and efficiently. Students move through the building in an orderly fashion and parents report satisfaction with the changes.

Dr. Callaghan herself would be the first to admit that the school has a long way to go before it becomes an effective middle school. The teaching staff is comprised mainly of lateral entry hires. After two summers with vacancies exceeding twenty slots, enough certified teachers willing to accept the challenges of Blewbury were not to be found. Effective classroom management is still the most pressing concern along with improved instructional strategies that invite active student participation in their own learning. Dr. Callaghan exercised her political clout in the system to enlist resources to hire instructional facilitators that offer continuous support to teachers in each core discipline. More staff development is being offered during school hours, and teachers are encouraged to take risks in trying new techniques.

The teaching force in the school still finds it difficult to maintain the energy required to make Blewbury work although teachers are more focused than they were

in the beginning. Dr. Callaghan clearly articulates her expectations when interviewing candidates and is blatantly honest in explaining the challenges of teaching at Blewbury. Unfortunately there still is no motto or slogan that unites the teachers around a vision. Although teachers verbally express a commitment to the school, there are only a few teachers who demonstrate an emotional, visceral attachment to an ethical purpose. Even though attitudes and values are discussed in small groups, there is no public rallying to a cause for children. Definitive, observable, positive changes in the climate at Blewbury have occurred; deep seated cultural changes are yet to materialize. However eighteen months is a short time in which to expect change in deeply rooted attitudes and beliefs. Dr. Callaghan and Mr. Gunn are uniquely talented individuals who feel strong emotional attachments to the students at Blewbury. Cultural change is an evolutionary process. Perhaps another doctoral student will take a look in five years.

### **Implications for Future Study**

#### **Redistricting and School Composition**

Blewbury Middle School is part of a school system that several years ago underwent merger between a county and city system. The former county system consisted of four major attendance zones, three of which were predominantly inhabited by Caucasian families. Over 90% of the students who attend schools in those three zones today are white. Blewbury and the high school it feeds are predominantly African-American and Hispanic. The high school has so few white students that “white” didn’t register as a subgroup in the federal accountability program, “No Child Left Behind.” Blewbury and its sister high school are

consistently under-enrolled while the schools in the other zones struggle with overcrowding. The lowest performing and most challenged schools in the system are located in the same zone as Blewbury.

Since merger the discussion of redistricting has surfaced several times. To embark upon such an endeavor would tax the political will of the local board of education members who are elected countywide, not by district. Redistricting is not a popular notion in the former county neighborhoods, some of which are characterized by racist attitudes.

However the general consensus among school administrators on school composition is that a school predominated by students at risk becomes a school that is difficult to maintain. Parent participation is limited and financial support from fund raising falls behind other non-impacted schools. When there is a predominance of students needing individual attention, teachers cannot offer as much one-on-one attention as in schools where the at-risk population is in the minority. School systems such as Wake County in North Carolina have enjoyed tremendous success in closing the Achievement Gap by monitoring and engineering school composition. Research on school composition could inform policymakers and help them make the case for or against redistricting to achieve racial and socio-economic balance.

### **Teacher Assignments**

Prior to the 1980's and the advent of site-based management, central office personnel managed teacher interviews, hires, and teaching assignments. With school accountability and the decentralization of power to principals, teacher selection shifted to the building level. Central offices still process applications, but building

administrators recruit and choose their own staffs. Site-based hiring more than any other practice has led to the chasm between the have and the have-not schools.

In an environment typified by a chronic teacher shortage, teachers have a decided advantage because schools compete for their services. With experienced and certified teachers having many options, challenged schools suffer. Since salaries are based on experience and education, pay is the same if a teacher chooses a successful school or a challenged school. In fact, with accountability bonuses more likely going to the less challenged schools, teachers realize no benefit and may actually lose money if they select a more difficult teaching assignment.

As a result the schools needing the most experienced teachers are left with lateral entry hires and emergency permits. In some instances teachers can't even be secured and permanent substitutes without any training teach classes for extended periods.

In order to alleviate the additional challenge of untrained staff in the most needy schools, central offices should reassume control in hiring teachers. Either needy schools could enjoy staffing before other schools were allowed to hire, or teachers wanting to double dip after retirement should be required to work in at risk schools. Further research on retention and recruitment for hard-to-staff schools could inform the field.

### **Extended School Year**

At Blewbury Middle School the vast majority of the teachers, even those with experience and certification, were not prepared to deal with the challenging disciplinary issues that surfaced. Nor were they equipped in the type of instructional

practices that research has proven to be more effective with students characterized by poverty. In order to address these deficits, staff at Blewbury needed extensive staff development. However many of the young teachers were committed to after-school jobs or college courses where they were clearing lateral entry requirements or working on advanced degrees. As a result teachers struggled throughout the year without the requisite skills needed to be successful with the clientele they were teaching. Rather than atypical, the situation at Blewbury is representative of other schools staffed with young teachers.

In order to address the need for staff training, the state should consider extended school years for schools that are struggling. The extra months of employment could be devoted to extensive staff development focused on the specific pedagogical and content needs of the teachers in the affected schools. The additional salary could also serve as a recruiting draw.

In addition to teacher preparation, extended school years could benefit the students in struggling schools. Summer academies, summer enrichment, and transition programs could be offered to students to enhance the regular instructional program. The efficacy of extended school year opportunities for teachers and students in low performing schools is an area for further study that would inform the educational community.

### **Personal Reflection**

The journey to the completion of this dissertation study began a little over four years ago with a cohort at the Department of Public Instruction. The oldest of the group, occasionally I questioned why I would embark on such a mission when most

people my age were retiring to golf courses and the coast. At times I felt as if I would never make it to the destination, but alas I am almost there, and the trip was well worth the travails.

I feel as if the experience has been quite valuable to me professionally as well as personally. My job assignment requires me to lead change efforts in instructional practices. My extensive reading on change has been quite insightful in helping me understand the reluctance in teacher attitudes toward new techniques. In the future I will attempt to attach emotional importance and ideas of equity to my staff development activities.

I have come to learn a lot about myself throughout these many months. I found that I am a student at heart – my curiosity has never been greater and my love for learning never more intense. Each new experience still seems fresh, and I question those in my profession or any other who think they learned it all so many years ago.

The skepticism and cynicism of many educators exasperates me. Why didn't those folks study business or engineering, some profession less likely to directly impact the minds and souls of our children? Thankfully the innocence of youth overlooks the petulance and irascible nature of many of the veteran teachers.

The dissertation, though interesting and compelling, was the most difficult assignment I have ever encountered. The more work I accomplished, the more I found I needed to do. I am convinced that if I read it over one hundred times, each sitting would find me revising it once again. Finally I had to just shut down the computer and let it go.

I was confounded during data collection by the eagerness of some folks to share their stories while others were adamant to keep quiet. I found that I am a good listener; I can probe for a deeper understanding. At times I felt I had missed my calling. Maybe I should have been a forensic scientist like Quincy or the investigators of CSI. I wanted to uncover the whole story and could not be satisfied until I was able to base my conclusions on a myriad of incontrovertible evidence.

Finding the time to do the writing was challenging in that I am at that stage where my responsibilities extend both to an older as well as a younger generation. These sandwich years are precious and to lose valuable opportunities with either mother or son entails quite a sacrifice. However they along with my husband were supportive, and my writing became an obsession for us all.

In the writing itself I found that I enjoyed telling a story. Ethnography I am sure was my best option for a research endeavor. Except for “allowed, reported, commented, etc.” and the multitude of other choices I substituted for “said,” the others words seemed to flow.

Particular obstacles were changing jobs and advisers during the process. The snow of 2003, a son’s wedding, and a precious dog’s paralysis and rehabilitation also sidetracked me along the way. My only real dissertation crisis was the day my computer froze with Chapter Five all but finished. But my 75-year old mom who knows nothing about technology scanned the yellow pages and found a technician to get me going again.

There were times during the journey that as a part of this reflection, I would have suggested a change in the process. However now that it is over, I think I

understand the institution of the dissertation. Universities have weathered well because they have changed little over time. Who would I be to question the ritual? I feel that as a result of this experience I have become more discerning with research. I am less gullible and more exacting in my own descriptions.

But, somehow through these challenges, I persevered and finally it is done. My grandmother, from whom I'm told my studiousness and scholastic ability descended, always pushed me to excel. She would be proud.

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## **Appendices**

**NC STATE UNIVERSITY**

Sponsored Programs and  
Regulatory Compliance  
Campus Box 7514  
1 Leazar Hall  
Raleigh, NC 27695-7514

919.515.7200  
919.515.7721 (fax)

From: Debra A. Paxton, IRB Administrator  
North Carolina State University  
Institutional Review Board

Date: May 29, 2003

Project Title: Sowing the Seed for Change: A Case Study of Blewbury Middle School

IRB#: 120-03-5

Dear Ms. Garland:

The project listed above has been reviewed by the North Carolina Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, and is approved for one year. **This protocol expires on May 22, 2004, and will need continuing review before that date.**

NOTE:

1. This board complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations. For NCSU the Assurance Number is: FWA00003429; the IRB Number is: IRB00000330.
2. The IRB must be notified of any changes that are made to this study.
3. Your approval for this study lasts for one year from the review date. If your study extends beyond that time, including data analysis, you must obtain continuing review from the IRB.

Please provide your faculty sponsor with a copy of this letter. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Debra Paxton  
NCSU IRB

### **Initial Interview Questions for Teachers:**

- For the record, what do you teach and how long have you been at Broadview Middle? How many years have you taught? Have you ever taught in another school? How would you compare them?
- How would you characterize the climate of Broadview Middle School?
- What kind of training have you participated in this year and how did it meet your needs?
- How would you describe the attitude of teachers in staff development training?
- How would you describe the leadership team and their effectiveness in supporting you?
- How would you describe the students?
- What is your vision for the school?
- How would you describe your teaching style?
- Could you relate your parent involvement since the beginning of the school year?

### **Administration Questions**

- For the record, what is your position and how long have you been at Broadview Middle? How many years have you been in administration? Have you ever been in administration in a previous school? How would you compare them?
- How would you describe the climate at Broadview Middle School?
- How would you describe the attitude of the teachers toward each other and toward the students?
- What have you done this year to support the teachers in their instructional needs?
- How would you describe the students and their parents?
- What is your vision for the school?
- How would you describe your leadership style?

### **Parent Questions**

- How would you describe Broadview Middle School?
- How does your child describe the school?
- Can you give me examples of communication efforts on the part of the school?
- Would you recommend this school to a friend? Why or why not?
- How would you describe the teachers and administrators at this school?
- How do you feel when you come into the school?

### **Participants from Outside the School**

- What is your relationship to Broadview Middle School?
- How would you characterize the climate of the school?
- How has it changed over time?

**North Carolina State University  
INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

*Sowing the Seed for Change: A Case Study of Blewbury* (fictitious name) Middle School

Rebecca Garland, Principal Investigator

Dr. Ken Brinson, Faculty Sponsor

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to examine school climate and culture at Broadview Middle School. The study will focus on instructional strategies employed by teachers, leadership styles, faculty beliefs about learning, and how the school fits within the community.

**INFORMATION**

Faculty and staff at the school will be asked to complete a survey anonymously and voluntarily. Some teachers will also be asked to participate in an interview. Those selected will be chosen in order to balance participation among a variety of subgroups such as subject taught, grade level, experience, race, gender, etc. Those teachers and staff members will be provided with a consent form. Participation is totally voluntary. Anyone not selected for interview will be included upon request. Each interview will last about 45 minutes and will be audiotaped.

**RISKS**

The researcher will make every effort to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Once the study is published there is always a chance that someone will recognize the school even though a fictitious name will be used. Any reference to individuals will be general in nature to further protect subjects from identification. All notes and tapes will be destroyed after they are transcribed. All records will be stored in a locked cabinet at home during the study.

**BENEFITS**

Subjects in the study will benefit by having the opportunity to share their experiences of working in an at-risk school. The interview will provide a forum for participants to share their perceptions about Broadview and its unique issues. Also, the field of study about at-risk schools and school reform will benefit from a cultural approach to school improvement.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to the person conducting the study unless you specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study.

**COMPENSATION**

For participating in this study you will not receive any monetary compensation but you should feel some satisfaction in knowing you have contributed to the educational field of study on school reform and unique needs of at-risk schools.

**CONTACT**

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Rebecca Garland at 548 Weathergreen Drive, Raleigh, 27615, (919/870-1347) or 336/570-6090 extension 206. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Matthew Zingraff, Chair of the NCSU IRB for the Use of Human Subjects in Research Committee, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/513-1834) or Mr. Matthew Ronning, Assistant Vice Chancellor, Research Administration, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/513-2148).

**PARTICIPATION**

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

**CONSENT**

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Subject's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**North Carolina State University  
INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

*Sowing the Seed for Change: A Case Study of Blewbury* (fictitious name) Middle School

Rebecca Garland, Principal Investigator

Dr. Ken Brinson, Faculty Sponsor

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to examine school climate and culture at Broadview Middle School. The study will focus on instructional strategies employed by teachers, leadership styles, faculty beliefs about learning, and how the school fits within the community.

**INFORMATION**

By random selection you were invited to participate in this study. You will be asked several questions during an interview. The questions will focus on the culture and climate at Broadview Middle School. The interview will be audiotaped and should take about 45 minutes. You will be provided with a consent form. Participation is totally voluntary.

**RISKS**

The researcher will make every effort to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Once the study is published there is always a chance that someone will recognize the school even though a fictitious name will be used. Any reference to individuals will be general in nature to further protect subjects from identification. All notes and tapes will be destroyed after they are transcribed. All records will be stored in a locked cabinet at home during the study.

**BENEFITS**

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benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

**CONSENT**

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Subject's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Rebecca Garland**  
548 Weathergreen Drive  
Raleigh, North Carolina 27615

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

As part of my doctoral program in Education Leadership at North Carolina State University, I am conducting a research project at Broadview Middle School on school culture and climate. Teachers, administrators, staff and parents associated with Broadview are invited to participate. Your name was among fifteen parents chosen through a random selection process.

If you agree I would like to ask you some questions in a formal interview that will be audiotaped. The interview should take about 45 minutes. You will be provided with a Consent Form that describes the conditions of the study, including steps taken to protect your identity. Your participation is totally voluntary.

I will be calling you next week to see if you would like to participate. You may at that time, or before, tell me you would rather decline. You are under no obligation to participate in this study. However, should you agree to participate, we will set up a time and place for the interview. Thank you for your consideration.

Should you wish to contact me, you may reach me at 336.570.6090 extension 206. My phone is equipped with voice mail so please feel free to leave a message.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Garland, Doctoral Candidate  
North Carolina State University

## OHI-M

**DIRECTIONS: THE FOLLOWING ARE STATEMENTS ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL. PLEASE INDICATE THE EXTENT TO WHICH EACH STATEMENT CHARACTERIZES YOUR SCHOOL BY CIRCLING THE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE.**

**R0=RARELY OCCURS SO=SOMETIMES OCCURS O=OFTEN OCCURS VFO=VERY FREQUENTLY OCCURS**

1. The principal explores all sides of topics and admits that other options exist..... RO SO O VFO
2. Students make provisions to acquire extra help from teachers..... RO SO O VFO
3. The principal gets what he or she asks for from superiors..... RO SO O VFO
4. The principal discusses classroom issues with teachers..... RO SO O VFO
5. The principal accepts questions without appearing to snub or quash the teacher.... RO SO O VFO
6. Extra materials are available if requested..... RO SO O VFO
7. Students neglect to complete homework..... RO SO O VFO
8. The school is vulnerable to outside pressures..... RO SO O VFO
9. The principal is able to influence the actions of his or her superiors..... RO SO O VFO
10. The principal treats all faculty members as his or her equal..... RO SO O VFO
11. Teachers are provided with adequate materials for their classrooms..... RO SO O VFO
12. Teachers in this school like each other..... RO SO O VFO
13. Community demands are accepted even when they are not consistent  
with the educational program..... RO SO O VFO
14. The principal lets faculty know what is expected of them..... RO SO O VFO
15. Teachers receive necessary classroom supplies..... RO SO O VFO
16. Students respect others who get good grades..... RO SO O VFO
17. Good grades are important to the students of this school..... RO SO O VFO
18. Teachers feel pressure from the community..... RO SO O VFO
19. The principal's recommendations are given serious  
consideration by his or her superiors..... RO SO O VFO
20. Supplementary materials are available for classroom use..... RO SO O VFO
21. Teachers exhibit friendliness to each other..... RO SO O VFO
22. Students seek extra work so they can get good grades..... RO SO O VFO

23. Select citizen groups are influential with the board.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
24. The principals looks out for the personal welfare of faculty members.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
25. The school is open to the whims of the public.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
26. A few vocal parents can change school policy.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
27. Students try hard to improve on previous work.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
28. Teachers accomplish their jobs with enthusiasm.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
29. The learning environment is orderly and serious.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
30. The principal is friendly and approachable.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
31. Teachers show commitment to their students.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
32. Teachers are indifferent to each other.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
33. Teachers are protected from unreasonable community and parental demands.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
34. The principal is able to work well with the superintendent.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
35. The principal is willing to make changes.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
36. Teachers have access to needed instructional materials.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
37. Teachers in this school are cool and aloof to each other.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
38. Teachers in this school believe that their students have the ability to achieve academically.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
39. The principal is understanding when personal concerns cause teachers to arrive late or leave early.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
40. Our school gets its fair share of resources from the district.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
41. The principal is rebuffed by the superintendent.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
42. Teachers volunteer to help each other.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
43. The principal is effective in securing the superintendent's approval for new programs or activities.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
44. Academically oriented students in this school are ridiculed by their peers.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
45. Teachers do favors for each other.....	RO	SO	O	VFO

## OCDQ-RM

**DIRECTIONS: THE FOLLOWING ARE STATEMENTS ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL. PLEASE INDICATE THE EXTENT TO WHICH EACH STATEMENT CHARACTERIZES YOUR SCHOOL BY CIRCLING THE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE.**

**RO=RARELY OCCURS SO=SOMETIMES OCCURS O=OFTEN OCCURS  
VFO=VERY FREQUENTLY OCCURS**

1. The principal compliments teachers.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
2. Teachers have parties for each other .....	RO	SO	O	VFO
3. Teachers are burdened with busywork.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
4. Routine duties interfere with the job of teaching.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
5. Teachers "go the extra mile" with their students.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
6. Teachers are committed to helping their students.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
7. Teachers help students on their own time.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
8. Teachers interrupt other teachers who are talking in staff meetings.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
9. The principal rules with an iron fist.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
10. The principal encourages teacher autonomy .....	RO	SO	O	VFO
11. The principal goes out of his/her way to help teachers.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
12. The principal is available after school to help teachers when assistance is needed.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
13. Teachers invite other faculty members to visit them at home.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
14. Teachers socialize with each other on a regular basis.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
15. The principal uses constructive criticism.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
16. Teachers who have personal problems receive support from other staff members.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
17. Teachers stay after school to tutor students who need help.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
18. Teachers accept additional duties if students will benefit.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
19. The principal looks out for the personal welfare of the faculty.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
20. The principal supervises teachers closely.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
21. Teachers leave school immediately after school is over.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
22. Most of the teachers here accept the faults of their colleagues.....	RO	SO	O	VFO

23. Teachers exert group pressure on non-conforming faculty members.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
24. The principal listens to and accepts teachers' suggestions.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
25. Teachers have fun socializing together during school time.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
26. Teachers ramble when they talk at faculty meetings.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
27. Teachers are rude to other staff members.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
28. Teachers make "wise cracks" to each other during meetings.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
29. Teachers mock teachers who are different.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
30. Teachers don't listen to other teachers.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
31. Teachers like to hear gossip about other staff members.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
32. The principal treats teachers as equals.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
33. The principal corrects teachers' mistakes.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
34. Teachers provide strong social support for colleagues.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
35. Teachers respect the professional competence of their colleagues...	RO	SO	O	VFO
36. The principal goes out of his/her way to show appreciation to teachers.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
37. The principal keeps a close check on sign-in times.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
38. The principal monitors everything teachers do.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
39. Administrative paperwork is burdensome at this school.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
40. Teachers help and support each other.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
41. The principal closely checks teacher activities.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
42. Assigned non-teaching duties are excessive.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
43. The interactions between team/unit members are cooperative.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
44. The principal accepts and implements ideas suggested by faculty members.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
45. Members of teams/units consider other members to be their friends.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
46. Extra help is available to students who need help.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
47. Teachers volunteer to sponsor after school activities .....	RO	SO	O	VFO
48. Teachers spend time after school with students who have individual problems.....	RO	SO	O	VFO

49. The principal sets an example by working hard himself/herself.....	RO	SO	O	VFO
50. Teachers are polite to one another.....	RO	SO	O	VFO

## **Abingdon School System Parent Survey 2000 – 2001**

1. An atmosphere of mutual trust exists between the school staff and parents.
2. I am informed of my child's progress regularly.
3. Sufficient opportunities are available for parent involvement.
4. Homework assigned is appropriate and clear to students.
5. The school facilities are adequate to support the instructional program.
6. My child has access to a computer at home.
7. Discipline is handled fairly at this school.
8. The faculty and staff share a sense of commitment to the school goals.
9. The school system is committed to school improvement and academic excellence.
10. We should have lower class sizes in our schools.
11. I feel welcome when I visit the school.
12. The school promotes good parent-teacher communication.
13. The school is supportive of parent concerns.
14. My child is challenged academically
15. The basic "to-and-from" school transportation services meet the needs of my child.
16. Rules for student behavior are consistently enforced.
17. The school administration is highly visible throughout the school.
18. Funding for our school system is adequate.
19. The school appears well organized and efficiently run.
20. The school does a good job of letting me know about school activities and events.
21. My child's test results are reviewed and explained to me.
22. The school building is neat, clean, and in good repair.
23. The school administration has high standards for student achievement.
24. The school's programs meet the needs of special students (learning disabled, gifted, etc.).
25. Teachers in the school show respect and concern for my child.
26. Students have sufficient access to computers and sufficient instruction in their use.
27. Students in the school have sufficient instructional materials.
28. Drug and/or alcohol use is not a serious problem at this school.
29. The school promotes and emphasizes character education.
30. Teachers are available to give students the assistance they need on their assignments.

31. The school rules are clear and fairly enforced.
32. The school administration has high expectations for student behavior.
33. The school makes every effort to maintain a safe environment.
34. Varied learning environments are provided to accommodate different teaching and learning styles.
35. Weapons are not tolerated on the campus of this school.
36. The school shows sensitivity to issues of racial and ethnic fairness.
37. Teachers have high expectations for students.
38. The central office is responsive to my questions and concerns.
39. District-wide facilities are adequate for students to achieve.
40. Renovations should be completed before construction of new schools.

The overall grade I would give this school is:

1. Excellent
2. Good
3. Fair
4. Poor

The overall grade I would give this school system is:

1. Excellent
2. Good
3. Fair
4. Poor

## **Abingdon School System Staff Survey 2000 – 2001**

1. An atmosphere of mutual trust exists between the school staff and parents.
2. Decisions are reached through a process in which staff members' views are considered.
3. Computers are integrated into my classroom curriculum.
4. Drug and/or alcohol use is not a serious problem at this school.
5. The central office is responsive to my questions and concerns.
6. Student discipline is administered fairly and appropriately.
7. The principal and assistant principal(s) set high expectations for staff performance.
8. Teachers use a variety of teaching methods and strategies.
9. Teachers are encouraged to communicate concerns, questions and ideas.
10. The school has adequate instructional supplies to support the instructional program.
11. Copiers and printers at the school meet my needs.
12. Administrators in the school handle discipline problems effectively.
13. Administrators provide constructive feedback to teachers based on in-class observations.
14. The school leadership team functions effectively.
15. The faculty and staff share a sense of commitment to the school goals.
16. The principal and assistant principal(s) work with the entire staff to ensure clear communication within the school.
17. The *Standard Course of Study* is used as the guide for instruction in this school.
18. The school building is neat, bright, clean and comfortable
19. Rules for student behavior are consistently enforced.
20. The principal is an effective instructional leader.
21. The school district is committed to academic excellence.
22. Faculty and staff feel that they make important contributions to this school.
23. The school provides sufficient opportunities for parental involvement.
24. There is a strong academic emphasis and high expectations at the school.
25. The temperature in my work area is usually comfortable. .
26. School rules and expectations are clearly defined, stated, and communicated.

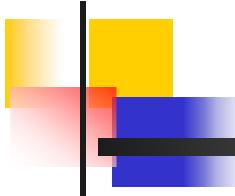
27. The principal and assistant principal(s) are highly visible throughout the school.
28. System-wide staff development is appropriate and well-organized.
29. Funding for the school system is adequate.
30. The school shows sensitivity to issues of racial and ethnic fairness.
31. Teachers have high expectations of students.
32. District-wide facilities are adequate for students to achieve.
33. Renovations should be completed before construction of new schools.
34. Understanding cultural diversity is important in educating our children.
35. Faculty and staff effectively cooperate in trying to achieve school goals.
36. Character education has an impact on the behavior of the students in this school.
37. I am kept informed when important decisions are made about the programs in this school.
38. The school is a safe and secure place in which to work.

The overall grade I would give this school is:

1. Excellent
2. Good
3. Fair
4. Poor

The overall grade I would give this school system is:

1. Excellent
2. Good
3. Fair
4. Poor



## So What about Culture?

- The importance of establishing a vision cannot be overstated.
- Capacity building and organizational learning cannot be postponed.
- Encouragement is a better motivator than constant monitoring.
- Goals, purpose, and commitment must be shared throughout the organization.
- Leadership must take priority over management.