

FACTORS IMPACTING TEACHER EFFICACY IN POLICY IMPLEMENTATION:
THE CASE OF THE READING FIRST INITIATIVE

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THE CASE OF THE READING FIRST INITIATIVE

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FACTORS IMPACTING TEACHER EFFICACY IN POLICY IMPLEMENTATION:

THE CASE OF THE READING FIRST INITIATIVE

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ABSTRACT

Implementation of educational innovations is a complex endeavor influenced by any number of individual and organizational factors (Berman, McLaughlin, Bass, Pauly, & Zellman, 1977; Elmore, 1978, 1979; Guskey, 1988; Huberman & Miles, 1984). Even as implementation research findings indicate policy success is most directly impacted by two broad factors – local capacity and will (McLaughlin, 1987), “policy-directed change ultimately is a problem of the smallest unit” (McLaughlin, 1987, p. 171). Inasmuch, however, as individuals have influence over factors impacting implementation so too do organizational dynamics affect how individuals act in response to policy initiatives (Elmore, 1978; 2004; Huberman & Miles, 1984).

Considerable resources have been expended over the years to build individual and organizational capacity to implement change (Guskey, 2000). Little is understood, however, about what it takes to influence the individual and organizational *will* to do so. Federal agencies, seeking to change “institutional behavior” at state and local levels “by offering... financial assistance on the condition that [subordinate agencies] undertake certain prescribed activities” (McDonnell, 2005), have tightened control over disbursement of categorical program funds by linking payout of federal monies more closely to learning outcomes. At the same time that such

strenuous requirements may serve to shift the political *will* at state and local levels, federal funds have been allotted for the purpose of building individual and organizational *capacity* for implementing change in school and classroom practices.

Milbrey McLaughlin's (1987) claim that "policymakers can't mandate what matters" is particularly salient in the current atmosphere of high stakes accountability created by No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The focus of this study, implementation of the Reading First initiative funded under Title I of NCLB, offers a complex context in which to examine the impact of environmental factors on the individual *will* to change teaching practices aligned with program requirements. This study is framed by the literature on teacher efficacy as I examine factors perceived to either enhance or undermine individual capacity and commitment for meeting policy goals. As the focus on implementation of federal education policies shifts from compliance with state and local requirements to the provision of technical assistance for supporting both teacher and student learning outcomes, it is imperative that research efforts focus on individual perception of environmental factors impacting such outcomes. In that sense, teachers may act as "informants and guides" to more effective policy design and implementation (McLaughlin, 1990, p. 15).

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction to the Study

Policy design of the current reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), now called the No Child Left Behind Act (PL 107-110) (NCLB), may have been based, in part, upon policy research findings indicating that successful implementation is most directly impacted by two key factors – local capacity and will (McLaughlin, 1987; Odden, 1991; Elmore, 2004). Federal agencies, seeking to change “institutional behavior” at state and local levels “by offering... financial assistance on the condition that [subordinate agencies] undertake certain prescribed activities” (McDonnell, 2005), have tightened control over disbursement of categorical program funds by linking payout of federal monies more closely to learning outcomes. While the 1994 reauthorization of ESEA, the Improving America’s Schools Act (IASA) required that states develop and execute assessments for measuring student progress on state education standards, NCLB goes one step further in requiring that students in Title I schools meet an “adequate yearly progress” (AYP) standard set by federal oversight monitors. Schools not meeting the AYP standard for all subgroups of students – including minorities and those with disabilities – face sanctions that could include mandated provision of tutoring for individual students or actual closure of schools having subgroups consistently failing to meet AYP requirements.

At the same time that such strenuous requirements may serve to shift the political *will* at state and local levels, federal funds have been allotted for the purpose of building individual and organizational *capacity* for implementing change in school and classroom practices. Federally funded regional technical assistance centers have been set up around

the country, for example, to provide intensive professional development for state level administrators for implementing the Reading First initiative, funded under Title I of NCLB. Reading First mandates the implementation of a preventive instructional model utilizing scientifically based reading instruction, methods, and strategies in kindergarten through third grade classrooms in schools awarded subsequent state grants. Along with NCLB sanctions for compelling significant increases in student achievement, the Reading First initiative provides inducements in the form of additional funds for building organizational and individual capacity at both state and local levels for teaching all students to read proficiently by the end of 3rd grade. Replacing past iterations of Title I Reading First offers significant technical assistance for putting compensatory educational programs for high risk populations of students in place. Even as, however, Reading First requires stringent adherence to rules and regulations for implementing local programs, implementation researchers agree “variability is not the exception to the implementation experience, but the rule” (Supovitz & Weinbaum, 2008, p. 7). Given McLaughlin’s (1987) contention that “implementation dominates outcomes” (p. 172), the focus of this study is the impact of implementation experiences, within the context of a particularly structured change initiative, on teachers’ feelings of efficacy.

NCLB and Reading

Despite increased fiscal effort and expanded federal control over Great Society programs implemented to increase basic skills among disadvantaged populations, “the percentage of minority students unable to read is [currently] greater than it was at the beginning of the 20th century” (Sweet, 2004). The original, primary purpose of Title I, the core program of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (PL 89-10) (ESEA), was

the distribution of federal monies to state and local education agencies to provide compensatory educational services for children considered to be disadvantaged. While the United States Department of Education (USED), charged with oversight of programs funded through this legislation, has increasingly tightened program requirements and expended additional funds, “critics have questioned whether Title I programs actually contribute to improved academic achievement for the country’s most disadvantaged students” (DeBray, McDermott, & Wohlstetter, 2005).

The 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report indicates that 38% of fourth-grade students across the nation “cannot read at the basic level.” For children living in poverty, this number is much higher – 64% and 60% for African American and Hispanic students respectively (Lyon, 2002a). American Indian/Alaska Native subgroup data were not disaggregated until the 2002 NAEP results report which indicates that 49% of 4th graders in this subgroup scored below the basic level in reading that year. African American and Hispanic student gains between 1998 and 2005 are deemed significant according to the 2005 NAEP report, with 58% of African American and 54% of Hispanic 4th grade students reading below a basic level, a six percentage point gain for each subgroup. Results for students in the American Indian/Alaska Native subgroup, however, indicate a 3 percentage point loss since the 2002 report, with 52% of 4th graders reading below basic in 2005.

Additionally, it has been argued that an alarming increase in the number of children found eligible for special education services as learning disabled exists, not because of a superior understanding of the disability and more sophisticated ways of identifying it, but because of poor instruction and a “wait-to-fail” model for identifying

children for these services (Lyon, Fletcher, Shaywitz, Shaywitz, Torgeson, Wood, Schulte, & Olson, 2001; Lyon, 2002b). The incidence rate of children found eligible to receive services as learning disabled (LD) has increased from 1.2 to 5.2 percent over the past 30 years (Lyon, et al., 2001; Lyon, 2002b) with reading disabilities comprising an estimated 80% of all such learning disabilities (Shaywitz, 2003). G. Reid Lyon, former Director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), testified in a 2002 Congressional Committee hearing that because children were not provided sufficient and appropriate reading instruction at the onset of reading difficulties many are not truly disabled, but rather “instructional casualties.”

The utilization of what has been termed a “wait-to-fail” model of finding children eligible for special education services under a learning disabilities categorization as opposed to that of a preventive model for providing reading instruction to meet the learning needs of struggling students has created a system that fails to meet the needs of many students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Fletcher, Coulter, Reschly, & Vaughn, 2004; Lyon, et al., 2001). Many states across the country use a “severe discrepancy” formula as a key criterion in LD eligibility (Ahearn, 2003). This model is based on a definition of learning disabilities that contends there must be a significant discrepancy between a child’s cognitive abilities and his achievement (Bradley, Danielson, & Hallahan, 2002). In some states, including the one in this study, changes in eligibility requirements and the observation that increasing numbers of students are scoring in “below” or “low average” ranges on cognitive assessments, have made it increasingly difficult for schools to find children eligible for special education services (Ahearn, 2003;

Fletcher, et al., 2004). Thus, a substantial number of students “fall through the cracks” and receive little or no compensatory educational assistance (Lyon, 2002b).

While considerable focus on the issue of literacy rates in the United States has brought to light thirty years of rigorous scientific research on reading (Chhraba & McCardle, 2004; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998), researchers have lamented a lack of impact on the way children are taught to read in our public schools.

The good news is that there have been scientific breakthroughs in our knowledge about the development of literacy. We know a great deal about how to address reading problems even before they begin... The tragedy is that we are not exploiting what is known about reducing the incidence of reading failure.

Specifically, the instruction currently being provided to our children does not reflect what we know from research. Direct, systematic instruction about the alphabetic code is not routinely provided in kindergarten and first grade, despite the fact that, given what we know at the moment, this might be the most powerful weapon in the fight against illiteracy (Blachman, 1996, pp. 66-67).

In an attempt to significantly increase individual teacher and organizational capacity to meet the needs of all students in the acquisition of skills essential for becoming proficient readers, Reading First addresses this lament by requiring that state education agencies (SEAs) provide extensive professional development opportunities and on-going support for teachers and administrators in schools awarded Reading First grants.

Reading First

Reading First, the “academic cornerstone” of the No Child Left Behind Act, was put in place by the United States Congress to provide funds to improve reading

instruction in kindergarten through third grade public school classrooms. Spurred by increasing numbers of students reading below grade level, meta-analyses of research findings over the past several decades have been undertaken in an effort to find converging evidence of what it takes to teach children to read (Chhabra & McCardle, 2004). These findings, documented in the *Report of the National Reading Panel* (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000), strongly suggest there are five essential components to effective reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension and that these components should be interwoven using systematic, explicit instruction. Additionally, findings indicate that students who struggle with the alphabetic code benefit from intensive instruction that provides more time and extensive exposure to phonemic awareness and phonics components. Thus, Federal regulations guiding state and local execution of Reading First requirements call for prescriptive use of funds to increase organizational capacity to support implementation of a three-tiered, preventive model of instructional delivery and to increase teacher capacity for providing systematic and explicit instruction utilizing the five essential components of effective reading instruction. The contention is that in order “to ensure that children learn to read well, [such] instruction must be provided” (*Guidance for the Reading First Program*, p. 3) within a model that addresses the needs of all children including those who struggle to acquire essential reading skills.

Scientifically based reading research (SBRR). A key focus of Reading First is the use of instructional methods and strategies that have been determined effective through research efforts guided by rigorous scientific methods. Conceptualizing implementation of Reading First through a backward-mapping policy design approach (Elmore, 1979) it

appears that policy makers may have heeded Bonita Blachman's (1997) contention that "the instruction currently being provided to our children does not reflect what we know from research" (p.67). Policy makers, appropriating extensive funds to build individual teaching capacity, may want to feel assured that these efforts will be based on "valid knowledge relevant to reading development, reading instruction, and reading difficulties" (*Guidance for the Reading First Program*, p. 4).

In order for state and local education agencies to receive Reading First funds, USED requires that the research related to instructional programs, methods and strategies selected for the purpose of implementing local Reading First grants must meet the characteristics of scientifically based reading research. Guidelines provided by USED outline evidence critical to the evaluation of whether or not programs, methods and strategies meet such requirements including:

- Use of rigorous, systematic and empirical methods
- Adequacy of the data analyses to test the stated hypotheses and justify the general conclusions drawn
- Reliance on measurements or observational methods that provide valid data across evaluators and observers and across multiple measurements and observations
- Acceptance by a peer-reviewed journal or approved by a panel of independent experts through a comparably rigorous, objective and scientific review

(*Guidance for the Reading First Program*, p. 4-5).

Appendix C of the *Guidance for the Reading First Program* provides additional information regarding the use of SBRR to evaluate the effectiveness of reading programs chosen for implementation.

The requirement for the use of scientifically based reading research to guide state and local education agencies in the implementation of Reading First cannot be emphasized enough.

In its application to the [United States] Department [of Education] for Reading First funding, each State educational agency must demonstrate how it will assist local educational agencies in identifying instructional materials, programs, strategies and approaches based on scientifically based reading research, and how it will ensure that professional development activities related to reading instruction be based on scientifically based reading research. In determining which LEAs to support, it is the SEA's responsibility to ensure that all programs, strategies and activities proposed and implemented meet the criteria for scientifically based reading research outlined [above] (*Guidance for the Reading First Program*, p. 5).

Program implementation. State education agencies, subjected to arduous grant writing and reviewing processes for meeting the requirements set forth by USED, received portions of the more than \$4.3 billion appropriated by Congress to increase state and local capacity for teaching all students to read proficiently by the end of third grade. Granted \$4.7 million to implement its Reading First program over a three year period, the state examined in this study subsequently required districts eligible for funding to go through a complex application process that included state meetings, technical assistance

sessions for examining core program elements as well as workshops held to assist districts in grant writing requirements. Schools were awarded funds based on a significantly specific scoring rubric designed to allow grant readers to eliminate schools they felt could not ensure adherence to strict implementation conditions. While much of the following description of these requirements applies to all state and local education agencies, the focus of this discussion is on those specific to the state examined in this study.

In addition to emphasis on the use of scientifically based reading research, the other core element of Reading First is the use of a 3-tiered instructional model for providing instruction. Seemingly based on Bloom's (1976) contention that nearly every person can learn what any other can learn given the right learning conditions, this model provides extra instructional time and support for students who need it. Thus, individual schools within districts meeting the requirements for receiving Reading First grant monies in this, and every other, state must implement this "preventive" model of instruction. The Tier 1 component of the model provides for 90 minutes of uninterrupted instruction using a core reading series for all students in the general education classroom. In Tier 2, students having difficulty with various reading concepts receive an additional 30 minutes of supplemental instruction on a daily basis over a period of time designated by local school policy. Students receiving assistance at this level may or may not respond positively to the additional time and support and thus, a third component provides students, experiencing significant delays, an additional 60 minutes of intensive, Tier 3, intervention instruction. Student learning of skills found to be most significantly predictive of future reading success is monitored using benchmark assessments at

designated periods throughout the school year. This same assessment measure is utilized to monitor progress of students in Tiers 2 and 3 in order to guide teacher instruction for impacting learning outcomes in specified areas of concern.

Intensive professional development is provided to state education agency personnel by staff members of regional centers established around the country for the specific purpose of providing technical assistance for implementing Reading First according to policy intentions. Subsequently, ongoing, job-embedded professional development is provided for teachers and administrators in local schools awarded grant funds. As in most other aspects of this federal initiative, professional development is to be provided using materials and designated methods set forth in the state's initial grant application.

Contentions about the ineffectiveness of previous reading instruction included the argument that teachers did not know *how* to effectively teach reading to children with diverse learning needs (Moats & Lyon, 1996). Thus, the implication for professional development is that it not be designed to show teachers how to implement a specific reading program, but to provide teachers with a deep understanding of how children come to acquire reading skills. This kind of professional learning, then, is meant to develop teacher capacity for examining student work and diagnosing developmental and cognitive factors impacting learning so that classroom teachers have the skills to provide immediate and appropriate assistance for students struggling in a particular area. Rather than having to rely on outside "experts" or wait for lengthy student evaluation processes, classroom teachers are empowered to positively affect learning outcomes for students whose learning needs may have previously been beyond their capabilities.

State education agencies (SEAs) are required to provide this level of technical support for three years unless evaluations indicate schools are not implementing Reading First in compliance with conditions established by SEA grant proposals in response to federal requirements. Based on the premise that teachers learn best from what they do (Smylie, 1989; Elmore, 2004), this type of on-going, job-embedded staff development, focused on a specific area of instruction, has been found to be one of the most effective means for providing professional learning for teachers (Sparks & Hirsch, 1997).

Each school applying for Reading First grant funds in this state must follow rigorous guidelines both in the grant writing process and in assurances that school personnel will adhere to specified requirements of implementation. These conditions include:

- Use of a designated guide for choosing a core reading series
- A comprehensive system of reading assessment
- Involvement and commitment of district and building level administrators
- Hiring reading coaches to support teachers and to serve in an administrative capacity for implementing the program at the local level

While schools in some states (e.g. California) are compelled to use a designated core reading program for Tier 1 instruction, the state in this study leaves that choice to the discretion of the local district. The choice of this core reading program, however, is to be guided by *A Consumer's Guide to Evaluating a Core Reading Program Grades K-3: A Critical Elements Analysis* (Simmons & Kame'enui, 2000) along with technical assistance and training provided by the state education agency (SEA) for this purpose. The primary objective of the *Consumer's Guide* is to determine weaknesses in the core

reading program in relation to the findings of scientifically based reading research. Any weakness found in the chosen program must be addressed in the grant application and supplemental materials must be purchased and assurance given that they will be utilized in classroom instruction to control for weaknesses in the core program. Thus, one area of variation in implementation of the Reading First 3-tiered model of instruction can occur in relation to both the core reading programs chosen by districts and in the supplemental and intervention materials selected to aid students who need additional instruction or intervention.

The most significant variation in the implementation of Reading First at the local level will most likely be found in the provision of intervention services for students who are struggling to reach benchmark standards. The state grant application plan for implementation of these two components consists of the following:

...individual interventions will include intensive, systematic instruction in the five essential components and:

- Appropriate duration of intervention (usually daily for an extended period)
- An increased amount of instructional time
- Careful attention to appropriately leveled materials
- Carefully planned assessment of progress
- Flexible groups of students with the same needs
- Additional time for guided practice and application

Interventions must be aligned with the core program so that students catch up with their peers.

Program evaluation. A process has been put in place by the state education agency (SEA) to evaluate each district's compliance to requirements set forth in their individual grants. This process focuses on such district inputs as the use of materials, attendance at professional development sessions, use of assessments, and implementation

of the three-tiered model of reading instruction. The primary focus of the state program evaluation is on *inputs*. There has been little to no emphasis on *outcomes* such as increased teacher and administrative capacity for implementing the program.

Whereas informal observations show that some Reading First schools in the state appear to be doing very well in their efforts to provide appropriate reading instruction for students, others are judged to be less successful. The literature suggests that differences in both organizational and individual capacity and commitment for implementing change agent innovations, such as Reading First, may have a significant impact on outcomes (Armor, Conry-Osequera, Cox, Kin, McDonnell, Pascal, Pauly, & Zellman, 1976; Berman, McLaughlin, Bass, Pauly, & Zellman, 1977). Of concern in this regard are factors perceived to impact not only student outcomes but also organizational and individual capacity and commitment for implementing the Reading First program in this state.

Purpose and rationale

The purpose of this study is to provide assistance to schools attempting to implement Reading First programs in the future. In that regard this study examines implementation factors perceived by teachers to impact their ability to bring about valued student outcomes. As state and local education agencies concentrate on executing Reading First programs in compliance with federal legislation, research examining individual perceptions of implementation issues can provide data to assist schools in understanding factors that appear to impact outcomes. While the plan, proposed by the state education agency (SEA) for evaluation of Reading First implementation in the schools examined in this study, contributes to an understanding of how districts comply

to grant requirements and thus, provides some insight into implementation variance, a more detailed examination of factors perceived to contribute to program success or failure can provide guidance for modifying future implementation efforts.

Of particular interest in this study is the extent to which variation in implementation of the Tier 3 component for providing intensive intervention instruction for “at-risk” students impacts teachers’ feelings of efficacy for bringing about valued student learning outcomes. While it would seem reasonable that provision of intensive professional development will enhance teacher knowledge and capacity for increasing student learning, the possibility of increasing teacher efficacy for doing so may prove even more significant. In light of state education agency allowance for considerable discretion in the implementation of the Tier 3 instructional component at the local level, an examination of factors impacting variance in personal teaching efficacy across schools may provide direction for increasing organizational capacity to influence implementation outcomes.

Conceptual framework

In an article outlining “lessons learned” from research conducted in the late 1970s examining the implementation of ESEA change agent innovations, Milbrey McLaughlin (1987) wrote that the comparatively emergent field of research on policy implementation (distinguished from the broader examination of policy processes) was indicating that “policy success depends critically on two broad factors: local capacity and will” (p. 172). While provision of professional development for implementing Reading First obviously addresses capacity, an examination of the literature on teacher efficacy may shed light on the more elusive construct of “will.” Researchers examining teachers’ sense of efficacy

define the construct as “the extent to which teachers believe they can affect student learning” (Ashton & Webb, 1986, p. vii). Even as one could expect that increased capacity would subsequently increase feelings of efficacy, ecological factors may have a greater influence than anticipated. In other words, inasmuch as individuals have influence over factors impacting implementation so too do organizational dynamics affect how individuals act in response to policy initiatives (Elmore, 1978; 2004; Huberman & Miles, 1984).

Milbrey McLaughlin’s (1987) claim that “policymakers can’t mandate what matters” is particularly salient in the current atmosphere of high stakes accountability created by No Child Left Behind. Thus, this study was framed by the literature on teacher efficacy as I examined factors perceived to either enhance or undermine individual capacity and commitment for meeting policy goals. As the focus on implementation of federal education programs shifts from compliance with state and local requirements to the provision of technical assistance for supporting both teacher and student learning outcomes, it would seem imperative that research efforts focus on individual perception of environmental factors impacting such outcomes. In that sense, teachers may act as “informants and guides” to more effective policy design and implementation (McLaughlin, 1990, p. 15).

Research questions

The following questions guided this study:

1. What factors do teachers implementing Tier 3 intervention instruction believe enhance their teaching abilities and efforts?

2. What factors do teachers implementing Tier 3 intervention instruction believe constrain their teaching abilities and efforts?

Methods

A qualitative inquiry approach was utilized to examine factors perceived by Tier 3 intervention instruction teachers to either enhance or constrain their teaching abilities and efforts within the context of implementing the Tier 3 component of Reading First. Unlike quantitative research methods that utilize standardized, objective instruments to collect and analyze data, qualitative methods employ the researcher as the instrument of not only data collection, but also of data analyses (Johnson & Christensen, 2000). Gibson and Dembo's (1984) *Teacher Efficacy Scale (TES)*, however, served as a screening tool to first examine variation in teacher efficacy across schools. Subsequently, four schools were chosen for in-depth case study examination of variance in implementation efforts and teachers' perceptions of factors influencing personal feelings of teaching efficacy in relation to implementation of the Tier 3 intervention instruction in their schools.

Interviews with intervention teachers were conducted for the purpose of examining teacher perceptions of factors impacting their efforts and abilities to implement Tier 3 instruction. Just as qualitative researchers strive to give voice to the subjects of their inquiry, so too do they add their voices to the work (Denzin, 1997), not only in the questions asked but also in the collection and interpretation of the data (Johnson & Christensen, 2000). Qualitative coding was utilized to analyze data from these interviews. As the instrument of research conducted in this study, and consistent with qualitative research norms, I have made use of first person voice in the construction of the text.

Significance of Study

Of particular interest in this study is the extent to which variation in implementation impacts teachers' feelings of efficacy for bringing about valued student learning outcomes. Because Reading First was designed to meet the learning needs of all students, schools were compelled to utilize a three-tiered instructional delivery model that would increase time and intensity of instruction for struggling students. While strict guidelines were put in place for Tier 1 implementation, state education agency coordinators allowed schools substantial discretion for putting Tiers 2 and 3 into practice. A closer examination of factors related to implementation variance across schools may provide direction for adapting efforts to increase student learning and teacher efficacy outcomes.

Limitations

Considerable limitations are noted in this study. While Reading First programs exist in numerous schools throughout the country, this study is restricted to those found in only one state. Traditional compensatory services for at-risk populations of children vary significantly across states (Orland & Goettel, 1982). For example, while the state examined in this study utilizes what is termed a "wait-to-fail" model for addressing the diverse learning needs of disadvantaged students, others (e.g. Iowa) have historically used a "response-to-intervention" model that is considerably similar to the three-tier model required in the implementation of Reading First. Having been exposed to the latter culture – whether or not a school has been significantly successful at using it to impact student learning outcomes – would seem to advantage teachers and students over those

found within the context of the less preventive approach. Thus, findings of this study cannot necessarily be generalized to Reading First schools in other states.

Additionally, while schools eligible to apply for Reading First funds had to be similar in regard to SES and achievement levels, a great deal of variance may exist in the types of resources available in various locations. Schools, for example, in particularly remote rural areas have difficulty recruiting Reading First coaches and experienced intervention teachers. While administrators and teachers in these locations may or may not have had the opportunity to hone their skills, school board members may be reluctant to dismiss those deemed ineffective or unwilling to meet the considerable requirements of Reading First since personnel may be quite difficult to replace. Teacher and administrator turnover is often a problem as well in these smaller schools. In addition to difficulty in replacing them, investment in professional development and experience garnered in first years of Reading First implementation is slowed considerably when people choose to leave a school.

Another area of concern is in the administrative capacity of the SEA for meeting the needs of teachers and administrators in all nine professional development regions. Professional development and ongoing support of schools implementing Reading First is provided through regional RF specialists housed in the Colleges of Education around the state. While the Reading First specialist in the professional development center in the central region of this state is in charge of providing assistance to only two RF schools, others are charged with doing so in up to twelve individual schools. It is possible that schools having the benefit of more extensive technical assistance may have an advantage over those that do not.

Summary

While the Reading First initiative of No Child Left Behind is a significantly prescriptive federal program, variation in implementation is inevitable. In earlier studies examining the implementation of educational innovations, Milbrey McLaughlin (1987) noted that “organizations don’t innovate or implement change, individuals do” (McLaughlin, p. 174). Her belief that “policy success depends critically on two broad factors: local capacity and will” (p. 172) centers on the contention that “at each point in the policy process, a policy is transformed as individuals interpret and respond to it” (p. 174). With implementation research well into its fourth decade, scholars continue to examine factors that may explain and predict *behavior* impacting policy actions (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973; Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1983; Goggin, Bowman, Lester, & O’Toole, 1990). The purpose of this study, however, focuses on explaining and predicting the *impact* of those actions and other environmental factors on policy *outcomes*.

While the ultimate goal of Reading First is to increase student learning outcomes, a secondary and perhaps more salient issue is the impact of this initiative on teacher efficacy. If teachers’ attitudes and perceptions change in a positive direction as a result of participation in Reading First, teacher efficacy theory suggests one would be able to predict teacher behaviors such as the amount of effort an individual is willing to expend and the extent of individual persistence in the face of obstacles (Bandura, 1981 as cited in Ashton & Webb, 1986). Understanding, therefore, those factors perceived to impact both personal and general teaching efficacy in relation to the implementation of Reading First

is imperative for providing technical assistance that may improve future implementation efforts and outcomes.

While policy makers appear to have expended significant effort in providing for increases in both individual and organizational capacity to implement Reading First, it is perhaps more difficult to impact factors perceived to influence individual and organizational will to do so. A key first step, therefore, is to gain a better understanding of what exactly those factors may be. As state and local education agencies execute programs to comply with federal legislation guiding the implementation of Reading First, research efforts can provide data to assist schools in understanding individual and organizational dynamics that appear to impact outcomes. This study utilizes a theoretically pragmatic approach to examine local perception of the influence of such factors and to serve as a guide for future action.

Definitions

Adequate yearly progress (AYP) – Under the No Child Left Behind Act, states are given the discretion for developing a definition of “adequate yearly progress” for determining achievement levels of students in districts and individual schools. This definition is to be utilized as a diagnostic tool for focusing resources for school improvement efforts.

Preventive model – This model utilizes early identification and intensive intervention to provide adequate assistance for preventing reading disabilities in students struggling to acquire the skills necessary for development as proficient readers (Lyon, et al., 2001).

Specific learning disability – “Specific Learning Disability” means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen,

think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The term does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage. (State Plan for Special Education: Regulations Implementing Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (2005)).

Teacher efficacy – Ashton and Webb (1986) explain that teachers’ sense of efficacy “refers to teachers’ situation-specific expectation that they can help students learn” (p. 3). They believe this construct “consists of two independent dimensions: sense of teaching efficacy and sense of personal teaching efficacy” (p. 3) and that teachers base actions in their classrooms from an integration of expectations derived from these two dimensions.

Wait-to-fail model – The “wait-to-fail” model refers to eligibility requirements in many states that call for a “severe discrepancy” between a child’s cognitive abilities and achievement (as measured by a standardized assessment) for determining special education services. Because this discrepancy has historically not been found to exist until around the 3rd grade year of a student’s academic career, much ground has been lost before any kind of formal assistance is provided. What is called for in the Reading First initiative of No Child Left Behind is a “preventive” model for providing intensive intervention for children as soon as possible (Lyon, et al., 2001).

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

Even as the Reading First initiative is a fairly prescriptive federal policy designed to increase reading achievement in high poverty, low performing schools, the bottom line is that state and federal agencies have little control over policy outcomes. Numerous factors impacting implementation of any policy can contribute to its success or failure. As implementation researchers have discovered over the past several decades, policy implementers do not always act in ways policymakers would expect or hope they would.

Pressman and Wildavsky in 1973...were first in the first generation of implementation analysts who showed that implementation dominates outcomes – that the consequences of even the best planned, best supported, and most promising policy initiatives depend finally on what happens as individuals throughout the policy system interpret and act on them (McLaughlin, 1987). As Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) point out, implementation is, in large part, impacted by individual understanding of and response to policy.

For over a quarter century scholars of public policy have participated in “intense academic debate” in pursuit of theories and methods for examining the phenomenon of public policy implementation (Hill & Hupe, 2002). While early research was based on atheoretical case studies exploring the intricacies of implementation in complex policy networks, later studies focused on the development of theories for explaining and predicting behavior impacting policy actions (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973; Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1983; Goggin, Bowman, Lester, & O’Toole, 1990). Variation in implementation is essentially impacted by the organizational and individual capacity and

will to enact policy requirements (McLaughlin, 1987). Studies examining such factors may guide future policy design and support for implementation.

NCLB and Reading

Although programs under the original Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) sought to increase basic skills in reading and math for America's most disadvantaged populations of students, efforts to do so did not necessarily produce the outcomes policymakers had hoped to achieve (DeBray, McDermott, & Wohlstetter, 2005). Even as subsequent reauthorizations of federal legislation have increased funding and tightened oversight, policy scholars admit "people in schools often don't know *what* [emphasis added] to do to fix the problems" (Elmore, 2004, p. 113). Consequently, the federal focus of current education legislation has shifted from merely appropriating funds to improve the fiscal capacity of state and local education agencies for developing and implementing compensatory programs, to providing technical assistance for enhancing the capacity of individuals and organizations for increasing student learning outcomes for all students. One such program for providing technical assistance for schools with high percentages of children living in poverty and reading below grade level is the Reading First initiative of No Child Left Behind.

Past examinations of the implementation of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act have revealed that local capacity for understanding both what to do and how to do it has been an issue in program effectiveness (McLaughlin, 1987; Orland & Goettel, 1982). Of particular concern in relation to student learning outcomes in reading over the past several years has been a lack of response on the part of local district personnel to the "scientific breakthroughs in our knowledge about the

development of literacy” (Blachman, 1996). Blachman contends that while researchers “know a great deal about how to address reading problems even before they begin... we are not exploiting what is known about reducing the incidence of reading failure” (p. 66). Even as policymakers have worked to enhance programs in subsequent reauthorizations of federal education legislation over the years, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2000) reports indicate that at the turn of the century

Thirty-seven percent of fourth graders nationally cannot read at a basic level. ...For children living in poverty, these statistics are even worse. In many low-income urban school districts the percentage of students in fourth grade who cannot read at a basic level approaches seventy percent (Pasternak, 2002).

Many researchers and policymakers believe the key to solving problems emanating from the growing numbers of children with poor reading abilities lies in understanding and utilizing the research bases for the acquisition of reading skills (Lyon, Fletcher, Shaywitz, Shaywitz, Torgeson, Wood, Schulte, & Olson, 2001). No Child Left Behind focuses extensively on increasing teacher knowledge and skills in this area as well as providing professional development for using scientifically based practices for increasing student learning outcomes.

Research bases and implications for instruction

Converging evidence of scientifically based research focused on preventing reading difficulties in young children emphasizes the importance of *integrating* “attention to the alphabetic principle with attention to the construction of meaning and opportunities to develop fluency” (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) (2000), *Report of the National Reading*

Panel. Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction: Reports of the Subgroups, describes five components deemed essential for effective reading instruction. These include: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary development, and comprehension. With these research bases in mind, federal legislation for implementing Reading First requires that schools utilize K-3rd grade reading programs that include instruction and assessment in these areas.

Preventing reading disabilities: The case for early intervention

Testimony presented at a June, 2002 hearing before the Subcommittee on Education Reform, Committee on Education and the Workforce of the United States House of Representatives focused on reforming special education referral and identification processes for children suspected of having specific learning disabilities. Of particular concern in the learning disabilities field is the issue of early identification and intervention for children having difficulty learning to read (Alexander, 1999; Fletcher, Coulter, Reschly, & Vaughn, 2004; Grossen, 1997; Lyon, 2002b; Pasternak, 2002). Long concerned over increasing numbers of students found eligible for special education services as learning disabled, G. Reid Lyon, former Director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) argues that researchers have come to the conclusion that many children are not truly disabled, but rather, “instructional casualties” (Lyon, 2002b).

Researchers in the field of learning disabilities have struggled with the ambiguity of a definition of the disability (Doris, 1993; Fletcher, Coulter, Reschly, & Vaughn, 2004; Lyon, 2002b) and with “the use of invalid eligibility criteria” as significant causes for

increases in the incidence of learning disabilities over the past 30 years (Fletcher, Coulter, Reschly, & Vaughn, 2004; Lyon, 2002b; Lyon, Fletcher, Shaywitz, Shaywitz, Torgeson, Wood, Schulte, & Olson, 2001). Particularly problematic is the use of an IQ-achievement discrepancy that is believed to have created a “wait-to-fail” model for finding children eligible for special education services (Lyon, Fletcher, Shaywitz, Shaywitz, Torgeson, Wood, Schulte, & Olson, 2001). The problem with utilizing this formula, requiring that scores on administered IQ and achievement tests be compared to determine whether or not a child is achieving commensurate to his or her cognitive ability, is that schools are hesitant to evaluate children before they have had the opportunity to receive “adequate” instruction in reading and mathematics. “Adequacy” is often determined by the quantity rather than the quality of instruction a child has been afforded. Thus, children are not likely to receive special education services until they have struggled in the general education classroom for several years (Lyon, Fletcher, Shaywitz, Shaywitz, Torgeson, Wood, Schulte, & Olson, 2001). Jenkins & O’Connor (2001) maintain this practice to be particularly problematic in that “reading difficulties grow stronger roots and possibly become more intractable” as children get older (pp. 2-3). These authors, in fact, believe early identification of reading difficulties to be “the first step in reducing the incidence or severity of reading disabilities” (p. 2).

Research conducted under the auspices of both the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) has provided evidence of the effectiveness of early intervention strategies in meeting the needs of students at risk of developing reading disabilities (Pasternak, 2002). Pasternak’s testimony before the Subcommittee on

Education Reform regarding research findings in relation to learning disabilities and early intervention outlines the bases for the development of the Reading First initiative including the use of scientifically based reading instruction and the provision of early intervention instruction utilizing a “preventive” rather than a “wait-to-fail” model of service delivery. Implications for assessment and instruction in relation to these research bases indicate that struggling readers are best served by improving the means by which they can be identified and intervention services provided *before* difficulties become disabilities.

Reading First

Labeled the “academic cornerstone” of No Child Left Behind, the basis of Reading First is the provision of reading instruction that will ensure a solid foundation for subsequent learning.

Learning to read is an essential foundation for success in our society. Research by the National Research Council clearly shows that the process of learning to read is lengthy and begins early in life. Research further reveals that children who are not proficient readers by the end of 3rd grade have difficulties throughout the course of their schooling, perform poorly in other subjects and are less likely to graduate from high school (Kauerz, 2002).

Key components, therefore, of the implementation of Reading First include not only the mandated use of scientifically based reading instruction, but also required assessment procedures that utilize screening, diagnostic, and monitoring measures for examining student progress in the acquisition of reading skills. The latter practice allows for early recognition of reading difficulties in order to provide appropriate and timely intervention.

Rather than focus on finding a child eligible for intervention services due to some sort of disability, the key is to consider what instructional strategies are successful for assuring positive student learning outcomes for all children (Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2002).

As federal education policy has sought to change institutional behavior over the years, policymakers have utilized sanctions and inducements to assure compliance to federal regulations. Previous studies examining the implementation of Title I over the years have pointed to the impact of individual and organizational capacity in relation to program effectiveness (DeBray, McDermott, & Wohlstetter, 2005; McLaughlin, 1987; Orland & Goettel, 1982). Reading First addresses concerns in this area by appropriating funds to improve professional development for both teachers and administrators in regard to utilizing scientifically based reading research for guiding instruction and assessment. While Congress seems to be aware of a need for building capacity in relation to implementing federal education policy, another area of concern in this respect deals with the political will to do so.

Conceptual Framework

Categories of literature pertinent to this study include those which examine psychological factors impacting both teacher receptivity to change and teacher efficacy. While the iterative process of working through implementation problems in relation to particular policies creates new and ever changing responses by policymakers at top levels, this study explores education policy at the point of implementation – where public policy directed at children most significantly impacts their lives – in schools and classrooms. Of particular interest is the impact of changes in teaching and organizational

practices, required for implementing Reading First, on what has come to be known as teacher efficacy. Thus, the literature on the implementation of change and teacher efficacy will serve to provide a theoretical lens for examining factors perceived by teachers as either enhancing or constraining personal effectiveness for increasing student learning outcomes within the context of implementing a policy lauded for its research bases.

Implementation

The Rand Change Agent study, undertaken from 1973-1978, indicated a significant shift in the ways people thought about affecting planned change in education. Rand found that effective projects were characterized by a process of mutual adaptation rather than uniform implementation, and that local factors (rather than federal program guidelines or project methods) dominated project outcomes (McLaughlin, 1990, p. 11).

A review of implementation literature based on a “bottom-up” perspective of policy implementation reveals that policy scholars have long maintained that implementation is significantly impacted by workers closest to “the source of the problem” (Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975; Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977; Elmore, 1978; McLaughlin, 1987; Palumbo, 1988) and that, in fact, “policy-directed change ultimately is a problem of the smallest unit” (McLaughlin, 1987, p. 171). Reading First was designed to increase teachers’ knowledge and skills for utilizing research-based practices to teach children to read. The implication for using the converging evidence of 30 years of scientifically based reading research is that teachers and schools will have everything they need to ensure all children will be proficient readers by the end of 3rd grade.

Inasmuch as increased knowledge impacts individuals' capacity for implementing new practices, however, organizational factors may impact teachers' abilities to implement such practices effectively. Reconsideration of Rand study findings underscored "the essential contribution of teachers' perspectives as informants and guides" to future policy development and implementation (McLaughlin, 1990, p. 15). With these assertions in mind, the focus of this study is the impact of factors perceived to either enhance or constrain teachers' abilities to bring about what they considered to be valued student learning outcomes within the context of implementing the Reading First initiative of No Child Left Behind.

Implementing federal education policy

Implementation research, as a separate entity within the study of public policy, essentially evolved from case studies examining 1960s programs developed in response to President Johnson's "War on Poverty" (Kirst & Jung, 1980). Of particular interest to education scholars in this respect was Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) (e.g. Archambault & St. Pierre, 1980; Borman & D'Agostino, 1996; Smith & Austin, 1969; Sunderman & Mickelsen, 2000) which designated funds to provide compensatory educational services for disadvantaged children. In this first stage of research on education policy implementation, findings concluded that conflict "between local orientations, values, and priorities" and programs initiated at either state or federal levels would inevitably continue to exist over time. These early studies also indicated a lack of capacity (educators did not know *how* to implement such programs) and will (they did not *want* to do so) at the local level (Odden, 1991). Particularly problematic, for federal policymakers, was the finding that appropriated funds were often

misused, resulting in adaptation of guidelines and regulations designed to constrain and correct non-compliant behavior. At any rate,

Conventional wisdom held that ongoing and continuous conflict was inevitable, that higher level government programs simply did not work, and that local governments would never implement them faithfully (Odden, 1991, p. 5).

Education policy scholars concluded, from second generation implementation research findings, that it is “incredibly hard to make something happen, most especially across layers of government and institutions.” In other words, “policymakers can’t mandate what matters” at the local level (McLaughlin, 1987, p. 172). McLaughlin (1991) later concluded that the study of implementation might be better informed by the literature on change in education (e.g. Fullan, 1982; Huberman & Miles, 1984).

In her reexamination of the Rand Change Agent Study, McLaughlin (1991) points out that findings “marked a significant shift in the ways policymakers, practitioners and researchers thought about affecting and understanding planned change in education” (p. 143). These Rand Corporation studies, conducted between 1973 and 1978, examined a handful of “federally funded programs intended to introduce and support” innovative practices at the local level (p. 143). Assumptions by policymakers in designing initiatives had led them to believe there to be a “relatively direct relationship between federal policy ‘inputs’, local responses, and program ‘outputs’” (p. 144). Left out of this way of thinking, McLaughlin contends, was the impact of “local practices, beliefs, and traditions” (p. 144). The findings that McLaughlin believed to hold true for revision of policy design at that time concluded that it remains extraordinarily difficult for policy to change practice, that implementation dominates outcome, that policy cannot mandate

what matters at the local level, and that variability in local implementation is the rule with any form of uniformity being exceptional (p. 147-148). She pointed out that beliefs about teacher behavior, commitment and technical assistance for supporting implementation, needed to be revised as policymakers sought to increase the impact of federal education policy initiatives on change in public school practices.

In an examination of the lessons learned from the field in regard to policy implementation, McLaughlin (1987) claims that “will, or the attitudes, motivation, and beliefs that underlie an implementer’s response to a policy’s goals or strategies, is less amenable [than capacity] to policy intervention” (p. 172). Moreover, she argues, attitudes toward a policy are often impacted by whether individuals believe in the “value of a policy or the appropriateness of a strategy” (p. 172). McLaughlin was convinced that the focus of policy implementation should be on “individuals and individual incentives, beliefs, and capacity” (p. 174) and later posits that “policy could achieve its goals only when local implementers supported it and were inspired to carry it out” (McLaughlin, 1991, p. 149). Considering factors affecting teacher behavior, McLaughlin is quick to point out that even as the Rand studies were among those breaking ground for a “backward-mapping” approach to policy analysis and design, it still did not take into consideration the significant effect of “micro-level realities” on teachers in their classrooms (p. 152).

In their research on implementing educational change, Hall and Hord (2001) focus on “what happens to people and organizations when they are involved in change” (p. 3). They focus primarily “on the people at the front lines who have to implement the expected change” and secondly “on how leaders can and do facilitate change” (p. 3).

Especially interested in how implementation experiences impact individual perceptions of future change, Hall and Hord argue that even as policymakers tend to focus on change in relation to “policy, systems, and organizational factors” they believe “successful change starts and ends at the individual level” (p. 7). Expectations for change in classroom practices, then, may be better informed by the literature examining “the role of self efficacy as a mechanism underlying behavioral change, maintenance, and generalization” along with that examining outcome expectancy as an influence on “behavioral instigation, direction, effort, and persistence” (Schunk, 1991, p. 207). In that respect, examination of the phenomenon of teachers’ feelings of efficacy could offer guidance in predicting behavior for implementing a program or policy.

Teacher efficacy

Initiated into the field of educational research by two Rand program evaluation studies (Armor, Conry-Osequera, Cox, Kin, McDonnell, Pascal, Pauly, & Zellman, 1976; Berman, McLaughlin, Bass, Pauly, & Zellman, 1977), the construct of teachers’ sense of efficacy has since generated a multitude of studies examining various nuanced aspects of the concept in relation to teacher expectations (Timperley & Phillips, 2003), motivation, (Ashton, 1984, 1985) and behavior (Ghaith & Yaghi, 1997; Guskey, 1988; Hargrave, 2001; Scribner, 1999). Just as the Rand studies, examining factors impacting implementation and continuation of federally funded educational innovations, found teacher efficacy to be a “powerful explanatory variable” in project outcomes, subsequent researchers continue to be interested in developing hypotheses about the impact of beliefs and attitudes on teacher behavior (Ashton, 1985; Ashton & Webb, 1986; Dembo & Gibson, 1985; Guskey, 1988; Stein & Wang, 1988) and student learning outcomes

(Ashton & Webb, 1986; Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2000; Ross, 1995). Findings from the Rand studies found significant relationships existing between, not only teachers' sense of efficacy and teacher motivation, but also between efficacy beliefs and student achievement (Armor, Conry-Osequera, Cox, Kin, McDonnell, Pascal, Pauly, & Zellman, 1976; Berman, McLaughlin, Bass, Pauly, & Zellman, 1977).

The construct of “*sense of efficacy* [in relation to the Rand studies] refers to teachers' beliefs regarding the ability of poverty-level students to learn in school and the teacher's confidence that he or she can teach such students effectively” (Berman, McLaughlin, Bass, Pauly, & Zellman, 1977, p. 3). Many studies (e.g. Ashton & Webb, 1986; Podell & Soodak, 1993; Scribner, 1999; Tournaki & Podell, 2005) examining dimensions of a teacher efficacy construct, utilize a definition of teachers' sense of efficacy based on Bandura's (1977) theoretical framework of self-efficacy. It has been suggested that a “majority of teacher efficacy researchers derive their conceptions” from Bandura's body of work which defines self-efficacy as “individuals' judgments of their ability to complete future actions” (Ross, 1994).

Self-efficacy

Albert Bandura (1977) presented his beliefs about self-efficacy as a “unifying theory of behavioral change” and argued that while cognitive processes have much to do with the acquisition and regulation of human behavior, experiences of “mastery arising from effective performance” are more significant in “effecting psychological changes” (p. 191). Bandura posits that individual behavior is based on observations of the consequences of one's actions over time and that cognitive processing of such enables individuals to determine which actions are “necessary to produce given outcomes” in

particular situations (p. 192). He maintained that the concept of self-efficacy could be utilized as a significant predictor of behavioral change.

Bandura (1997) defines perceived self-efficacy as one's belief in his or her "capabilities to organize and execute the courses of actions required to produce given attainments" (p. 3).

People make causal contributions to their own psychosocial functioning through mechanisms of personal agency. Among the mechanisms of agency, none is more central or pervasive than beliefs of personal efficacy. Unless people believe they can produce desired effects by their actions, they have little incentive to act.

Efficacy belief, therefore, is a major basis of action (pp. 2-3).

Key in this statement is Bandura's contention that people must believe their actions can produce desired results in order to have the motivation necessary to act in accordance with either internal or external goals.

Within Bandura's theoretical analysis of this construct, efficacy expectations are distinguished from outcome expectancies. While outcome expectancy is defined in relation to one's estimation that a specified behavior will result in certain outcomes, an efficacy expectation refers to "the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcomes" (p. 193). The differentiation of these two concepts is significant in that one's belief "that a particular course of action will produce certain outcomes" will not influence behavior if a person doubts his or her personal ability to perform the necessary activities to produce such outcomes (p. 193).

In earlier studies, Bandura (1977) examined the impact of four treatment methods for effecting change in self-efficacy. Of these treatments: performance accomplishments,

vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and emotional arousal, Bandura found the effects of personal mastery experiences to have the most significant impact on perceived self-efficacy. As one experiences cumulative positive outcomes in relation to expended efforts, efficacy expectations are strengthened lessening the effect of occasional negative outcomes on one's motivation to persevere.

Bandura (1997) maintains that self-efficacy can be measured and that in the case of measures designed to assess a person's belief about capabilities in a particular area (e.g. mathematical ability) can be significantly predictive of subsequent behavior in that area. Bandura contends that perceived self-efficacy influences several areas of action including the amount of effort a person is willing to exert in relation to a task, perseverance in the face of obstacles, and how he or she copes with challenging environmental pressures. Of significant interest in relation to policy or program implementation is Bandura's contention that individuals "will not attempt to make things happen, if they believe they have no power to produce results" (p. 3). Because implementation of any new policy, program or innovation often deals with changes in everyday practices and routines, it is imperative to examine the impact of various factors and emerging issues on teachers' abilities to produce desired results. Bandura's argument that "much of psychology is concerned with discovering principles about how to structure environmental influence... to promote human adaptation and change" (p. 4), is particularly salient in relation to ensuring mastery experiences that may serve to enhance teachers' feelings of efficacy for implementing new practices.

Teacher efficacy, motivation, and behavior

Considered to be the best predictor of teacher behavior, teachers' sense of personal efficacy has been defined as "the extent to which teachers believe they can affect student learning" (p. vii, Ashton & Webb, 1986). The authors in this study found that teachers do indeed differ in their "efficacy attitudes," that such differences are "reflected in teachers' behavior and students' performance," and that teacher efficacy attitudes are susceptible to "interactive influences" found within the context of school environments (p. viii, Ashton & Webb, 1986). Researchers studying teacher efficacy (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Denham & Michael, 1982; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998) generally agree that the construct consists of two independent dimensions which have subsequently been labeled "general teaching efficacy" and "personal teaching efficacy." General teaching efficacy (Bandura's "outcome expectancy") refers to the expectation that teaching can indeed impact student learning for even the most disadvantaged populations of students. Personal teaching efficacy (Bandura's "efficacy expectation"), on the other hand, deals with the extent to which an individual teacher believes he or she has the capacity to positively impact student learning. The importance of the differences in these dimensions lies in the extent to which experiences related to student learning may serve to enhance or detract from teacher "motivation and future behavior" (Ashton & Webb, 1986).

If teachers are successful in getting across a difficult concept to students they believed could not learn it, they may modify both their personal assessment of their ability to teach such students (sense of personal teaching efficacy) and also their belief that such students cannot be taught (sense of teaching efficacy) (p. 5).

Just as Bandura argues that self-efficacy beliefs influence the amount of effort one is willing to expend and the degree of perseverance in the face of obstacles, researchers examining the construct of teacher efficacy have found that teachers with high feelings of efficacy are often more willing to try new and more difficult teaching and management practices (Armor, Conry-Osequera, Cox, Kin, McDonnell, Pascal, Pauly, & Zellman, 1976; Berman, McLaughlin, Bass, Pauly, & Zellman, 1977; Ghaith & Yaghi, 1997; Guskey, 1988), to exert more effort in working with hard-to-reach students (Podell, & Soodak, 1993; Tournaki & Podell, 2005), and to “persist in the face of adversity” (Ghaith & Yaghi, 1997).

Summary

Compelled by the belief that a crisis in teacher motivation had become “the single greatest impediment to school improvement,” (Ashton & Webb, 1986) researchers Ashton, Webb, and Doda (1983) conducted a major, seminal research study to examine the nature of teacher efficacy and its relationship to teacher behavior. In their attempt to study correlations between teacher motivation and student achievement, these researchers provide considerable insight into the construct which they maintain refers, in general, to “teachers’ situation-specific expectation that they can help students learn” (Ashton & Webb, 1986, p. 3). In some cases, these expectations are connected to what teachers believe their students are capable of learning. In other cases, however, expectations are related to whether or not teachers believe working conditions create barriers to positive student learning outcomes. In other words, environmental factors may serve to either enhance or constrain teachers’ experiences in trying to implement new knowledge or practices. Following Bandura’s premise that mastery experiences have a significant

impact on feelings of efficacy and that, in turn, efficacy beliefs are the basis of all action, attention to environmental factors impacting teachers' experiences and subsequent behavior may help us better understand McLaughlin's (1987) contention that "will" is a major factor in the successful implementation of public policy.

Ashton and Webb's contention that "teachers' efficacy expectations influence their thoughts and feelings, their choice of activities, the amount of effort they expend, and the extent of their persistence in the face of obstacles" (p. 3) may be just as salient today as they found it to be twenty years ago. To this end, an examination of factors perceived to contribute to variation in teachers' sense of efficacy in relation to the implementation of the Reading First initiative in the schools examined in this study should serve to guide future policy design, implementation, and technical assistance efforts.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Design and Methods

We currently have a much greater understanding of both the antecedents and consequences of teacher efficacy (Ross, 1994) as well as more effective and extensive means for measuring the construct (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Guskey & Passaro, 1994; Riggs & Enochs, 1990) than the two-item instrument introduced in the 1970s Rand studies (Armor, Conry-Osequera, Cox, Kin, McDonnell, Pascal, Pauly, & Zellman, 1976; Berman, McLaughlin, Bass, Pauly, & Zellman, 1977). Since the time these early program evaluations, examining the implementation of federal change-agent innovations, found teachers' sense of efficacy to be the most significant factor impacting program outcomes, numerous studies have contributed to our understanding of efficacy consequences such as teacher behavior (Ghaith, & Yaghi, 1997; Guskey, 1988; Scribner, 1999; Smylie, 1988) and student achievement (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Ashton, Webb, & Doda, 1983; Armor, et al., 1976; Berman, et al., 1977). Other research efforts have made considerable contributions to the knowledge base regarding the impact of antecedent conditions such as teaching experience (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993; Woolfolk, 2000), gender (Greenwood, Olejnik, & Parkay, 1990), grade level (Imants & DeBrabander, 1996), teacher collaboration (Rosenholtz, 1989), and student ability (Hargrave, 2001) on teachers' sense of efficacy.

Because past studies of teacher efficacy have focused, in large part, on the nature of the construct (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Ashton, Webb, & Doda, 1983; Soodak & Podell, 1996; Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 1998) and on means of measurement (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 1998; Tschannen-

Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) for examining various dimensions and questions of interest, most research designs have utilized quantitative methods to establish relationships between hypothesized antecedents and consequences (Labone, 2004). While the use of such methodologies has been significant for establishing “the power of teacher efficacy beliefs” (Labone, 2004, p. 341), in relation to these antecedent and consequential relationships, scholars are more recently seeking other perspectives and methodologies for extending the construct for practical use (Labone, 2004; Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 1998; Wheatley, 2005).

Driven by a hiatus in teacher efficacy research that limits our understanding of both the development of efficacy beliefs and the role of teacher efficacy in changing social contexts, the research community now recognizes the need to broaden both the foci and methodologies used to explore teacher efficacy (Labone, 2004, p. 342).

In that light, this study utilized qualitative methods to examine teacher perceptions of factors believed to either enhance or constrain teachers’ beliefs about their ability to bring about valued student learning outcomes within the context of implementing one of the latest federal change-agent innovations, the Reading First initiative (Title I, Part B, Subpart 1) of No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001).

The purpose of this study was to investigate factors perceived to impact variation in teachers’ sense of personal teaching efficacy across schools implementing Reading First in one Midwestern state. Because of federal conviction that only scientifically based programs, methods and strategies can be utilized in schools receiving federal grant monies to implement Reading First, variation of outcomes in the face of extensive

capacity-building professional development for utilizing such research evidence is a considerably salient issue. Even as it would seem reasonable that provision of intensive professional development will improve teacher knowledge and skills (capacity) for increasing student achievement in reading, the possibility that changes in teaching practices could enhance teachers' sense of efficacy (will) in relation to changes in practice may prove even more significant. A pragmatic look at individual experiences and perceptions of factors believed to be influential in outcome variance should serve to guide future implementation action.

The following questions guided these research efforts:

1. What factors do teachers implementing Tier 3 intervention instruction believe enhance their teaching abilities and efforts?
2. What factors do teachers implementing Tier 3 intervention instruction believe constrain their teaching abilities and efforts?

Design

This research study was designed with the intention of providing informed direction for enhancing future Reading First implementation efforts and was driven by a pragmatic theoretical perspective that would contend “merit lies not in form of inquiry but in relevance of information” (Cronbach & Associates, 1980, p. 7) for guiding future action.

Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) suggest that research design should be guided not only by the questions we have about a particular problem, but also by one's *reason* for executing the study at all. In that respect, the authors list nine categories that frame

“typology of purpose” (p. 175) for conducting social science research. These include the intent to: predict, add to the knowledge base, have an impact, measure change, understand complex phenomena, test new ideas, generate new ideas, inform constituencies, and examine the past. The ultimate intention for examining a program mandating significant change in teaching and organizational practices was, in this case, concerned with increasing teacher efficacy in bringing about valued student learning outcomes (to have an impact). Within that context, however, can be found at least two related purposes: to gain a better understanding of the meanings teachers construct from their experiences and the subsequent impact on teacher efficacy (to understand complex phenomena); and to uncover factors that either contribute to or undermine teachers’ beliefs and attitudes about teaching and learning (to predict). Because this study was focused primarily on understanding individual experiences and resulting perceptions constructed in relation to the implementation of Reading First, explanatory case studies served as the primary means for examining factors perceived to either enhance or undermine teaching efforts.

Case studies are, Yin (1994) observes, “particularly suited to situations in which it is impossible to separate a phenomenon’s variables from their context” (cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 29). In that respect, this method is particularly useful for analyzing contextual factors impacting individual perceptions in relation to the implementation of a significantly prescriptive educational innovation within and across schools in the state examined herein. Evaluative case studies, in particular, “involve description, explanation, and judgment” (Merriam, 1998, p. 39), all of which can be utilized to guide future implementation action.

Researcher

Merriam (1998) reminds us that “because the primary instrument in qualitative research is human, all observations and analyses are filtered through that humans being’s worldview, values, and perspective” (p. 22). Unlike quantitative research methods that utilize standardized, objective instruments to collect and analyze data, qualitative methods employ the researcher as the instrument of not only data collection, but also of data analyses (Johnson & Christensen, 2000). Thus, a researcher must be sensitive to personal biases and subjectivities in relation to not only the design of one’s investigation but also to analyses of research findings. As researcher, my perspectives in this study have been shaped most significantly in two ways. Personal teaching experiences in the field of special education over the past 30 years continue to have an effect on my preconceived notions in respect to factors that impact student and teacher outcomes. In my current position as a professional development project director in the state examined in this study, I have been personally involved in implementation of the Reading First grant at both the state and local education agency levels. While personal involvement has been focused for the most part on implementation in one school, my outlook for program success has been influenced to some degree by my perceptions of the potential impact of state and local implementation support on student and teacher outcomes. I am mindful of the importance of keeping these biases in check in order to stay true to the purpose of this study – gaining a better understanding of *teacher* perceptions of factors impacting outcomes.

As the instrument of research conducted in this study, and consistent with qualitative research norms, I will make use of first person voice in the construction of the text.

Methods

Peirce, James, and Dewey were all interested in examining practical consequences and empirical findings to help in understanding the import of philosophical positions and, importantly, to help in deciding which action to take next as one attempts to better understand real-world phenomena (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003, p. 17).

While most research efforts examining the phenomenon of teacher efficacy have to date utilized quantitative methods to explain the significance of relationships between and among various factors and dimensions related to the construct, few have utilized qualitative methods to explore teachers' perceptions of factors impacting their personal sense of efficacy in relation to implementing change (Labone, 2004). If this important construct is indeed likely to be utilized for practical purposes, as earlier researchers have proposed (Labone, 2004; Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 1998; Wheatley, 2005), it would seem reasonable to make use of research methods that can get at the heart of the matter – that is, teachers' beliefs about factors impacting teaching practices in their classrooms. To that end, this study utilized an evaluative case study approach in purposefully selected schools to examine and better understand factors perceived to have an effect on teacher efficacy outcomes within the context of implementing the Reading First initiative of No Child Left Behind. The remainder of this section is divided into the following: setting, participants, data sources, data management and confidentiality, and analytic procedures.

Setting

Local education agencies had to meet two essential eligibility requirements in order to apply for Reading First grants in the state examined herein: low reading scores and high numbers of students living in poverty. In this respect, therefore, demographic and achievement levels are somewhat similar across schools. Four schools were selected as case studies for examining teachers' perceptions of factors impacting efficacy. Three of the four schools chosen for inclusion in this study were awarded 3-year grant contracts at the beginning of the 2004-2005 school year – the first year of implementation in the state examined in this study. These schools completed their third year of implementation at the end of the 2006-2007 school year. The school chosen for the final case study began their Reading First program at the beginning of the 2005-2006 school year and completed their third year at the end of the 2007-2008 school year. These schools were purposefully chosen so that teachers and schools would have had a longer period of time to establish the Tier 3 intervention level of reading instruction. Gibson and Dembo's (1984) *Teacher Efficacy Scale* was utilized as a screening tool to determine levels of teaching efficacy over Reading First schools in the state. Results of these scales were examined in an attempt to find patterns of high efficacy and low efficacy. The initial intent was to choose two urban and two rural schools with varying levels of efficacy. Since none of the urban schools agreed to participate, this method was abandoned and schools were ultimately chosen based on a number of factors. These included: interest in the study, size, location, prior researcher knowledge of implementation difficulties, and patterns of efficacy. In examining school population size I tried to choose as much variation as possible in the cases that responded to requests for participation in the study. After sorting schools

accordingly, I then looked at variation in region around the state. Because professional development and technical assistance is provided by personnel in nine regional professional development centers I wanted to choose schools in different regions. As it turned out, I was able to choose schools from three different regions. I chose one school that I had more contact with than others because I wanted to be sure to have at least one school that was experiencing difficulties in putting its program in place. It seemed important to do this in order to gain a better understanding of factors teachers perceived to undermine their abilities to get valued outcomes. I knew teachers in that district were frustrated but I did not know why. Finally, I was surprised by the results of the efficacy scales. While I had hypothesized that teachers would have either high or low feelings of efficacy based on location, I found that not necessarily to be the case. While some teachers in a location exhibited “high” feelings of efficacy, others did not. I found this to be an interesting phenomenon which I wanted to explore further.

Teacher Efficacy Scale (TES). Gibson and Dembo (1984), in an attempt to extend earlier efficacy questions (Armor, Conry-Osequera, Cox, Kin, McDonnell, Pascal, Pauly, & Zellman, 1976; Berman, McLaughlin, Bass, Pauly, & Zellman, 1977) based on Rotter’s (1966) locus of control, added a conceptual strand from Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy to develop what has been considered a “more extensive and reliable measurement of teacher efficacy” (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998, p. 212) than the two-item instrument utilized in the 1970s Rand studies (Armor, et al, 1976; & Berman, et al, 1977). Instrument development yielded two distinct dimensions of this construct – personal teaching efficacy and teaching efficacy (in general) – which have proven significant in subsequent efficacy research efforts.

For Gibson and Dembo (1984), the first dimension represents “a teacher’s sense of personal teaching efficacy, or belief that one has the skills and abilities to bring about student learning” (p. 573). This component corresponds to Bandura’s (1977) *efficacy expectation* and the question utilized in previous Rand studies (Armor, et al, 1976; & Berman, et al, 1977) “If I really try hard, I can get through to even the most difficult or unmotivated students.” The second, which corresponds to Bandura’s (1977) *outcomes expectancy* “represents a teacher’s sense of teaching efficacy, or belief that any teacher’s ability to bring about change is significantly limited by factors external to the teacher, such as the home environment, family background, and parental influences” (p. 574). This dimension relates to the Rand studies (Armor, et al, 1976; & Berman, et al, 1977) question, “When it comes right down to it, a teacher really can’t do much because most of a student’s motivation and performance depends on his or her home environment.”

While this instrument has been used extensively in studies examining the construct of teachers’ sense of efficacy, researchers have criticized the limitations of the scale over the years and attempts have been made to rectify perceived inadequacies (Guskey & Passaro, 1994; Ross, 1994; Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). While, however, such attempts have provided significant findings on a variety of measurement efforts, it has been suggested that, in order to compare future studies to those past, researchers should continue to utilize scales most prevalent in the literature (Ross, 1994). In light of this suggestion, the 16-item version of Gibson and Dembo’s (1984) *Teacher Efficacy Scale* (TES) served as the primary measure of teachers’ sense of efficacy in this study.

Participants

Three categories of participants, representing both district and building level school personnel, contributed to this study. Two categories of participants serve primarily in administrative rather than teaching roles. The first category is comprised of the building principal of each of the four participating schools. The second is made up of school level reading coaches. Teachers providing Tier 3 intervention instruction in participating schools represented the third category of participants. While principals and district reading coaches were interviewed to get a better understanding of teachers' perceptions of factors impacting outcome variance, most of the data I collected was from teachers responsible for providing Tier 3 instruction.

Data Sources

Local intervention implementation plans. Because implementation of the Tier 3 intervention component has been essentially left to the discretion of local education agencies, I planned to do a document analysis to examine variance in local plans for implementing this component. I found, however, that districts did not have what might be considered implementation plans beyond grant applications submitted to the state education agency. Because grant applications did not include the information I wanted to understand variation of Tier 3 implementation, I was able to determine this from interviews.

Interviews. Principals, local reading coaches and intervention teachers were contacted by phone and/or email and asked to participate in open-ended, semi-structured interviews with the researcher. Interview appointments were set up and conducted in face-to-face meetings in each case. Seventeen interviews were recorded and transcribed

by the researcher. As themes and additional questions emerged from the data, participants were contacted and asked to participate in follow-up interviews to either clarify perspectives and/or to gather further information. To further facilitate triangulation from multiple data streams, regional Reading First specialists and special education consultants were asked to participate in conversations regarding professional development experiences provided to personnel to help build capacity for implementation. Two of these conversations were recorded and transcribed. All other conversations with regional facilitators were minimal and conducted essentially in passing.

Observations. On occasion, teachers requested that I observe them providing intervention instruction for one or more Tier 3 students. Because I serve in this capacity in my current professional development position, I consented to these observations which served to enrich field notes on teacher behavior and affect.

Field notes. Field notes were kept to record participant affect during interviews. I felt this to be a particularly significant data source in lieu of prevailing sentiment related to local perception of state and federal involvement impacting implementation of federal programs.

Data Management and Confidentiality

In order to comply with informed consent requirements and standards of ethics, participants at all levels were assured anonymity. Since the state education agency (SEA) in the state examined in this study posts considerable information regarding Reading First funded districts on its website, descriptions necessary for explaining case study settings might lead to exposure of particular schools and consequently, particular teachers. The name of the state examined in this study is, therefore, not disclosed. Schools, teachers,

administrators, reading coaches and other personnel will be referred to by names I chose to protect their true identities. Interview protocols were coded and data stored on a removable disc that was secured at all times so that personal information was available to the researcher only. Participant protocols and audio tapes were labeled by position rather than by name (e.g. teacher/SV (for Summervale), administrator/FV (for Forest Valley, etc.).

Analytic Procedures

Analysis and data collection. Consistent with qualitative research methods, data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously. As themes and categories emerged from the data, follow-up interviews or conversations were utilized to elaborate on information from initial contacts. This iterative process served as a means for reaching a saturation point in relation to understanding as fully as possible stakeholder perceptions of factors impacting student learning and teacher efficacy outcomes.

Coding. The researcher used open coding to segment information gleaned from interviews into initial categories and properties, or subcategories. Axial coding was then utilized to further examine dimensions and themes emerging from the Reading First implementation process in chosen schools. Coding of data was centered on factors relating to core categories chosen by the researcher – student learning and teacher efficacy outcomes. While not in keeping with a true grounded theory approach whereby a central category emerges from the data (Creswell, 2005), this researcher was interested in examining related categories that emerged from stakeholder perceptions of factors influential to the two central categories mentioned above.

Trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba (1985) point out that “conventional criteria” for trustworthiness include internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity. These criteria, however, are based on an “objective” positivist paradigm in which internal validity is based on the extent to which results of a study are “isomorphic with the reality they purport to describe” (p. 218), external validity can be claimed when conditions of probability sampling are met, reliability hinges on whether or not “results are stable and replicable” (p. 219), and objectivity is achieved by interposition of an “objective” instrument between “inquirer and the object(s) of inquiry” (p. 219). A naturalistic paradigm, however, in which “reality” is based on multiple, individual perspectives and perceptions calls for different means for ensuring trustworthiness:

Guba (1981) proposes that... conventional formulations be replaced with four new terms that have a better fit with naturalistic epistemology; these he has named “credibility” (in place of internal validity), “transferability” (in place of external validity), “dependability” (in place of reliability), and “confirmability” (in place of objectivity) (cited in Lincoln & Guba, p. 219).

Lincoln and Guba suggest that the naturalistic inquirer can meet the criteria of credibility through such activities as “prolonged engagement,” “persistent observation,” “triangulation,” and “member checking.” Prolonged engagement and persistent observation seem fairly obvious in the contention that questions related to a particular phenomenon cannot be answered with any degree of credibility unless the researcher expends adequate time examining subjects within the phenomenal context. Triangulation refers to the use of multiple sources of data such as interviews, observation, and documents that can corroborate information. Member checking can be accomplished by

asking subjects of inquiry to verify “data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions” and is considered by the authors to be “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314). To that end, I have tried to establish credibility for my findings by verifying components of school Tier 3 implementation plans (whether written or unwritten) with all study participants, have provided participants with written descriptions of my interpretations for verification, and have conducted follow up interviews to corroborate themes and categories that emerge from the data.

Transferability deals with the extent to which findings can be generalized across subjects and contexts. Lincoln and Guba argue that

The naturalist cannot specify the external validity of an inquiry; he or she can provide only the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility (p. 316).

I have, therefore, attempted to provide substantial accounts of all settings, participants, interviews, and observations so that readers and future researchers might recognize described characteristics in considering future examination of other settings and other participants.

Dependability is achieved through the maintenance of an audit trail which is best accomplished by organizing and storing data in such a way that an outside examiner or “auditor” would be able to check both the process and the product of data collection to determine whether or not such could be verified.

Confirmability, much like dependability, can be accomplished through external audit procedures whereby an “inquiry auditor” can examine “the *product* of an inquiry –

the data, findings, interpretations, and recommendations” – and can subsequently confirm that such “is supported by data and is internally coherent so that the ‘bottom line’ may be accepted” (p. 318).

In an attempt to ensure dependability and confirmability, recorded interviews are voice-dated at the beginning of the interview and tapes have been labeled with the date as well as participant and location codes. All documentation from each case study is stored in a separate and secure location. This includes identification of participant and location codes. Coded interview transcriptions are also stored in a hidden computer file to which I have sole access.

Summary

This study utilizes a theoretically pragmatic, qualitative approach to answer questions examined in relation to the implementation and subsequent teacher efficacy outcomes within the context of implementing the Reading First initiative of No Child Left Behind. Teacher efficacy outcomes were measured utilizing Gibson and Dembo’s (1984) *Teacher Efficacy Scale*. Results were examined to help guide the purposeful selection of schools for in-depth examination of factors perceived to influence outcome variance.

Findings in relation to factors perceived to influence teacher efficacy outcomes were informed by data sources including: interviews, observations, field notes, teacher and student demographic data, and Gibson and Dembo’s (1984) *Teacher Efficacy Scale*.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

Introduction

Lessons learned from past examination of educational reform efforts indicate that policy success or failure is significantly impacted by those closest to the point of implementation (Elmore, 1978; 2004; McLaughlin, 1987; 1991; Odden, 1991). With that perspective in mind, the purpose of this study was to examine teachers' perceptions of factors impacting their ability to bring about valued student outcomes within the context of implementing No Child Left Behind's Reading First Initiative. The state education agency (SEA), with oversight responsibilities for schools included herein, has conducted program evaluations of Reading First implementation to determine whether or not funded districts are in compliance with federal grant requirements. While those evaluations provide some insight into implementation and outcome variance, this study focuses on individuals' perceptions of issues related to the reasons *why* such variance may occur. Stephen Covey (2005) contends that every organization is perfectly aligned to achieve the results it gets. In other words, how people within a system view the world determines what they do, which in turn determines what they get and finally the circle is complete when those results perpetuate how they see the world. Reading First, as the academic cornerstone of No Child Left Behind, represents a dramatic shift in what schools *do* in relation to reading instruction in the primary grades. Teachers in Reading First schools no longer use their favorite philosophy for how children learn to read to guide instruction. They no longer have to wait for struggling students to fail so they can be referred for special education services but, rather, Reading First requires utilization of a multi-tiered

instructional delivery model designed to meet the learning needs of all students *before* difficulties become disabilities. Teachers are no longer forced to search for whatever materials they can find to teach reading. Reading First provides scientifically research-based training and materials to build capacity so that schools have what they need to *get* positive outcomes. Guskey's (1986, 1988) theory, that teachers are more committed to the implementation of new learning if practices result in better student learning outcomes, guided the questions for this study. A clearer understanding of teachers' perceptions of factors impacting learning outcomes, in other words how they *see* the world in relation to Reading First implementation, may provide assistance to teachers and administrators attempting to implement similar reform efforts in the future.

Of particular interest is the extent to which variation in implementation impacts feelings of efficacy for bringing about valued student learning outcomes for teachers providing Tier 3 intensive intervention instruction for "at-risk" students. Even as the framework for executing a three-tiered instructional model was not negotiable, local education agencies (LEAs) were allowed substantial discretion for putting Tiers 2 and 3 into practice. A closer examination of factors related to implementation variance across schools may provide direction for adapting efforts to increase student learning and teacher efficacy outcomes. The following questions guided this study:

3. What factors do teachers implementing Tier 3 intervention instruction believe enhance their teaching abilities and efforts?
4. What factors do teachers implementing Tier 3 intervention instruction believe constrain their teaching abilities and efforts?

Bandura (1997) posits that “unless people believe they can produce desired effects by their actions, they have little incentive to act (p. 193).” Within Bandura’s theoretical analysis of the construct of self efficacy he distinguishes efficacy expectations from outcome expectancies. While the former refers to a personal conviction in one’s ability to execute behavior necessary to produce desired outcomes, the latter focuses on one’s estimation that a specified behavior will result in certain outcomes. In that respect, he argues that the differentiation of these two concepts is significant in that one’s belief “that a particular course of action will produce certain outcomes” (p. 193) will not influence behavior if an individual doubts his or her personal ability to perform the necessary activities to produce such outcomes. The focus of this study is on factors perceived to either enhance or undermine teachers’ beliefs that what they *do* will make a difference in student learning outcomes.

In this chapter, I submit the findings of my research. I first discuss Reading First policy requirements as the context within which teachers were experiencing changes in their school environment. Next I explain two broad categories, *context* and *will*, along with various subcategories and dimensions that emerged from analysis of the data examined. Subcategories and dimensions included within the category of *context* include: (a) external environment including population demographics and community descriptions; and (b) internal environment addressing student demographics; initial response to change; conditions for Tier 3 implementation; organizational culture; organizational capacity; and leadership. Subcategories of *will* include: (a) results; (b) values; and (c) confidence.

Research on the implementation of change in schools emphasizes the importance of context on behavior (Fullan, 2003; Hall & Hord, 2001; Smith, 2008; Wagner, Kegan, Lahey, Lemons, Garnier, Helsing, Howell, & Rasmussen, 2006.) In that respect, descriptions of the four research settings include: school size, location, student and teacher demographics, and grant eligibility factors. In addition, I will provide perceptions of the local context for and conditions of Reading First implementation as well as those related to subsequent subcategories. I will also address the influence of context on will or commitment for implementing Reading First in each case. Finally, I summarize my findings by discussing similarities and differences observed in each of the four cases comprising this study.

Reading First Eligibility and Implementation

Eligibility to apply for Reading First funds in the state examined herein is based on two criteria – academic performance and socio-economic factors. Districts were eligible to apply for funds if they met both of the following criteria: 1) at least 30 percent of third-graders reading below grade level **and** 2) at least 15 percent of students at the census poverty level; or the district serves more than 6,500 students from families below the poverty line; or the district resides in an enterprise community, empowerment zone; or the district has at least one building that qualifies under Title I as a building targeted for school improvement. Schools from either Cohort 1 (schools funded in the first year of state grant awards) or Cohort 2 (schools funded in the second year of state grant awards) could meet the academic performance criteria if they had 30 % or more third grade students scoring below grade level on any *one* of three consecutive annual administrations of the state Communication Arts assessment given in the three years just

prior to application for funding. “Below grade level” is considered by the state education agency as any score falling below the category labeled “Proficient.”

Reading First implementation requires a three-tiered instructional delivery model with 90 minutes of uninterrupted reading instruction provided for all students in the general education classroom. This level of instruction is considered Tier 1, oftentimes referred to as the “core.” Within this level teachers are required to utilize a reading series designed to offer scientifically based teaching practices in what the National Reading Panel (1999) reports to be the five essential components of effective reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Students struggling to acquire skills in any of these areas receive additional targeted instruction during either a daily 30-minute session (Tier 2) or a daily 60-minute session (Tier 3). This model serves as a means for providing increasingly intensive and targeted instruction geared to meet diverse student learning needs. Students receiving Tier 3 intervention instruction may or may not also be eligible for special education services.

Eligibility for Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction in the state examined in this study is determined through the utilization of the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). Benchmark data is provided through this assessment three times per school year for all students in grades K-3. Any student not achieving benchmark scores is eligible for either supplemental (Tier 2) or intervention (Tier 3) instruction. While students considered at “some risk” for not meeting end of year benchmarks for their grade level receive Tier 2 instruction, those found “at risk” receive Tier 3 instruction. Response to instructional intervention is monitored by continuous administration of DIBELS assessments to determine whether or not instruction is adequate to close the gap

between a student's current status and the benchmark standard. Changes are made utilizing a continuous problem-solving method in an effort to match instruction with student learning needs.

In all the schools included in these case studies Tier 3 instruction was provided by both Title I and special education teachers. In one case, a classroom teacher provided Tier 3 instruction for students in her classroom. These Tier 3 providers were the ones for whom the questions guiding this study were designed. A major aspect of Reading First implementation that appears to impact teachers' feelings of efficacy in the four cases examined herein includes individual school policies, processes and procedures related to providing this level of instruction for the population of students in their schools.

Policies, processes and procedures

State policy for implementing federal guidelines under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004) mandates that a student's individualized education plan (IEP) supersedes Reading First implementation. This requirement was not necessarily, however, a foregone conclusion in provision of instruction for students receiving special education services in the Reading First schools I examined. While some schools were more closely aligned with federal regulations, most appeared to be more constrained by SEA guidelines directing Reading First implementation in the state. Overall, processes and procedures utilized to guide implementation of Tier 3 instruction in the four cases in this study were for the most part dependent on a school's personnel capacity to put a multi-tiered instructional delivery model in place.

As stated earlier, levels of instruction in Reading First schools examined herein are based on student assessment data from the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early

Literacy Skills (DIBELS). Cut point scores indicate whether or not students are considered to be at “low risk” (at benchmark or above), at “some risk” or “at risk” of not meeting end-of-year benchmark requirements. In order to determine whether or not students will respond positively to Tier 1, “core” instruction, the state education agency requires that schools not provide Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction for students before the second semester of the first implementation year. This is the case for all students, including those that had already been determined eligible to receive Title I or special education services for reading difficulties or disabilities.

Categories

Two broad categories emerged from the data gathered for this study. These include the impact of *context* on the subsequent *will*, or commitment related to the experiences shaping individual perceptions of Reading First implementation.

Context

Working from a two-pronged premise that “the power of context is an environmental argument” and that “behavior is a function of social context” (Gladwell, 2000, p. 150), the subcategories that emerged from this construct relate to the overall environment and individual situations within which teachers were attempting to implement Reading First in their schools. These include the external environment such as community and student demographics, but more importantly, in this study, the internal environment and working conditions that directly impact collective and individual behavior within each organization. In that respect, organization culture, capacity and leadership played decisive roles in how teachers experienced program implementation.

Organizational Culture

Implementation scholars, along with those studying educational and organizational change, agree that culture is a significant issue in the behavior of both an institutional entity and the individuals working within it (Barth, 2003; Bolman & Deal, 2002; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Elmore, 2004; Fullan, 2001; Hall & Hord, 2001; Schein, 2004; Smith, 2008). While culture is generally included as a subcategory of context, it has been separated in these findings to highlight its significance for influencing teachers' feelings of efficacy for bringing about outcomes valued by Reading First oversight agencies.

Culture is defined by Deal and Peterson (1999) as "the underground stream of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that has built up over time as people work together, solve problems, and confront challenges" (p. 28). They contend that

Culture influences everything that goes on in schools: how staff dress, what they talk about, their willingness to change, the practice of instruction, and the emphasis given student and faculty learning (p. 28).

Guskey points out that the implementation of new practices in schools often "requires the development of new values, beliefs, and norms" (Guskey, 2000, p. 151). Several scholars who study the implementation of change agree that changes in beliefs and attitudes are not a prerequisite for changing behaviors. It is their contention that changes in practices and behaviors that result in valued outcomes are catalysts for changes in beliefs about what is possible (Elmore, 2004; Fullan, 2006; Guskey, 1986; McLaughlin, 1991). The subcategories that emerged from the data in relation to culture in this study include: collaborative problem-solving and shared decision-making; cooperation and collegiality;

and shared responsibility and support for outcomes. These constructs are particularly salient in Reading First schools as they relate to significant changes in norms such as teacher autonomy and the way schools have historically gone about scheduling and allocating resources to support learning.

The central component of Reading First is the implementation of a tiered instructional delivery model designed to meet the learning needs of all students. While teachers have become accustomed to isolation and considerable autonomy for how they conduct their work, effective implementation of this model requires that teachers and administrators engage in collaborative and ongoing inquiry to guide instruction and to solve systemic problems that impact learning outcomes (Batsche, Elliott, Graden, Grimes, Kovalski, Prasse, Reschly, Schrag, Tilly, 2006). As this occurs, it may be necessary to make implementation adjustments. Cooperation between teachers and administrators as well as between teachers is essential for ensuring that barriers to positive results are addressed in a timely manner.

Leadership

Implementing change in any organization is a complex task to say the least. Duke (2004) points out that “how implementation is experienced and what meaning is ascribed to the experience,” is impacted by any number of factors including one’s “investment in the change at hand” (p. 158). Those in charge of leading reform efforts have considerable influence on how individuals within an organization perceive and learn from those experiences (Covey, 2006; Duke, 2004; Evans, 1996; Fullan, 2001, 2006; Hall & Hord, 2001; Kotter, 1996; Smith, 2008). Fullan (2006) contends “leadership is the turnkey to system transformation” without which implementation of change cannot be sustained (p.

88). Subcategories that emerged from the data related to leadership include: *style; beliefs; shaping the culture; managing change and policy ambiguity; allocating resources; teacher support; and trust.*

Organizational and Individual Capacity

Policymakers designed Reading First around the belief that “teaching young children to read is the most critical educational priority facing this country” (*Guidance for the Reading First Program*, p. 1). Encouraged by the fact that significant scientifically based research is available in this area, they utilized findings to guide policy design for providing assistance to states and local districts for establishing research-based programs for students in kindergarten through third grade. Funds were designated to provide not only materials based on scientific research but also for “providing significantly increased teacher professional development to ensure that all teachers, including special education teachers, have the skills they need to teach these programs effectively” (*Guidance for the Reading First Program*, p. 1). Such capacity-building efforts set Reading First apart from other federally funded reading initiatives because of the focus on scientifically based reading research. In that respect this initiative “focuses directly on ensuring that every child can read at grade level or above by the end of third grade” (*Guidance for the Reading First Program*, p. 1).

In considering implementation challenges, it is imperative to determine whether or not local education agencies have the “capacity to support change” (Lappan, 1997). As in other studies (e.g. Lappan, 1997), factors related to capacity were crucial to perceived implementation success. In this study the construct of *capacity* is described in relation to teachers’ perceptions of the adequacy of: *time; personnel; materials; and training or*

previous experience for effective implementation of the Tier 3 component of Reading First.

Will

Will refers to teachers' feelings of commitment to Reading First implementation based on whether or not they believed their efforts would actually bring about what they considered to be valued outcomes. This became evident as teachers began to see the *results* of their efforts in student learning data, in whether or not they believed in the *value* of implementation and/or instructional strategies, and in their growing *confidence* that they had the knowledge and skills to achieve positive student learning outcomes.

SWEET OAK

Context

External Environment

The unincorporated community of Sweet Oak is marked by signs at each end of a one-half mile stretch of blacktop highway. Because of its unincorporated status there is no available census data for Sweet Oak aside from county data. County data does not provide an accurate picture of the Sweet Oak community since it is averaged with that of several wealthier towns. The K-8 Sweet Oak school district campus is located two miles south of the only substantial business in the area – a convenience store housing a bank with live tellers at one end and a deli-counter with made-to-order cold meat sandwiches at the other. With only a handful of small businesses in the immediate vicinity, many parents of district students seek employment in nearby communities or, in some cases, drive an hour or more to work in one of the state’s two major metropolitan areas. Sweet Oak Elementary, with 38 certified staff and a handful of others responsible for running day-to-day school operations, is the largest employer in the area. The community accommodates station #2 of a fire and ambulance district located in a nearby town. Other area businesses include a post office, a propane gas company, a small café and a used car lot. Except for paved highways running north and south or east and west out of the town itself, houses sit on gravel roads running haphazardly through the community. While several homes are somewhat dilapidated looking, featuring yards with rusted-out vehicles and piles of discarded junk, others are neatly painted with well-kept lawns decorated with flower beds.

Internal Environment

Seemingly the largest of the schools included in my study, Sweet Oak Elementary has a current enrollment of just under 400 students. The student population count in this district, however, includes kindergarten through 8th grade students while other case study schools report kindergarten through 5th or 6th graders in their student population count. With approximately 40 to 45 students per grade level Sweet Oak Elementary serves around 300 students in kindergarten through 6th grades. Over the past five years, the predominantly white (five year average = 94.7%) student population at Sweet Oak has decreased by nearly 60 students. The mobility rate for students transferring in and out of the district is considered significant by school personnel. For example, the district had 23 students transfer into the district at the beginning of the current school year. Of those students five had transferred out by mid-March. African American students make up the largest percentage (4.24%) of other racial and ethnic populations in the school. Student to classroom teacher ratios over the past five years average out to be 16.6 to one. Student to overall teacher ratio over the same time period fell at 12.8 to one.

The incidence rate for students receiving special education services during the 2006-07 school year was 18% (state average = 14.25%) with a Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) rate of 7.50% (state average = 5.27%). The district was able to successfully integrate all but one special education student into general education classrooms for Tier 1 instruction during the first three years of implementation. A follow-up interview with the district's reading coach indicated, however, that family mobility rates have increased the district's population of special education students so that during

the fourth and fifth years of implementation four students received Tier 1 instruction outside the general classroom setting.

The district's 8th grade graduates may attend any of the surrounding high schools but Sweet Oak provides transportation to only two of them. The overall student population of one district is just over 2400 students while the overall student population of the other is closer to 850 students.

During the three years prior to Reading First eligibility the percentage of Sweet Oak 3rd grade students scoring below grade level on the state Communication Arts assessment ranged from a low of 79.1% to a high of 84.5%. The state range, of all 3rd graders reading "below grade level" for this time period, went from a low of 64.7% to a high of 68.4%. The census poverty level for Sweet Oak Elementary during the grant application year was 37.11%. This level has fluctuated between 38.67% and 40.63% over the course of the three-year grant cycle.

Initial Response to Change

The district's reading coach, Sally Denver, explained that the decision to apply for the grant was never a controversial issue for teachers and administrators but rather a chance they embraced as an opportunity to help their students. She said the fact that the district had *qualified* for the grant was essentially the most significant factor in the decision to apply. Expressing her concern that the district's reading program had been "very disorganized," she explained that teachers not only had "broad variations on how to teach reading" but that "nobody was using the same [reading] series." She said teachers and administrators realized they all "needed to be on the same page and [they] all needed to do the same thing." Another deciding factor for the district was funding. They

understood that Reading First grant monies would give the district financial resources to provide for a consistent reading curriculum across grade levels. Sally stated that before Reading First, teachers “had to find what [they] could find to teach reading” and that the thought of having the resources they needed was an exciting prospect for teachers and a major reason the district decided to apply.

There is a general consensus between the district’s primary grant coordinators, Ms. Robinson and Ms. Denver, that teachers were initially very enthusiastic about the grant. As Ms. Robinson put it, “They were thrilled, excited, absolutely blown away.” Ms. Denver agreed that “everybody was like, ‘Yeah, yeah!’ because they wanted all that stuff.” She smiled as she said, “You know how teachers are.” “But,” Ms. Robinson stated, “We had no clue what we had just opened up.”

“Overwhelming” was a word used repeatedly by teachers and administrators in all four cases to describe initial implementation of Reading First in their schools. Title I teacher, Kelly Patterson, explained that having “so many new things” including “a whole new reading program and a whole new everything” was somewhat overpowering for Sweet Oak teachers. She said they essentially “had to start from scratch... to redo all this stuff and [to] find things that would work.” Ms. Robinson agreed that the first year was “very hard” for teachers and that, in fact, it was “still hard for some of them” at the end of the third implementation year. She felt it had been much easier for teachers with little to no prior teaching experience and explained that “to them, it’s just like, ‘Oh, this is how you teach reading.’” On the other hand, it seemed to her that Reading First had been more difficult overall for veteran teachers. Reading coach, Sally Denver, concurred that “the

first year was a very big learning experience... *huge* learning experience.” “But,” she added, “We made it through.”

Conditions for Tier 3 Implementation

When asked how their school made decisions for providing Tiers of instruction for special education students Ms. Robinson replied, “I don’t think we were really given much of a choice. We were pretty much led to believe that the special ed kids were going to be in the general ed classroom for 90 minutes... period.” She said it was her feeling that as long as students were getting instruction “that agreed with their IEP” there really was not a “whole lot [they] could do” other than include those students in Tier 1 instruction in the general education classroom.

Within these parameters, Sweet Oak administrators decided to utilize their reading coach and district Title I and special education teachers along with aides from each program to assist with small group instruction in the general education classroom during the 90 minutes of core instruction. These teachers and paraprofessionals also provide Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction for struggling students. When they are in the general education classroom they assist the classroom teacher during time periods designated for flexible grouping according to student needs. They collaborate with the classroom teacher to provide additional instruction to small groups of students who may be struggling with a particular concept or skill. In addition to their time in classrooms, the Title I teacher and her paraprofessional pull students from K-3 classrooms for Tier 2 instruction while the special education teacher and her paraprofessional do the same for students receiving Tier 3 instruction. The reading coach adjusts her schedule to fill in the blanks when no one else is available. Along with trying to meet the learning needs of students at the primary

grade levels within the context of Reading First implementation Title I and special education teachers and paras also serve students at upper grade levels. Essentially, these five individuals spend as much time as their schedules will allow providing assistance at all three instructional levels in Reading First classrooms for students struggling to acquire reading skills.

Organizational Culture

In looking at implementation of change in educational settings, Evans (1996) describes culture in terms of how an organization's assumptions and beliefs define not only how the organization views itself, but also shapes its environment and the "meaning of experience" individuals have there. Evans has found that when "assumptions and beliefs emphasize the nobility of the work" and "a "can-do" attitude," individuals are more resilient in the face of setbacks and disappointment. Additionally, a sense of "common purpose" helps them stay "connected and mutually supportive" of those around them.

Collaborative problem-solving and shared decision-making. Sweet Oak has one special education teacher and one Title I teacher who, along with their aides and the district's reading coach, provide Tier 3 intervention for students struggling to acquire reading skills. These teachers work closely with the reading coach and other teachers to consider strategies for meeting student learning needs. Special education teacher, Kathy Harris talked about collaborating with reading coach, Sally Denver, to determine how they might adjust instructional delivery that was not working to close the achievement gaps for two students. She was excited to report that one of the students had responded positively to changes they had made.

When I got them... one little boy was reading five words a minute in 2nd grade and the other one... I don't think he was reading. I got with Sally, who's our leader, and we had a meeting... These kids had to have a little more than just the [reading] centers. It wasn't working... Now my little guy... he's up to 68 words per minute.

In a follow-up interview, Sally Denver explained how she and other Tier 3 providers had been scheduling intervention instruction for struggling students during the first three years of Reading First implementation. She said they would go to each grade level to confer with teachers on the best time to pull students out of the classroom for Tier 3 intervention so they would not miss crucial instruction. She described this process as “crazy” since times “would always overlap” and they would have to negotiate with teachers to work through the scheduling process. She said they generally spent the first week of school trying to work that out for everyone. The principal decided to take on that challenge for their fifth year of implementation. He met with Ms. Denver and all the teachers this spring to set the schedule so that intervention could start for struggling students from the first week of school for the current school year. Ms. Denver contends “it was just easier for him to do it because I was in with him with the teachers doing that so it more of a coordinated effort.” Once the schedule was set, teachers were not allowed to “move it around.” She said that decision “took a lot of load off” Tier 3 teachers.

Just as they have done from the beginning of implementation, Ms. Denver meets with individual grade level groups of teachers every week. She said one of their major topics of conversation is whether or not their structure for levels of instruction is working for their students. Additionally, then in monthly meetings “where everybody is there

[they] talk about it some more... to get a feel..." for whether or not things are working. They ask questions such as "Have things changed? Did that work? Do we need to change a person? Do we need to change what we're doing?" She said it is an ongoing process of tweaking their efforts to increase student learning.

Cooperation and collegiality. By and large, the climate at Sweet Oak Elementary indicates a culture in which teachers and administrators work cooperatively to implement Reading First. In talking about scheduling issues that plague schools attempting to implement Reading First, Title I teacher, Kelly Patterson, explained that Sweet Oak teachers were able to work cooperatively to meet student needs. In other words, she said they have been able to "work around the conflicts." She explained the teachers are flexible enough to say, "Ok, while you're taking this group, we'll do this thing that I may not be taking a grade for."

Additionally, she said, there had essentially been no conflict over allocation of resources between grade levels. Even as teachers in some schools reported that teachers in grades not involved in the program were uncooperative and in some cases even hostile to the resources afforded teachers participating in Reading First, this was not the case at Sweet Oak. Ms. Patterson stated the 90-minute reading blocks, for example, are considered "sacred time" and described how the daily workings of the school were scheduled and protected to ensure that classroom instruction was not interrupted by anything that would disrupt teaching and learning.

Ms. Denver described how teachers have become more in tune with each other over the years as they work together to support students. She described working with special education teacher, Kathy Harris, who she described as being "so on board with

Reading First.” Part of Ms. Denver’s job is to coordinate efforts between general education teachers’ and Tier 3 providers’ efforts to meet student learning needs. As they work together to work out strategies for individual students she said all she has to say to Ms. Harris is “This is what works. This is what you need to use.” and then, she explained Ms. Harris “just does it.”

Shared responsibility and support for outcomes. Assistant Principal, Lisa Robinson described how Tier 3 teachers worked with general education teachers to provide support for all students. Both Title and special education teachers and their paraprofessionals go into the general education classroom during Tier 1 core instruction. Ms. Robinson said, “They don’t say, ‘Hi, I’m here for this special education kid, Susie, over here... she’s going to be my student today.’” But rather, she stated, “They just go in and they’re there and [they] do what needs to be done.” In that respect, then, “it’s more than just the special ed kids [that are] getting the help.”

Ms. Harris said she usually monitors student progress of reading skills for some of the special education students but that for the most part general education teachers are responsible for progress monitoring required by Reading First implementation. She is, however, aware of how students are doing because she related, “[Teachers] come to me and tell me so I can be sad or I can be happy” [about results].

Additionally, Ms. Robinson explained that stakeholders including teachers, administrators and parents are able to keep up with implementation efforts through a newsletter created by Ms. Denver. This bulletin is utilized to distribute not only Reading First news but also to “spotlight the teacher... and spotlight the kids that are making good [progress].”

Ms. Denver said that she continues as the district has started its fifth year of Reading First implementation to utilize her newsletter to keep everyone informed of student progress. The night before our interview she had presented data to the school board showing percentages of students at each level of instructional support. She said she keeps everyone updated “pretty frequently... so that they’re very much aware of where we are” with student learning. She said everyone, including school board members, worries about students’ progress especially as they get older and that everyone works together to analyze data to determine where they, as a school and community, need to place instructional emphasis.

Leadership

Leadership and management duties for implementing Reading First in the Sweet Oak district are distributed across several layers. Principal, Joe Baker, takes responsibility for management duties including allocation of resources such as personnel scheduling and provision of materials. Leadership, in terms of envisioning a mission, shaping the culture, and developing strategies (Evans, 1996) for putting Sweet Oak’s Reading First program in place, is distributed primarily between Assistant Principal, Lisa Robinson, and the reading coach, Sally Denver. Both Ms. Robinson and Ms. Denver have special education backgrounds, Ms. Robinson holding certification in several special education categories as well as in elementary and middle school teaching and elementary administration. Ms. Denver was a special education teacher before taking over as the district’s reading coach. Additionally, Superintendent, Bill Michaels, came to Sweet Oak from another Reading First district and is described as “a big proponent” of the program. Ms. Denver said he is “very supportive” of their efforts to meet the learning needs of all

students. Teachers expressed the belief that leadership commitment (Duke, 2004) to Reading First was crucial to its success in their school.

As part of her administrative responsibilities overseeing federal programs and district initiatives, Ms. Robinson believed she was a natural fit for taking on the task of coordinating Reading First efforts in their district. She explained how she formed a committee with teacher representatives from each grade level – K through 3rd grade – along with representatives from special education and Title I to take them through the initial grant writing process to apply for funding. They “divvied up” the application “so that the special ed people wrote the special ed part. The Title I people wrote the intervention part. The regular classroom teachers addressed the curriculum and what books [they] were going to use and then [they] all got back together and put it together into a cohesive thing...”

Style. Situational leadership theory, based primarily on the work of Paul Hersey and Kenneth Blanchard (Marzano, 2005) suggests that leaders adapt leadership behavior in accordance with followers’ willingness or ability to engage in a particular task. Four styles are matched to various situations in that respect. Leaders use the “*telling*” style to direct actions when followers are both unable and unwilling to perform a designated task. Ms. Robinson explained that from the beginning of their efforts to put Reading First in place meetings were, and continue to be, conducted to disseminate information to staff. She stated that she attends “at least the first part of” all meetings but that “when they get down to the brass tacks on who’s doing what and when” she directs her staff to do what Ms. Denver tells them to do. She supports Ms. Denver’s efforts even when teachers may be a little reluctant to adhere to Reading First requirements.

Ms. Robinson uses the “*selling*” style of situational leadership with those teachers she considered able but less willing to follow through with Reading First implementation. She described her outlook on dealing with commitment issues.

Follow through has been a lot like trying to catch the big fish and wind them in. You’ve got to hook them. Once you hook them and reel them in... and they realize it is important... that they *do* have to do this... that is *does* work, then usually you’ve got a convert.

The “*participating*” style is one in which followers are willing but not necessarily able to perform a given task. This style is revealed through a leader’s friendliness toward followers as she “provides concrete direction and guidance” to increase ability for bringing about valued outcomes. Ms. Robinson demonstrated this style by her involvement in meetings with teachers, other administrators and the reading coach to work together to solve problems of implementation. Additionally, this aspect of her style is displayed in her efforts to provide professional development opportunities for teachers. Administrators were concerned that teachers were not prepared for or willing to differentiate instruction for their students. While some teachers were willing to try it, they had not necessarily had previous training and experience with that type of teaching. Ms. Robinson holds workshops over the summer to provide direction for incorporating differentiated instruction into teaching practices.

Finally, she displays her “*delegating*” style in the trust she puts in willing and able followers to perform tasks without her interference. This is most obvious in her relationship with reading coach, Sally Denver. While Ms. Robinson makes known her

unequivocal support of the basic ideas and concepts of Reading First, she leaves the details of guiding implementation to Ms. Denver.

Beliefs. Sweet Oak district administrators believe strongly in seizing opportunities to help struggling students. Ms. Robinson talked about conversations she had with colleagues after attending state meetings informing eligible districts about grant requirements. She stated that she told them, “If we don’t do this, we’re stupid. We have kids that are failing and we have somebody willing to help us... so if we don’t do this, we’re stupid.”

Ms. Denver talked about Superintendent Michaels’ enthusiasm for Reading First. While he is “very supportive” of the program, she said his “big thing” is ensuring that teachers instill a love for reading in their students. Apparently, she believes, he worries that Reading First might have a negative impact on that and brings it up at every state meeting they attend. She explained that he says things like, “Ok, I understand... I love Reading First... but are you teaching the kids to love to read?”

Ms. Robinson’s influence on the climate at Sweet Oak Elementary can, to a large degree, be summed up in the advice she would give to anyone thinking about implementing a Reading First program in their school. She told me, “If you know of a school that has the opportunity to do it, I’d say ‘go for it with all the gusto you’ve got. Don’t do it half way.’”

Managing change and policy ambiguity. Ms. Robinson talked a little about teachers’ resistance to changes mandated by Reading First requirements. She said this was not necessarily a problem for younger teachers but was rather more difficult for veterans. She claimed teachers who had taught in the district “for 15, 20, 25 years” were

a little shocked; “What do you mean you want me to change the way I’m teaching reading?” She said “they go with it [but] they’re just a little bit reluctant so they have to be pushed a lot.” She left much of the pushing to reading coach, Sally Denver, but claimed she was “just there behind her” telling them to do, “What [Ms. Denver] said...”

Mr. Baker and Ms. Robinson work together to develop school improvement plans required by the state for guiding improvement efforts and professional development opportunities over designated five-year periods. Ms. Robinson explained they are aware of the difficulty involved in managing change and in shifting teachers’ views in relation to providing instruction to meet diverse student learning needs. She said that even though K-3 teachers were getting better than others at learning to differentiate instruction, for example, she realizes that getting them to change how they teach and measure student learning is “a very slow process.” She described one teacher’s reaction to administrative encouragement of such changes.

She says, ‘What do you mean – differentiated instruction? All the 8th graders have to pass this constitution test.’ And to her this test needs to be passed this way by these students. She doesn’t see that you can do that differently.

Ms. Robinson was planning to provide staff development for teachers during the summer months on differentiated instruction.

Ms. Denver talked about how administrators were able to cut down on concerns related to change in their district over time. She said it has gotten to the point for administrators where they no longer have to “sell the program” to resisters because when the district has a vacancy to fill Principal Mr. Baker tries to hire only teachers with Reading First experience. Ms. Denver stated that she is now included in job interviews

“so [she] could ask and... get a feel for what [prospective new hires] really do know because not all of the Reading First schools are the same.” She said “that made things a lot better” because it precluded a new teacher from coming into the district “cold” insofar as knowing how to put the program in place in their classrooms. They had had to hire a new kindergarten teacher at the end of their fourth implementation year. The teacher was able to come to Sweet Oak to get “a couple of days of training of ‘This is how we do it at Sweet Oak.’” She believed “that made the beginning of the year much easier.” She was appreciative of Mr. Bakers’ efforts to alleviate some of the stress of incorporating new teachers into the Reading First program at Sweet Oak.

Policy ambiguity in relation to determining how the district would provide instruction for special education students was not really an issue at Sweet Oak. As stated earlier, it was Ms. Robinson’s perception that the state education agency would not allow for local discretion regarding student placement in Tier 1 core instruction. Special education teacher, Kathy Harris, described administrative support for Reading First implementation in relation to scheduling issues that were found to plague other districts. She said that because administrators were “*really* big into the Reading First,” program implementation took precedence “as far as all the scheduling goes.” She stated that there were essentially no conflicts in that regard and pointed out that by the time the schedule got to the teachers it was considered to be “in stone.” She said that even though the state had ruled a student’s individualized education plan (IEP) takes precedence over Reading First requirements, if anyone tried “to pull a kid out of Reading First to do something, it just doesn’t happen here. It just doesn’t.”

Shaping the culture. The culture in relation to Reading First was shaped not only by Assistant Principal Robinson but also by other administrators' support for implementation efforts. Ms. Harris pointed out that the district superintendent was particularly supportive of the program and thus she believed scheduling conflicts prevalent in other schools were not a substantial issue since Reading First "comes first" at Sweet Oak Elementary.

Ms. Robinson's influence was apparent in the ways she worked to provide support while at the same time holding staff accountable for implementing the program effectively. She talked about holding a dinner for teachers at the end of each school year. She said it was "not a district issue; it was "not a Reading First issue;" but rather she explained, "It's just a Lisa issue. It's just what I do... and they know it." This celebration of sorts carried over in how teachers treated efforts and accomplishments in the school.

Ms. Denver explained administrative decisions to set up collaborative efforts to increase student achievement during the fourth year of Reading First implementation. She indicated that state standardized assessment scores were a disappointment at the end of the district's third implementation year. In analyzing possible causes for lower than desired scores administrators realized there had been considerable teacher turnover in their third grade classroom over the course of the first three years of Reading First implementation. Recognizing the pressure state assessments were adding to teachers' feelings of efficacy, it was decided to distribute the third grade population across three classrooms to lower class size. Meetings were then set up between three third grade teachers, the reading coach, Title I teacher and administrators so that "everybody knew where everybody was with third grade." Meetings during planning time or after school

were held twice each week with classroom teachers, the reading coach and Title I teacher. Another meeting was held once each week that included administrators to discuss possible problems and strategies related to student learning outcomes.

Ms. Denver indicated that any resistance to Reading First had been essentially eliminated by the fourth year of implementation. She said that was no longer a problem “because the ones that were resisting are gone.” She said administrators reassigned a couple of them to grade levels not included in Reading First implementation, that one had retired, and that another had moved to a different position outside the classroom. She explained these changes made the culture in the building “much better.”

Allocating resources. Ms. Robinson stated that scheduling is the most difficult aspect of administering Reading First in their district and indicated that teacher input is key in the decision making process. She described a school-wide change made to increase instructional time based on teachers’ contentions that they didn’t have enough time to teach everything they needed to teach. Both Ms. Robinson and Ms. Denver work with teachers to ensure that students are getting what they need to be successful and thus many scheduling decisions are based on meeting individual student learning needs.

Ms. Denver talked about moving teachers around to get the best fit and explained that making staffing decisions was not only a matter of fitting the needs and comfort levels of individual teachers but also a matter of fitting students’ needs in relation to teachers’ abilities and fit with their students.

Teacher support. Ms. Robinson was openly enthusiastic about teachers’ attempts to improve student learning and in their achievements for doing so. She understands their

resistance to change and rather than forcing issues in that respect she encourages them and watches for opportunities to point out their successes to others.

She acknowledged that, next to scheduling, teacher attitude about managing their classrooms had been one of the more difficult aspects for her in administering Reading First implementation. While the structure of Reading First calls for 90 minutes of instruction in the general education classroom, part of that time is spent on whole-group instruction while the remainder is designed for concentration on small group instruction to build skills. During the latter other students are expected to work individually or cooperatively in differentiated reading centers. But, Ms. Robinson explains, setting up and managing centers can be a difficult aspect of Reading First implementation. She thinks it is particularly difficult because “Teachers are controlling by nature.”

We control kids. We control environment. We control activities. We control behavior. That’s just what we do. But when you say to a group of kids, ‘I’m going to work with these four [students], you all go play in these centers,’ they’re letting go of control and it’s hard for them to do that especially with the older teachers. It’s hard for them. They say, ‘But they’re not producing something I can grade... So, how do I know they’re really working?’ Well, sometimes you just have to trust kids, too.

She indicated that she tries to persuade teachers it is acceptable to allow children some freedom and tells them that as long as students “are actively involved in the center, they don’t need to produce a product” in order for them to know students are learning something.

She encourages teachers to take risks in their classrooms and expressed delight at those who are willing to allow students to learn in what she considers unconventional ways. She was excited about activities a kindergarten teacher had utilized to help students learn skills and described one in which a center had been set up in the hallway so that students could throw bean bags along an alphabet line. She explained, “She’ll have kids out here with alphabet bean bags... in the hallway while she’s teaching in the classroom. She knows that we’re watching out for them...” Ms. Robinson’s point was that even though the teacher was not supervising these students directly she felt secure in knowing that other adults in the building would watch out for them and at the same time was not concerned about having direct control of their behavior. Ms. Robinson stated that although this teacher was very young it was not obvious that she had had little teaching experience. In other words, “you couldn’t tell that by watching her.” She said that “as to letting go... [For this teacher] it’s not that big of an issue because she never had them [under control] in the first place.”

She described another center activity the teacher had set up in which students were instructed to sift through a large tub of sand to find magnetic letters to spell out words for a lesson. Ms. Robinson said her initial reaction was, “My god, what a mess in your classroom” but she said, the kids “were in heaven. The room was a mess, but they were in heaven.” She seemed to enjoy watching how those experiences played out in respect to both student *and* teacher learning.

Ms. Denver indicated several ways administrators work to support teachers’ efforts. She said theirs was an attitude of “we’ll give you anything you need” to increase student learning.

Trust. Trust builds over time as a result of others' perceptions of a leader's consistency and predictability (Duke, 2004). Having spent (and most likely will continue until retirement) her entire career in the Sweet Oak district, Lisa Robinson has given teachers and community members ample time to know whether or not they can trust her judgment when it comes to implementing change. Even as, she admitted, veteran teachers were reluctant to implement Reading First they went ahead with it. Sosick and Dionne (1997) define trust-building "as the process of establishing respect and instilling faith into followers based on leader integrity, honesty, and openness" (p. 450). Not only do teachers trust her, but Ms. Robinson obviously has a lot of faith in subordinates. Her actions encourage teachers not only to trust each other but also to trust themselves and their students. Telling teachers to follow their reading coach on issues related to Reading First implementation was not so much a delegation of responsibility, for example, as it was a bestowal of permission for teachers to put their trust in someone else. It was evident in many instances that trust is the cornerstone of Ms. Robinson's philosophy for leading.

Ms. Denver indicated that all three administrators in the district trust that teachers know how to do their jobs and that they will do them. She said "they don't feel the need to come in and dictate to us what we're doing or what we should be doing." However, she does believe that "if something would come up" administrators would have no problem intervening. She believes there is an "open door" culture in the district where administrators "could tell [teachers], 'this is what we need to change.'" She contends "we're professionals. We should know how to do our job so they're very... 'Just do your job' and they trust [us] to do it."

Organizational and Individual Capacity

When it comes to resources in any service organization, including schools, there is never enough (Evans, 1996; Lipsky, 1980). Especially true, some would say, in schools – there is never enough money, never enough time, never enough people, never enough space (Evans, 1996). While issues related to capacity are no exception at Sweet Oak Elementary, teachers and administrators were able to adapt to meet the challenges that are ubiquitous in change efforts (Evans, 1996). Time, however, to accomplish everything required by Reading First is never a non-issue and Sweet Oak educators’ concerns were no exception.

Time. Assistant Principal Robinson explained that scheduling was the most problematic aspect of Reading First implementation in their district. She said there is simply “not enough time in the day” to do everything that has to be done. When confronted with a question related to whether or not math instruction would be the next subject to be modeled after Reading First implementation she said she exclaimed, “I hope not! We don’t have enough time!” She said she doesn’t think there is anything wrong with the idea but contended, “I don’t think we have any more 90-minute blocks. We shortened our activity time because our teachers were saying that they didn’t have enough time.” She said as a matter of fact teachers are concerned that they no longer have the time to teach social studies and science and that indeed the perception is that all they are “teaching is reading and math.”

Although Tier 3 teachers admitted they sometimes had less time than they would like to have with students, they did not consider scheduling conflicts to interfere with student learning outcomes. Special education teacher, Kathy Harris, talked about the

impact of her caseload of twenty-three students on how she and her paraprofessional, Mrs. Apple, work with Reading First implementation. She said it would be more beneficial for students if they could stay in each general education classroom with special education students for the entire 90-minute core reading block but that their “caseload is such that [they] have to make sure [they] cover all [their] kids.” She said they “just move from classroom to classroom” attempting to meet individual students’ learning needs as well as to cover designated minutes on individualized educational plans (IEPs).

Title teacher, Kelly Patterson, had been the special education teacher at Sweet Oak Elementary during the first two years of Reading First in their district. She had served as the Title teacher during the third year of implementation and explained that the district has been able to deal with scheduling issues because “the grant says we have to do it so we do it.” She said they had essentially been able to “work around” any conflicts that normally occur when making major scheduling changes. She admits, however, that scheduling, and having enough time to work with students, can be difficult.

I think the biggest restraint is time... is finding the time whenever you can take those kids out of the classroom to work with them individually or in a small group and not have them missing something else that is going on in their classroom.

That’s the biggest problem that I see.

She went on to explain how she deals with juggling her role as a Title teacher for upper grade level students and her responsibilities within the context of implementing Reading First. The district has extended the Reading First model up through the fourth grade so she tries to “get in there a couple of days a week” and work with struggling students “so they get some extra help as well.” She said, however, that she sees fourth

grade students as much as possible but that she doesn't "get to see them as much as [she] would like because the grant wants [her] to be with K-3." Seeing students two times a week then is "as much as [her] schedule can allow [her] to go up through 4th grade because" she contends, "I can't split myself more ways than I already am."

Ms. Denver indicated that "time is always the biggest [factor impacting teachers' feelings of efficacy] because they "don't have enough people" to meet student learning needs. She said that since those are issues teachers "can't control" she "really had to pull the teachers together" in a "coordinated effort" to increase learning outcomes. She said that instead of the situation being "'I'm doing this skill and you're doing this skill and the kids aren't connecting them at all'" they had to make a plan whereby Tier 2 providers were "supplementing what they're doing in class" and Tier 3 providers were "going back and hitting the core basics and trying to tie it into what they're doing in class for the kids." She said it then becomes a matter of coordinating "a lot of communication between the interventionists and the teachers."

Personnel. Ms. Robinson explained that overall scheduling is primarily done by Mr. Baker who has to take into consideration the fact that Sweet Oak is a K-8 district with limited personnel resources. She said the district has "a whole other set of rules for those middle school... junior high kids that says we have to offer them the exploratory courses. We have to offer music, band, P.E., computers... at the same that we provide this elementary education and use the same teachers." She said that does create a situation in which "you are doing some creative scheduling" and that "unfortunately, sometimes the blunt of that creative scheduling ends up being the fourth, fifth and sixth graders."

Materials. Assistant principal, Lisa Robinson, talked about the impact of Reading First on the district's ability to support teachers and said she worries about upcoming years when their district will not have the financial support provided during the first three years of the program's implementation. She said that because of funds provided by the state education agency for Reading First the district was "able to be there financially" for teachers. It was her contention that all one has to do is "to look at the size of the district" to realize how limited their resources have been. She said, "We're tiny. We don't have money." So, for her, "it was wonderful... to be able to say to a teacher, 'You can buy stuff for a classroom library and we have the money for it. You can have all the consumables that you need for the school year and we can get them for you. You can make centers and we can help you with them.'" She said they "couldn't do that before" because they "just didn't have [the money]" and that it's going to be difficult going forward because the district is now "having to pick up the tab for the consumables, for the classroom libraries, for the centers, materials..." When asked if there would be enough money, she laughed and said, "There's never enough... there's never enough. But [the principal is] making it work. You have to..."

Training or previous experience. Ms. Robinson said Sweet Oak Elementary was one of six schools notified several weeks later than others of eligibility to receive Reading First funds from the state education agency. She described first experiences with the program at the annual Reading First conference held that year in Minneapolis where Sweet Oak educators started to grasp how complex implementation would be. She said

once they recognized the extent of the challenge, they realized they “didn’t know what [they] were doing.”

Ms. Denver believes that teachers with special education backgrounds had an easier time adapting to Reading First implementation. She said they already “know how to multi-task and... how to do small groups and work stations” which most of the general education teachers at Sweet Oak were not used to doing. She said for those with special education backgrounds, however, “nobody has to teach you to do that... That’s just how you’ve done it.” She said that was especially difficult for “the new teachers that are coming in... just out of college.” She explained that “as a culture” she always tries “to put a new teacher with a very seasoned counterpart mentor so that [new teachers] can go in and watch [their mentors] do that kind of stuff.” She feels “that’s huge in getting what you need from your kids and getting them to learn what they have to learn.”

Ms. Denver said the district has had a new Title I teacher every year since they started implementing Reading First. She takes the opportunity then to train them in how she wants them to work with students and other teachers. She said she tells them “this is what works... this is what we’re going to do.” She explained that as far as implementing Tiers 2 and 3 of their program, they “just figured it out for themselves.” She said that while “much of the professional development was focused on the Tier 1 for the first two years... every once in awhile [state or regional Reading First coordinators] would talk about interventions or interventionists.” She said, however, “it’s never been one of [the] huge topics” discussed at meetings. When asked how they “figured it out” she said they used “trial and error” and a lot of discussion to determine what was and was not working. Sweet Oak currently has several teachers assigned to general education classrooms that

had previously been Title I teachers working with small groups of students. The preparation for and experience in working with those students better enables classroom teachers to work with Tier 2 students so that Ms. Denver can concentrate on working with those who need more intensive interventions.

Will

Confidence

Assistant Principal, Lisa Robinson, talked about her belief that veteran teachers who have taught “15, 20, 25 years” find Reading First implementation more difficult than younger, less experienced teachers. Because it is a completely new way of teaching for them, they are less willing, she feels, to give up old practices. She also believes having a special education background impacted teachers’ willingness to teach reading in the “differentiated manner” required by Reading First. She said general education teachers have not historically been trained to teach like this but that special education teachers have “had to pick that [skill] up in self-defense.”

As Sweet Oak starts its fifth year of Reading First implementation Ms. Denver believes that teachers in their school are much more committed to the program than teachers were when they started. She said they talk about what it would “be like if [they] weren’t doing” Reading First now. She said the teachers “that have been here the whole time” agree “it was crazy before” in that “they didn’t get together to plan... one teacher was doing this... the other was doing that...” In other words, “there was no cohesiveness” to their reading program. She believes they feel much more secure in their teaching practices because “they don’t have to guess at what they should be doing... this is what you do and that’s it.” She agreed that is especially true “when [they] bring a new

teacher in.” They are told “this is how we do it and this is what it is so here you go.” She said “if I was a first year teacher, [I would think,] ‘Ok, I can do that.’”

Ms. Denver explained that she feels like the school is “kind of out of the ‘overwhelming’ stage” and that at this point “it’s just practice.” She said they “were kind of getting out of it last year... Everybody knew what to do and there weren’t so many ‘How do you do this?’ and ‘What’s this?’ and ‘I have to do what?’” She stated that she tries “to keep everybody as tuned into everything else as possible...” for example, “what the state says and what the state’s doing.” She went on to contend “I think it’s just getting better over time... because most of our teachers now have been in it two or three years so they know what’s going on themselves so... they better understand what [interventionists] are doing...” so that when [teachers] do small group with kids, they know what we’re doing so they can kind of feed off that the same way.”

Values

Special education teacher, Kathy Harris, said that “some of [the classroom teachers] complain about the 90 minutes” because they feel “it’s too structured.” She said she and her paraprofessional, Mrs. Apple “love the program” and believe it is a positive change for “special ed kids – well for all kids.” She said she has wanted to tell them that they do not “know what a diamond [they] have here.” She explained her experiences in other schools where students “are wasting valuable minutes of every day” on practices that were not helping them learn to read. Title teacher, Kelly Patterson, summed up her feelings about Reading First.

I think it's a good program and it's workable and I think that it's beneficial to the kids and to the school and to the reading program. I back it up all the way. Tell me what to do and I'm going to do it. Whatever's best for the kids.

Results

In expressing her feelings about Reading First in relation to past experiences she had had working with students as a substitute teacher in other schools, Kathy Harris talked about teachers' excitement when their efforts paid off for struggling students. She said that when one of her students "got to 68 words per minute... that teacher was right at my door saying, 'Guess what!'" So, she said, even though classroom teachers "think it's kind of a pain, they see results and they cannot deny that."

Ms. Robinson talked about students' feelings of efficacy in relation to increasing their reading skills and the reciprocal nature of efficacy. She explained students "know what a score is. They know the difference between – on the DIBELS benchmark on word reading fluency – between 8 and 25." She said when they "start seeing themselves do better... they're proud of themselves... and it's contagious."

SUMMERVALE

Context

External Environment

According to United States Census Bureau data, Summervale is located on a 1.2 square mile tract of land that houses just under 1500 residents. According to 2000 census data, the racial makeup of the city consists of 98.65% White, 0.13% African American, 0.07% Native American, 0.13% Asian, 1.68% Hispanic, and 0.27% from other races. The median income for a household in the city was \$29,583, and the median income for a family was \$36,071. Males had a median income of \$26,438 versus \$17,880 for females. About 9.0% of families and 14.1% of the population were considered to be living below the poverty line, including 21.8% of those under age 18 and 9.7% of those ages 65 or older.

Turning off the highway that runs parallel to a business route, one spots the usual sights, including a local grain elevator, often found in rural American towns of this size. Like other such communities around the state, a once-thriving downtown area is marked by an occasional business still operating on a block of empty buildings with dirt-covered, graying windows. There is one grocery store, a couple of bars and café's, including one with "Home-Cookin'" in its name, and a dentist's office. The town's square is flanked by a large post office, a public library, and a police station. Turning off the square, one drives by a large church across the street from the district's high school which is housed in a large brick building that looks surprisingly new and well-kept. At the end of this street is the elementary school, a brick building with flowers and wooden benches near

the front door. While not quite as impressive as the high school, the elementary building also looks relatively modern with a large, colorful playground behind the building.

Summervale lies between two larger towns where local residents often go to work and shop for groceries, clothing and other essentials. One of these supports a much larger school district that has the funding capacity to hire teachers at salary rates significantly higher than surrounding smaller districts. One teacher offered this explanation of salary disparity as a factor in high teacher turnover rates in the Summervale district.

Internal Environment

With less than 200 students, Summervale Elementary School is one of the smaller schools participating in Reading First implementation in the state examined herein.

Student enrollment for the entire district is around 350 students. The student population in the elementary school which is predominantly white (five year average = 97.6%) has dropped by just over 50 students in the past five years. In this same period, attendance by African American students has increased by 2%. No students from any other racial or ethnic category were reported as attending Summervale Elementary over the five-year time span between the 2003-04 and 2007-08 school years. The average student to classroom teacher ratio over this time period has been 16.2 to one. The average overall teacher to student ratio is 9.6 to one. While the 2006-07 state average incidence rate for special education placement is 14.25%, the incidence rate for Summervale Elementary is 23.05%. The predominant disability category is Specific Learning Disabilities at 12.39% (state average = 5.27%), followed by Speech/Language Impairment at 5.19% (state average = 3.90%), and Mental Retardation at 2.59% (state average = 1.29%). During the three years prior to applying for a Reading First grant the percentage of Summervale 3rd

grade students scoring below grade level on the state Communication Arts assessment ranged from a low of 34.6% to a high of 91.8%. The state range, of all 3rd graders reading “below grade level” for this time period, went from a low of 64.7% to a high of 68.4%. The census poverty level for Summervale Elementary during the grant application year was 66.32%. This level has fluctuated between 48.26% and 55.06% over the course of the three-year grant cycle.

The principal’s office can be found off a wide central hallway just inside the front door. Light-colored walls add to the feeling of openness as one walks down the central corridor and turns down the major cross-hall that runs parallel with the front of the building and the street outside. Given that the school year was nearly over when I visited this building, there wasn’t much to see on the walls since teachers had already started taking papers and artwork down in preparation for the summer break. Because one of the teachers I wanted to interview was absent the first time I went on site, I visited the school twice. During my first visit I met with the building principal, reading coach, and two teachers. Interviews with the reading coach and teachers were held in the coach’s office which is a small, cozy room off one of the side hallways. I met with the principal in her office, a neatly kept, large space off the front office. On my second visit I met with the teacher in her classroom, a large, fairly spacious room, the disheveled nature of which was to be expected during the last few days of a school year.

Initial Response to Change

Concerned about reading scores in their district, teachers and administrators at Summervale Elementary School looked to Reading First as a means for “establishing consistency” in the provision of reading instruction across classrooms. Prior to Reading

First implementation “each teacher was doing what they wanted” and, as reading coach, Linda Lawson explained, this strategy “wasn’t doing what the school needed.” According to Principal Norma Simpson, administrators were especially concerned about curriculum and instruction in the early grades, what she called “the foundation” of reading instruction. She explained that teachers in her building believed pursuing funding to improve their reading program was a “worthwhile” endeavor. Ms. Lawson corroborated Ms. Simpson’s claim that teachers were involved in the decision to apply for the grant as well as in the grant-writing process. Both described how teachers worked together to write portions of the grant. When it was finished, Ms. Lawson explained, everyone signed a form declaring they were in agreement with moving forward in the application process.

We all wrote it. When it was finished we all got together and said, ‘It’s done. Are we all 100% behind this? That means every teacher... is everybody 100% behind this?’ Everybody signed the form and we sent it off.

Conditions for Tier 3 Implementation

At Summervale Elementary general education teachers provide Tier 1 and Tier 2 instruction in their classrooms. Three teachers in the building provide Tier 3 instruction for students “at risk” of not meeting end-of-year DIBELS benchmarks. These include one Title I teacher, one special education teacher and a 3rd grade teacher who has several special education students in her classroom.

At the end of Summervale’s third year of Reading First implementation, all but two students were included in the general classroom 90-minute Tier 1 instructional component. State education agency standards guiding special education law require that

students' individual education plans (IEPs) supersede Reading First implementation. Summervale administrators, however, essentially ignored the law. The measured cognitive scores of the two students whose IEPs precluded their inclusion in Tier 1 instruction fell in the 40s range. Other students with significantly low cognitive skills (50s to 60s), however, received reading instruction in the general education classroom over the objections of special education and general education teachers – both mandated members of a child's IEP team. This factor put an undue burden on the one special education teacher in the building. She was expected to oversee instruction and care for the two students who remained in her classroom with a paraprofessional as well as modify instruction for students receiving Tier 1 “core” instruction in the general education classrooms. On top of those duties she was assigned to provide Tier 3 instruction for any K-3rd grade special education student participating in Reading First. Once the district decided to include 4th through 6th grades in Reading First implementation, she was again expected to support general education instruction as well as to provide Tier 3 instruction for special education students in those grade levels. Finally, she was the district's special education coordinator with all responsibilities of a special education director for K-12th grade students except for those related to fiscal management of special education funding.

All grade levels were scheduled to have Tier 3 instruction at the same time with three teachers providing this level of instruction. Besides the special education teacher who was charged with this duty for most of the special education students, there was one Title I teacher and a 3rd grade classroom teacher who had seven special education students on her roll. Except for Tier 1 reading instruction and special classes such as

music and art, classroom teachers make their own daily schedules. Special education teacher, Janet Jones, said that student schedules vary in some grade levels from day to day. Additionally, classroom teachers send students to the special education classroom to have tests read or to have her help students with their work. Thus, she may find herself trying to provide Tier 3 intervention instruction with anywhere from two to fifteen extra students in her classroom at the same time. Even as research guiding Reading First implementation shows that Tier 3 groups should have no more than three to four students to be effective, Ms. Jones reported having seven students in one of her groups.

Additionally, this group is made up of “2nd and 3rd graders with a large range of skills.”

Third grade teacher, Kari Salmons, reported that one-third of the 22 students in her classroom receive special education services. Several of these students receive services due to low cognitive functioning and even though they “may only be on a 1st grade reading level” Ms. Salmons is concerned that they are expected “to do 3rd grade level work.” She said she has to make “lots and lots of modifications” in their instruction.

We reduce spelling words. We modify our worksheets as far as... you know if they can't write an explanation we might take that part out. They're doing some vocabulary work... we may give them two choices instead of having them look at the whole list of eight vocabulary words. We may narrow it down, 'Ok, here's the definition. Is it 'A' or it is 'B'?'

Ms. Salmons felt that, because of having to differentiate instruction to such a large degree for students with low cognitive abilities, she was essentially running two classrooms at once – a general education classroom and a special education classroom.

Organizational Culture

As the category of *culture* emerged from the data gathered for the Summervale case, the ways in which individuals purportedly interacted with one another was particularly striking. While the principal and reading coach talked about collaborative and cooperative efforts during initial Reading First application processes, teachers expressed concerns with differences between expectations for and realities of Reading First implementation.

Collaborative problem-solving and shared decision making. Interviews with Tier 3 teachers at Summervale Elementary indicated they did not feel included in problem-solving efforts related to student learning needs. In some instances it was reported that changes were made with little to no consultation with teachers involved in the changes. Special education teacher, Janet Jones, described one such case in which the reading coach and regional Reading First consultant made a decision involving several of her students. Ms. Jones had been going into general education classrooms to work with 2nd and 3rd grade special education students during Tier 1 instruction. She said that in the middle of the school year, it was decided her paraprofessional would go into the classroom “to give support” instead so that Ms. Jones would be available to provide intensive reading instruction for her 4th through 6th grade students. She felt this switch was detrimental “because it was a mid-year switch for the kids” who had to get “used to somebody new.” Both Ms. Jones and the 3rd grade teacher expressed concerns that these changes had negative impacts on learning outcomes for 3rd graders. Additionally, Ms. Jones explained, the principal was angry with the switch because the change had not been

“cleared” with her before it was implemented. She indicated that she took the brunt of the principal’s displeasure even though she had no input into the decision.

Ms. Jones expressed considerable frustration with the lack of input as well for decisions made about the students on her special education caseload. She talked about the impact of extending the Reading First grant beyond grades K-3 to include 4th through 6th grade students. She was upset that students were put into Tier 1 instruction in those grades when several of them were two to three years below grade level in reading. She said these students were unable to keep up even with modifications made to instruction and curriculum and that the principal had been angry with her when she learned in February that they were failing. But, Ms. Jones explained she was not able to be in the classroom with them during their reading instruction because she was working with 2nd and 3rd graders who were also having Tier 1 instruction at that time. As mentioned earlier, the decision had been made to pull Ms. Jones from the lower grades to provide Tier 3 intensive instruction for the older students. This decision was made without Ms. Jones’ input regarding possible consequences.

Third grade teacher, Kari Salmons, talked about the process utilized at Summervale to determine whether or not students should receive either Tier 2 or Tier 3 instruction. Reading First implementation calls for flexible grouping so that students who need it can receive more intensive instruction for acquiring a particular skill. This flexibility is meant to address student learning needs while at the same time precluding permanent placement at a certain level. Teachers, reading coaches, principals, and Tier 2 and 3 providers collaborate to determine the best avenue for achieving valued outcomes. Ms. Salmons explained, however, that she gets “all... rules from [her] reading coach” and

that it is the coach who tells her. ‘Ok, so-and-so is below their [aim] line three times. We need to move them from Tier 2 to Tier 3 because they’re slipping somewhere.’

Cooperation and collegiality. Everyone involved in Reading First implementation – teachers, administrators, reading coaches, and regional consultants – agree that the most difficult aspect of the implementation process is scheduling. The task of putting a 3-tiered model of instruction in place, especially in light of limited time and personnel resources, was described as “overwhelming” by Summervale teachers and administrators. While cooperation among teachers, as well as between teachers and administrators, makes the task a little less daunting, lack of such cooperation lends itself to a toxic culture.

As noted above considerable demands were put on Ms. Jones, in part due to the sheer numbers of students on her special education caseload but also because of scheduling issues. She described numerous conflicts that either required her to be in several places at one time or that created situations in which her teaching environment was not conducive to learning. Some are mentioned in previous sections. Another example describes the impact of 4th grade scheduling on her classroom.

No one in 4th grade has schedules the same every day. And so, for example, my 4th graders some days come down at 12:00 and stay until 1:00 two or three days a week while my kid that comes in at 12:30 for Tier time... some days he’s with more 4th graders and anybody else that would come in and some days he’s not. Some days he’s just in the room where my two profound[ly handicapped] kids are.

Additionally, teachers are allowed to send students to her classroom at will. Ms. Jones said she generally has no idea how many students will show up for assistance. This

is particularly problematic when students appear during one of her Tier 3 group instruction times. Not only did Ms. Jones often have more students in a Tier 3 group than research allows for effective instruction, but she also had numerous students working on various subjects for which they required assistance in her classroom at the same time.

Shared responsibility and support for outcomes. Ms. Jones' frustration is amplified by what she perceives as a lack of support for working with a diverse population of students. Because she is the only special education teacher for grades K-6, as well as the special education coordinator in charge of testing for the entire district, she feels pressured to keep up with demands on her time. She feels there is no support for her situation when scheduling issues create barriers to effective instruction. In one case she was supposed to be working on math instruction with 6th grade students at the same time her schedule called for her to be working with lower grade level students during time allotted for Reading First. She said the upper grade teachers would not switch schedules to adapt to the situation and that the principal would not "back" her request that the change be made.

Kari Salmons felt that decision-makers did not understand the difficulty of getting the expected student learning outcomes in a classroom as diverse as hers. She talked about having students who could read 160 words per minute by the end of the school year in the same class with those who had struggled significantly to get to 38 words per minute. She said teachers were told they would just have to "deal with it."

They're not working with these children that I'm working with... You make the modifications and in all honesty, I mean... I have to be careful what I say... you know, I get looked down upon because this child is not making the progress that

he's supposed to make and I'm like, 'What do you want me to do here? I'm not a miracle worker.' You know, let's be realistic here.

Leadership

Principal, Norma Simpson, had been at Summervale Elementary for 30 years. She had served as the principal there for most of her career, retiring shortly after our interview. She stated that she liked Reading First because it provided a consistent reading curriculum for the school. Administrative duties for Reading First implementation at Summervale are shared by reading coach, Linda Lawson. She taught third grade during the first year of the district's three-year grant cycle before taking over the reading coach position. She said she had been "in on writing the grant from the beginning" and that Ms. Simpson had come to her when the previous reading coach decided not to renew her contract. "[Ms. Simpson] said, 'Linda, would you like to do the reading coach? You know the grant. You know what's in it.' And I'm like, 'Ok.'"

Style. Bass and Avolio (1994) designate three types of transactional leadership one of which, *management-by-exception active*, seems the best description of Ms. Simpson's leadership style. The authors explain that leaders who follow this style are more apt to carefully monitor the behavior of their followers. As a matter of fact, they contend, followers of this type of leader are often afraid to take risks or exhibit initiative. This behavior was indeed exhibited in teachers' beliefs that their actions would jeopardize the districts' Reading First funding. They felt threatened by the notion that any deviation, on their part, from stringent rules described by administrators as state education agency (SEA) mandates, would result in considerable penalties for the district.

Ms. Simpson stated that one of her favorite aspects of Reading First implementation was the teacher observation form required by the state to observe teaching practices for the K-3 teachers in her building. She said she utilizes the form for teachers in grades K-6 to “check what [teachers] are doing” in their classrooms and pointed out three-ring binders where she “keeps all their lesson plans.” She maintains charts of student progress to see how much improvement students are making in acquiring reading skills. She believes these charts can also be utilized to monitor teacher efforts. “To me if a teacher is not teaching then I can tell much more easily because, in fact, I can look at their charts. I can see if the children are moving up or if they are stagnant.” She stated these charts were also useful for reporting to school board members who she said have “been really impressed with Reading First.” She explained that she can use the graphs to “show them how the students are doing... how the teachers are doing.” She said “there’s really not a question” then of whether or not the program is making a difference in student learning outcomes.

Beliefs. Unlike other principals examined in this study, Ms. Simpson did not clearly articulate her beliefs in relation to implementing the Reading First program at Summervale Elementary. She did, however, through her actions show that she neither trusted teachers nor valued their input when it came to making decisions about implementation efforts. Rather than taking an approach of continuous problem-solving to assure valued outcomes, she delegated much of the responsibility for managing implementation to the reading coach. It seemed that she believed in taking a more linear approach for putting particular components of the program into place, choosing not to revisit decisions to determine whether or not they were working.

Managing change and policy ambiguity. One of the more difficult aspects of Reading First implementation is scheduling. While principals in some schools work diligently to ensure that schedules allow for effective use of teacher time, this was not necessarily the case at Summervale Elementary. While Principal, Norma Simpson, admitted “scheduling is really difficult,” reading coach, Linda Lawson, explained it is essentially left up to teachers to work it out. She said, “We just tell them, ‘Schedule your 90 minutes and schedule another hour for Tier work.’”

This laissez-faire attitude to one of the reportedly most complex issues of implementation made it particularly difficult for teachers trying to increase student learning outcomes for students receiving Tier 3 intervention instruction. As the only special education teacher in the building, Janet Jones admitted that having all students coming out of the classrooms “for Tier 3 at the same time” had been problematic for her. In one such example she explained how Reading First scheduling impacted provision of special education services for students at other grade levels. She explained that because 5th and 6th grade teachers departmentalize their instruction, one teaches math for both grade levels and the other “one does all the reading” instruction. The reading teacher “refused to change reading time for the 6th grade.” This created a significant problem for Ms. Jones.

The reading time for 6th grade is at 8:30 in the morning when we have all the Tier times. I’m not serving my 6th graders for math who qualify so the Title I teacher is taking my lesson plans and stuff and trying to teach them and it’s just been awkward. [The principal] would not back me in having the classroom teacher change her math time.

Additionally, classroom teachers are allowed the discretion to send students to the special education classroom at will. Ms. Jones said the size of her Tier 3 groups “varies from day to day” and that there will be times when she will have “from two extra up to fifteen extra” students in her classroom during the time that has purportedly been set aside for intervention instruction. This is apparently dependent on whether or not “they’re sent down to have a test read” to them.

Summervale administrators made the decision to put all but two cognitively disabled special education students in general education classrooms for Tier 1 “core” instruction. Several of the students included in Tier 1 were also cognitively impaired but not to the same degree as those who were excluded. Teachers complained that their concerns were essentially ignored even as they believed policies for providing instruction for these students were “unfair to them” and “absolutely ludicrous.” When Ms. Jones was reminded that IEPs supersede Reading First implementation she stated that administrators had told them “they could not do that.”

All I know is [the principal] came to me and told me that she was told... if we didn’t go in the classroom and serve all our special ed kids in the classroom we would have to pay back all the money we’d received from Reading First. She went on to explain that someone from the state education agency had told their principal “she didn’t care if the kid was in a hospital bed with IVs hooked up, a full time nurse and couldn’t communicate they were going to be in Reading First.”

When asked if the state education agency had told the district that would be the case, Linda Lawson admitted that “[the state education agency] would like us to keep

them in there 90 minutes, but I think as a school *we* decided to keep them in there for 90 minutes.”

Shaping the culture. The culture at Summervale is in large part a reflection of teachers’ feelings of frustration as they struggle to cope with implementation decisions for which they have had little to no input. While some were admittedly involved in initial processes for acquiring Reading First funding, they believe they were misled regarding their subsequent involvement in implementation efforts. Special education teacher, Janet Jones, was particularly incensed in that regard.

We were originally told point blank by... some man... who was in charge of the Reading First grant. We... asked him and he said the IEP supersedes everything so I was fine with Reading First until we started and then halfway through the year we were told, ‘No, you will be in the classrooms. They will not be pulled out.’ So I feel I was pretty much lied to.

Even as state education agency personnel struggled to develop Reading First implementation policies and guidelines, local education agencies were ultimately the final decision makers for integrating their special education population into the program. While state-level personnel did indeed pressure schools to include special education students in Tier 1 instruction, the final decision for inclusion was left to local district discretion. Directed by the special education division of the state education agency, some administrators made decisions based on IEP team recommendations, student learning data, and teacher observations. Others, however, made arbitrary decisions based on outside pressure. Summervale chose the latter.

Allocating resources. Teachers' feelings of efficacy in relation to resource allocation at Summervale Elementary were based on the impact of limited personnel for meeting the learning needs of struggling readers. Tier 3 providers were left on their own to schedule intervention instruction for "at-risk" students in K-6th grade classrooms. While there was only one kindergarten with 26 students, 1st, 2nd and 3rd grade level teachers were able to split students between two classrooms. One 3rd grade teacher had 22 students in her classroom, one-third of which received special education services. She provided Tier 3 instruction for these and other students in her classroom. Every other teacher utilized either the special education teacher or one Title I teacher to work with students needing this intensive level of instruction. As mentioned earlier, Tier 3 teachers struggled to make this work with uncooperative classroom teachers and little to no administrative support.

Principal Simpson noted that school board members utilized data she had offered them to make decisions related to hiring personnel. While they saw a need, based on administrator recommendations, to hire another reading coach to assist 4th through 6th grade teachers, they did not recognize a need to hire another special education or Title I teacher.

Rather than utilize student learning data or teacher input to make changes in implementation decisions for meeting the learning needs of Tier 3 students, reading coach, Linda Lawson explained the administrative position.

This year we started looking at it a little differently. We let it go for about two and a half years just to... because I think it needs longer than say a year or a half

year... I think we need to go a little longer just to see how things are going to work out.

Teacher support. Special education teacher, Janet Jones' frustration is compounded because she did not expect her students to be included in Reading First due to the stipulation from the special education division of the state education agency that individualized education plans (IEPs) supersede Reading First requirements. She indicated that because several of the students on her caseload have significantly low cognitive abilities she feels ill-prepared to meet their needs when it comes to reading instruction. She explained that she has "not received any support" for implementing the program with her students.

Kari Salmons talked about needing help because of the nature of her students' cognitive abilities. She felt that all the training that had been provided through Reading First implementation had been geared toward working with "your normal, regular kids" and pointed out that "a third of [her] class was not normal and regular." "So," she implored, "help me help these kids." She talked about students in her class that "are almost non-verbal because their IQ is so low" and asked "What do I do with them?"

Reading coach, Linda Lawson, on the other hand, explained that her ideas for assisting teachers with Reading First implementation had been supported by Principal Simpson. She said she might go to her and say, "I'd like to try this with the teachers. I'd like to have them do this." She said Ms. Simpson would say, "Sure." She described one example in relation to lesson plans. She said that when she was a classroom teacher during the first year of Reading First implementation she had struggled with knowing what she should be teaching on a particular day. So, she had developed a system for other

teachers to follow and told Ms. Simpson, “You know, I think this would help them if I can get them to do this.” Ms. Simpson agreed that teachers should do their lesson plans that way. Even though teachers are required to give lesson plans to their principal, Ms. Lawson said “they’re still out on” whether or not they want to do them her way.

Trust. All three Tier 3 providers I interviewed talked about feeling threatened by the possibility of losing grant funds. In explaining her feelings of efficacy in relation to working with special education students in her classroom, 3rd grade teacher, Kari Salmons said that decision-makers “don’t want to hear [teachers’] side.” She said the reading coach and the principal told teachers “all children will be in the room for 90 minutes” for Tier 1 instruction and that “if they’re not in the room [the state education agency is] going to pull your funding.” Title I teacher, Carol Jameson, said she was afraid to do what she thought would be more effective than the program chosen for Tier 3 instruction. “This was a lot of money for a small district like ours and we don’t want to jeopardize our future with [the grant].” As mentioned earlier, Janet Jones said Principal Simpson had told her the district would have to return Reading First funds if all special education students were not receiving Tier 1 instruction in the general education classroom.

Organizational and Individual Capacity

Time. As in every other Reading First school, the demand of implementing a tiered model of instruction has an impact on the amount of time teachers have to accomplish everything they would like. Reading coach, Linda Lawson, had been a 3rd grade teacher before taking on her current position. She talked about worries related to state standardized assessments at that grade level.

Time is a big factor... We've got this much time for reading. What do we do about social studies and science? ...I'm like, 'How am I going to get all this in?' ...especially with 3rd grade being a [state standardized assessment] grade and I'm like, 'Oh, these kids aren't going to do well.'

Principal Simpson explained that "getting the time for all the children to get what they need" was a factor impacting her efforts to manage Reading First implementation.

Personnel. Teachers providing Tier 3 intervention for struggling students were troubled that the school did not have enough staff to provide effective instruction. Ms. Jameson talked about the size of intervention groups explaining that Reading First "recommends that you work in a group size of one to three" students. She described the difficulty in doing that if there are "several children in a particular classroom that need Tier 3 instruction." She indicated that Tier 3 teachers had to provide instruction for students in larger groups simply "because there wasn't any other [choice]."

As described in previous sections, this was a significant concern for special education teacher, Janet Jones. While other teachers could have provided Tier 3 instruction for special education students, Ms. Jones had sole responsibility for special education students' instruction in a number of areas. Since she was the only special education teacher serving Kindergarten through 6th grade students in her building for all subjects, she also went into classrooms to support students during Tier 1 and Tier 2 instruction and helped classroom teachers make modifications to their instruction in reading and other subjects. She had help from two paraprofessionals, one of which worked with two significantly disabled students while the other helped support special

education students in Tier 1 instruction since all grade levels had the 90-minute reading blocks scheduled at the same time.

Third grade teacher, Kari Salmons explained her feeling that “you almost need two people when you teach.” She said, “You almost need somebody looking at your data... saying, ‘Ok, here’s where we’re weak. Here’s what we need to do.’” While she acknowledged that was something the reading coach could do, she realized “she’s one person for all grades and so it’s difficult.” Before the district had decided to include 4th through 6th grades in the Reading First program, Ms. Salmons and Ms. Jones had been able to team teach during the 90-minute Tier 1 block. Given that one-third of Ms. Salmons classroom had been found eligible for special education services that decision made her feel much more effective in meeting the learning needs of all her students. Ms. Salmons said her classroom “was just kind of chaotic” after the decision was made to pull Ms. Jones to provide intervention instruction for older students.

Materials. Title teacher, Carol Jameson, expressed her belief that Reading First did not always allow teachers to do what was best for students. She believed that, in order to master necessary skills, some students needed either different materials or methods than what the school had decided to use for their Tier 3 students. The district had materials on hand that she felt would be more effective but stated teachers were not “allowed to use the right materials.” She felt there was essentially no discussion regarding learning outcomes or about making changes to meet student learning needs. She said she would “like to be able to utilize [other materials] without feeling like [she was] breaking the rules.”

Training or previous experience. Because the school has only one Title I and one special education teacher to provide Tier 3 instruction for K-3rd grade students, classroom teacher, Kari Salmons, provides not only Tier 1 core and Tier 2 supplemental instruction but also Tier 3 intervention instruction for the students in her classroom. She said she felt “overwhelmed” and ill-prepared to cope with the diverse learning needs of the students in her classroom as she tried to implement Reading First. She had been in the district for five years, teaching one year of 4th grade followed by three years in 6th before moving to her current position in 3rd grade.

There were so many things to learn because I was a departmentalized teacher my very first year that I taught. I did math and then when I came here I was departmentalized and I did math and so I had not really taught reading before... I have seven special ed kids in my room who qualify for special ed reading [out of 21]... I have some mentally retarded children. Not functionally mentally retarded... high level... 60 IQs... they're just low... very, very low...

Will

Confidence

Summervale teachers did not indicate feeling confident about their efforts to provide Tier 3 instruction for struggling students. Even though, for example, the assessment results discussed by Ms. Salmons indicated students were able to increase learning substantially she was frustrated with feeling she could have done better if teaching conditions had been different. Ms. Jones was completely frustrated that the conditions under which she was forced to provide instruction was not conducive to learning especially since the purpose of Tier 3 is to increase instructional time and

intensity for struggling students. Intensity is addressed by limiting the number of students in a Tier 3 group. This was problematic not only for Ms. Jones but admittedly for Title teacher, Carol Jameson, as well, who stated it was “very difficult to schedule” students into small groups when there are “several children in a particular classroom that need Tier 3 instruction.”

Values

Each of the teachers providing Tier 3 intervention expressed concerns in relation to Reading First implementation in their building. Title I teacher, Carol Jameson, for example, stated she had been trained as a Reading Recovery teacher and that because the state had taken several months to make a decision regarding whether or not Reading Recovery would be allowed as a supplemental program in the state’s Reading First grant, the first implementation year “was very frustrating” for her. She went on to express dissatisfaction with the state’s guideline requiring that schools not provide supplemental or intervention instruction for struggling students until they had been exposed to core instruction for at least the first semester of Reading First implementation. While some schools made the decision to ignore the state policy, Summervale opted to follow it. Ms. Jameson stated that because she “was not allowed to begin working with... the lowest 1st graders that Reading Recovery tries to reach... it was just a waiting game.” She said it was a matter for her of “will we do Reading Recovery, won’t we do it?” Her prior experiences with the Reading Recovery program had been positive for her and she believed it was inappropriate to discard what she already knew.

Special education teacher, Janet Jones, did not believe students with low cognitive functioning and limited language ability should be included in Reading First instruction.

She vehemently expressed her concern about the impact of this policy on students' feelings of efficacy. "I think it's unfair to them. I think it's absolutely ludicrous... They're frustrated. I mean, here we are... we're working on their skills and they're so proud of themselves and then they're given a grade level DIBELS."

Third grade teacher, Kari Salmons, argued that having special education students in her classroom had put her in a position of neglecting others. She believed that the inordinate amount of time she had spent working with the special education students had had a considerable impact on the learning outcomes of the students who also had very low skills and limited oral language abilities but who did not qualify for special education services. She felt she could have made a real difference for those students if she had had more time to work with them.

Results

Even as teachers were collaboratively involved in initial decision making and grant writing processes, Ms. Simpson admitted the first year of Reading First implementation in her school was a struggle. She said teachers "were overwhelmed by everything they had to do" to put the program in place. It was, however, Ms. Simpson's contention that implementation "got easier" after the first year because everyone started to see progress. She expressed her opinion that "you don't really buy into something until you try it and see if it is going to work or not." She said that because of the success they had seen over the three years of Reading First implementation they now "wouldn't do anything else."

The will to support Reading First in this school was impacted by teachers' feelings that the school's policies for Tier 3 implementation did not allow for positive

student learning outcomes for both the most at-risk students as well as some of their peers. Third grade teacher, Kari Salmons, mentioned this in terms of how inclusion of significantly low functioning students impacted her ability to work with students who fell just short of meeting end-of-year benchmarks.

Ms. Jones felt scheduling issues often rendered her teaching efforts essentially ineffective. She appeared to be working hard to produce positive results for her students but the cards were stacked against her in a number of ways. This was sometimes the case when unexpected interruptions created an environment that was not conducive to learning either because of the sheer numbers of students demanding her attention or because of noise and distractions. Several examples have been given in previous sections.

Additionally, scheduling problems impacted implementation fidelity for one of the Tier 3 programs chosen by the district. While the program calls for 45 to 75 minutes of uninterrupted instruction each day, Ms. Jones was given only 30 minutes of scheduled time (as opposed to actual instructional time) to implement lessons with students who had fallen significantly behind over the course of several years. She complained that they were supposed to be reading on grade level as a result of the program even though she was unable to implement it effectively.

It was Ms. Jameson's contention that although "Reading First helps many kids... it's not the answer to *all* reading problems for children" and argued that, "There are still kids who struggle and don't reach the benchmarks."

PINEY RIDGE

Context

External Environment

According to United States Census Bureau data, Piney Ridge is located on a 2.0 square mile tract of land. With just under 850 residents the town is located on one of the state's popular canoeing and floating rivers. According to 2000 census data, the racial makeup of the town was 96.69% White, 0.36% African American, 0.83% Native American, and 1.30% Hispanic. The median income for a household in the city was \$19,766 and the median income for a family was \$31,154. Males had a median income of \$29,250 versus \$17,981 for females. About 17.7% of families and 25.0% of the population were considered to be living below the poverty line, including 31.3% of those under age 18 and 25.1% of those ages 65 or older.

The county seat and largest town in the county, there is a court house and sheriff's office as well as town police and fire stations, doctors' offices and a medical clinic. Local businesses catering to tourists visiting area parks and rivers include: campgrounds, outfitter and canoe rentals, motels, and restaurants. The town also boasts two or three grocery stores and banks as well as several churches, a community center and a ball park. A seemingly self-sufficient community, the nearest larger town is approximately 45 miles away.

The town itself is located on a hilly, rocky area at the edge of a national forest. Houses located near the school district campus can be found on narrow, tree-lined streets dotted with potholes. Most homes near the campus are small with lawns littered with toys, lawn chairs, barbeque grills and trash cans. Many have small boats or trailers as

well as dilapidated sheds and other outbuildings that lend to the cluttered look of the properties.

Internal Environment

With a current enrollment of just over 250 students Piney Ridge Elementary is the second largest district included as a case study in this examination of Reading First implementation. The average percentage of white students enrolled at Piney Ridge Elementary over the five-year span from 2003-2007 is just over 99%. During the same period, the percentage of African-American students in the district increased from 0 to 1.3% with the only other reported racial or ethnic group being Native American Indian at 0.4%. The average student population for the district, over this time period, fell at just under 530 students with the elementary building population fluctuating between 225 and 260 students. Student to classroom teacher ratios over the past five years average out to be 14.4 to one. Student to overall teacher ratio over the same time period is 9.8 to one.

The incidence rate for students receiving special education services during the 2006-07 school year was nearly 18% (state average = 14.25%). The percentage of students eligible for services in the areas of both Specific Learning Disabilities and Other Health Impaired fell at approximately 3% with state averages of 5.27% and 1.71% respectively. The incidence rate in this school for students eligible for services under the Mental Retardation category was approximately 1.40% (state average = 1.29%) during this school year. Finally, students eligible for services in the area of Speech/Language Impairment was just over 7% (state average = 3.90%). This figure is significant in light

of research findings that early language ability is the most significant predictor of reading proficiency in later grades.

During the three years prior to Reading First eligibility the percentage of Piney Ridge 3rd grade students scoring below grade level on the state Communication Arts assessment ranged from a low of 63.9% to a high of 77.5%. The state range, of all 3rd graders reading “below grade level” for this time period, went from a low of 64.7% to a high of 68.4%. The census poverty level for Piney Ridge Elementary during the grant application year was 87.8%. This level has fluctuated between 70.83% and 74.27% over the course of the three-year grant cycle.

The principal’s office is located in the center of a small complex of rooms at the end of a dimly lit hallway near the front of the building. I sat with my back to a wall, my knees nearly touching the desk I was facing, and chatted with the secretary while waiting for someone to escort me to interviews with Tier 3 teachers. As in other schools at this time of year, teachers were preparing for summer break. Many had taken students on field trips for the day, hallway walls were devoid of student work, and classrooms were starting to look bare. We made a couple of turns before exiting the back of the main building to cross a street to a small barracks-like structure that houses Title I and special education classrooms. After meeting with four teachers who provide Tier 3 instruction for struggling students, I met with the principal in her office.

Not much larger than the outer waiting area, the principal’s office was dark except for one or two lamps that gave the room a peaceful enclave sort of feeling. As she offered her chair as the best place for me to sit with my tape recorder and notebook, Principal, Helen Harris, pulled up another and sat down at one corner of a desk stacked with books

and documents – a consequence of wearing “many hats,” she explained. At one point, a door opened on another side of the room and people exited through the office from an inner conference room. Even with the interruption, the clutter, and the smallness of the office there was a sense of calm determination and focus of purpose as Ms. Harris sat on the edge of her chair and leaned forward to talk about the state of reading instruction in her school.

Initial Response to Change

As the elementary principal, Helen Harris, is the primary administrator with oversight responsibilities for Reading First implementation at Piney Ridge. Before adding the duties of principal for grades K-3 to her workload, Ms. Harris had served as the district administrator for special education for nearly 20 years. She assumed the principalship two years before the district was awarded Reading First funding and explained that they had started putting components of a similar instructional model in place during that time. She stated she had been particularly concerned with measuring student growth through ongoing assessment and felt, when given the opportunity to apply for funds, that Reading First “was what they were looking for” in relation to progress monitoring and instructional guidance. She indicated a few veteran teachers had initially had some reservations about the program and that the school had experienced “growing pains” as they struggled to put Reading First in place. Prior to implementation, she admitted, there had been little to no consistency in reading instruction. “Whatever you did in *this* 1st grade classroom was fine. Whatever you did in *this* first grade classroom was fine.” She said overall, however, teachers “were pretty strong from the beginning” in

supporting it. She feels they have become “much more comfortable” with the program and “excited” about the benefits they have seen as a result.

While most teachers interviewed for this study were not directly involved with the application and initial implementation of Reading First in their building, all were positive in their perceptions of administrative support for the program. One stated she had been teaching in the high school when the district applied for the grant. She said she knew even then that the elementary principal was “very focused” on and “very concerned” about reading in her building. It was her belief that getting a Reading First grant must have been “very appealing” to Principal Harris since, she said, the district was “essentially underfunded” and getting the grant “would really put the focus on reading.”

Conditions for Tier 3 Implementation

While districts were required to provide additional time for Tier 2 supplemental and Tier 3 intervention instruction for struggling students there is considerable discretion within Reading First implementation guidelines in this state for doing so. Piney Ridge developed a unique way of putting this component of their program into place. Rather than provide only 30 minutes of daily Tier 2 supplemental instruction for struggling students, Piney Ridge arranged schedules so that all students received an additional 50 minutes of supplemental reading instruction every day. This additional 50-minute block was delivered through a “push-in” model whereby four teachers and/or paraprofessionals provided instruction with small groups of students in their classrooms. The principal described this as a significantly beneficial aspect of their program, “Everybody is Tier 2 even the gifted are Tier 2. So, we really take care of so many problems with the Tier 2 [instruction].” With this component administered in this way, most of the students

receiving Tier 3 instruction at Piney Ridge are those that have been found eligible to receive special education services.

Both the principal and Tier 3 instructors voiced some degree of reservation with the reading instruction provided for their lowest achieving students. The district currently employs two Title I and two special education teachers for the elementary school. These four instructors are heavily involved in providing assistance to students at the Tier 2 instructional level. Because of their schedules, all Tier 3 students receive their primary instruction in the general education classroom during the 90-minute, Tier 1 component of the program. Principal Harris admitted she does not “know that [their] core [instruction] takes care of that as well as it should.” While special education teachers seemed pleased with the administrative push to have special education students in general education classrooms, they showed some concern that such inclusion might not be the best strategy for meeting student needs in areas such as basic living skills. In spite of these concerns, both special education teachers seemed pleased with the overall implementation of Reading First in their school.

Organizational Culture

Veteran teacher, Annie Mason, talked about a culture of change at Piney Ridge in which teachers are willing to work together to try new programs and innovations. Having gone through “a lot of change” in her 23 years as a teacher in the district, she believes teachers are willing to “swing with” whatever change comes along. She said they jump in and try whatever is asked of them and that “teachers here all try to get along really well.” She explained, “We just swing and go with the flow and do it...” She said if teachers ever

“rebelled I don’t know what [administrators] would do because I don’t know that anybody ever has.”

Teachers and administrators in Piney Ridge were very open about the priorities, beliefs and values that drive the actions and policies in their school. Principal, Helen Harris, explained that she had made several changes in the school when she took on the job a couple of years before Reading First implementation. These changes were based on her philosophy that “if the student isn’t learning, *you* [teachers and administrators] need to do something different. You need to find out *why* it’s not working.”

Collaborative problem-solving and shared decision making. In that respect, Principal Harris concentrated her initial efforts as principal on the utilization of ongoing assessments to determine student growth. Additionally, she believed strongly in purposeful collaboration between teachers and administrations, as well as between general education and specialized teachers, focused on increasing student learning outcomes. She explained that even before Reading First implementation she had worked toward building a collaborative culture in the building. She had gone so far as to moving teachers to other positions if they were uncomfortable working in collaborative teams. This action did not seem to be carried out in a punitive way but more in respect for teachers’ comfort levels with working together to meet student learning needs.

In setting up grade-level teams for Reading First implementation, Ms. Harris explained that schedules were established so that teachers at each grade level would have time to plan together. She described how she and the reading coach meet with classroom teachers every week during one of these prep periods. Additionally, they meet with each grade level along with special education and Title I teachers once a month. Although

there was a little resistance to this type of collaboration at first she feels teachers are “seeing the benefits” of working together in this way. Both Ms. Harris and Tier 3 teachers talked about working together to solve problems related to student learning. Decision making in that regard is essentially based on student learning data especially that provided by the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). Ms. Harris portrayed examination of the data, “we dissect everything to pieces... ‘Why? Why is he not doing it? What’s wrong? What can we do?’” She said when they looked at their 2nd grade students’ scores earlier in the month they were initially appalled with the results. Teachers were saying things like, “Oh, my gosh! What is wrong? What is wrong?.” As they looked, however, at students individually, Ms. Harris said, they were encouraged by the amount of growth students had made from the beginning of Reading First implementation even if they were not yet achieving at the benchmark standard. She said they have “always been that way” in their approach to student learning outcomes and that they have been astounded at the amount of growth their lowest kids have made as a result of their efforts.

As teachers had looked at student learning data they realized one year that a particular class of kindergarten students had not performed as well as they would have liked. Ms. Simms said they “panicked a little bit that summer” about how well those students would do in subsequent years so teachers and administrators looked at the efficacy of other programs they had used with that age group of students before Reading First and decided to use one to supplement instruction during Tier 2 time that fall. Even as administrators realized the program was not something that had been written into their

Reading First grant, they felt “comfortable in what [they were] doing with it” because, she explained, their application “didn’t say that we weren’t going to try something else.”

Cooperation and collegiality. Tier 3 intervention teachers expressed their appreciation for a culture of cooperation and collegiality focused on student learning outcomes. Piney Ridge has two Title teachers and two special education teachers who provide both Tier 2 supplemental and Tier 3 intervention instruction for students struggling to attain reading skills. During the initial year of Reading First implementation Annie Mason was a 2nd grade teacher before moving to her current Title I position. She was able to provide perspectives of Reading First implementation through her experiences as both a general education and an intervention teacher. She said “it was wonderful” and that she “loved it” when teachers came into her classroom to work with small groups of students beyond the 90 minutes of core instruction. She went on to explain how this collaborative atmosphere was enhanced by feelings of cooperation and flexibility among teachers. “There’s a real good feel there... We go in and they’re excited to see us.” She said that even though some teachers, including herself, had expressed concerns about the feasibility of having four teachers in a classroom at the same time, it had actually worked out very well.

When I first started I didn’t think it would work. I thought, ‘How idiotic. There’s no way this is going to work... four teachers in one room with all these four different groups.’ But it just flows and works... I mean, it’s just been a really good experience. It’s just over, above, and beyond anything I could have ever dreamed.

Shared responsibility and support for outcomes. There is a sense of collective responsibility for student learning at Piney Ridge. While teachers and administrators are aware that not every student has the home support he or she may need, that fact is not used as an excuse for lower student achievement. Ms. Harris described a system for getting students to read outside school whereby parent signatures are collected daily to indicate the number of minutes each student read at home the night before. If a student comes to school without a parent signature he knows, “Ok, I’ve got to find five people to read to this morning.” So, she explained, “everybody around here has a kid to read with... before school, during recess, after school...”

In reference to using student learning data to guide decision-making, Ms. Harris talked about a case where they realized, “This isn’t working. What are we going to do?” Teachers decided to divide students into small groups for fluency instruction. Because several teachers were needed to keep the student groups small enough to be effective, Principal Harris “took the very lowest ones.” Ms. Harris said they always “look beyond what [they are currently] doing for the answer” [to student needs].

Annie Mason explained her feeling that having the 50-minute push-in time provided an exciting opportunity for teachers to work collaboratively. She believed it had enabled them to “get a real good feel for those kids that are ‘ours.’”

Leadership

At the time of our interview, Helen Harris had been in the Piney Ridge district for 21 years, serving as the Special Education Director for 18 years before adding the duties of K-3 principal to her district responsibilities. Ms. Harris and the district’s curriculum director had begun implementing practices such as universal screening prior to receiving

grant monies to implement Reading First. She explained it was important to her to have a sense of where students are in their learning and thus, when they were notified of district eligibility to apply for funding she stated “it was what we were looking for.”

Style. Ms. Harris exhibited many of the leadership behaviors described in Edward Demings’ (1986) total quality management (TQM) model. The 14 principles Demings described as guiding leadership behavior in organizations were later organized into five categories (Waldman, 1993) “that more specifically define the actions of an effective leader” (Marzano, 2005) including: change agency, teamwork, continuous improvement, trust building, and eradication of short-term goals.

As with any change agent (Sosik and Dionne (1997), Ms. Harris worked to create a shared vision for the future of her organization – in this case, for what needs to happen to meet the learning needs of Piney Ridge Elementary students. She and her team continuously analyze what changes need to take place and subsequently work to ensure structures are put in place and barriers removed in order to achieve their goals. At the same time, she encourages and empowers others to make collaborative decisions about what they believe will work for students and celebrates learning gains even when students have not yet achieved the highest standards.

Beliefs. Principal Harris stated that her philosophy for leading is based on finding out where students are in their learning, why instruction is or is not working, and doing whatever it takes to meet student learning needs. While interview data from all participants substantiated a culture of collaboration and shared decision making, Ms. Harris said she didn’t have a problem making decisions she thought would best serve the learning needs of students in the school. “I *do* think there are times when you have to say,

‘You’re going to do it or you’ll have to do something different.’” She felt strongly that in the light of the converging research evidence supporting Reading First’s design there was a powerful argument for doing it. Ms. Harris summed up her outlook on principal leadership in a Reading First school.

It’s not for the weak of heart... This program is not... because when you... are trying to be a true instructional leader – which is our reading coach, too... it’s hard work. When you’re... totally involved and you know where all the kids are on their learning curve, it’s a lot of work. It *is* much easier to say, ‘Here’s our curriculum guide; go to it.’ That’s easier. That truly is.

Managing change and policy ambiguity. Everyone agreed the first year of Reading First implementation was “very stressful” at Piney Ridge Elementary. Since Ms. Harris had become the K-3 principal two years prior to the district’s involvement in the program, she had pushed for universal screening of all students in the area of reading as well as for collaboration among teachers at each grade level. She admitted initiation of those propositions along with their Reading First program had created a “little resistance” from some teachers, “It was a lot of big changes in close proximity to each other.”

Special education teacher, Joanne Miller, said she believes teachers are a little apprehensive about “anything new” since there is always that sense of “wonder [in relation to] how it’s going to work.” She admitted that teachers were not necessarily “scared” at the beginning of jumping into Reading First implementation but “maybe a little reluctant.” She believed younger teachers were especially worried about the amount of money the district had received to put the program in place. She said they were “really

willing to try” to implement it “but everybody had just a kind of sense of ‘What does this consist of? With so much money put in there, can we live up to those expectations?’”

Others talked about the fact that “change is... always difficult” and that, at first, teachers were worried they were going “to have to change everything.” Some initially believed that the structured nature of Reading First implementation would mean everyone would “have to do it the way the grant says.” But even as some were concerned about losing control of decision making in their classrooms one Tier 3 teacher expressed positive feelings about knowing what she needed to do when and how she needed to do it. That provided a sense of security for her. Her main concern then was “making sure that [she] implemented it correctly.”

Title teacher, Mia Simms, had only taught in the district for five years but said “We were kind of used to change.” Others corroborated that the district had tried other programs over the years and that change was not necessarily considered a negative aspect of working at Piney Ridge. Ms. Simms pointed out, however, that “the way Reading First did it was so different from... the little changes that [they had] done before.” She said the way teachers went into classrooms for the 50-minute reading time and the mandatory 90 minutes were “things” that were “really different” for them. She agreed that the first year was “very stressful” as teachers became used to required changes but explained “now that we’re used to it we realize there is a lot of leeway into this is how *I* teach so that doesn’t really have to change. Yes, I have to follow this program but...” She felt it helped that the district had not chosen a core reading series that was “as scripted as some of the others.”

While administrators in other districts struggled with sorting through policy ambiguity for integrating special education students into their Reading First programs, Ms. Harris had no problem with that. It was decided that all special education students would be included in Tier 1, “core” instruction in the general education classrooms. When asked if she felt it was something they had to do because of state education agency pressure, Ms. Harris stated, “We felt like it was something we *had* to do for *them*. [the students]”

Shaping the culture. Ms. Harris explained that while she believes there is a time and a place for top-down decision making, her actions in relation to collaborative data-based decision making are essentially the norm in this school. She said that while teachers had previously operated in isolation, Reading First had helped them create a culture where teachers worked together. She believed it was essential for teachers to be on the same page in what they were teaching and to share ideas for meeting student learning needs. She said the idea of collaborative teaming had not always been an easy change for teachers and that several had made the choice to move to other positions in which collaboration was not considered as crucial.

Ms. Simms discussed changes that were made from the first year of Reading First implementation, during which time there was a perceived lack of communication and collaboration, to the second year when the principal arranged for horizontal and vertical team meetings to help alleviate these problems. Ms. Simms said “part of the transition” for them had been “having so many teachers” who needed to be “on the same level at the same time.” She said they really did not meet very much during the initial year of implementation so “there was some disconnect between making sure every teacher knew

what theme, what week, what skill” they were supposed to be teaching even though memos were sent out in that regard. Ms. Harris set up a schedule then for the second year so that teachers met in “grade level meetings and push-in meetings” every week to “make sure everybody knows, ‘Hey, this is exactly what we’re doing.’” Ms. Simms said the meetings have helped ensure that everyone is teaching what they are scheduled to teach when they are scheduled to teach it. This has helped teachers providing instruction across the tiers coordinate their efforts to increase student learning outcomes.

Veteran special education teacher, JoAnne Miller, talked about her appreciation of changes in the culture as a result of Reading First implementation. She said that the school has gone from a culture in which special education students were more isolated from their peers to one in which teachers work together to meet student learning needs in the general education classroom. She said she liked the program because her “little kids” felt “included.” She explained that before Reading First was implemented at Piney Ridge, students would come across the street to her room for specialized instruction but that now “we go over there instead of pulling them out” which helps them “feel a part of the class.”

Allocating resources. Teachers had, for the most part, positive reactions to the school’s decision to implement Tier 2 as a 50-minute push-in block of supplemental instruction. Annie Mason, for example, had taught 2nd grade during the first year of Reading First implementation and talked about the impact of this structure in her roles as both a classroom teacher and an intervention provider. She described how three other teachers came into her 2nd grade classroom for the 50 minutes and raved about this time being “over and above and beyond the 90 minutes.” She said “it was wonderful” to have

the extra teachers there to work with struggling students and that she “just loved it!” She explained that students would be grouped during that time to work on skills they were lacking and that administrators “made sure there were enough people” to meet their needs. She was “impressed” at how well it had worked.

Mia Simms agreed that having the materials and personnel to meet student learning needs in this way was a positive solution to having “so many different ability levels” in each classroom. She said their reading series had included materials they could use to increase reading fluency across a wide range of instructional levels so, she explained, they “had fabulous materials” and “the staff” to provide the targeted instruction their students needed.

This is a way to go in there and provide structure and instruction for each level... the bright kids were going to get challenged and the lower kids... we were going to be able to remediate what they need to and all level kids would get their extra practice as well. So, it was just a way for us to say ‘this is the best thing we can do.’

Special education teacher, Laura Stevens, talked about the reactions of teachers from other schools when they hear about the Piney Ridge plan for implementing Tier 2. She said they tell Piney Ridge teachers, “You are so lucky. You have all those teachers to come in during your Tier 2 time.” She agreed the plan was working well for both teachers and students.

According to Ms. Harris, one of the most difficult aspects of implementing Reading First is scheduling. She said “it’s horrendous when you’re taking your special education people and your Title people and your gifted people and you’re trying to

schedule a 50-minute slot for everybody for every grade level.” She had had to redo the schedule for the upcoming school year because the district had lost “another [teaching] position that affected music and P.E.” Even as she claimed “it was a nightmare” to reschedule everything up to the 8th grade level, they were able to keep the 50-minute push-in blocks for Tier 2 instruction as well as the collaborative planning times for teachers at each grade level. “That’s a pain,” she stated, “It really is.”

Teacher support. While Ms. Harris understood that teachers were resistant to some of the changes initiated at Piney Ridge, she was also mindful of supporting their efforts. She explained that she and their reading coach would meet with grade level teams of teachers every week and with Tier 2 and 3 providers and the teachers together once each month. “They have support. Nobody is left alone here. I don’t think you’re going to find anybody who says they feel left hanging out on their own.”

Special education teacher, JoAnne Miller, explained that having a principal with a special education background had been a positive experience for her in relation to implementing Tier 3 instruction. She said, “Helen is very understanding... and it has helped a lot.”

Trust. Teachers expressed appreciation for the leadership in their building. Annie Mason, for example, did not remember participating in the initial decision to apply for Reading First funding but felt certain they had been informed about the program and talked about trusting the judgment of those who made the decision to go forward with it. She explained that district administrators are “always talking grants and new things... and they do ask our opinions.” She believes their leaders are “very innovative” and “really good” at pursuing grants to help teachers obtain updated materials and

professional development. She said that even though teachers are included in making decisions about implementing new programs they “just trust [administrators] to do it.”

Ms. Harris believes that teachers have become more comfortable with Reading First over time. Knowing where students are in acquisition of reading skills and feeling supported in their efforts are factors Ms. Harris believed were significant in that respect. Whereas teachers had worked in isolation prior to Reading First implementation, current collaborative practices have created an environment of continual interaction not only among teachers but also between administrators and teachers. There is currently “so much communication” which, Ms. Harris admitted, “wasn’t [there] before.” Such practices serve to enhance feelings of trust (Gimbel, 2003) at Piney Ridge.

Organizational and Individual Capacity

Tier 3 teachers at Piney Ridge Elementary expressed very little concern about the individual or collective capacity of the school to implement its Reading First program. Time, however, is never a non-issue in Reading First schools.

Time. One of the changes required for program implementation is the use of reading centers or stations in general education classrooms. Centers are to be structured so that groups of students can practice skills while the classroom teacher works with another group. Ms. Harris said some teachers were struggling to put centers in place and that even though she and their reading coach “try to work with them on that but there’s just not enough hours in the day to get everything done.”

With Reading First requirements mandating 90-minute reading blocks in the general education classrooms and Piney Ridge’s policy for an additional 50-minute block devoted to reading instruction, it is difficult for teachers to “fit everything else in.” While

3rd grade teachers have to provide instruction in science because of state standardized assessments at that grade level the district's focus is on reading and math and thus, it was decided that K-2 grade teachers would limit their instruction for the most part to those two subject areas.

Personnel. Despite their praise for and appreciation of having the 50-minute, push-in model for implementing Tier 2, Ms. Simms was still frustrated with not having enough personnel to meet the learning needs of one group. She had made the charts showing where students were on benchmark assessments at the beginning of the school year and had found that nineteen of them needed Tier 3 instruction. She admitted that the school did not “have enough Tier 3 people for them” to be in small enough groups to meet the research for effectiveness at this level of intervention instruction.

Materials. Special education teacher, Laura Stevens was pleased with the amount of resources and training afforded teachers through Reading First grant funds. During the first year of program implementation Ms. Stevens had been a 1st grade teacher. She subsequently moved to a special education position and became one of the district's Tier 2 and Tier 3 providers. She said that before Reading First implementation teachers “didn't have all the fabulous resources that we did after [the program] came into play...” She explained that “it was wonderful” to have “all the extras” and explained that she actually enjoyed having the structure the program requires. “I liked having someone tell me what you're going to do for this block of time and this is what you're going to do now and how you're going to do it...”

Training or previous experience. Ms. Simms explained her belief that training for implementing their Reading First program was valuable. She said that any time teachers were struggling with specific problems regional Reading First specialists would come in to their district to provide more training for them. She felt that she had had “sufficient professional development” for doing her job as a Tier 2 and 3 provider. Ms. Stevens agreed the training made available to teachers for putting, for example, “centers and work stations” into place had been “really helpful” for her as a 1st grade teacher.

Will

Confidence

When asked whether or not general education teachers felt Reading First would make a difference for most students, Ms. Stevens explained that “with the exception of a few” of the “really low functioning” special education students “people [were] overall pretty optimistic” that they could get positive results from their efforts.

Title teacher, Mia Simms, described a group of five second grade students that had struggled to acquire reading skills since kindergarten. She said teachers “did as much as they could but it was a tough group.” The students had made progress over the years but teachers were frustrated because they were still unable to reach expected goals on benchmark assessments.

Values

Laura Stevens had spent the initial year of Reading First implementation teaching 1st grade students before taking a special education position and becoming a Tier 2 and Tier 3 provider. She wasn’t necessarily as pleased as JoAnne with having some of her more cognitively challenged students included in the general education classroom for

reading instruction. She said she was initially a little concerned that student needs would not be met in that setting. She did, however, feel that teachers and administrators had been able to work out any problematic issues that may have come about in relation to the school's policy. "I'm not going to say that I haven't at times thought, you know... 'If there could just be somebody, somewhere else for the really, really, really low ones to go...' But it's worked out..."

Results

As mentioned earlier, Ms. Simms' main concern about the school's capacity to implement Reading First was related to a group of 2nd grade students. She believed it was difficult to make a make a lot of gains with them because of the sheer number of students struggling to acquire reading skills at that grade level. Teachers were upset that students were not making the gains they had hoped for.

I know that our teachers did as much as they could but it was just a tough group.

We tried to go back with some of them and do this reading series from kindergarten. You know, to press those sounds into them. They did summer school... They made progress. It's just that they still didn't make their benchmarks so it's been frustrating.

Principal Harris was, however, excited with the amount of growth these students had made despite the fact that they had not reached benchmark standards. "When you look at them individually and we looked at the percent of growth that they had done from the beginning until now – it is those lower kids... it's astounding the growth that they've made..." She believed it was more important for teachers to look at how much students

had improved, and that they should, in fact, be proud of the progress students had made because of their efforts.

FOREST VALLEY

Context

External Environment

According to United States Census Bureau data, Forest Valley is located on a 0.4 square mile tract of land. Located within driving distance of what might be considered a small city, Forest Valley is considered a “bedroom community” with a population of just over 200. While several families own construction companies which subsequently provides employment for other community members, many parents work in surrounding towns or cities. According to 2000 census data, the racial makeup of the town was 95.91% White, 0.45% Native American, 1.36% Hispanic, and 3.64% from two or more races. The median income for a household in the city was \$29, 375 and the median income for a family was \$37,250. Males had a median income of \$31,250 versus \$19,375 for females. About 3.4% of families and 6.0% of the population were considered to be living below the poverty line, including 3.1% of those under age 18 and 16.7% of those ages 65 or older. Of the twenty families enrolled in the district’s Parents as Teachers program many parents have Bachelor’s degrees and several households have at least one parent with a Master’s degree.

The winding, blacktop road leading to Forest Valley is dotted with fields of corn, hay bales, and cattle herds. One can spot an occasional rusty windmill and grain bins are prevalent. The Forest Valley school district which includes kindergarten through 12th grade is situated in one building located around the first curve within the city limits. The school’s name is proudly displayed in large letters across the front of the building which sits on well-kept grounds. There is essentially no business district in Forest Valley. While

there are over 50 residences including a least a dozen newer-looking brick ranch style homes, there is no grocery store. A tiny post office sits just down the street from the city hall which is housed in a small, mobile unit. There are two churches, one of which appears to be the largest single building in the town (the school is larger but consists of several attached buildings), a city park, and a baseball field. Businesses in the area include: a gas station, a bank, a car wash, a small restaurant and a hardware store.

Internal Environment

With just over 80 students, Forest Valley is not only the smallest district examined in this study but also one of the state's smallest Reading First schools. Another district with a predominantly white student population (five-year average = 99.02%), Forest Valley has gained ten students over the past five years. During this same period, attendance by both African American and Hispanic students has increased from 0% to 2.4% and 0% to 1.2% respectively. No students from any other racial or ethnic category have attended Forest Valley over this five-year reported time span. During the initial 3-year cycle of Reading First implementation, both the superintendent and elementary principal were male with the remainder of the all-white elementary school staff being female. The average student to classroom teacher ratio fell at 9.8 to one. The average student to overall teacher ratio was 7.4 to one.

The 2006-07 incidence rate for Forest Valley Elementary special education placement was 15.79% (state average = 14.25%). The predominant disability category in the school was Specific Learning Disabilities with an 8.55% (state average = 5.27%) incidence rate. Forest Valley was awarded a Reading First grant as part of Cohort 2 which began the 3-year cycle of funding during the 2005-2006 school year. During the

three years prior to Reading First eligibility the percentage of Forest Valley 3rd grade students scoring “below grade level” on the state Communication Arts assessment ranged from a low of 36.4% to a high of 100%. The state range, of all 3rd graders reading “below grade level” for this time period, went from a low of 64.7% to a high of 65.9%. The census poverty level for Forest Valley Elementary during the grant application year was reported by the district at 35.53%. This level has fluctuated between 30% and 32% over the course of the three-year grant cycle.

The interior of the school is dark with dim lighting and dark wooden walls. The special education classroom was recently remodeled to lower 15-foot ceilings which helps provide lighting more conducive to a learning environment. The heating/cooling system, previously consisting of a hole in the wall between classrooms, was also updated. Title I students work with their teacher in a larger, newer classroom just off the gymnasium. The teacher said the noise level from physical education classes and indoor recesses does not necessarily impact teaching.

Initial Response to Change

Interview participants indicated that initial implementation of Reading First was negatively impacted in Forest Valley by the district superintendent, Dr. Jim Hardt’s, unilateral decision to apply for grant funds. Concerned that students’ reading “scores had not really been moving” and that “nothing [had] really been working” Dr. Hardt reportedly gathered information from schools that had achieved positive results from Reading First implementation and decided “this is what we’re going to do.” Principal Mike Monroe, stated the program “wasn’t very well received” by teachers who “didn’t feel they had a say in it.” Teachers were not only resentful because they believed it had

been forced on them but also because “no one explained the program. They didn’t know what they were getting into.”

Even though the district did not receive Reading First funds after an initial application, “an effort was made to starting putting things in place” to implement a Reading First model. A new reading series was purchased “so the teachers had it for a year before [the reading coach] got there.” The district was awarded funding for the subsequent school year and hired reading coach, Marin Scott. She stated in her interview that although teachers had had the opportunity to use their new core reading series for an entire year before implementing Reading First, they essentially “knew nothing about reading” when they first started the program.

As in every other school, the principal reported that scheduling was the most difficult aspect of Reading First implementation. As stated earlier, the amount of designated time spent on reading each day is set by Reading First policy. Not only is the classroom teacher required to spend 90 minutes of uninterrupted time in the general education classroom on reading instruction for Tier 1, but Tier 2 requires an additional 30 minutes and Tier 3 an additional 60 minutes of instruction each day. Coupled with all other aspects of the elementary curriculum, Mr. Monroe reported that “the teachers really didn’t think that they would have enough time in their day to get all of this done.” In light of these concerns, he and Ms. Scott met with each teacher to go through their schedules to try and find the time they would need to do what they were required to do. During the second year of implementation the district extended the school day at the teachers’ request.

Conditions for Tier 3 Implementation

During the first two years of Reading First implementation, very few students received Tier 3 instruction. At the end of year one, only one student in grades K-3 fell in the Tier 3 “at risk” category on the DIBELS benchmark assessment. Thus, the teacher primarily designated to provide instruction for struggling students spends most of her time working with Tier 2 students. The district has had three teachers who could provide Tier 2 and/or Tier 3 instruction. There has been one special education teacher to serve K-12 students and thus, her schedule does not afford time for Reading First involvement. Another special education teacher works half-time as a speech implementer and the other half as a special education instructor. This teacher currently provides Tier 3 instruction for any students eligible for special education services in grades K-3. Finally, the district employs one Title I teacher, Penny Potter, who serves all students falling into the Tier 2 category. Because the district has had only one student receiving Tier 3 services and because that teacher did not wish to participate in this study, Ms. Potter provided much of the interview data explaining instruction provided for struggling students.

Ms. Potter explained that because she works with grade levels K-6, she is unable to provide instruction for all students considered “at some risk” in the K-3 Reading First classrooms. General education teachers are required, therefore, to provide Tier 2 instruction for struggling students. Reading coach, Marin Scott, explained, however, that this practice is not followed as it should be since classroom teachers “don’t always have time for Tier 2.” She contends “if something gets slighted during the day, it’s Tier 2” and expressed concern that when the Title I instructor is absent “those kids miss [supplemental instruction] time and the teachers complain” about it because their students

are falling further behind. As it turned out, Ms. Potter had to leave the district several weeks before the end of the school year due to complications related to a pregnancy. During that time, therefore, her students did not receive Tier 2 instruction mandated by Reading First requirements.

Organizational Culture

In his seminal work, *The Human Side of School Change*, psychologist, Robert Evans (1996), contends that once a culture has been established in an organization, “it not only shapes people’s behavior, perception, and understanding of events,” but it also has a significant “impact... on the way an organization responds to changes in its environment” (p. 44). Forest Valley teachers’ responses to changes required for Reading First implementation were influenced, in large part, by a culture shaped by top-down decision making and lack of trust between teachers and administrators.

Collaborative problem-solving and shared decision making. Principal Mike Monroe expressed his belief that teachers initially resented Reading First because the decision to apply for and accept funding from the state had been a unilateral, top-down decision. The realization that teachers in other Reading First schools participated in decision making processes, not only for initial application and adoption, but also in relation to issues guiding subsequent implementation only added to their feelings of frustration. He talked about a particular teacher who had worked in a Reading First school during initial adoption of the program. She told Forest Valley staff the administration in that school had “involved all the teachers from day one” and explained that administrators told teachers, “We found this information. Do we want to look at it? Is this something... we would consider?” Mr. Monroe said “she told teachers that their

school as a group decided that ‘yes,’ that’s something they wanted to do.” He then declared, “Here [teachers] were told [by the superintendent] ‘This is what we’re doing.’

Reading coach, Marin Scott indicated that Forest Valley teachers felt they “had lost control of their classrooms.” She explained their perception that “they didn’t get to make decisions anymore. Everyone was telling them what to do.” She expressed her belief that even though this was, in fact, true, “the decisions they were making weren’t *good* decisions” and that “they needed someone to help guide them.” But the teachers, she said, “didn’t see it as guidance. They saw it as forced.” Ms. Scott reported that teachers repeatedly told Mr. Monroe they would do what they were told while he was the principal at Forest Valley but that they had been in the school long before he got there and that they would be there when he left. This turned out to be the case as Forest Valley continues to struggle with Reading First implementation under an entirely new administration.

Ms. Scott agreed with Mr. Monroe’s perception that top-down decision making had a significant impact on initial as well as subsequent implementation issues at Forest Valley. Her contention was that teachers did not have a clear understanding and vision of Reading First until they were well into implementation. She explained her belief that “one huge strike they had against them was it was forced.” She said that no one had explained the program to teachers either prior to application or after funding had been procured. She described how “the superintendent came around with a piece of paper saying, ‘Sign this. If we get the grant, you will be doing this.’” It was her contention that teachers “didn’t know what they were signing. They were just told to sign and then [Dr. Hardt] gave them a choice... He said, ‘If we get the grant we’re going to do this program.

This is the direction the school's going to go in.” She stated that teachers *were* given a choice of whether or not they wanted to participate in Reading First implementation but explained that they really had no choice except to leave the district. Dr. Hardt had told teachers, “If you don’t want to be a part of the grant then you should move grade levels.” Apparently, however, there was only one opening available. This 5th grade position was taken by the second grade teacher while the other three primary teachers chose to stay in then-current teaching assignments. Ms. Scott was convinced that because they had neither participated in the application process nor been included in initial decision making for putting the program in place, teachers essentially “didn’t know what they were getting into.”

Collaboration was not part of the lexicon at Forest Valley Elementary until well into the third implementation year when data meetings were established to examine student learning trends. Mr. Monroe felt these meetings created a more collaborative culture for both problem solving and decision-making. He explained that he, the reading coach, the Title I teacher and the classroom teacher would meet periodically to analyze DIBELS and other data in order to make decisions about instructional delivery. He said that this component of Reading First implementation had not been in place before the third year and that he felt it made a big difference in how teachers worked together. Title teacher, Penny Potter, corroborated his view in explaining this “paradigm shift” in teachers’ thinking about “how the data really does tell us what we need to know.” She was excited about the assessment meetings and about making collaborative decisions to increase student learning outcomes. She explained that teachers would discuss individual children and strategize what to do to meet learning needs. The discussion went something

like, “Ok, this child’s not moving. What are you trying? What have I tried? What can we try together?” She said they would then reconvene a month later to determine whether or not they had “corrected the problem.”

Cooperation and collegiality. Ms. Potter joined Forest Valley’s faculty as a Title I teacher at the beginning of the second implementation year. She had heard there were a lot of “power struggles” during the first year and that teachers didn’t like the idea of having to change teaching practices from how they had “always done it.” Mr. Monroe described one example of teachers’ resistance to changing daily schedules to increase instruction time. He explained that teachers had previously scheduled several recesses during the school day and that, in fact, teachers were spending twice as much time on recess as they were on reading instruction. He said it had been “a struggle... getting them to change that.”

Ms. Potter explained that while teachers had become more collaborative during the third year of implementation, issues related to her role as the only Title teacher in the district continued to generate contentious situations for her. She described the difficulties she had in getting teacher cooperation in scheduling instructional time with students who needed assistance because they did not understand that she “can’t take all first graders at one time because not all first graders have the same problem.” She explained the situation, for example, with first grade students.

I have one first grader that has *no* sounds. He knows his letters but he knows none of his sounds. My other ones know the sounds and we’re ready to start blending their letters to make the words. The two groups can’t go together. One’s going to get completely left behind.

She said, however, that teachers complain, “But there are only three kids and you should be able to do all of them in an hour.” She said it has been difficult getting them to believe “it doesn’t work that way.” She said the most significant frustration for her is not having enough time to do what she needs to do to have a positive impact on student learning.

She went on to talk about the difficulty in trying to include upper grade levels in Reading First implementation. Even as Reading First requires districts to follow stringent rules for implementation in kindergarten through third grade classrooms, schools have more discretion for implementing the program at other grade levels. Regional Reading First specialists often discuss the difficulty in trying to provide consistency in reading instruction across grade levels without the luxury of mandated requirements. Ms. Potter described this at Forest Valley as “almost like a split in our building.” This lack of cooperation between the lower and upper level elementary grade teachers made her work more difficult and she believed, as well, that student learning has suffered as a result.

Shared responsibility and support for outcomes. There was really not a sense of shared responsibility for student learning outcomes in this school. While it seemed that people were working hard and making progress toward collaboration and cooperation, there was still a feeling of isolation between classroom teachers and those providing Tier 2 or Tier 3 instruction for struggling students. Ms. Potter described feelings of isolation that were particularly prevalent during her first year in the district.

Last year it felt very... *I* felt very isolated like, ‘You’re the Title teacher so you do your thing but don’t cross over into anything that we’ve tried.’ ...There comes a point where you’ve tried everything you know and it’s almost like... I don’t want to say you’re admitting a weakness but that’s sometimes how it feels in

teaching... that you're a weaker teacher because 'I've tried everything and I can't get it to work so obviously I'm at fault.'

She felt as though she was "seen that way" by other teachers whose attitudes seem to say "If you can't figure it out yourself then you're not a good enough teacher."

Ms. Potter talked about teacher frustrations with a perceived lack of support for struggling students. A result of the shortage in the area's substitute teacher pool, Ms. Potter is often pulled from providing Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction to cover general education classrooms. She described teacher resentment and frustration during a two-week time period when students did not receive extra instruction. They were especially concerned because their students were falling behind and they felt pressured to ensure that did not happen. "It's looking bad on us because why should we be picking up the pieces when we've got all this other stuff that we have to do?" They were angry with the message they were getting from administrators.

'Why do you keep pulling Penny to sub when she's our Title teacher? You know if you're expecting...' and this is the thing I kept hearing... 'If you're expecting to hold us to the standard, why aren't you holding everybody to that standard? Why isn't the administration saying that reading is important?'

Leadership

Leadership and management for implementing Reading First were shared, to a large degree, by Principal Mike Monroe and reading coach, Marin Scott. Additionally, evidence indicates that Superintendent Jim Hardt was more directly involved with Reading First implementation than district superintendents in the other schools included in this study.

Style. Each person interviewed talked about the impact of Dr. Hardt's top-down authoritative style on both initial and subsequent teacher reaction to the program. While he was not necessarily engaged in day-to-day decision-making, his presence nonetheless shaped how others reacted to emerging implementation issues.

Principal Monroe talked about differences in their leadership styles and how Dr. Hardt's style influenced his personal experience implementing Reading First. Mr. Monroe finished his specialist's degree in administration the same year Forest Valley started Reading First implementation. While his program of study had been "collaborative in nature... involving the teachers," Dr. Hardt, whose leadership style had been shaped, Mr. Monroe believed, by theories prevalent during his doctoral studies in the mid-60s, "doesn't feel that way." He explained, "Everything I learned through [my] program... I don't want to get myself in trouble here... we have differences of opinion." In that respect, he said "the first three years" of his tenure in the district had been "really a struggle."

Even as Mr. Monroe and Ms. Scott encouraged teachers to participate in decision-making processes for implementing their program, Ms. Scott felt teachers had difficulty because they were not used to thinking about their work in that way. They had become accustomed to hearing phrases like, "this is what we're going to do" or "this is the way it is" or "you will be doing this" and subsequently working to carry out those directives the best they could.

Ms. Scott is essentially a pragmatic, "let's-do-what works" kind of leader. Even though she was not considered an administrator, Mr. Monroe relied on her expertise in reading to help guide implementation of their program. She did not have a problem

making unpopular decisions if she believed they would be the best decisions for students.

Beliefs. Obviously, Dr. Hardt believed strongly in the idea that subordinates do what they are told. While Mr. Monroe was more inclined toward collaborative efforts, he was unable to shift decision-making practices in that direction until meetings for assessing student learning data were established during the third year of Reading First implementation. While Ms. Scott worked to help build collaboration for shared decision-making she believed some aspects of implementation had to be non-negotiable if they were going to get good results.

Beliefs and attitudes about responsibility for student learning were implied in how resources were allocated. These findings will be discussed in a subsequent section.

Managing change and policy ambiguity. Not only were teachers resentful of having Reading First “forced” on them, but Ms. Scott claimed they were overwhelmed with the magnitude of work involved and with uncertainty about what they were doing. Teachers did not have a chance to visit other schools and had no opportunity to talk with teachers that had started implementation the previous school year. “No one explained the program” to them “so,” she stated, “it was just kind of a lot... for them [to absorb] the first year.”

Title I teacher, Penny Potter, said that communication “is just not there” when it comes to letting teachers know about, not only day-to-day changes related to their work, but also about those impacting Reading First implementation as a whole. She indicated administrators “would get word that a change had been made and then, ‘Oh yeah, now you’re supposed to be doing it this way.’” They did not explain, she said, why changes were being made or that such directives had come from the state education agency so

they had no choice in the matter. She said “communication in general” had been a problem at Forest Valley.

Just as in other schools, Mr. Monroe cited scheduling as a significant barrier to putting Reading First in place. He talked about the “struggles” they had in “juggling the times” and about teacher concerns with changes in their schedules. As mandated by Reading First rules, for example, the amount of time for instruction increased dramatically in the initial phase of implementation. Power struggles ensued as Ms. Scott started out her tenure in the district by telling teachers they had to decrease the number of recesses they were allowing each day in order to increase the amount of time they were required to spend teaching children to read. While teachers eventually came to their own conclusion that the school day needed to be extended to provide more instructional time, initial changes in their daily schedules were not well received. Teachers felt they were “losing control” of their classrooms which was essentially true. Mr. Monroe admitted the first year was “really tough” stating “there were a lot of struggles to get through and some teachers just didn’t think we’d ever get to where we are.”

As mentioned earlier, policy ambiguity allows for implementation discretion based on available needs and resources. In Forest Valley’s case, Tier 3 implementation, an initial factor due to significant numbers of students considered “at risk,” became a non-issue as teachers were able to meet student learning needs in subsequent years. The one or two students who continued to need Tier 3 instruction were served by special education personnel who could most easily absorb this demand on their time. The more significant issue as far as discretion was concerned surfaced in relation to implementing Tier 2 for those students who continued to score at the “some risk” category. Because of

the number of students, the disparity of their learning needs, and a lack of adequate personnel scheduling Tier 2 instruction was more difficulty. As the district wrestled with personnel capacity issues, Tier 2 instruction suffered significantly. Teachers were increasingly upset about leadership decisions for providing instruction for students in danger of falling further behind their peers.

Shaping the culture. Leadership styles had a significant impact on the culture at Forest Valley Elementary. As stated earlier teacher resistance to Reading First implementation was perceived to be a direct result of having had no initial involvement in district application for funds. Teachers did not feel like valued members of the school community. They were unsure of expectations, changes were not communicated to them in a timely manner and they had little to no say about issues that more times than not had significant impacts on their classrooms. Consequently, resentment and suspicion were evident in how they talked and in how they treated each other. One person described the atmosphere during the first implementation year as “very tense.” Ms. Scott talked about the nature of emerging implementation issues and the impact of teacher reactions. She said that Mr. Monroe was very supportive of teachers as well as of her as the reading coach, but she did not think he felt confident about “having to deal with K-3 crying teachers who didn’t know what to do.”

Ms. Scott discussed the fact that teachers were unprepared for dealing with the changes required for Reading First implementation. Not knowing what to expect created a significant amount of anxiety for everyone involved. She recalled how Superintendent Hardt introduced her to teachers as she described her first few months at Forest Valley Elementary. “When I showed up, it was basically... ‘Here’s the person that’s going to

help you do this grant. And I know you know nothing about it.” She said that teachers gave her a pretty hard time until around December when they started feeling a little more confident in what they were doing. “Before [then],” she said, “there were a lot of tears... there was a lot of yelling and crying...” She stated that it didn’t really bother her because she knew that “the direction [they] were going in was the right direction.” “But,” she admitted, “there were days that were tougher than others.”

Allocating resources. Reading First funding constraints preclude even the most financially strapped districts from hiring personnel other than reading coaches. This position comes with clearly outlined duties that do not include teaching other than modeling lessons for other teachers. Lack of personnel to meet student learning needs was a significant issue at Forest Valley. The Title I teacher assigned to provide supplemental instruction discussed concerns about leadership decisions that pulled her away from working with struggling students when a substitute was needed to cover for another teacher. She admitted the district has no subs to call when teachers are absent, but indicated the message teachers were getting from administrators especially frustrated them when, for example, students received no Tier 2 instruction from her for two entire weeks.

Teacher support. Ms. Scott worried about Mr. Monroe’s past experience for supporting initiatives that called for such vast changes as those required by Reading First implementation. Not only had he not had previous opportunities overseeing school reform but he came to Forest Valley Elementary with a high school background in music and counseling. At the same time, however, she complimented his efforts not only to increase his personal knowledge of reading instruction but also to support teachers. She

said “he was very supportive” but she did not “think he knew what to do to help” especially when faced with a group of “K-3 crying teachers who didn’t know what to do.” She said “he handled it well” even as, she believed, “it was overwhelming for him.”

He was always willing to do whatever he needed to do. I just think he didn’t know what to do. He has learned a lot about reading. He has been at everything and he has taken it all in and he has asked good questions. He tries to do whatever is best for them but you know... he just didn’t have an elementary background. So that was tough. All of a sudden he was thrown in and he had to do it.

Mr. Monroe admitted that teacher morale was his biggest challenge in Reading First implementation. He said it got “very low” before teachers started feeling more confident in their abilities. This came about, he asserted, not so much in relation to his efforts but when teachers and administrators from other districts came to observe Forest Valley’s Reading First program. Mr. Monroe said visitors “were very complementary to the teachers and let them know what an awesome job they were doing.” He felt such incidents were a significant help in “boosting morale” in the building.

Trust. Issues related to trust were most significant as they related to a perceived lack of communication from administrators (Gimbel, 2003). Ms. Potter talked about teachers’ feelings of distrust with the lack of communication from administrators when they felt they needed support.

I think the teachers start to get frustrated with it because you send behavior issues or concerns to the office and it kind of dies and you don’t hear anything back or they’re working on it but you don’t know that they’re working on it.

In addition to their frustrations over behavioral issues teachers were upset about administrative decisions, or a lack thereof, about concerns they felt were significantly impacting student learning in their classrooms. Ms. Potter talked about a special education student who had moved into the district. She said his individualized education plan (IEP) indicated he was “supposed to have an aide” when he was included in general education classroom instruction. The 2nd grade teacher had apparently asked about the situation several times to no avail even though the child had “become violent in her classroom – started biting, throwing things.” Ms. Potter went on to explain, “They’ve had to restrain him. They’ve had to carry him out of the room. And [the teacher’s] like, ‘What am I supposed to do with the other kids?’ ‘Well, we’ll let you know when we figure it out.’” She said an aide was coming the next day but that the classroom teacher still felt she did not know what to do to meet the child’s needs. She had asked questions but was frustrated with the answers she had received. Ms. Potter said administrators told the teacher, ‘We don’t know yet. We don’t even know what the person’s schedule is going to be.’” “So,” she explained, “there’s a lot of, ‘How do you not know what we’re doing?’”

Organizational and Individual Capacity

Time. Forest Valley teachers struggled with finding enough time in a school day to implement the requirements of Reading First implementation. Principal Monroe stated that “getting everything in place” was difficult and that “teachers really didn’t think they would have enough time in their day to get all this done.” He said that he and Ms. Scott sat down with teachers individually and went through their daily schedules to determine how much time they were spending on various activities and instruction throughout their school day. He said it was a matter of prioritizing, reallocating, and letting some things

go in order to do what they had to do to meet Reading First mandates. He said even as teachers worried about losing instructional time for social studies and science, they had decided to integrate that content into their reading instruction through expository text. They felt a little better about trying to fit everything in after Superintendent Hardt let them know “he wanted the focus to be on reading and math in K-3. That was it.”

Additionally, Mr. Monroe expressed concern that Title and special education teachers did not have the time to meet the demands of Reading First implementation. He said “the Title I teacher doesn’t have enough hours in her day... to really meet the needs.” The previous year she had focused her efforts on Kindergarten through third grade students and “worked when she could with 4, 5, and 6.” He indicated “she didn’t get with the 6th grade as much as she would have liked to but [the schedule] just didn’t allow it.”

The district had hired another teacher to help with their special education student population. Her schedule allowed her to be a part-time speech implementer as well as a part-time teacher working with students struggling to acquire reading skills. Mr. Monroe said two younger children with IEPs had moved into the district which had created unexpected issues since they had not previously had special education students in any of their Reading First classrooms. He said they were still “trying to figure out who’s in charge of [Tier 1 instruction].”

Ms. Scott stated that even with two teachers, special education personnel had little to no time to work with Tier 2 and Tier 3 students since one of them was working with students from Kindergarten up through 12th grade and the other was half-time special education and half-time speech implementer. She was also somewhat concerned with

their lack of knowledge and skills for teaching reading but had a little more faith in one than the other because the teacher had a Master's degree in reading.

Ms. Scott also confirmed Mr. Monroe's opinion that scheduling had been a significantly problematic issue in Reading First implementation at Forest Valley. She explained her belief that "scheduling is just the hardest thing and I don't care if it's year one or year five, scheduling is a nightmare." She said she agreed with the extra hour mandated for students who need intensive intervention instruction but argued with the way the state education agency (SEA) requires schools to work with students within that time requirement. She said she had wanted to put 1st and 2nd graders with similar skill abilities together for instruction but that the SEA would not allow the district to do that. During Forest Valley's second year of implementation, however, they allowed them to do so "if it was necessary." Ms. Scott felt that to be the case.

We just did it because there are not enough hours in the day to allow one Title teacher to see seven grade levels... We had to start combining. We combined 4th, 5th, and 6th [grades] anyway because we didn't have the constraints but I think they have to change some things on that or find a way to start funding more people... bodies in the building. There's just no way to do it.

Ms. Potter agreed that having only one teacher to work with students in seven grade levels creates impossible odds for meeting their learning needs. "I have only 30 minutes a day with [6th graders] and that's not by far nearly enough time. You do what you can do with the schedule that you've got."

Personnel. Proximity to larger school districts that offer significantly higher salaries for both teacher and administrative positions often creates substantial staffing problems for small districts. Forest Valley is a perfect example of how difficult it is to find and keep qualified teachers and substitutes who can fill in when teachers are absent. Due to illnesses and other familial obligations, Forest Valley finished the third year of its initial Reading First grant cycle with substitute teachers in several key elementary positions. This is especially problematic within the context of implementing an initiative as complex as Reading First. Reading coach, Marin Scott, was particularly concerned with putting substitute teachers into classrooms of students who needed intensive instruction to catch up with their peers. Most intervention programs adopted by Reading First schools required training that their substitute teaching pool had not received.

Ms. Scott explained that one of the Title teachers had taken a job in another district and was not replaced for the third implementation year. Because of Reading First mandated training opportunities and complications related to a pregnancy, the remaining Title teacher missed several days of school during the school year. Ms. Scott believed factors such as these created difficulties for classroom teachers expected to “pick up the slack” for meeting the needs of struggling students. Because there were not many students with low enough skill levels to require Tier 3 intervention instruction the district’s Title teacher had been able to help classroom teachers with Tier 2 students. Ms. Scott’s contention was that classroom teachers “don’t always have the time for Tier 2” and that “if something gets slighted during the day, it’s Tier 2.” She said anytime that Ms. Potter was out of the building for training or for personal reasons “those kids miss the

time and the teachers complain about that.” She said the problem was pervasive in small schools like Forest Valley.

So, I don’t know how you solve that and I especially don’t know how you solve it in a small school where you just don’t have... there’s no one... and Penny, my Title [teacher] has K-6. There’s no one to help her and if she’s gone you can’t stick a sub in there. We don’t have subs anyway so... you know? What’s the solution? I don’t have one.

Another factor impacting Reading First implementation across the state examined in this study relates to the difficulty of replacing teachers and administrators who leave a Reading First school with someone else who has had Reading First experience. Ms. Scott pointed this out as especially problematic when she left Forest Valley to take a supporting role at the regional level. She said when she left there was essentially “no one to hire.” She explained that it is not feasible to hire someone who has not had Reading First training “because they don’t know enough to go into a year three school.” By the time districts have implemented the program for two years classroom teachers have had enough training and experience that they would know more than the coach who is supposed to be guiding them.

At the end of Forest Valley’s third year of Reading First implementation both the superintendent and the principal, along with several teachers and the reading coach, chose not to renew their contracts. Forest Valley is currently beginning its fourth year of implementation with staff that has had little to no training in either reading or in implementing the program.

Materials. Forest Valley teachers did not have any comments about the materials they are using in their district either in the general education classrooms or for Tier 2 or Tier 3 intervention.

Training or previous experience. As mentioned earlier, Mr. Monroe did not have a background in elementary education before coming to Forest Valley. He admitted this was a significant concern for him as he dealt with some of the administrative aspects of implementing the Reading First program. For example, while grant requirements mandate the use of a particular classroom observation tool, he did not feel particularly confident in his ability to judge teachers' classroom instruction in the area of reading. Even as he realized he had come a long way in increasing his knowledge base in this area he was still uncomfortable judging others' knowledge and skills.

Ms. Scott talked about teachers' prior training and background knowledge for teaching reading. She stated that none of the teachers at Forest Valley had come from a college program that had prepared them for their current teaching assignments. It was her belief that the state's Colleges of Education "are not turning out teachers that are ready to go teach reading" and stated that even though the school's "2nd grade teacher has her Master's... [she] doesn't know a thing about reading other than what she's learned with Reading First."

She was also concerned about what she perceived as a lack of knowledge and skill for working with students who struggle to learn to read. She argued that teachers "know we should teach to what the problem is" but they have had no training in strategies for doing so. Ms. Scott believes, there is "not enough specialized training" provided by

Reading First administrators at the state and regional levels “in that area.” She said, “We give them training on programs but not necessarily on how to understand learners.”

She praised the Title teachers who she felt had a better understanding of reading and who, she also believed, were more committed to Reading First implementation, at least in the first couple of years, than the classroom teachers. She felt fortunate in having them on her “team.” She described them as quick learners who were “very confident” and “willing to do whatever we needed them to do.”

Principal Monroe expressed his opinion that professional development and technical support provided for Reading First implementation was undoubtedly the most beneficial aspect for teachers in his school. He said he did not “think any of this would have been what it is had we not had all the professional development that came with it.” He described the school’s ongoing involvement with professional development in areas such as data analysis and the five components of effective reading instruction. He described the emphasis on increasing their knowledge and skills in reading as “just constant.”

Will

Confidence

Even as teachers struggled with initial implementation in their school, Principal Monroe saw a significant change in morale as teachers became more confident in their knowledge and skills for implementing the program. He said things started to shift “about midway through the second year” when teachers and administrators from other schools came to observe Forest Valley’s Reading First program. Title I teacher, Penny Potter agreed that teacher morale increased over time. She acknowledged feeling that teachers

“didn’t realize the benefit of it” during their first year. She believed teachers felt better about Reading First as they became familiar with materials and got comfortable with what they were doing in their classrooms. She noted that they felt empowered by their ability to converse easily about the program when visitors came to Forest Valley.

[It] helped us feel more confident because we were able to sit and talk and use the language that we’ve learned through Reading First and they were looking at us like, ‘What? What does that mean?’ And it was like, ‘Oh, well, yeah we understand it and we can talk about it like it’s... second nature.’ And so that kind of helped.

She believed that increases in comfort levels with the materials and the structure of the Reading First program as a whole had helped change teachers’ beliefs and attitudes over time. She said they were also starting to get a feel for analyzing student learning data.

They’re starting to... ‘I know that that kid has a problem and this might be what it is. Let’s see if we can figure it out.’ Because they have the experience of... you know this is our third year... We’re starting to see the trends... and they’re starting to know what goes with what.

She also discussed changes in her own confidence level in relation to the work she was doing with struggling students. The year before she had thought, “How do I put all this stuff together?” But she now realizes that her teaching focus has to be on one or two areas students are struggling to learn. “I have to... get in there and figure out what it is that they’re not getting and go from there. And now I’m kind of like, ‘That’s my job. That’s what I have to do.’ And then do it.” She said having specialized training in a particular reading intervention program had also helped validate her feelings of

effectiveness. She realized then, “Oh, I *am* doing the right thing. I *am* going at the right pace.” Even as teachers thought the students she was working with should be reading at higher levels because of her instruction, the training had helped her understand that “no, we really can’t be.” She said she felt like, “Phew! It *is* a slow process.”

Values

Ms. Potter expressed teachers’ concerns that she was often pulled from providing Tier 3 instruction to substitute for teachers who were absent. It was her contention that this practice sent a clear message to teachers that reading was not as important to administrators as they let on.

Results

Ms. Potter pointed out that teachers were becoming more committed to implementing Reading First as they began to see increases in student learning outcomes. She said they were feeling “pretty good” after they had started “seeing the results of it” and that now they “can look at the data and... see where our efforts are paying off.” They were particularly excited that results indicated none of Forest Valley’s third grade students had scored in the bottom level of the state standardized assessment and that current fourth graders had also not dropped from the year before. She said “that was exciting for us to see and it’s kind of like there really is a point to all this [work] we’re having to do.”

She said there had also been a significant change in teachers’ attitudes about using data to make decisions about individualizing student instruction. Where teachers had been decidedly unwilling to use data to guide instruction during the first implementation year, they had become excited about trying to understand student strengths and

weaknesses. She indicated that was “a big shift from last year where it was, ‘We’re not looking at that data. We’ve done it – they’re yellow – we’re just moving on.’ She said it was nice to see this kind of “paradigm shift of how the data really does tell us what we need to know” in their attitudes.

Mr. Monroe expressed his belief that teacher attitudes had shifted dramatically as a result of realizing the positive effects of Reading First implementation. He said that as everyone began to appreciate how student achievement was moving up they felt better about the fact that even though they “still had a long way to go” they were making progress.

Table 1: Dimensions of Efficacy along Organizational and Individual Factors

Sweet Oak			Forest Valley		
	Level			Level	
	Hi	Lo		Hi	Lo
Context					
Response to change	x				x
Conditions for Implementation	x				x
Organizational Culture	x			x	
Collaboration	x				x
Cooperation/collegiality	x				x
Shared responsibility	x				x
Leadership	x				x
Style/beliefs	x				x
Change management	x				x
Resource allocation	x				x
Trust	x				x
Org. & Ind. Capacity		x			x
Time		x			x
Personnel	x				x
Materials	x			x	
Prof. development/Exp	x				x
Will					
Confidence	x			x	
Values	x				x
Results	x			x	
Piney Ridge			Summervale		
	Level			Level	
	Hi	Lo		Hi	Lo
Context					
Response to change	x				x
Conditions for Implementation	x				x
Organizational Culture	x			x	
Collaboration	x				x
Cooperation/collegiality	x				x
Shared responsibility	x				x
Leadership	x				x
Style/beliefs	x				x
Change management	x				x
Resource allocation	x				x
Trust	x				x
Org. & Ind. Capacity	x				x
Time		x			x
Personnel		x			x
Materials	x				x
Prof. development/Exp	x			x	
Will					
Confidence	x				x
Values	x				x
Results	x				x

SUMMARY

Context

External Environment

The communities in which the schools in this case study reside are similar in several ways. Census and/or school data indicates the population of each to be predominantly white ranging from a low of 94.7% to a high of 98.65%. Sweet Oak reported just over 4% of their student population to be African-American. Census data in the other three communities reveals African-American populations ranging from 0% to 0.36%.

Two of the communities, Sweet Oak and Forest Valley, are essentially made up of a small group of homes, a post office and a school district. Forest Valley is the larger of the two as far as area within town limits. It has named streets and more amenities including a ball field and a couple of churches. While each supports a handful of small businesses, parents find employment and do their shopping for the most part in surrounding communities. The other two communities, Piney Ridge and Summervale, appear to offer more amenities to their residents. There are many more homes and several businesses in both communities. While Summervale has many nicer homes surrounded by well-kept lawns lined up along tree-lined streets, the streets of Piney Ridge are marked by large potholes surrounded on each side, in many neighborhoods, with run-down houses and lawns strewn with neglected toys and discarded junk. While Summervale has fewer businesses, it is within driving distance of two much larger communities to which residents can easily commute to work and to shop. Piney Ridge businesses provide, for

the most part, seasonal work for residents that depend on weather and adequate conditions for visitors coming there for floating and canoeing trips on several area rivers.

According to 2000 United States Census Bureau data, the percentage of the population of Forest Valley, Summervale, and Piney Ridge considered to be living below the poverty line were 6.0%, 14.1% and 25% respectively. Except for that provided by the school district (listed in the next section), there are no data for poverty levels for the Sweet Oak community.

Internal Environment

The school populations of the four elementary buildings included in this study range from a low of approximately 80 students to a high of just under 400 according to the district directory available on the state education agency website. This is somewhat deceptive, however, in comparing districts since Sweet Oak includes kindergarten through 8th grade in their student population and the other three include either kindergarten through 5th or kindergarten through 6th grades in theirs. The race and ethnic demographics of the student populations reflect that of the community as listed in the previous section.

Poverty rates reported to the state education agency, however, are not reflective of the data mentioned earlier since the reported rate for schools is dependent on services sought by parents from community agencies rather than by data reported to federal census collectors. While poverty rates in Forest Valley were reportedly 6.0% according to the U.S. Census Bureau, school data reveals this number to be 35.53% for the initial grant application year. Summervale's U.S. Census Bureau data was 14.1%; school data showed 66.32%. Piney Ridge, with a U.S. Census Bureau rate of 25% reported school data at

87.8%. With no available U.S. Census data, Sweet Oak school data indicated 37.11% of students living at or below the census poverty level.

Incidence rates for students receiving special education services are perhaps more significant in analyzing environmental impact on implementation in Reading First schools because of state education agency (SEA) pressure to include special education students in Tier 1 instruction. Additionally, SEA policies leaving discretion for Tier 3 implementation to local districts is significant in how variation in doing so impacted teachers' feelings of efficacy for getting valued outcomes from their students. While the 2006-2007 state average incidence rate for all special education students was 14.25%, the 2006-2007 reported incidence rates for the four cases included in this study included Summervale at 23.05%, Sweet Oak at 18%, Piney Ridge at 17.80%, and Forest Valley at 15.79%. The predominant disability category across the nation is Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) with the 2006-2007 state average SLD rate in this case falling at 5.27%. The SLD rates for the four cases included herein were Summervale at 12.39%, Sweet Oak at 7.50%, Piney Ridge at 3%, and Forest Valley at 8.55%.

During the three years prior to Reading First eligibility, the state average of percentages of third grade students reading "below grade level" on the state-mandated Communication Arts assessment ranged from a low of 64.7% to a high of 68.4%. These averages fell at a low of 63.9% to a high of 77.5% at Piney Ridge; 34.6% to 91.8% at Summervale; 79.1% to 84.5% at Sweet Oak; and finally 36.4% to 100% at Forest Valley.

The state average student-to-classroom teacher ratio over the five-year period between 2003 and 2007 fell at 18.4 to one. The average for Sweet Oak fell at 16.6 to one; Summervale fell at 16.2 to one; Piney Ridge fell at 14.4 to one; and Forest Valley fell at

9.8 to one. The state average student-to-total teacher ratio over the same period fell at 13.4 to one. The average for Sweet Oak fell at 12.8 to one; Summervale fell at 9.6 to one; Piney Ridge fell at 9.8 to one; and Forest Valley fell at 7.4 to one.

Internal Response to Change

While teachers at Forest Valley were told they *would* be implementing a Reading First program in their school if funded, those in the three other cases were at least included to some degree in initial decision-making processes for applying to receive state funds.

Teachers at Piney Ridge did not necessarily remember how they were initially approached about the grant but admitted trusting their leaders to be concerned about student learning and innovative in how they created learning opportunities for teachers. Because the principal had initiated collaboration and use of assessments to inform instruction for struggling students prior to applying for grant funding, teachers had already become accustomed to changes similar to those required by Reading First implementation. Teachers were “pretty strong from the beginning in supporting it” and having survived the “growing pains” that come with putting a program of this magnitude in place, were “excited” about the results of their efforts.

Much like Piney Ridge, Sweet Oak teachers were enthusiastic about results they were seeing because of Reading First implementation. A couple of them had been, however, very involved in initiating and implementing their program from the beginning. The district’s reading coach indicated that applying for grant funds had never been a “controversial” issue and that teachers were thrilled to have the money they would need to purchase materials to improve reading instruction. Once they got into actual

implementation, though, they realized just how “overwhelming” a job it was. Several veteran teachers had more difficulty adapting than did those with less experience. As teachers retired or moved to positions less impacted by Reading First requirements teacher response to implementation became easier for leaders.

Even as teachers were involved in initial application and implementation processes, Summervale’s Reading First program was negatively impacted by misunderstandings and changes that came about as state education agency personnel attempted to establish some sort of consistency for implementation across schools. One teacher, in particular, talked about agreeing to the program because she thought she and her students would not be involved in it. She described feeling she had been “lied to” about the program, feeling unsupported in her efforts to help implement it, and not included in decisions that had a significant impact on her daily experiences at the school.

Forest Valley teachers felt much the same as did those at Summervale. They were not included in initial decisions to apply for funding, felt they had lost all control of their classrooms, and were overwhelmed with the amount of work they had to do. They were essentially hostile all through the first three years of implementation. They are currently starting their fourth year of implementation with nearly all new staff including their reading coach, Title I teacher, classroom teachers, principal and superintendent.

Conditions for Tier 3 Implementation

Implementation variance was found in the following areas:

- how teachers and administrators determined eligibility for Tier 3 instruction;
- program materials utilized for instruction;

- location of services;
- variation in intensity of instruction based on numbers of students in instructional groups; and
- time of day instruction is provided.

In all four cases, students eligible for and receiving special education services were included in Tier 1 “core” instruction in general education classrooms. Because they had no kindergarten through third grade students receiving special education services, however, this did not become an issue for Forest Valley until their third implementation year when a student with an IEP transferred into the district. Since they had not previously been faced with this situation, district administrators had no idea how to handle Reading First instruction for the student. Both Sweet Oak and Piney Ridge were able to integrate special education students into Tier 1 instruction without much difficulty. In both schools special education teachers provided Tier 3 instruction for students eligible for special education services. Piney Ridge implemented the Tier 2 supplemental instruction component so effectively that they had very few students needing Tier 3 instruction. This helped them tremendously in terms of meeting student needs with the personnel they had available. Summervale had the most difficulty with Tier 3 instruction. Both Summervale and Sweet Oak had only one teacher providing services for special education students in their elementary schools. The Summervale teacher worked with students in kindergarten through sixth grades while the Sweet Oak teacher worked with kindergarten through eighth grade students. Even though Summervale Elementary had over 100 fewer students than Sweet Oak, the latter had approximately 4% fewer students receiving special education services. Additionally,

while the incidence rate of Sweet Oak special education students under the “mental retardation” category was reportedly 1.25%, the percentage of students in the same category at Summervale was 2.59%. Teachers providing all tiers of reading instruction at Summervale referred often to their frustration in trying to bring about valued outcomes for this group of students. Scheduling issues also caused tremendous pressure for the special education teacher at Summervale.

Organizational Culture

Collaborative problem-solving and shared decision-making. Piney Ridge principal, Helen Harris, worked hard to establish professional learning communities (Hall & Hord, 2001; Scribner, Cockrell, Cockrell, & Valentine, 1999) in which teachers and administrators could work together to increase student learning outcomes. She was able, over the course of several years, to move teachers who were uncomfortable working collaboratively to positions where it was not as important to do so. Sweet Oak teachers seemed to fall naturally into this sort of mutual effort to increase student achievement. All four people interviewed in this school had special education backgrounds from the assistant principal to the special education teacher herself. All had been trained to differentiate instruction and thus had a good understanding of teacher needs in terms of resources and scheduling that Tier 3 providers would need to feel effective. Reading coach, Sally Denver, talked about training teachers as Tier 2 and 3 providers and then switching them into general education classrooms in subsequent years so that they had a greater appreciation for what it takes to meet the learning needs of struggling students. She felt this practice helped create a culture wherein teachers were better able to work together to solve problems and make decisions to increase learning outcomes. Tier 3

teachers at both Forest Valley and Summervale talked about issues that lead to feelings of isolation and frustration. While one talked about classroom teachers actually indicating to her that their work was separate from what they expected her to do, the other described situations in which decisions were made about either her work or her students without her input. The situation at Sweet Oak got better during the third year of implementation when data meetings were finally established whereby the principal, classroom teacher, reading coach and Title teacher would meet to discuss student learning problems and coordinate efforts to meet individual student needs. Title teacher, Penny Potter, was particularly excited about working together in this way. On the other hand, Summervale teachers indicated there was little to no collaboration for solving problems. The reading coach explained she and the principal thought it best to leave the program as it had initially been set up for at least two and a half to three years to see if it would work before making substantial changes. While teachers and administrators at other schools met to discuss factors impacting student learning, reading coach, Linda Lawson indicated their monthly meetings were more about sharing ideas.

We talk about what's working and sometimes I'll ask, "Ok, how do you teach this?" And if I see something good going on I might say, "You know, share with us how you did that because I thought that was a really good idea."

Cooperation and collegiality. Scheduling is evidently the most problematic issue of implementing a tiered instructional delivery model such as the one required for Reading First. Not only is there not enough time in a school day, but it is difficult to work around how teachers want to schedule other instruction for their students. This was no exception in the four schools examined in this study. Teachers at Piney Ridge were

enthusiastic about the nature of interaction among teachers and administrators in their building. Because of the way they handled the Tier 2 component of Reading First teachers worked together in teams of four for 50 minutes every day. One person talked about the cooperation and flexibility that had become a part of the culture as a result. In the other three cases Tier 2 and 3 providers were responsible for scheduling those components with classroom teachers. While this was not an extreme problem at Sweet Oak, it took a lot of time away from instruction to “work around the conflicts.” By the end of their fourth year of implementation the principal sat down with the reading coach, classroom teachers and Tier 3 provider to work out a schedule for the upcoming school year. Reading coach, Sally Denver, said that took a huge load off her in terms of negotiating with teachers for time to work with their students. Tier 3 provider, Penny Potter, described teachers’ attitudes toward her attempts to provide support for students at Forest Valley. They did not understand why she did not want to group students whose skills did not match in one session of instruction. Since she was the only person providing services for the vast majority of Tier 3 students, there was not enough time for her to help as many teachers with Tier 2 instruction. They were unhappy with the situation which it appeared caused friction between and among teachers. Scheduling was probably the most contentious for Tier 3 providers at Summervale. While there were two Title I teachers in the building to split up the workload this was not the case for special education. With only one teacher, scheduling was significantly stressful. She had to manage not only her caseload of K-6 grade students but also worked hard to support Tier 1 instruction for her students in general education classrooms and to provide Tier 3 instruction for another hour each day. Tier 1 reading instruction was scheduled for all grade levels at the same

time. Classroom teachers, in some cases, refused to cooperate in changing instruction time so she could fit students into her schedule and, she explained, the principal would not intervene on behalf of her argument that she could not provide effective instruction. The special education teacher was essentially running in circles trying to provide services for as many students as possible with little to no cooperation from the administrator or classroom teachers.

Shared responsibility and support for outcomes. Teachers and administrators at both Piney Ridge and Sweet Oak indicated there is a sense of shared responsibility and support for student learning outcomes in their buildings. This was particularly evident at Piney Ridge where administrators meet formally with grade level teachers every week and with grade level teachers and Tier 2 and 3 providers monthly to discuss their data. Principal Harris talked about “dissecting” their data to try and figure out why students were not learning and about taking responsibility herself for a group of students that were not advancing as quickly as teachers would have liked. This sort of collaboration was implied by teachers and administrators at Sweet Oak but was not as obvious as at Piney Ridge. Tier 3 providers at Summervale and Forest Valley indicated teachers’ feelings that there was little shared responsibility and almost no support from administrators for learning outcomes. Forest Valley teachers were particularly bitter that their only Tier 3 teacher was pulled to substitute whenever another teacher was absent. They complained that administrators were holding teachers but not themselves accountable for increasing student achievement. Summervale teachers felt they were essentially on their own in trying to bring students’ skills up so they could reach end-of-year benchmarks on their

DIBELS assessment. They were stressed and frustrated with the attitude that teachers “would just have to ‘deal with it’” when they asked for help.

Leadership

To a large extent, leadership and management duties were shared by principals and reading coaches in each of the four schools. In two cases, Sweet Oak and Forest Valley, the reading coach appeared to have a greater role in terms of making decisions for implementation than they did at Piney Ridge and Summervale.

Put in charge for the most part for oversight of their Reading First program, Sweet Oak Assistant Principal, Lisa Robinson, indicated she left much of the management of their program up to reading coach, Sally Denver. She admitted that while she came to meetings to support the basic ideas of Reading First, she would leave the day-to-day decision-making to their coach. She supported Ms. Denver’s efforts by telling teachers to do “what she said” to do. By the end of their fourth year of implementation, Ms. Denver reported that Principal, Joe Baker, became more involved with scheduling. Always in charge of allocating resources, Mr. Baker had made sure teachers had what they needed as far as materials. As time went on, Ms. Denver indicated they realized she needed a little more support with allocation of personnel resources. Mr. Baker stepped in to help with that. Otherwise, Reading First implementation seemed to be running smoothly in their district.

Administrators at Forest Valley relied, in large part, on reading coach, Marin Scott’s expertise in reading to guide implementation of their program. She left the district after two years to take a position supporting Reading First implementation at the regional level. In that position she was able to continue supporting Forest Valley’s efforts to put

their program in place. Teachers and administrators struggled with implementing Reading First in this district. Teachers continued throughout the first three-year cycle of implementation to resent having had the program “forced” on them. They did not have the personnel resources they needed and they did not feel that administrators were serious about ensuring positive student learning outcomes.

The coach at Piney Ridge was not available for an interview but the principal spoke highly of her ability to serve as a liaison and sounding board for teachers as they struggled to put their program in place. She said that even though teachers were not necessarily hesitant about coming to her regarding implementation problems, the reading coach seemed to be the first one they turned to with their issues. The coach was retiring at the end of the school year and Principal Harris worried that both she and teachers would sorely miss her presence and help with their program.

At Summervale both the principal and the reading coach seemed to be somewhat disengaged from what would be considered leadership for guiding implementation of their Reading First program. There did not appear to be a vision guiding their actions nor did they seem to understand the paradigm shift required in relation to how teachers and leaders work together to ensure high levels of student learning. They were more interested in micro-managing what teachers did in terms of lesson plans and such, but not at all concerned with issues that undermined teachers’ beliefs that leaders were doing what was best for their students.

Style and beliefs. Leadership styles across the four schools in this study varied from limited managerial involvement in Reading First implementation to nearly total immersion in the processes of ensuring positive student learning outcomes. While

Summervale principal, Norma Simpson, micromanaged teachers in relation to issues like lesson plans that actually had little to no impact on student learning, Helen Harris worked with teachers, the reading coach and other administrators at Piney Ridge on a daily basis to influence outcomes. She essentially knew where every child was in acquiring reading skills and worked diligently to try and figure out what needed to be done to get them where they needed to be in order to become proficient readers. Charged with the responsibility for overseeing Sweet Oak's Reading First program, Lisa Robinson exhibited different leadership behaviors for different situations. Not only did Ms. Robinson, but so too did Principal Baker and Superintendent Michaels, trust subordinates to be professionals and to do their jobs to the best of their abilities. They were aware of their data as far as student learning was concerned and worked to ensure teachers had what they needed to increase achievement. There was no one leadership style guiding Reading First implementation at Forest Valley Elementary. Principal Monroe struggled to overcome the impact of Superintendent Jim Hardt's top-down authoritative style which had angered teachers from before the district even acquired funding for their program. Mr. Monroe's lack of experience in elementary instruction and in dealing with implementing a program as complex and as different as Reading First is for veteran teachers created significant problems for getting the program up and running at Forest Valley. Even as Ms. Scott worked pragmatically to put pieces of the program in place, teachers had to be confused by the mixed messages they were getting in terms of who to follow and what to believe.

How managing change and policy ambiguity shaped the culture. Implementing change, especially in the case of an innovation as complex as Reading First, takes both leadership and management (Duke, 2004). How either one, or both, is manifested can have significant impacts on how people experience change. In two of the cases examined in this study, administrators exhibited behaviors that had a positive influence on how teachers perceived Reading First implementation, in the other two cases administrative behaviors had the opposite effect.

Teachers at both Forest Valley and Summervale Elementary schools felt their input was essentially disregarded when it came to making decisions about putting Reading First programs in place. Forest Valley teachers were put off at being told their school *would* be implementing Reading First and were especially perturbed when they found out teachers in other schools were included in basically all decision-making processes related to their programs. Summervale teachers felt they had been lied to by state education agency personnel when, in fact, district administrators were the ones who had made implementation decisions teachers found most upsetting. It appeared that Summervale's principal and reading coach did not try to correct teachers' incorrect perceptions but, in fact, used the belief that the state agency would retaliate to threaten teachers. Teachers believed Reading First funding would be pulled and that the district would have to re-pay already expended funds if they did not comply with policies they felt undermined their abilities to increase students' learning outcomes.

While teachers and administrators at Sweet Oak believed they were compelled by the state education agency to include special education students in Tier 1 "core" instruction, they experienced negligible difficulties adapting to required changes. This

may have been the case during the early years of implementation since their students' disabilities were not so severe that teachers were overwhelmed when it came to differentiating instruction for them. Teachers and administrators worked out any conflicts that arose. Piney Ridge principal, Helen Harrison, believed including special education students in Reading First implementation was the "right thing" to do for their students rather than the required thing to do to meet state or federal agency requirements. While teachers may or may not have believed inclusion in general education instruction was the best placement for students, they could not argue that decisions were being made based on arbitrary opinion. At Piney Ridge decisions impacting student outcomes were made collaboratively based on student learning data.

Allocating resources to support teachers' efforts. The factor most often cited as detrimental to teachers' efforts to get valued outcomes was not having enough personnel to provide small group instruction for the number of students needing it. At times this situation could have been eliminated, or at the very least, assuaged through administrative efforts to control scheduling conflicts. Piney Ridge principal, Helen Harris, talked about the "nightmare" of creating a schedule that ensured every classroom had 50 minutes of Tier 2 "push-in" instruction every day. She also made sure the schedule included teacher collaborative planning time so that teachers could engage in collective inquiry and make decisions about instruction to effectively meet student learning needs. At Sweet Oak, teachers worked out conflicts among themselves until the end of their fourth year of implementation when they decided it took too much instructional time each fall to do so. At that point, Principal Joe Baker, took control of working out the schedule with teachers

in the spring so that Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction would be up and ready to go as soon as school started.

Summervale teachers struggled a great deal with scheduling issues. They believed they had to simply “deal with” what they had been given since administrators were nonresponsive to both quantitative student learning data and to qualitative data from teacher input on why they believed they were unable to get valued outcomes. Teachers at Forest Valley also struggled with the problem of limited personnel not so much because they were making poor scheduling decisions but simply because they did not have enough people on staff to meet the demands of implementing a Reading First program.

Trust. At least one Piney Ridge teacher used the word “trust” in referring to the ways in which administrators have worked with teachers over the years to initiate change in their district. Both Piney Ridge and Sweet Oak teachers and administrators exhibited behaviors indicative of a culture based on mutual trust (Covey, 2006). Administrators in these two districts showed teachers, by their actions, that they were serious about student learning outcomes. They provided resources, including their own hard work, to ensure that teachers’ efforts were successful. They listened to teachers’ concerns and did whatever they could to alleviate implementation problems. This was not the case at Summervale and Forest Valley. In those schools, teachers felt they were on their own to “deal with” whatever implementation problems arose. In some cases those problems were directly connected to administrative decisions made without teacher input. Administrators were essentially non-responsive in several cases to teachers’ concerns that implementation strategies were not working. This behavior led teachers to believe that motivation for initiating Reading First in their schools was not what district leaders had

espoused it to be (Covey, 2006). In these two cases, teachers' initial reservations about implementation had been ignored because, administrators claimed, Reading First would provide what children needed to become proficient readers. When no one paid attention to the factors teachers believed undermined their abilities to bring about valued student learning outcomes, however, this argument was diminished and any trust leaders may have accumulated as a result of past behaviors was weakened considerably (Covey, 2006).

Organizational and Individual Capacity

Time. Due to the nature of a tiered instructional delivery model, there is simply not enough time in the school day, as it is currently structured in most schools, to “get everything done.” Reading First implementation requires at least two and one-half hours of reading instruction for some students every day. All students are to receive Tier 1 “core” instruction in their general education classrooms. Students who are struggling with particular skills or concepts receive an additional 30 minutes of instruction each day. This instruction can be provided by classroom or other teachers in the general education classroom or students can be “pulled out” for extra instruction. Students who are unable to master skills after several weeks of daily 30-minute Tier 2 sessions are subsequently provided an additional 60 minutes of Tier 3 intervention instruction every day. General classroom teachers who sometimes loathe teaching lessons more than once try to work schedules so that students pulled out for Tier 3 will not miss classroom instruction. With state mandates requiring students not miss “specials” classes like music and art teachers complain that they have no time to teach anything other than reading and math. Tier 2 and Tier 3 teachers complain that they do not have enough time to provide effective

instruction so that all the students assigned to them can reach benchmarks on progress monitoring assessments. Time to achieve what teachers feel they need to achieve is currently not available in any of the schools examined in this study.

Personnel. Lack of personnel was one of the most significant issues impacting teachers' feelings of efficacy for bringing about valued learning outcomes for students in their schools. Allocation of personnel resources along with scheduling made a substantial difference in how teachers were able to cope with work loads.

Piney Ridge Elementary had the least amount of difficulty with this aspect of implementation. With two Title I and two special education teachers, they were pleased with the number of people they had available to "push-in" to general education classrooms for Tier 2 instruction. But even as teachers were able to meet the learning needs of most students through this model, Title teacher, Mia Simms still worried that there were not enough people to provide effective Tier 3 instruction for one group of students.

Even though they had only one Title I and one special education teacher to provide services in the school with the most students in this study, Sweet Oak Tier 3 teachers did not appear to be stressed about their situation. Reading coach, Sally Denver, explained a strategy she had used over the years that seemed to help in that regard. While Tier 3 teachers in other schools were also expected to help provide Tier 2 instruction, Ms. Denver had had a different Title I teacher each year they had implemented their program. Those teachers had been subsequently moved into general education classrooms where the training and experiences they had gained through working with Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction through Title I made them better equipped to provide Tier 2 instruction for

students in their classrooms. This strategy was helpful in lessening the workload on the remaining teachers assigned to provide Tier 3 instruction. In addition to the one Title and one special education teacher, Ms. Denver also provides instruction for Tier 3 groups. She was the only coach in this study scheduled to do that as part of her regular Reading First responsibilities.

While Summervale had two Title I and one special education teacher, one of the Title I teachers did not provide services for Reading First implementation. Tier 3 intervention instruction, for special education students, was handled by the special education teacher and a third grade teacher who had a substantial number of special education students in her classroom. The remaining Title I teacher worked with any other students requiring Tier 3 instruction. The special education teacher at Sweet Oak had four students for whom she was responsible to provide both Tier 1 and Tier 3 instruction. The number of students Summervale special education teacher, Janet Jones, had on her caseload was significantly larger. In addition, she went into general education classrooms to support special education students during Tier 1 instruction and worked with 4th through 6th grade students providing Tier 3 instruction as well as instruction in other subjects. On top of everything else she was responsible for two profoundly handicapped students and was the special education coordinator in charge of testing for the entire district.

Forest Valley Elementary also had considerable problems related to limited personnel to provide services for struggling students in their district. For the most part, Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction was provided by one Title I teacher. Because the district was often unable to find substitute teachers, this teacher was often pulled from working with

struggling students to cover classrooms when someone was absent. General education teachers were upset when Ms. Potter was unable to take students for small group instruction. They felt unable to provide extra help for students even though most of them had only ten or eleven children in their classrooms

Materials. One of the major purposes of Reading First funding is the purchase of materials based on scientifically based reading research. For the most part teachers in each of the four cases felt they had enough materials for implementing Tier 3 instruction. Some did not necessarily feel the materials their districts had decided to purchase were the best materials for meeting the learning needs of their particular students. Overall, adequacy of materials was not a problematic issue for teachers. Most were thrilled with the resources Reading First had provided their schools.

Training or previous experience. While most Tier 3 teachers felt adequately prepared to provide instruction for struggling students, one teacher expressed frustration in that respect. Classroom teacher, Kari Salmons, noted she had never taught reading before being assigned to a position as one of two third grade teachers at Summervale Elementary. At the time of our interview she was nearing the end of her second year in that position and her sixth year as a teacher. She had spent the first four years of her career teaching math in 4th and 6th grade classrooms. She said she had been overwhelmed with learning everything she needed to know about teaching reading and that any training she had received through Reading First had been geared toward working with “normal” children. She was upset that she had had no previous experience or training for working with the seven special education children in her classroom. She felt she had learned a significant amount of information about how to deal with low functioning students but

that administrative expectations for those students were unreasonable and that she had been left on her own “to deal with it.”

Will

Confidence

Teachers in three of the four cases talked about feeling more confident with Reading First practices over time. The first implementation year was difficult because everyone had so much to learn. In many schools, teachers had done whatever they wanted to do to teach reading. There was little to no cohesiveness in either the curriculum or teaching practices across classrooms and between grade levels. Everyone had to learn the materials in their new reading series’ and attend multiple trainings related to how children learn to read. Teachers were simply overwhelmed with new information and with trying to do everything they needed to do in their classrooms. As they became more familiar with materials and more confident in using them, they were less stressed. The tiered instructional delivery model started to make sense and they were able to begin utilizing data to make instructional decisions. Teachers in three of the four cases talked about feeling better about Reading First in that respect. Teachers at Summervale, however, did not talk about feeling more confident with what they were doing to implement the Reading First program in their school.

Values

Tier 3 teachers in both Piney Ridge and Summervale had concerns about whether or not low functioning special education students should be included in Tier 1 “core” instruction in general education classrooms. While Piney Ridge teachers were somewhat concerned that students were not getting what they really needed in terms of increasing

basic living skills, those at Summervale were more vocal in denouncing the policy as “ludicrous.” The special education teacher, in particular, felt that students who were working hard to improve their skills were continuously reminded of their limitations when forced to be measured by the same benchmarks as their higher functioning peers.

Additionally, Summervale Title teachers who had been trained in Reading Recovery were not convinced that Reading First was the best program for all students. One talked about her frustrations that other state education agencies allowed Reading First schools in their states to use Reading Recovery while schools in the state examined in these cases did not.

Results

Teachers and administrators in each of the four cases talked about positive student learning outcomes they had seen as a result of their efforts to implement Reading First. Summervale was the only school where negative opinion of program implementation was such that any positive outcomes resulting from implementation efforts were essentially overshadowed. Teachers and administrators in the other three cases were proud of the progress they had made but realistic about how far they have yet to go to be what they believe that can become.

CHAPTER FIVE

Findings, Conclusions, and Implications

Introduction

Implementation of educational innovations is a complex endeavor influenced by any number of individual and organizational factors (Berman, McLaughlin, Bass, Pauly, & Zellman, 1977; Elmore, 1978, 1979; Guskey, 1988; Huberman & Miles, 1984). Even as implementation research findings indicate policy success is most directly impacted by two key factors – local capacity and will (McLaughlin, 1987), “policy-directed change ultimately is a problem of the smallest unit” (McLaughlin, 1987, p. 171). Substantial resources have been expended over the years to increase individual and organizational capacity to implement change (Guskey, 2000). Whether or not individuals and organizations are *willing* to change, however, is not as easily addressed.

While federal mandates, in the form of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), have created a sense of urgency for making substantive changes to increase student learning outcomes, the law also held out the promise of government assistance for doing so. Policymakers designed the Reading First initiative so that state and local education agencies would have substantial resources to build individual and organizational capacity for utilizing scientifically based reading research to guide instruction for students in primary grades. In that respect, educators in Reading First schools have been given the opportunity to gain the knowledge and skills they need to make a real difference for students in their classrooms. Various evaluation findings have determined the efforts put into Reading First implementation were paying off in some schools. In others, however, the results were not as promising. The findings of this study substantiate that of numerous

others focused on examining the implementation of new policies and programs in organizations – that is, that change is exceedingly difficult and that numerous factors oftentimes get in the way of positive outcomes (Berman, McLaughlin, Bass, Pauly, & Zellman, 1977; Guskey, 2000; Huberman & Miles, 1984).

Examination of implementing change is not simply to acknowledge that barriers exist but rather to figure out ways to get around them (Fullan, 1993). Initial observations of implementation efforts in Reading First schools in the state examined in this study suggested varying changes in teachers' attitudes and behaviors over time and across schools. Intrigued by why that might be happening and what it could mean for sustainability of efforts as well as student learning outcomes, I decided to look for factors to explain what Reading First specialists and consultants were observing. The purpose, therefore, of this study was to gain a better understanding of factors teachers believed either enhanced or constrained their abilities to increase student learning outcomes within the context of implementing a complex federal initiative. Such insight might then be utilized to guide future efforts for implementing change in our nation's schools.

Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) suggest that research design should be guided not only by the questions we have about a particular problem, but also by one's *reason* for executing the study at all. Because this study was focused primarily on understanding individual experiences and resulting perceptions constructed in relation to the implementation of Reading First, explanatory case studies served as the primary means for examining factors perceived to either enhance or undermine teaching efforts. The following questions guided this study:

1. What factors do teachers implementing Tier 3 intervention instruction believe enhance their teaching abilities and efforts?
2. What factors do teachers implementing Tier 3 intervention instruction believe constrain their teaching abilities and efforts?

Discussion of Findings

Of the four cases examined in this study, teachers in two schools described factors that enhanced their abilities and efforts to increase student learning outcomes while those in the other two talked about those that constrained their abilities and efforts in that respect.

In explaining the Reading First programs in their schools, Sweet Oak and Piney Ridge teachers were enthusiastic about:

1. Adequate personnel for meeting student learning needs;
2. Decision-making processes for removing barriers to positive learning outcomes based on data, including teacher input;
3. Collaborative efforts for meeting student learning needs;
4. Resources they had received for putting new teaching practices in place; and
5. Shared responsibility for increasing student learning outcomes.

Teachers in these schools felt supported by administrators. They felt like valued members of the teams in their schools believing their input was crucial to program success. They believed the hard work they had put into implementing Reading First was worth it because they had been able to increase learning outcomes for students who had historically struggled to acquire reading skills. They were, in many respects, able to

achieve something they had never been able to achieve before. Students, teachers, parents and administrators were excited about what was happening in these two schools.

Teachers at Summervale and Forest Valley, on the other hand, were much less enthusiastic about the promise of utilizing research-based practices to increase student learning outcomes. Factors they felt constrained their efforts included:

1. Limited personnel available to meet the learning needs of struggling students;
2. Utilization of decision-making processes that were not based on available data, including teacher input;
3. Isolation and lack of cooperation among teachers;
4. Administrators were unresponsive to perceived barriers to positive learning outcomes; and
5. Lack of a feeling of shared responsibility for outcomes.

Teachers in these two schools were discouraged and seemed exhausted by their efforts. Even as there was some admission that Reading First had produced positive results, particularly at Forest Valley, teachers did not necessarily believe it had been worth what they had had to endure. There was a feeling that teachers would be happy to go back to what they had been doing before receiving Reading First funds.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Implementing Change

In “lessons learned” from 1970s Rand studies examining the implementation of federal education initiatives, researchers found that the success or failure of program implementation rested essentially on factors that impacted teachers in their classrooms (Berman, McLaughlin, Bass, Pauly, & Zellman, 1977; McLaughlin, 1987). Even as

Reading First was designed to build individual teacher capacity for putting research-based reading instruction in place at the classroom level, design components meant to increase building-level capacity for supporting teachers in doing so were lacking.

Superintendents and principals in the state examined in this study were required, for example, to attend professional development opportunities provided for building teacher capacity. The rationale for this requirement was to increase administrative capacity for recognizing and supporting research-based teaching practices in classrooms. The implication for including administrators was essentially two-fold. The more significant reason was to increase knowledge about the complex nature of teaching children to read so that leaders would be able to remove barriers to positive student learning outcomes. This was especially crucial for students who struggled most to acquire reading skills; their teachers were the key participants in this study. The second reason was to ensure implementation fidelity when state or regional facilitators were not available to oversee implementation. Fidelity of implementation is particularly important for replicating outcomes of research-based practices and strategies (Torgesen, J., Myers, D., Schirm, A., Stuart, E., Vartivarian, S., Mansfield, W., Stancavage, F., Durno, *D.*, Javorsky, R., & Haan, C. (2006).

Even as, however, administrators were included in teachers' professional development opportunities as well as provided substantial information related to sustainability of efforts, they did not appear to understand the implications of ensuring positive experiences for teachers in relation to increasing student learning outcomes. In his seminal work on evaluating the impact of professional development on teaching practices and student outcomes, Guskey (2000) made a salient point in this regard.

Many improvement efforts in education fail simply because they are unclear or misleading about the kind of organizational support required for change. As a result, educators end up trying to implement innovations that they do not fully understand in organizations that do not fully support their efforts (p. 149).

Inasmuch as individuals have influence over factors impacting implementation so too do organizational dynamics affect how individuals act in response to policy initiatives (Elmore, 1978; 2004; Huberman & Miles, 1984). Tier 3 teachers, in the cases examined in this study, were greatly impacted by how they experienced implementation of Reading First programs in their schools. Their actions revealed subsequent feelings of efficacy in relation to what they perceived to be valued outcomes related to student learning.

The human side of change

In looking at the nature of change in education, Evans (1996) posits that the success of proposed change depends, in large part, on whether or not “educators make the necessary changes in practice and beliefs” (p. xi) for putting it in place. While teachers and administrators in Reading First schools essentially have little to no choice when it comes to making required changes in their practices, changes in beliefs are not so easily achieved. As McLaughlin (1987) so succinctly puts it, “policymakers can’t mandate what matters” (p. 172). If then, we are to achieve reform in light of “the extraordinary effort it requires,” leaders must understand that “a genuine respect for the sober realities of experience is crucial to success” (Evans, 1996, p. xv). In other words, we have to build leadership capacity for understanding not only the impact of individuals’ experiences on implementation success or failure but also how leaders’ actions and behavior in guiding change efforts influence those experiences. Sustainability of change depends in large part

on whether or not values, beliefs, and norms are in line with the intent of a policy, program or practice (Elmore, 2004; Guskey, 2000; McLaughlin, 1987). Leaders have substantial power in changing the norms in their buildings. The norms they choose and how they go about making such changes can to a large degree shape the values and beliefs of followers. As Piney Ridge principal, Helen Harris, put it, however, doing so is “not for the weak of heart.”

Stephen R. Covey (2004) posits that “every organization is perfectly aligned to get the results it gets.” He explains that how we *see* the world determines what we *do* and that subsequently what we *do* determines what we *get*. The results then ultimately corroborate our worldview and the cycle repeats itself until we essentially decide, for one reason or another, to change what we are doing. No Child Left Behind’s Reading First initiative provided government incentive to compel schools to change what they *do* in regards to teaching young children to read. Funding for this initiative did not simply “throw money” at schools in the hope that someone would know how to use it to make a difference (Elmore, 2004). The program was designed rather to provide extensive technical assistance to state and local education agencies for ensuring they would know *what* to do to increase student learning outcomes. It was designed as well to hold state and local education agencies accountable for actually using the knowledge. In other words, Reading First sought to change what teachers *do* in their classrooms. It did not, however, address the other “broad factor” McLaughlin (1987) offered as essential for successful implementation of new programs and that is the *will* or commitment necessary to sustain them. That was the ultimate question guiding this study. What impacts the *will* to continue the changes in teaching practices called for by Reading First? What impacts

the way teachers *see* the world in relation to teaching young children to read? Teachers, reading coaches, and administrators in every school examined in this study talked about the increases in student learning that had resulted from their efforts to implement Reading First in their schools. While some were more excited than others, most were encouraged that they could indeed make a significant difference for the children in their classrooms. For some, this was a revelation. These teachers had, at least to some degree, felt there was little they could do to increase achievement because of the environmental and familial factors impacting student learning. Many teachers and administrators did not recognize until after Reading First implementation that poor instruction and lack of early intervention for struggling students had been more significant causes for the difficulties students were experiencing in relation to becoming proficient readers. Once, however, they realized the benefits of utilizing effective instruction and implementing an instructional delivery model that prevented reading difficulties from becoming disabilities they “wouldn’t do anything else.”

Self-efficacy

Bandura (1977) defines self-efficacy in terms of one’s belief in having the personal capacity to achieve valued outcomes from expended efforts. He offered this construct as a “unifying theory of behavioral change” and argued that experiences of “mastery arising from effective performance” are more significant in “effecting psychological changes” than are cognitive processes believed to influence human behavior (p. 191). Bandura maintained that the concept of self-efficacy could be utilized as a significant predictor therefore of behavioral change as people come to realize the impact of their efforts in bringing about expected outcomes.

Within Bandura's (1977) theoretical analysis of this construct, *efficacy expectations* are distinguished from *outcome expectancies*. While outcome expectancy is defined in relation to one's estimation that a specified behavior will result in certain outcomes, an efficacy expectation refers to "the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcomes" (p. 193). The differentiation of these two concepts is significant in that one's belief "that a particular course of action will produce certain outcomes" will not influence behavior if a person doubts his or her personal ability to perform the necessary activities to produce such outcomes (p. 193). Bandura (1997) explains that "unless people believe they can produce desired effects by their actions, they have little incentive to act. Efficacy belief, therefore, is a major basis of action" (p. 2). Key in this statement is Bandura's (1997) contention that people must believe their actions can produce desired results in order to have the motivation necessary to act in accordance with either internal or external goals.

Bandura (1997) posits that perceived self-efficacy influences several areas of action including the amount of effort a person is willing to exert in relation to a task, perseverance in the face of obstacles, and how he or she copes with challenging environmental pressures. Of significant interest in relation to policy or program implementation is Bandura's contention that individuals "will not attempt to make things happen, if they believe they have no power to produce results" (p. 3). He posits that "much of psychology is concerned with discovering principles about how to structure environmental influences and enlist cognitive activities to promote human adaptation and change" (p. 4). This point is particularly salient when examining factors perceived by

teachers to either enhance or undermine their beliefs that they can achieve valued outcomes for students struggling to acquire a skill as essential as learning to read.

At Summervale Elementary, working conditions for Tier 3 teachers created considerable barriers teachers believed precluded them from increasing student learning outcomes. Sweet Oak and Piney Ridge administrators, on the other hand, were responsive to teachers' concerns and subsequently worked to remove perceived obstacles. In those cases teachers' feelings of efficacy for increasing students' skills were substantially higher than were those at Summervale and Forest Valley. When faced with other implementation difficulties Sweet Oak and Piney Ridge teachers trusted that administrators would address them. Beliefs and attitudes about Reading First continued to be positive in these two schools as they continued to improve their program to get better results. This was not the case for Summervale and Forest Valley teachers where administrators were not as responsive to factors perceived to undermine learning outcomes. Reading coaches at both Summervale and Forest Valley talked about the impact of high teacher turnover rates on Reading First implementation. While the Forest Valley coach recognized this as a consequence of teachers' frustrations with Reading First implementation, there was no admission on the part of Summervale leaders that teachers were struggling with Reading First implementation in their school.

Changes in beliefs and attitudes

Much has been made of the notion that successful implementation of innovations must be supported by initial teacher buy-in (Berman, McLaughlin, Bass, Pauly, & Zellman, 1977; Huberman & Miles, 1984). This contention must have been considered important by policy makers designing Reading First since teachers were compelled to

sign forms stating they were in agreement with moving forward. In a re-examination of the findings from the 1970s Rand studies, McLaughlin (1991) admitted, however, that there were times when changes in beliefs followed changes in practice. This follows Guskey's (1988) theory of attitude and perceptual change which posits that changes in teaching practices become a catalyst for changes in teachers' beliefs, attitudes and perceptions about their students' as well as their own abilities. If such changes lead to positive student learning outcomes, negative attitudes are more apt to change to positive ones. The same can be said when positive feelings become negative ones as a result of failed efforts. Guskey believes then that commitment or rejection of a teaching practice is based on teachers' experiences with that practice. We tend to keep those practices which provide "demonstrable results in terms of students' performance" (p. 445) and drop those that do not. It would follow from such a premise, Elmore (2004) argues, that "context matters."

If most of what teachers learn about practice they learn from their own practice, it is imperative to make the conditions and context of that practice supportive of high and cumulative levels of achievement for all students (p. 111).

In schools where teachers' experiences with Reading First implementation resulted in what was perceived to be valued outcomes, teachers were excited and committed to Reading First. They alluded to the differences in what they knew before implementation about teaching children to read and how what they had learned as a consequence of the program had made such a positive difference in their teaching. They were empowered by what they had been able to do to increase student learning for even the most difficult-to-reach students. In schools, however, where teachers faced daily

obstacles in bringing about high levels of student learning, teachers were discouraged, ready to give up and several moved on to other schools. They did not believe in Reading First, were not committed to the idea that utilizing research-based instruction would make a difference for their students, and in some cases still believed that environmental and familial factors had a greater impact than teachers. What these teachers “learned” from their experiences was that teaching still could not make a difference.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

Policymakers designing the Reading First initiative of No Child Left Behind attempted to leave no stone unturned in providing the resources and technical assistance state and local education agencies would need to put their programs in place. They provided funding for: state-level administration; local acquisition of research-based materials, professional development, and reading coaches; and regional centers to provide professional development for state-level facilitators. They required state education agencies to apply for federal funding and set strict standards based on the use of scientifically based reading research for allocating funds. Each state, in turn, was required to develop stringent guidelines for local funding and implementation. Local education agency requirements in the state examined in this study included a provision that local administrators had to attend all professional development opportunities provided for teachers. It appears the motivation for such inclusion was to ensure administrative and organizational support for implementation. This aligns with Guskey’s (2000) contention that “without a systemic approach, organizational factors can hinder or prevent the success of improvement efforts” (p. 149). He points out that “unless individual learning

and organizational change are addressed simultaneously and support one another, the gains made in one area may be cancelled by continuing problems in the other” (p. 149). Even as those providing technical assistance for implementing local Reading First programs attempted to stress this point, evidence indicates there was not a clear understanding that “local capacity to support change is central to implementing reform” (Lappan, 1997). Superintendents and building principals may or may not have grasped the significance of their actions in relation to teachers’ experiences with Reading First implementation. Sweet Oak and Piney Ridge administrators worked diligently to support teachers’ efforts. They held teachers accountable for working collaboratively to ensure increases in student learning outcomes. At the same time, teachers understood that leaders in these two schools shared responsibility for outcomes. The message from Summervale and Forest Valley administrators, on the other hand, was that teachers were essentially on their own. Summervale’s principal and Forest Valley’s superintendent appeared to have little patience with or understanding of teachers’ concerns about implementation. Summervale’s principal went so far as to let teachers know they would just have to “deal with it.” It seemed to me that differences in administrators in these four cases was related to their beliefs and attitudes about not only “how things work around here” but also to their beliefs and attitudes about students. Both Sweet Oak and Piney Ridge administrators had strong special education backgrounds. Both served as special education directors in their schools along with their duties as principal or assistant principal as the case may be. They both talked about differentiating instruction to meet the learning needs of individual students. As one so succinctly put it “if the student isn’t learning, *you* need to do something different. You need to find out *why* it’s not working.

Sweet Oak and Piney Ridge administrators looked to solving problems at the problem level rather than at the teacher or student level. When things were not working, it was not the teacher's fault or the student's fault. There was something wrong with the system. They were aware of everything that was going on with students and teachers in their schools. They knew which students were struggling with particular skills or behaviors. They knew which teachers were struggling and worked to solve problems. Forest Valley and Summervale administrators did not think this way. While the Forest Valley principal worked hard to support teachers, he essentially did not know *what* to do when teachers were struggling. He was hampered by an authoritative superintendent who, like Summervale's principal, was not empathetic to teachers' concerns and not particularly worried about student learning – at least not on an individual level. Administrators at both Forest Valley and Summervale were focused on the funding Reading First afforded their districts.

Recommendations

In his latest work on implementing change, Fullan (2008) declares, “give me a good theory over a strategic plan any day of the week” (p. 1). His favorite definition of the construct is offered by biologist David Sloan Wilson (2007) who contends, “a theory is merely a way of organizing ideas that seems to make sense of the world” (p. 16 as cited in Fullan, 2008, p. 16). Fullan suggests reform efforts must be accompanied by theories that enable us to understand what is happening within the context of those efforts. The best such theories, he contends, “are at their core solidly grounded in action” (p. 1). In the cases examined in this study, Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy works well in helping us understand the impact of teachers' experiences on their beliefs and attitudes

about implementing new teaching practices. When they can “see where [their] efforts are paying off” it makes a difference in how they view the work. At the same time, when working conditions are such that teachers feel they can do little to be successful, they are more apt to simply give up trying. Fullan explains then that “good theories are critical” in helping us appreciate the “underlying reason... [or] thinking behind actions and their consequences” (p. 16). Utilization of Bandura’s theory to reflect on working conditions and the impact of administrative behavior on teachers’ feelings of efficacy could serve us well in developing and providing more effective technical assistance to schools engaged in reform efforts. To that end, it would seem more qualitative research is needed to help us understand *why*, that is, under what conditions teachers’ feelings of efficacy are impacted either positively or negatively within the context of implementing a particular innovation. Of particular interest in respect to the findings from this study would be research to answer questions related to differences in technical assistance and administrative efforts for implementing Reading First. For example,

1. What sorts of activities did regional facilitators in different regions utilize to help administrators understand the impact of their actions on teachers’ experiences for implementing Reading First programs?
2. How did regional facilitators perceive administrative efforts to support Reading First implementation?
3. What factors do administrators believe either enhanced or constrained teachers’ efforts and abilities to get positive student learning outcomes?

As policymakers design future reading initiatives, hopefully based on research findings, they must take into consideration that schools do not have the capacity to fund

adequate numbers of personnel to meet the learning needs of children who struggle to acquire reading skills. If the ultimate purpose of Reading First is to provide appropriate and adequate instruction for our most at-risk populations of students, we cannot just rely on knowing *what* to do. We have to be able to *do* it. Reading First calls for the use of scientifically based research to teach children to read. Part of the research guiding program design was the finding that to be effective Tier 3 instruction should be provided in groups of no more than three students. It did not provide funding, however, to ensure this could be achieved. Teachers worked hard to learn new practices. They worked hard to put them into place. They were willing to follow research dictates if it would make a difference for students. Sometimes it did and sometimes it did not. More often than not, personnel capacity was a major factor when it did not work. If state education agencies do not have the political will to change funding formulas to provide for equity of opportunity, there is little choice but to increase federal intervention.

We must utilize the best knowledge we have to ensure children learn to read. There is no other skill as critical to the well-being of our citizenry than the one on which all other knowledge is built. Teachers can only do so much with what they have. If they cannot achieve valued outcomes through their efforts they have little incentive to act and little hope of making a difference in the lives of the children they teach. Elmore's (2002) principle of "reciprocity of accountability for capacity" calls us to support teachers in those efforts. He contends "for every increment of performance I demand from you, I have an equal responsibility to provide you with the capacity to meet that expectation" (p. 5). The Reading First initiative sought to increase capacity for utilizing scientifically based reading research findings in our nation's classrooms. The findings of this study are

but tiny steps toward gaining a better understanding of the factors teachers perceive to either enhance or undermine their efforts and abilities to effectively put that knowledge into practice. While these findings cannot be generalized to all settings, they may be useful in similar settings as teachers and administrators work to implement future policy initiatives to increase student learning outcomes in their schools.

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VITA

Vicki Logan Myers was born on June 6, 1952 in Quincy, Illinois. She lived in LaBelle, Missouri with her father, mother, and brother until graduating from LaBelle High School in 1970. She started her college career at the University of Missouri that fall receiving a B.S. in Special Education in 1975 and a M.Ed. in Special Education in 1980. She has worked on a PhD in Education Policy Studies for most of the 21st century.

She and her husband, Sam, have four grown children, Samuel, Jill, Kelly, and Nick and a grandson, Cole Hunter Lee Peleuses on the way. They currently reside in Columbia but their hearts call Baring Lake in Baring, Missouri “home.”

Vicki was a teacher for 24 years. She taught special education students in seven different school districts in Missouri as well as in the Fairfax County Public Schools while her husband worked at the Clinton White House. She spent two years at the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education as a Special Education Compliance Supervisor. She currently provides professional development for teachers and administrators through the Heart of Missouri Regional Professional Development Center. She specializes in early literacy, remediating reading disabilities, and implementation of a Response to Intervention instructional delivery model. She plans to use her knowledge and skills in the coming years to make a difference in the lives of the children who need it most.