

THE PERCEIVED COHERENCE LEVEL OF SUPPORT BETWEEN THE
CENTRAL OFFICE AND DISTRICT SCHOOLS

By

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A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2010

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To my very supportive wife, Julie and my
understanding children; Justin, Megan, and Andrew

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank my wife, Julie, whose support of the journey to further my educational endeavors has been life giving; and also my three children, Justin, Megan, and Andrew who endured the loss of time with their father. I thank my chair, Dr. Linda Behar-Horenstein, for her patience and presence in shaping my future. I thank my committee members for their commitment of time, energy, and collaboration to a fellow educator. Also, I thank my good friend, Randy for lending me a hand anytime I needed it.

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
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May 2010

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Major: Educational Leadership

The purpose of this study was to explore central office administrators', school based administrators', and teachers' beliefs about the level of coherence provided by central office support in relationship to school achievement. Three focus groups, homogenously grouped by central office administrators, school based administrators, and teacher were conducted to discover coherence levels in the categories of Systems, Resources, and Structures. From an inductive analysis of the data, eight themes emerged; needs-based resource allocation, progress monitoring, professional development planning and delivery, consultant professional development, collegial professional development, technology for data analysis, formal structure, and informal structure.

Progress monitoring had the highest level of coherence between all groups and resource allocation showed more coherence between central office administrators and teachers when compared to teachers and school administrators and central office administrators and school administrators. Coherence levels in the category of resources were inconsistent. While central office and school based administrators were aligned in the area of professional development planning and delivery, teacher's coherence levels were low when compared to both central office

and school based administrator groups. Coherence levels were consistent among all groups regarding use of consultants and colleagues for delivery of professional development activities. Conversely, coherence levels of reliance on technological tools for data analysis were higher between teachers and school based administrators when compared to teachers and central office administrators and school-base administrators and central office administrators. With respect to formal and informal structures, teachers favored the use of informal structures, although central office and school based administrators preferred formal.

There has been a lack of research about central office functions regarding the coherence or connections made between central office administrators, school based administrators, and teachers regarding their meaning making and understanding of the systems, resources, and structures that affect school achievement. This study illuminates that when participants are willing to share their views, a greater understanding of the relationships among Systems, Resources and Structures directed towards school achievement can result.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Many educators believe that the further an individual moves away from the classroom the less effect that person has on student achievement. Mac Iver (2004) affirms that the farther away a policy-making body [central office] is from the school, the less influence it is likely to have. Many researchers assert that central office administrative functions, like policy making and reform initiatives are often too abstract or irrelevant to enhance student outcomes (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2005; Wong, Buice, & Cole, 2006). However, according to the Institute for Educational Leadership, school improvement efforts have largely ignored the potential roles of superintendents, school boards, and central-office administrators in promoting student achievement for the past two decades (Johnston, 2001). Marla Ucelli, the Director of District Redesign at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, also argued that the central office is both one of the most important untapped resources as well as, one of the biggest obstacles, in efforts to reform schools.

According to Hightower, Knapp, Marsh, & McLaughlin (2002):

There needs to be a more powerful set of frameworks for conceptualizing what a district is and does, how thinking and action from the central office and school board can permeate the teaching environment, and thereby how the district can positively shape the work and careers of its teaching force (p. 6).

The collective characteristics of positive school cultures are often overshadowed by the demand for immediate reform due to federal, state, and central office mandates. As a result, the demand for reform has made many school cultures sterile (Deal & Peterson, 2002). To make school culture dynamic, structuring the school and its interactions with the goal of achieving consensus requires that everyone strives to work in unison.

In their book, *Transforming Schools: Creating a Culture of Continuous Improvement*, Mud, Kuklis and Kline (2004) wrote:

A competent system requires several significant shifts—from unconnected thinking to systems thinking, from an environment of isolation to one of collegiality, from perceived reality to information-driven reality, and from individual autonomy to collective autonomy and collective accountability (p. 1).

Systems' thinking supports the work of school personnel and can be used to connect central office administrative functions with improved district culture and school achievement.

Organizational culture becomes stronger when people in a school district hold beliefs focused on student and teacher learning, core values of collegiality and achievement for all, and a shared sense of responsibility for student outcomes (Deal & Peterson, 2002). This view must be cultivated and supported by both school based and central office administrators, and they must value effective teaching (Beauchum & Dentith, 2004).

Recently two dissertations examined how the superintendent and director of instruction ensured that instructional leadership supported school personnel. These studies looked at the support provided from two positions within the central office and utilized quantitative methods (Davidson, 2005; Kox, 2005). There is no doubt that the leadership provided by central office administrators, principal, or assistant principal of a school is critical. More important, perhaps is what teachers perceive as support. From an open-ended survey, teachers reported that a supportive administrator is seen one that, “provides needed material, encourages professional growth, shows interest in teachers and students as humans, is flexible on how to achieve goals, takes necessary action to support staff, values teacher and student input, and handles changes cautiously” (Beaudoin & Taylor, 2004, p. 135). These attributes specifically describe the school based administrator, but do not elucidate what support, if any, is provided by activities performed by central office administrators. One way central office administrative personnel can reform schools is through support.

Using qualitative research methods, this study explored how central office support influenced the daily work of schools, and describes the perceived coherence between support from the central office and school achievement. There is a plethora of professional literature about school culture and the influence that school level administrators and their staff have over the culture of school (Begly & Johansson, 2003; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Peterson & Deal, 2002); there are fewer studies about the effects superintendents have on student achievement or school culture (Morgan & Petersen, 2002). Also, few studies have specifically focused on the support that central office has provided to teachers and school based administrators, and the impact that support has on school achievement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore central office administrators', school based administrators', and teachers' beliefs about the level of coherence provided by the central office support in relationship to school achievement.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following overarching question.

What is the perceived coherence between support from the central office and school achievement?

Corollary questions bounded by three categories: systems, resources, and structures were designed to answer the overarching question.

- 1) In terms of central office resource allocation and progress monitoring systems:
 - a) How do central office administrators describe their role in supporting school based administrators?
 - b) How do central office administrators describe their role in supporting teachers?
 - c) How do teachers perceive the support they receive from central office administrators?

- d) How do school based administrators perceive the support they receive from central office administrators?
- 2) In terms of human and technological resources:
- a) How do central office administrators describe their role in supporting school based administrators?
 - b) How do central office administrators describe their role in supporting teachers?
 - c) How do teachers perceive the support they receive from central office administrators?
 - d) How do school based administrators perceive the support they receive from central office administrators?
- 3) In terms of formal and informal structures:
- a) How do central office administrators describe their role in supporting school based administrators?
 - b) How do central office administrators describe their role in supporting teachers?
 - c) How do teachers perceive the support they receive from central office administrators?
 - d) How do school based administrators perceive the support they receive from central office administrators?

Definition of Key Terms

The following terms are defined as they are used for the purpose of his study.

CENTRAL OFFICE ADMINISTRATORS	Individuals whose primary duty encompasses curriculum and/or instructional services with over three years of experience at the central office level.
CULTURE	The predominating attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviors that characterize the normal day-to-day practices of a group of people that comprise an organization.
CLOSE THE GAP FORM	A progress monitoring document used by teachers to inform others about declining student performance and specific steps to be followed for remediation.
HUMAN RESOURCES	Professional development activities that support school personnel growth.

PELP COHERENCE FRAMEWORK	A diagram that depicts categories of related activities of support that focus on school improvement initiatives.
RESPONSIBILITIES	Tasks that an individual or group is assigned that align with one's duties.
ROLE	A set of responsibilities, activities and authorization an individual is expected to fulfill.
SCHOOL BASED ADMINISTRATORS	Principal or assistant principal of a school site with a minimum of three years administrative experience.
SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT	The achievement level of a school reported by Florida school grading system that is perceived to be an indicator of collective student achievement.
TEACHERS	Personnel with over three years of classroom experience who provide instruction or support to students in grades K-12.
360 DEGREE MODEL	A strategic framework that aligns progress monitoring initiatives, data analysis protocol, and staff expectations for action that was developed by the district.

Significance of the Study

In a world of increased school accountability, it becomes the responsibility of all staff to work towards increasing and supporting achievement among all students. In order for school personnel to realize increased student performance, cultural changes are needed at both the school and central office level (Fullan, 2001; Honig & Hatch, 2004). Providing such staff development, for many districts, has become more challenging as fiscal and human resources continue to diminish. School based administrators are expected to (a) provide support for their teachers; (b) manage budgets, facilities, transportation, and extracurricular endeavors; (c) offer leadership for the instructional process and professional development; and (d) make classroom observations and comprehensive end-of-year teacher evaluations (Coppola, Scricca, & Connors, 2004).

There is a dearth of literature regarding the impact that support from the central office administrative team has on school achievement. Some examples of central office support focus on specific reform initiatives (Finnan & Meza, 2002; Mac Iver, 2004), the level of instructional leadership (Mac Iver & Farley, 2003), support for the school personnel's implementation of state policies (Gross & Goertz, 2005), and central office organization effects on student achievement (Gross & Goertz, 2005). Some authors suggest that research conducted on the roles of central office supervisor's call for greater attention to qualitative methods of inquiry (Mac Iver & Farley, 2003; Pajak, Adamson, & Rhoades, 1998). Traditionally, studies that have used survey methodology have not provided the information necessary to explain the "how," "what," and "why" that support from the central office has on school achievement.

Many researchers have described the responsibilities or tasks that promote increased student achievement in schools. Some authors have suggested that direct assistance, staff development, group development, curriculum development, and action research will affect student achievement (Pajak & Glickman, 1989). Others place emphasis on Talking with teachers, professional Growth, and Reflection as they refer to their view as the TiGeR model (Blasé & Blasé, 2004). The TiGeR model supports collegial cultures through professional interactions between staff, implementation of staff development techniques for adult learners, and high engagement in reflective practices among school staff (Blasé & Blasé, 2004). Central office personnel need to take an active role in the planning and implementation of improvement processes such as these to move their schools and district in a positive direction. Higher performing districts have central office personnel that provide a clear focus on instruction, train educators on best practices, and encourage educators to take risks and grow professionally.

Limitations

Participation in focus groups is voluntary, thus there is a risk that the commentary will not be representative of the school population. Another limitation of the study is that the veracity of the findings is dependent upon the authenticity of the participants. Also, the quality of the researcher's interview skills may influence the depth and breadth of information that is acquired during data collection.

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Since the inception of the No Child Left Behind legislation in 2001, school and central office staffs have been held increasingly more accountable for student achievement. The superintendent and central office staff has been charged with the responsibility for schools that do not make adequate yearly progress. They must undertake the necessary steps to ensure that these schools are undergoing a state mandated restructuring plan. Central office administrators are now being called upon to lead reform initiatives to increase school achievement. School personnel are not likely to realize increased achievement if their central offices do not take an active role in school improvement or fostering coherence (Gross & Goertz, 2005). While central office involvement in increasing school achievement is rising, the lack of understanding surrounding the type and amount of central office involvement is less comprehensive. This concern becomes more poignant when principals report that while they want more school autonomy and less top-down bureaucracy, and that they consider the support that central office administrators provide as essential (Foley, 2001; MacIver & Farley, 2003). Because school and central office personnel often hold conflicting viewpoints about what is district bureaucracy and what is support, there has been tension between local school authority and central office authority (North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, 2000).

One example that highlights this tension is provided by Darling-Hammond, Hightower, Husbands, LaFors, & Young (2002). Researchers reported that principals and teachers in San Francisco believed that central office personnel were focused on instruction and primarily promoted development for principals and teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002). Principals identified central office functions related to staff and curriculum development that are responsive to the needs of school personnel (Ragland, Asera, & Johnson, 1999). From their perspective

“curriculum” development should be completed at the school level but that the central office personnel should provide support for implementing new techniques and organizing the curriculum (Skrla, Scheurich, & Johnson, 2000).

Researchers reported that high performing and improving districts (a) have a shared sense that the central office provides support and service to schools, (b) focus primarily on improving instruction, (c) provide a high level of resources to professional development that is linked to research-based practices, and (d) ensure that curriculum, instructional practice and assessment are aligned (Ragland, et al., 1999; Skrla, Scheurich, & Johnson, 2000).

Findings from previous studies may be grouped into three categories. The first category is systems. School districts manage themselves through a variety of systems, which are the processes and procedures through which work gets done. Central office administrators aid in this by effectively allocating resources to improve instruction and to ensure that progress monitoring is occurring in the school (Skrla, et al., 2000). Second, central office administrators provide human and technological resources to make certain that there is an alignment of curriculum, instructional practice, and assessment (Ragland, et al., 1999; Skrla, et al., 2000). Finally, high performing districts have central office personnel who utilize formal and informal structures that signify to staff that there is collegiality between central office administrators, school administration and teachers, with a commitment to focus on school achievement.

The review of related literature is structured around the Public Education Leadership Project (PELP) Coherence Framework (Harvard Graduate Schools of Education and Business, 2003). (See Figure 2-1) The PELP Coherence Framework was selected because the framework links systems, resources, and structures to the district strategy for improving school achievement.

PELP Coherence Framework

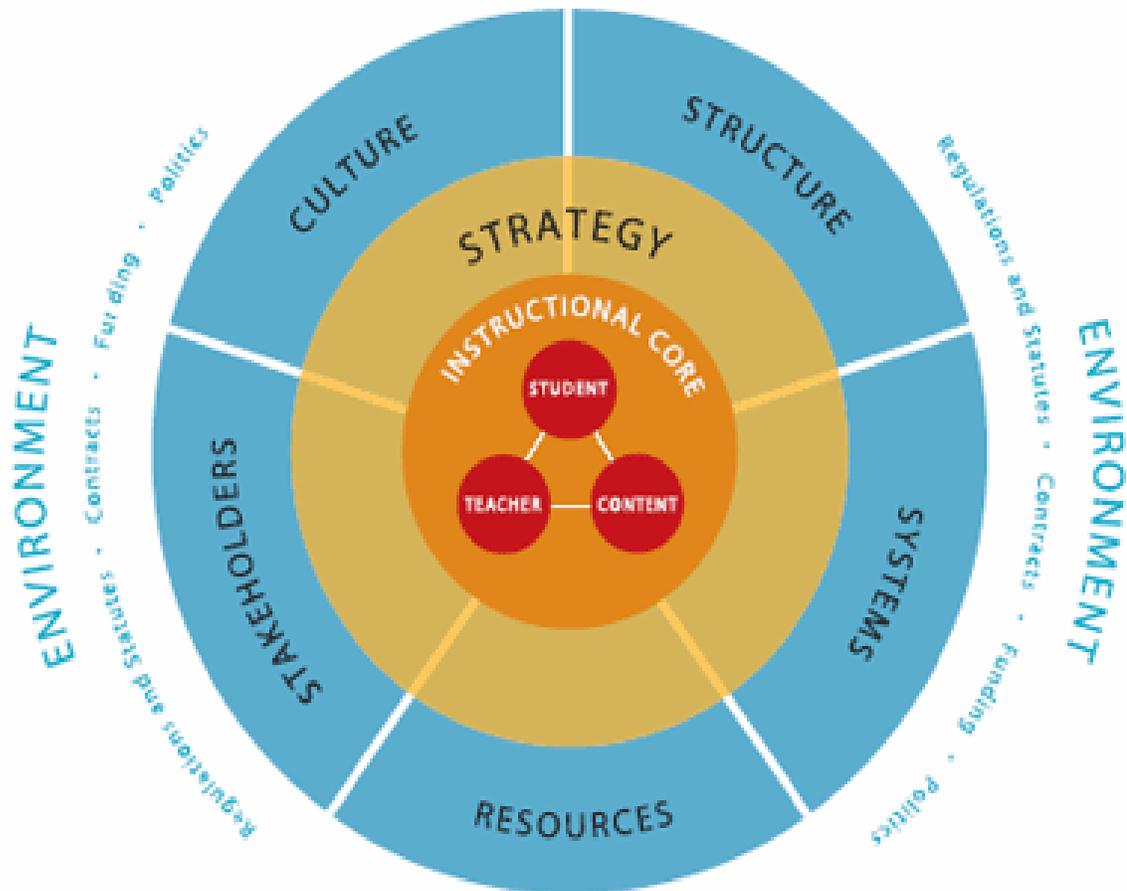


Figure 2-1. The Public Education Leadership Project (PELP) Coherence Framework.

While the framework also outlines culture and stakeholders as factors influencing the district strategy for improvement, these factors fall outside the scope of the present study. The researchers reported the effective practices of high performing districts rarely included culture and stakeholders in their discussion. This chapter provides an overview of relevant literature and includes the following topics: (a) district strategic planning, (b) systems, (c) resources, and (d) structures.

District Strategic Planning

Planning for the improved achievement of schools and school districts involves deliberate steps. The strategic planning process begins with pre-planning and questions such as “Where are we?” “Where do we want to go?” and “By what means are we going to get there?” should be asked (Lane, Bishop & Wilson-Jones, 2005). These questions help central office administrators focus on the procedures and processes that will support the “instructional core” which is made up of the teacher, student, and content (Cheng & Marietta, 2003). Because the over-arching goal is to increase student, school, and district achievement, several stakeholders need to be involved during the planning process.

High performing districts have central office and school personnel work together in the strategic planning process. The planning results in changes to and growth of instructional reforms that affect school achievement (Lane, et al., 2005; Hambright & Diamantes, 2004). These districts take on a long-term commitment to success through continuous improvement while maintaining a focus through strategic planning on the current challenges facing the organization (Elmore & Burney, 1999). Part of this planning is the making sense of goals for district improvement, legislative mandates, and school reform at the central office level.

Systems

According to the PELP framework, central offices and school personnel manage themselves through a variety of systems, which are the processes and procedures through which work gets done. Reports from the Chicago Annenberg Research Project suggested the term “instructional program coherence” (Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, & Bryk, 2001, p. 9). Instructional program coherence is employed when central office personnel or school teachers and administrators determine the relevance that the new initiative has to the instructional program (Newmann, et al., 2001). Staff should determine if the initiative will positively or

negatively affect the work of the district. In terms of systems, the district's likelihood of improvement will increase if personnel at the school and central office engage a common instructional framework, initiate staff support, and allocate resources necessary for progression of the framework.

Resource allocation

Increasingly central office administrators rely on state and federal mandates for funding and staffing schools. Restructuring seems to be commonplace for teachers and school administrators in schools that are not making adequate yearly progress as defined in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. This legislation provides restructuring guidelines that enable central office administrators to change staffing and funding allocations needed to improve schools.

Some research has shown that central office administrators offers selective assistance and only allocates additional resources when there seems to be a need (Honig & Hatch, 2004). Allocation of fiscal, human, material and time resources cannot be done without some understanding of the need and student achievement goals of school and central office personnel (Ouchi & Segal, 2003). Once goals are realized, central office administrators can build coherence for the allocation of resources provided to school personnel by using informational policies and implementing procedures that govern resource allocation (Honig, 2003).

Resource allocation does make a difference in school achievement within high achieving districts and low achieving districts. Concentration of fiscal resources by central office personnel in high performing districts is in core instruction and teachers, while fewer resources were devoted to the support of general administration. Conversely, in low performing districts central office personnel provided fewer fiscal resources to instructional needs and had little evidence of reallocation of resources based on need (Pan, Rudo, & Smith-Hanson, 2003). Lastly, Pan and

colleagues provide that improving districts showed a commitment to alignment of district and school goals for increased achievement. Also, they stress the value of “needs-based budgeting” (p. 9) for resource allocation to schools demonstrating specific student needs identified through ongoing data analysis.

Another form of resource allocation is personnel allocation. Human resource allocation by central office administrators in improving districts resulted in more teachers per 1,000 students, central office administrators provided greater professional development opportunities, and reduced the use of paraprofessionals (Pan, et al., 2003). Likewise, research on the relationship between school resources and student outcomes revealed that central office administrators that invested in the human capital within school staffing showed greater student achievement. Inclusive in human capital is the hiring of high quality professionals and the use of comprehensive professional development (Greene, Huerta, & Richardson, 2007).

Allocation of fiscal and human resources will not alone affect school achievement. Central office administrators can support teachers with material resources that aid instructors in performing their job. In a survey of 228 special education teachers in a South Texas school region 90% strongly agreed or agreed that they did not have the materials needed to do their job well (Kaufhold, Alvarez, & Arnold, 2006). Material resources such as books, computers, projectors, and various supplies are an important factor in a teacher’s ability to teach more effectively. Ensuring that teachers have the materials they need is important. Kanter (1999) offers the term “professionalism to perform”. The material may not be the key, but the climate developed in the district that supports the needs of teachers and school administrators will aide personnel in being able perform their jobs.

Evidence-based findings indicate that providing time resources for teachers to plan is beneficial, however, for that time to be effective teachers must be in structured learning communities with common goals. Building collegiality is a commitment to growth of one another and provides the foundation for professionalism. Professionalism is linked to efficacy of the staff and a commitment by the administration and teachers to embrace a “professionalism to perform” attitude (Kanter, 1999).

Schools that have personnel who work on reaching a higher level of professionalism utilize inquiry effectively. Some researchers signify that organizing teachers in small groups called “inquiry-oriented professional learning communities” (Dana & Hoppey, 2008, p.16) strengthen the collegial bonds. Groups meet regularly and engage in meaningful dialogue about the practice of teaching. Data are collected and analyzed and improvements on effective practices are made (Dana & Hoppey). Weglinsky (2000) found that the grade level of students increased by 39%, 107%, and 40% when teachers engaged in professional development that focused on their subject area, learning about diverse student populations, and higher-order thinking skills, respectively. Alignment of the work of school personnel that centers on collegiality and professionalism results in teacher learning by studying, doing, and reflecting; by collaborating with other teachers; by looking closely at students and their work; and by sharing what they see (Darling-Hammond, et. al., 2005).

Progress monitoring

Proper monitoring of student progress and school achievement requires central office administrators to be organized and mobilized for monitoring progress of schools (Leithwood, Aitken, & Jantzi, 2001). In a study that looked at the use of reading specialists in Dade County, specialists were immersed in the standards, benchmarks, and assessment tools so they could bring a working understanding to every teacher in the district (Confer, 1999). Likewise, front-

line central office administrators “view[ed] their roles as site monitors rather than as site supporters and shifted their day-to-day activities to reflect site monitoring” (Honig, 2006, p. 373). Although responses to progress monitoring as it relates to support of school personnel causes some confusion, monitoring of school achievement is a form of support (Ragland, et al., 1999; Skrla, et al., 2000).

Schools can make achievement gains when central office administrators utilize progress monitoring, plan for improvement, and implement strategies that are aimed at raising achievement. In addition to the information that progress monitoring can provide to teachers and school administration, it also engages central office personnel in reassessing their roles and considering what they can do to focus on school-based teaching and learning (Hightower, Knapp, Marsh, & McLaughlin, 2002).

One way that central office personnel can focus on teaching and learning in the classroom is by familiarizing themselves with school needs. By using needs assessments and the analysis of achievement data, central office personnel can establish specific goals to pursue. Honig (2006) writes “School district central-office administrators typically lack information and have limited, if any, jurisdictional authority to mandate goals and strategies for schools” (p. 359). However, since central office administrators have no real authority over the school it becomes apparent that they must provide strong support for the initiatives that school personnel identify (Honig & Hatch, 2004). Also, school based administrators’ have voiced their opinion regarding the amount of involvement they desire in the school level goal setting and support for attainment of those goals. For instance, school level leaders in high poverty districts indicated that “fostering a balance between district-level support and school-level flexibility to innovate” (p. 16) was

needed to advance a district's mission and improve school achievement (Togneri & Anderson, 2003).

Some researchers have reported that school level personnel desire the flexibility to employ innovative programs to reach school goals, while others suggested that principals and school-based staff desire more central office support in selecting and implementing instructional programs to help raise student achievement (Christman, 2001; Foley, 2001; Spiri, 2001). The involvement of central office personnel in school level decisions concerning instructional focus is one way to help concentrate on school achievement although the efforts of the central office administrators ought to be directed in assessing the effectiveness of selected instructional programs.

Resources

Ragland, Asera, and Johnson (1999) reported how central office administrators aligned resources and produced structured support to 10 poverty stricken but high achieving districts in Texas. They emphasized that central office personnel were more likely to assume support functions and less likely to assume compliance monitoring functions. Central office administrators were more focused on classroom instruction and less focused on administrative procedures (Ragland, et al., 1999).

Increasing classroom and school level achievement occurs through individuals' efforts. Therefore, human resource support provided by central office personnel is an important mechanism to improve school achievement. While studies have reported that central office administrators offer support for school goals by providing professional development, there is often a lack of connectedness between development activities and school achievement (Massell, 2000).

Human resources

While central office administrators value people and the part they play in advancing student and district performance, the challenges that these personnel face can be numerous. These challenges include helping school personnel understand student achievement data, determining how to improve classroom instruction, and equipping teachers to accomplish this (Massell, 2000). The literature for this subsection is limited to professional development and teacher induction.

Research studies conducted on the effect professional development and teacher induction programs have on teacher effectiveness and school achievement are numerous. First, professional development activities rich in teacher knowledge building and increased teacher awareness of effective strategies have resulted in increased performance of students (Firestone, Mangin, Martinez, & Polovsky, 2005; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2006). Second, comprehensive teacher induction programs have been used in high performing schools and districts. Induction programs provide beginning teachers with mentors or coaches that share such things as best practices, lesson delivery, and modeling (Athanases & Achinstein, 2003; Wang, 2001;).

Analysis of how state accountability systems influence the central office administrator's responsibilities provides insight into the role of human resources (Goertz, 2001). Although central office personnel had structures in place to attend to increasing student achievement, those structures did not pertain to classroom practice. Providing quality professional development for developing principals and teachers emerged as a crucial issue. Researchers for the *Learning First Alliance* reported that from over 200 interviews, 60 focus group meetings, and 15 school visits that central office personnel within improving districts changed their approach to staff development (Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Changes to staff development included using research based professional development tied to data and needs assessment, supporting a "cadre"

of district trainers able to provide trainings, supporting new teachers, providing financial support, and aiding teachers and school administration with data analysis (Togneri & Anderson, 2003).

Previous professional development efforts have been seen as fly-by-night (Sweeney, 2003). Research indicates that school-based successes with professional development are dependent on central office administrators' willingness to provide a comprehensive program aimed at increasing teacher knowledge and supporting classroom instructional activities (Blasé & Blasé, 2004; Darling-Hammond, et al., 2005; Fullan, 2001). Instructional activities in the classroom revolve around standards and testing and Desimone et al. (2002) specify that

Districts that align professional development with standards and assessments are more likely to offer reform types of activities and are more likely to engage in continuous improvement efforts, which in turn are related to increased opportunities for active learning (p. 1269).

Aligning professional development with standards and assessments is important; however, developing a coherent program for staff learning is imperative. A coherent program consists of focused professional development with few areas of concentration and increased depth, more time for development sessions, follow-up, and modeling practices being taught (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Firestone, et al., 2005). High performing districts have found that as district professional development plans increasingly encompassed the aforementioned priorities the coherence level increased across the district (Firestone, et al., 2005). Researchers observed that more coherent districts adopted a staff development plan that supported district goals, embedded teacher development activities in the school, emphasized collective improvement, offered support, and provided active learning through modeling behaviors. In districts that lacked coherence teachers made few connections between professional development opportunities and their potential impact on classroom instruction (Firestone, Mangin, Martinez, & Polovsky, 2005).

Some researchers have found two ways to impact the classroom environment through teacher learning. Furthering teachers' understanding of the subject matter is the first way. For example, when teachers from 16 schools increased science complexity taught to primary students in England were provided with ongoing professional development in science curriculum and the development of lesson plans, 10% more of the students at the participating schools achieved top scores on the national science test (Mant, Wilson, & Coates, 2007). In their study of high poverty schools, Balfanz & Byrnes (2006) concluded that increased teacher support and training, including in-classroom non-evaluator peer coaching, contributed to increases in student achievement on the mathematics portion of the *Stanford 9*.

Providing professional development in teaching methods and helping teachers enhance their repertoire of instructional strategies is the second way. Teachers who have a solid foundation of several instructional strategies realized improved student achievement (Anusavice & Behar-Horenstein, 2005; Behar-Horenstein & Anusavice, 2003).

While professional development is vital for district improvement, the induction of new teachers is another important function of the central offices' human resource program. Through a synthesis of 37 studies on beginning teacher programs, Wang, Odell, & Schwille (2008) reported, "teacher induction and its components are not isolated structures" (p. 147). The processes that make up a true induction program are interrelated to the practice of teaching and demonstrate commitment by individuals. High performing districts have central office personnel that provide induction characterized by strong mentoring, ongoing workshops for new teachers, and a classroom observation component (Wang, 2001).

The value of strong mentoring activities cannot be overestimated. Strong mentoring programs combine effective mentoring activities with focused induction (Wang, 2001). When

combining these two aspects, senior teachers acted more like guides by assisting new teachers in their adaptation to the culture of the school and less like mentors of effective teacher routines (Wang, 2001). Similarly, Athanases and Achinstein (2003) found that new teachers believed that mentors have several characteristics that make the induction process meaningful including,

Skills, strategies, and methods for teaching students and for guiding teachers . . . the mentor . . . know[s] strategies, know[s] how to recognize them in a beginning teacher's work, and know[s] how to coach to increase use of them. (p. 1499).

While teacher induction programs are important for teachers, school based administrators' also need support for beginning their administrative tenure (Mullen, Gordon, Greenlee, & Anderson, 2002; Grogan & Andrews 2002). Deliberate and specific collaborative processes between novice school leaders and experienced staff can provide reciprocal learning experiences for both the mentor and mentee (Hansen & Matthews, 2002; Mullen et al., 2002).

Central office administrators often are reluctant to provide specific support to new administrators for fear that they are meddling in the day-to-day operations of the school. However, Hertting's (2008) survey research of over 100 principals and central office administrators showed that:

Principals valued one-to-one interaction with their supervisors the most [as well as] . . . having an administrative mentor, receiving financial support to join professional organizations, reviewing the traditions of the school and staff, and the joint development of a professional growth plan (p. 37).

Technological resources

Professional development also pertains to the use of technology as well. The increased need for educational technology can aid teachers' instructional effectiveness (Sugar & Kester, 2007). Recent studies have pointed out that some central office administrators are unable to support school personnel needs for data or rich data analysis because they lack the skilled human resources (Mac Iver & Balfanz, 2000; Mac Iver & Farley 2003). In a study of four school

districts in North Carolina technology integration prospered in schools that employ facilitators' who provided continual support and staff development (Sugar & Kester). Professional development activities can help with training teachers; however, the implementation of technology with fidelity should be monitored. Through monitoring efforts there are less instances of individual implementation. Individual usage of technological tools can result in lower collaboration and less effectiveness. Conformity allows more productivity and increased support for implementation and professional development activities (Wayman & Stringfield, 2006; Sugar & Kester, 2007).

Central office support of technology can enable school administrators and teachers to utilize technological tools to improve school achievement. Teachers and administrators must have the access necessary to change the direction of instruction and meet their needs (Burch, 2006). Mouza (2005) cites instructional changes, along with administrator support:

Two important elements that helped teachers overcome . . . challenges [associated with] professional development and administrative support . . . such as release time for teachers to attend workshops and re-arrangement of schedules to provide blocks of time for teachers to plan together and exchange opinions and experiences. (p. 527)

Central office personnel in high performing districts that invested in technology and disaggregated student achievement data, and later provided specific feedback to teachers and administrators on subject area and curriculum mastery affected instructional focus (Kerr, Marsh, Ikemoto, Darilek, & Barney, 2006). Specifically, the success of data analysis by school personnel advanced the accessibility and timeliness of data, training, and the alignment of data strategies with other instructional initiatives (Kerr et.al, 2006).

Wayman and Stringfield (2006) described additional ways that research of technological resources can promote school achievement. From their research of three schools that employed data analysis technology they concluded that technological tools could provide focus for

instructional efforts. By immersing teachers in data analysis programs, teachers received administrative support that resulted in, improved teaching practices, collaboration, and focused efforts.

Structures

According to the PELP framework, structures help define how the work of the district gets done. Structures in the PELP framework reflect how people are organized, who is responsible and accountable for results, and who makes or influences decisions. Structures can be formal; deliberately established organizational forms and informal; by guiding the way decisions get made or the way people work and interact outside of formal channels.

High performing districts attend to professional relationships. Several researchers have discussed relationship building, steps building rapport, and the effects of constructing these purposeful interactions. Fullan (2001) indicated that relationship building is continuous and must include diverse mechanisms. Fostering purposeful interaction is important to elicit true bonds that incorporate ideals of professional communities. Reinforcing Fullans' perspectives on professional relationships is Kanter (1999) who suggests that these interactions require "openness to collaboration"(p.16). These concepts are coupled by the belief that leaders must make connections with others [teachers and administrators] and a belief that these fellow educators have insights that will contribute to the betterment of the school and district.

Togneri and Anderson (2003) describe the power of professional relationships. Their qualitative study of central offices in seven states revealed that expanding leadership required collaboration among stakeholders, that attaining goals was insufficient:

Leaders determined that amity held little value if it did not create positive change for children. . . . The most collaborative districts in the study worked at working together. Districts deliberately sought and implemented goals to guide collaboration . . . not all of these districts involved all of the stakeholders to the same degree. (p. 15).

These findings suggested that collaboration was essential among stakeholders. Whether collaborative efforts are formal or informal is irrelevant. More to the point is that the interactions between professionals focus on improved achievement (Confer, 1999).

Formal

The central office can be characterized by its complex historical development and organizational structures. Central offices were structured to oversee schools and teachers, develop policy, and shield the school from external forces (Elmore, 2000; Hightower, 2002). Central office leaders are often perceived as displaced from classroom learning processes. As a result, teachers and school based administrators often feel they are solely responsible to meet accountability measures. In a National Educational Longitudinal Study, Peterson (1999) reported that the central office structure had a negative effect on student achievement, through its negative effect on school climate. Conversely, central office administrators in high performing districts provided the structures to support for continuous school and district improvement (MacIver & Farley, 2003). Central office administrators impact school achievement when the roles, responsibilities, and functions of central office administrators are aligned to support instructional focuses (MacIver & Farley, 2003). For example, Togneri & Anderson (2003) reported that districts making strides in student achievement provided strong principal training, coordinated district-wide curriculum, established and implemented multi-measure accountability systems, and provided supports for new teachers across the district.

Formal organizational charting of central office personnel that delineated the aforementioned responsibilities show alignment of the what, who, and how processes would be accomplished within the district.

School districts have improved when their superintendents continuously endorsed central office administrator roles that support school functions; often this meant that restructuring the

central office to ensure that necessary support was provided to school administrators and teachers (Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Also, school reform happens more easily once central office administrators provide and understand the structures that support the reform process in general (Mac Iver, 2003).

Simply reorganizing central office administrator efforts is not sufficient; the specifics of the restructuring efforts need to be focused. Central office administrators should align resources and produce structured support. Aligning resources in 10 poverty stricken, but high achieving districts in Texas, central office administrators were more focused on instruction in the classroom and less focused on administrative procedures (Ragland, et al., 1999). Identifying the true articulation of how and to what extent the roles and functions needed to change were crucial.

The clarity with which “front-line” administrators perceive their role must transcend to those who are not typically seen as central to the working of the district. Support professionals at the central office who do not have well defined roles can be left picking up where directors, assistant superintendents, or superintendents have left off. With no other defined responsibilities for these employees than support, reforms employed by central office administrators to improve performance will falter if reform is solely assigned to “low-ranking personnel who already have numerous other responsibilities” (Slavin & Madden, 1999, p. 14).

Informal

Unlike formal structures, informal processes are less identifiable. Although the support that informal structures provide is less organized, the informality can give individuals a sense of understanding. According to Confer (1999), “The sharing may be as informal as a short dialogue about an article in a social setting . . . however, dialogues can be mutually beneficial by enhancing the collegiality between teachers and administrators” (p.11).

A study of the effects of administrative support for teachers showed that principal leadership was positively correlated with teacher commitment, especially in new teachers (Friedrichsen, Chval, & Teuscher, 2007). Principal leadership and support include creating informal structures. Some informal interactions comprise listening to problems, providing ideas for lesson planning, and sharing instructional strategies (Friedrichsen, Chval, & Teuscher, 2007). The challenge for central office administrators is to provide leadership to principals, so that it transcends to the classroom level and provides direction [coherence] for stakeholders.

Coherence between support of the central office and school achievement is minimized when directives by central office administrators are so inflexible that they impede school personnel's efforts to implement the directives that adhere to contexts or program parameters (Corcoran & Chirstman, 2002). For example, if central office administrators create a district-wide focus calendar of essential skills to determine what teachers are teaching, but teacher and school administrator discussions focus on what students are learning then there will be a disconnection.

In contrast, by allowing flexibility in the standards that schools have established for school functions then school personnel can understand the district direction (Corcoran & Christman, 2002). Understanding that schools and central offices are "loosely coupled" systems that do not interact closely with one another, it becomes more important for central office administrators to rely on informal mechanisms to build coherence.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to describe the coherence between central office administrators, school based administrators, and teachers in regards to central office support and school achievement. To achieve this purpose the following research question was explored: What is the perceived coherence between central office support and school achievement? In this chapter, the design of the study, including the setting and participants, is described. A theoretical framework for the study along with an overview of instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis is presented. This chapter concludes with a researcher subjectivity statement.

Setting

This study took place in a rural public school district in North Central Florida. The district operates four school sites with grade structures of K-6 and 7-12 and a total student population of about 2,800. Minority students comprised 8.2%, students qualifying for free/reduced lunch were 51.4% and students with disabilities comprised 28.7% of the population. The school district employs 376 staff members. The average teacher has 11.5 years of experience. The central office was comprised of one elected superintendent, one assistant superintendent, and eight directors. This rural public school district was selected because it ranks in the top quartile among the 67 districts in the state. This distinction becomes more apparent when this district is compared with similar sized districts as shown in Table 3-1.

Critical sampling was used to select the participating school district because it represents an exceptional case. The performance levels of the research district are extraordinary when compared to like size districts. The researcher can learn much about the phenomena that is being studied and this is the preferred strategy for participant selection (Creswell, 2008).

Table 3-1. Comparison of similar-sized school districts.

District	Student Population	Free/Reduced Lunch Rate (%)	District Grade					
			2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Research District	2,887	51.4	A	A	A	A	A	A
District 1	2,241	66.7	C	C	B	B	A	B
District 2	2,193	45.1	B	B	B	B	A	A
District 3	2,036	65.6	D	C	C	C	C	D
District 4	3,384	55.7	B	C	B	C	A	B
District 5	3,420	58.1	C	C	C	B	B	B
District 6	3,565	54.8	B	B	B	B	C	B

Note. From FLDOE Student Database, Survey 2 data, October, 2009

Participants

Participants were recruited through both written invitation and verbal description at school faculty and central office staff meetings. The final selection of participants was completed after examining the roles and responsibilities within the school or central office.

Selection of central office administrators was based on their involvement in curriculum and instructional support. Criteria for selecting school based administrators required a job classification as a principal or assistant principal with a minimum three years of experience in administration. Selection of teachers was dependent on their specific role and responsibility at the school site. Examples of roles and responsibilities included, reading coaches, department chairs, grade level team leader, or teachers (Silva, Gimbert, & Nolan, 2000). Only teachers with a minimum three years of experience in the studied district were selected.(see Table 3-2).

Theoretical Framework

This study was framed by constructivism. Crotty (1998) asserts that constructivism is grounded by an individual's ability to make sense of his/her world through their experiences and interactions with others. A theoretical perspective of interpretivism grounded this research. Interpretivism directs the researcher to take the standpoint of those being studied, while having

no pre-conceived ideas of what might be discovered, with results of finding the unexpected (Thomas & Pring, 2004).

Table 3-2. Demographics of focus group participants

	Gender		School Level			Years of Experience
	M	F	Elementary	Secondary	Both	
Central Office Administrators (n=4)	1	3	1	1	2	<10 = 1 11-19 = 1 >20 = 2
School Based Administrators (n=4)	2	2	2	2		<10 = 1 11-19 = 1 >20 = 2
Teachers (n=4)	1	3	2	2		<10 = 1 11-19 = 1 >20 = 2
Participant Totals (n=12)	4	8	5	5	2	<10 = 3 11-19 = 3 >20 = 6

Instrumentation

The researcher conducted focus groups. Focus groups have been commonplace for market research. They have also become increasingly used by social science as a flexible and cost effective practice to measure attitudes, experiences, and responses (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robinson, 2001). The selection of focus groups for interviewing is three fold. First, focus group interviewees may share more when they participate with others who share similar characteristics such as those who hold teacher leader roles or administrative responsibilities (Creswell, 2008). Second, individuals may be hesitant to provide information that involves other personnel when they are interviewed alone. Finally, scheduling interviews with 10-20 individual interviews may present difficulties because of the lack of unscheduled time associated with school schedules.

Focus groups permit researchers to gather data from six to eight people simultaneously. Further, the use of group interaction often catalyzes more dialogue.

Data Collection

The value of qualitative research is that it allows the researcher to locate commonalities in expressions of others and use them to identify themes (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Focus groups allow the researcher to build a complex, holistic picture of the collective conversation by analyzing words, reporting participants' viewpoints and conducting the study in a natural setting (Creswell, 1998). The researcher developed three focus groups and each group was interviewed twice.

The first meeting was designed to build rapport and present the topic of the study. Edmunds (1999) suggests that moderators who are comfortable being in groups "can make others comfortable . . . develop a rapport . . . quickly at the start of the session and maintain it throughout the discussion" (p.73).

A researcher-developed interview protocol was utilized following a pilot study. The guide directed the early stages of the interview and oriented the group to the research topic (Edmunds, 1999). While conducting the interview probing questions and clarifying statements were asked. The purpose of the follow-up focus group sessions was to clarify and generate a deeper understanding of the coded protocol from previous meetings (Puchta & Potter, 2004).

Focus group sessions were scheduled for no less than 60 minutes and a maximal time limit of 90 minutes was set. All focus group levels were conducted within a three-day to one-week time period (Seidman, 1998). Each of the three focus groups was comprised of four to six heterogeneous participants in regard to gender, age, and race. However homogeneous grouping was applied in consideration of title, role, and responsibility in the district as represented in figure 3-1.

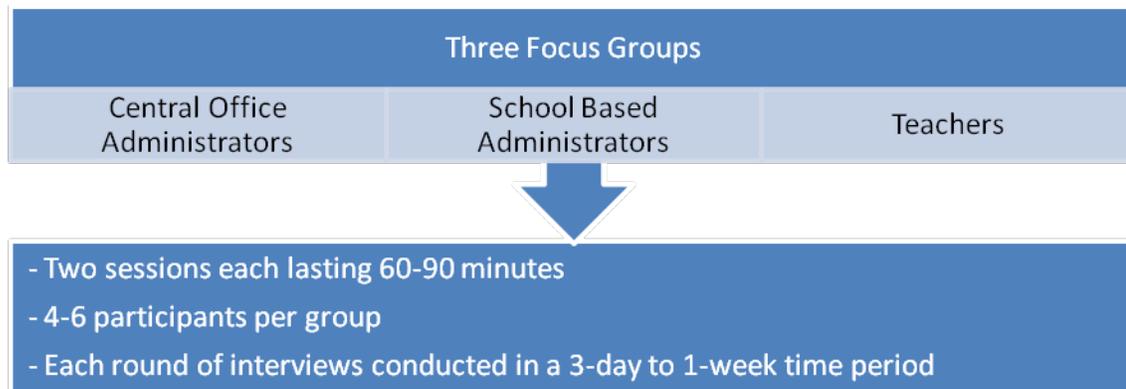


Figure 3-1. Focus group assignment and defining characteristics.

Triangulation was achieved by using multiple focus groups, researcher notes, and document review (Creswell, 2008). Researcher notes and taped recordings were kept on all focus group sessions. Taped recordings were transcribed and compared with researcher notes. Document review was conducted in cases where participants referred to specific documents.

Validation of this study was accomplished through member checking and external auditing. The first validity measure, member checking, was conducted in two phases. During the first round of focus groups, the researcher summarized group responses and discussions took place at the end of each session. In addition, after each session and prior to future sessions, members of focus groups were provided with copies of transcribed audio recordings. Subsequent sessions began with clarifying discussion of the member-checking sheet.

A university instructor with broad knowledge of qualitative methods and a fellow doctoral candidate conducted external audits of the data. Throughout the study, they were given access to coding sheets and themes derived from collected data. The purpose of the audit was to determine whether the findings were grounded in the study, whether the categorical system was supported, and if there was incidence of bias (Creswell, 2008; Scott & Morrison, 2006).

In any study, whether it is quantitative or qualitative the research is bias laden and values of the researcher are always present (Scott & Morrison, 2006). Although acknowledging

researcher bias is one step to controlling it, other techniques to lessen the potential that bias' would influence the interpretation of the findings were used. For instance, the use of a reflective journal gave the researcher an opportunity to express conflicting values and beliefs before meeting with other groups or coding data.

As with most qualitative research the transferability of the study is limited and this was the case in the present study.

Data Analysis

Analysis of data for this study were conducted using thematic analysis. Informed by Creswell (2008), the researcher first used lean coding of focus group manuscripts to provide the researcher a manageable number of codes and result in grouping of like codes (Creswell, 2008). After the initial coding of data, axial coding was utilized. The researcher used NVivo to code the data. Advocates of qualitative software point out how qualitative computer programs ease the storage and management of data and the capacity to assist in the process of analysis (Scott & Morrison, 2006). Results of thematic analysis were reported in a narrative format using excerpts from the data. The results were summarized in a discussion and overview section. References to the literature were cited and limitations of the results discussed (Creswell, 2005).

Researcher Subjectivity Statement

Interest in this study was shaped by the researcher's position and career goals. Formerly, he was a director at the central office level in a North Central Florida school district. He has aspirations of being employed as a Superintendent in the future and believes that the findings from this study will enable him to become a more informed central office administrator and Superintendent.

His experiences in qualitative study methods are limited to graduate level course work. However, the researcher has familiarity with focus group methodology through professional

experiences with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and the Florida Department of Education professional development process (PROTOCOL). Through his service as a chairperson and onsite reviewer for these organizations, the researcher has acquired experience in interviewing and developing thematic analyses. Finally, his experience as a practitioner over 14 years allows him to have an informed understanding of school operations, instructional practices, personnel, culture, and district operations.

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

In this chapter the findings are reported. First, the findings are presented thematically in regards to systems, resources, and structures. Next, themes relevant to the school based administrators' perceptions of central office support and its impact on school achievement and teachers' perceptions of central office support and its impact on school achievement are presented. Eight themes emerged in the study; needs-based resource allocation, progress monitoring, professional development planning and delivery, consultant professional development, collegial professional development, technology for data analysis, formal structure, and informal structure. Each theme was conceptually defined as shown in table 4-1.

Table 4-1. Conceptual definition of themes

Theme	Definition
Needs-based Resource Allocation	Allotment of supplies or services provided to a school based on program development, student need, or strong data support.
Progress Monitoring	Commercial products and district made assessments, forms, and coherence models used to provide data on student progress toward school achievement goals and to inform instructional decisions.
Professional Development Planning and Delivery	Formal development days and ongoing informal meetings devoted to staff growth activities based on specified needs from progress monitoring data.
Consultant Professional Development	Planned development activities presented by individuals outside of the district.
Collegial Professional Development	Planned or unplanned development activities presented by a colleague within the district.
Technology for Data Analysis	Use of an electronic program to assess student level of progress and/or school achievement.
Formal Structure	Hierarchy of processes governed by district forms, calendars, and meeting schedules.
Informal Structure	Impromptu meetings, discussions, phone calls, and e-mails that take place.

Corollary research question 1. In terms of central office resource allocation and progress monitoring systems:

- a) How do central office administrators describe their role in supporting school based administrators?
- b) How do central office administrators describe their role in supporting teachers?
- c) How do teachers perceive the support they receive from central office administrators?
- d) How do school based administrators perceive the support they receive from central office administrators?

Systems

From a systems perspective, needs-based resource allocation and progress monitoring are some of the ways in which central office administrators and school personnel manage the day-to-day operations of their office and schools throughout the district. For a summary of the frequencies of themes by categories, refer to table 4-2.

Table 4-2. Frequency of themes by category

Theme	Central Office Administrators (n=4)	School Based Administrators (n=4)	Teachers (n=4)
Systems			
Needs-Based Resource Allocation	6.4(3)	4.7(5)	7.6(3)
Progress Monitoring	27.3(21)	26.6(18)	25.4(11)
Resources			
Professional Development Planning and Delivery	8.3(5)	8.2(5)	1.1(1)
Consultant Professional Development	2.1(2)	2.7(3)	4.1(5)
Collegial Professional Development	5.4(4)	10.1(7)	13.8(13)
Technology for Data Analysis	6.4(5)	8.7(5)	9.9(4)
Structures			
Formal Structure	23.8(11)	20.9(13)	16.4(9)
Informal Structure	20.3(9)	18.1(10)	21.7(11)

Note: The numbers in the table represent the percent of coverage in that theme while the numbers in parentheses refer to the raw number of coded statements.

Needs-Based Resource Allocation

While focus group reports varied, the school administrator and teacher groups agreed that: “They [central office personnel] do their best to get us what we need and support us in what we do”. School based administrators reported that support for program development and implementation was a central office focal point. R. R. stated that “the programs play a part in it [funding] too. If you had the severely emotionally disturbed unit . . . or intensive reading classes that had to have lower ratios, then that does play into it [resource allocation].” L. L. added that funds for starting up a new program required support. She reported that “we started a new engineering program and in the first year all you are going to have are ninth graders, so you need extra support.”

Teachers seemed satisfied with the level of support that the central office administrators provided. C. C. indicated her contentment with the level of support for teachers. “I’ve never gone to anyone when I needed something that they either did not get for me or try. If they could not get it for me then I received an explanation.”

Similarly, G. K. indicated that justification for the need of a program or funds is done through data:

I’ve never been turned down for something. . . . If I could show the success of the program based on data . . . , we’re a data driven county, then I think I never have been turned down.

Central office personnel were perceived as being approachable, and willing to assist school based administrators with collaborative efforts. As a result they were seen as providing necessary support to schools.

J. S., a central office administrator, described how central office personnel interact with other district personnel to ensure that resource-based needs were met:

There's probably a lot of formal and informal communication on teacher needs, especially the feedback from *close the gap* forms. . . . The formal process of what your school need(s) is based on those reports that the instructional teams bring to the central office team. . . . But the informal is ongoing; it's the individual meetings at the schools and each one of the directors are in the schools, so there is a lot of informal discussion.

He reported that instructional teams are expected to support and defend this need for additional resources.

Progress Monitoring

Central office administrators' acknowledged that a comprehensive progress-monitoring program is congruent with the accountability mandate because it provides for monitoring processes and guides the direction of the progress monitoring system itself. For example, J. B. acknowledged that the continuous review of progress monitoring results and communication was essential for forward momentum. "Each school has a school level instructional team. And, there is a lot of progress monitoring between the district and the schools and a lot of discussions."

J. S. spoke about supporting school achievement and stated that:

Everything is based on doing things . . . going back to the *360 degree model*; it's like a map of itself. Things (monitoring/meetings) have to happen at certain times of the year . . . [or] you've lost opportunity and it will impact how your students perform. We are constantly reminding schools that there are things that have to get done at certain times . . . [when] have teachers covered certain skills or certain benchmarks.

W. O. a director of elementary education responded that "The model brings it [achievement] to the forefront, I mean the monitoring and the model constantly has teachers looking at the standards."

M. B., director of student services, added that it was the analysis and the action planning that resulted from the monitoring system that was valuable. "We have close the gap forms for our *ThinkLink* testing . . . we look at each student individually on that close the gap form and determine what skills they performed poorly on and make a plan for those students."

School based administrators' provided evidence for their coherence of the progress monitoring system and central office support. For example, administrators revealed their understanding of the district generated close the gap form. M. S. explained that by looking at the results of the close the gap form, administrators can identify students with deficiencies, "After we progress monitor, then we work to close the gaps before the next progress monitoring." R. R. explained how teachers work with central office staff to close gaps. He shared that teachers use results from the forms to develop action plans. Each school report the action plans to the central office instructional team. "We will look at trends at the school level and from elementary to high school."

R. D. added that the close the gap forms provide continuous action research that is supported by central office administrators. "You're drilling down to the individual student and the research is finding what there is out there to help that child." M. S. believed strongly in the 360 degree model, because of the high level of school based administrators input in developing the model. L. L., a high school principal, added that the structure of the model and "the back and forth communication and looking at data throughout the year played an important role."

Teachers' described the progress monitoring system and the systems' relation to school achievement. L. C. believed the system to be well thought out and "fluid":

There are periods during the school year that lend themselves to, first grouping data, then breaking down data to each individual [student] and their skills . . . monitoring the situation and starting again. It automatically gives you goals . . . for the district, then at a school level, then at the grade level, and then in your classroom.

L. C. saw the sense of purpose and acknowledged that the system was designed to help the district see positive results from using progress monitoring.

G. K. described the support he received from central office personnel and school level administrators. "It's the amount of time that the administrators put in, actually looking at your

results . . . if we are constantly low in an area, they want to know why.” Others in the group recognized similar perceptions. N. M. recalled a day that central office directors worked with them on end-of-course tests. “It was an intense day, but they were there all day helping us. Sometimes you need . . . to feel the fire.” N. M. expressed her respect for the central offices’ administrative staff and their efforts to help raise achievement.

Further discussion on the use of progress monitoring tools revealed that teachers did not focus on the assessment or tool itself, but gravitated toward results and people. For example, like both the central office and school based administrator groups, G. K. described the use of the close the gap form in relation to the progress-monitoring tool, ThinkLink. He described how it helped identify the students’ proficiency levels and the areas of weakness from the first to the second ThinkLink. “By looking at the group and areas of weakness, we can identify and provide a strategy that we’re going to use to address this.”

While they were discussing the progress-monitoring tool, the description of attending to student achievement and addressing individual students’ needs was evident. C. C. asked, “what if ThinkLink went away? The beauty of ThinkLink is its fast, it’s computer assessed, and we can get the results fast. Any time you have something that’s that swift, that leaves you more time to respond to the results.” Once again, her response acknowledged the power of using assessment tools to make information readily available. However it was the people and the activities that engaged in these processes that made the progress monitoring system work.

Accountability

All groups reported close connections between progress monitoring systems and accountability. Central office administrators viewed accountability as a subsidiary outcome of progress monitoring and staff evaluations. Equally, school based administrators and teachers provided evidence of the use of instructional meetings, teacher professional development plans,

and evaluations that increase accountability of staff. Teachers reported that accountability was necessary. They did not feel threatened by it because they believed that central office administrators would support them in improving student achievement.

Central office directors' W. O. and J. B. discussed the systematic process in holding school-based staff accountable for desired outcomes in improving school achievement. W. O. described that accountability is multi-layered. "Students should be accountable to teachers, teachers to their school administrator, and school administrators to their directors at the central office." Conducting the district monthly team meetings at the central office aligns the responsibility placed on everyone monthly. J. B. clarified the context of these meetings:

It [instructional team report] is a standard form . . . and they have to defend it. And the school based instructional team pulls that [data] together and analyzes it before they bring it to the meeting.

Other central office administrators agreed with this statement.

M. B. identified the classroom level as the place where accountability measures began. She explained that when teachers receive their data from a progress monitoring assessment, that they take ownership of those students and their achievement levels. W. O. added "it goes from the teacher level to the grade level." J. B. reported that knowing that their administrator would be looking at the data and the grade level action plans to meet the needs of the students made it important to teachers.

J. S. tied professional development of teachers and their annual evaluation to the level of accountability within the district. By connecting student achievement levels to the professional development of teachers in meeting the needs of low performing students, the level of accountability for that individual teacher increased. J. S. stated, "60% of their [teacher] evaluation is based on student data and student growth"

School based administrators supported the views of the central office administrators and disclosed the level of accountability performed in the monthly district instructional team meetings. Group participants described the usefulness of the 360 degree model.

L. L. indicated that district instructional meetings are where tough discussions took place. As a result, the meetings focused administrators and teachers on student and school achievement. “I think when the central office staff is looking at data and they are in the schools . . . it’s another set of eyes that can look more objectively at it [achievement].”

Other school based administrators described the meetings as being transparent with data and pressure by peers to do a better job. M. S. shared that the transparency of reviewing everyone’s data makes it more of a team approach. “Just because I have 20 kids in my class doesn’t mean that I have no responsibility to the other 80 in my grade level.” R. D. offered “It keeps us focused on the end goal which is student achievement . . . and all the way up everyone is focused on the same thing.”

M. S. stated:

Teachers know that ThinkLink testing is such a valuable progress monitoring tool for our district . . . that the data is looked at in such a focused manner that they want to be present. Teachers know that someone will be asking us about it and we need to report on it [data]. Ultimately, it increases achievement. It has too.

Similar to the central office group, R. D. promoted the relationship between professional development, school achievement and teacher accountability. He described working with individual teachers on their professional development plan to make a difference in the classroom. “My question to staff is what have you done besides what we have offered at our school, what have you implemented and where can I see the results of that implementation.” Supported by his colleagues, the group indicated that classroom walk-throughs and professional development helped the collaborative efforts. R. D. said, “Honestly, professional development is for student

achievement gain, it's not just time off. We need to see that something is going happen that is good in that classroom.”

Teachers described accountability in ways similar to the central office and school based administrators. Participants reported using the close the gap forms and data to hold teachers and students accountable for achievement. While describing the use of the *close the gap* form and its utility for accountability, the group made statements such as, “we’re held more accountable as teachers”, “it [*close the gap* form] brings in personal accountability”, and “he’s [principal] going to hold me accountable and I’m going to hold you [student] accountable.” Although these statements were bold, participants were equally as audacious in discussing what it meant for job performance and raising achievement.

C. C. stated, “I think all of us as teachers have to be comfortable with that question of, well these students are not proficient in this, what are you going to do? . . . We need to be able to address that question.” N. M. added that by using data and having it “plastered on walls”, that accountability was really a natural progression that resulted in individuals taking responsibility. She explained that it was the district’s practice for administrators to sit down at mid-year and look at teachers’ professional goals in relationship to their classroom goals.

Corollary research question 2. In terms of human and technological resources:

- a) How do central office administrators describe their role in supporting school based administrators?
- b) How do central office administrators describe their role in supporting teachers?
- c) How do teachers perceive the support they receive from central office administrators?
- d) How do school based administrators perceive the support they receive from central office administrators?

Resources

Themes that defined the support of central office staff in the areas of human resources and technological resources are presented in this section. Themes significant to human resources are professional development planning and development, consultant professional development, and collegial professional development. The one theme that emerged under the technological resources category was technology for data analysis.

Human Resources

Professional development planning and delivery

All groups reported having scheduled early release days for professional development activities. Central office group participants explained how the use of academic teams from the schools helped in planning for the next year. J. B. clarified that the teams got together a few times a year and at the end of the year to discuss what is working and what is not:

It's key people from each school and they give use suggestions and ideas that they would like to see in the schools. . . . It's our responsibility to take their recommendations and see how we can work with it.

J. B. added that the academic team of teachers requested professional activities and changes in school level professional development. Although there was not as rich description by school based administrators on use of teachers for the district professional development planning and development, they did describe the use of a needs assessment survey and teacher inquiry projects.

L. L. discussed that while she has attempted to get at least four teachers to participate in teacher inquiry, she and other administrators worked on a school wide project to incorporate action research. R. D. acknowledged the use of inquiry projects and described some of the less formal ways that professional development planning occurred at individual schools. For

example, R. D. indicated that school morning meetings (M&M) and “lunch and learns” were school initiated and dedicated to specific issues pertinent to individual schools.

Teachers also supported M&M and lunch and learn. They believed these meetings provided staff with school specific development in areas of need. G. K. indicated that “we’re able to determine what we are going to present to the schools, how we’re going to do it.” It was evident that he was proud to be part of a district that allowed teachers and schools the flexibility to plan for and direct their own professional growth activities. “It [the meeting] was relaxed and very professional, yet in a collegial manner. . . . We left with a feeling that I can handle this because everyone was at ease and there’s value in the task.”

Consultant professional development

Consultant professional development programs were planned development activities presented by individuals outside of the district. Focus group participants reported that use of consultant professional development resulted in a decreased sense of partnership, a lack of connection to personnel needs, and reduced effectiveness of follow-up and support.

J. B., a director in the central office, sensed disappointment in utilizing consultants for delivering professional development activities. “When we used more consultants, we got to a point that where who we were bringing in did not meet our needs.” She described teacher dissatisfaction too. “Our teachers would complain and they’d say, “We would rather you or someone, a teacher or someone who knows this [professional development] do it.” Next, the central office administrative group reported less ownership for outcomes and a lack of support of the development activities when they used outside consultants. M. B., director of student services explained, “When they walk out that day, it [the ownership] ends.”

Like the central office group, school based administrators also made a connection between the use of consultants and reduced effectiveness of the professional development activities. R. R.

described the use of consultants and the central office support for making professional development school and district directed changes:

Professional development . . . did not drill down deep enough for what we needed. And, when we have turned [professional development] over specifically to the schools and using their own people, I think there is more of a buy in.

Although she acknowledged R. R.'s statement, L. L. indicated there were some professional development activities that were "best" if personnel within the district performed them and other times when it was "best" if others outside the district presented the activities, especially if controversial in nature.

In contrast to L. L.'s perception that professional activities were "best" presented sometimes by colleagues or outside consultants, the teacher group was unified about the use of consultants. The group, like the central office personnel, perceived a relationship between the person performing the professional development and the level of satisfaction. C. C. stated:

We use both . . . I think our trained colleagues give us more practical information, useable information . . . an outside agency may come in and talk to us about lesson planning. But they could not articulate the use in the actual classroom . . . they really could not help us apply it. We could help each other apply [the training].

G. K. thought that a consultant could not possibly understand the school climate or culture enough to be effective. "Bringing in an outside consultant, they don't know the environment of my school". And N. M. provided that "they're [consultants] really not invested as much either, I think in the success of the district."

Collegial professional development

Collegial professional development refers to activities presented by a colleague within the district. Focus group participants reported more staff satisfaction, support, and stronger staff commitment as outcomes to using collegial professional development.

Teachers described several examples of satisfaction with collegial professional development. G. K. explained, “if you had someone go through a training who was competent, then using your own (colleagues) . . . is more relevant and I think more effective.” C. C. also reported that the central office personnel assisted in building and supporting the development of a collegial environment. “The climate is such that there is free discussion . . . probably not formal, but it builds collegiality among the staff.”

G. K. described a more specific episode of central office support for professional development of colleagues:

We met with J. B. and W. O. [central office directors] to discuss the new math and science standards . . . we determined what we were going to present to the schools, how we were going to do it . . . we left with a feeling that I can handle this because everyone was at ease and there’s value in the task we have to do. It’s not something that’s jammed down your throat telling you, you will do this.

Described with conviction, G. K. was passionate about the process the district followed to provide training to teachers. G. K. also emphasized the commitment that central office and school based administrators exhibited in supporting collegial professional development initiatives in curriculum and instruction.

As evidenced by school based administrators’ description of guarded informal interactions curriculum and instruction remained were central issues. L. L. indicated that they did “huddles” with teachers and the reading coach, while M. S. described “M&M” sessions called morning meetings held for professional development. R. D. stated that:

They [teachers] come and ask for specific professional development . . . like the 4th grade team noticed in their data that they were weak in a strand . . . we did a lunch and learn and gave a quick 30 minute professional development.

Central office administrators discussed the use and continued support of teachers. “We have found that we have a lot of teachers on staff that are very good in their area and they have a lot to share”, indicated J. B. Members of the group agreed and believed that using teachers and

getting them together regularly to have conversations about “teaching” was sometimes more beneficial than a structured activity. J. S. stated, “another thing I think we’ve done . . . is we have pulled in the teachers at the end of the year to work on the curriculum maps and the post-tests. Not only are they doing that, but they are having conversation.”

W. O. stated that the discussions were very helpful for the teachers and that it built stronger alliances between staff. J. B. described how teachers began having conversations about what is really working:

Because we set aside time for them to share those things, they leave with so much more every year . . . knowing this we have tried to have more morning meetings (M&M) with just math teachers or just reading teachers to do more of that sharing.

Technological Resources

All of the participants reported that central office personnel provided support by purchasing and maintaining the technology necessary to collect and use the data. Their discussions focused not only on the data analytical tool, but teacher instruction and how the data was used.

Technology for Data Analysis

For instance, central office administrators discussed how the analysis aided school based administrator and teacher decision-making in their use of instructional time and how it was likely to affect school achievement. M.B, stated, “It is about time management”. J. B. linked time management to what would happen if they did not have the technology to aid in data analysis. “All the calculations of which skills each student missed would have to be calculated by hand and it would be very time consuming.” J. S. viewed the use of the technology the same as the others.

If we had to do this [data analysis] by hand it would be difficult because you [would need] a lot of people to do it. . . . [Because it] takes a lot of time to score it and

analyze . . . you [would] lose valuable teaching time . . . Technology has made a big difference in our county.

School based administrators also believed that support for the use of technology for data analysis and time management were important factors in helping students to achieve. For the school level administrator the continuous discussions and meetings about the data that resulted in teacher action were significant.

First, L. L. stated, “it’s the time. If it [data analysis] used to take you a whole day to generate a report, you can do it in minutes now.” R. R. stated that the work associated with data analysis now would be very difficult to maintain without technological support. “If we didn’t have it, it (data) would be impossible to keep up with. R. D. presented that they use to build spreadsheets for data analysis, but was quickly refuted by R. R. “No, we did not do it the way we do it now. I would spend all my nights doing this.”

R. R. reported on the uses of technology and how it related to instruction:

All the time we took doing it by hand It was useful . . . but now . . . instead of you manipulating the data, you have time to look at the data and make decisions; instructionally based decisions and be the leader you need to be.

School based administrators spent time talking about how data aided making instructional decisions, while the work of data analysis was performed at the school level, the administrators reported that meetings were conducted with central office personnel.

L. L. explained that the central office directors expected schools to have an action plan to meet the needs of struggling students. “We meet as a whole faculty and different grade levels present their results and action plans . . . and then that’s when we [administration] meet.” M. S. offered another perspective about technological tools and outcomes.

I think in terms of data and technology and how it’s sustained . . . the reflection and feedback piece of the professional relationships that happen from the teachers, to the administrators, to the district office.

M. S. explained that while the technology made it easier to get data, the collegiality that resulted from the interactions among the different levels of practitioners could only lead to improved achievement.

Teachers' descriptions revealed the coherence between central office personnel support, the use of technological tools for improving instruction, and school achievement. C. C. placed confidence in the central office administrators.

I think they're [central office administrators] very supportive . . . when you've given an assessment and a week later someone comes asking for the numbers . . . they're not just putting this out here and check a box.

The group had understanding of central office administrators' role and their support for the process. G. K. explained that the hierarchy of communications regarding how results were shared.

The first one to get it [data] is the assistant principal. . . . They're going to analyze it before the day is out . . . they will identify the weak areas and will be encouraging the strong areas. The data goes up to the directors and assistant superintendent where they look at trends between schools and grade levels . . . they are also following up. Then communication with our administrators would come down to us . . . to develop any specific strategies.

Teachers concurred that while the technological tools were used to obtain the data that the time spent meeting and presenting the use of the data by all levels of personnel was most beneficial.

Corollary research question 3. In terms of formal and informal structures:

- a) How do central office administrators describe their role in supporting school based administrators?
- b) How do central office administrators describe their role in supporting teachers?
- c) How do teachers perceive the support they receive from central office administrators?
- d) How do school based administrators perceive the support they receive from central office administrators?

Structures

Structures help define how the work of the district gets done including how people are organized, who has responsibility and accountability for results, and who makes or influences decisions. Themes reported in this section are formal and informal structures.

Formal Structure

J. S. explained that meetings and the close the gap form were the ways in which school administrators and teachers formally get what they need. “I think along with meetings, there’s a lot of formal and informal communication on teacher needs, especially the feedback from close the gap forms. . . “ The formal process addresses what resources schools needed and it was based on the reports that the instructional team brought to the district team. J. S. added that formalized processes were needed. Communication and discussions among staff were the one constant that tied the process together. “Unless there is some real good discussion and some debate at those district administrative meetings . . . then we may be happy with whatever.”

M. B. added that you have to have formal structure, but that it cannot be at a level that deters individuals from sacrificing the vision that had been set for the district. “ [A] strength we have is unity at the district level. We have to be respectful of each other’s area and collaborate.”

W. O. reported that discussions took place at the school level as well. She indicated that at monthly scheduled meetings with principals and then with reading coaches, accompanied by walk-through allowed for collaborative encounters. Meetings were formal, scheduled on the district calendar and school agendas, but the discussions were mutual between directors and school personnel:

I meet with my elementary principals once a month and we talk about everything going on at their school . . . we meet with the reading coaches once a month and we will do walk-throughs and sit down to talk about what ideas they bring up.

J. B. added that it was important to be in the schools and “seeing what was happening. . . . We can’t help direct what’s happening, if we are not there to see it ourselves.”

Another formal structure that the central office administrative group described was their *360-degree model*. Described as a formal document that helped to direct the work of the district, the model is revised annually. “Everything is based on doing things, going back to that 360 degree model”, stated J. S. “it [360 degree model] starts at the classroom, but from the classroom to grade levels and departments . . . there is a picture of the school . . . of the district.”

Similarly, school based administrators discussed the use of the 360 degree model and their input in the process of revisiting the district model. L. L. stated that “it’s 360 degrees . . . it runs year round.” R. R. and R. D. agreed. They added that it provided a “graphical representation of what we do year round.” M. S. described the model as a clock. “. . . It looks like a clock, but instead [of numbers] it has the months and what we need to do each month.” When asked if the model is used regularly, L. L. replied “every month. It is reported on every month.” About the amount of input school based administrators had in the development of the model L. L. indicated:

In fact we need to relook at the high school one because we’re showing pre and post test . . . after doing that last year our teachers asked to give a cumulative pre-test and only do a post-test each nine weeks . . . we look and tweak it (the model) each year.

The school based administrative group felt that central office personnel listened to and welcomed their input.

While some of the group scheduled specific formal meeting times such as “once a month” or discussions with the district staff at the administrators’ meeting”, R. D. reported that, “there was a desire for people to get around the table . . . [for] the good of the district”. R. R. continued and stated that, “I feel that you can have an impact or a say on what this district does from any position you are in.”

Teachers seemed content with the formalized processes and shared their understanding of close the gap forms, the *360-degree model*, and meetings that focused on school achievement.

For instance, C. C. stated:

A formal process is like the close the gap form. That's a universal form that everybody is filling out to show where you're weak and where you're strong. You also have room for your action plan and that's a formal process.

Her understanding of the process is one way that the coherence between central office administrative expectation and the actions by teachers necessary to increase school achievement was accomplished.

N. M. discussed her understanding of the *360-degree model* and its relation to formal structure. "There's a great deal of contentment or satisfaction when I know what's expected next of me. I've administered this test, I have my data, and now this is coming next." She indicated that she experienced satisfaction and not being overwhelmed with the daily work. "It's like you're taking little steps or manageable steps throughout the course of the year. It's planned for me."

The group believed that the model along with the formal process associated with close the gap forms were thoughtfully developed to support them in the work they do. L. C. also stated that, "We depend on each other for information. It's team; it's all a team. We have a valued opinion."

In regards to formal meetings the focus group participants described the morning meetings (M&M) that took place at the school site. Although the meetings were scheduled, the discussion and interaction between participants was informal and non-threatening. N. M. stated that "morning meetings are formal and sometimes they are twice a week. Our reading coach or someone who's been to a workshop will present to us in the morning meetings." C. C. reported that during their meetings that the central office administrators acted like team members and

instead of coaches. “Their role is that they are guides and cheerleaders. They guide us to increase our effectiveness in the classroom.”

Informal Structure

Central office personnel engaged in discourse that revealed their role in developing informal structures. J. B. provided an example of her informal encounter. In the past few days she had talked with high school principals regarding what they were going to do with students doing online dual enrollment online “I e-mailed the list to them today . . . they will pull in their high school academic representative and see if they have any suggestions and then the three of us will make a final decision”. J. B. reiterated that although informal, she intentionally involved principals and teachers in helping to come to a decision that would be best.

Another example of an informal interaction was provided by M. B. She sent an electronic survey and followed up with a teacher that had a specific question:” this morning I answered one [teacher] that was asking about getting funds from the dollars to do incentive reinforcement for the behavior programs . . . I responded that it would be an appropriate use. M. B. indicated that she wanted input from others and that a non-threatening context is sometimes the best. Again, the structure of this interaction was informal, but the topic was directed at the work of the district in improving curriculum and instruction.

The central office group believed that there was a connection between the interactions they had with school based administrators and teachers and the achievement of the schools. J. B. and W. O. explained that “75% to 80% of our conversations are focused around instruction, but even the percent that’s not somehow it [instruction] ties into it.” M. B. discussed her role in “anticipating” the needs of the staff she works with, “I think we need to anticipate the needs of our faculty, staff, and students and be ready to facilitate professional development, technology,

or whatever's needed to increase student performance." Finally, J. B. pointed out how the *360-degree* model helped to maintain the coherence between educators' at all three levels.

Those arrows represent communication between the individual teacher, the instructional team, the district team, and back and forth . . . when they bring us data and then we give suggestions . . . we're continuously having conversations between all groups of those people.

It was apparent that central office personnel valued the informal structure of getting things done and supporting others in the daily workings of the district.

School based administrator responses also showed high levels of coherency with central office participants. Through informal interaction with central office personnel, school based administrators reported feeling supported and engaged in the relationship building and that there was a decided focus on curriculum and instruction.

According to L. L. even though the organization of the district was formal in nature, the relationships between staff seemed informal R. D. referred to the availability and openness of the directors at the central office to discuss issues. He explained that when he would come into W. O.'s office and say:

I am worried about this area and this is what I'm going to do. She may come up with a few ideas to try or say why don't you talk to so and so and see what you can do about that.

Additionally, M. S. stated that central office administrators were very "serious and professional" about their jobs to set a vision and support schools in achieving those goals. "They [central office administrators] are engaged . . . engagement means be an active participant and I think they are right in the middle of it".

According to the school based administrative group, engaging in informal interactions with central office administrators was not the only valued relations. Because the central office administrators used informal structures to increase opportunities for relationship building and a

focus on common goals, school based administrators made connections informally with their group and teachers at the school. M. S. shared an experience of informal conversation that was data driven. “We [principals] were meeting on behavioral issues and L. L. said, “let me put some data up, I need your opinion on this.” It was grades, but it was very revealing.” R. D. gave an example of talking with teachers:

We talked to our teachers about the tendency is to slough off . . . we need to think about how we can attach some sort of accountability to the monitoring assessments for the students to try to do the best they can to show what it is they have learned and teachers have taught.

This example provided further data to support the use of informal structures to obtain common goals in increasing school achievement. Omnipresent was the idea that informal structures were needed to ensure that there was an understanding at all organizational levels that their focus had to be on student achievement.

When asked about the percentage of content in informal interactions relating to curriculum and instruction, the group had differences. Unlike the central office administrator group who was certain about the percentage of informal interactions that focused on curriculum and instruction, school based administrators differed in their initial assessments. One principal stated, “I would say it’s half and half.” Two others concurred that the percentage of discussions focused on instruction were higher. And another principal believed the focus on instruction was lower than 50%. L. L. stated “for me I would say it’s 70/30 with the 30 being instructional.

Like the high coherency level between central office and school based administrators about the use of informal structures to accomplish things, teachers also made the connection to relationships and to the focus on instruction to improve student achievement. G. K. shared his experience with informal structure through collaborative working conditions. He stated, “Once we have all of the results and we’re looking at trends within grade level and from school to

school . . . there's usually an opportunity and an encouraging sense of collaboration." C. C. felt that she could approach anyone at anytime do discuss any issue. "The climate is such that there is free discussion. It is probably not formal, but it builds collegiality among the staff."

Perceptions from the teachers on the level of support they received from central office administrators and the outcomes were provided by N. M.:

They [central office administrators] would not throw a teacher in and say do it. They would come in and give you a mentor or they would teach you . . . my reading coach or administrator is in my room almost every day. I have their [central office administrators] support, they know what I'm doing, and I know they care.

The teacher group was asked to provide a metaphor for how they view central office administrators and the daily interactions that take place in the district. G. K. believed they were on the "team" and signified that the central office administrators were in the "dug-out with us". He offered that in other school districts, many central office administrators are looked at as being removed from school functions. L. C. added that central office personnel supported the team any way that they could. "They're coaching, but they'll also play catcher or pitcher or whatever they need to do."

Finally, like the other two groups, the researcher inquired about the percentage of informal interactions that focused on curriculum and instruction? N. M. replied "99". Others in the group acknowledged this response. L. C. presented an example:

The last informal discussion I had with J. B. was about inquiry because I coach the teachers in the district in action research. She had asked me a question about it and we were talking about the complexity of it and people nailing down a question, a burning question and how it's difficult when it's something that is not measurable.

To summarize the discussion on the percent of instructional focus embedded in informal interactions, N. M. added, "What would be the alternative? Do you mean chew the fat? We don't do that."

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

In this chapter, a summary of the findings is presented, followed by implications of the findings, and then recommendations for future research. This chapter concludes with a summary.

Summary of Findings

There was more coherence between central office administrators and teachers than between school based administrators and the other two groups with respect to resource allocation. Coherence levels within systems were high. The progress monitoring system was rated with a high frequency of coverage by all participant groups. Perceptions of central office support for progress monitoring systems showed that a comprehensive progress monitoring program was inclusive of accountability. School based administrators and teachers reported that the central office administrators provided support by developing the direction and structure for the progress monitoring system.

There was a higher level of coherence between central office and school based administrators than between school based administrators and teachers in the area of human resources. Teachers reported a lower level of coherency for professional development planning and delivery than central office and school administrators. There was inconsistency in the level of coherence between professional development planning and the delivery of professional development. While there was a lack of coherence regarding the planning of development opportunities among the participant groups, there was more coherence with delivery. All groups reported lower frequencies with the use of consultants and high frequencies in using colleagues to provide development activities.

Coherence was prevalent among all participating groups with regards to the use of technology for data analysis; however teachers' reliance on the data analysis technological tools was the highest-followed by school based and central office administrators, respectively.

While there was data coverage in the category of structures, teachers viewed using informal structures more favorably than formal structures when interacting with central office administrators. Conversely, there were higher levels of coherence between central office and school based administrators in the use of formal structure. Data coverage for collaborative efforts was high for all groups.

Implications of the Findings

Research shows that school districts are characterized by central office personnel who monitor and support curriculum implementation, allocate resources, provide professional development and follow up, and coordinate instructional initiatives (Ragland, Asera, & Johnson, 1999; Skrla, Scheurich, & Johnson, 2000). Other studies have shown that central office personnel respond proactively to principals' and school staff's desire for more support to help raise student achievement (Christman, 2001; Foley, 2001; Spiri, 2001).

What has not been shown in the literature is the coherence or connections made between central office administrators, school based administrators, and teachers regarding their meaning making and understanding of the systems, resources, and structures that affect school achievement. Previous studies have not explored the "how, what, and why" about these connections. As this study has shown, when participants are willing to share their views, a greater understanding of the relationships between systems, resources and structures directed towards school achievement can result.

Like the PELP Coherence Framework (Harvard Graduate Schools of Education and Business, 2003), the district's strategic planning and development of the 360 degree model

linked systems, resources, and structures to the district strategy for improvement helped them work towards increasing school achievement. By providing this template, central office staff elevates levels of coherence between central office administrative support and school achievement. The 360 degree model moved people in the district to make connections to other people and to provide support for the development of a culture of collegiality (Zmuda, Kuklis & Kline, 2004).

Focus group participants discussed the use of the model. The teacher group indicated that it truly connected the work of individuals. One of the teachers in the group stated, “We depend on each other for information. It’s team, it’s all a team. We have a valued opinion.” Likewise, the school based administrator group described the model as multi-dimensional. The consensus among the group was that communication and interaction between people is where the model connects the work of the district to increase achievement. Lastly, the central office administrator group focused on the use of the model to keep people moving in one direction. They explained the model as dynamic and never static. The constant “tweaking” and revisiting of effective practices connects people’s work and “keeps us on course”.

There were discrepancies between the participant focus groups in several areas (1) professional development planning and delivery, (2) consultant and collegial professional development, and (3) formal and informal structures.

Professional development planning is performed by central office level administrators rather than by school based administrators. Thus, how can central office administrators include school based administrators and teachers in the yearly planning of professional development? In the research district central office administrators focus their planning of staff development opportunities based upon the needs assessments garnered at the school and teacher levels;

however an understanding of how those plans are made and how the development activities are delivered is lacking.

The methods of delivering professional development varied between use of outside consultants and colleagues within the district. Collegial professional development had a higher level of coherence and more coverage. Also, the district's culturally embedded practices of collaboration and shared decision making promote staff efficacy. Teachers, school based administrators, and central office administrators seem to value the contributions of co-workers and hence there was a higher level of coherence when colleagues delivered professional development. How could the use of outside consultants who would focus on ongoing targeted follow up activities and monitoring result in more staff satisfaction?

There was an incongruity in coherence levels among the use of formal and informal structures. Formal organizational structures in school districts place administrators in management level positions where they are engrossed in bureaucracy. As a result, coherence between administrators at the central office and school based level increases. Because teachers are typically shielded from the business side of school district functions and there was a lack of coherence between central office administrators and teachers and school based administrators and teachers. Conversely, teachers in the research district were fixated on informal structures that joined their efforts with district administrators. The blend of formal processes with informal structures increased the coherence levels between all levels of personnel. Questions that still remain include how can teachers interact informally with school based administrators and central office administrators to bring about increased student achievement and what are the differences between high performing district climates and low performing district climates?

The climate in the research district was one of openness. Aided by the 360 degree model, interactions between central office administrators, school based administrators, and teachers centered on data about student achievement. Personnel in the district have moved the discussions from formalized meetings to collegial dialogue. However, this way of communication has been enculturated by the district leadership as well as the longevity of participants. Many individuals in central office administration, school based administration, and teaching have been in the district on average more than 10 years. Longevity in positions increases the normative practices and stability within the district.

For districts to become high performing a process of strategic planning involving central office administrators, school based administrators, and teachers are imperative. Like the 360 degree model, a district developed coherent model that dictates the working of the district and how practices connect the effort of personnel within the district to student achievement outcomes is necessary. Maybe more important are the deliberate steps taken by central office and school administrators to communicate with support staff and teachers through informal non-threatening interactions. These interactions should be focused on student achievement and school performance.

Recommendations for Future Research

Strategic planning by school districts should be examined further. First, there is a vast amount of literature on strategic planning processes, central office and school personnel development of strategic plans, and establishment of goals (Elmore & Burney, 1999; Hambright & Diamantes, 2004; Lane, Bishop & Wilson-Jones, 2005). However, investigating how a district plans strategically and the ways that administrators and teachers act on those plans could elicit information on the level of coherence within a school district. Second, exploring school districts

that have developed and used a “coherence” model versus school districts that do not may provide further insight into coherency level and school achievement.

Conclusion

The findings in this qualitative study have shown, the coherence levels between central office administrative support and its affect on school achievement as perceived by central office and school based administrators, and teachers. While further research can aid in exploring specific support mechanisms and strategic planning processes used by central office administrators, the current study provides a basis for why coherence is necessary among central office and school staff in the areas of systems, resources, and structures.

APPENDIX A INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Initial Focus Group Questions

Central Office Administrator

1. Think about non-categorical dollars that are allocated to the district. Now please describe how fiscal, human, and material resources are allocated to schools in this district?
2. How does the district monitor student progress? What tools does the district have in place to monitor this? School achievement? What specific procedures support the work of teachers?
3. How is scheduled professional development performed and followed up?
4. Is technology use and implementation to aid in progress monitoring and student data analysis a priority in this district? Why?
5. How do school based administrators and teachers use progress monitoring and student data analysis technology? How do you support the use of technology to enhance school achievement?
6. Describe how the structure of the organization supports school administrators and teachers to get what they need to do their jobs?
7. Besides formal organizational methods, are there other avenues to get things done in your district?

School Administrator

1. Think about non-categorical dollars that are allocated to the district. Now please describe how fiscal, human, and material resources are allocated to schools in this district
2. How frequently does district-wide progress monitoring occur in this district? How many types of progress monitoring are used? i.e. classroom walk through, benchmark testing
3. Tell me about a time when progress monitoring results helped you and the school? What role did central office personnel play in progress monitoring?
4. Is there support or encouragement for staff or schools to do action research/inquiry?
5. How is scheduled professional development performed and followed up?
6. Describe how progress monitoring and student data analysis technology is used in this district? Can you describe how technology use supports school achievement?
7. How do you view the organization of this district? (i.e. flat/horizontal, hierarchy/top down) Examples?
8. Describe a central office directive flexible enough for schools to implement effectively. How involved were central office administrators in implementation of it at the school level?

Teacher

1. In what area (instruction, buildings, books, PD) of the school are the majority of resources allocated? Do these allocations come from your school based administrator or central office personnel?
2. What process does the district follow in using data received from monitoring student progress or school achievement? Describe the role of central office personnel as it relates to progress monitoring?

3. Who conducts professional development in your district? Outside professionals? Trained colleagues? Does it make a difference?
4. How does central office staff aid in implementation and use of progress monitoring and student data analysis technology?
5. Can you think of a metaphor that describes the work of central office and/or the staff? (describe)
6. In terms the organization of the district, can you describe how teachers get what they need to do their jobs?
7. Describe your most recent interaction with central office staff? What was the outcome? How did the encounter make you feel?

Follow-up Focus Group Questions

Central Office Administrator, School Based Administrator, and Teacher

1. Other than state weighted FTE funding for special student populations, does the district utilize and local weighted funding for support for schools or programs?
2. In what ways does progress monitoring by central office personnel affect school achievement?
3. What leadership activities do central office personnel engage in, that support the work of teachers/school administrators?
4. In terms of data analysis and technology, how teachers' and school based administrators' level of use and understanding of technological tools sustained?
5. Describe for me what formal processes support school achievement in the district?
6. Discuss your last informal interaction with teacher/school based administrator/central office personnel. What was the subject matter and what were the results of the meeting?
7. In your words, what is the role of central office administrators in increasing school achievement?
8. Describe how the 360-degree model connects the work of people in the district?

Reviewed Documents

Close the Gap Forms
360-Degree Model

APENDIX B INFORMED CONSENT

Protocol Title:

Perceived Coherence Between Central Office Support and School Achievement

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study.

Purpose of the research study:

The purpose of this study is to examine the coherence between central office support and school achievement as perceived by teachers, school administrators, and central office administrators responsible for curriculum/instruction.

What you will be asked to do in the study:

Participate in a focus group made up 4-6 participants. The focus group will meet a total of two times. Each meeting will be 60-90 minutes in length and will be audio taped for transcription purposes. Several open-ended questions will be explored in each session with the amount of questions being regulated by time. After each session you will be provided with a member-checking sheet that incorporates over-arching themes formed from the previous session. You will be asked to review and provide any feedback in the reliability of the information shared in the focus group interviews.

Time required:

60-90 minutes

Risks and Benefits:

I do not foresee any risks, however you may benefit from the findings regarding central office support and an increased awareness of the kind of supports provided to enhance school achievement.

Compensation:

You will not receive compensation for participating in this research.

Confidentiality:

Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Identification of you will only be done through first and last initials. The list of initials will be kept in a locked file in my possession. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the list will be destroyed. Your name will not be used in any report.

Voluntary participation:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating.

Right to withdraw from the study:

You have the right to withdraw from the study at anytime without consequence.

Whom to contact if you have questions about the study:

Mike Todd, Graduate Student, Department of Educational Administration and Policy, University of Florida, (352)317-4815, f2ric@ufl.edu

Dr. Linda Behar-Horenstein, Distinguished Teaching Scholar and Professor, Doctoral Committee Chair, Department of Educational Administration and Policy, University of Florida, (352)392-0731 ext. 299

Whom to contact about your rights as a research participant in the study:

IRB02 Office, Box 112250, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611-2250; phone 392-0433.

Agreement:

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and I have received a copy of this description.

Participant: _____ Date: _____

Principal Investigator: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C
IRB PROTOCOL

1. TITLE OF PROTOCOL:

Perceived Coherence Between Central Office Support and School Achievement

2. PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR(S):

Mike Todd Med. Educational Leadership; 5211 NW 53rd Street Gainesville, FL 32653
f2ric@ufl.edu 352-317-4815

3. SUPERVISOR (IF PI IS STUDENT): (Name, campus address, phone #, e-mail & fax)

Dr. Linda Behar-Horenstein; 1202 Norman Hall 352-392-0731 ext. 299 lsbhoren@ufl.edu 352-392-0038

4. DATES OF PROPOSED PROTOCOL: From 1/14/08 to 12/04/09

5. SOURCE OF FUNDING FOR THE PROTOCOL: (A copy of your grant proposal must be included with this protocol if DHHS funding is involved.) There is no source of funding for this protocol.

6. SCIENTIFIC PURPOSE OF THE INVESTIGATION: The protocol is a dissertation to investigate the perceived coherence between central office support and school achievement

7. DESCRIBE THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY IN NON-TECHNICAL

LANGUAGE. This research will involve inclusion of three (3) focus groups, each made up of 4-6 participants. The focus groups will meet a total of two times. Each meeting will be 60-90 minutes in length and will be audio taped for transcription purposes. The recordings will be secured in a locked cabinet and destroyed once the study is completed. Several open-ended questions will be explored in each session with the amount of questions being regulated by time. After each session participants will be provided with a member-checking sheet that incorporates over-arching themes formed from the previous session. Participants will be asked to review and provide any feedback in the reliability of the information shared in the focus group interviews. This data may be used for future presentations or publications.

8. POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND ANTICIPATED RISK. (If risk of physical, psychological or economic harm may be involved, describe the steps taken to protect participant.) The participants will benefit from qualitative feedback of central office support and increased awareness of said support on school achievement. No more than minimal risks are anticipated.

9. DESCRIBE HOW PARTICIPANT (S) WILL BE RECRUITED, THE NUMBER AND AGE OF THE PARTICIPANTS, AND PROPOSED COMPENSATION (if any): Each focus group will be made up of 4-6 participants with a maximal participation of 18. No more than 50 potential participants will need to be contacted for this protocol with all participants being 18+ years of age. Selection of participants will be dependent on their specific role and responsibility at the school site or central office. Some examples of roles and responsibilities will include, but not be limited to reading coaches, department chairs, grade level team leader, teacher, school based administrator, and central office support for curriculum and/or instruction. Amount of Initial recruitment of participants will be determined through both written invitation

and verbal description at school faculty and district staff meetings.
There is no proposed compensation.

10. DESCRIBE THE INFORMED CONSENT PROCESS. INCLUDE A COPY OF THE INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT (if applicable). Recruited participants will be determined through both written invitation and verbal description at school faculty and central office staff meetings. All participants will be presented with an informed consent document (attached) and asked to sign in duplicate. They will then be given a signed copy.

Principal Investigator's Signature

_____ Supervisor's Signature

I approve this protocol for submission to the UFIRB:

Dept. Chair/Center Director Date

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Michael Dennis Todd was born in 1970, in St. Petersburg, Florida. The youngest of four children, he grew up in Crystal River, Florida graduating from Crystal River High School in 1988. He earned his B.S. in exercise and sport sciences from the University of Florida in 1994. Upon graduating, Mike taught middle/high school physical education and mathematics for almost 3 years. Returning to school to pursue a graduate degree, Mike earned his M.Ed. in both educational leadership and health and physical education from Valdosta State University, Georgia in 1998.

Upon graduating with his M.Ed., Mike's career took him from being a classroom teacher to being a school administrator. He has accumulated a total of 11 years in educational administration inclusive of assistant principal, principal, and secondary education director of a rural school district. Presently, Mike is the Chief Learning Officer of an educational consulting firm that specializes in supporting low performing schools and districts.

On completion of his Ed.D program, Mike plans to continue with his current position with hopes of becoming a superintendent in a small school district. Mike has been married to Julie Todd for 15 years. They have three children, Justin, Megan, and Andrew.