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# Becoming a Learning System that Maximizes the Modes of Professional Learning: A Change Leadership Plan in a Middle School Setting

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Becoming a Learning System that Maximizes the Modes of Professional Learning:

A Change Leadership Plan in a Middle School Setting

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This document was created as *one* part of the three-part dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership EdD is a professional practice degree program (Shulman et al., 2006). For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement three major projects, one each year, within their school or district with a focus on professional practice. The three projects are:

- Program Evaluation
- Change Leadership Plan
- Policy Advocacy Document

For the **Program Evaluation** candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The “program” can be a current initiative; a grant project; a common practice; or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning.

In the **Change Leadership Plan** candidates develop a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement, and have a clear target in mind. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner et al., 2006).

In the **Policy Advocacy Document** candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane and social critics, moral leaders, and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995).

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper follows a program evaluation conducted at Hamlin Middle School. It begins with the premise that the Modes of Professional Learning function somewhat independently of each other and therefore, Hamlin Middle School fails to function as a learning system. The goal of the research is to establish a set of structures that leverages each of the four modes to their greatest advantage. The methodology is mixed-method, utilizing quantitative results from the Illinois 5Essential Survey and qualitative data gathered during focus groups convened to discuss the survey data. Results suggested the following:

- A culture of compliance negatively impacts collective responsibility and school commitment.
- Perceptions of peer competence impact trust between teachers.
- Common teacher plan time is critical to learning systems.
- New standards documents have necessitated significant teacher professional learning, which teachers perceive might lead to burnout.

The paper concludes with strategies and actions for strengthening the learning system at Hamlin Middle School.

## PREFACE

In January of 2015, I began my doctoral studies in Educational Leadership at National-Louis University. At that time, I was an Instructional Specialist at Hamlin Middle School (pseudonym). My job responsibilities included supporting the professional development of teachers in English Language Arts and Social Studies. Prior to my doctoral studies, my district had transitioned to the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Mathematics. The transition involved teachers writing new curricula, aligning resources, and attempting to shift instructional practices to match the new standards.

From my perspective as an Instructional Specialist, I observed many teachers meeting these tasks with frustration, confusion, anxiety, and resentment. In my opinion, teachers were being asked to do something they did not know how to do. There was a lack of adequate professional development to prepare them for the tasks they were being held accountable for completing.

On the other hand, I observed the teachers who took personal responsibility for their own learning and showed initiative in securing ways to develop professionally weathered the storm much better. I was amazed at how little effort some teachers put into their own learning, and strongly believed teachers, as promoters of learning, needed to do a better job of promoting their own learning. I clearly remember a colleague of mine, saying, “We have been asking for years for professional development on teaching reading in the content areas, but we have never gotten it.” My unspoken response was, “Do you mean for years you have not known how to do your job and did nothing about it?”

My whole life, I have been someone who has taken initiative for my own learning. In the summer prior to beginning the doctoral program, I enrolled in an online course through a Harvard extension called Leaders of Learning. This Massive Online Open Course, or MOOC, was taught by leading educational theorist, Richard Elmore. This class introduced me to the Modes of Learning Framework, which organized learning across two continua. According to Dr. Elmore, learning tends to be either hierarchically driven, when content is packaged in a pre-defined sequence and disseminated from an expert to a novice, or distributed, where the learner takes responsibility for organizing learning. Learning also occurs individually or collectively. When arranged in a matrix, these continua form four “modes” of learning: Hierarchical-Individual, Hierarchical-Collective, Distributed-Individual, and Distributed-Collective. In reality, the modes do not function in isolation of one another, however learners show preferences for different modes of learning for different purposes.

I began to think about how the Modes of Learning might be adapted to describe Modes of *Professional Learning*. I thought about who is responsible for designing professional learning experiences. How much responsibility rests with the school district, and how much should teachers be expected to pursue on their own? I thought about whether or not teachers learn better in groups, or working independently.

In the first year of my three-part dissertation, I used the Modes of Learning Framework to understand teachers’ perceptions on these questions. I concluded there is a need for mode of professional learning within a comprehensive professional development program. In the second year, I researched change efforts necessary to ensure that each mode of professional learning contributed to the school functioning as a learning system

which promotes continuous improvement. I came to understand that change is a complex process that requires thoughtful responses across a variety of contexts. In my final year, I advocated for a policy to implement Standards for Professional Learning. I believe that by having a shared understanding of what constitutes high-quality professional learning, schools and districts will make more progress towards improving learning for students.

I began this doctoral journey as a teacher. In my final semester the program, I became a middle school principal. Being in a position of legitimate authority means I have a lot of responsibility in helping teachers grow professionally, supporting both hierarchical and distributed modes of learning, as well as encouraging teachers to learn individually and collectively. I am extremely grateful that I had the opportunity to read, write, and think deeply on this responsibility during my three years of dissertation work.



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## SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

In his bestselling book, *Good to Great*, Jim Collins (2001) recounted the tale of a little hedgehog. Although a simple creature, the hedgehog is never defeated by the more cunning fox. Every time the fox moves to pounce on the waddling hedgehog, the hedgehog transforms herself into a tight little ball with sharp, protruding spikes. The moral to this story is that while the hedgehog does only one thing, she does it incredibly well.

Collins used this parable to describe what makes some organizations great. In short, great organizations know their singular purpose and fully commit to it. The singular purpose of schools is to promote learning. Therefore, the “hedgehog concept” for improving schools is deceptively simple: in order to improve learning, all people within the system need to *learn how* to improve learning. When viewed from this perspective, improving the way in which teachers learn is the singular solution to improving student learning. The school must function as a *learning system*.

In this change leadership plan, I will utilize a systematic approach to changing teacher professional learning. By applying the approach developed by Wagner et al (2007), I will discuss the current context, conditions, culture, and competencies that relate to professional learning at Hamlin Middle School. I will review the literature and synthesize what other researchers and theorists have said about the school as a learning system. I will share quantitative and qualitative data and discuss how my interpretation of those findings deepened my understanding of the need for change. I will describe a vision of success to result after the change is implemented. I will conclude by describing

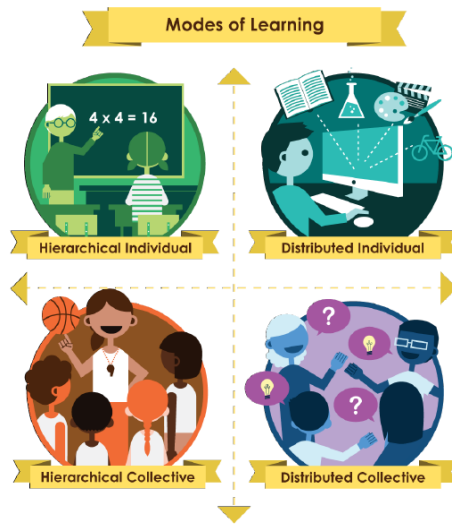
strategies and actions that can be used to bridge the the reality of my school as is with my vision of it to be.

### **Background on Modes of Learning Framework**

This change leadership plan is a follow-up to a program evaluation of teacher professional learning that was completed at Hamlin Middle School in November 2015. The program evaluation used the Modes of Professional Learning Framework and assessment. The assessment was adapted from an open-source online course called Leaders of Learning that was presented by Richard Elmore (HarvardX, 2014). The purpose of the assessment was to sort teachers' perceptions of professional learning along two continua. The first continuum is hierarchical-distributed. In hierarchical learning experiences, learning is structured in a sequenced progression, and knowledge is transmitted from an expert to a novice. In distributed learning experiences, the learner is responsible for what and how learning takes place.

The second continuum is individual-collective. Individual learning experiences focus on the learner in isolation, whereas collective experiences focus on group learning and shared knowledge. When the two continua intersect, they form four modes of learning. The four modes of learning are represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Modes of Learning Framework (HarvardX, 2014)



While the graphic suggests that each mode is distinct, in reality learners move fluidly between modes depending on the context.

### Problem

While the results of my program evaluation revealed that each Mode of Professional Learning is present at Hamlin Middle School (Cremont, 2015), it is my belief that each mode operates somewhat independently. Moreover, 76.3% of teachers surveyed in the program evaluation primarily viewed professional development the district's responsibility to provide, not teachers' personal responsibility to seek out. As a result, Hamlin Middle School fails to operate as a learning system. According to Hirsh, Psencik, and Brown (2014),

All educators [in a learning system] commit to continuous learning and to applying that continuous learning to their own and others' performances. Educators at the district and school levels share responsibility for their own learning and for ensuring great teaching for every student every day. (p. 5)

Peter Senge (1990) described a similar concept in his writing about *learning organizations*. According to Senge, a learning organization is one in which “people continuously expand their capacities to create the results they truly desire” (p. 3). Therefore, the process of school improvement is by definition a learning process. I believe that unless explicit attention is paid to the ways in which people within the system *learn* to improve, school improvement is unlikely. In this change leadership plan, I will attempt to address this problem.

### **Rationale**

My whole life, I have been a self-directed learner. From trying to learn as much as I could about dinosaurs in the first grade, to designing my own bachelor’s degree in college, I have always valued being in control of both what I learned and how I learned it. When I took the Modes of Learning Assessment (HarvardX, 2014) in preparation for my program evaluation, I discovered that my preferred mode of learning is individual-distributed. These results, unsurprisingly, suggest that I prefer to learn by myself and to be in control of what and how I learn. The Strengthsfinder 2.0 Assessment (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001), an online tool to help people identify their top five talents, reveals that my primary strength is *Learner*. This means that I enjoy the process of learning, not as a means to an end, but as a “deliberate journey from ignorance to competence” (n.p).

These characteristics have served me well in my role as an instructional specialist. With the shifts in education brought about by the new standards documents, including Common Core, Next Generation Science Standards, and the C3 Framework, there has been a steep learning curve for teachers. Although I am not a building principal, I do see my role as being one of the lead learners within the building (Fullan, 2014). I have spent

many hours reading books, researching strategies, taking online classes, and viewing webinars to better understand the changes required to address the shifting expectations for student learning. Doing so is the best way I know how to support my classroom teacher colleagues in teaching and learning.

My role as an instructional specialist has also positioned me to have a system-wide view of professional learning within my school. No matter how much I try to learn about methods to improve teaching and learning, I have learned that it is never the result of one person's work. I depend on collaborative relationships with my peers to work through ideas and gain insights about the practice of teaching. Professional learning that impacts an entire school must take place in the context of collaborative work environments. The process of sharing professional knowledge with the collective group is the process of whole-school improvement.

### **Goals**

The primary goal of this change plan is to establish a set of structures for professional learning that leverages the four modes of learning to the greatest extent possible. By doing so, Hamlin Middle School will become a learning organization. The process of school improvement is by definition a process of learning. Focusing on becoming a learning organization will result in professional learning that is more closely aligned with student learning goals and has a greater potential impact on student learning. While the graphic of the Modes of Learning Framework presents four distinct modes of learning, Elmore (HarvardX, 2014) acknowledged that learners move fluidly between the modes depending on the context. Each mode overlaps and plays a critical part in



developing a learning system. A more thorough discussion about the ways in which modes of learning overlap will be provided in the review of literature.

I hope to establish explicit structures for facilitating the flow of professional knowledge as a result of this change leadership plan, maximizing learning in each of the modes while ensuring that each works to support the other three. This will contribute to a collaborative work environment marked by a shared sense of responsibility and increased teacher-to-teacher trust (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010). By creating a collaborative learning environment for teachers, professional satisfaction and student achievement will increase (Johns, Kraft, & Papay, 2012). The outcome of fulfilling all these goals is the establishment of a learning system within the school that is better prepared to improve as an organization.

### **Setting**

Hamlin Middle School (pseudonym) is located in an urban setting about 10 miles west of a major midwestern city. All demographic data reported here is according to the 2015 Illinois School Report card. In 2015, Hamlin Middle School served 1,099 students in grades six, seven, and eight. Of those students, 89.1% were designated as low-income and qualified for free or reduced lunch. In 2015, the racial and ethnic makeup of the student body was as follows:

- Hispanic: 79.3%
- Black: 14%
- White: 4.5%
- Asian: 1.7%

Achievement data from 2015 Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) testing indicates that 34% of Hamlin Middle School students met or exceeded state standards for English Language Arts, compared with 38% of students statewide. That discrepancy was slightly broader in mathematics, as 20% of Hamlin Middle School students met or exceeded state standards compared with 28% statewide.

Because the focus of this change leadership plan is on teacher professional learning, it is also relevant to consider teacher and administrator demographic information. Data on teacher and administrator salary and education is collected at the district level. The majority of teachers in the school district (72.9%) hold a master's degree or higher. In 2015, the average teacher salary in the district was \$59,200, compared to the state average of \$62,600. For the last 10 consecutive years, the average teacher salary in the district has been lower than the state average, with the largest gap (of \$11,300) occurring in 2013. Despite the lower average salary, in 2015 Hamlin Middle School has a higher teacher retention rate (90.2%) than the state average (85%).

In 2015, the average salary for administrators in the district was \$118,000, compared with the state average of \$101,000. For 9 of the last 10 years, the average administrator salary in the district has been higher than the state average, with the largest gap (\$25,000) occurring in 2013. Hamlin Middle School has had three principals within the last six years.

## **SECTION TWO: ASSESSING THE 4 CS**

In thinking about my goal for school change, and to better understand the challenges associated with the change, I have applied a systematic approach described by Wagner et al. (2006). This approach prompts change leaders to consider the four arenas of change: context, conditions, culture, and competencies. In this section, I will describe the state of my school in each of these categories before the change plan was enacted.

### **Context**

When Wagner et. al (2006) referred to the context of change, they described “‘skill demands’ all students must meet to succeed as providers, learners, and citizens” (p. 104). Within the last 10 years, the “skill demands” set forth by new state standards documents have changed considerably. The Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts are designed to support students as they grow in capacity to be self-directed learners. According to the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers (2010), Common Core learners:

- Value independence
- Build strong content knowledge
- Comprehend as well as critique
- Value evidence
- Evaluate other points of view critically and constructively

The Next Generation Science Standards set forth similar goals. By integrating knowledge, practice, and concepts, NGSS encourages students to “approach problems not previously encountered, engage in self-directed planning, monitoring, and evaluation, and employ valid and reliable research strategies” (NGSS Lead States, 2013, p. 12).

Additionally, the C3 Framework for Social Studies Standards (the document upon which the Illinois Standards for Social Sciences were based) asserts, “Students must be able to work independently, be self-directed learners, interact effectively with others, and work effectively on diverse teams” (National Council for the Social Studies, 2013, p. 82). Each of these standard documents describe a change in context for the skill demands of students, which in turn requires a change in context for teachers.

Beginning in 2012, the district began the process of creating new curricula for every subject area. Teams of teachers worked on subject area committees, or SACs, to align curricula to the new standards documents. The SACs were facilitated by a consultant from an outside company that specializes in a process oriented approach to curriculum development and alignment. Common Core-aligned curricula for English Language Arts and math were written during the 2012–2013 school year and implemented in 2013–2014. A science curriculum, influenced by the Next Generation Science Standards, was written in 2014–2015, with a draft implemented in 2015–2016. A draft of the social studies curriculum, aligned to the Illinois State Standards for Social Science and guided by the C3 Framework, was written during the 2015–2016 school year.

The constructivist approach to education described in the standards is supported by the new tool for teacher evaluation, called the the Danielson Framework for Teaching. In her book *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching*, Charlotte Danielson (2007) stated, “Constructivism recognizes that for all human beings—adults as well as children—it is the *learner* who does the learning. That is, people’s understandings of any concept depends entirely on their experience in deriving that concept for

themselves” (p. 15). Danielson’s work informed the development of many school districts’ teacher evaluation tools. During the 2013–2014 school year, the district adopted the Danielson Framework as a model for teacher evaluation. In order for a teacher to be described as distinguished, she or he must be able to create conditions for student learning that allow for varying levels of student initiative. To use the language of the Modes of Learning Framework, teachers must create conditions for student learning that are (at least some of the time) in a distributed mode. Danielson’s model supports the intentions of the new standards documents in that the highest scoring category of instruction requires teachers to place students in control of their own learning.

### **Culture**

Wagner et al. (2006) defined culture as “the shared values, beliefs, assumptions, expectations, and behaviors related to students and learning, teachers and teaching, instructional leadership, and the quality of relationships within the school” (p. 102). Despite the new standards documents and the teacher evaluation instrument calling for a learner-centered approach to instruction, several elements of the school and district culture may impede a similar change in context for teacher professional learning. From my perspective as an instructional specialist, the school district has a culture of compliance. Language used by top-level district administration reflects a desire to maintain a hierarchical structure in which decision-making is not likely to be distributed. For example, a top-level district administrator refers to herself as the one who “sits in the big chair.” She refers to members of her cabinet as the “kings” or “queens” of their departments, which also reflects an explicitly hierarchical structure. While comments such as these are made informally and metaphorically, I believe they are representative of

a culture that values compliance. From my perspective, this culture inhibits teacher initiative in professional learning because it assumes that teachers will be told what to do by the district office. In the Findings and Interpretation section of this paper, I will present data that more fully discusses the culture of compliance.

While many teachers may believe their job is to follow directives, 2015 results of the Illinois 5Essentials survey suggest that teachers do not always trust that the people giving the directives are effective leaders. On measures of teacher-principal trust and instructional leadership, Hamlin Middle School rates below the state average. Wagner (2001) suggested that when a culture of compliance exists within a school, collective responsibility and shared commitment suffer. Wagner's conclusion is represented in the 2015 results of the Illinois 5Essentials Survey. Hamlin Middle School has less than average ratings on measures of collective responsibility and commitment to the school when compared with other schools statewide. I will provide a more complete analysis of the 2015 and 2016 Illinois 5Essentials results, as well as teachers' perspectives on the results, in section five of this change leadership plan.

### **Conditions**

Although the culture of the school may not yet fully support shifting teacher professional learning to a learner-centered approach, there are conditions in place to encourage this change. According to Wager et al. (2006), conditions are "the external architecture surrounding student learning; the tangible arrangements of time, space, and resources" (p. 101). In addition to one personal planning period per day, the daily schedule affords one common planning period. During this time, teachers meet with grade-level colleagues in teams based either on similar content areas or shared groups of

students, content-area teams, or in “small teams”, which are the interdisciplinary teachers who share the same pool of students. Beginning in the 2015–2016 school year, one period per week of common planning time was devoted to professional learning. The other instructional specialist and I worked with the teachers to create the agendas for this time. We committed to being less directive and more learner-focused, choosing to use some of the time for peer observations (called *teacher learning walks*) and reflective discussion.

Every Wednesday, teachers stay for an additional 75 minutes after student dismissal. This time is dedicated to various professional development and school improvement efforts. Although there is adequate time set aside for professional learning, teacher-administrator trust may impact teachers’ willingness to participate in it. Results of my program evaluation showed that teachers do not always trust that administrators make good decisions about how professional development time is spent; teachers also do not always believe administrators trust them to use the time appropriately as they see fit for their own professional learning and growth (Crement, 2015).

### **Competencies**

Wagner et al. (2006) defined competencies as “the repertoire of skills and knowledge that influences student learning” (p. 99). In order to shift teacher professional learning to a more learner-focused approach, several competencies need to be developed by teachers and administrators alike. First, school and district leaders need to develop the capacity for distributive leadership. According to Kennedy, Deuel, Holmlund Nelson, and Slavit, (2011), distributed leadership includes “1) a leader’s recognition and use of internal intellectual and experiential resources, 2) differentiated top-down and lateral

decision making processes, and 3) culture building through dialogue and collaborative inquiry” (p. 21).

Additionally, in order to translate teacher learning to productive action, teachers will have to develop the capacity for strategic thinking and informed, evidence-based decision making. Although there may be instances of high-quality professional learning within the district, neither teachers nor administrators expect that teachers use their learning to influence decision making. From my perspective, decisions are made at the district level and outlined in a five-year plan, which is presented as an unchangeable document. As Heifetz, Grashow, and Linskey (2009) suggested, “Assume the need for midcourse correction in whatever you do ... maintain the flexibility to move, reflect, and move again” (p. 125). However, midcourse corrections based on new learning are discouraged; teachers are instead encouraged to stay the course and told that, contrary to what they may be experiencing, everything is working as planned.

Finally, all stakeholders will need to develop the capacity to have productive disagreements without confounding person with practice (Katz & Dack, 2013). True learning is messy. It is not linear, and requires that learners wrestle with conflicting perspectives. All learners need to be able to engage in debate about those perspectives without becoming personally offended by disagreement.



## **SECTION THREE: METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

My research design seeks to examine the factors at Hamlin Middle School that have influenced positive and negative changes toward becoming a learning system. In a learning system, teachers have collective autonomy for professional learning that leads to informed decision making and accountability. To understand these influences, I used a mixed methods approach. First, I used quantitative data from the Illinois 5Essentials Survey from the 2014–2015 and 2015–2016 school years. Next, I conducted focus groups with teachers and interviews with building administrators to interpret the results and discuss factors that may have contributed to them.

This research design allowed me to gain an accurate understanding of where the school stands in regard to becoming a learning system. The Illinois 5Essentials Survey reports teacher perceptions on factors that contribute to the development of a well-organized school. Using focus groups helped me to understand what may or may not have influenced changes in those factors over a two-year period. This research design also conveyed the urgency for implementing this change. According to Bryk et al. (2010), schools that are implemented on three of the five essential elements are 10 times more likely to improve than schools that are not. In other words, without examining the factors shown to promote conditions for school improvement, efforts towards school improvement will ultimately be futile.

### **Participants**

The key participants from whom I gathered data are the teachers at Hamlin Middle School. An invitation to participate in the focus groups was extended to all

certified staff members in the fall of 2016. In order to be eligible, teachers were asked to self-identify as having participated in the Illinois 5Essentials Survey in both 2015 and 2016. These teachers were chosen for the pool of subjects because they were able to compare factors that influenced positive and negative changes between the 2015–2016 and 2016–2017 school years. According to the Illinois 5Essentials Report, 91.3% of teachers participated in 2015 and 87.8% of teachers participated in 2016. Interested teachers signed up to participate in one of two focus group sessions.

### **Data Collection Techniques**

Quantitative data was collected through the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) using the Illinois 5Essentials Survey. The ISBE is required by state statute to provide a survey on learning conditions to all school districts. Schools are required to administer said survey (or an approved alternate survey) at least every other year. Data from the 2013, 2015, and 2016 5Essentials Surveys were published online through the ISBE School Report Card in the fall of 2016. For the purpose of this study, I focused on the indicator I believe is most central to becoming a learning system: collaborative teachers. Within this indicator, I looked at measures of collaborative practices, collective responsibility, quality professional development, school commitment, and teacher-teacher trust.

Qualitative data were collected in focus groups and interviews with teachers. An email was sent out inviting eligible teachers to participate in one of two days. Interested teachers responded indicating which day they were available. Focus groups consisted of six participants in each session, held after school in the office of the instructional

specialists. Each focus group lasted about one hour, and participants were given pizza and pop during the session.

During each focus group, participants were shown slides that indicated changes in scores for indicators of collaborative practices. They were then asked to discuss what factors they believed influenced a positive or negative change. They were also asked to describe what it might take to improve the score to higher levels of implementation. Focus group discussions were recorded using a digital recording device. Files were sent to a professional transcriber using a secure connection.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

The statistical analysis of the Illinois 5Essentials survey was completed by the University of Chicago on behalf of the Illinois State Board of Education. Scores from each indicator on the survey were compared against the state average or benchmark. From this comparison, an essential score was generated. Comparisons to the benchmark were reported in terms of implementation, with the following descriptors:

- “Most implementation”: at least 1.5 standard deviations above the benchmark
- “More implementation”: between 0.5 and 1.5 standard deviations above the benchmark
- “Average implementation”: above -0.5 standard deviations and below 0.5 standard deviations above the benchmark.
- “Less implementation”: 0.5 to 1.5 standard deviations below the benchmark.
- “Least implementation”: at least 1.5 standard deviations below the benchmark

(University of Chicago, 2017)

My analysis involved determining whether the essential score for a particular indicator increased or decreased between 2015 and 2016.

After the focus groups and interviews, I conducted a qualitative analysis of the transcripts. I coded the data to look for themes. Each theme was then categorized according to which arena of change—context, culture, conditions, competencies (Wagner et al., 2006)—it related to the most explicitly. Much of my understanding of the themes that emerged was impacted by my review of the literature on becoming a learning system. In the following section, I will present a review of the literature.

## SECTION FOUR: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

In this section, I will review the literature about leading change in teacher professional learning. The focus of this change leadership plan is on how to create a learning organization through utilizing each mode of professional learning to its greatest potential. The literature review that follows reflects the reading I have done to better understand what the change looks like according to researchers and educational theorists.

My review of the literature on teacher professional learning and its relationship to the process of school change can be framed in the following quote from Peter Senge (1990): “Real learning gets at the heart of what it means to be human” (p. 13). To put the quote in the context of this change leadership plan, I believe that a system that is committed to improving the learning of children must be committed to improving learning for all humans within the system, including teachers.

In his book *The Predictable Failure of School Reform*, Seymour Sarason (1990) challenged the assumption that schools exist only for the growth and development of children. “That assumption is invalid because teachers cannot create and sustain the conditions of productive development of children if those conditions do not exist for teachers” (p. xiv). Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) echoed this assertion. They wrote, “How can we expect children to develop 21st-century skills of innovation and creativity if their teachers don’t enjoy the same opportunity?” (p. 117).

In 21st-century learning, the emphasis is less on knowing and more on learning, which means that adults within schools need to be expert *learners* and not simply experts in content (Richardson, 2015). Mitchell and Sackney (2000) believed that educators need

to be “active creators of knowledge and facilitators of knowledge creation” (p. 32). In order to improve students’ learning, attention must be paid to the conditions of teacher learning (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

The remainder of this literature review will focus on those conditions, including the exploration of new metaphors for organizational learning and the need to re-evaluate power structures in schools. I will discuss the role of the individual teacher-as-learner and how she participates in a community of adult learners. I will conclude by summarizing what the literature says about the role of the principal within a community of adult learners.

### **New Metaphors for Organizational Learning**

To envision the change that is required in teacher professional learning, it is helpful to conceptualize both how things were in the past and how they may continue to be to this day. Richardson (2015) stated that the old premise is that “an education needs to be organized, standardized, and controlled by the institution” (p. 8). This view of organizational learning can be considered Newtonian (Wheatley, 1992), because it assumes a system in which every action has an equal and opposite reaction. Under the old premise, training is provided to teachers, who absorb the content from the training, and apply new methods of instruction to students, resulting in achievement gains.

Garmston and Wellman (2009) rejected this Newtonian view. They stated, Schools are nonlinear dynamical systems in which cause and effect are not tightly linked. In nonlinear systems, the parts do not add up to the same sum each time they are combined. Fresh combinations result in different outcomes. A blend of regularity and irregularity shapes nonlinear systems, producing patterns of

stability and instability. (pp. 8–9)

In order to move away from the old premise of education, which is more likely to limit learning than enhance it (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000), it is helpful to re-conceptualize professional learning in a way that is less focused on people as machines (Wheatley, 1992), and more aligned with human nature (Senge, 1990). Mitchell and Sackney (2000) advocated for developing metaphors that reflect “wholeness and connections, diversity and complexity, relationships and meaning, reflection and inquiry, and collaboration and collegiality” (p. 6). The metaphor they suggest is that of a learning community (p. 9).

Other researchers and theorists have discussed metaphors in the literature, as well. Roland Barth (1990) suggested the metaphor of a beehive, in which all members work together in collegial relationships. Ash and D’Auria (2013) discussed a web of “active adult learners who are connected to each other within a school and to educators throughout the world” (p. 38). Wheatley (1992) used another nature metaphor to describe a learning system that highlights the lack of hierarchical structures. She quoted K.C. Cole as saying, ““After all, how do you hold a hundred tons of water in the air with no visible means of support? You build a cloud” (as cited in Wheatley, 1992, p. 90).

Whether the organizational metaphor is that of a beehive, a web, or a cloud, the important symbolism is that the architecture or infrastructure should promote professional learning by integrating work with continuous learning (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000; Senge, 1990). It is also helpful to visualize the structure of organizational learning in terms of fractals (Wheatley, 1992; Garmston & Wellman, 2009). A fractal is a pattern that repeats itself at ever-increasing or decreasing scales. For example, call to mind an image of

broccoli. The smallest floret of broccoli follows the same structural pattern as several florets together, which creates a head of broccoli. Similarly, the learning structures established for a team of teachers—say, 6th grade English Language Arts teachers—can be replicated across a larger team (i.e., all grade-level English Language Arts teachers). According to Ash and D’Auria (2013), these structures can be expanded to larger and larger scales to “utilize the vast, virtually untapped resource of synergistic collaboration within schools, between school districts, and between colleagues outside the school system” (p. 92). Eventually, the structures of learning systems will expand “to parents and other members of the educational community” (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000, p. 16).

### **Power Structures**

In order to create better learning conditions for students that reflect the new metaphors of organizational learning, Sarason (1990) asserted that power relationships within schools must be altered. Sarason believed that teacher powerlessness has led to a lack of regard for their professionalism. He also affirmed, “The feudal style of organization [in schools] suppresses changes and innovation” (p. 52).

The negative effects of power relationships in schools have also been discussed by several other researchers in the field. Rosenholtz (1989) described that when teachers are powerless in matters of planning and school policy, they become “alienated from the essence of their work” (p. 162). Barth (1990) wrote that teacher exclusion from decision making in schools contributes to feelings of inefficacy and isolation. Mitchell and Sackney (2000) observed that deference to authority figures in school systems leads to a lack of ownership and collective responsibility for school improvement.



In organizations with rigid power structures, people may be less likely to seek new understandings for methods of improvement in an effort to maintain power over others. In a speech given in January 2016, I quoted Michael Fullan to say, “People in power are ordering people in less power to do something that neither one of them knows how to do, and when it doesn’t work out, people with more power blame people with less power.”

It is more useful to think of power structures in schools in ways that reflect the ideals of equity and democracy, rather than as rigid hierarchies with an inflexible chain of command. As Mitchell and Sackney (2000) wrote, “Leadership, power, and structures are all in the service of teaching and learning. The organization is there to increase the capacity to bring about human growth and development” (p. 139). Instead of a hierarchy, Kennedy et al. (2011) introduced the concept of a heterarchy. “In a heterarchy, leadership is shared laterally, and decisions are made by individuals who have both status and expertise in the community” (p. 22).

Re-evaluating power relationships in schools can have several potential benefits. Within systems of shared leadership, people experience a sense of ownership (Wheatley, 1992) which leads to collective responsibility and professionalism (Kennedy et al., 2011). Teachers are more likely to ask questions, innovate, and be committed to decisions and the effort necessary to act on those decisions, resulting in a change of culture for the building and district (Robinson, 2011).

### **Autonomy, Judgment, and Decision Making**

A critical element of shared leadership is autonomy. In his book *Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us*, Daniel Pink (2009) wrote that autonomy of

task, time, technique, and team has a “powerful effect on individual performance and attitude” (p. 88), which leads to engagement and motivation. Pink distinguished autonomy from independence. “[Autonomy] is not the rugged, go-it-alone, rely-on-nobody individualism of the American cowboy. It means acting with choice—which means we can be both autonomous and happily interdependent on others” (p. 88).

Beyond having a positive effect on motivation, autonomy means that people within an organization are valued for their judgment. According to Heifetz et al. (2009), in such organizations, “the question asked is not ‘What would the people above me in the hierarchy do?’ but ‘What do I think is the best thing to do here in the service of the mission of the organization?’” (p. 104).

Rosenholtz (1989) believed that teachers’ collective autonomy in the process of decision making may be instructive in and of itself. She stated,

As colleagues sift and winnow strategies, ideas, and materials, and cull from them those most likely to enhance the quality of their classroom instruction, they also deliberate, evaluate, suggest, and modify their own classroom practices. These activities may clarify teachers’ instructional method and purpose, thereby enhancing their opportunities for learning, as decisions become conscious and well-reasoned choices rather than arbitrary or automatic reactions. (p. 73)

Improved decision making leads to what Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) called *decisional capital*, which is “capital that professionals acquire and accumulate through structured and unstructured experience, practice, and reflection. [Decisional capital] enables them to make wise judgments in circumstances where there is no fixed rule or piece of incontrovertible evidence to guide them” (p. 94.) Hargreaves and Fullan

explained that teachers get better at making judgments and build more decisional capital when they have a lot of practice making and examining judgments alone and with colleagues in a cycle of reflective practice and inquiry.

### **Individual Teacher-as-Learner**

In envisioning the school as a learning system, one might begin by looking at the individual teacher-as-learner. According to Senge (1990), “Organizations only learn through individuals who learn. Individual learning does not guarantee organizational learning. But without it no organizational learning occurs” (p. 129). Individual learning requires initiative on the part of the teacher. Rosenholtz (1989) explained that in learning-impooverished schools, teachers typically utilize professional development resources that are easily accessible, whereas in learning-rich schools, teachers put forth a larger expenditure of their own time and effort seeking out resources that are outside of the school system.

Intentional knowledge seeking and personal initiative on the part of master teachers reflects a change in mindset about what it means to be a learner in the 21st century, which many students also possess. Richardson (2015) wrote, “Just as kids aren’t waiting for the Minecraft course, we adults must seek out own resources and teachers, whether online or off. Those who wait to be taught will be left behind” (p. 36).

The quest for continual learning is what Senge (1990) referred to as *personal mastery*, which is “the discipline of personal growth and learning” (p. 131). Mitchell and Sackney (2000) used the term *personal capital* to describe the result of active construction of knowledge on the part of the individual learner, as well as the “amalgam of all the embedded values, assumptions, beliefs and practical knowledge that teachers

carry with them” (p. 13). A third way to name this concept is *human capital* (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012), which is the collection of all the “requisite knowledge and skills” (p. 89) that an individual teacher embodies. The bottom line is that the quality of the organizational learning depends on the level of personal mastery/personal capital/human capital of the individuals engaged in the thinking and learning. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) stated that without high-quality individuals, “what peers may share may be ignorance of knowledge” (p. 87).

### **Teachers in a Community of Adult Learners**

While the individual teacher is a critical player in the learning system, traditional structures of schooling that serve to minimize contact between and among individual administrators and teachers do not allow for collective improvement (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000). Roland Barth (1990) used the term *parallel play* to characterize the typical adult relationship in educational settings. According to Barth, parallel play is a developmental stage in which “four-year olds are busily engaged in opposite corners of the sandbox” (p. 16). He compared parallel play to the isolation within which many teachers work. However, the less teachers talk to each other about their practice, the less they are able to develop professional relationships, and the less cohesive the instructional program will be (Rosenholtz, 1989).

Judith Warren Little (1981) has advocated for deprivatized practice. In the early 1980s she studied the factors that influenced school improvement in six schools that were impacted by court-ordered desegregation rulings. She found that schools were more likely to improve if teachers talked about practice, observed each other, worked on curriculum together, and taught each other. These conditions are what Garmston and

Wellman (2009) referred to as “a living laboratory of instructional space” (p. 16). These conditions allow for a greater likelihood of collective responsibility for all students in the school (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Given the importance of collaborative learning, members of an organization should be intentional in how they nurture relationships. Wheatley (1992) drew from research in new science to describe the impact of relationships on the individual learner. She stated:

Several years ago, I read that elementary particles were “bundles of potentiality.” I began to think of all of us this way, for surely we are as undefinable, unanalyzable, and bundled with potential as anything in the universe. None of us exists independent of our relationship with others. Different settings and people evoke some qualities from us and leave others dormant. In each of these relationships, we are different, new in some way. (p. 35)

Mitchell and Sackney (2000) described the conditions that nurture relationships as being the affective climate. They wrote that a strong affective climate is characterized by affirmation, or “valuing the contributions of colleagues.” As they stated, “[Affirmation] does not imply agreement. People can disagree radically on a host of issues, but affirmation means that, even in the face of deep disagreement, they still acknowledge the values of others’ opinions, ideas, or contributions” (p. 46). In addition to affirmation, Mitchell and Sackney advocated for invitation, in which colleagues are explicitly asked to participate in learning and work.

Strong relationships in a healthy affective climate can lead to group flow. The concept of flow was originally described by Csikszentmihalyi (1990) as being a state of

optimal experience in which “consciousness is harmoniously ordered, and [people] want to pursue whatever they are doing for its own sake” (p. 6). In his book *Group Genius*, Keith Sawyer (2007) built on Csikszentmihalyi’s research and wrote about the conditions that create flow within a group. Sawyer observed jazz ensembles, pickup basketball games, and improv comedy troupes to determine the conditions that lead to group flow. Among the conditions he found to be important were close listening, blending egos, and equal participation. He also identified that a sense of control contributed to the likeliness of group flow. According to Sawyer,

[G]roup flow increases when people feel autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Many studies have found that team autonomy is the top predictor of team performance. But in group flow, unlike solo flow, control results in a paradox because participants must feel in control yet at the same time they must remain flexible, listen closely, and always be willing to willing to defer to the emergent flow of the group. The most innovative teams are the ones that can manage that paradox. (p. 49)

Another crucial ingredient in developing strong professional relationships is trust. In a 10-year case study and longitudinal analysis, Bryk and Schneider (2003) studied 400 schools in Chicago to determine the essential factors that influence school improvement. They conducted interviews and focus groups, and observed meetings, events, and classrooms. They concluded that trust plays a powerful role in the success of school reform. Bryk and Schneider defined trust as respect, personal regard, competence, and personal integrity (p. 43). Tschannen-Moran (2014) added benevolence, honesty, openness, and reliability (p. 39) to the definition. In schools with high levels of trust,

teachers are more likely to seek assistance from peers (Deal, Purinton, & Waetjen, 2009). Trust also enables higher levels of professional learning, as less energy is expended on self-protection (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000). Students and parents may benefit from higher levels of trust within school faculty as well (Tschannen-Moran, 2014), which again reminds us of the fractal pattern within a learning organization, as patterns of trust are likely to be repeated at different scales.

In school systems characterized by trusting adult relationships, information moves freely through the organization, allowing for cognition and intelligence to be distributed (Perkins, 2003; Wheatley, 1992). Dialogue serves as the vehicle that moves information. Perkins (2003) called conversations “the virtual neurons that tie an organization together” (p. 19). According to Senge (1990), “The discipline of team learning starts with ‘dialogue,’ the capacity of members of a team to suspend assumptions and enter into a genuine ‘thinking together’” (p. 10).

By focusing on deprivatization, trusting relationships among colleagues, and the art of dialogue, the social capital of a school is developed. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) defined social capital as a measure of how “the quantity and quality of social interactions and social relationships among people affects their access to knowledge and information; their senses of expectation, obligation, and trust; and how far they are likely to adhere to the same norms or codes of behavior” (p. 92). Because the dynamics of the group influence individual learning (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000), collective effort becomes a means of building individual capacity (Deal et al., 2009). Michael Fullan stated it simply. In a speech he gave in January 2016, I quoted him to say, “Use the group to change the group ... If you want to move a school, invest in social capital.”

With all the discussion around the importance of establishing communities of adult learners, school leaders may be tempted to artificially implement professional learning communities (PLCs) as a standalone program or approach. However, Katz and Dack (2013) cautioned educators that “the rhetoric around professional learning communities has far outpaced the research” (p. 30). Deal et al. (2009) reminded educators that the establishment of PLCs is not an end in and of itself, and that their development is best accomplished organically, “because of collective commitment to serving young people in better ways” (p. 10). Likewise, Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) advised,

[W]e need to move the debate away from pushing PLCs per se and into the arena of developing professional capital, which, in its more advanced forms, means that teachers will challenge each other as well as challenge their leaders as part and parcel of the give and take of continuous improvement. (p. 132)

Teacher collaboration around professional learning is by no means a magic bullet, as it can sometimes lead to groupthink, a term Sawyer (2007) credits Janis (1972) for coining. This refers to when a “team of smart people ends up doing something dumber than they would have done if they were working on their own” (p. 66). Groupthink often occurs because people become invested in the relationships within the group and place a higher priority on maintaining group harmony than on speaking up about problems or potential disagreements (Deal et al., 2009). Robinson (2011) added that unless the learning is focused, there is also a risk that groups of teachers will “reinforce counterproductive beliefs about what is wrong with students and spend little time examining their own practice” (p. 106).



One way to overcome groupthink is to adopt the view that conflict is not something to be avoided, but is instead an opportunity for learning (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000). Colleagues should become critical friends and not simply “yes-people.” According to Katz and Dack (2013),

What’s important in the critical friend concept is that the appraisal [of an idea] is in fact honest and challenging, yet with the purpose of being supportive and with an eye for improvement. Critical friends don’t tell you what you want to hear; they offer an external perspective that thwarts you from simply seeking confirming evidence. (p. 81)

### **Role of the Principal**

In reconceptualizing schools as communities of adult learners, it is important to recognize that the role of the principal or school leader must shift. Instead of placing principals at the helm of schools, Deal et al. (2009) placed principals “in an intricate web of influences [where] their main role is to ferret out and empower others” (p. 7). Barth (1990) suggested,

[T]he principal need no longer be the “headmaster” or “instructional leader,” pretending to know all, one who consumes lists from above and transmits them to those below. The more crucial role of the principal is as head learner, engaging in the most important enterprise of the schoolhouse—experiencing, displaying, modeling, and celebrating what it is hoped and expected that teachers and pupils will do. (pp. 45–46)

Fullan (2015) underscored this concept in his description of a principal as the lead learner. Fullan believed that in that role, principals are responsible for creating conditions that foster human, decisional, and social capital among teachers and staff.

The impact that the principal-as-learner has on a school is well documented in the research. In her analysis of 30 studies that measured direct or indirect impact of leadership on student outcomes, Robinson (2011) found that leading teacher learning and development had an effect size of 0.84, double that of any of the other leadership practices she found to have an impact on learning. Robinson surmised that the reason for such a large effect is that when principals directly participate in professional development, they are able to learn about the challenges that arise when new learning is implemented, and can then create conditions to succeed in light of those challenges. In order for principals to participate as learners, Barth (1990) believed that culture around principals-as-learners must change. No longer should principals be granted “presumed competence” (p. 70) by nature of their role, nor be forced to wear a “scarlet letter” (p. 70) when they acknowledge their own professional learning needs.

Another critical responsibility of school leaders in increasing professional capacity is recruiting, hiring, and socializing new teachers “whose knowledge, skills, dispositions, and attitudes are the best match for the particular job and the best match for the school at large” (Ash & D’Auria, 2013, p. 122). Intentional and selective hiring will bring higher levels of human capital into the system. Tschannen-Moran (2014) advocated that the hiring process should be used intentionally to gather “trust-relevant information on both sides of the hiring decision” (p. 50). Rosenholtz (1989) described the hiring process as not only one of quality control, but also as one that serves a symbolic function.

She wrote, “Schools that are clear about recruitment criteria underscore how teachers and principals collectively view their present school goals—what they stand for, what they care about, and what they ultimately aspire to be” (p. 17). As such, Rosenholtz advocated that teachers should be active participants in the selection of colleagues and principals.

While hiring is a critical responsibility of school leaders, dealing with staff members who are perceived as incompetent is also an essential role of school leaders. Robinson (2011) stated, “Allowed to persist, gross incompetence is highly corrosive to trust and undermines collective effort” (p. 35).

The literature suggests other important roles for principals. According to Heifetz, et al. (2009), it is the role of the leader to develop structures to capture collective learning, and to “nurture shared responsibility for the organization” (p. 168). Deal et al. (2009) believed that principals should focus on “building power relationships and cultural bonds” (p. 3), as well as being “bridge builders” (p. 84) between divergent groups. School leaders should also create conditions for trust within a school (Tschannen-Moran, 2014) and establish norms of collaboration by inviting participation in decision making (Rosenholtz, 1989). Simply stated, people in authority should limit their actions and decisions to functions that only they can perform, and should spend the rest of their energy investing in the development of others within the organization, and creating conditions to nurture development (Heifetz et al, 2009).

### **Conclusion**

In this review of the literature, I have examined the impact that improved conditions for teacher professional learning can have on the change process in an attempt to demonstrate that the change process is a learning process (Ash & D’Auria, 2013). I

began by comparing conditions for student learning and conditions for teacher learning, and showing how one cannot be improved independent of the other. I then discussed traditional organizational metaphors for school systems, and shared alternate metaphors that are found within the literature. I then summarized the need for re-evaluating power structures to support the new organizational metaphors. Next, I looked at the role of the individual teacher-as-learner and how she is a part of a collective group of learners rooted in collaborative, trusting relationships. I concluded by discussing the shifting role of the principal in a community of adult learners. In the following section, I will present data from both quantitative and qualitative sources that helped me better understand how to implement these changes.

## **SECTION FIVE: FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION**

### **Introduction**

In this section, I will present and interpret data that relates to my change plan of transform Hamlin Middle School into a learning system. In September 2016, I conducted two focus group sessions with groups of Hamlin Middle School teachers and asked them to interpret data from the 2013, 2015, and 2016 Illinois 5Essentials Surveys. I categorized survey results and focus group responses according to the four arenas of change: culture, competencies, conditions, and context (Wagner et al., 2006). Each of the arenas of change will need to be addressed in order to maximize opportunities for professional learning, making Hamlin Middle School a true learning system.

### **Culture**

Wagner et al (2006) defined culture as being “the shared values, beliefs, assumptions, expectations, and behaviors related to students and learning, teachers and teaching, instructional leadership, and the quality of relationships within and beyond the school” (p. 102). Having a healthy school culture is integral to developing a learning system within the school, one in which all members of the system participate fully as learners. In this section, I will analyze data from the Illinois 5Essentials Survey that speaks to school culture in terms of collective responsibility and school commitment. I will interpret qualitative data collected in two focus groups during which teachers shared their perceptions on what influenced positive or negative changes in survey data from 2013–2016. I will address themes including a perceived culture of compliance within the district; the perceived value of teacher initiative; confusion and frustration about the role of administration; and teacher perceptions on student achievement expectations.

## **Collective Responsibility**

The Illinois 5Essentials Survey measures teachers' perceptions of collective responsibility, which is the extent to which "teachers share a strong sense of responsibility for student development, school improvement, and professional growth" (University of Chicago, n.d.). On the survey, teachers responded to the following likert-style multiple-choice items:

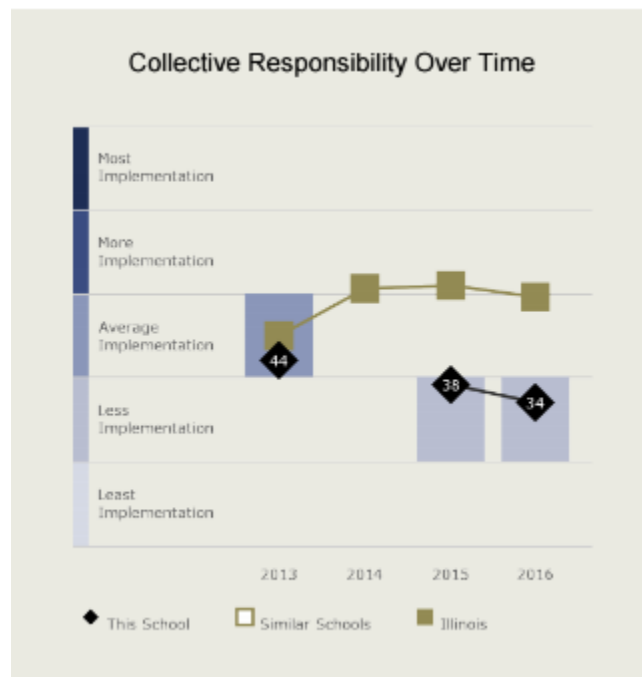
Teachers report that other teachers in the school:

- Feel responsible when students in this school fail
- Feel responsible to help each other do their best
- Help maintain discipline in the entire school, not just their classroom
- Take responsibility for improving the school
- Feel responsible for helping students develop self-control
- Feel responsible that all students learn

The responses to each of these multiple-choice questions were combined and calculated using Rasch analysis at the University of Chicago on behalf of the Illinois State Board of Education. Scores were then compared against a benchmark on a scale of 1–99. The different bands on the report represent the distance from the benchmark, or mean of all participants who took the survey during that administration. On the measure of collective responsibility for the 2016 administration, Hamlin Middle School is in the "less implemented" category, meaning that the scale score of 34 is between 0.5 and 1.5 standard deviations below the benchmark. In 2013, the scale score was in the "average" band; however, it dropped to the "less implemented" band in 2015 with a scale score of

39, only to drop again to 34 in 2016. Figure 2 displays Hamlin’s scores (represented by black diamonds) compared to the state average scores (represented by gold squares).

Figure 2. Illinois 5Essentials Survey, 2016—collective responsibility



In the focus groups, teachers were asked to comment on the factors that influenced a change in collective responsibility over time. One participant suggested that teachers may be feeling burned out from the amount of committees they have been asked to join. Another teacher responded to this comment similarly, by summarizing that teachers are “spreading [themselves] too thin.”

While teachers perceive that they have been asked to join a great number of committees, several comments made in the focus groups also suggested a perception that teacher input on committees was token, which has led to decreased feelings of collective responsibility. When responding to the decrease in collective responsibility from 2013 to 2016, one teacher said the following:

My gut reaction is in the first set of data [2013], we were about to implement

Common Core. And I feel like, at least for people that I see on a regular basis, there was an excitement, there was a collaborative feeling. Then once we realized there wasn't really much [collaboration], the district had initiatives that we couldn't go against, I know that me and some other people, we felt less control over it, because it was what you wanted to do versus the limitations put on you by the district. And that I feel like that ownership went away a bit.

When I, as the focus group moderator, asked for examples of the limitations put on by district, the participant continued,

The curriculum we created, using the [organizational structure of] components and assessments, was very limiting, but it was created four years ago. And now that it's four years in the future, the idea of what we can't change and what we can change is very fuzzy. And we are hearing different things from different people. And that's frustrating. Because we're supposed to follow district initiatives or we could get written up. Whereas there's also good teaching and logical teaching and doing what's best.

To my knowledge as the researcher, no teacher has ever been written up for making changes to the curriculum. However, based on conversations I have had with teachers in my role as an instructional specialist, the perception that disciplinary action against teachers *might* occur is prevalent among the staff. The uncertainty teachers feel about whether they are allowed to exercise professional discretion has contributed to a sense of frustration and feelings of disconnectedness among people within the organization. The following focus group comment reflects these feelings.

I guess I empathize with the frustration of when you said being told two different



things [about changing the curriculum]. Maybe we have a curriculum and we spent time and money to create it and then we put it into action and we find flaws and then we're told, no, you can't change it, but somebody standing in the very next room is telling you to change it. So that's just very confusing and then people end up doing different things and not the same thing, and then resentment grows between colleagues, which does not help collaboration.

Another focus group participant reported that diminishing feelings of collective responsibility may be the result of administrators' low expectations that teacher learning leads to informed decision making. She stated,

Don't tell me to think of what's good so that you can tell me that it's wrong.

That's how I kind of feel. If [administrators] say, "Go research it," it's just like,

"Oh, so I can be told that I'm wrong again?"

While the above comment reflects a frustration about the perception that administrators may not value teacher research and judgment, other comments made in the focus group suggest that teachers do not always value their own judgement. Instead they sometimes depend on directives from administration to follow established best practices. In the following comment, a teacher is describing a classroom management strategy for quieting a group by counting backwards from five.

Like even counting off from five, that still works, [but] I don't see people doing it as much. Like people now just do what we used to do. We used to yell to get someone's attention. But the counting down, it works, but we don't do it, because our admin doesn't talk about it anymore.

The above comment is somewhat paradoxical. While the teacher states she had firsthand experience with the strategy being effective, she still felt that it was her administrator's responsibility to *tell* her to do what she already knew was working. Without being told to continue doing what was effective, she and others stopped using the strategy. This paradox may be representative of a confusion of the role of the administrator, and an acknowledgement that the role of the building leader has shifted in recent years. One participant reflected,

I think back in the 90s, 2000s ... your principal was supposed to be a building manager. Their job was to run the building. And they cared about the facilities, they cared about employment, they cared about just keeping the school a safe place. And somewhere, I don't know when, the 2000s, the late 2000s, the principal is now educational leader. So now on their plate is all the previous things plus curriculum, and reading and math scores. Now the job of the principal is so much more wide.

A lack of clarity about the changing role of the building administrator may also account for decreased feelings of collective responsibility, because teachers are not sure about who is responsible for what. One teacher stated,

None of us know exactly what goes on in the office, so I don't want to make assumptions. [I feel like saying to administrators], "Please don't make assumptions that I'm not doing my job, that I'm not in the hallway because I'm lazy, or don't want to go the extra mile and support my colleagues. Don't assume that you know what's going on, just like I shouldn't necessarily assume that when I go into the office and sit at your desk that you're not fully committed to your

job.”

While feelings of collective responsibility may be diminished by a perceived culture of compliance and an uncertainty about the role of school and district administrators, it is also worth noting that many of the negative feelings about administrators may be the fallout from a previous building administrator’s tenure. Focus group participants described a former principal who “lacked integrity.” They characterized this administrator as a “bully” who made decisions “maliciously and vindictively.” One participant acknowledged, “I think [our current principal] stepped into a position where she had to earn trust more than a normal principal taking the position.” These comments lead me to conclude that the effect a building leader has on the culture of a school should not be underestimated, and that the impact of negative cultural conditions can take years to overcome.

### **School Commitment**

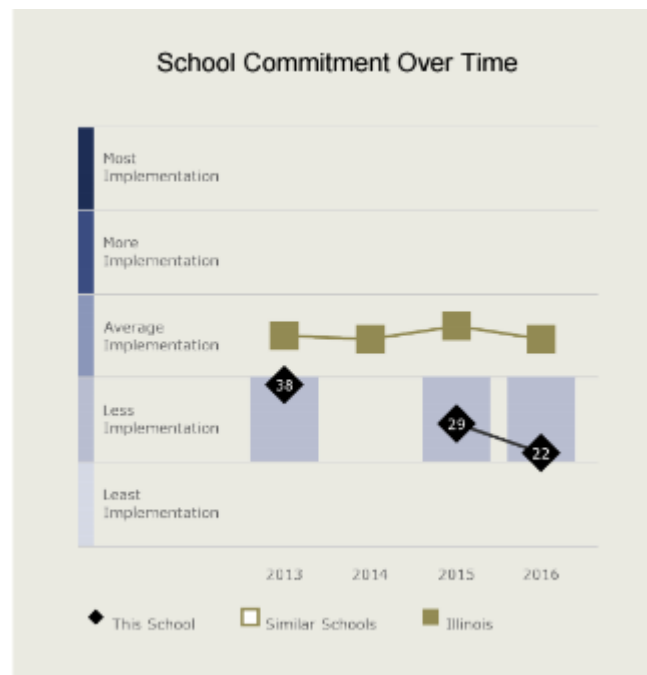
Another aspect of school culture that can be measured quantitatively through the Illinois 5Essentials Survey is the level of school commitment reported by the teachers. The survey asked teachers to respond to a series of Likert-style multiple choice items, including:

- I wouldn’t want to work in any other school.
- I would recommend this school to parents seeking a place for their child.
- I usually look forward to each working day at this school.
- I feel loyal to this school.

Results from each multiple-choice item were combined using a Rasch analysis and compared against the mean on a scale of 1–99. For the last three surveyed years,

Hamlin Middle School’s score on school commitment has been in the “less implemented” category, meaning that the score is between 0.5 and 1.5 standard deviations below the mean. The score has decreased from 38 in 2013 to 29 in 2015, and to 22 in 2016. The score from the most recent year is close to being more than 1.5 standard deviations away from the mean, almost placing it in the “least implemented” category. Figure 3 below represents Hamlin Middle School’s measure of school commitment, with school data (shown as black diamonds) compared to the state average (shown in gold squares).

*Figure 3. Illinois 5Essentials Survey, 2016—school commitment*



In both days of the focus groups, the item within the school commitment category that teachers chose to highlight was the statement, “I would recommend this school to parents seeking a place for their child.” Consider the following comment made by a focus group participant:

I had a hard time with this, when I was scoring this myself, because actually I do

like my job, and I do like my position, but in a million years I wouldn't recommend this school to parents. If I had a friend that said I'm going to move here, I would say, find a private school, which is sad. I thought about that on the way home because what does it say that I'm proud to work here? I like working here, yet I wouldn't recommend it. Like what does it say about my expectations or my performance?

Her comment was met with agreement by another focus group participant.

I agree with you. [The survey] said that "I would recommend this school," that's why I had to go low. I could not, in good conscious say, "Yeah, come and enroll in HMS. They'll be fine." Whatever. I can't. I couldn't. I couldn't.

At the focus group held on a different day, another participant's sentiments about school commitment were nearly identical.

I vividly remember answering that question about would I send my kids to this school? I just ... boy, I was just so conflicted. I was so conflicted. Because that really would show commitment. That would show commitment. If you would actually put your kid [in this school it would] show commitment, trust in your colleagues, and everything in the neighborhood and everything. Then the other part of my brain is saying; but if they go to a higher SES [socioeconomic status] school they get higher scores, you know what I mean? Like it's such a hard thing, you know?

In my interpretation, two themes are worth noting about these comments. First, teachers feel a sense of conflict or regret about not being able to recommend their school to a parent seeking a place for their child. Second, their comments reflect a concern that

the expectation for student achievement is lower at Hamlin Middle School than it is at other schools. Teachers acknowledge that students in schools with higher socioeconomic statuses are expected to achieve at higher levels. However, it is my interpretation that working in a school that teachers perceive as “less-than” has a direct impact on school commitment.

### **Competencies**

Wagner et al (2006) defined competencies as “the repertoire of skills and knowledge that influences student learning” (p. 99). In this section, I will discuss quantitative and qualitative data that relate to current competencies impacting the school’s ability to function as a learning system. I will begin by revisiting several themes discussed in the interpretation of data relating to school culture. While the perceived culture of compliance and the value placed on teacher expertise have a large impact on the culture of the school, I will reframe those themes through the lens of competencies necessary to create cultural conditions. I will then discuss the theme of trust as it relates to the skills and knowledge that are required to establish collaboration within a system.

#### **Leader Competency for Distributed Leadership**

In the previous section’s discussion on data relating to school culture, I reported that teachers perceive a culture of compliance within the district. In the focus groups, teachers described instances when their knowledge and experience helped them determine the need for mid-course corrections, but that they felt limited in their authority to make changes due to fear of disciplinary action. While I acknowledged that from my perspective as a researcher, no such disciplinary write-up has ever occurred, the perception that it might is evident in the data. One teacher described a scenario in which

she had done research and learning about a given topic, only to be told that what she had learned was wrong. This teacher cited this experience as a reason for a decline in personal responsibility, which can have an effect on school culture.

It is important to note that the scope of my research is limited to teacher perceptions. No data was collected about the perceptions of building and district leaders around the issue of distributed leadership. Therefore, it is outside the context of this study to make conclusions about whether or not school administrators possess the competencies required to distribute leadership throughout the organization. However, from the data I collected and analyzed, I suggest the following questions for further study: To what extent do school and building leaders have competency in recognizing expertise within the system? What systems are in place that allow leadership to be distributed across expertise?

## **Trust**

Trust is a commodity that has a large impact on the culture of an organization, and it would fitting to discuss trust within the arena of culture (Wagner et al., 2006). For the purposes of this change leadership plan, however, I have decided to discuss trust as it relates to the arena of competencies. As Garmston and Wellman (2009) wrote, “Groups cannot improve trust; they can only increase trusting behavior. We’ve learned to ask what people will be doing and saying when they are ‘trusting’” (p. 143). When examined in terms of observable behaviors and ways of communicating, trusting behaviors can be seen as skills to be learned and not just feelings to be experienced.

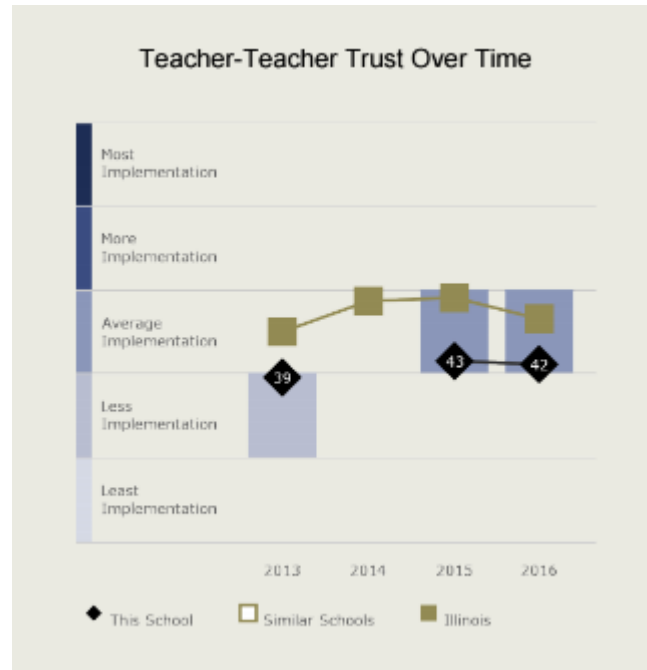
The Illinois 5Essentials Survey provides some quantitative data on teacher-teacher trust. Teachers responded to a series of Likert-style multiple-choice questions, including the following:

- Teachers at this school trust each other.
- It is okay at this school to discuss feelings, worries, frustrations with other teachers.
- Teachers respect other teachers who take the lead in school improvement efforts.
- Teachers at this school respect those colleagues who are experts at their craft.
- Teachers feel respected by other teachers.

Results from each multiple-choice item were analyzed at the University of Chicago on behalf of the Illinois State Board of Education using Rasch analysis. An overall score for teacher-teacher trust was reported on a scale of 1–99 and compared against the mean. The teacher-teacher trust score for Hamlin Middle School for 2016 was 42, which falls within the “average” band. This means it is within 0.5 standard deviations from the benchmark. Levels of teacher-teacher trust have remained stable over the last three surveyed years. Figure 4 shows the teacher-teacher trust score for Hamlin Middle School (shown as black diamonds) compared against the state average (shown as gold squares). Although the score is within the “average” implementation band, it is still below the state average.



Figure 4. Illinois 5Essentials Survey, 2016—teacher-teacher trust



While the stability of the data did not provide opportunities for focus group participants to discuss factors that influenced change, they commented on factors that may be limiting growth. One focus group participant described how trust and collaboration within a group is directly related to the perceived level of competency in knowledge or teaching skill held by members of the group. She stated,

If there is a perceived weak link on a team, then people begin to withdraw from the team effort because they don't want to be the one that does all the work. So when everybody pitches in, there's a harmonious level of work, but if there's a perceived feeling like somebody's riding the coattails of the rest of the group, the group tends to withdraw and the collaboration decreases. If somebody feels that there's somebody [else] on the team who can't pull their own weight, people pull away.

This comment reflects the importance of each team member coming to the table with competencies in content area knowledge and teaching skills. It highlights the necessity of each teacher being an individual learner, as well as the need for leaders to address perceived incompetence of individual staff members. These ideas were discussed more fully in the review of the literature.

While my review of the literature presented in section four demonstrates that it is critical for leaders to address perceived incompetence of individual staff members, teachers in the focus groups revealed an ambivalence as to whether or not this responsibility rests solely with building administration. Focus group participants acknowledged that teachers may need to develop the skill of addressing issues directly with peers without administrator involvement, and that professional development in developing those skills may be necessary. Consider the following exchange:

**Participant A:** Maybe that could be a professional development ... having those really hard talks [with colleagues].

**Participant B:** How to have a constructive talk about disagreements, because we can't have admin involved in any way because then it becomes evaluative. As soon as you get admin, it's like getting mom and dad involved in a kid fight. You just don't. I think part of the trust [issue] comes from teachers don't deal directly with each other as much, especially when there's a problem. There's this rush to go to administration, because I'd rather do that than have the difficult dialogue with somebody about what's going on.

**Participant C:** I think you're absolutely right. I think it's very difficult to confront, not confront, that sounds aggressive, but to just sit down and [say to a

colleague], “I need to talk to you about something.” I would rather someone come to me directly, as awkward as the conversation might be. I would rather it come from my colleague than get pulled into the office.

To this end, another focus group participant reflected that teachers should develop the willingness to “be uncomfortable and ... admit that we make mistakes.” This willingness may be difficult for many teachers to achieve, however. Comments made in the focus group suggested that teachers may be guilty of what Steven Katz and Lisa Ain Dack (2013) referred to as “confounding person with practice.” In other words, teachers find it difficult to talk about improving teaching practice without feeling personally attacked. The following comment reveals such a misperception.

I feel like [some teachers] need help, but we don’t offer help because it’s embarrassing, and it’s too personal, and you’re attacking somebody, when you’re attacking someone’s profession. You’re kind of attacking them personally, and no one wants to go there. So we just kind of coexist.

Another participant identified the skill of giving and receiving feedback as being necessary to developing trust among colleagues.

Sometimes people don’t take constructive criticism as that; maybe [they are] a little bit more defensive, or maybe the way that we say things could be a little bit more diplomatic. And I think that kind of creates a wall sometimes.

From these comments, I can conclude that more time and attention need to be paid to developing the competencies that allow people to increase trusting behaviors.

## **Conditions**

According to Wagner et al. (2006), conditions are “the external architecture surrounding student learning, the tangible arrangement of time, space, and resources” (p. 101). In order for collaborative practices in teacher professional learning to exist, the condition of time must be satisfied. In this section, I will share focus group findings that review results from the Illinois 5Essentials Survey dealing with collaborative practices.

### **Collaborative Practices**

The Illinois 5Essentials Survey measure of collaborative practices indicates how often teachers report doing the following:

- Observing another teacher’s classroom to offer feedback
- Observing another teacher’s classroom to get ideas for your own instruction
- Going over student assessment data with other teachers to make instructional decisions
- Working with other teachers to develop materials or activities for particular classes
- Working on instructional strategies with other teachers

Quantitative data analysis was completed by the University of Chicago on behalf of the Illinois Board of Education. All indicators were combined using Rasch analysis.

The measure score was placed on a scale of 1–99, compared against a norm, and reported according to standard deviations from the norm. In 2015, Hamlin Middle School’s measure in this category was 44, placing it in the “average implementation” category. In 2016 the score increased to 62, which placed it in the “more implementation” category, as it was between 0.5 and 1.5 standard deviations above the norm. Figure 5 shows Hamlin

Middle School’s scores (represented by black diamonds), compared against state average scores (gold squares).

Figure 5. Illinois 5Essentials Survey, 2016—collaborative practices



Focus group participants were asked to account for the changes in the measure of collaborative practices from 2015 to 2016. One teacher brought up how a change in the master schedule allowed for common plan time among similar grade-level and content-area teachers. She said the following:

I think this goes back a few years, but the common plan is the first time when I really sat down with people in a content [department] and we developed materials, instructional materials, to go along with the content. That never happened before ... [Now] you wind up talking about how you deliver the instruction. [For example], “We both taught the same lesson using the same materials, but mine was horrible and yours went well—what did you do

differently? And maybe just how you grouped the kids made a difference.” So the common plan made that possible.

While the creation of common planning time no doubt had a large influence on collaborative practices, the provision of time alone does not explain the score increase from 2015 to 2016—common plan time was implemented in 2013, two years before the score increased dramatically. One teacher acknowledged that it may have taken a few years for people to adjust to working collaboratively, given that teachers were accustomed to working independently for many years. However, when teachers began to describe changes in the ways common plan time was being used *intentionally*, possible explanations for the increase in scores began to emerge. One teacher described how using common plan time to collaborate on daily lessons allowed for more authentic comparison of assessment data. Another teacher agreed that intentionally setting common time aside to look at assessment data has prevented the practice from “going on the backburner.”

According to focus group participants, the factor that had the greatest influence on the change from 2015 to 2016 was the implementation of teacher learning walks. In this teacher-led initiative, teams of math and English language arts teachers visited other classrooms and used a structured protocol to review their observations. One teacher reported that prior to the implementation of structured learning walks, it was very difficult to set up a peer observation. She didn’t know who would be comfortable with the practice or how to arrange for a substitute teacher to provide coverage. She stated that the intentional use of common plan time made the learning walks possible. According to the focus group participants, the walks helped them clarify achievement expectations across and among grade levels, as well as see implementation of grade-specific programs,

such as the 1-1 Chromebook initiative for sixth graders in 2015. Focus group participants described their participation in learning walks as very beneficial and a great use of time.

### **Context**

Wagner et al. (2006) defined context as being the “‘skill demands’ all students must meet to succeed as providers, learners, and citizens, and the particular aspirations, needs, and concerns of the families and community that the school or district serves” (p. 104). As noted in the As is section of this change leadership plan, the skill demands defined by the current context of education have changed. The Common Core State Standards (adopted in Illinois in 2010), the Next Generation Science Standards (2014), and the new Illinois Standards for Social Science (2016) all shift the context of learning to a 21st-century model that values a constructivist approach, highlighting student initiative in the learning process. While teachers in the focus group did not specifically comment on the new standards documents, they did discuss the subject area committees (SACs), which were created by the district for the purpose of writing curricula that aligned to the new standards documents. One teacher reflected on how many people were asked to join SACs over the last five years, and wondered whether the level of involvement would lead to teacher burnout. This notion suggests that some teachers are fatigued by the rapid change in the context of education.

### **Professional Development**

As discussed in previous sections, the context of 21st-century education is shifting away from an emphasis on knowing and toward an emphasis on learning (Richardson, 2015). One way that districts can help teachers respond to the change in context for student learning is to design professional development that reflects that shift for teachers.

The Illinois 5Essentials Survey asked teachers to respond to how often professional development has done the following:

- Included opportunities for teachers to work productively with teachers from other schools
- Included enough time to think carefully about, try, and evaluate new ideas
- Been sustained and coherently focused, rather than short-term and unrelated
- Included opportunities to work productively with school colleagues
- Been closely connected to [the] school improvement plan

Quantitative data analysis was conducted by the University of Chicago on behalf of the Illinois State Board of Education. Researchers used a Rasch analysis to combine each indicator into a measure score, which was placed on a scale of 1–99. Results were then compared according to standard deviations away from the benchmark. From 2013 to 2015, there has been little or no change in score, placing Hamlin Middle School within the “average implementation” category for both years. Figure 6 shows Hamlin Middle School’s scores (black diamonds) compared with state average scores (gold squares).



Figure 6. Illinois 5Essentials, 2016—quality professional development



When asked to comment on ways to improve the measure of professional development, one focus group participant stated:

I was thinking that some people might not know what professional development actually is. Or what is available to them. I was just thinking about including opportunities [to work] productively with teachers from other schools. I wouldn't even know how to make that happen unless I knew somebody.

Other focus group participants indicated that they seek out professional development on their own time, with their own money. However, when responding to the Illinois 5Essentials Survey, they felt that they were unable to report those experiences because they were not provided by the school or district.

Within the district, teachers do have opportunities to share individual learning with the collective group through a structure called School District Internal University (SDIU). In SDIU, teachers sign up to present a session at an institute day, and other

teachers select which session(s) they would like to attend. Focus group participants felt very positively about SDIU. One participant described it as “a major improvement” over previous professional development experiences.

### **Conclusion**

In this section, I shared and interpreted findings pertaining to changing Hamlin Middle School into a learning system. I included data from the collaborative teachers category of the Illinois 5Essentials Survey from 2013, 2015, and 2016. I also summarized teachers’ analyses of the survey data, which were collected in two focus group sessions. I used Wagner et al.’s Arenas of Change—culture, competencies, conditions, and context—to think systematically about challenges to change.

I began by describing a culture at Hamlin Middle School that has shown decreasing levels of collective responsibility and school commitment as measured by the survey. I shared that focus group participants detected a culture of compliance that has a negative impact on school culture. I also discussed how the changing role of the building administrator and the perception of the school as a lower-achieving environment are factors in limiting feelings of collective responsibility and school commitment.

Next, I described the the competency levels of staff as they related to the skills and abilities necessary to promote teacher-teacher trust. Third, I summarized the main condition of the school that supports the creation of a learning system: common plan time. During this time, teachers meet to plan lessons, look at assessment data, and participate in teacher learning walks. Finally, I briefly described the changing context of school as it relates to the implementation of new standards documents, and the perception that those changes may be leading to teacher burnout. I reviewed survey and focus group

data that examined professional development to support teachers through those changes. In the next section, I will present my vision of what the future culture, competencies, conditions, and context would look like if Hamlin Middle School were an improved learning system.

## **SECTION SIX: VISION OF SUCCESS (TO BE)**

The focus of this change leadership plan has been to create a learning system that maximizes multiple modes of professional learning. In this section, I will use the 4 Arenas of Change—context, culture, competencies, and conditions (Wagner et al., 2006)—to describe a vision of future success when this change has been fully realized.

### **Context**

In previous sections of this change leadership plan, I have discussed how the context of education has shifted in response to the needs of the 21st century. These shifts are demonstrated within newly adopted standards documents, including the Common Core State Standards (2010), the Next Generation Science Standards (2013), the C3 Framework for Social Studies (2013), as well as the Framework for Teaching by Charlotte Danielson (2007), which is currently used as a tool for teacher evaluation. A commonality among each of these documents is that the learner is no longer a recipient of knowledge directed by the teacher, but is actively engaged in constructing new knowledge and understanding. This requires a high level of initiative on the part of the learner, along with the expectation that learning will lead to informed decision making.

In my vision of success, the shift toward learner initiative and constructivism outlined in the standards and evaluation documents will be experienced by both teachers in professional learning and students. There will be less of an emphasis on training teachers to use specific skills, and more of an emphasis on action research and collaborative learning in which teachers are co-creators of knowledge and understanding. This change in context will require adult learners to recognize that there are no easy answers. It will virtually eliminate the notion that the purpose of professional

development is to receive answers that someone else has already thought through. In the future context of professional learning, teachers will be willing to take risks, to learn from mistakes, and to innovate. Changing this context will have a direct impact on student achievement. Teachers will be better prepared to create conditions for productive student work because they have experienced such learning conditions themselves (Sarason, 1990).

### **Culture**

My vision of the culture at Hamlin Middle School includes a shift from one of compliance toward one of performance. According to Kim Smith (2003), in a culture of performance the question becomes, “What have you done to help every child in your building become a successful adult?” (Smith, 2003, n.p.), and not “Have you done what the district office told you to do?”

To promote this cultural shift, everyone within the system must be fully committed to each other’s growth and development. This commitment involves actively recruiting, developing, and retaining the best people. It also involves accepting that mistakes are a part of learning, and that when people at all levels within the system make mistakes, mid-course corrections will have to be made. Although this may not be a comfortable shift for some teachers accustomed to a culture of compliance, the shift will result in increased collective responsibility in which teachers feel accountable for the success of every student, as well as an imperative to ensure that everyone is doing their best. It will also increase school commitment, allowing each adult in the system to wholeheartedly recommend Hamlin Middle School to parents seeking a place for their child.

## Competencies

Perhaps the most important competency that is evident in my “to be” vision is the ability to establish trust in schools. Bryk and Schneider (2003) have demonstrated that the relationship between trust and student achievement in a school is not a matter of correlation—it is cause and effect. High levels of trust should not be misinterpreted to mean that everyone feels comfortable. Instead, it means that people feel *safe*. In my vision, teachers and administrators will feel safe in exposing their vulnerabilities to others because they trust the intentions of those around them (Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

As I described in the Findings and Interpretation section, I consider trust to be a competency, not a feeling, because developing trust depends on demonstrating specific skills and behaviors. Two of the specific skills that individuals will possess are the ability to recognize and respond to the needs of others, and a willingness to have open conversations and engage in conflict (Ash & D’Auria, 2013). Individuals will have developed these competencies by using norms and protocols that “promote effective and efficient communication and problem solving” (Katz & Dack, 2013, p. 71).

In my vision, leaders in formal authority positions will also have the knowledge and skills to distribute leadership to others in the system. This does not mean that everyone will do everything. Liang and Sandmann (2015) advised that leadership should be distributed along “contours of expertise” (p. 57). Such a model of distributed leadership will be accomplished through demonstrated competencies on the parts of administrators and teachers alike. First, administrators will be adept at recognizing expertise in others. There are many tools and frameworks that can assist administrators in developing this competency. One such framework is described by Buckingham and

Coffman (1999) and Buckingham and Clifton (2001) in the books *First Break All the Rules* and *Now Discover Your Strengths*. In these books, the authors utilized a tool called the StrengthsFinder 2.0 to help people recognize talents and learn to use them to achieve maximum results within an organization.

Of course, leader competency for distributing leadership along the contours of expertise is only half of the equation. In my vision for Hamlin, teachers will also possess the skills and knowledge in their pedagogy and content areas to be rightly counted as experts. This will require teachers to assume greater responsibility for their own professional learning and growth in the distributed mode of learning (HarvardX, 2014).

The more practice administrators and teachers have in making shared decisions, the more their competency for making sound decisions will increase. The process of weighing evidence, evaluating options, and reflecting on the impact of a decision hones decision-makers' abilities to make future decisions (Rosenholtz, 1989). As Fullan and Hargreaves (2012) stated, "You get better at making discretionary judgments when you have lots of practice examining your own and other people's judgments, with your colleagues, case by case" (p. 94). Better judgments and decision making will lead to increased student achievement.

### **Conditions**

In my "to be" vision, the conditions of time, space, and resources will be maximized to promote a learning system. Regarding the first, the conditions to support a learning system already exist at Hamlin Middle School. In addition to one personal planning period per day, teachers have one common planning period with colleagues in similar grades and content areas. This time is set aside for collaborative lesson planning,

analysis of student work, or quarterly teacher learning walks. Teachers also stay for one hour longer every Wednesday to participate in professional development. When the future context of teacher professional learning shifts toward a more constructivist approach, and culture shifts away from compliance and toward performance, the condition of common plan time will be used more intentionally. The best way to continue to support the intentional use of common plan time is to validate flexible designs for professional learning, including book study, peer observation, coaching and mentoring, lesson study, and online coursework. This validation can occur through policy, collective bargaining agreements, and resource allocation. According to a report jointly presented by the American Federation of Teachers, the Council of Chief State School Officers, the National Education Association, and the National Staff Development Council, effective policies and agreements that promote flexible designs for professional learning do the following:

- Acknowledge that one-size-fits-all professional development is not in the best interest of every teacher
- Ensure that states and local school districts have the capacity to maintain accurate records regarding teachers' professional development
- Encourage teachers to seek out and to implement varied designs for professional learning
- Ensure that schools and districts receive necessary support to employ multiple designs for teachers' professional learning (p. 67)

Advocating for such policies will be the focus of my year-three dissertation project.



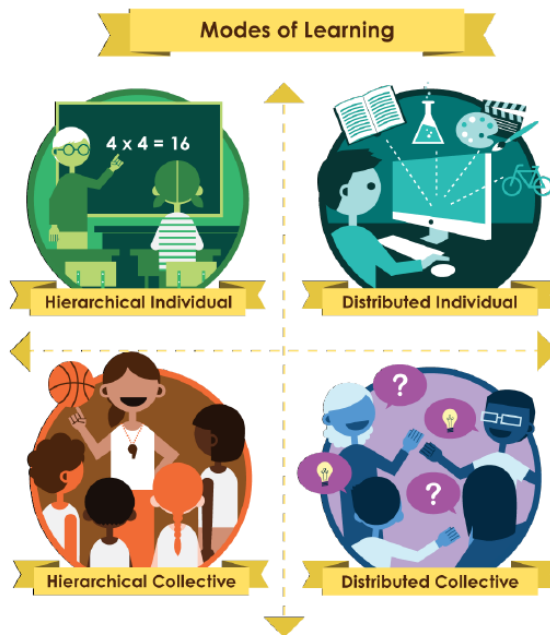
## **Conclusion**

In this section, I have described my vision of future success for when Hamlin Middle School functions as a learning system that maximizes multiple modes of professional learning. I described a context for professional learning that places teachers in the role of co-creators of knowledge, along with a shift in culture from compliance to performance. I discussed the competencies that adult learners in the system will demonstrate through their ability to distribute and accept leadership roles, and in their commitment to becoming experts of pedagogy and content. I also discussed the competency of promoting trust within the school. Finally, I described the improved conditions that allow for flexible designs of professional learning, ensuring that professional learning time is used intentionally. In the following section, I will outline specific strategies and actions to bridge the “as is” with the “to be.”

## SECTION SEVEN: STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

The focus of this change leadership plan is to create a learning system that maximizes the four modes of professional learning. According to Richard Elmore (Harvard X, 2014), the Modes of Learning Framework is a way of representing learning across two continua. The horizontal axis represents a hierarchical to distributed learning continuum. Hierarchical learning means knowledge that has been structured or sequenced by an expert or institution, whereas distributed learning puts the learner in control of both what and how knowledge is acquired. The vertical axis represents the individual to collective continuum. In individual learning, the primary learner is the individual participant, while collective learning assumes that knowledge-making is a social activity. Each quadrant of the matrix shows an extreme version of that particular mode of learning. However, in real life, the modes of learning are rarely one or the other; they often blend together in practice. Figure 1 represents the four modes of learning.

*Figure 1.* Modes of Learning Framework



Thus far, I have utilized the Four Arenas of Change (Wagner et al., 2006) to describe the present culture, context, conditions, and competencies of Hamlin Middle School, and to present a vision of future success when a learning system is created. In this section, I will present strategies and actions that bridge the gap between the “as is” and the “to be.” I will discuss each strategy and action as it relates to the each mode of professional learning. Within each mode, I will describe the arena of change that will be most impacted by the strategies.

### **Hierarchical-Individual**

In the hierarchical-individual mode, learning is directed and sequenced by an institution or an expert. The primary focus is the individual learner. Teachers engage in hierarchical-individual learning when they participate in district-led training, or attend colleges or universities in sequenced programs of study. In the school district that includes Hamlin Middle School, teachers are entitled by contract to receive partial tuition reimbursement to pursue graduate degrees in the field of education.

A strategy for maximizing the impact of hierarchical-individual learning within the learning system is to intentionally harness that learning for the collective good. Teachers who are recipients of hierarchical-individual learning should be invited and expected to share their knowledge and understanding with others within the system. One action step that can accomplish this is the continued development of School District Internal University (SDIU). In SDIU, teachers with specialized training or advanced coursework volunteer to be presenters at sessions during district institute days. Teachers sign up to attend their sessions, thus becoming recipients of hierarchical-individual learning and extending the impact of the initial learning.

Another action for maximizing hierarchical individual learning is to appoint teachers with specialized degrees as task force leaders in school improvement efforts. For example, a teacher pursuing a master's degree in social and cultural foundations in education might be appointed as a task force leader in addressing the school's gender-inclusive policies. In that way, the expertise the teacher acquires through hierarchical-individual learning can be utilized to benefit the entire school community.

The strategy of maximizing hierarchical-individual learning experiences will impact the area of competency for both administrators and teachers. Administrators will gain competence in recognizing expertise among their staff by intentionally leveraging the hierarchical-individual learning of teachers who pursue graduate coursework. Likewise, establishing the expectation that district-subsidized graduate coursework will result in teachers attaining expert status in their fields will increase the competency level of teachers in the learning system. This strategy will also impact culture by fostering a culture of learning and collaboration.

### **Hierarchical-Collective**

Like hierarchical-individual learning, the hierarchical-collective mode of learning is directed and sequenced by someone with expert status; however, the latter approaches learning as a communal activity with group learning as one of its goals. One of the ways teachers at Hamlin Middle School engage in hierarchical-collective learning is when an instructional specialist facilitates content teams in professional development. While the instructional specialist is sometimes granted expert status, and can serve as an intermediary between district or school administrators and teachers, that person's primary

objective in leading teams in content-team professional development is to direct the communal knowledge of the group.

One strategy that will support the creation of a schoolwide learning system is to develop hierarchical-collective learning experiences to their greatest potential. An action to support this strategy is to lead teachers on classroom walkthroughs, or learning walks. According to Kachur, Stout, and Edwards (2013), “Involving teachers as observers in the walkthrough process can transform the entire school into a learning community and build a culture that values the engagement of teachers in continuous and sustained professional growth” (p. 4). After the learning walk, a facilitator uses protocols to focus the discussion and build common understanding.

While learning walks allow teachers to observe their colleagues practice in real time, considerations such as bell schedules, common plan time, and class coverage can make them a challenge to schedule. Therefore, another action to promote hierarchical-collective learning is the implementation of video-enhanced professional development (Knight, 2014). By using video to capture classroom instruction, teachers can document their implementation of district initiatives and share the video to discuss with colleagues.

The initial implementation of teacher learning walks and video-enhanced professional development will be hierarchical in nature. Both actions will need to be led by a skilled facilitator who utilizes protocols to guide post-observation discussions. However, as teachers become more accustomed to the procedure, and a culture of communal learning develops, the process will shift toward the distributed side of the Modes of Learning Framework.

These actions will primarily impact the arena of competency. First, by participating in facilitated group learning, teachers will gain competence in having open discussion and engaging in professional conflict. Learning how to productively manage interactions with colleagues will build trust within the system. Teachers will also gain competence in strategic thinking and making evidence-informed decisions. By participating in learning walks and video-enhanced professional development, as well as having facilitated opportunities to observe and evaluate the impact of instructional decisions, teachers will gain competence in making better decisions.

### **Distributed Individual**

The distributed-individual mode represents professional learning that is self-directed by the teacher and takes place outside of a hierarchical structure. It is based around the idea that teachers “are capable of making judgments about what knowledge is helpful to them and what's useful to them” (HarvardX, 2014). Teachers engage in distributed-individual learning when they read professional books and journals, view webinars, or take online classes including massive online open courses (MOOCs).

In order to become a learning system in which the distributed-individual mode of learning is maximized, Hamlin Middle School needs to acknowledge and vigorously promote teacher-initiated learning. One action to support this strategy is to recognize and encourage teacher involvement in professional organizations. Professional organizations, such as the National Council of Teachers of English, National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, National Science Teachers Association, and the National Council on Social Studies, give teachers access to valuable resources in the form of books, journals, and

online resources such as webinars. Hamlin Middle School should recognize participation in professional organizations by listing teacher involvement on a school webpage.

Building administrators should also leverage Danielson's (2007) teacher evaluation framework to promote involvement in professional organizations. Within the category of "planning and preparing: demonstrating knowledge of resources," distinguished teachers have extensive knowledge of resources for classroom use and for extending content and pedagogical knowledge, both within the district and "through professional organizations and universities, and on the internet" (p. 56). In the category of "professional responsibilities: growing and developing professionally," the distinguished teacher "seeks out opportunities for professional development and makes a systematic effort to conduct action research" (p. 105). By using the teacher evaluation tool as it is written, administrators can maximize the distributed-individual mode of professional learning.

Another action to acknowledge and promote distributed-individual learning is to offer continuing professional development units (CPDUs) or online badges for teacher participation in micro-credentials. According to DigitalPromise.org (2016), micro-credentials are "competency-based," "on-demand," and "personalized" informal learning experiences. Within each micro-credential, teachers review curated resources to build their ability around a specific teaching skill, and collect artifacts in the form of videos, student work samples, and student reflections to demonstrate their competency in mastering that skill. The artifacts are then scored against a rubric by a reviewer, who awards a digital badge for successful completion. Many micro-credentials are eligible for CPDU credits in the state of Illinois.

By formally acknowledging informal learning experiences through CPDUs, Hamlin Middle School will maximize individual-distributed learning, and the context of professional learning will be improved. Teachers will experience the kind of initiative that is now required of students of the 21st century, and will be better able to shift the context for students.

### **Distributed-Collective**

The distributed-collective mode of learning occurs when individuals self-select learning communities based around common interests or learning goals (HarvardX, 2014). Teachers engage in distributed-collective learning when they form learning groups, sometimes crossing role or grade-level teaching assignments. Examples of such groups are book studies, or action research groups to address shared problems of practice.

Because distributed-collective learning occurs outside of a hierarchical structure, the strategies that school leaders employ to maximize this mode of learning have an indirect influence. One way leaders can influence distributed-collective learning is to recruit, select, and retain teachers with a high level of personal human capital (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). To distribute responsibility for the hiring process, leaders should involve current teachers in colleague selection to the greatest extent possible. Teacher participation in colleague selection will allow teachers to feel more accountable by giving them “control over the quality and capacity of their team” (Center for Teaching Quality, 2015).

Another step to operationalizing the distributed-collective mode of learning is to use teacher-initiated action research in the decision-making process. James, Milenkiewicz, and Bucknam (2008) defined action research as “a multi-stage type of



research designed to yield practical results capable of improving a specific aspect of practice and made public to enable scrutiny and testing” (p. 8). In action research, teachers would self-organize into informal networks to collect data and draw conclusions around a common area of interest. In order for teachers to be motivated to conduct action research, school and district administrators must demonstrate a willingness to consider research results in the decision-making process.

These action steps will impact the culture arena of change by undoing the culture of compliance and promoting the culture of performance. When teachers self-select learning groups based around a common interest or purpose, the potential for innovative approaches to enhance student achievement are increased.

### **Conclusion**

The focus of this change leadership plan has been to develop Hamlin Middle School into a learning system that maximizes the four modes of professional learning. I began this change leadership plan by describing my perspective on the current reality in relationship to this change. I reviewed literature relating to the school as a learning system to deepen my understanding of the change I was describing. After conducting quantitative and qualitative research, I shared my interpretations of the contexts, conditions, culture, and competencies at Hamlin Middle School that support or impede my vision of change. After detailing my vision of future success for after the change is implemented, I outlined strategies and actions for bridging the gap between the current reality and the time when Hamlin Middle School can truly be considered a learning system that maximizes the four modes of professional learning.

Engaging in the work of this change leadership plan has deepened my commitment to improve schools. Teachers need to be fully immersed in the work of improving student learning. To make that work possible, school leaders need to be fully immersed in the work of improving teacher professional learning. I look forward to my work as a change leader in this area, and to advocating for policies to promote this change.

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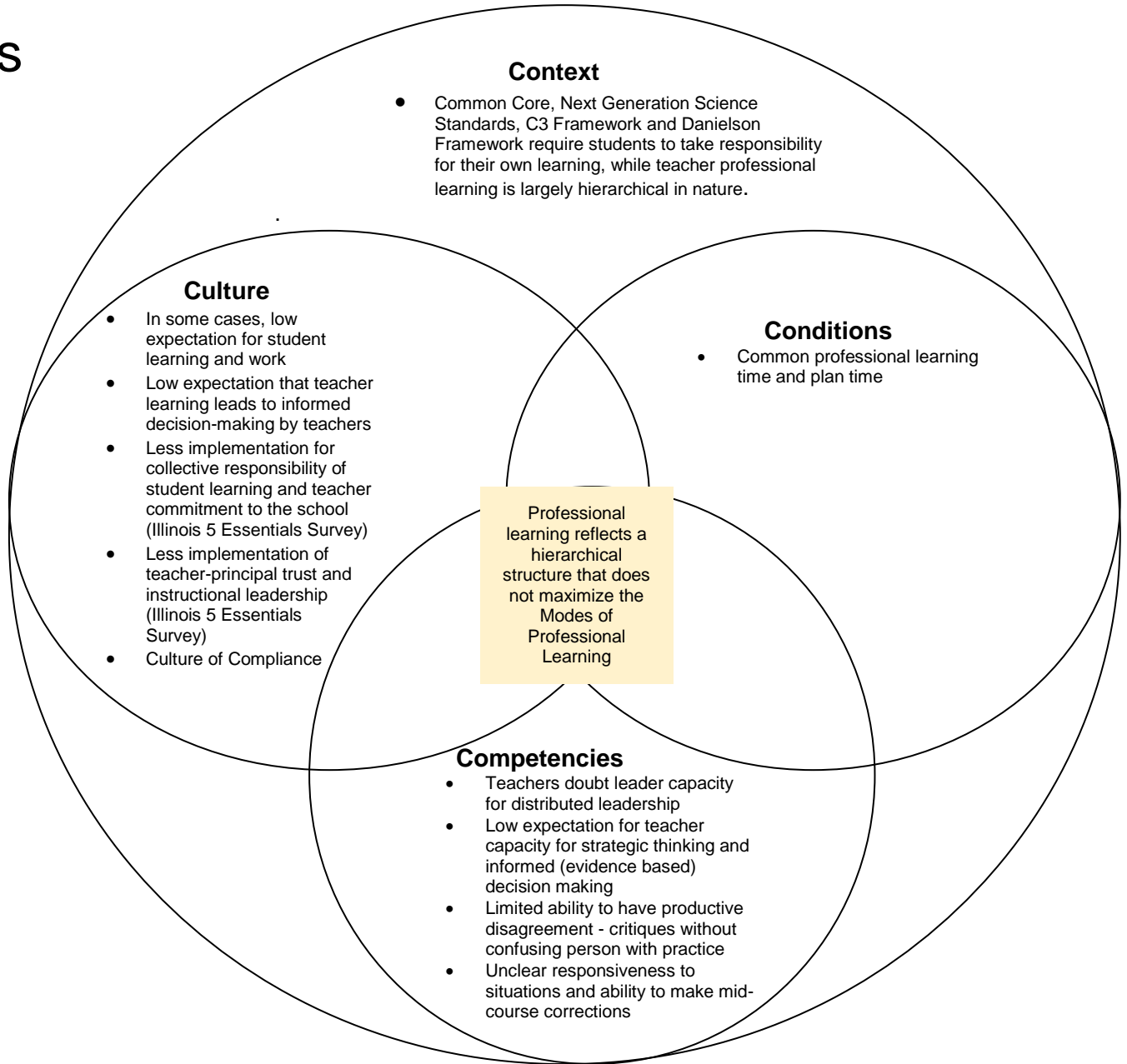
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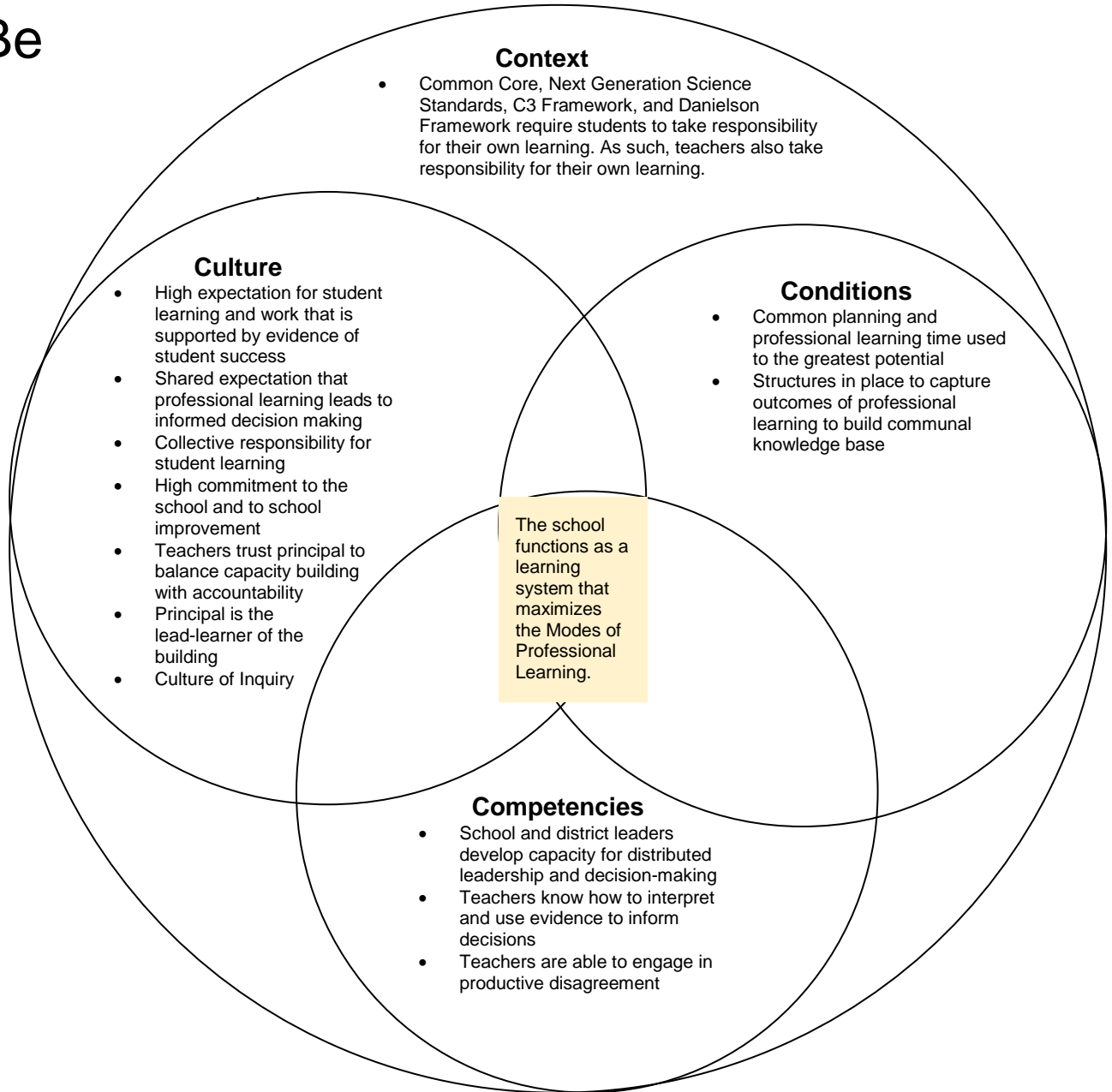


## APPENDIX A: AS-IS AND TO-BE CHARTS

# As-Is



# To-Be



## APPENDIX B: STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS CHART

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Action</i>
Maximize the impact of <b>Hierarchical-Individual</b> learning within the learning system to intentionally harness that learning for the collective good.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Utilize teachers with advanced degrees and specialized coursework as Internal University instructors</li> <li>● Appoint teachers with advanced degrees and specialized coursework as task force leaders</li> <li>● Build capacity of administrators for distributed leadership (strengths/asset inventories, adult learning and development)</li> </ul>
Develop <b>Hierarchical-Collective</b> learning experiences to the greatest potential.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Develop a system for video-enhanced professional development (SWIVL)</li> <li>● Lead teacher learning walks</li> </ul>
Acknowledge and vigorously promote <b>Distributed Learning</b> .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Recognize involvement in professional organizations on school website</li> <li>● Offer micro-credentials for webinars and MOOCs (badges)</li> </ul>
Build strong teams to allow for <b>Distributed-Collective</b> learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Establish teacher hiring task force to recruit and select colleagues</li> <li>● Promote action research</li> </ul>