Innovative Collaborative Cultures: Bridges to Successful High School Reform

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How can educational leaders create and nurture a culture of learning and safety in an organization?

Introduction

As the Great Depression of the 1930s held Americans in its grip educator, historian, social and political activist George Sylvester Counts boldly electrified listeners with a call to reformative action (Urban, 1978, preface in Counts, 1932). In "Dare the School Build a New Social Order?" a compilation of several powerful speeches, Counts framed the critical educational and economic issues of his time as issues of security. America of the 1930s, like America of today, was a society of great contradictions. Dire poverty and starvation existed side by side with extravagance, abundance, and deliberate waste. Counts recognized that despite severe economic depression, America in the 1930s possessed technological and industrial capabilities to ensure basic needs of food and shelter for all Americans. He wrote, "We hold within our hands the power to usher in an age of plenty, to make secure the lives of all, and to banish poverty forever from the land. The only cause for doubt or pessimism lies in the question of our ability to rise to the stature of the times in which we live" (Counts, 1932, p. 32-33).

In another of the many similarities to 21st century America, Counts observed that "our generation has the good or the ill fortune to live in an age when great decisions must be made" (ibid., p. 33). He noted that economic, political, and social power was "inextricably bound" to educational power, and that teachers should eagerly grasp the power to positively influence social attitudes, ideals, and behaviors of young people. Teachers, embedded in the schools, were in a unique position to bridge the gap between school reform and social reform, with the potential to insightfully shape public discourse. He states, however, "…the power that teachers exercise in the schools can be no greater than the power they wield in society" and he challenged teachers to seize the opportunity to face social issues squarely and courageously (Counts, 1932). Teachers who live with courage, intelligence, and vision could "become a social force of some magnitude" (ibid. p. 25). "We have a haunting feeling", Counts wrote, "that we were born for better things and that the nation itself is falling far short of its powers." George Counts died in 1974, but the issues about which he wrote continue to be critical issues for us today. He would likely support Thernstrom and Thernstrom's (2003) assertion that our failure to provide excellence in education for all our youth is the central civil rights issue of our time. He likely would agree with the Thernstroms (ibid.) that the division of Americans into haves and have-nots continues to be the unhealed wound of our time.

High school reform is at the top of the education policy agenda. The *what* that must be done, the *how* it must be done, and even *whether or not* we will commit to doing it is a crucial focus of debate. Minority students from urban schools are most at risk of entrapment in schools that have been called dropout factories. The racial gap in academic achievement is an educational crisis as well as a source of ongoing racial inequality, "America's great unfinished business" (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). Every high school in America today must face these issues, as George Counts would say, squarely and courageously. Even in affluent schools, one dropout is unacceptable; one graduate unprepared to enter college is unacceptable. Counts would likely also be in the middle of modern discourse about the definition of an educated citizen and he would certainly have much to contribute to the modern debate surrounding the purpose for which we educate our youth in a P-20 framework. Hargreaves and Shirley (2008) provide an analysis of the progress of educational research and practice over the last five decades.

They insist that educators build on the best of what we have learned without retreating to the worst, describing the evolution of reforms as a series of waves. A first wave of reforms sought to raise student achievement through course and testing mandates; a second wave focused on improvements in teaching and teacher education; a third wave focused on defining standards for learning while restructuring schools to produce significantly better outcomes. Now in the fourth wave, high school reform with teacher excellence at the very core appears to hold the greatest promise. America's ability to compete depends on our ability to prepare students for success in an increasingly knowledge-based economy. Counts asked, as we ask today, "For what are we educating American children?" We agree on very few of the murky philosophical questions that lay before us, but for students who don't graduate from high school outcomes are clear and devastating.

The most encouraging development regarding high school reform is that the right kind of continuous structured teacher collaboration improves the quality of teaching and pays significant, immediate dividends (Schmoker, in DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, Eds., 2005). There is a growing clarity and consensus about the mission of high schools in America; that all students must graduate with the ability to do college-level work. Since 2006 the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) has made high school reform one of its top legislative priorities. Several themes emerge in that policy paper: innovation on the part of teachers and other leaders; rich, meaningful curriculum; increased rigor, and student engagement characterized by persistence in the face of difficulty. Again, Counts' (1932) words are relevant to our time: "In their own lives teachers must bridge the gap between school and society and play some part in the fashioning of those great common purposes which should bind the two together (Counts, 1932).

While recognizing that much controversy surrounds complex issues of student achievement and accountability, Schmoker (in DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, Eds., 2005) reminds us that we share the desire to help children learn, to reduce the achievement gap that exists along racial and economic lines, and to persistently refine the complex work of teaching in all schools. In the decades since George Counts' death in 1974, his work continues to speak as sharply as ever to the economic, social, and educational issues of our time. "If schools are to be really effective they must become centers for the building, and not merely for the contemplation, of our civilization" (Counts, 1932). Bold calls to reformative action continue in the 21st century. Schmoker (in DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, Eds., 2005) reminds us that we cannot put high school reform away for a later time. Professional learning communities, implemented and sustained with fidelity, offer an opportunity that is both practical and affordable. Our success could reculture the profession of public education.

Theoretical Framework

Counts (1932) foreshadowed current socio-educational theory and the reculturing of schools as professional learning communities when he stated, "The man who would live unto himself alone must retire from the modern world" (p. 46). Schmoker (in DuFour, Eaker, DuFour, Eds., 2005) proposes that schools designed according to the simple, powerful concept of professional learning communities offer our most practical and affordable opportunity to redefine education. Indeed, during the last 20 years researchers have explored the professional learning community model as a promising organizational framework for school change and sustainability. The professional learning community model emerged from Peter Senge's learning organization theory explored within the business setting. Senge's seminal work, *The Fifth Discipline* (1990), described the essential components of a learning organization. Senge believed that the 5 dimensions of systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, and team learning build organizations that "truly 'learn' and can continually enhance their capacity to realize their highest aspirations" (Senge, 1990). As business leaders and researchers investigated the potential of the learning organization to support sustained success within a changing environment, educational researchers and practitioners developed and refined the professional learning community as a theoretical and practical learning organization model (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hipp & Huffman, 2010; Hord 1997; 2004; Kruse, Louis, and Bryk, 1995; Newman and Wehlage, 1995).

In the forward to *Reculturing Schools as Professional Learning Communities* (Huffman & Hipp, 2003) Shirley Hord stated, "A community of continuous learners – professional learners – is a key element of school capacity, a way of working, and the most powerful professional development and change strategy available for improving our education system" (p. vii). Huffman, Hipp, Shrode, Waldrip, and Dorff (2010) defined the term with a focus on sustaining teacher and student learning; thus, professional learning communities are defined as "Professional educators working collectively and purposefully to create and sustain a culture of learning for all students and adults" (slide 27).

As research continued studies have suggested that development of professional learning community within the school culture is making a difference in student learning. "There is a growing consensus that professional learning communities play a key role in building individuals' and schools' capacities for continuous and sustainable learning in a rapidly changing world" (Stoll, Robertson, Butler-Kisber, Sklar, & Whittington, 2007, p. 63). Schools as professional learning communities are places where the cultural norms of collective learning and collaborative and supportive relationships are fostered within the context of shared leadership, shared values and vision, and shared professional practice. Hipp and Huffman (2010) define the professional learning community as an organization where professional educators work "collectively and purposefully to create and sustain a culture of learning for all students and adults" (p. 12). The framework of the professional learning community culture builds upon five dimensions: shared leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application of learning, shared personal practice, and supportive conditions fostered by relationships and organizational structures (Hord, 1997; Hord & Hirsch 2008; Huffman & Hipp, 2003; Hipp & Huffman, Eds., 2010).

DuFour, Eaker, DuFour, and Karhanek (2004) focus teachers on critical guiding questions of *student* learning. "Exactly what is it we want all students to learn? How will we know when each student has acquired the essential knowledge and skills? What happens in our school when a student does not learn? (pp. 21-27). In the same way Hipp & Huffman (Eds., 2010) focus us on necessary prerequisite questions of *teacher* learning, "What are you learning? Why are you learning that? How are you learning? How are you disseminating your learning?" (pp. ix-xii). Success in school and the school's ability to adapt to change so that students may achieve is determined by a variety of factors of which a collaborative culture is extremely important (Fullan, 2001; Sergiovanni, 2000). Creating cultures within schools supportive of success for all students is complex and evolves in different ways within changing social, political and economic environments (Fullan, 2007). Although the daily continual improvement of student and teacher learning within this context of change happens at the local school level, Fullan (2005) suggests that a professional learning community *at large* is essential to whole school culture reform.

The development of sustainable professional learning communities at the school level must occur within this *at large* context. Collaborative relationships, staff support, organized data, and organizational structures shared among local, district, regional and state levels provide the necessary components for fostering a learner focused school culture found in sustainable professional learning communities. Fullan (2005) continues by stating district leadership must foster a a collective moral purpose, organize the structure and roles most effectively, provide ongoing leadership for those in key roles, and formulate strategies where schools learn from each other (lateral capacity building). They pursue deeper learning agendas, appreciate that conflict is part and parcel of moving forward, raise expectations of all to achieve more, and seek external partners and resources that enable them to go even further.

Leadership becomes paramount in developing professional learning communities embedded within the context of district and school cultures. Sparks (2005) emphasizes the importance of how leadership shapes "a school or system's structure and culture in ways that promote learning, collaboration, and environments in which all members feel cared for and respected" (p. 157); thus, relationships become foundational to all collaborative efforts. "Knowledge sharing fuels relationships" (Fullan, 2001, p. 76), and thereby creates a culture of safety. Supportive knowledge sharing cultures do not occur by chance but are planned and developed through purposeful change oriented leadership at both the district and school levels. Fullan (2001) noted "change leaders work on changing the context, helping create new settings conducive to learning and sharing that learning" (p. 79). He elaborates further, "School systems, in any case, would be well advised to name knowledge sharing as a core value…work on the barriers and procedures to dramatically increase its use" (p. 205).

Through knowledge and systematic data sharing focused on student learning districts foster a culture where leadership is nurtured and the organization improves over an extended period of time (Kruse & Seashore Louis, 2007). Creating this leadership involves "slow learning over time" (Fullan, 2001, p. 119) and requires establishing structures and practices focused on district level student learning (Eason-Watkins, 2005). Monthly principal professional development for increasing knowledge sharing and instructional leadership capacity and the use of accessible data to all stakeholders are structures which support shaping learner focused decisions at the district, school and classroom levels (Eason-Watkins, 2005; Blacklock, 2009).

Methodology

The research design of this case study used a mixed methods approach. The mixed methods approach is described by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) as "a class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts, or language in a single study" (p. 17). This approach allows the researcher to use both quantitative and qualitative measures to study the same set of questions, collect corresponding data and conduct parallel analyses (Yin, 2009) which adds depth and richness to the study. With permission of district and campus leadership, this case study allowed for the examination of how educational leaders create and nurture cultures of learning and safety at the district and campus levels. Wichita Falls Independent School District (WFISD) is a mid-sized public school district in north central Texas. Hirschi International Baccalaureate High School is one of three high schools in the WFISD. Quantitative and qualitative data were used to review and describe the on-going process of initiating and implementing deep change in the cultures of the district and the campus. Longitudinal analysis of the results of two administrations of the Professional Learning Community Assessments (Olivier, 2003; Olivier, Hipp, & Huffman, 2008) yielded insights into changes in perceptions of campus faculty regarding five critical dimensions of professional learning communities.

Interviews with key district leaders involved in initiating and implementing professional learning communities (PLCs) throughout the district were conducted, analyzed, and reported. The interviews were conducted with the Board of Trustees President, Assistant Superintendent and District Director of Staff Development. Interviewing added richness and rigor to the study by gathering descriptive data from the district level perspective so that insights can be developed concerning the context by which schools may develop into PLCs (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Observations of one author/participant added richness to the study, while objective analysis was ensured by reviewing pertinent district and campus documentation. Through data triangulation this study sought to improve how well the findings matched reality by collecting data from multiple sources (Merriam, 1998). Mathison (as cited in Merriam, 1998) supports triangulation as a process by which a holistic understanding of the phenomena studied can be constructed through data collected from a variety of sources. Thus, district documents, interviews, longitudinal questionnaire data, and personal insight developed a clearer picture of how the district and school cultures have changed in relation to the PLC model.

Context

Wichita Falls is a north central Texas community of 103,000 people located on the southern border of the Red River in the midst of dozens of smaller communities. The economic base of the city has suffered from recent departures of large industries. Wichita Falls' economic base is currently derived in large part from a health care industry that serves the region, a state prison, Sheppard Air Force Base, several manufacturing plants, and Midwestern State University. The predominant ethnic breakdown of the community is 74% white, 12% African American, and 14% Hispanic.

The Wichita Falls Independent School District serves approximately 14,480 preschool thru 12th grade students in thirty five schools. WFISD employs approximately 1100 teachers, 225 support personnel and 73 administrators. At the secondary level the district supports three high schools, one alternative educational school, two secondary career centers, and a cooperative juvenile justice alternative education center. WFISD enjoys support from several local philanthropic foundations that provide funding for post-baccalaureate teacher education, classroom grants, student activities, and student and faculty incentives. In the mid-1990s the district was released from decades of federal court oversight related to desegregation orders of the 1970s. WFISD emerged as one of only a few districts in Texas to offer parents free choice of school enrollment, choice which continues for all WFISD secondary schools. Four years into district-wide implementation of the concepts of professional learning communities, the Wichita Falls ISD and Hirschi International Baccalaureate High School provide an opportunity for timely analysis of multi-year high school reform efforts.

In the WFISD, white students make up 51% of the student enrollment, 27% of students are Hispanic, 18% are African American, and 2.5% are of Asian/Pacific Island descent. 54% of students in the WFISD are economically disadvantaged, determined by eligibility for free or reduced priced meals. The district is overseen by the Board of Trustees and the WFISD Superintendent functioning as a *Team of Eight*. Five of the seven trustees are elected within single districts; two trustees are elected at-large. Under the Texas Education Agency's Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS), the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) is administered to students beginning in 3rd grade until an Exit exam is mastered, ideally in the 11th grade.

Using TAKS assessment results, Texas districts and schools are ranked according to four levels of achievement: *Unacceptable*, *Acceptable*, *Recognized*, and *Exemplary*. The WFISD has consistently achieved an *Academically Acceptable* rating until 2010 when the district achieved a *Recognized* rating.

In response to the unavoidable competition of school choice in Wichita Falls during the 1990s, district and campus leadership developed magnet school options. Hirschi High School added a strong math and science curriculum and opened a multi-million dollar technology plaza providing students access to high-level, technologically integrated curriculum. Students were provided opportunities to graduate with majors in aviation, medical, and multimedia in addition to the traditional high school diploma. In addition, Dr. Robert Mobley, principal at Hirschi High School from 1997 to 2005, led Hirschi's successful efforts to become an authorized International Baccalaureate school. The introduction at Hirschi High School in 1998 of the academically rigorous 11th and 12th grade curriculum for which IB is known also created the disappointing but predictable reality of a school-within-a-school. By 2003 Dr. Mobley had crystallized recognition among district and campus leaders of the necessity to ensure access to the IB curriculum to all students so that by 2007 three new WFISD schools had been authorized to provide the IB Primary Years Programme (PYP) and the IB Middle Years Programme (MYP) from Kindergarten thru 10th grades.

Hirschi International Baccalaureate High School continues to serve a primarily economically disadvantaged (64%), racially balanced student population (38% African American, 32% White, 26% Hispanic). Since 2003 Hirschi High School has been rated *Academically Acceptable* by the TEA's Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS), a rating that hints at the acceptability of marginal graduation rates and the absence of a post-high school focus. Hirschi also consistently met federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Adequate Yearly Progress standards until the spring of 2008, when the results from the Math portion of the state assessment indicated lack of adequate progress. The faculty faced resulting pre-Stage 1 sanctions with the determination to avoid decline into Stage 1 status the following year. Hirschi's faculty balanced mandatory, prescriptive correctional procedures and in-depth data disaggregation with leadership's commitment to continuing the school's efforts toward reculturing as a professional learning community. Spring 2009 state assessment results provided welcome evidence of the soundness of the commitment to the concepts of learning communities. Although still labeled *Academically Acceptable* by the Texas Education Agency, the rating is no longer assumed by faculty to be the best that Hirschi High School can achieve.

Case Study: Wichita Falls Independent School District and Hirschi High School

Counts (1932) stated that forward progress in education can have little meaning in the absence of clearly defined purposes and direction; we can never be so satisfied with movement in circles that we neglect the question of direction. He likened educators to a "baby shaking a rattle, utterly content with vigorous, noisy action" (p. 6). Almost sixty years later Senge (1990) emphasized the necessity of clarity of focus on the desired destination and fidelity of alignment with the values and vision of the organization. To clarify our beliefs, we continue to report our research, fieldwork, and observations from the district and school perspectives. We believe that reculturing schools as professional learning communities (PLCs) results from a whole school focus and efforts based on the five PLC dimensions, with participation by all professional staff (Huffman, et al. 2010).

Five Dimensions of Professional Learning Communities

Shared and Supportive Leadership that is nurtured among staff; power, authority and responsibility is shared; decision making reflects commitment and accountability

Shared Values and Vision with norms formally established; student learning is the focus; high expectations exist; shared vision guides teaching and learning

Collective Learning and Application so that information is shared; new knowledge, skills, and strategies are collectively and collaboratively learned; teachers work collaboratively to plan, solve problems, and improve learning opportunities

Shared Personal Practice including peer observations and sharing of knowledge, skills, and encouragement; feedback improves instructional practices; outcomes are shared; coaching and mentoring are practiced

Supportive Conditions-Structural so that resources such as time, money, materials, and people are efficiently and effectively shared

Supportive Conditions-Relational where people care about each other; trust and respect guide interactions; recognition is celebrated; risk taking is encouraged; change is accepted

We also believe that the clearly focused, persistent progress espoused by Counts, Senge, Hord and others is in a longitudinal look at both the Wichita Falls ISD and Hirschi High School. The following information is a chronological 8-year summary of the plans, strategies, actions, and results of the efforts of educators in the Wichita Falls ISD and at Hirschi High School.

2003-2004

WFISD – For a number of years the WFISD Board of Trustees had recognized that leadership development was one means of increasing student achievement. In 2003 trustees were presented with the opportunity to bring in new leadership aligned with their vision. A new assistant superintendent, Dr. Tim Powers, was tasked with developing instructional leadership throughout the district. Through the following email communication Dr. Powers described his initial efforts:

> The first thing we did as a group of instructional leaders was to create an understanding for the need to have educators to meet to discuss student achievement. We spent the entire year as administrators, reading and studying about the need to meet and discuss this topic…we used, and continue to use the DuFour's book, *Whatever It Takes* to create the atmosphere for implementing professional learning communities.

Dr. Powers immediately implemented a monthly leadership development study using *Creating Powerful Learning*, a publication of the Texas Principals Leadership Initiative with presentations of material shared by all principals in the district. Four additional professional publications were purchased for principals at district expense that first year. Campus planning guidance was provided and a document was developed and distributed for use in summarizing and sharing information from conferences attended. Dr. Powers recruited a number of elementary principals to participate with him in a series of parenting workshops, "Making Children Mind Without Losing Yours". Powers and Dr. Jan Bennett, Director of District Staff Development, began parallel monthly leadership development meetings with assistant principals. Articles regarding assessment and grading philosophies were introduced for the first time. This was an effort to rethink district practices and was consistently noted over each year of this review. Lexile frameworks and administrator/teacher accountability frameworks, *Leveled Assessments*, were introduced which would also become a familiar component of the district's improvement plan.

During 2003-2004 16% of Dr. Powers' monthly principal meeting agenda items directly related to professional learning communities. Hirschi High School – Primary focuses of campus leadership during the 2003-2004 school year included familiarization of faculty with the re-tooled state assessment, now called the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) before its first administration in the Spring of 2004; efficient administration of newly acquired grant funds; continued professional development for teachers in the 11th & 12th grade IB program; attraction of students to participate in the unique aviation, multi-media, and medical magnet programs offered at Hirschi.

2004 Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) % of student mastery
WFISD *Academically Acceptable*
HHS *Academically Acceptable*

2003-2004	District	HHS All	AA	His	Wht	Ec Dis
ELA	88	84	81	78	88	78
M	77	61	48	47	77	46
Sc	74	77	63	65	90	61
SS	92	90	86	86	94	81

Attendance						
2004	95.8		95.3	96.6	93.6	95	94.5

Graduation						
2004	87.9		91.5	94.8	85.1	91	88.4

Note. Values in blue indicate campus performance higher than district performance.

Hirschi's population of white students was clearly benefiting more from the learning environment of the school than all other sub-populations, especially in the math and science areas. District and campus attendance rates are relatively similar, but graduation rates of Hispanic and economically disadvantaged students, though higher than the district average, are the lowest at Hirschi High School.

2004-2005

WFISD – Campus principals continued to actively participate in monthly leadership development components, including analysis of each principal's leadership style as measured by the Martin Operating Styles Inventory. Outstanding teachers from all campuses were recruited to participate throughout the year in a Teacher Leadership Development Cohort. Interviews were conducted for this study with Board of Trustees President Reginald Blow and Director of Staff Development Jan Bennett. Both confirmed the importance of leadership development at the district and school levels. Blow stated, "Teacher leadership cohorts have made a difference because these individuals are locally grown and know the district and town." Not only have the cohorts provided active modeling of the collaborative qualities that are encompassed in the values and vision of the district, but both Blow and Bennett felt that the teacher leadership cohort has improved the quality of WFISD principalships. The district is growing leadership from within through knowledge sharing and collective learning.

Powers' handwritten notes from one principal's meeting indicate reflections from reading of Peter Senge's *The 5th Discipline (1990)* and Robert Greenleaf. His notes refer to the five disciplines of organizational learning, the four critical questions for improvement, and the 10 characteristics of servant leaders.

During 2004-2005 7% of the Dr. Power's monthly principal meeting agenda items directly related to professional learning communities.

Hirschi High School – Primary focuses of campus leadership during the 2004-2005 school year included analysis of data from the results of the new Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS); direct impact of TAKS data analysis on classroom instructional adjustments; continued support for IB teacher access to high quality professional development. Dr. Mobley and campus leaders began the application process for the IB Middle Years Programme, acting to expand the common educational philosophy and framework for excellence in teaching and learning to all 9th and 10th graders at Hirschi High School. Late in the 2004-2005 school year, Dr. Mobley was named principal of another WFISD high school, one in danger of being identified by the Texas Education Agency as a low performing campus.

2005 Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) % of student mastery
WFISD *Academically Acceptable*
HHS *Academically Acceptable*

2004-2005	District	HHS all	AA	His	Wht	Ec Dis
ELA	85	77	69	78	84	72
M	74	62	49	52	77	52
Sc	67	64	46	51	84	48
SS	90	88	77	90	96	83
Attend						
2005	95.7	94.5	94.9	92.9	94.9	93.6
Grad						
2005	87.4	89.7	93.4	89.6	86.2	88.9

Note. Values in blue indicate campus performance higher than district performance.

Across the district, student performance was lower than the previous year in all content areas. Hirschi's population of white students appears to continue to demonstrate the most benefit from the learning environment of the school in comparison to other subpopulations. Some differences in the science scores of African-American, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged students continue to be almost 40 points lower than the scores of White students. Hirschi's attendance rates for all subgroups dropped below the district rate reported for this year. The reported 2004-2005 graduation rate for white students is lower than the rate for the district and all subgroups.

2005-2006

WFISD – Dr. Powers continued to emphasize leadership development at monthly principal meetings. Individual principal and teacher accountability continued using the Leveled Assessment document. Dr. Bennett continued monthly assistant principal meetings. Leaders' awareness and acknowledgement of the achievement gaps along racial and economic lines were directly highlighted throughout the year in district and campus leaders participated in an ESC workshop with Ruby Payne. A new group of campus teachers formed for Year 2 of the Teacher Leadership Development Cohort. Throughout the district, online staff development opportunities were made available including options such as Leading Learning Communities & Breaking Ranks Revisited. The district's Student Support Team process, often reported as an obstruction to student success, came under review. Power's personal note indicates "Review as a process to keep students successful".

In March 2006 district professional development activities became directly related to the professional learning communities concepts as outlined by DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Karhanek (2004). Powers requested the Board's commitment of a portion of the district's time and money to the development of a district framework designed to reculture all schools within the district as professional learning communities. Initially, a cadre of leaders made up of a nucleus of campus principals and Dr. Powers participated in a national professional learning communities conference. The cadre followed up with four weeks of small group study and planning for subsequent introductory presentations to all principals in the district. The framework for change evolved to include district allotments of money to each campus for purchase of multiple copies of relevant publications.

During 2005-2006 9% of Powers' monthly principal meeting agenda items directly related to professional learning communities.

Hirschi High School – During the summer of 2005 Mrs. Wanda E. Jackson, at that time serving as district coordinator for elementary special education, assumed the campus principal's position. Mrs. Jackson enjoyed a long history with the school, first as a member of the Hirschi High School graduating class of 1973, later serving at Hirschi as a counselor and as an assistant principal. Mrs. Jackson was welcomed with warm and energetic applause by the Hirschi faculty when the anouncement of her selection was made. Members of Hirschi's faculty attended an International Baccalaureate conference in Salt Lake City, UT. At that conference reference was made to the work of DuFour and Eaker, including the publication, *Whatever it Takes: How Professional Learning Communities Respond When Kids Don't Learn*. The book was purchased and read, and a brief summary was presented to Mrs. Jackson. A presentation of the major points of the book was made to Hirschi faculty at the opening of school in August, 2005. The faculty also participated in professional development related to research-based instructional strategies.

The primary focus of campus leadership throughout the 2005-2006 school year was a school-wide initiative to include all students in rich and rigorous academic learning. *Resource rooms*, where special education students had previously received instruction below grade level, were closed and special education students were systematically introduced into regular education classrooms across all content areas. Regular ed. and special ed. teachers began working in teams to provide intensive support to all students. Other focuses of leadership during the year included expansion of the IB Middle Years Programme (MYP) to all 9th and 10th graders at Hirschi High School. A campus MYP coordinator began intensive teacher training in common IB philosophies and learning frameworks, including collaborative planning and development of common assessments.

2006 Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) % of student mastery
WFISD *Academically Acceptable*
HHS *Academically Acceptable*

2005-2006	District	HHS all	AA	His	Wht	Ec Dis
ELA	90	87	83	82	93	82
M	76	57	41	47	74	47
Sc	74	64	51	51	80	50
SS	91	91	87	85	95	86
Attend						
2006	95.5	93.9	94	93.5	93.9	93
Grad						
2006	85.7	86.5	78.7	86.4	92.2	86.2

Note. Values in blue indicate campus performance higher than district performance.

Across the district student performance gains were seen in each of the four content areas. At Hirschi, gaps along racial lines narrowed in ELA and Social Studies, but a gap of as much as 33 points continued to exist between the performances of white students and other subpopulations in the math and science areas. Hirschi's attendance rates for all subgroups continued to be lower than the district rate reported. Graduation rates for African American students fell significantly lower than all others reported.

2006-2007

WFISD **–** In July principals, assistant principals, and district curriculum specialists participated in a three-day leadership development seminar clearly focused by Dr. Powers on principles of learning, with professional learning communities concepts at the core. Led by the cadre of leaders trained during the summer of 2006, district leadership was challenged to commit as instructional leaders to keeping the achievement of all students at the forefront of district and campus goals and activities. "Poster Points" from *Whatever it Takes* were spotlighted for the first time, and all principals and assistant principals participated in a year-long study of additional publications including *On Common Ground* (DuFour, Eaker, DuFour, Eds. 2005).

The district subscribed to a professional learning community website, further increasing faculty and staff accessibility to PLC information. District leaders also expressed expectations for use of time for collaboration focused on professional learning and growth for teachers and administrators. Beginning in August of 2006, the traditional opening-of-school assembly became an opportunity for district leadership to share common vision and goals within a professional learning communities' perspective. Monthly administrator meetings focused directly on book studies and discussion, just as veteran teachers continued to be actively recruited for a third year of Teacher Leadership Cohorts that encouraged a new paradigm of distributed leadership. The Board of Trustees allocated thousands of additional dollars for each campus to use for professional learning communities training and travel. A nearby district which was also focused on district reculturing as a professional learning community was invited to share their process. Throughout the year principals and curriculum specialists studied and demonstrated successful, research-proven instructional strategies.

During 2006-2007 59% of Powers' monthly principal meeting agenda items directly related to professional learning communities.

Hirschi High School - Primary focuses of campus leadership during the 2006-2007 school year included continuation of successful inclusion initiatives and introduction of the concepts of professional learning communities. Following analysis of Spring 2006 TAKS data, faculty participated in a review of the school's *brutal facts*, especially the existence of significant gaps in math and science performances that appeared to fall along racial and economic lines. Mrs. Jackson presented individual teacher results to the assembled faculty, a presentation that incensed many members of the faculty, but only served to steel the principal's determination to hold each teacher accountable for student success.

Throughout the year teachers were introduced to SMART Goals (Conzemius & O'Neill, 2002) and the critical questions of collaboration outlined by DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek (2004). By mid-year Mrs. Jackson had specified general expectations for content-specific collaboration, providing teachers with a template to be used to document the collaborative work of the teams. Using DuFour's (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, Karhanek, 2004) model of a pyramid of interventions, faculty began systematically attempting to design a school-wide structure of responses to the question, "What happens at our school when kids don't learn?" *I Have Opportunities to Pass* (iHOP) was implemented as a directive intervention during each day's lunch periods. Teachers referred students to iHOP to complete classwork and homework assignments that were negatively impacting grades. Mrs. Jackson began using the Leveled Assessment document for teacher accountability directly related to TAKS analysis. Individual conferences were conducted between Mrs. Jackson and each core content teacher during the Spring of 2007.

Also in the Spring of 2007 Hirschi's IB Diploma Programme was expanded to include an authorized IB Middle Years Programme. All teachers of 9th and 10th graders began a multi-year process of extensive MYP training related to philosophies, lesson planning within the MYP framework, and collaborative development of common assessments for all 9th and 10th graders. Several early dismissal days throughout the year provided time for teachers at Hirschi to plan together and in cooperation with Kirby Junior High School, newly authorized middle school.

2007 Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) % of student mastery
WFISD *Academically Acceptable*
HHS *Academically Acceptable*

2006-2007	District	HHS all	AA	His	Wht	Ec Dis
ELA	92	84	76	86	90	79
M	81	60	47	56	73	51
Sc	74	60	40	58	78	51
SS	93	93	88	95	96	92
Attend 2007	95.3	93.1	93.4	91.1	93.5	91.9
Grad 2007	82.1	83	86.4	69.4	87	82.9

Note. Values in blue indicate campus performance higher than district performance.

TAKS mastery across the district continued a steady rise in ELA, Math, and Social Studies, and held steady in Science. At Hirschi, performance gaps continued to be seen between white students and other subpopulations, still most glaring in Math and Science where differences grew to as much as 38 points. Hirschi's attendance rates for all subgroups continued to be lower than the district rate reported. Graduation rates for Hispanic students fell significantly lower than all others reported.

2007-2008

WFISD – Principals, assistant principals, and district curriculum specialists opened the school year with a three-day leadership development seminar continuing the district focus on professional learning community concepts. *Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work* (DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R., Many, T., 2006) was purchased for all principals and assistant principals to assist in implementation of PLCs at each campus. The power of professional learning communities was the focus at the annual assembly of all WFISD personnel. Leadership development continued to be encouraged among campus principals and assistant principals focused on principles of change, authentic mission and vision, and the establishment of high performing teams. Principals continued to participate in monthly book studies, including *The Learning Leader: How to Focus School Improvement for Better Results* (Reeves, 2006). Closing the gap in African American student achievement continued to be a focus, and a panel of community leaders was assembled to share information and expand the knowledge of educators in their efforts. Throughout the year campus leaders were exposed to information from *No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning* (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003).

Teachers were recruited for a fourth year of the Teacher Leadership Cohort. An additional component in the district-wide plan to grow leadership from within was implemented, this component to provide professional learning communities orientation seminars to all new teachers in the district. Thirteen teams of veteran teachers and administrators volunteered to participate, with fidelity to the PLC concepts assured by the use of a common PowerPoint presentation of *Whatever it Takes* (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Karhanek, 2004) as the basis for each segment of the seminar. Leadership discussions about district grading and assessment policies that inhibit student learning continued in the Spring of 2008, as did discussions of formative versus summative assessment. Initially principals delved into their own personal and professional philosophies of grading and assessment and by mid-year changes in the district grading and assessment policy were being widely discussed by all district stakeholders. Principals continued reviewing chapters of *The Learning Leader* (Reeves, 2006) and participated in discussions of Stiggins's 1999 article, *Assessments, Student Confidence, and School Success*. District leadership continued to hold principals and teachers accountable for individual student success using the Leveled Assessment document.

During the summer of 2008 members of the Board of Trustees continued a support the multi-year plan for district reculturing with both time and money. Board members personally attended Solution Tree Professional Learning Community conferences during the summer of 2008. In an interview conducted for this study, Reverend Reginald Blow, current Board president, stated that it became his goal to sell the professional learning community agenda to the district after he had personally attended a PLC conference.

During 2007-2008, 78% of Powers' monthly principal meeting agenda items directly related to professional learning communities.

Hirschi High School – The school year again opened with all faculty members participating in analysis of the *brutal facts* of Hirschi's most recent TAKS data. Significant gaps in math and science performances continued to appear along racial and economic lines and again Mrs. Jackson spotlighted teacher accountability for student success, presenting individual teacher results to the assembled faculty. The question, "What happens at our school when kids don't learn?" continued to be the focus of planning throughout the year.). Teachers began to learn about the potential benefits of INOVA and DMAC technology tools in support of student learning. Teachers continued to support *iHOP* during lunch periods each day, expanding the intervention to include Math and Science teachers volunteering their time to assist students with assignments in *iHOP*. Professional development for Hirschi's 9th and 10th grade teachers continued to include early dismissal days for further training, collaborative lesson planning, and collaborative development of formative assessments although teachers struggled to find weekly collaborative time during the school day. The principal continued to encourage teams to focus their work on student success, minutes of meetings often reflected lack of focus and purpose.

In the spring of 2008 the Professional Learning Communities Assessment (PLCA) (Olivier, 2003) was administered to the Hirschi IB High School faculty as a measure of strength of school as a professional learning community. The following 4 tables provide descriptive data collected during the 2008 administration of the PLCA. The first table identifies each of the professional learning community (PLC) practices and characteristics defined by the PLCA statements. The statements are aligned to the professional learning community dimensions including: shared and supportive leadership (SSL), shared values and vision (SVV), collective learning and application (CLA), shared personal practice (SPP), supportive structures – relationships (SCR), and supportive structures – conditions (SCC). The third table presents the distribution of frequency of staff responses, mean average, and standard deviation (SD) of each PLCA statement which characterizes each of the professional learning community dimensions. According to Olivier, Antoine, Cormier, Lewis, Minckler, & Stadalis (2009) "In analyzing the results of the PCLA-R questionnaire, descriptive statistics are very useful in determining the strength of the dimensions" (p. 9) of the PLC model; therefore, this data provides valuable insight into the development and of Hirschi's organizational culture in relation to the PLC model. The final table summarizes data for each of the PLC dimensions.

2008 PLCA Practices and Characteristics

Statements
Shared and Supportive Leadership (SSL)
1. Staff members are consistently involved in discussing and making decisions about most school issues.
2. The principal incorporates advice from staff members to make decisions.
3. Staff members have accessibility to key information.
4. The principal is proactive and addresses areas where support is needed.
5. Opportunities are provided for staff members to initiate change.
6. The principal shares responsibility and rewards for innovative actions.
7. The principal participates democratically with staff sharing power and authority.
8. Leadership is promoted and nurtured among staff members.
9. Decision-making takes place through committees and communication across grade and subject areas.
10. Stakeholders assume shared responsibility and accountability for student learning without evidence of imposed power and authority.
Shared Values and Vision (SVV)
11. A collaborative process exists for developing a shared sense of values among staff.
12. Shared values support norms of behavior that guide decisions about teaching and learning.
13. Staff members share visions for school improvement that have an undeviating focus on student learning.
14. Decisions are made in alignment with the school's values and vision.
15. A collaborative process exists for developing a shared vision among staff.
16. School goals focus on student learning beyond test scores and grades.
17. Policies and programs are aligned to the school's vision.
18. Stakeholders are actively involved in creating high expectations that serve to increase student achievement.
Collective Learning and Application (CLA)
19. Staff members work together to seek knowledge, skills and strategies and apply this new learning to their work.
20. Collegial relationships exist among staff members that reflect commitment to school improvement efforts.
21. Staff members plan and work together to search for solutions to address diverse student needs.

(continued

2008 PLCA Practices and Characteristics (continued)

Statement
Collective Learning and Application (CLA)

22. A variety of opportunities and structures exist for collective learning through open dialogue.

23. Staff members engage in dialogue that reflects a respect for diverse ideas that lead to continued inquiry.

24. Professional development focuses on teaching and learning.

25. School staff members and stakeholders learn together and apply new knowledge to solve problems.

26. School staff members are committed to programs that enhance learning.

Shared Personal Practice (SPP)

27. Opportunities exist for staff members to observe peers and offer encouragement.

28. Staff members provide feedback to peers related to instructional practices.

29. Staff members informally share ideas and suggestions for improving student learning.

30. Staff members collaboratively review student work to share and improve instructional practices.

31. Opportunities exist for coaching and mentoring.

32. Individuals and teams have the opportunity to apply learning and share the results of their practices.

Supportive Conditions – Relationships (SCR)

33. Caring relationships exist among staff and students that are built on trust and respect.

34. A culture of trust and respect exists for taking risks.

35. Outstanding achievement is recognized and celebrated regularly in our school.

36. School staff and stakeholders exhibit a sustained and unified effort to embed change into the culture of the school.

Supportive Conditions – Structures (SCS)

37. Time is provided to facilitate collaborative work.

38. The school schedule promotes collective learning and shared practice.

39. Fiscal resources are available for professional development.

40. Appropriate technology and instructional materials are available to staff.

41. Resource people provide expertise and support for continuous learning.

42. The school facility is clean, attractive and inviting.

43. The proximity of grade level and department personnel allows for ease in collaborating with colleagues.

44. Communication systems promote a flow of information among staff members.

45. Communication systems promote a flow of information across the entire school community including: central office personnel, parents, and community members.

2008 PLCA Responses

PLC Statements	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree/ Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
SSL1	8.3%	14.6%	60.4%	16.7%	77.1%	2.85	0.80
SSL2	0.0%	18.8%	43.8%	37.5%	**81.3%**	**3.19**	**0.73**
SSL3	4.2%	22.9%	54.2%	18.8%	72.9%	2.88	0.76
SSL4	4.3%	21.3%	38.3%	36.2%	74.5%	3.06	0.87
SSL5	2.1%	27.1%	50.0%	20.8%	70.8%	2.90	0.75
SSL6	2.1%	12.5%	41.7%	43.8%	**85.4%**	**3.27**	**0.76**
SSL7	4.2%	25.0%	33.3%	37.5%	70.8%	3.04	0.90
SSL8	8.5%	25.5%	44.7%	21.3%	66.0%	2.79	0.88
SSL9	2.1%	16.7%	54.2%	27.1%	**81.3%**	**3.06**	**0.73**
SSL10	10.4%	22.9%	50.0%	16.7%	66.7%	2.73	0.87
SVV11	6.4%	17.0%	59.6%	17.0%	76.6%	2.87	0.77
SVV12	4.2%	18.8%	66.7%	10.4%	77.1%	2.83	0.66
SVV13	6.3%	18.8%	58.3%	16.7%	75.0%	2.85	0.77
SVV14	2.1%	14.6%	60.4%	22.9%	**83.3%**	**3.04**	**0.68**
SVV15	4.2%	18.8%	58.3%	18.8%	77.1%	2.92	0.74
SVV16	18.8%	25.0%	33.3%	22.9%	56.3%	2.60	1.05
SVV17	6.3%	16.7%	58.3%	18.8%	77.1%	2.90	0.78
SVV18	10.4%	22.9%	50.0%	16.7%	66.7%	2.73	0.87
CLA19	2.1%	12.5%	60.4%	25.0%	**85.4%**	**3.08**	**0.68**
CLA20	6.3%	10.4%	58.3%	25.0%	**83.3%**	**3.02**	**0.79**
CLA21	7.1%	32.1%	17.9%	42.9%	60.7%	2.96	1.04
CLA22	6.3%	16.7%	66.7%	10.4%	77.1%	2.81	0.70
CLA23	4.2%	16.7%	62.5%	16.7%	79.2%	2.92	0.71
CLA24	8.3%	22.9%	50.0%	18.8%	68.8%	2.79	0.85
CLA25	4.3%	36.2%	44.7%	14.9%	59.6%	2.70	0.78
CLA26	0.0%	12.8%	63.8%	23.4%	**87.2%**	**3.11**	**0.60**
SPP27	10.4%	37.5%	45.8%	6.3%	52.1%	2.48	0.77
SPP28	2.1%	40.4%	55.3%	2.1%	57.4%	2.57	0.58
SPP29	2.1%	6.3%	66.7%	25.0%	**91.7%**	**3.15**	**0.62**
SPP30	8.5%	42.6%	44.7%	4.3%	48.9%	2.45	0.72
SPP31	4.3%	29.8%	53.2%	12.8%	66.0%	2.74	0.74
SPP32	2.1%	21.3%	59.6%	17.0%	76.6%	2.87	0.65
SCR33	5.9%	11.8%	45.1%	37.3%	**82.4%**	**3.14**	**0.85**
SCR34	8.5%	12.8%	53.2%	25.5%	78.7%	2.96	0.86
SCR35	0.0%	11.5%	51.9%	36.5%	**88.5%**	**3.25**	**0.65**
SCR36	4.3%	21.3%	61.7%	12.8%	74.5%	2.83	0.70

(continued)

2008 PLCA Responses (continued)

PLC Statements	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree/ Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
SCS37	14.9%	25.5%	51.1%	8.5%	59.6%	2.53	0.86
SCS38	14.9%	23.4%	55.3%	6.4%	61.7%	2.53	0.83
SCS39	10.6%	27.7%	51.1%	10.6%	61.7%	2.62	0.82
SCS40	4.3%	8.5%	57.4%	29.8%	**87.2%**	**3.13**	**0.74**
SCS41	4.4%	17.8%	51.1%	26.7%	77.8%	3.00	0.80
SCS42	8.7%	15.2%	41.3%	34.8%	76.1%	3.02	0.93
SCS43	2.1%	21.3%	51.1%	25.5%	76.6%	3.00	0.75
SCS44	0.0%	21.3%	63.8%	14.9%	78.7%	2.94	0.60
SCS45	6.4%	29.8%	53.2%	10.6%	63.8%	2.68	0.75

Note. Values in blue indicate statements with percentages greater than 80% agree/strongly agree and a mean average greater than 3.00. N = 48.

2008 PLCA Professional Learning Community Dimension Means

PLC Dimension	Mean	SD
Shared and Supportive Leadership	2.98	0.82
Shared Values and Vision	2.84	0.80
Collective Learning and Application	2.92	0.77
Shared Personal Practice	2.71	0.72
Supportive Conditions - Relationships	3.05	0.78
Supportive Conditions - Structures	2.83	0.82

Barth (cited in Huffman, et al. 2010) stated that "the nature of relationships among the adults within a school has a greater influence on the character and quality of that school and on student accomplishment than anything else" (slide 18). The mean averages from the Professional Learning Community Assessment (PLCA) tool supports the importance of the influence of adult relationships on shaping the school culture and student accomplishment. The 2008 data demonstrates that supportive conditions fostered by positive relationships were perceived by the staff to be more evident within the school culture than the other professional learning community dimensions.

Collectively, the Hirschi staff had been working together developing the IB program and investigating ways to support learning for all students. The PLCA data demonstrated the staff worked together to seek knowledge, skills and strategies and applied the new learning to their work; were committed to programs that enhance learning; informally shared ideas and suggestions for improving student learning and accessed technology and instructional materials to support their goals. The staff also believed the principal shared responsibility and rewards for innovative actions and that outstanding achievement was recognized and celebrated at their school. The findings suggest elements of the professional learning community model were emerging, however, at different rates and varying levels of depth.

2008 Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) % of student mastery
WFISD *Academically Acceptable*
HHS *Academically Acceptable*

2007-2008	District	HHS all	AA	His	Wht	Ec Dis
ELA	94	88	88	77	92	83
M	84	62	51	55	75	56
Sc	76	64	53	47	84	55
SS	93	91	90	82	97	86
Attend 2008	95.7	93.7	93.1	93.1	94.3	92.8
Grad 2008	83.2	84.4	78.7	87.8	86.8	81.3

Note. Values in blue indicate campus performance higher than district performance.

TAKS mastery across the district continued a steady rise in ELA and Math, while Social Studies and Science held steady. At Hirschi, performance gaps continued to be seen between white students and other subpopulations, still most glaring in math and science where differences continued to be as great as 37 points. Hirschi's attendance rates for all subgroups continued to be lower than the district rate reported. Graduation rates at Hirschi continued to meet or exceed graduation rates in the district.

2008-2009

WFISD – Three days of leadership development in July continued Dr. Powers' district level focus strong professional learning communities as the vehicle for sustainable school improvement. Principals were led by Powers to reflect on "Where we are", "What we need to do", and "Our destination". Continuing study of effective grading and assessment practices and efforts to close achievement gaps by increasing use of proven instructional strategies would continue. DuFour's *big ideas* (2004) of professional learning communities were reviewed and reinforced, and the concepts of SMART goals (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006) were revisited. In addition, four cornerstones were introduced that would lead to closing achievement gaps: quality teaching, high expectations, extra time and support for learning, and positive teacher/student relationships.

In addition to continuation of funding for campus PLC training and travel, the Board of Trustees allocated funds to bring Dr. Robert Eaker to Wichita Falls to consult with district and campus leaders. Eaker spoke at the opening assembly of all WFISD personnel, approximately 1400 in number, reinforcing the power of professional learning communities to impact student learning. At each monthly principal's meeting throughout the year campus leaders focused on the four cornerstones as the basis for all campus and district improvement. Principals continued to deepen understanding of the impacts of poverty on learning and completed a book study of *Ahead of the Curve* (Reeves, Ed., 2007). Leaders began to develop understanding of the potential benefits and use of INOVA and DMAC technology tools in support of student learning. Campus leaders began planning and implementing Response to Intervention (RTI) initiative, attempting to integrate PLC intervention concepts with RTI mandates. Across the district, the Teacher Leadership Cohort continued in its fifth year, and the new teacher PLC Orientation Cohort began its second year. Throughout the year, principals continued gaining a deeper understanding of how to identify of power standards and what to look for in formative assessments. Campus accountability continued to be documented using the now-familiar Leveled Assessment.

Two things consumed much of the conversation throughout the 2008-2009 school year. One was the mid-year departure of a talented and respected Superintendent. The other was the continued focus on grading and assessment practices and the incompatibility with a professional learning community culture that emphasizes student learning. Discussions were often spirited as district practices at both elementary and secondary levels were scrutinized. District leadership was met with significant opposition to policy changes from teachers, with particular opposition at the secondary campuses to two of the proposed changes. Some secondary teachers were vocal in there disagreement with elimination of the grade of "0". Some secondary teachers also disagreed with the proposed change that would provide students with additional time and opportunities to demonstrate learning without a grade penalty. Campus meetings were held between district leadership and groups of concerned teachers, especially at the secondary level. Parents participated in meetings with district leadership as did 11th and 12th graders from each of the three high schools. Through the spring of 2009 the Board of Trustees considered input from all stakeholders. Following their deliberations, the Board of Trustees voted to support the proposed changes to the grading and assessment policy only to be overturned by a related decision of the Texas Legislature that denied district's the discretion to eliminate the grade of "0".

During 2008-2009 86% of Powers' monthly principal meeting agenda items directly related to professional learning communities.

Hirschi High School – During the Spring of 2008 teachers collaborated to plan PASSport 2012, an opportunity for incoming 9th graders to participate in four mornings during the summer to acquaint themselves with each other, the new school, and their new teachers. Planned in conjunction with WFISD Junior Highs, PASSport 2012 also focused students on the goal of on-time graduation in 2012.

Although Hirschi had previously met federal Adequate Yearly Progress standards, results from the Spring of 2008 math portion of the TAKS indicated lack of adequate progress. Hirschi's faculty participated with the regional service center in in-depth data disaggregation and planning. Mrs. Jackson remained committed to recharting the school's course with input from all members of the faculty. For the third year, teachers assembled in August to confront the *brutal facts* of individual teacher's most recent TAKS results. Teachers appeared less offended and more prepared to participate in dialogue about closing gaps and changing instruction. The decision was also made to present a brief view of Hirschi's brutal facts to students during class assemblies in the first week of school. Surprisingly, students became excited and animated as they were provided with information from the previous TAKS assessments. Students appeared to enjoy the competitive aspect of assessment scores presented in this format.Campus leadership passed on the concepts of four cornerstones for eliminating gaps in student learning that exist along racial lines (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). These cornerstones, quality teaching, high expectations, additional time and support, and positive relationships became part of a foundational document presented with a specific set of common district and campus goals: inspiring and engaging students and teachers, graduating all Hirschi students with a post-secondary plan, ensuring a safe and secure school environment, and careful planning and monitoring of campus funds. The goals and the cornerstones were revisited throughout the year. Three years of attention to systematic school-wide change focused on inclusion of special education students in regular education classrooms appeared to have moved from initiation and implementation phases to a sustaining phase. Now significant changes in the instructional schedule of the school were initiated at the beginning of the school year to provide time within each school day for teachers to plan and collaborate.

Initially the plan provided a structure for student activities during lunch periods allowing teachers to meet in collaborative teams each day. By mid-year the plan was modified to provide two days of teacher collaboration time and three days of teacher/student contact time each week. Hirschi's MYP coordinator planned four early dismissal days during the year for collaborative time to plan lessons and develop common assessments. Time within each school day for teachers to plan and collaborate was gradually eliminated as faculty focused on instructional contact time with students.

Throughout the year the district controversy over changes in grading and assessment policies was reflected in the conversations among Hirschi teachers. A campus team was formed to begin planning and implementing Response to Intervention (RTI) initiatives, learning to identify research-based learning strategies that further supported by PLC concepts and framework. In the Spring of 2009 Hirschi's faculty was the only secondary school in the district to volunteer to pilot implementation of federal Response to Intervention structures. The tiered structure of RTI provided further evidence of the need for continuous development of research-based instructional strategies. Again in the spring, Mrs. Jackson met individually with each core content teacher to review their Leveled Assessment documents. Campus accountability continued to be documented using the now-familiar Leveled Assessment.

2009 Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) % of student mastery
WFISD *Academically Acceptable*
HHS *Academically Acceptable*

2008-2009	District	HHS all	AA	His	Wht	Ec Dis
ELA	93	90	88	88	95	84
M	85	63	53	63	74	55
Sc	78	72	59	72	87	63
SS	94	92	89	88	96	89

Note. Values in blue indicate campus performance higher than district performance.

District science and social studies scores remained steady while math scores rose slightly from 2008. District ELA scores, though still exceeding 90%, dropped for the first time since 2005. For Hirschi, Spring 2009 state assessment results provided welcome evidence of the soundness of the power of learning communities and the value of commitment to teacher collaboration and data-based decisions. At Hirschi, performance gaps continued to exist but appeared to have narrowed again in all areas. The greatest difference, 21 points, occurred between white and African American students in math.

2009-2010

WFISD – Following a long year of efforts to bring district policy in line with the professional learning community culture, the handwritten note in Dr. Powers' new 2009-2010 principal's meetings binder says, "*Why are we here? Positive Attitude*". WFISD principals began the school year with a new superintendent, Dr. George Kazanas, whose prior experience in a district supportive of the concepts of professional learning communities was a factor in his selection by the Board of Trustees. The WFISD Board of Trustees not only continued to commit financial resources for staff development related to professional learning communities, but also committed to the planned implementation of a comprehensive, guaranteed and viable curriculum in CScope. The plan called for initial implementation in all WFISD math instruction, with implementation in other core instructional areas to follow the following year. District and campus leadership continued integration of Response to Intervention strategies with the principles of professional learning communities and the four cornerstones of quality teaching (high expectations, additional time and support for learning, and positive teacher/student relationships). These structures continued to have the support of trustees and district leadership as the basis for all decisions.

Principals prepared to read and share strategies from Brookhart's *How to Give Effective Feedback* (2008). Along with the book study district leaders and campus principals led studies of the 5E Model of Effective Teaching. Dr. Bennett coordinated the introduction of *PD360*, an additional online staff development tool providing countless options and opportunities for learning within a PLC culture.

During 2009-2010 61% of Powers' monthly principal meeting agenda items directly related to professional learning communities.

Hirschi High School – The 2009-2010 school year again opened with opportunities for incoming 9th graders to participate in PASSport. For PASSport 2013, teachers used the basic format from the previous summer with improvements in the use of time and organization of activities. PASSport 2013 again focused students on the goal of on-time graduation in 2013. August staff development continued to present the *brutal facts* of individual teacher's most recent TAKS results. Again a brief view of Hirschi's *brutal facts* was presented to students during class assemblies during the first week of school. Students again cheered each other and appeared to enjoy the competition as they were provided with information from the previous TAKS assessments. The four cornerstones for eliminating gaps in student learning (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003) continued to be a foundation of all staff development, as did the set of common district and campus goals. Goals and cornerstones were continually revisited throughout the year.

Continued district introductions of CScope as a common, district-wide curriculum required Hirschi faculty to commit time to training, dialogue, and collaboration. Again the original plan which provided a structure for teachers to meet in collaborative teams each day was sacrificed as tutorial instruction and a number of additional math and science interventions took priority. Already shortened time for peer planning and development of common assessments was impacted further by the availability of fewer early dismissal days for Hirschi's MYP collaboration. Faculty began looking for ways to maximize valuable teacher time, resulting in blending of several campus teams for improved effectiveness and efficiency. In the Spring of 2009 Hirschi's faculty was the only secondary school in the district to volunteer to pilot implementation of federal Response to Intervention structures. The tiered structure of RTI provided further evidence of the need for continuous development of research-based instructional strategies.

Throughout the year the district controversy over changes in grading and assessment policies was reflected in the conversations among Hirschi teachers. Hirschi teachers met with Dr. Powers in small and large groups at various times during the year, and dialogue was sometimes contentious. In the spring of 2010 the Professional Learning Communities Assessment-Revised (PLCA-R) (Olivier, Hipp, & Huffman, 2008) was administered to the Hirschi IB High School faculty, again as a measure of strength of school as a professional learning community. This revision integrates items within each PLC dimension related to the school's collection, interpretation, and use of data to focus school improvement efforts. The PLCA-R now serves as an even more powerful formal diagnostic tool for identifying school-level practices that support intentional professional learning (Hipp & Huffman, Eds., 2010, p. 31). The following tables present PLC practices and characteristics within the PLCA-R and descriptive data collected through the 2010 spring administration of the assessment tool.

2010 PLCA-R Practices and Characteristics

Statements
Shared and Supportive Leadership (SSL)
1. Staff members are consistently involved in discussing and making decisions about most school issues.
2. The principal incorporates advice from staff members to make decisions.
3. Staff members have accessibility to key information.
4. The principal is proactive and addresses areas where support is needed.
5. Opportunities are provided for staff members to initiate change.
6. The principal shares responsibility and rewards for innovative actions.
7. The principal participates democratically with staff sharing power and authority.
8. Leadership is promoted and nurtured among staff members.
9. Decision-making takes place through committees and communication across grade and subject areas.
10. Stakeholders assume shared responsibility and accountability for student learning without evidence of imposed power and authority.
11. Staff members use multiple sources of data to make decisions about teaching and learning.
Shared Values and Vision (SVV)
12. A collaborative process exists for developing a shared sense of values among staff.
13. Shared values support norms of behavior that guide decisions about teaching and learning.
14. Staff members share visions for school improvement that have an undeviating focus on student learning.
15. Decisions are made in alignment with the school's values and vision.

<div align="right">(continued)</div>

2010 PLCA-R Practices and Characteristics (continued)

Statements
Shared Values and Vision (SVV)

16. A collaborative process exists for developing a shared vision among staff.

17. School goals focus on student learning beyond test scores and grades.

18. Policies and programs are aligned to the school's vision.

19. Stakeholders are actively involved in creating high expectations that serve to increase student achievement.

20. Data are used to prioritize actions to reach a shared vision.

Collective Learning and Application (CLA)

21. Staff members work together to seek knowledge, skills and strategies and apply this new learning to their work.

22. Collegial relationships exist among staff members that reflect commitment to school improvement efforts.

23. Staff members plan and work together to search for solutions to address diverse student needs.

24. A variety of opportunities and structures exist for collective learning through open dialogue.

25. Staff members engage in dialogue that reflects a respect for diverse ideas that lead to continued inquiry.

26. Professional development focuses on teaching and learning.

27. School staff members and stakeholders learn together and apply new knowledge to solve problems.

28. School staff members are committed to programs that enhance learning.

29. Staff members collaboratively analyze multiple sources of data to assess the effectiveness of instructional practices.

30. Staff members collaboratively analyze student work to improve teaching and learning.

Shared Personal Practice (SPP)

31. Opportunities exist for staff members to observe peers and offer encouragement.

32. Staff members provide feedback to peers related to instructional practices.

33. Staff members informally share ideas and suggestions for improving student learning.

34. Staff members collaboratively review student work to share and improve instructional practices.

35. Opportunities exist for coaching and mentoring.

36. Individuals and teams have the opportunity to apply learning and share the results of their practices.

37. Staff members regularly share student work to guide overall school improvement.

Supportive Conditions – Relationships (SCR)

38. Caring relationships exist among staff and students that are built on trust and respect.

39. A culture of trust and respect exists for taking risks.

(continued)

2010 PLCA-R Practices and Characteristics (continued)

Statements
Supportive Conditions – Relationships (SCR)

40. Outstanding achievement is recognized and celebrated regularly in our school.

41. School staff and stakeholders exhibit a sustained and unified effort to embed change into the culture of the school.

42. Relationships among staff members support honest and respectful examination of data to enhance teaching and learning.

Supportive Conditions – Structures (SCS)

43. Time is provided to facilitate collaborative work.

44. The school schedule promotes collective learning and shared practice.

45. Fiscal resources are available for professional development.

46. Appropriate technology and instructional materials are available to staff.

47. Resource people provide expertise and support for continuous learning.

48. The school facility is clean, attractive and inviting.

49. The proximity of grade level and department personnel allows for ease in collaborating with colleagues.

50. Communication systems promote a flow of information among staff members.

51. Communication systems promote a flow of information across the entire school community including: central office personnel, parents, and community members.

52. Data are organized and made available to provide easy access to staff members.

Note. Statements in red indicate data statements added to the PLCA.

2010 PLCA-R Responses

PLC Statements	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree/ Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
SSL1	1.9%	14.8%	72.2%	11.1%	83.3%	2.93	0.58
SSL2	7.5%	22.6%	56.6%	13.2%	69.8%	2.75	0.78
SSL3	0.0%	18.5%	72.2%	9.3%	81.5%	2.91	0.52
SSL4	0.0%	20.4%	63.0%	16.7%	79.6%	2.96	0.61
SSL5	1.8%	20.0%	60.0%	18.2%	78.2%	2.95	0.68
SSL6	0.0%	20.4%	57.4%	22.2%	79.6%	3.02	0.66
SSL7	3.9%	19.6%	58.8%	17.6%	76.5%	2.90	0.72
SSL8	0.0%	18.5%	63.0%	18.5%	**81.5%**	**3.00**	**0.61**
SSL9	0.0%	13.0%	64.8%	22.2%	**87.0%**	**3.09**	**0.59**
SSL10	5.7%	20.8%	60.4%	13.2%	73.6%	2.81	0.74
SVV11	1.9%	9.3%	53.7%	35.2%	**88.9%**	**3.22**	**0.69**

<div align="right">(continued)</div>

2010 PLCA-R Responses (continued)

PLC Statements	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree/ Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
SVV12	1.8%	10.9%	70.9%	16.4%	**87.3%**	**3.02**	**0.59**
SVV13	0.0%	10.9%	76.4%	12.7%	**89.1%**	**3.02**	**0.49**
SVV14	0.0%	16.7%	64.8%	18.5%	**83.3%**	**3.02**	**0.60**
SVV15	0.0%	3.8%	79.2%	17.0%	**96.2%**	**3.13**	**0.44**
SVV16	0.0%	13.2%	69.8%	17.0%	**86.8%**	**3.04**	**0.55**
SVV17	5.7%	20.8%	54.7%	18.9%	73.6%	2.87	0.79
SVV18	0.0%	9.4%	71.7%	18.9%	**90.6%**	**3.09**	**0.53**
SVV19	1.9%	21.2%	63.5%	13.5%	76.9%	2.88	0.65
SVV20	0.0%	13.0%	68.5%	18.5%	**87.0%**	**3.05**	**0.56**
CLA21	1.8%	9.1%	65.5%	23.6%	**89.1%**	**3.11**	**0.63**
CLA22	1.8%	10.9%	60.0%	27.3%	**87.3%**	**3.13**	**0.67**
CLA23	1.9%	7.4%	64.8%	25.9%	**90.7%**	**3.16**	**0.63**
CLA24	1.9%	13.0%	66.7%	18.5%	**85.2%**	**3.02**	**0.63**
CLA25	1.8%	9.1%	70.9%	18.2%	**89.1%**	**3.05**	**0.59**
CLA26	3.8%	15.4%	55.8%	25.0%	**80.8%**	**3.02**	**0.75**
CLA27	1.9%	19.2%	67.3%	11.5%	78.8%	2.88	0.62
CLA28	1.9%	7.4%	66.7%	24.1%	**90.7%**	**3.13**	**0.62**
CLA29	0.0%	7.7%	65.4%	26.9%	**92.3%**	**3.19**	**0.56**
CLA30	3.7%	11.1%	64.8%	20.4%	**85.2%**	**3.02**	**0.69**
SPP31	11.3%	32.1%	45.3%	11.3%	56.6%	2.57	0.84
SPP32	3.8%	24.5%	56.6%	15.1%	71.7%	2.83	0.73
SPP33	1.9%	9.4%	66.0%	22.6%	**88.7%**	**3.09**	**0.63**
SPP34	3.7%	20.4%	63.0%	13.0%	75.9%	2.85	0.68
SPP35	3.8%	11.3%	54.7%	30.2%	**84.9%**	**3.11**	**0.74**
SPP36	1.9%	9.4%	71.7%	17.0%	**88.7%**	**3.04**	**0.59**
SPP37	7.4%	20.4%	64.8%	7.4%	72.2%	2.72	0.71
SCR38	1.8%	8.9%	55.4%	33.9%	**89.3%**	**3.21**	**0.68**
SCR39	5.7%	11.3%	49.1%	34.0%	**83.0%**	**3.11**	**0.82**
SCR40	1.9%	11.1%	50.0%	37.0%	**87.0%**	**3.22**	**0.72**
SCR41	0.0%	16.4%	65.5%	18.2%	**83.6%**	**3.02**	**0.59**
SCR42	3.6%	9.1%	60.0%	27.3%	**87.3%**	**3.11**	**0.71**
SCS43	1.9%	17.0%	60.4%	20.8%	**81.1%**	**3.00**	**0.68**
SCS44	0.0%	13.2%	64.2%	22.6%	**86.8%**	**3.09**	**0.60**
SCS45	3.8%	21.2%	61.5%	13.5%	75.0%	2.85	0.70
SCS46	3.7%	11.1%	66.7%	18.5%	**85.2%**	**3.00**	**0.67**
SCS47	0.0%	14.5%	74.5%	10.9%	**85.5%**	**2.96**	**0.51**

<div align="right">(continued)</div>

2010 PLCA-R Responses (continued)

PLC Statements	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree/ Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
SCS48	0.0%	9.3%	50.0%	40.7%	**90.7%**	**3.31**	**0.64**
SCS49	1.9%	3.7%	74.1%	20.4%	**94.4%**	**3.13**	**0.55**
SCS50	3.8%	9.4%	71.7%	15.1%	86.8%	2.98	0.63
SCS51	1.9%	13.2%	67.9%	17.0%	**84.9%**	**3.00**	**0.62**
SCS52	0.0%	11.5%	71.2%	17.3%	**88.5%**	**3.06**	**0.54**

Note. Values in blue indicate statements with percentages greater than 80% agree/strongly agree and a mean average greater than 3.00. N = 54.

2010 PLCA-R Professional Learning Community Dimension Means

PLC Dimension	Mean	SD
Shared and Supportive Leadership	2.96	0.66
Shared Values and Vision	3.02	0.60
Collective Learning and Application	3.07	0.64
Shared Personal Practice	2.89	0.73
Supportive Conditions - Relationships	3.14	0.71
Supportive Conditions - Structures	3.04	0.62

The PLCA-R data collected two years after the initial PLCA administration in 2008 demonstrated the staff continued to grow in their ability to collaboratively work together, learning and applying their learning within a culture of positive and supportive relationships. Hord and Hirsch (2008) posited relationships and collective learning are central to the developing and sustaining the professional learning community (PLC) culture. Also a dissertation study conducted by Blacklock (2009) found supportive relationships and collective learning were foundational to fostering a PLC culture and the most evident in sustaining this culture in highly successful and diverse elementary schools. These findings suggest also relationships built on mutual trust and respect are essential for developing the context for PLC development at every level within the school system. The data also suggests that the parallel development of a PLC at large within the district influenced staff perceptions at the school level both directly and indirectly. As school leaders and teachers attend district training more focused on PLC practices and characteristics their own perceptions and practices have changed which are mirrored by their responses on the PLCA-R.

2010 Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) % of student mastery
WFISD *Recognized*
HHS *Academically Acceptable*

2009-2010	District	HHS all	AA	His	Wht	Ec Dis
ELA	90	91	89	89	94	88
M	83	65	62	56	71	58
Sci	82	84	81	74	92	78
SoSt	97	95	98	85	98	92

Note. Values in blue indicate campus performance higher than district performance.

All district scores increased by several points from 2009 results, and for the first time in this study the WFISD earned a Recognized rating based on all measured indicators in TEA's Academic Excellence Indicator System. At Hirschi performance gaps in achievement falling along racial and economic lines were at their lowest of this study, the greatest gap of 18 points occurring between African American and white students in science.

Conclusions

The following summary data presents the evidence suggesting where patterns emerge from the Professional Learning Community Assessment (PLCA) and Professional Learning Community Assessment – Revised (PLCA-R) tools administered to the Hirschi staff during the 2008 and 2010 school years. Using the data from this assessment tool can provide a means by which schools measure the development of professional learning community characteristics and practices; thereby, fostering a *data driven* culture supporting school improvement.

PLCA and PLCA-R Mean Comparison

PLC Dimension	Mean 2008	2010	SD 2008	2010
Shared and Supportive Leadership	2.98	2.96	0.82	0.66
Shared Values and Vision	2.84	3.02	0.80	0.60
Collective Learning and Application	2.92	3.07	0.77	0.64
Shared Personal Practice	2.71	2.89	0.72	0.73
Supportive Conditions - Relationships	3.05	3.14	0.78	0.71
Supportive Conditions - Structures	2.83	3.04	0.82	0.62

PLCA/PLCA-R Summary Comparison – Most Improvement

PLC Statement 2008/2010	Agree/ Strongly Agree 2008	Agree/ Strongly Agree 2010	Mean 2008	Mean 2010	SD 2008	SD 2010
SSL8/8. Leadership is promoted and nurtured among staff members.	66.0%	81.5%	2.79	3.00	0.88	0.61
SSL9/9. Decision-making takes place through committees and communication across grade and subject areas.	81.3%	87.0%	3.06	3.09	0.73	0.59
SSL11. Staff members use multiple sources of data to make decisions about teaching and learning.		88.9%		3.22		0.74
SVV11/12. A collaborative process exists for developing a shared sense of values among staff.	76.6%	87.3%	2.87	3.02	0.66	0.49
SVV12/13. Shared values support norms of behavior that guide decisions about teaching and learning.	77.1%	89.1%	2.83	3.02	0.77	0.60
SVV13/14. Staff members share visions for school improvement that have an undeviating focus on student learning.	75.0%	83.3%	2.85	3.02	0.68	0.44
SVV14/15. Decisions are made in alignment with the school's values and vision.	83.3%	96.2%	3.04	3.13	0.74	0.55
SVV15/16. A collaborative process exists for developing a shared vision among staff.	77.1%	86.8%	2.92	3.04	1.05	0.79
SVV17/18. Policies and programs are aligned to the school's vision.	77.1%	90.6%	2.90	3.09	0.87	0.65
SVV20. Data are used to prioritize actions to reach a shared vision.		87.0%		3.05		0.56
CLA19/21. Staff members work together to seek knowledge, skills and strategies and apply this new learning to their work.	85.4%	89.1%	3.08	3.11	0.68	0.63
CLA20/22. Collegial relationships exist among staff members that reflect commitment to school improvement efforts.	83.3%	87.3%	3.02	3.13	0.79	0.67
CLA21/23. Staff members plan and work together to search for solutions to address diverse student needs.	60.7%	90.7%	2.96	3.16	1.04	0.63
CLA22/24. A variety of opportunities and structures exist for collective learning through open dialogue.	77.1%	85.2%	2.81	3.02	0.70	0.63
CLA23/25. Staff members engage in dialogue that reflects a respect for diverse ideas that lead to continued inquiry.	79.2%	89.1%	2.92	3.05	0.71	0.59
CLA24/26. Professional development focuses on teaching and learning.	68.8%	80.8%	2.79	3.02	0.85	0.75

PLCA/PLCA-R Summary Comparison – Most Improvement

PLC Statement 2008/2010	Agree/ Strongly Agree 2008	Agree/ Strongly Agree 2010	Mean 2008	Mean 2010	*SD* 2008	*SD* 2010
CLA26/28. School staff members are committed to programs that enhance learning.	87.2%	90.7%	3.11	3.13	0.60	0.62
CLA29. Staff members collaboratively analyze multiple sources of data to assess the effectiveness of instructional practices.		92.3%		3.19		0.56
CLA30. Staff members collaboratively analyze student work to improve teaching and learning.		85.2%		3.02		0.69
SPP31/35. Opportunities exist for coaching and mentoring.	66.0%	84.9%	2.74	3.11	0.74	0.74
SPP32/36. Individuals and teams have the opportunity to apply learning and share the results of their practices.	76.6%	88.7%	2.87	3.04	0.65	0.59
SCR33/38. Caring relationships exist among staff and students that are built on trust and respect.	82.4%	89.3%	3.14	3.21	0.85	0.68
SCR34/39. A culture of trust and respect exists for taking risks.	78.7%	83.0%	2.96	3.11	0.86	0.82
SCR36/41. School staff and stakeholders exhibit a sustained and unified effort to embed change into the culture of the school.	74.5%	83.6%	2.83	3.02	0.70	0.59
SCR42. Relationships among staff members support honest and respectful examination of data to enhance teaching and learning.		87.3%		3.11		0.71
SCS37/43. Time is provided to facilitate collaborative work.	59.6%	81.1%	2.53	3.00	0.86	0.68
SCS38/44. The school schedule promotes collective learning and shared practice.	61.7%	86.8%	2.53	3.09	0.83	0.60
SCS42/48. The school facility is clean, attractive and inviting.	76.1%	90.7%	3.02	3.31	0.93	0.64
SCS43/49. The proximity of grade level and department personnel allows for ease in collaborating with colleagues.	76.6%	94.4%	3.00	3.13	0.75	0.55
SCS45/51. Communication systems promote a flow of information across the entire school community including: central office personnel, parents, and community members.	63.8%	84.9%	2.68	3.00	0.75	0.62
SCS52. Data are organized and made available to provide easy access to staff members.		88.5%		3.06		0.54

Note. Greatest improvement is based upon agree/strongly agree response frequencies greater than 80% and mean averages greater than 3.00. Red indicates statement added to PLCA-R.

Developing healthy and sustainable school cultures as professional learning communities is not an easy task. Time, leadership, and faculty and district commitment to collaborative relationships and collective learning are required. According to Hipp and Huffman (Eds., 2010), size and organizational complexity make educational reform at the high school level especially challenging. Reform becomes even more important considering the evident gap in student achievement that falls along racial and economic lines. Although Hirschi High School's journey towards a sustainable community of learners continues it is far from complete. Hirschi is becoming a *learning* school, and at some point will become a *leading* school where faculty are successfully working to develop clear understandings of what must be done to ensure student learning and what must be done to sustain that success for all students (Reeves, 2006).

Again the question: "*How can educational leaders create and nurture a culture of learning and safety in an organization?* Can we generalize from Hirschi IB High School's progress down this path towards becoming a community of professional learners?

Although the transformation is painfully slow and not nearly perfect or complete, we believe that three factors have coalesced to foster and support changes in the culture of Hirschi High School.

First, through modeling vision, effective professional development, and changed school structures leadership at the district level have supported school reculturing as a professional learning community. The PLCA longitudinal data suggests that Hirschi staff continues to grow in working collectively and collaboratively together as they continue to move towards fully implementing a shared vision of doing *whatever it takes* to improve student learning. Data itself is also viewed by the staff as an important tool for making instructional decisions within a collaborative school and district culture. In interviews for this study, Board president, Reverend Reginald Blow and district director of staff development, Dr. Jan Bennett, confirmed the importance of leadership keeping the vision and persistently moving the district towards a sustainable professional learning community at large (Fullan, 2005).

Second, at district and campus levels, student learning is increasing and gaps in student success are narrowing due to sustained leadership, actively engaged in the culture of the school and courageously keeping the needs of the students the primary focus of the school. Although shared and supported leadership has lagged behind in development in comparison to the other PLC dimensions at the campus level there continues to be district support for the development of leadership focused on student needs which will be required to continue the PLC transformation. There are glimmers of hope as the Hirschi staff continues to see leadership promoted and nurtured within the complexities of the secondary school setting.

And finally, through a professional learning community culture of collective learning and supportive relationships the faculty continues to work to create a place where all students will be successful. Fullan (2005) continues to argue that it is our moral imperative to "foster greater cohesion and shared commitment toward a higher purpose and to constantly seek and refine better ideas and practices" (p. 222) to support learning for all students. Doing so within the context of a professional learning community at both the district and school levels can create a culture where adults and students learn and grow together and based upon our findings this is essential for continued and purposeful improvement.

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