UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

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BOTTOM-UP ACCOUNTABILITY:

HOW LEADERSHIP TEAM MEMBERS IN HIGH-NEED SCHOOLS PRIORITIZE AND CONTEXTUALIZE THEIR WORK

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

Requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Outcomes of formal accountability measures often portray schools in low-income communities as ineffective. This happens without taking into account the broader issues that impact a schools' ability to create the conditions for teaching and learning. This qualitative study sought to understand site-based goals established by leadership teams in high-need schools and how these goals address student and community needs, including how contextualization of formal data sheds light on issues of shared responsibility for school success. It also sought to understand how site-based goals and context shape the supports provided by the district. The leadership teams of three pilot schools in the Paso Nuevo Unified School District (pseudonym) were interviewed. These schools all service low-income high-need communities throughout Paso Nuevo. Although these schools exhibit some of the conditions considered optimal for

teaching and learning, they have struggled to meet formal accountability measures. The principals for each school were also interviewed for this study, including four members of district leadership. My findings show that leadership team members prioritize the immediate needs of students and communities. These site-based goals address issues of trauma, safety, poverty, violence and dislocation. Contextualization of formal data pointed to issues that make the conditions for teaching and learning a challenge. These include a lack of resources, lack of effective teachers, lack of accurate and timely data and serving a disproportionate number of students with high needs, including English Leaners, Newcomers and Special Education students. Although district leadership acknowledged the broader issues that impact these conditions, they failed to provide solutions to these challenges. District leadership was focused on addressing formal accountability measures, which are prioritized by LEA's and state accountability systems. These findings suggest that leadership teams work collaboratively and effectively, aligning resources and supports to address the immediate needs of students. Additionally, findings suggest that broader issues that are not measured by formal measures impact a schools' ability to create the conditions for teaching and learning. Lastly, the state and district should develop reciprocal intelligent accountability systems that hold districts and states accountable for not addressing and supporting the needs of schools.

The dissertation of Cynthia Gonzalez is approved.

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2018

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my two daughters, Isairis Victoria Dominguez and Elisly Daniela Dominguez. I love you girls with all my heart and all my soul. Although I haven't been the best mom these last three years I hope that through this process you have learned that going after your dreams is not always easy but always possible. To my parents, Rafael Gonzalez and Socorro Gonzalez who have always made my career and my educational attainment possible, gracias por su apoyo. I am equal parts hard working and opinionated because of you. To my Comm and Tech family, thank you for stepping in for our students and holding down the fort during this journey. To UCLA GSEIS, for making me the educational leader that I am today. My Bruin journey began in 2001 with TEP and continued with PLI, LSP and has concluded with this doctoral degree. Throughout this journey UCLA has provided me countless mentors and friends. I will forever hold you close to my heart. To my lovely and fabulous Fridas. Without you this would not be possible. We enacted all the things that make for great organizations and even better friendships. In true Frida fashion, we remained strong, persistent and will forever change the world. Si se puede! Y Si se pudo!

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Chapter 1

Problem Statement

There is immense pressure on inner city schools to demonstrate academic growth regardless of the conditions they face or the scarcity of resources available to them (Heilig, 2011; Kim & Kemp-Graham, 2013; Taylor, 2005). This pressure has been exacerbated by new educational reforms that have introduced market driven approaches to public education mostly centered on competition, choice and vouchers that further perpetuate performance gaps within communities. Over the last several decades, school performance data and standards based accountability, which is a formal way of assessing schools, has increased pressures on schools to succeed. Formal accountability measures such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP), and Academic Growth Over Time (AGT), rated the performance of schools and, in the case of AGT, educators, based on one-time, end-of year high stakes testing. More recently, local districts have attempted to capture a more qualitative approach to accountability through the use of School Experience Surveys. School accountability measures based on federal, state and local district goals are often published and shared with communities and families using documents such as the School Report Card (Berliner, 2011; Elish-Piper, Matthews, & Risko, 2013; Heilig, 2011; May & Sanders, 2013).

Over the last several decades beginning with NCLB, high-stakes tests have labeled many schools as failing regardless of their varying socioeconomic realities. There is little attention paid to the pressure these schools face to increase performance and the role that socioeconomic contexts can play in student achievement. Working under these conditions perpetuates a cycle of disillusionment and frustration for individuals who dedicate their lives working in the hardest to teach schools. They are expected to make academic gains despite of the conditions that make it

academic gains difficult. Educators in these spaces are often overwhelmed, attempting to rectify for students what society has failed to address. These issues include shelter, healthcare, mental health, substance abuse, and violence, among other factors that plague these communities. Unfortunately, the time and effort spent addressing these basic needs of students are seldom captured through formal accountability measures. Under such distressful conditions, educators are forced to make decisions about how they will invest their time and energy. These decisions are impacted by local, state and federal policies that demand focus and attention. Educators are placed in an almost impossible situation, attempting to address both formal and site-based accountabilities.

On the one hand, educators feel pressured to demonstrate academic gains on a yearly basis while on the other hand they attempt to tackle the social-emotional needs of students, which might take longer to address. The importance given to academic gains forces schools to make decisions that will demonstrate immediate results instead of allowing them to invest time and energy in more adaptive and transformative changes. The top-down approach to school accountability prioritizes academic gains in ways that causes harm to schools whose goals require attention be paid to more pressing issues. Success in this model is determined by high-stakes test results with little attention being paid to more fundamental aspects of successful schooling. A fundamental paradigm shift that legitimizes the goals of schools is essential in creating schools that directly address the impact that socioeconomic and social-emotional circumstances have on student learning (Craig, 2016). Recognizing the efforts and gains schools make in these site-based measures of accountability is critical if we seek to have schools that meet the demands of the 21st century.

In order to truly transform inner-city schools, educators need to be empowered to identify and address the specific and unique needs of the students they serve. School leadership teams should be trained and empowered to tackle these issues in clear and effective ways. Effective leadership teams can identify site-based data that are aligned with schoolwide goals and allow these to take precedence when sharing schools' progress with the larger public. Giving power to school leadership teams to be able to prioritize their time and resources would be a bottom-up approach that provides a more realistic depiction of their work. This bottom-up approach to accountability goes against a one-size-fits-all model of public accountability. By understanding the goals, approaches and strategies of schools, district and state officials can truly support the needs of schools in ways that can transform the educational landscape of inner-city schools and communities. This view of school performance legitimizes the work of schools in ways that honor the unique context of schools. This legitimacy extends beyond traditional performance and accountability metrics that can be disconnected from the goals of schools and communities.

By allowing schools to prioritize their identified areas of need and supporting the work of schools in this process, the district will demonstrate an understanding of the intricacies of schools and the multifaceted approaches that are needed in order to make these spaces a success. Engaging in this work will allow school leadership teams to prioritize their resources, both human and financial to ensure that students are college and career ready. This work is centered on a holistic approach that recognizes the importance of academic performance but places just as much if not more importance on the emotional and social well-being of students. Most importantly it acknowledges the input and professionalism of school staff as being capable of identifying their most pressing issues and providing educators the supports and resources to transform their schools.

Background of the Problem

Horace Mann, considered the "father of American public school education," identified the purpose of schools as places intended to provide "equality and opportunity and reduce the friction between the rich and the poor" (Spring, 1996, p. 4). The responsibility of creating equity and reducing the friction between the rich and the poor continues to be prevalent today. In addition, a decline in social programs that provide a safety net for students has left a hole in our society that schools are expected to, but quite often cannot fill (Putnam, 2015). These changes are further compounded with an era of accountability that place schools, specifically those that serve urban youth, in an almost insurmountable situation to achieve success.

As the responsibility of schools has increased, so have accountability measures that seek to prove to the larger public that education is of value to our society. Accountability measures became a national concern with the 1983 educational report *A Nation at Risk,* which painted a dire picture of the failures of public education (Au, 2014; Emery, 2007). Increased accountability led to high-stakes testing requirements that slowly began to reshape the educational landscape of our country (Au, 2013; Emery, 2007). The passage of *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB; 2001), during the Bush administration further cemented the reliance of high-stakes testing as a determinant of a school's academic performance (Heilig, 2011; May & Sanders, 2013; Taylor, 2005; Thompson & Allen, 2012). Over the last decades, scholars have noted the opportunity gaps that have continued to exist under the high-stakes testing era (Heilig, 2011; Taylor, 2005). Special attention has been placed on how the over-reliance of high-stakes testing accountability has impacted communities of color, punishing schools who did not make adequate progress by inflicting sanctions, restructure and reconstitution (Brown, Wohlstetter, & Liu, 2009; May & Sanders, 2013; Thompson & Allen, 2012). The achievement gap is well

documented through local, state and federal accountability measures such as the school's accountability report card, Academic Performance Index (API) and AYP. Failing schools have a difficult time staying above water when the narrative shared with the general public is so dire. The failure of this form of accountability lies in the inability to address issues that fundamentally inhibit inner city schools from reaching high levels of success.

Research on the inequities of public schools points to disparities in resource allocation; quality of teachers; and access to advanced placement classes including courses that support the attainment of a post-secondary education. Included in this data are issues of campus safety; cleanliness; staffing and access to critical programs that support student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Rogers et al., 2007). These are conditions that are fundamental in creating environments where learning can take place. The intense focus on high-stakes accountability measures ignores the impact that these circumstances have on schools. It specifically ignores the systemic and oppressive structures that create these social disparities. This is particularly true in communities of color (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007; Heilig, 2011; Darling-Hammond, Wilhoit, & Pittenger, 2014; Kim & Kemp-Graham, 2013; Rogers & Freelon, 2012). NCLB offered little to no support to schools in need of additional resources. Instead, schools found themselves being revictimized not only by their circumstances but by a new bureaucratic accountability system that further punished those most in need (Heilig, 2011; Thompson & Allen, 2012)

The recent signing of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA; 2015), which replaced the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, seeks to provide a new model of accountability at the federal level. This legislation acknowledges the unique needs of communities by giving power to state governments in determining accountability measures (ESSA, 2015). Due to this new

policy, the state of California is taking into account multiple forms of accountability that go beyond standardized test scores. These measures include attendance data, school climate data, and graduation rates among other measures (Affeldt, 2015). Although heading in the right direction, the measures still lean toward favoring high functioning schools. Even this expanded vision of accountability does little to measure the conditions necessary for effective teaching and learning. Inadequate learning conditions often impact high needs schools the most. Although district, local and state leadership are a part of the accountability structure, they often are left unaccountable for providing schools the resources to be successful (Noguera, 2004; Oakes, Blasi & Rogers, 2004).

Statement of Local Problem

As mentioned, The State of California has developed a new funding and accountability model that attempts to provide schools a more accurate picture of their performance. The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF; 2013) was created to provide more equitable funding to districts (Affeldt, 2015). Connected to this funding is the state's attempt to reframe the way schools are held accountable to the larger public. Through the development of this new accountability system the state has selected eight priorities. These priorities include Basic, State Standards, Parental Involvement, Pupil Achievement, Pupil Engagement, School Climate, Course Access and Other Pupil Outcomes. Within each priority subcategories are included that categorize specific areas of focus. These subcategories include equity, professional learning, resource alignment, teachers, curriculum, instruction, culture and climate, assessment and family and community (California Department of Education, n.d.a). Under the first priority, Basic, the state outlines the importance of having schools understand the diverse needs of their student populations through a focus on equity (California Department of Education, n.d.a). This is a

promising move toward acknowledging the diverse communities that make up the educational landscape of the state. Although moving in the right direction, this first and critical priority continues to remain focused on goals around academic achievement and fails to take into consideration the impact of trauma, poverty and social-emotional well-being as a basic and fundamental priority. When it comes to addressing measures of school culture, the state points to research around the importance of student relationships and sense of belonging but continues to connect measures of that to traditional forms of accountability such as suspension and attendance rates. The fact that these measures need to be wide enough to capture all of the various communities within the state make some of these data pieces arbitrary. Schools in middle class communities will potentially continue to score high under this new system, given the access to support and resources that they receive both within the school and from the community.

Local Education Agencies (LEAs) will also have flexibility within this new system to determine the accountability measures they will use given the parameters of the eight priorities, called the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP). This new process gives LEAs more autonomy in addressing the unique needs of their communities. For a district like the Paso Nuevo Unified School District the creation of a districtwide LCAP becomes large and disconnected from the specific needs of schools and communities. This continues to force schools to allocate their resources to meet the accountability needs of district and state goals that might not accurately capture the goals and unique needs of individual schools.

Pilot schools serve inner-city low socioeconomic communities and attempt to transform these spaces through the formation of effective schools that use innovative research-based best practices. The essential features of pilot schools include equity based, accountable, autonomous,

personalized and collaborative. Through this approach, pilot schools seek to provide students and communities the supports needed to achieve success. Pilot schools within the Paso Nuevo Unified School District (PNUSD; a pseudonym) were created to foster teacher leadership and innovation. These schools operate under a memorandum of understanding (MoU) that gives pilot schools several autonomies from PNUSD policies. These schools are located in some of the district's lowest socioeconomic status communities. Pilot schools are expected to outperform traditional district comprehensive schools because of the use of innovative strategies, teacher led practices and personalization they offer. Although pilot schools are currently outperforming comprehensive counterparts, they are doing so only slightly better on formal accountability measures. Larger gains are currently evident in social-emotional and school culture areas. In order to have a clear understanding on the impact of these schools within the district it is crucial that we are able to capture the work of leadership teams as they work toward the creation of successful schools. Pilot schools provide a perfect environment to understand how effective leadership teams work together to address the needs of their students and in prioritizing the focus of their work around formal and site-based accountability systems.

Statement of the Project

State and local accountability systems should take into consideration the prioritized needs of schools as identified by school leadership teams and provide the supports these schools need in order to ensure student success. In order for this to occur, leadership teams must be able to clearly articulate the context of their schools and be reflective about the way they address both formal and site-based accountability measures. This is essential in providing a space for schools to focus on site-based goals and to be able to contextualize specific needs.

Pilot schools are a part of the Paso Nuevo Unified School District. An MoU was established to relieve overcrowding at existing high schools, allowing for the creation of pilot schools in the district. The model expanded through the adoption of Community Choice (CC)[1] Pilot schools grew in number across the district over the last decade. Pilot schools are considered a teacher led reform model. In addition to having a bottom-up approach to leadership, pilot schools have autonomies that are meant to facilitate school success. These autonomies include governance, curriculum and assessment guidelines, school calendar, budgeting and staffing. In addition to these autonomies, pilot schools have adopted the Understanding of Work Expectations (UWE)[2], which serves as a thin contract for teachers. The UWE was developed by teachers and approved by the School Guidance Council (SGC). This agreement is part of the MoU and is agreed to by the teachers union. In some sense, pilot schools are the district's response to the charter school movement. These schools are typically small and therefore can offer a more personalized educational setting. The UWE also allows some of the flexibility around teacher commitment to the school that is difficult to achieve in traditional public school settings. The flexibility to hire and release teachers who fail to meet the UWE offers pilot schools the flexibility to staff their schools in ways that closely mirror charter schools.

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[1] [Community Choice] was passed by the [Paso Nuevo Unified School District] between the years of 2007-2010. It created the opportunity to open new district schools, as well as provided schools that have historically struggled to make academic progress the opportunity to adopt schooling models aimed at accelerating student performance.

[2] The [UWE] Agreement is a thin contract developed by teachers that outlines the additional responsibilities outside of the required union contract.

By legitimizing and contextualizing the stories of these schools, this study seeks to address issues regarding school based performance metrics that are disconnected from school and community priorities This is critical for pilot schools within PNUSD. Due to district wide reorganization, pilot schools, which had existed within the Autonomous Office of Support (AOS) and used to receive support from district staff that understood the model, were reorganized into districts factions within PNUSD. This action disbanded the base of support that these schools depended on to engage in innovative work. This had a dramatic impact on pilot schools' ability to be both innovative and autonomous while at the same time receiving targeted support as identified by school sites. Under the new structure, pilot schools often do not have the autonomy that they are granted by their MoUs, and they often do not receive the supports that they need. Along with the reorganization, district leadership began to compare the success of pilot schools to other district schools based on only one measure, the Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA). The district's desire to see rapid academic growth among pilot schools has caused a sense of pressure to produce in ways that are counter to what research says matters in schools. In order to combat this narrative, the Pilot School Committee (PSC)[3] has been proactive in analyzing multiple forms of data to demonstrate the importance and legitimacy of their work. This dissertation seeks to understand the impact of community and school context on the goals and formal accountability outcomes of schools as described by leadership teams, including how district leadership determines school success and provides the supports necessary to create the conditions for teaching and learning.

[3] The Pilot School Committee is made up of principals from pilot schools.

The Pilot school model, with its autonomy, focus on collaboration, equity and personalization, provides a perfect opportunity to document how schools determine shared goals; address the needs of the communities and students they serve and understand how they contextualize their ability to meet formal accountability outcomes. In order for schools to function effectively, they must first have a common goal or task (Bolman & Deal, 2008). This study will provide information critical to understanding the goals of leadership teams in low-income communities. By identifying specific goals and practices, the study will be able to identify the relationship between site-based goals and connections to school and community needs. Accountability is an essential component of pilot schools and school site leadership teams will be asked to contextualize current results on formal accountability measures. This is an important question in the study. In the final component of the study, I speak with district leaders about the way in which they assess school performance for some of their high-need schools and the role of the district in establishing the teaching and learning conditions necessary for school success.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide my study:

- Aside from goals related to formal accountability measures, what are the central goals of pilot school leadership teams? Why are these goals important to them? How do school leadership teams communicate their efforts to advance these site-based goals?
- How do pilot school leadership teams contextualize and explain their school's performance on formal accountability measures?
- How do district leaders assess the performance of schools and the role of the district in establishing the conditions for school success?

Existing Intervention and Gaps This Research Will Fill

Research on pilot schools is limited. Comparative research between small schools within PNUSD and traditional schools has been done. Findings indicate a higher level of collaboration among pilot schools, which leads to a greater sense of interdependence and responsibility among staff (Fuller, Waite, Chao, & Benedicto, 2014). In addition, research on PNUSD Pilot School autonomies and their impact on student learning found that Pilot school leaders face limitations in their work due to district and union policies that hinder a schools ability to address the needs of their students (Payne, 2013).

A variety of research exists which detail strategies for school success. Included in this work is the importance of collaboration among staff members through the use of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), ensuring the use of effective Tier I instruction and providing systemic support to students who need intervention, providing social-emotional support for students by establishing safe spaces and fostering strong relationships between students and staff and measuring student learning through a standards based mastery approach (Buffum & Mattos, 2014; Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2012; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Noguera & Boykin, 2011) Research on accountability measures points to the negative impact that a focus on high-stakes testing has had on urban schools (Chiu, 2009; May & Sanders, 2013; Meyers & Murphy, 2008; Thompson & Allen, 2012). These approaches fail to identify the progress that schools are capable of making if they engage in high-leverage best practices.

Research has not captured how schools prioritize their work between formal and site-based goals and how this work differs from community to community. Research on the way pilot schools use innovative, research-based strategies does not exist. By understanding how pilot schools contextualize their goals and formal data, the school district and the larger public

can understand the complex work of schools and might rethink the current narrow view of school success. In addition, the study also intends to legitimize the uniqueness of schools and communities and the work that is required by school sites to address these needs. This new approach posits the power of accountability in the hands of school site members and requires that their voices are legitimized as they discuss their goals and contextualize the needs of their schools.

Site and Population

The three pilot schools chosen for this study are high schools with high numbers of English Learners and Special Education students. The three sites span across the Paso Nuevo Unified School District. Pilot schools were chosen based on their participation in the Leadership Development for Schools program (LDSP) at the University of Southern Hills. These schools have received extensive training on leadership team capacity building. In addition, the schools chosen have high percentages of English Learners, Special Education and low socioeconomic students. It is these schools that most clearly must be able to articulate the unique needs of their schools. Schools with a high number of EL, Special Ed and low SES students struggle on formal accountability measures. Therefore, contextualizing the work of teams as they address the needs of these students can provide a different picture of school effectiveness and success as well as an understanding of the resources and supports needed.

Overview of the Research Design

This dissertation used a qualitative research study, including individual interviews as well as focus group interviews with school site principals, members of the schools' leadership teams and district leadership. This methodology provided the most flexibility in allowing schools to contextualize their work and their abilities to meet or not meet formal and site-based

accountability measures. Focus group and individual interviews were transcribed and common themes were identified through a process of tagging and grouping.

Site leadership teams contextualized formal accountability data and provided descriptions of what they prioritize as a school and how these goals reflect community and student needs. Although some overlapping themes emerged from the contextualization provided, not all context was the same at each site. The same was true of the site-based goals at the schools. Although there were some commonalities among schools, schools provided different focus areas based on the unique needs of their schools. By capturing the unique needs of schools and communities as well as contextualizing formal accountability data, district leadership and policymakers will be given insight that will allow them to focus on true indicators of school success and a framework to provide schools support. This will shift accountability from a focus on results to a focus on processes, approaches and strategies that are essential for creating the conditions for teaching and learning in schools.

The Significance of the Research for Solving the Problem

School-wide goals should take precedence when determining the effectiveness of schools and leadership teams. This allows schools to invest and leverage resources in practices and strategies that are high leverage, instead of focusing on meeting one-time high stakes tests that are often unreliable and inconsistent. Most importantly, being able to clearly articulate these goals allows pilot schools to speak to the importance of their work and their needs within the district. Giving power to schools in contextualizing their work can better educate the larger public on a schools' effectiveness and the supports needed to create the conditions for teaching and learning. This is a bottom-up approach that allows schools to highlight their strengths, while receiving aligned support to address challenges they face. Findings of this research could

transform accountability structures between the schools and the districts and policy makers changing from a top-down focus on one-time test results to a focus on research-oriented approaches that support the transformation of schools, including bottom-up accountability structures. It also empowers schools and communities to prioritize resources in ways that truly meet their unique needs.

Findings of this study will be shared with PNUSD leadership, including human resources and staffing. This information will also be given to the PSC, which consists of social justice minded leaders. Another interested and invested ally in this work is the LDSP at the University of Southern Hills, whom I work closely with around issues of equity in schools. Findings will also be shared with the Principals Education Program at a local university, whose central mission is addressing issues of equity in public schools.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

Public education continues to be seen as the "great equalizer" in our society. Nowhere is this truer than in schools that reside in communities that are underresourced and lack political and social investment. Schools that reside in these communities sometimes face insurmountable hurdles in order to ensure the equalization that they promise. The increase of students of color in the United States has led to demographic changes experienced in America's schools, specifically in large urban areas. In addition to these changes, the polarization between the rich and the poor, have had a dramatic effect in students' accessibility to a quality education. A decline in social programs that provide a safety net for students has left a hole in our society that schools are expected to fill but quite often cannot (Putnam, 2015). In addition to this challenge, new reforms geared at creating a market driven approach in public schooling have increased the pressure on schools to perform.

Although new reforms in education have increased pressures on these schools around accountability measures, the idea of holding schools accountable has existed for decades. This has presented itself in the form of federal, state, and local policies using a top down approach, leaving school site stakeholders out of the process in addressing needs that they deem critical for their success (Edwards & Pula, 2011; May & Sanders, 2013). These measures are almost always created by individuals detached from schools and communities and are often broad in scope (Au, 2013). If public schools are to serve as institutions that mitigate and attempt to equalize opportunity for students, we need accountability measures that allow schools to identify the critical needs of their students and communities. These needs are connected to the larger

socioeconomic and political realities that shape the communities these students come from (Darling-Hammond, 2010). For students in inner-city schools these needs can include but are not limited to poverty, homelessness, substance abuse, violence and a lack of social mobility that creates a cycle of poverty. Schools in these neighborhoods serve as the first and sometimes only institution of support and are expected to ensure that students learn despite these obstacles (Putnam, 2015). It is the teachers, leaders and staff at these schools that can most accurately articulate the ways in which they can truly address the needs of students. They understand the context of their schools and are best positioned to speak to how to address the major challenges students face. Therefore, a bottom up accountability system that accurately validates the work of schools must be supported by local and state policymakers with a primary purpose of student success (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

My literature review begins with a discussion of formal top down accountability systems in public education, including the role that NCLB played in the implementation of high stakes testing. School performance on NCLB highlights two levels of disparities, school based and societal. The LCAP in California, which takes into account inequalities in communities and in schools, serves as an example of a different approach to school accountability. I then define site-based accountability measures by using the framework of professional learning communities (PLC's) and distributed leadership, which are critical in effective schools but are not a part of formal accountability measures.

Next, I explore the use of critical pedagogy of place as a theoretical foundation for the bottom-up approach in educational accountability and praxis and the inclusion of the voice of those most marginalized in our educational system as they take action on both formal and site-based goals. I also describe the use of reciprocal intelligent accountability and propose the

power of such accountability in empowering schools traditionally left behind and providing them the supports and resources needed to create the conditions necessary for learning.

Formal Accountability

Accountability in public schools has been a dilemma facing policymakers and educators alike. A controversial piece of educational legislation was NCLB signed by President George W. Bush in 2002. This act was intended to give the larger public information about the progress of America's schools. In order to accomplish this task, states, districts and schools were required to administer tests on an annual basis that determined a schools' progress in meeting academic standards (NCLB, 2001; Thompson & Allen, 2012). This focus on testing created a culture of high-stakes testing, which when aligned to mandated state content standards created an environment of punishment and reward in public education. However, over the last 2 decades, scholars and researchers have written about the pitfalls of such measures. This is specifically significant in the unequal way that this form of accountability impacted schools and communities of color. An example of this was the cutting of elective coursework and arts education programs, which was replaced with courses aimed at increasing test scores and demonstrated little to no evidence of effectiveness. By narrowing access to courses and limiting a schools' autonomy entire schools were placed under strict scrutiny and control by district and state officials (Heilig, 2011; Kim & Kemp-Graham, 2013; May & Sanders, 2013; Thompson & Allen, 2012).

In the State of California under NCLB, students were required to take the California Standardized Test (CST) on a yearly basis in grades 2-11. The CST assessed students' knowledge on state content standards in the areas of science, social science, math, and English language arts. These multiple-choice tests produced results that ranked students, schools, districts and states as achieving or failing. Performance bands that ranged from advanced to

below basic were used to designate student performance. These scores along with the California Modified Assessment, California Alternative Performance Assessment and the California High School Exit Exam were used to give schools an API score that ranged from 200 to 1000. Schools received a base score and were given growth goal targets on a yearly basis. The API score, including measurements on student sub-group performance were used by the state to satisfy AYP requirements mandated by the federal governments Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA; California Department of Education, n.d.b). Schools were required to grow every year and failure to do so would lead to loss of federal funding (NCLB, 2001; Au, 2013). These harsh penalties began to come under scrutiny during the Obama administration, which proposed changes to NCLB.

Race to the Top. Under President Barack Obama's leadership, beginning in the year 2009, a new form of accountability emerged nationwide. The Race to the Top grants were given to 11 states within the country focusing on improving outcomes in states by granting state educational agencies (SEAs) accountability flexibility. These grants examined educational reform differently than NCLB. Under Race to the Top, states had to develop innovative strategies to align standards and practices to support students' progress toward preparation for college and career. They also were required to develop systems to support effective instruction along with a focus on turning around the lowest performing schools. Race to the Top rewarded states and educational stakeholders for working collaboratively to address the needs of local education agencies (LEAs; Chism, 2015). Race to the Top shifted away from the single outcome, high-stakes testing model of NCLB and looked toward multiple measures to determine college and career ready progress. These measures included graduation and college enrollment rates. Although California was not a recipient of the Race to the Top grant, some of its influence

around college and career ready standards is evident in the state's new Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF).

Another critical component of Race to the Top was a move toward assessments that measure college and career readiness. It was a move away from tests based on rote memorization of facts to tests measuring critical thinking skills, a dramatic shift that was necessary and connected to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). In order to accomplish college and career readiness, a push toward CCSS across nearly all states became the new phase of educational reform.

Two assessments consortia emerged as options for states moving toward a common college and career accountability model that would accurately assess a state's progress in meeting CCSS. They were the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). This assessment moves away from rote memorization and requires students to engage in higher levels of critical thinking. In the classroom, educators will need to engage in meaningful work centered on critical thinking, moving teachers away from teaching to the test and reviewing test taking strategies as methods to improve individual and school-wide performance. The CCSS prompted larger legislative changes and led to the signing of Every Student Succeeds Act, a shift toward state and local accountability. Amid all of the changes consuming public education, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA; 2015), signed by President Barack Obama, which replaced the ESEA, also shifted responsibility from federal to state educational agencies. The ESEA outlined goals that called for equitable use of funding dollars to address the needs of the most marginalized students, rigorous standard and high expectations for all, use of innovative strategies to support student learning and flexibility for LEAs in addressing the diverse needs of

schools and communities. The state of California adopted the previously mentioned LCFF in 2013. The LCFF required that the state distribute money among districts in a more equitable way, taking into account schools in low resourced communities. Under this new formula, districts receive a base fund that then is supplemented with additional dollars to meet the needs of three specific subgroups of students: foster youth, free and reduced lunch students and English Learners. These additional dollars are intended to supplement schools in order to provide better services for these subgroups of students (Affeldt, 2015).

LCFF has also changed the way in which LEAs are held accountable for meeting a variety of measures and are responsible for developing a Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP). LCFF comprises 10 state priorities: Basic (Conditions of Learning); State Standards (Conditions of Learning); Parental Involvement (Engagement); Pupil Achievement (Pupil Outcomes); Pupil Engagement (Engagement); School Climate (Engagement); Course of Access (Conditions of Learning); Other Pupil Outcomes (Pupil Outcomes); Expelled Pupils (Conditions of Learning); and Foster Youth (Conditions of Learning; CA Dept of Education, n.d.b). The promise of this work is the use of multiple measures that range from academic to school culture, in order to more accurately depict the nature of schools. Also, the reliance on high stakes tests as single measures of success is diminished with this model.

LEAs are expected to develop their funding plans to address these state priorities. The California Board of Education is currently making decisions on ways in which this data will be measured, captured and shared with the public. This shift provides LEAs the opportunity to shape district goals away from outcome measures and toward systems to leverage change in schools. Examples of this shift exist in a few Southern California districts. One of these school districts is Downey Unified School District (DUSD), which in its LCAP has as its goal to "hire

the best teachers, ensure a highly effective and trained staff, promote opportunities for shared and distributed leadership" (DUSD, 2015, p. 61). This goal is different than setting an outcome goal using data, such as 100% graduation. Another example of this in DUSD is the outcomes for students which states "Ensure that all students graduate college-career ready . . . Equip students with 21st Century learning skills of creativity, communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and civic responsibility" (DUSD, 2015, p. 87). These types of goal and outcome measures move away from high stakes testing models that evaluate the effectiveness of schools on one-time yearly tests such as the CST. This move away from a high stakes testing model aligns to research on effective schools. In addition, districts have the opportunity to be creative problem solvers as they address the needs of students. In DUSD's plan, one of the ways they identify in meeting their college-career ready goals is implementing full scale Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) programs in their schools[4]. Such programs have the potential of allowing greater collaborative work between districts and schools and can lead to a greater sense of support. Moving toward this new framework of accountability matters to all schools but even more so to low-income communities of color that need collaborative structures between schools and LEAs to be successful.

California's new funding model demonstrates an understanding of the various factors that impact student learning, which include the effects of poverty, language status, and family support structures (Affeldt, 2015). By expanding accountability measures to include school culture

[4] AVID Advancement Via Individual Determination is a program that teaches students basic organizational and study skills, provides them a college awareness curriculum; informs students on the Cornell note-taking process; and requires that teachers use high leverage instructional strategies in the classroom.

elements, which are traditionally left out of accountability measures, an opportunity exists to begin to legitimize the work of schools that address them (CA Department of Education, 2017).

The new funding model has the potential to expand the formal responsibilities of schools and capture the authentic work of schools in more expansive ways. What is unknown is whether this new accountability system will change which schools are identified as high- and low-performing throughout the state. The type of impact the LCFF and LCAP will have on the way school teams function is also unknown. The LCFF and LCAP will use multiple measures both academic and nonacademic to monitor a school's performance (Affeldt, 2015). Such multiple measures will undoubtedly change the way in which schools will have to interact with one another and with their LEAs. Traditional accountability measures have always produced winners and losers (Popham, 2001). In the past, these have more often than not correlated with the socioeconomic status and race of a school's student body (Boyd-Zaharias & Pate-Bain, 2008; Emery, 2007; Glassman & Patton, 2014; Heilig, 2011; Taylor, 2005). Those most marginalized in the past accountability structure have attended or worked in schools in challenging communities. It is still unknown whether nonacademic measures (e.g., attendance and suspension rates) will produce new winners and losers or if these indicators will continue to highlight the disparities between schools in low-income communities of color.

Although the funding structures in the LCFF model attempt to capture a more holistic picture of the work taking place in LEAs and schools, the accountability measures embedded within it continue to perpetuate a top-down approach that imposes on schools the states own interpretation of success. Therefore, although the work in LCFF is promising, it continues to follow a top-down approach.

Even when states like California move toward more equitable systems such as the LCFF, the fact that they require districts to create LCAP plans based on the state's priorities continue to perpetuate a top-down accountability approach. What is promising in California's new accountability framework is the research that has been used to ground some of the changes the state is attempting to make, specifically around the 10 state priorities. Attached to each priority is comprehensive research that legitimizes its relevance in driving the work of schools within the state. These practices and processes are essential to creating high quality schools. Understanding the practices and processes outlined in the LCFF framework will allow us to contextualize the work and effectiveness of schools as leadership teams collaborate with one another. It will also provide districts and schools the tools necessary to build teacher capacity and capabilities in order to create the conditions for teaching and learning that are necessary to transform schools.

A model that legitimizes the voices of those most impacted by educational accountability systems must incorporate the goals and outcomes valued by those members working within schools. It is this trust in the professionalism of individuals that dedicate their lives working in these schools that are most capable of diagnosing what they see as critical needs in their schools. If schools are effective about identifying these needs they will more accurately advocate for the right support and services. This model of accountability would require that policymakers and educational leaders have faith in the work of those in schools and trust that their judgments will address the needs of students. Engaging in the practice of seeking school teams as professional who can make sound professional judgments speaks to the site specific work of schools, which I propose is an essential component of transformational leadership in schools. The goals and efforts that go unseen or unmeasured have the potential of being some of the most important

functions that takes place in schools. This work, often cited by researchers as key drivers (Fullan & Quinn, 2016), is not legitimized through formal accountability measures and therefore not as public to both district personnel or community members. The goals that teams set around this work can be seen as an important function within the organization.

Promise and Shortfalls of the Local Control Funding Formula

The LCFF is rooted in research-based practices that are intended to improve the functions of schools in ways that foster conditions for teaching and learning. Some of this research highlights issues expanding from social-emotional supports to effective learning models in schools (California Dept of Education, n.d.a). The state's LCFF legislation was created with a larger context and framework in mind, with the knowledge that schools are impacted by both internal and external forces and that great schools are able to create protective factors to ensure student success (California Department of Education, n.d.a).

Research contained in the California Department of Education website that shaped the development of the LCAP accountabilities includes information on teacher competencies and expectations of professional learning (Barnett et al., 2014; Wei Chung, Darling-Hammond, & Orphanos, 2009) This research highlights the importance of relationships and collaboration, specifically in high-poverty schools. The importance of creating and sustaining strong relationships applies to the work of school teams and extends to the interactions that take place with students. Strong relationships are critical, as indicated in the research provided by the California Department of Education ([CDE] Faer & Cohen, n.d.; Nagaoka et al., 2015; Voight, Austin, & Hanson, 2013). The way LEAs interpret the states accountabilities will dramatically shape the work of schools and the ideals embedded within the LEAs' LCAP framework.

Although the work of a few smaller districts in the State of California demonstrates a promising move toward goals focused on effective practices and processes (Fuller et al., 2014) , instead of the usual data based outcomes, these approaches continue to follow a top-down approach, as described in the work of Downey Unified. Accountability is addressed following a one-size-fits-all approach. Through this paradigm, even small districts direct changes within schools. This top-down structure goes counter to the research highlighted by the CDE, which posits the importance of personal relationships and collaboration within schools as critical to student success. Therefore, the responsibility of district and state leaders is to support the fostering of relationships and collaborative practices in schools. This happens most effectively when schools are able to articulate their needs and build collective capacity around site-based goals. This bottom-up approach to accountability is not included in the current LCFF model.

Site-Based Goals

For purposes of my study, the term site-based goal refers to the work of schools that is unseen by community, district and state officials but deemed as a priority within the school community. Site-based goals require that teams align resources and human capital to achieve internal goals. Because site-based goals can vary from school to school, for purposes of this dissertation, I will examine site-based goals through what educational theorists deem as the most important work of successful schools. One of the most important aspects of this work is relational trust within the organization. Relational trust allows teams of educators to take risks and implement new initiatives with fidelity and commitment. It allows for honest conversations on the necessary work required in schools. When trust exists, teams can honestly discuss progress and pitfalls and work together toward a common and unifying goal, developing strong professional communities (Bryk & Schneider, 2003).

A key feature of creating conditions for teaching and learning is the fostering of collaborative environments in schools. Professional Learning Communities and the ability of school teams to work in collaborative ways to achieve their goals (DuFour & Eaker, 2005; Fullan & Quinn, 2016). It is impossible to create conditions for teaching and learning without first establishing collaborative approaches in schools. Therefore, a clear focus on what works in these schools is essential because these approaches often go unmeasured in formal accountability systems.

The urgency of effective collaboration is even more critical in inner city schools. These schools face a myriad of pressures both internal and external which make it difficult to achieve success on traditional accountability measures. Many of the pressures faced by these schools require that school teams leverage resources both financial and human to address the basic needs of students. These site-based goals can look vastly different in low-income communities and can have the greatest impact on student learning (Howard, 2010; Noguera & Boykin, 2011; Rogers et al., 2007; Rogers, Bertsand, Freedon, & Fanelli, 2011).

Professional learning communities. PLC's require high levels of collaboration around issues that matter in schools. Identifying common values, a shared vision and a belief that all students have the capacity to learn are fundamental in PLC's (Buffum & Mattos, 2014; DuFour & Eaker, 2005; Fuller et al., 2014; DuFour & Marzano, 2007). Functional teams are essential in ensuring that schools are able to work effectively in solving problems and obstacles their schools might face.

Creating collaborative cultures in schools is fundamental in creating the conditions for teaching and learning. An important aspect of collaborative cultures is building teacher capacity and capabilities as instructional leaders. Research on PLC's highlights the positive impact that

collaboration amongst schools teams has on transforming and sustaining effective schools (Barnett et al., 2014; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Wei Chung et al., 2009). Based on the work from DuFour and Eaker (1998) the PLC process incorporates a cycle of reflections among school site team members centered on continuous improvement in the teaching and learning process. Embedded in this process, is a schools ability to identify problems and develop strategic plans to solve them (Buffum & Mattos, 2014; Darling-Hammond, 2002; DuFour & DuFour, 2013; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour & Marzano, 2007). A critical component of this is creating a viable and reliable curriculum (DuFour & Marzano, 2007) in which student learning and success isn't left to chance or the luck of the draw but instead is carefully constructed by schools in order to ensure that every student, no matter what classroom they are in are receiving a high-quality instruction. It is these environments where teachers collaborate and identify their goals with purpose and coherence that are the most successful.

Inherent in this work is a sense of shared values and belief systems, the use of a common language and strategies and a sense of collective responsibility (Buffum et al., 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2010; DuFour & Marzano, 2007). Leading drivers of success correlate with collaborative structures in schools (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). School teams must structure their purpose around a common goal and vision that is intended to build their skillset as professionals in order to support student learning. Included in this growth mindset are the challenges in perceptions of student ability.

The context in which teams engage in this work is critical to the process (Fuller, Waite, Chao, & Benedicto, 2014). Connected to this is the need for teams to tackle perceptions of race, poverty and ability that may shape the way in which school teams engage in their work. Teams who effectively tackle issues of race and class are better able to take on the responsibility of

ensuring that all students learn (Buffum et al., 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2002). Changing the mindset of adults around issues of race empowers school teams to believe that their collective work can serve as a protective factor in the lives of students (Howard, 2010). Creating the conditions for learning begins with the ability of adults to harness their collective power to address the needs of their students. Understanding the role that they play in creating protective factors can have a greater impact on learning than economic, community or familial dynamics (Hattie, 2009). Therefore, collaboration on its own is not sufficient. Teams must collaborate around the critical issues and priorities. They must be willing to challenge group thinking and engage in courageous conversations. Leadership teams should be able to orchestrate conflict (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002) in ways that move the work of the school forward. This means that collaboration isn't simply an academic task that is connected to content knowledge and pedagogy but is instead a deeper more adaptive process that requires a fundamental alignment in belief systems that prevails within an organization (Garmston & Wellman, 2009).

The values that organizations hold are evident in the culture of schools. School culture has a symbiotic connection to student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2002; May & Sanders, 2013; Voight et al., 2013). Nurturing positive relationships and increasing personalization can be accomplished in many ways. These strategies include strong advisory programs, peer mentoring programs, use of restorative practices, extra-curricular activities, being trauma informed. Including student voice in content matter curriculum and making learning relevant are also ways that relationships can be nurtured in schools. Creating environments that allow for greater student personalization are key to school success (Darling-Hammond, 2002). These practices are essential in all schools, but even more so in inner city schools. Effective practices are crucial in creating the conditions for student learning; unfortunately these site-based practices often go

unacknowledged in formal accountability measures. These programs can be the life-line that will determine the future of many students, especially in those in inner-city schools.

Distributed leadership. Shared leadership leads to a greater sense of commitment toward building successful schools. Fostering environments in which responsibility is shared is critical in creating a sense of collective responsibility (Brooks, J., Brooks, J-M., Normore, & Hodgins, 2007; Garmston & Wellman, 2009). School leaders support this leadership model in schools by including teacher voice in decision-making processes. Working with them in collaborative ways so that they not only become effective educators within the classroom but can also make valuable contributions to the school outside of their four walls. Building the capabilities of educators to become active contributors and decision makers is key to ensuring a successful distributed leadership model (Garmston & Wellman, 2009). Schools that effectively engage in a distributed leadership model exhibit greater productivity and decision making that results in the greater use of resources, all of which are critical in struggling schools (Northouse, n.d.). A distributed leadership model compliments and supports the work of PLC's. When all members of the school community are empowered to create and commit to a common vision, values and the development of schools goals a greater sense of responsibility and ownership of the work takes place (DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

Creating the conditions for teaching and learning: Why it matters in inner city schools. Creating the conditions for teaching and learning is the fundamental responsibility of the school, district, state and federal government. The urgency to do this in low-performing high-poverty schools is of even greater importance. It is these schools that suffer the most from a lack of resources, qualified teachers and a rigorous culturally relevant curriculum. The inequities faced by inner city schools, specifically those with high populations

of students of color are well documented. These problems are often ignored or not considered when determining or evaluating schools for student outcomes. Instead, schools are seen as failing students' despite of these conditions. In this context, it is the schools and those within it that experience the most severe consequences of conditions that they have little to no control of. The responsibility or accountability of district and state officials is not considered when discussing what schools are lacking in order to be effective. Public officials' inability or lack of will to ensure that students in these communities receive adequate and equitable resources is seldom questioned or held to account. This inequity in resource allocation leads to unequal outcomes in student performance (Oakes et al., 2004).

In addition to the lack of resources and supports within schools, students in inner cities also face a myriad of obstacles outside of schools, within their communities. Many of these students also come to schools with less support from home. Taking this Broader, Bolder Approach[5] (Noguera, 2011; Noguera & Wells, 2011) on equity and its impact on student success requires that we look at basic needs as not only encompassing equitable resources in schools but supports to help students cope with the lack of resources and negative experiences outside of schools. Expanding our view of basic needs requires that policymakers think about schools beyond the school plant. They need to be able to understand the impact that the place in which schools are situated has on student performance. Understanding this concept will allow schools to adapt their perception of basic needs to meeting the critical needs of students in more personalized ways (Noguera, 2011; Noguera & Wells, 2011).

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[5] The Broader, Bolder Approach to Education is a national campaign that advances evidence-based strategies to mitigate the impacts of poverty-related disadvantages on teaching and learning.

According to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, self-actualization can only be achieved when basic needs are met (as cited in Poston, 2009). These "basic" needs differ significantly from what the state has deemed as basic needs, which include teacher credentialing and textbook sufficiency. Although important to schools, the basic needs referred to in Maslow's theory include psychological needs such as shelter, food, warmth and safety, as well as security (as cited in Poston, 2009). If schools are to meet this basic element they must be able to work collaboratively to address such needs in meaningful and supportive ways. When school teams function effectively they are able to examine their school through a lens of collective responsibility. This allows the team to identify the issues that hinder student learning and mobilizes the team into action. Site-based accountability matters in these schools because of the constant pressures that schools in inner-city areas face. The historical divestment in these neighborhoods impact student learning in real and tangible ways (Howard, 2010; Oakes & Lipton, 2007; Putnam, 2015). Generally, school teams are trying to problem solve issues that sit outside the scope of their work and training. For many, this includes addressing issues of poverty, homelessness, substance abuse, violence and trauma. These factors have real cognitive impacts on student learning and schools that are attempting to meet formal accountability goals must first be able to address some of these basic needs (Howard, 2017). The way in which teams meet these basic needs are internal because schools do not have to account for the ways in which they work together to address these in their schools.

Compounding all of this very real and difficult work is the impact of trauma in schools. The Paso Nuevo Unified School District studied traumatic events in the lives of 572 students and found that three or more traumatic events were experienced by 88% of the students with half of them showing characteristics of posttraumatic stress disorder. The implications of these findings

are very important for our schools. Traumatic experiences have real physiological impacts on students ability to learn; such trauma can affect the way the brain functions and leads to higher mortality rates (Craig, 2016). Individuals who work in these schools must understand the role that trauma plays in the lives of their students and must be prepared to address this trauma as part of their work (Craig, 2016). This work can only happen in schools where teams prioritize this critical need. This is difficult when federal, state and LEAs fail to see the impact of trauma as a priority, especially when the focus continues to be centered on academic performance.

Central to research on effective schools is the necessity of effective school teams (Chrispeels, Burke, Johnson, & Daly, 2008; Klenowski & Ehrich, 2016). These teams must be able to clearly articulate their needs and work together to problem solve them. Sometimes these needs align with federal, state and LEA priorities, but can also sit outside formal accountability measures. Taking the varying needs into consideration leads us to the importance of school voice and the use of a bottom-up approach to accountability that is able to adequately capture the unique characteristics and work of schools (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Critical pedagogy can enable those within schools to determine their needs and receive the support and resources to address those needs, as critical pedagogy provides a framework that empowers those most marginalized.

Reciprocal, Intelligent Accountability

The concept of a bottom-up system of accountability is already being used in other countries. Reciprocal, intelligent accountability functions from a paradigm different than that of traditional accountability. It is more closely aligned to the ethos of critical pedagogy of place and the belief of equity embedded in the LCFF. Through this approach schools are trusted to articulate their needs and districts and state resources are used to provide the support required to

meet these needs (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Although this approach is a great paradigm shift in our country it is not a new approach to education. Practiced in countries like Finland, this approach enacts educational theories that are well established in the United States and are recognized by educational scholars and policy makers (Sahlberg, 2010). Hence, although reciprocal accountability is not present in our country or in the state of California, the theories that surround these practice such as increased respect for the profession, collaboration and planning time for teachers, teacher autonomy and decision making at the site level, are highly regarding by educational scholars (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hunt, 2013; DuFour & Marzano, 2007).

Reciprocal intelligent accountability is a promising solution to ensuring that site-based narratives are given credibility in future accountability measures. Research on the successes of the Finnish educational system points to key elements that go against neo-liberal policies dominated by the idea of control, management and competition (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Hunt, 2013; Sahlberg, 2015; Stoner, Rautiainen, Moisio, & Green, 2014). Instead, the Finnish approach to education allows for teacher collaboration and preparation, a focus on equity, a rejection of standardization and high-stakes testing and the autonomy of teachers to identify the needs of their students. Giving teachers autonomy and ensuring that assessments happen at the site level are key components to this work (Hunt, 2013). In addition to this approach, the entire social structure in Finland is created to address the needs of those most marginalized. This means that society at large has a vested interest in ensuring that students who are from low-socioeconomic communities receive the resources they need to be successful. Although this is a stark difference between U.S. and Finnish societies, the LCFF in California attempts to address issues of equity by restructuring the way in which schools are funded. The LCFF is a step in the

right direction. Through the use of continued research and new approaches there is hope that accountability measures shift in ways that reflect a clearer focus on equity and site-based autonomy.

Critical Pedagogy of Place

One cannot begin to talk about the importance of bottom-up accountability without the inclusion of the work of Paulo Freire. A specific focus on his ideas of critical pedagogy and his work as an education official will lay the foundation for the importance of a collaborative process in schools and the value of community and stakeholder voice.

Critical pedagogy of place combines critical pedagogy and place-based education to describe the necessary and complex work of schools. Critical pedagogy of place allows educators to make students aware of inequities and build consciousness and action while grounding their work to local issues (Gruenewald, 2003). In order to understand the synthesis between two theories one must fully understand the critical pedagogy and its relationship to accountability.

Accountability measures have historically served as oppressive forces against our most vulnerable communities. These structures gained legitimacy for decades and created a narrative of underperformance in low-income communities of color (Au, 2013; Chiu, 2009; Emery, 2007; Kim & Kemp-Graham, 2013; Taylor, 2005). This served to reinforce stereotypes about the abilities and potential of individuals in low-income communities of color. The cycle of systemic failure was normalized and accepted and created the perception that students, teachers and community members were no longer the victims of the system but active participants in its failure. An approach to transforming this way of thinking is Freire's concept of consciousness,

in which those being oppressed come to understand their oppression and use praxis "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (Freire, 2000, p. 51).

Accountability systems inherently serve the needs of those in power. Therefore, there needs to be critical awareness of this circumstance in order to fight against it. Freire (1993) states: "The dominant class ends up adjusting the bureaucracy to its own interest. The hard thing is to have this bureaucracy at the service of the progressive dreams of a people's government, rather than a populist one" (p. 69). The way in which the dreams of the people can support necessary change is to raise awareness in order to mobilize action. Unfortunately, current and old accountability systems remove those most marginalized from this process and prevent them from playing a larger role in changing the systems that lead to this marginalization (Freire, 1993).

Too often low performing schools are looked at as having poor quality teaching, among other deficit thinking. This mentality prevents both those at the top and at the bottom from being able to see an alternate story. Furthermore, by having policy makers legitimize site-based goals driven by the needs of schools and its constituents a powerful paradigm shifts can begin to shape the accountability landscape. "In democracy the aim is not elimination as much as it is transformation" (Knight & Pearl, 2000, p. 199). Critical pedagogy demands a collaborative process that is inclusive of those most impacted by oppressive structures. Freire (1993) speaks of this collaboration saying:

> To change the face of schools implies also listening to the children, to ghetto societies, parents, school directors, instructional coordinators, supervisors the scientific community, janitors, cafeteria workers, etc. It is not possible to change the face of schools through an act of the secretary's goodwill. (p. 30)

Critical pedagogy offers a bottom-up grassroots solution to longstanding educational ills. This collaborative framework, which requires reflection and action, gives power to those who are powerless in our current educational system and institution. Schools that service the most vulnerable and disenfranchised in our communities have been the most negatively impacted by high-stakes testing reforms and are quite often the ones that had to endure the most severe punishments for underachievement (Brown et al., 2009; Chester, 2005; Edwards & Pula, 2011; Glickman & Scally, 2008; Levitt, 2008; May & Sanders, 2013; Thompson & Allen, 2012). These communities will benefit from leading action efforts to transform their schools. Building capacity and capabilities among members of this community is needed in order to begin to challenge systems that work against them (Warren, 2005). In order to do this, schools and stakeholders within a school need to be well versed in identifying barriers to performance that hinder their abilities to be successful. They must then be given the tools and resources by state and local educational agencies in order to engage in the actions necessary to address the critical needs of their schools. It also ensures that those further from schools are used as capacity builders whose purpose is not to oversee and manage schools but to provide the resources and supports that schools need to take action. By engaging in the work in this way praxis can be achieved and transformation can be accomplished.

This paradigm shift is vastly different from the traditional top down approach where solutions to the perils schools face come from the top and often from those most disconnected from the local work of schools (Glassman & Patton, 2014). This often leads to failed reforms, due to a lack of buy-in from those required to carry the work through. This lack of voice and choice in the implementation of new programs is met with resistance from the very people who are necessary in any change effort. Even more alarming than failed implementation of programs

is the unintended pressures high stakes testing has on the ethical principles that guide educators. In order to demonstrate progress, schools often resort to quick fixes by pushing low performing students out of schools, manipulating student data in order to give the impression of year to year growth and narrowing curriculum and course options for students including limiting access to nonelective academic courses (Chester, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Heilig, 2011; Kim & Kemp-Graham, 2013; Levitt, 2008; Thompson & Allen, 2012).

Place-based education centers on the idea that location matters and that educators can use location to engage students in learning. Although founded in a more ecological framework that values the experiences of students, the use of critical pedagogy of place synthesizes the concept of raising awareness and mobilizing action through the contextual lens of place. That is to say that context is connected to location, including all of the sociopolitical impacts that help create and form communities (Gruenewald, 2003). What is important about critical pedagogy of place is the power to acknowledge that the work of teachers in schools is not disconnected from location and community and the complexities that this work entails. It allows for an understanding of unique and personalized decisions that are adapted based on the needs of students and communities. This can better capture the dynamics of schools and the complexities of school teams as they work together to improve student success.

A highly effective team alone cannot fully address the needs of students without first developing critical awareness of the struggles students face as they enter schools. In essence, teams who are effective should display these characteristics in order to better advocate for their students and schools. This is especially true for our most disenfranchised communities. Students who come to schools from these neighborhoods often require services that extend far beyond academic support (Craig, 2016; Darling-Hammond, 2002; Oakes & Lipton, 2007;

Putnam, 2015; Walden-Ford, 2001). Educators that work in these communities must find ways to address the needs beyond the boundaries of classroom walls if they hope to achieve academic success. If we are to value this type of work in our schools it will require legitimacy by district officials and policy makers. Our current accountability system is not created in a way that sees this work as critical or important. There are however examples of a different approach to accountability that allow for those at the bottom to demand resources and support from those at the top (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Sahlberg, 2010). This system, most evidence in European countries is reciprocal, intelligent accountability.

Conclusion

Educational policymakers have historically exerted control over schools through top-down accountability systems and the use of high-stakes testing. These approaches negatively impacted low-income communities of color (Berliner, 2011; Culp, 2002; Minarechová, 2012; Thompson & Allen, 2012). The LCFF in California attempts to shift this narrative by creating an accountability system that takes into consideration a variety of measures. What is still unknown is whether these new measures will continue to replicate the inequalities present in our society.

Understanding the way in which schools integrate and address formal accountabilities and site-based goals will provide valuable information regarding the true impact of the new accountability system in California. This insight can be used to continue to push the state toward a more progressive approach to accountability in public education, one that truly captures the efforts made by those that commit their lives to transforming schools in high need communities.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

State and local accountability systems should take into consideration the prioritized needs of schools as identified by school leadership teams and provide the supports these schools need in order to ensure student success. In order for this to occur, leadership teams must be able to clearly articulate the context of their schools and be reflective about the way they address both formal and site-based accountability measures. This is essential in providing a space for schools to develop their own accountability systems, which supports solution based collaboration. By understanding the goals, approaches and strategies of schools, district and state officials can truly support the needs of schools in ways that can transform the educational landscape of inner city schools and communities. This study documented how staff at pilot schools identify their most pressing issues and seek to transform their schools as they address formal and site-based accountability measures.

These research questions will guide my study:

- Aside from goals related to formal accountability measures, what are the central goals of pilot school leadership teams? Why are these goals important to them? How do school leadership teams communicate their efforts to advance these site-based goals?
- How do pilot school leadership teams contextualize and explain their school's performance on formal accountability measures?
- How do district leaders assess the performance of schools and the role of the district in establishing the conditions for school success?

Research Design and Rationale

A qualitative method was used in this study. Qualitative methods are able to provide an understanding of the way in which individuals interact with one another and to capture details of their experiences (Maxwell, 2013), which were necessary for this study. This approach allowed for an understanding of individual and group behavior. Studying groups make sense of experiences, and interactions are a key component of qualitative research (Maxwell, 2013). Qualitative studies allow researchers to learn about phenomena, develop causal explanations, and have a more detailed understand of the impact of context (Maxwell, 2013).

I chose a qualitative study because it allowed for the exploration of perceptions of individuals and teams in relation to one another, as well as systems and practices that impact their work. It gave leaders of the school an opportunity to contextualize their work in relation to school accountability. This methodology allowed for the collection of data around the teams contextualization of formal accountability and site-based goals (Maxwell, 2013). This contextualization looked different at various school sites and the site-based priorities differed based on the schools needs and the staffs' capacity to engage in meaningful planning and implementation. Capturing the varying context around formal accountability and what schools prioritize, gives district leadership and policymakers insight on the needs of schools. This information allows them to focus on true indicators of school success and to question issues of shared responsibility. This will shift accountability from a focus on results to a focus on school needs and effective system coherence, which is essential for school success (Oakes et al., 2004).

My research included interviewing leadership teams and capturing the interactions and creation of context of the group's work as it relates to formal and site-based goals. The use of qualitative methods provided the most flexibility in allowing schools to contextualize their work.

Understanding how groups make sense of their lived experiences is essential to my study. It is through these lived experiences that context is created and shared. This ability to study group dynamics is best captured through a qualitative approach and best in answering the research questions for this study.

A quantitative approach would not have captured the intricate and complex nature of work in schools. Including the dynamic decision-making processes, relationships, impacts and ebbs and flows of the work that take place within the work of teams. It also would not be able to accurately capture the perceptions of pressures enacted by top-down accountability measures that can have a dramatic impact on ways teams prioritize their work.

Strategies of Inquiry

Site and population. The sites I chose for this study have strong, functioning leadership teams. These sites are pilot schools within the Paso Nuevo Unified School District and are a part of the Leadership Development for Schools Program (LDSP) at University of Southern that supports the development of leadership teams in schools. These sites span across the school district and service low-income communities of color. These sites also have high numbers of English Learners, Special Education and low socioeconomic students. The schools chosen are three Pilot high schools in the Paso Nuevo Unified School District and will be referred to Resilient High School, Spirited High School, and Hope High School. Leadership teams, principals and local district officials were a part of this study.

Pilot schools were chosen for this study due to their teacher-led focus and autonomy from district policies and initiatives. Since this study required active leadership team participation, the Pilot School model allows for greater understanding of the work of site teams in making decisions to improve their schools. These three schools are also a part of the LDSP grant with

the University of Southern Hills, which is intended to develop strong school site teams using research-based best practices. The leadership teams from these schools have gone through intensive professional development on practices that align to the research within the LCFF priorities, including collaboration, relationships and plans of action. This is important because this study focused on the work of teams and selecting schools that have teams that have been trained to work together gives additional credibility around the effectiveness of their work as they attempt to address formal accountabilities and site-based goals.

Data Collection Methods

Focus groups. The focus group participants from each site included leadership team members, which included support staff and/or the instructional leadership team and other members that the principal identified as being critical in making school level decisions. These individuals are responsible for the implementation of school goals as well as meeting district, state and federal accountabilities. Focus groups comprised four leadership team members from each site. Focus group interviews for Spirited High School and Hope High School took place at the teams' school site in private locations. Team members from Resilient High School were interviewed at an off-site location, in a private room. The focus group interviews lasted between 60 to 90 minutes.

It was important for members of the leadership team to be present together because they each provide differing perspectives that offered more complete information for the interview. For example, a member of the school team who is a coordinator had different knowledge from district meetings they are mandated to attend than did a teacher who is also a member of the team. Although they collectively make decisions about the school, they each bring with them a frame of reference that is essential in providing and creating the context of the school and its

performance. School leadership teams are tasked with moving the school data on a variety of measures. Their collective work in creating and executing school plans is a critical component of ensuring that the school makes gains. By including these members in the focus group process, I was able to gain insight into the way the teams' thinking is impacted by formal and site-based accountabilities.

These team members were identified by the principal as having the most influence on decisions made at the school site. This included instructional leadership team members as well as support staff team members that the principal deemed responsible for leading the work of the school. Leadership team members were asked about the schools' goals or site-based priorities. Teams were also asked to contextualize their ability to meet or not meet formal accountability measures. This provided an opportunity to capture discussions, conflicts, tensions and agreements among team members as they explained ways in which they met or did not meet formal and site-based accountability measures and how they align school resources. Leadership teams at these schools, due to their extensive leadership training around adaptive schools, communicate with each other in productive ways, limiting possibilities of conflict when disagreements arise. The focus group interview process provided team members the opportunity to share the ways in which they work collaboratively, leveraging skills like relational trust, learning and personalization to help in the improvement of their school.

Focus groups allowed for a constructivist approach to data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This supported the questions that guide this study, which required groups come together to construct their narratives through contextualizing their work. Although it would be best to hold focus groups with individuals that do not know each other, the nature of the research questions allowed team members to talk about their collective work in more substantive ways.

The work, although personal, was not necessarily attributable to one member of the team. Therefore, the collaborative nature of the work of school team made the use of focus groups efficient in this study.

I facilitated the focus interviews. I used audio recording devices to capture interview responses from focus group members. The focus group interview was conducted in three parts. The first consisted of asking detailed questions about the values that guide the work of the team, both individually and collectively as well as to have them describe the school and the community in which the schools reside. In addition, team members were asked to describe site-based priorities and how these priorities connect to community needs. The second part of the interview consisted of asking leadership team members to look at their school's qualitative formal accountability data using the accountability tool and contextualize data outcomes. Lastly, the team was asked to contextualize quantitative formal accountability data to explain why the teams met or failed to meet formal accountability measures. They were asked about supports they received from directors and the local district to address some of their challenges. They were also asked to identify and reflect on who shares responsibility for their schools' success.

Individual interviews. Individual interviews were done with the principal and district personnel. Three principals were interviewed, one from each of the participating schools in the study. Three district directors were also interviewed. These directors did not directly oversee the schools in this study. A high-level district leader was also interviewed. The principal interviews were important because they serve as the liaison between the district and the school site. They approach their work through a different lens to both ensure that the school team feels autonomous and effective while at the same time satisfying district mandates. Due to the political nature of the principals' positions, principal were interviewed individually to allow

more transparent data collection. The individual interviews followed the focus group interviews in order to give me an opportunity to ask clarification questions of the principal since they have a more expansive view of the work of the school. Each principal interview took place after the focus group interviews for each school site in order to give me time to prepare clarification and follow up questions.

Principals from each school helped identify leadership team members and organized meeting dates in order to conduct the focus group interview. I protected confidentiality by maintaining participant anonymity. Participants were informed that the study aimed to understand the priorities of leadership teams and to understand what these priorities reflected. They were also informed that this information would be shared to district leadership in order to see if it influenced perceptions of effectiveness and success. The school will not receive direct feedback from the findings but I will make the dissertation available to all participants.

District personnel were also interviewed. These individuals understood the autonomies of pilot schools and have overseen pilot schools in a director capacity. The director helped shape the understanding on how a teams' contextualization is perceived by those in district level positions. These interviews took place after the focus group and principal interviews. The directors were asked general questions regarding use of data and their own experiences working with academically underperforming schools. They were also asked about the supports that they provide these schools and the protocols they use to identify the supports schools needed. They were presented with information from the accountability tool. This was done in the following ways: Directors first were presented with formal accountability data, including the contextualized responses by school sites. They were then asked questions about the explanations

for school performance provided by school leadership teams as well as district responsibility for addressing issues raised by the leadership teams.

A high-level district leader was also interviewed. This executive provided insight into larger district policies and district support to schools. The interview consisted of two parts: use of the accountability tool to frame questions around district responsiveness to identified needs of schools and questions on the accuracy of accountability systems that are used to determine school effectiveness and school support. These responses informed our understanding of district level support and sharing of responsibility for school success and in creating the conditions for teaching and learning. This is an important part of this study because it helps shed light on ways in which systems interact with schools in need of additional support.

Accountability tool. An Accountability tool was used to collect data from school leadership teams. Completed by me using responses from focus group interviews, the tool was used in a variety of ways. This completed tool was then presented to principals at the time of the principal interviews. Principals had the opportunity to clarify, add to or comment on the data provided by the team. I then took the feedback and refined the information on the tool based on these responses. The summation of responses from the accountability tool was used as a part of the director interviews.

The accountability tool is composed of three sections. The first section contains quantitative measures based on student and teacher responses from the School Experience Survey created by the local district and administered by schools. Areas of focus are connected to the theories of critical pedagogy of place. The themes are around climate and safety. The second page contains quantitative data centered on the measures the state will use to monitor student academic growth. These measures indicate school academic performance. The third

section is the site-based accountability section. Schools identify goals and actions they prioritize as a school that are not connected to larger district or state accountability. Sections one and two allowed for contextualization by leadership team members as well as provided the teams an opportunity to think about how responsibility can be shared with other stakeholders.

The accountability tool has gone through several iterations. Changes were also made by having members of my school site respond to each section using our own school's data. Engaging in this process informed decisions regarding structure and placement. A more in-depth description can be found in Appendix C.

Data Analysis Methods

Voice recorders were used to capture information gathered at interviews. Information was gathered and submitted to rev.com to convert recordings into transcriptions. These transcripts were used to identify themes using Quirkos. The data gathered was organized according to school and study group, (e.g., leadership team, principal, district personnel). As a part of this process I captured general observations by writing notes on the margins of transcripts (Creswell, 2009). This gave me the opportunity to get a sense of the overall meaning of what was captured. Once the data was gathered and sorted I read through all of the data and began to code the data. Initially, this was done through the use of a computer and simple color-coding methods using Quirkos software. Themes were identified among the data gathered which allowed me to interpret the meaning of the themes that arose from data collection.

This methodology helped me create a narrative for each site. This narrative was used to understand the dynamics, processes and contexts of the work of leadership team members and their work in schools as it relates to meeting formal and site-based accountability goals. It also provided insight as to assumptions and perceptions of district leadership.

Ethical Issues

In order to address ethical issues associated with this study, I ensured the honest and transparent collection of evidence. Access to the site was gained by leveraging existing relationships and study participants were not coerced or harmed. Participants' information remained confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Participants granted informed consent in order to participate in the research. Information collected during interviews was only used for purposes of this dissertation. Evidence collected was not disseminated or distributed to any person or organization. Coded evidence was only used for purposes of this study and direct quotes and relevant data was only available as a part of this study. Ethical issues that might have arisen during the focus group interview process did not present themselves. This study's creator ensures that no harm was done to individuals or participating sites.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

In order to gain credibility for my study I had to address the potential for bias, reactivity and insufficient evidence with strategies that would produce credible findings. As a principal and member of the pilot schools committee I experienced firsthand and through the sharing of experiences with fellow administrators the frustrations regarding current accountability systems. These experiences can shape the way I interpret data collected and therefore impact the conclusions that I draw from the collected evidence. It can also impact the information that people are willing to share. In order to address bias in my study I made a concerted effort to accurately collect interview transcript data. I used direct quotes frequently in order to validate findings. I maintained awareness of reactivity during the interview process by avoiding leading questions and by ensuring that the setting of the interviews made participants feel comfortable and safe. This was done by the selection of the interview space and seating arrangements.

Although I studied three schools, I was able to interview a minimum of four staff members including an administrator at each school. Completing a case study analysis at three sites allowed me to identify unique characteristics at each school. I triangulated data for this study. This included the use of transcripts from focus and individual interviews as well as the collection of data available to the public in relation to formal accountability measures. By creating a systemic approach to data collection, I minimized opportunities for subjectivity. Most importantly I prepared questions in advance and planned anticipated responses in order to effectively ask follow-up probing and clarification questions in order to capture meaningful experiences and perceptions.

Access

As a principal of a pilot school and participant in the Leadership Development for Schools Program (LDSP), at University of Southern Hills, I have direct access and existing relationships with other pilot school principals. I have spent the last year building relationships with these individuals and have informed them of my participation in a doctoral program. I have also interviewed a few of the principals as a part of a previous course assignment around issues of social justice leadership. During that time, I expressed my interest in including them as my dissertation participants and they all were willing to participate.

Anonymity

To protect the identity of the district, schools and the study participants, pseudonyms were created for all. The district is called the aforementioned Paso Nuevo Unified School District and the schools within this district will be referred to as Resilient, Spirited and Hope; and all organizations connected to the district and schools were also given false names. In addition, a pseudonym, the University of Southern Hills, was created for the university

connected to the schools through its leadership program. All data came from the legitimate school or district's website; however none of the sites will be cited in this paper to protect their anonymity.

Summary

Understanding the impacts that formal accountability and site-based goals have on school teams can help identify ways in which districts can support schools. This includes information needed to continue to improve accountability measures in ways that are more equitable and reflective of the needs of schools. Through individual and focus group interviews, this study seeks to understand this impact in more substantive ways.

Chapter 4

Findings

Introduction

The current California accountability dashboard moves the state toward a more holistic direction. As a part of this change district and state educational leaders are moving a way from solely looking at high-stakes tests to determine a school's effectiveness. The new model will include other data such as attendance, suspension rates along with other outcome measures. Although this change seeks to provide a more equitable perspective of school performance the structure continues to be a top down structure in which the state and LEA's determine what is measured and prioritized. There is some promise around this new model of accountability but little is known as to how high-need schools will be impacted by this shift or whether the new dashboard will continue to reflect disparities that exist in our educational system. In order to understand how accountability measures impact high-need schools it is important to understand how school leadership teams interact and make sense of the way in which they prioritize their work including how they contextualize their work in relation to state and LEA mandates. State and local accountability systems should take into consideration the goals and needs of schools as identified by school leadership teams and provide the supports these schools need in order to ensure student success. In order for this to occur, leadership teams must be able to clearly articulate the context of their schools and be reflective about the way they address both formal accountability measures and goals. By understanding the goals, approaches and strategies of schools, district and state officials can truly support the needs of schools in ways that can transform the educational landscape of high-need schools and their communities.

This study sought to understand the goals of school leadership teams in low-income communities, particularly how these goals address the immediate needs of students and communities and how leadership teams contextualize formal accountability data. It also sought to understand how district leadership assesses school performance and how that leadership provides resources and supports to foster the conditions for teaching and learning. In order to capture this information, I met with leadership teams from three different high schools from various parts of the same city. All three schools were in low-income communities. These teams were asked to clearly articulate the context of their schools as well as the context of the communities in which these schools reside. They were also asked to contextualize formal accountability data using an accountability tool. Their explanations of formal accountability information was presented to three directors and one high-level district official in order to identify issues of support and resource alignment to improve the conditions for teaching and learning.

This chapter begins with a brief description of the sites chosen for this study in order to provide context for the reader. Then, I will reintroduce the research questions that guide the study including a brief description of overarching findings. This will be followed with a more thorough explanation of the teams' site-based goals and the connection between these goals and the school community. I will then address how teams do or do not communicate these goals and the teams' contextualization of formal accountability data. I will conclude the findings chapter by highlighting the degree in which district personnel identified ways in which they support schools to create the conditions for teaching and learning.

Sites

Three pilot schools were chosen for this study. Pilot schools function under a distributed leadership model: Teachers at these schools take more active roles in out-of-the-classroom responsibilities and activities, which includes participating in shaping the vision and mission of the school. The schools in this study spanned across the Paso Nuevo Unified School District. These schools were chosen because they serve low-income communities throughout the city of Paso Nuevo. They are small autonomous schools with a focus on teacher leadership. These schools are partnered with the University of Southern Hills via a grant focused on developing effective school leadership teams. Although these schools are small, autonomous, inclusive of teacher voice and focused on creating personalized environments for students, conditions considered important for school success, they were below the district on most formal accountability measures. Table 1 illustrates the subgroup demographic make-up of the schools in the study as compared to district data.

Table 1

Demographic Data, Paso Nuevo Unified vs. Pilot Schools

	Paso Nuevo Unified	Resilient HS	Spirited HS	Hope HS
Students with Disabilities	3.9% (HS only 16-17 data)	15-17%	21-23%	9-11%
English Learners	4.1% (HS only)	31-33%	23-25%	24-26%
Socioeconomically Disadvantaged	78.8%	89-91%	94-96%	91-93%
Foster Youth	.5%	2-4%	1-3%	1-3%
Latino/a	73.6%	82-84%	94-96%	97-99%
African American	8.6%	16-18%	1-3%	1-3%

Note. Adapted from district and California Department of Education data.

As shown in in Table 1, subgroup data greatly exceeds that of the district. Being able to address the needs of student subgroups such as English Learners, Students with Disabilities, socioeconomically disadvantaged, foster youth and Latino/a and African American students requires specialized training and additional school level resources. Being heavily impacted by one of these groups requires that schools align resources and energy toward meeting the needs of these students. This is important in the study because it highlights the added pressures team members experience working at their school sites.

This data points to issues of inequity in district schools, in that certain schools service a higher proportion of student subgroups, such as English Learners, Special Education students, foster youth, socioeconomically disadvantaged, African American and Latino/a students as compared to the district at large. It also speaks to the concerns of educators who sense that their schools face additional challenges not shared equally across the district or across communities. These pressures are most evident with formal accountability systems that often depict schools with low standardized test scores as being ineffective and inefficient. Having a better understanding of this data and how it impacts schools can lead to more meaningful conversations about shared responsibility for school success.

Table 2 illustrates formal accountability measures from the state Dashboard, School Report Card and School Experience Survey. Although there are a few places in which the participant schools are performing above the district average, the propensity of data indicates that these schools are struggling to meet these metrics. Interestingly, all target schools performed above the district average on two measures from the School Experience Survey: “This school promotes trust and collegiality” and “Teachers go out of their way to help students.” The three

schools' measures on these items counter the narrative being told by other formal accountability data.

Table 2

Formal Accountability Data

	Paso Nuevo Unified	Resilient HS	Spirited HS	Hope HS
Graduation Rate	75%	58-60%	77-79%	86-88%
Attendance Rate 96% or above	70%	62-64%	58-60%	64-66%
Reclassification Rate	13%	11-13%	14-16%	16-18%
SBA ELA	54%	43-45%	38-40%	42-44%
SBA Math	25%	2-4%	12-14%	11-13%
How safe do you feel in your school	68%	48-50%	67-69%	60-62%
How safe do you feel in your neighborhood	60%	38-40%	62-64%	45-47%
This school promotes trust and collegiality	83%	87-89%	88-90%	93-95%
Teachers go out of their way to help students	61%	69-71%	65-67%	65-67%

Note. Adapted from district and California Department of Education data.

Research Questions and Principle Findings

My study explored three research questions:

- Aside from goals related to formal accountability measures, what are the central goals of pilot school leadership teams? Why are these goals important to them? How do school leadership teams communicate their efforts to advance these site-based goals?
- How do pilot school leadership teams contextualize and explain their school's performance on formal accountability measures?

- How do district leaders assess the performance of schools and the role of the district in establishing the conditions for school success?

Instructional and Professional Development Goals

Instruction is believed to be the primary driver of a school's ability to meet formal accountability measures. Along with having a clear instructional focus it is essential to have a school team that takes on the collective responsibility of making this work a reality. Leadership team members were asked to describe the goals that they develop as teams beginning with their instructional focus areas. Although schools spoke to instructional goals personalized to their school environments, they also expressed the need for additional support in becoming better at developing instructional goals that effectively shift measurable outcomes. Additionally, all three schools expressed frustration with the constant negotiation between addressing the immediate needs of students, dealing with systemic conditions out of their control that often interfere with their ability to improve instructional outcomes and being able to maintain a strong instructional focus. Understanding how schools address instruction, while negotiating competing challenges in order to meet formal accountability measures can shed light on the capacity and desire of teams to transform their schools. The next sections address participants' discussions of instruction and professional development at the three sites: Resilient, Spirited and Hope high schools. Their stories demonstrate that they are working within their capacity to address the instructional needs of students. Their stories around instruction also lead to questions about additional causes that make continuous academic growth difficult. Giving credibility and legitimacy to these voices can inform the way in which we provide schools support and can shift perceptions of accountability structures.

Resilient High School

Table 3

Resilient High School Focus Group Participants

Name	Position
Isa	English Language Arts Teacher
Araceli	Resource Specialist Teacher
Jorge	Instructional Coach
Eli	Science Teacher
Sofia	Principal

Instructional goals expressed by the principal and leadership team members were focused on professional development (PD) and training. This was evident in the certification process associated with the career skills courses offered at their school. Principal Sofia described the process: "We are going for, it's called Advanced Status Certification. We feel really strongly that we're going to get it, and that's because our teachers are doing some really innovative, amazing work in interdisciplinary teams." As a part of the certification process the school needs to demonstrate the use of effective strategies and evidence of interdisciplinary work amongst teachers. Sofia added "We have I feel really amazing, rigorous instruction and products that are being produced by our students."

As part of a grant with the University of Southern Hills, leadership team members and most teachers have been engaged in professional development training around the use of highly effective instructional practices. Sofia stated "We have so many PD opportunities, not just on campus, but off campus . . . My teachers go to PDs all the time." She continued "I have teachers in Math for America, which [is] really intense. Every Saturday they're going to math PD."

As evidence of their commitment toward their instructional capacity and meeting the academic needs of students the focus group interview for Resilient HS occurred during the teams

planning session taking place over winter break. Eli expressed this sentiment about the teams' efforts in improving their instructional capacity: "Before you came, we were looking at our instructional focus for this year and we have this little feedback form that we're gonna use this semester." This feedback form will be used to conduct peer observations around the agreed on instructional goal. Eli explained, "one of the foci is academic strategies to encourage or increase reading, writing; just literacy, basically, across the contents."

Although the team meets and develops these instructional goals, they have not yet seen these efforts lead to improved student performance on formal accountability measures. As Sofia put it "but it's not translating on the standardized tests. That's where the challenge is now."

Spirited High School

Table 4

Spirited High School Focus Group Participants

Name	Position
Elisa	Special Education Teacher
Merry	CPA Grant Advisor Teacher
Marco	Social Studies Teacher
Eunice	Counselor
Kathy	Principal

When discussing how the school determines academic goals Spirited's principal, Kathy said:

> The way it normally works is in the summer we do a week of PD and we do all the goal setting. Big picture, we look at WASC, we look at our single school plan, we look at our data, SBA, all that, and we set some instructional goals for the year. Then we try to create sort of a PD schedule that reflects the different things that we're trying to work on. We

kind of try to map that out as a full staff, taking into account what the data is showing us and how are we going to work together as a school.

Team members at Spirited HS identified three instructional goals for the year in order to address underperformance in ELA and Math. According to Kathy, the school was interested in "supporting our subgroup (EL and SPED) students more effectively." In order to do this teachers implemented three cycles of instructional rounds to examine teacher practice and to refine teaching. The areas of focus were discussion techniques and student participation, quality and purpose of questions and use of academic vocabulary. Marco explained the instructional rounds process in the following way: "In advance of each walk, teachers and our ELD coordinator led PD in best practices and strategies that were connected to the topics. We conducted three sets of instructional rounds in each area, scripted what we observed, and then debriefed each round as a full staff. All teachers observed and were observed." This was done in order to observe the incorporation of best practices that were taught to staff.

In addition to this work, the school has focused its energy in providing intervention to struggling students. They have worked together using data to target students and provide them additional instructional support. Kathy explained it this way: "We are trying to target certain students to really help them be successful and we have a couple of teachers who've been sort of working with real purpose and focus." She continued saying, "We do some afterschool tutoring where I can pay them to do targeted instruction. So I think we've done much better with this and I think we'll continue to do well." Marco spoke of the staff commitment in ensuring that this support takes place: "What we've done as a staff, is we've just with our capability and our time, we've tried to intervene as much as we can."

Hope High School

Table 5

Hope High School Focus Group Participants

Name	Position
Callie	English Language Arts Teacher
John	Intervention and Support Advisor
Edgar	Math Teacher
Angel	Science Teacher
Sandra	Principal

Teachers at Hope High School develop and invest in instructional strategies to support student learning. Sandra spoke to the way in which the school creates its yearlong goals. She stated, "We try to break down our accreditation goals into more manageable goals." They do this by creating thematic goals for the year. She added, "This year our theme was making connections, because it's not just about having a good community. We also have to have strong instruction." Angel shared, "We have things like the Kagan structure. Students become more interactive. They communicate." He continued saying, "We have also instituted this mastery learning strategy. And, I'm reassured that these things are really helping our students to being able to learn on their own pace." John added, "I think the Kagan initiative is meant to engage the students more in instruction." John also spoke to the level of investment around mastery grading:

> Since we started this pilot school, we'd been working on mastery grading and learning and continue to develop that, but I think it's changed from just saying on paper, this is what we're gonna do to now teachers are taking full ownership of it. But also the students are recognizing it and are aware of it. It's changed. I don't think it's had enough time to have a direct impact on quantitative data. It's a little bit of impact, but it's not across the board. But I think that students are learning how to take better advantage of it. I think

> teachers are learning how to take better advantage of it. I think we're all figuring it out that it's easier now for us to get students to pass the courses, but much harder for us to get the students to have an A.

Sandra also felt that mastery grading was an important aspect of the school. She said:

> We were probably one of the first schools in the district to do mastery grading, at least trained through the district. We've struggled. We've had so many conversations. I personally feel like we are probably the best we've ever been in terms of grading. There's mastery learning, the concept, the big picture, and then the grading piece, I think we're pretty much fully there with the grading. Mastery grading we talk about a lot in with our leadership team. We do observations in the class. We look at grade distributions and things like that.

Sandra shared this experience about making the instructional progress needed:

> Yes. Last year, for our pilot school review, we got this overall developing, and it just threw us. We had just come from WASC last year, and WASC was really positive. It was like, great, great, great, but the pilot school review, it felt like they were very focused on the data as compared to the district. It was very hard to read into what they wanted to see, because the report was very lacking in specifics, but they clearly had some issues with our teaching.

Sandra said the feedback from the review was hard for teachers to hear given all of their hard efforts and work around instructional strategies.

Meeting instructional goals. All schools identified instructional goals that were developed in collaboration with leadership teams. These goals aligned to the implementation of effective strategies. However, all schools also spoke of the need to improve in this area. They

felt that instructional support in refining goals and monitoring progress was necessary at their schools. In addition to having teams identify instructional goals, this study sought to understand priorities closely related to addressing the needs of students and their communities. In the next section, teams shared a variety of practices they engage in, in this area. When asked about the work they value and prioritize leadership team members pointed to actions and goals that foster relationships, increase student engagement and sense of agency and address community needs that make the goals relevant to both students and educators. Although these goals and priorities demonstrate the development and use of essential life skills, teams have not seen them move formal academic data. Teams however believe in the core effectiveness of these programs and their importance in the lives of students and the overall spirit and culture of their schools. Levering the collaborative efforts and commitments demonstrated by the actions and programs highlighted by these teams can inform districts and a wider audience about a teams' effectiveness as well as make us question the value of our current accountability structure in making determinations about what makes schools successful.

Site-based goals and community and student needs. Participating leadership team members all expressed an understanding of and connection to the communities that they serve. In addition, they all were able to articulate their efforts and commitments in wanting to improve the lives of students in these communities. They used this understanding and connection in the development of site-based goals. Several were from the community they worked in or grew up in similar communities. They spoke about students and their families as lacking the resources necessary to be successful and they were willing to take on the task of providing as much as they possibly could. Team members demonstrated high levels of knowledge regarding community dynamics, historical trends and the social-emotional needs of the students they served. These

were fundamental in the development of the team's site-based priorities and goals.

Leadership teams expressed goals that were very closely connected to a specific community and student level needs. This study found that leadership team members prioritized goals unique to their student population and to the communities in which they serve. These goals and priorities focused on responding to social-emotional needs, trauma, dislocation, violence and the need to build community. Goals and priorities also focused on the development of career and life skills connected to improving the communities in which the schools reside, including goals around instructional practices to support student academic achievement.

Many saw these as foundational elements to creating a successful school. Although there were some cross cutting goals between schools, the programs and practices in each school addressed site specific needs (see Table 3). Themes that connected the success of these programs included having autonomy over hiring and budget. Most of these programs functioned with community partnerships that were disconnected from district hiring restrictions or budget limitations. These programs required teacher collective responsibility, meaning that teachers at the sites created plans, participated and led teacher training and implementation. Often this included the development of curriculum for these programs. Teachers spoke of these programs with a tremendous amount of passion and referred to them as exemplifying some of the core values of their schools.

These goals should not only be of value to the site but also should be of value to the district and the state. These goals and priorities are actualized through programs and practices that provide a clearer picture of a schools' ability to address college and career requirements and school climate and safety, some of the states dashboard's new measures.

Table 6

School identified community needs and site based priorities

Identified Community Needs		
Resilient High School	Spirited High School	Hope High School
Social-emotional support, Trauma and violence	Dislocation and lack of healthy food options.	Dislocation, language access and immigration status
Site Based Goals and Priorities		
Resilient High School	Spirited High School	Hope High School
Building Community	Career Skills building in-Agriculture and Farming	Building Community
Career Skills Building in the area of emotional well being	Partnerships with Community organizations	Language supports for English Learners
Professional Development and Training	Career building Grants	Community based service learning projects
Partnerships with Community Organizations	Academic Intervention Supports	Mastery Grading and Learning
Collaborative Structures	Collaborative Structures	Collaborative Structures

In the next sections, I share the comments study participants made regarding the issues that affect their schools and communities.

Resilient HS School and Community issues

Resilient High School participants expressed concerns over community safety, trauma and emotional health. As a part of the schools' original plans, plan writers, who were teachers themselves, integrated a strong emotional health focus, a unique program for PNUSD. Teachers felt very strongly that in a neighborhood like Paso Nuevo it was important to educate students

and the community on these issues. They see the work around emotional health and career skills courses as a vital component of their work. Isa stated:

> I am proud that we have a school in [Paso Nuevo] that is dedicated to supporting students whether or not they choose to go into social work or emotional health, that they have been given some tools for themselves, for their families, for their community, for wherever they go.

All team members in this school agreed that their career skills course was one to take pride in. It was integrated into the curriculum and students were able to expand their career options by taking coursework that might not be available at other schools. Teachers also felt that a focus on emotional health was not just about preparing students for potential future careers but gave them immediate tools they could use with their own families and within their own communities. Eli added:

> I always brag about our emotional health focus. Behavioral and emotional health career course like [my colleague] was talking about, like the social work class, the internship . . . that's very rare in a high school that you would learn about emotional health. "We're like one of the only schools that this is our focus." And it's so important especially when you live in a society but particularly the community where there is violence and trauma and all this stuff going on, and what other tool do you have but your own brain to try to process this stuff, so how can we give you more tools for that?

Teachers pointed to the various programmatic changes they have had to make to prioritize this work in their school. This has included the ability to negotiate and create consensus with staff and a high level of focus working with community partners. Eli stated:

> You have to have actual classes set aside, and you have to . . . it's a whole other structural

piece around the bell schedule. We currently have seven periods. I don't know what we're gonna do next year because we're talking about going to six periods. I don't know, but you have to actually have classes that kids take, and you require it.

Aside from having to make a master and bell schedule changes to incorporate courses into students' schedules, teachers also spoke to the experiences of students who take these courses. Isa explained how these classes have impacted students:

> My students, and part of the class that she said as well, is the 10th-grade social work class, we look and read articles, view videos about what it means to experience trauma, and how it's not . . . when there are diagnoses, like PTSD [that] is not just for veterans, and I think once they understand what one trauma means, one with identifying symptoms and [what the] effects of trauma are, they are sort of in shock of the fact that they too have been traumatized, and they can identify it and they can kind of like what [my colleague] said earlier about a student saying, "It happens all the time. People get shot. I know, I've seen it." It's like your level of trauma speaks to why you can make that statement as opposed to someone who might have never had that experience and is like, "Whoa, that's startling."

Teachers are committed to these programs because of the more human aspects of what they can do to help students navigate their current circumstances. Jorge described the program's importance to students:

> I think that's part of, again back to what maybe the data doesn't show, what we're proud of is that there have been times where students, based on their own identification of their own trauma or challenge, will self-refer or will say, "I wanna talk to somebody." And we can say, "Okay, we don't need to ask you any questions, you can go ahead and talk to

somebody about it." Or they will speak to a teacher about it and the teacher will say, "Okay, well, although I'm here for you, I think we need to have you talk to somebody to really get through this." And I think that is safety and that is accounting for how they feel.

In addition, Isa expressed the importance of equipping students with essential life skills:

> I feel like they are more empathetic. They are more aware of their own triggers. They are able to recognize how to support others and have a willingness to advocate and to think of themselves as advocates. I think that's not measurable yet, and that's not highlighted.

At Resilient, restorative practices were also highlighted as being critically important for teachers and students. They have collaborated with an outside organization and were given a Restorative Justice (RJ) coordinator through this organization, which has helped transform discipline and community building practices at the school. Isa described the importance of the program:

> I think one of the things we were proud of is our restorative justice practice because like every week, we have community circle so we're trying to build that community so they can feel comfortable within the school and feel comfortable to express their needs and so when stuff happens, just in general, we try to discuss it. We have good relationships with a lot of our students and so they become like family. They're like your kids and they know it.

Restorative practices at this school exemplify the school's core values, Jorge put it this way:

> The other thing that our kids know is our school is set up with the restorative practices that we're not gonna give up on kids, that you may be a knucklehead but that doesn't

> mean we're just gonna find the first opportunity to move you to another campus to be a knucklehead someplace else. We're gonna spend the time and energy to try to work with you and get you through whatever it is that you need to get through, so that you can be a meaningful constructive part of our community.

Sofia felt that restorative practices at her school were meant to "shatter the school-to-prison pipeline."

Partnerships have been essential in getting these programs off the ground. Teachers spoke to having an RJ coordinator purchased through grant funds, including a partnership with a career-building program, which includes a work-related coordinator that supports students in finding summer internships. Most importantly these programs and teachers' commitment to these programs are a part of the schools Understanding of Work Expectations (UWE), a teacher developed a thin contract that formalizes teachers' commitment to ensuring the success of these priorities. When speaking of the impact that these partners have had on the school Sofia stated "Anytime that we need panels for our projects, they show up in droves. That's because we also have a really strong work-based learning coordinator." She continued saying, "That's been essential. Honestly, I think [it is] the reason we got a 6-year WASC accreditation."

This work has happened because of the high level of commitment demonstrated by educators at this school. Jorge explained the sentiment this way:

> I think that one of the things that really struck me when I got to this school is—and I feel like that this is a testament to the type of leadership that we have—there's a genuine belief that everybody there is there for the kids and we all know that we're having struggles to do the best that we can, and the best way to overcome those is together as a team . . . and I think that if you look at our principals, they care about their staff

immensely, and I think that that filters into the staff cares about each other.

Restorative practices have had an impact on students at Resilient HS. Araceli shared a conversation she overheard students having.

> I had overheard the kids one time talking and one of the kids was like, "Well, I know my teacher cares about me." And that made me proud, like, "I know my teachers care about me." It's not just with one teacher, it's with all your teachers, you have this sense of community that they know we're here. We're here because we care and I think that's what really drives me to be here and love what I do.

Aside from relationships teachers expressed getting involved in other aspects of students lives. Isa explained:

> Most of our sports are coached by teachers and while that again becomes a huge burden on the teachers because whether it's a club or a sport, they are giving way more time than they're getting acknowledged for or compensated for. It does create another level of student support that students I think feel teachers go out of their way for, that it wouldn't if they just went into a class.

This is important to the study because leadership team members at Resilient HS have found ways to support the work they deem important to their school and community. Often these programs and practices require networking on behalf of site team members. Understanding the core values of school site leaders, like those at Resilient HS, is important in shaping the perceptions that we have of them and what is happening at their school. It is important to know that this team has spent valuable time and energy attempting to create spaces that honor student voice and address community needs. As Jorge stated:

> They need the best. They need to be seen as a promise, not risk. And, I think we all

have that mentality. And, you know? When all the battles bring us down at the end of the day, that reminds us why we are here.

Sofia spoke of her team in this way:

> Social justice, community collaboration, innovation, equity and access, those are our core values. . . . That's what draws people here and that's what makes you feel part of this collective of adults that's here to really help and support our students. . . . Most of the adults here came from similar backgrounds, similar experiences. We made it . . . we want to give our students the same opportunities. That's why this works. But then, why [do] we . . . continue to struggling in the—what did you call it—more formal.. . . accountabilities? . . . I just think that maybe we just don't have the tools, I guess, or the guidance to make it happen.

Spirited HS School and Community Issues

Spirited High School is the only site located in the same area as a charter school. Spirited High School's leadership team saw dislocation due to gentrification as a major concern for students in their community. Along with housing instability, the team identified a lack of healthy food options, food justice issues that have plagued their communities. Students don't have easy access to grocery stores with healthy meal options. In order to address these needs the school has developed an urban farm on their school campus. This urban farm is a part of the career skills courses offered on their campus. Teachers at the school wrote several grants in order to develop these programs. These grants have allowed them to purchase a career skills teacher who is from the local community and who is able to teach urban farming to students. Eunice explained the connection of the urban farm to the community in this way:

> We're trying to bring more resources into the community. If you see, there's only one

market. There's no clinics. There's no banks. There's no healthy food around. And I know, the dream of the school farm that we have, start more community farms, right? In the neighborhood, just to help with the whole, better eating.

Marco spoke to the unique nature of the program:

> I mean, having an urban farm, and having a program that, not only connects the students to agriculture in the middle of the city, but also, to student's cultural background, and having that cultural reference. I mean, that's unique. And, I think that our principal has focused a lot in developing that program. Which we, I think even trying to network around the neighborhood, I think that's always been one of the goals.

The connections educators see to the lives of students and to the needs of the community are clear, however teachers also expressed the value that these programs provide in bridging the educational and social-emotional needs of students. Elisa expressed it this way:

> I think it also is nice, because it gives them a space. Like, it gives them a space where they have ownership over something. And, they can really put their effort into that, and visualize what they're getting back from it. A lot of the students we talked about, like, they don't really have stable home environments. It's like, they don't know who's gonna have to stay home to take care of kids or, "I can't stay after school, 'cause I have to go pick up my brother from school." And then, the whole immigration issues with kids that are nervous about that. It gives them, like, "This is my space to work in." I think that's really valuable.

Marco described the impact of the farm, saying, “Another thing on the core values was about a sense of ownership. Along the way, they develop their own voice, and have a sense of their own agency, and feel more confident to engage, once they leave here.”

Teachers also spoke to the ways in which this specific program addresses students' skills, both academic and career related. Elisa said:

> I think this year, we're starting to see a lot more of the program really rolling out, and developing, and blossoming. You know? Some students have been there for 3 years. And, it's amazing what they could tell you, and how they could tie it to the science. The students know how to replant seeds. They know the process. You know? And, to learn a trade like that. I have a black thumb. I wouldn't know how to plant something. And, our kids have learned all these great skills in the farm, you know?

Team members acknowledged a high level of coordination and dedication between the school site and local partners to make this farm a reality at their school. Their commitment to the success of the program has come from seeing the connections students have made to the program. Merry stated:

> I feel that, right now with our agriculture program The Farm, our students are so proud of actually, they're caring for the animals, and they're growing crops, and they take a lot of pride in that. Of maintaining it. And, being part of something big. Because, what school, or what student can say, "I have a farm at my school"? So, I really feel that a lot of our students have had a lot of buy in with our program.

Included in this, are partnerships that extend outside of the school. As Merry put it:

> Yeah. So, all of our students take at least one of those classes, as part of their time here at our school. And again, it goes back to honoring the knowledge that they come with, from their communities, and then building upon that, and giving them those skills, to go back, and apply what they're doing here. And so, that goes also . . . That connects with the partnerships that we make. We always try to find people who are gonna support our

efforts through those forces. So that, those experiences can be magnified through the lens of actual employers, and organizations, that are doing that work.

Teachers have had to write grants to fund these programs and have had to engage in collaborative practices to ensure their success, including taking turns over break to feed farm animals. Merry stated, "They write for Perkins. All the Career courses have Perkins funding. I mean, funding is the biggest hurdle there. So that we can keep those programs running, because we only have so much funding for them." Marco connected the funding to data requirements "you have to keep those numbers going, so the money can stay." Teachers are committed to the success of these programs at their school, which is evidence of their ability to create and foster a student-centered environment. Elisa expressed it in this way: "Our school really takes a lot of pride in building these relationships with our students, and the parents, and really letting them know that we are here for them."

Marco attributed their ability to work as a team to the leadership at the school. He said:

> You can give a lot of that to the principal of the school. We developed the level of trust, I, we have that rapport and she trusts that we're professionals, and she trusts our direction, and our vision for the school. She allows us a lot of space to build the programs that we feel are necessary, on campus, and do the work with each other that we need to.

This level of collaboration is essential at Spirited HS. Teachers sense of efficacy and mutual trust allows leadership team members at this school to engage in "miracle" work, because as Elisa put "Yeah. We have miracle work that needs to happen. We need miracle strategy."

Hope HS School and Community Issues

The site-based priorities for Hope High School have centered on the changing demographics of their community. This led the team to prioritize the development of an

induction program to address the needs of students who are new to the country and a focus on restorative practices and community service-learning projects. A great deal of effort was placed in ensuring that students have access to content courses in their primary languages. In order to accomplish this, changes to the master schedule had to be agreed to by staff, training on the use of effective strategies for meeting the needs of newcomers had to be established and become a part of professional development. This effort began a few years ago, before the high influx of unaccompanied minors into the country. Due to this effort the school saw a rise in reclassification rate during that time. John expressed their focus around newcomers in this way:

> I'm really proud of teachers. It's been a big challenge because it used to be mostly, long term English learners. Used to be we had maybe 20 out of our 500 students who were newcomers and so they didn't require as many resources. But now we have whole sections . . . I took 60 kids in that are in the first 2 years in the country. And so we have to have much bigger classes and much bigger differentiation issues. And the teachers are taking it on; they're recognizing it's a big challenge. But they're not ignoring it, they're not denying it. They're working hard.

Teachers understood that they provided a service in the community that was not being offered by other schools. This has had an impact on the expansion of their program. Kathy stated, "I think word spread in the community that we're a welcoming school. So many siblings of current newcomer students have also enrolled in our school." The team has had conflicting responses to the growth of this program. They have realized that expanding this program has had both positive and negative impacts. They want to address the needs of newcomers by ensuring that they have courses in which they can be successful, but they also do not want to exclude them from becoming important members of the school community. Callie expressed the

tension in this way:

> So, we were just reevaluating the induction line because we're kind of stuck a little bit because we have conflicting values, which is we want the students to be integrated into the culture. We know that having them with some kind of level of bilingual instruction is important. We know what they need, but how do we get, with the limited resources we have, how do we get them what they need? And with those limited resources we find ourselves torn between do we adhere to the newcomer line because we know that it's effective, but it's got a cultural backlash, which is it's isolating them from the rest of the community.

Sandra also questioned whether creating a program like this has impacted the school's overall data, bringing the school's scores down over the last couple of years since it's inception. Understanding the unintended impact of this decision prompted me to ask Sandra if she would end the program in order to recruit a different type of student. This would in theory help improve her school data. When asked if she would prefer to market the school to recruit only higher performing students, she vehemently said, "No," if given the two options, she would choose to provide the service to students who are often left behind in traditional school systems.

Hope High School, similar to Resilient High School, also had a strong focus on restorative practices. This became a focus because team members saw results from the school experience survey and wanted to address the sense of safety students were reporting on surveys. Their restorative practice program includes a peer counseling class in which students lead restorative practices work in classrooms. Teachers see this program as being important in creating positive relationships between students and teachers on the campus. They also see effects of the program on students' classroom work.

Callie spoke of the transferability of the skills and the impact of the skills gained through restorative practices: "What I am starting to see with just some of the observational data that we are collecting is our classrooms are much more interdependent and collaborative." She continued, saying:

> The other day I gave a quiz and the students were interacting and no matter how hard I tried to say this is individual they were so engaged. Every single student was engaged in what was going on with the quiz. Even though it was intended to be an assessment, it ended up being kind of a lesson. They didn't need me to help them answer the questions. They were all together just really helping each other and supporting each other to find the answers.

Callie credits the focus on relationship building as supporting classroom dialogue and discussion among students.

The school has a strong advisory program for students. It is in this advisory program that students receive critical college and career information and develop a service-learning project connected to providing a community service or action. These projects function with the collaboration of community partners. Students have to present their projects to teachers and member of the community. These projects are connected to the larger theme of the school, which is centered on social justice. Sandra expressed the following about student experiences with service projects:

> Just having kids be able to own something that's their own, like this is what I want, this is what I want to research, this is what I want to do. The senior one is the biggest one, obviously, and they do an individual service learning project. They have to plan something, research it, and then execute some sort of service on their own, whereas the

> others are a little bit more either group or whole class . . . There are just some days when we just split all the kids up and we move them to different rooms and we have a work day, all of our seniors sign up with a mentor. Not just teachers, but all of our staff members, so I have kids that I'm working with on their senior project. We read, we proofread, we help them. I think that part, we're all invested.

Engaging in this type of high-level work is not easy. As can be seen it takes commitment and effort from everyone involved and these projects kids create are real world. Students have to demonstrate the use of valuable skills, including valuable literacy and critical thinking skills.

High levels of collaboration among staff were also present with members of Hope High School as exemplified in the following statement by John: "I think that distributed leadership, it makes them (teachers) feel more empowered to be part of the decision making. Feel like that they are enabled to and also ask to work together more." It is this sense of active participation that allow for programs that teachers deem important to take shape and become actualized. This sense of efficacy and capacity building, coupled with a commitment to students allows for this work to take place. Callie stated:

> Yes. We don't always agree though, but yes, they do. We all are centered around the same focus, which is our students and the population of students that are sitting in front of us and how best to reach the common goal of learning and graduation. We don't always see eye to eye on that and so that's where we have to work out some of our own values, conflicts and pedagogical conflicts and things like that. But yeah, I think we are all very committed to our why we're here and what we're doing here. We all have a common goal in terms of helping students be successful in this community.

Callie described their commitment to students in the following way "I think that's what keeps our

drive strong. We want to see this community flourish. And, we want to see our students flourish." John stated "I think that we are doing the best we can, but if we could liberated of more restraints, there are some things that the district could do to make things easier as opposed to making things harder. Most of the compliance, because that's what I do, but if we could eliminate those things, we could be much more effective." Although the school discusses instructional priorities and goals they have struggled to make gains on formal accountability measures. Sandra describes the impact this has had on the school and on her thinking as the school leader.

> I'm always thinking, and I don't think of it like "Oh God, now what?" I'm trying to think of it as "What do we do next?" It's about picking the right people. Everybody always says that. We need to pick the right people, but I think we have the right people, they just get burnt out, so what are we gonna do differently as a leadership, as a school, to support each other better, to talk, to make it more well-rounded, to make us help each other and help the kids. I don't know. It's about thinking differently. I think the innovation happens in the classroom, but it also has to happen in our thinking about how to support teachers through this kind of work. It's hard.

Commonalities and Differences

Overall, the priorities exemplified by all three schools demonstrate teacher commitment, collaboration, the use of creative partnerships and resources and a belief that students should be exposed to activities that will provide them the skills necessary to address current needs as well as potential future careers. These priorities addressed community needs around trauma, violence, dislocation, language and food justice. Although some commonalities were found among schools, each school prioritized and engaged in work in different ways. Most

importantly, these priorities demonstrate the ability of educators to develop programs and practices that require strategic thinking and collaboration. Practices demonstrate high level planning and coordination of resources. I asked leadership team members how they communicated this work to others, given that these actions and priorities can provide a powerful counternarrative of the effectiveness of their schools. In addition, the priorities they've identified align closely to the California dashboard indicators around school climate and career. Although leadership team members don't perceive these indicators as important to their LEA, site-based priorities exemplify programs and practices that should in theory connect to elements of the new dashboard.

Communicating site-based goals. When it comes to communicating site-based goals leadership team members from all three schools stated that they do not communicate the advancement of site-based priorities. They provided the following reasons as to why this has been difficult to do:

- They are overwhelmed addressing the immediate needs of students.
- They perceive that district leadership does not value the work.
- They do not know how and do not have metrics and ways to collect and present data.
- Teams saw this as an additional task that they currently did not have time for.

Teachers expressed being overwhelmed with other responsibilities, which impacted their ability to communicate their site based goals. Isa expressed it in this way: "I think that ends up going on the lower part of the priority list, compared to work that needs to get done right now." She continued, "We gotta do the work and then by accident, somebody will hear about this, or maybe we will write an email and that's as far as we'll go." Eunice added, "Sometimes we are so immersed in wearing multiple hats in a small school that sometimes we don't have a lot of the

time to promote . . . and network with other community partners, or other schools." She continued: "We're really invested in the classroom. And so, we don't have the luxury of communicating a lot of the good things that we do. That's definitely an area of growth."

Callie spoke of the various organizations they partner with: "We've had relationships with a lot of different organizations. But in terms of communicating our successes, I don't know. We do not do a very good job at that." School leadership teams found themselves so focused in addressing the immediate needs of their school and engaging in the work, that they did not have time to think about or plan ways in which to communicate and share these practices. John said, "Honestly, the question is always to focus on the problems instead."

One of the schools, Resilient, was in the process of receiving a certification for their career skills course options, something they achieved during the writing of this project. I asked Sofia, principal at Resilient HS, if the success of her school would be perceived differently if the district or state highlighted different outcomes instead of just formal accountability measures. She responded, "Yeah, I think we'd be shining. We'd be an example for the rest of the district. I think that people that really know us do that." Although teachers at these schools understood the collective power of their work, they also were so engaged in it that they have had little time to promote it. They also have never collected or created their own data collection methods around this work to provide a strong counter narrative.

Teachers from the three schools also felt that district leadership was uninterested in what school teams prioritized because the district focuses so heavily on formal accountability. Eli commented on the issue: "I feel like the district in many ways too is like Well, we gotta do whatever it is, the work, and then the other stuff, the actual relationships and building of acknowledgement is not as prioritized." Eli continued by saying "The data isn't changing as far

as tests scores and reading levels and math scores. They are not going up . . . and that is the bottom line, it seems." Eunice spoke about it in this way:

> But, we just feel, they don't see any of these things. Like, "Oh, that's a pretty picture." So, what are your math scores? What happened? Your enrollment's down." . . . What we do here, if it doesn't show in numbers when it comes to test scores, when it comes to enrollment, it doesn't matter to them.

Isa reflected on the measures that are prioritized by the district this way:

> We realize that we do really well in relationships and support, which is not often measured, but we don't do as well on the academics which is always measured in some form or another, and I think that's our own kind of self-reflection too, but we don't get any kind of recognition of the stuff we're doing well. It's always well, "How are you going to move on the other end?"

Sofia summed up issues with the district saying:

> These [successes other than formal accountability measures] are not the priorities for the district. They're not. Again, I think was it last year? I don't remember when, but they started to in our local district anyway, they started to talk more about career skills courses because they're so worried about the declining enrollment. Actually, we are one of the higher enrolled schools in our area of Paso Nuevo Unified. We never get acknowledged for that. One of the things that we do well is career skills courses. The district started to roll out their career skills courses. They didn't even have our course focus on their list. That's how ignored we are. We're like, are you kidding? That's one of the tenets of our work and we're not even listed as a career course example.

John's comments addressed the contradiction he felt existed with district priorities. He

said, "District priorities always say that instruction is more important than compliance and test scores. But we are constantly being bombarded with the importance of test scores and compliance." He continued saying, "The state shows more value to it because they are giving more funds to at-risk populations. But it's just dumping money on a problem." John also expressed the feeling that schools needed more support and recognition for their work.

Being able to create a counternarrative is critical in shifting perceptions of success. Despite the fact that these schools are functioning under inequitable conditions they have managed to demonstrate resilience and persistence in developing a strong counter-narrative when it comes to programs that are strongly connected to the priorities of their schools. A part of having an effective counternarrative is being able to share successes in both qualitative and quantitative ways. This is something that these teams still need to be able to develop. In addition to this, team members from all three schools expressed the need to feel encouraged and valued by the district.

Contextualized Formal Accountability Data

Addressing formal accountability measures posed a different challenge for leadership team members. When given the opportunity to contextualize formal accountability data, leadership team members expressed frustration in not being able to adequately address the needs of students in ways that would impact formal measures. Teams pointed to a variety of issues that they perceive to have an impact on their ability to create the conditions for teaching and learning. Leadership team members spoke of serving a distinct group of students and pointed to larger systems that have impacted the type of student that they serve. They also felt they did not receive the adequate support and training to address the needs of the students they serve. In addition to a lack of support, they also indicated a need for valuable data. Data is perceived to be

inaccurate and does not help inform teacher practice and school level decision-making. Teachers preferred data that addresses the immediate needs of students and expressed the need for additional training on the effective use of data. Current formal accountability measures do not take into account the lack of quality teaching and learning. These conditions are perceived by leadership team members to be connected to larger systems outside of the control of schools, which make it harder to meet formal measures. School team members believe that formal accountability measures, when understood as an assessment of school performance, misrepresent the quality of the work done at the school. In the next section, I look at the schools individually to highlight how participants contextualized accountability data. Listening to the voices of educators regarding their ability to move formal accountability can provide district leadership and policy makers a larger understanding of the challenges that schools face, often out of their control. Providing an honest and authentic account of the obstacles that make the conditions for teaching and learning difficult can force district and state leadership to identify ways to problem solve these larger issues, particularly when they impact some of our highest needs schools in inequitable ways.

Resilient High School

Team members of Resilient High School contextualized their data in variety of ways. Team members expressed concerns over the distinct needs of the students that they serve. These needs include trauma and low academic skills, specifically in reading. They viewed systems like charter schools and the new competitive approach to public education as having an influence over the distinct type of student that they serve, specifically a higher proportion of English Learners and Special Education students. In addition to this, members from Resilient felt that they did not have access to accurate data, expressed the need for support to meet the needs of

students and felt that they did not have the right staff to support the academic achievement of the school.

Student needs vs. accountability requirements. Although the principal, Sofia, acknowledged some of the positive work the school was engaged in, she understood that some of the school's priorities are often shaped by the needs of the students they serve. Sofia stated:

> We have I feel really amazing, rigorous instruction and products that are being produced by our students, but it's not translating on the standardized tests. That's where the challenge is now. I know that that has a lot to do with the leaders because, again, we've been so focused on the social-emotional needs of students.

Sofia's statement speaks to the reality that team members face and how difficult it has been to see movement on formal accountability measures when so much of their attention goes to addressing the more immediate needs of their student populations. Team members described some of the very real challenges they faced dealing with trauma that students experienced in their communities. Jorge explained the challenge this way:

> For me, it's dealing with the level of violence and the issues of feeling safe. I think that that's one of the biggest challenges, especially in those times of . . . there always seems to be an ebb and flow to it and when you're on an upswing and it gets really tense, it's felt I feel like through the whole community, and so I feel like that that's a big challenge. What it means that you might have 3 or 4 years where there's not a direct impact of violence on your school community and then you might have 1 year where there's three or four really tragic incidents that directly affect your school community, which is what happened to us last year.

He described last year's events: "We had a student that was shot and killed three blocks

away from campus on his way home after dismissal. We had another student that was hit crossing at a crosswalk and was in a coma for several months and never returned to school." Araceli also shared an interaction with a student following one of the traumatic events:

> [The student said,] "Miss, did you know what happened yesterday?" So I said, "What happened yesterday?" And she's like, "One of the kids got killed, and I seen it." And I was like, "Oh, wow." I said, "How do you feel about it?" She was like, "It's nothing. I've seen so many people die and be killed in front of my eyes. It was nothing." And so that bothered me because I've never seen anyone get killed in front of my eyes and so for a student to say, "Oh, it's nothing," I'm like, "That's death." So you're dealing with this, every day and so the kids are like seminumb and you look at them like they're 16-year-old individuals, they're 15-year-old kids, and they're just starting their life and they're not even . . . they haven't even started yet, and they have experienced all this trauma.

One of the greatest needs expressed by team members was that of trauma experienced by students. They pointed to this as having an impact on their ability to engage in effective instruction as well as impacting formal measures such as attendance, graduation, and feelings of safety, both at school and in the community.

Isa described safety issues, saying, "A lot of students speak to not feeling safe walking around. I think they have limited resources and green space and areas for kids to play, I feel like, in our immediate community. There's parks, but even the parks, a lot of kids are like, "Oh, no, that's not as safe." Teachers understood the impact that feelings of safety have on a students' ability to learn. Eli expressed the impact this way "It's Maslow's hierarchy. You can't learn if you don't feel safe."

Team members from Resilient High School contextualized more severe experiences with

students' feelings of safety than did the other two schools, something that was clearly evident in the schools' data with a 22% difference between the school and the district average. Teachers connected working with students who experience these conditions to a more challenging working environment. Teachers had to decide whether to push on with instructional objectives or address the social-emotional needs of students. The issue of social emotional needs vs. instruction was echoed in all three schools. Isa explained how social-emotional issues impact her daily instructional decision making process:

> When it gets down to the challenges that we see on a daily basis, it's like he said, if there's a kid that is seemingly distraught and walks into your class and you're like, well, I could really work on my objective right now and really fine tune that or I could ask the kid what's wrong, which may get me like a whole lot of other answers and then I have to write a referral, which then . . . and I think for the bulk of my 16 years of teaching, I think that's been where I've worked and I've made those priority decisions of putting the kid first and saying, "Okay, are you okay? What happened?" And they tell you they're not okay . . . and all the other like 10 competing daily issues that come up, and I think that is important because I think that doesn't come out on the data. The data is like, well, you didn't get that kid from that level to that level. It's like, yeah, but the kid is okay now because they got some services and I think that it's hard and it's hard to again negotiate those things on a daily basis, especially when we have a high number of students that have those needs.

Low reading levels. Of the various formal accountability measures that are not being met, one of the greatest issues team members spoke of was student reading levels. Jorge expressed his concern this way:

> Our kids struggle with reading, and if you can't read in ninth grade, you're just automatically behind. And so I always have to take that step back to say, "Okay, why? Why are kids coming in at a fourth grade reading level?"

Eli summed up teachers' frustration with demands of accountability in this comment:

> We have kids spanning from first grade level reading to 12th grade level reading in one classroom, and we're supposed to be these heroes who can differentiate and give each kid a personal learning plan. Yeah, right, how does that happen? You show me, come on in, district, and show me how that happens.

Resource specialist Araceli spoke of the high need in the area of special education:

> We're doing full inclusion and in a class of 45, 25 students have Individual Educational Plans (IEP's)[6] and the teacher only has me as support. You expect me to differentiate for each class, and still provide the same adequate information and get them through?

In addition to meeting the needs of a high percentage of special education students, team members also spoke to the needs of English Learners (EL) and newcomers to the country. Isa commented on the school's experiences with newcomers and EL students,

> We have so many kids that are coming in on a daily, weekly basis, and it's challenging for the teachers, challenging on our resources. It is also challenging on the classroom because now you have another student that you have to incorporate in and find out where their needs are then you have their socio-emotional needs because they're not living with a parent.

Team members saw this population of students as facing additional challenges because of the

[6] Individual Education Plans, specify instructional accommodations for Special Ed students.

either lack of parental support because as Eli stated students are often "living with aunties or uncles" or as John put it "parents when they come, are not really that sure of the educational system in the United States." Leadership team member saw these distinctive characteristics among the schools' student population as a challenge to advancing formal accountability data.

This reality is coupled with a lack of sufficient and accurate data about students' academic skills and abilities to help teams make sense of and strategize on how to address these issues. This means that although teams can articulate some of the challenges they face, they feel unprepared and unable to address them. This led them to adopt their own standardized reading assessment.

> I think that one of the things that we've started to try to do is look at data internally. We pulled their SBA scores from middle school, we gave them a standardized reading assessment at the beginning of the year to see what level they're at. Out of the 120 ninth graders, we only had seven students that are reading at grade level. Only two students meet benchmark in math, and then when we look at their reading level as a whole grade, ninth-graders are reading at a fourth grade reading level. And in 4 years, we're supposed to catch them up 8 years [of education].

Jorge also expressed frustration with not having sufficient data on graduation rates to give them a better sense of how they are doing with their specific population of students. He said,

> I'd be curious to actually see because sometimes I do wonder, what are our graduation rates compared to similar schools in the community? What are our graduation rates? What are some of these literacy rates or whatever these measures are? Because we do have a pretty good sense of community in our school. Is that helping? Is that really

helping with these other things? My hypothesis would be that it would help, but especially in the context of the community in which our students live, but I don't know.

Jorge added:

> Fifty-six percent seems low, but when you look at those numbers, it's like 56% might be high, because we're coming in with kids that are basically on their way out of elementary school. I think that one of the things that we're starting to do now is to really look at some of the internal data. When we looked at that reading assessment at the beginning of the year, right now we're not accelerating them at all. They're barely moving 1 year per grade level.

Teachers are aware of the fact that they are not making the academic progress they would like to make and they are struggling to figure out how best to engage in this work.

Although principal Sofia acknowledged that the school serviced a distinctive population of students with the high needs described by members of the team, she was more critical of her own leadership and the teams' ability to focus their work around some of the major academic needs of the school and the students.

> Yeah. Present day I think the challenge still remains that we have not grown in terms of our academic data. Our data is still stagnant I would say. There hasn't been progress in that area based on the metrics that we're judged by. Even though I feel like we've made a lot of gains in terms of being able to provide the supports that our students and their families need, which is to me to be honest, what I'm passionate about, I really feel like it's like saving lives, I do. Because I think we have such a focus on that, we haven't really gotten together our instructional focus.

The charter school effect. Aside from speaking about the distinctive needs of the students, team members also brought up systemic issues that they perceive cause students with distinctive needs to enroll at their school. Eli saw "choice" systems as creating additional disparities in their communities. She described the issues created by charter schools:

> So these people are actually going and trying to take the better performing kids . . . and also, charters are rejecting special education kids or rejecting behavioral problem kids. They're basically kicking kids out. We always get kids coming from charters because they were kicked out for various reasons, and I think that's a district problem.

In addition to the perceived impact of charters and choice on subgroups like special education students, English learners and newcomers, Isa expressed frustration in the ways that schools market themselves to families and how this sense of competition harms their school:

> If the district didn't grant so many charters, if the district didn't allow so many of these organizations to basically infiltrate these communities and create this sort of hierarchy in the parents' minds of, "Oh, I should send my second kid to this charter because they're better." And then the kid gets kicked out. I think that's a huge piece the district could do differently.

Understanding this context, as perceived by educators at Resilient High School is critical and reflects the subgroup data evident at their school. It reflects the high need within their student population. In addition to reading levels, teachers also pointed to concerns over low graduation rates.

Resource needs of the school. Lastly, teachers at Resilient High School expressed concerns in having adequate staff and access to effective teachers. The resources that they expressed needing most at their school included campus aides. They expressed difficulties in

making sure that all students were in class. Eli said, “Helping kids stay in class who are roaming” is essential to support student learning. They felt that given the safety concerns in the community the district should assign more aides to their sites. They also shared their desire to have autonomy over selecting staff who are placed at their school sites. John felt that being able to play a role in the selection process of all school staff was important because they would select “people to fit the culture and personality of the school.”

The leadership team and principal also pointed to credentialing issues that have impacted their school and how these larger systems intended to protect students can sometimes work against students and schools that are hard to staff. During the time of the focus group interview, leadership team members had recently learned that one of their science teachers failed to pass a state credentialing exam and was going to be pulled from the site. All members had a high regard for this teacher. Isa expressed her, and perhaps her colleagues’, frustration with the situation:

> Why is it better to put some random long-term sub in there? That's out of our control. Our principal did a really good job. She kept him there all semester, last semester, because they were trying to get him out of there back in what, November or something. And so she was just like, "No." I don't know what she did, some kind of magic, to at least keep him there. And so you had someone who actually wants to be there and loved it, and then you're gonna remove him because of the test. So you'd rather put someone to change out every 20 days than have a consistent body in there, because the person that's gonna be there for 20 days is not gonna have the know how, they don't have the science background.

Team members had a difficult time making sense of systems that did not take into account unique circumstances and structures that often trigger larger negative impacts on their schools. These structures often seem so daunting, that principals who navigate them are seen by team members as having had to use as Isa put it "magic" to protect their schools.

As the interview with Sofia progressed, her responses began to shift from feeling ultimately responsible for the schools' inability to meet formal accountability measures to explaining and contextualizing challenges that make this really difficult to accomplish. This was especially true when discussing the school's low SBA Math data and being able to hire the right people to address the larger newcomer needs of the school. She bluntly stated, "My math department is weak." Sofia explained that she has one strong math teacher who is responsible for carrying and supporting the entire department. She then provided a recent example of why she had to replace one of her previous math teachers, who had a lot of potential "she got really traumatized last year because we thought a student had brought a gun to her classroom." This unfortunate circumstance led to a vacancy that she filled with a much less experienced teacher who has since struggled in a high school setting with classroom management. Sofia expressed the following concern "she's going to need years of PD [professional development] to get to the level where we can see gains in math scores." This reality, which is not accounted for on formal accountability measures has a direct impact on a schools' ability to make annual growth and demonstrate academic achievement.

Sofia was able to clearly articulate not only school wide needs but the needs of specific teachers. This is critical and valuable information that can be used to ensure that schools feel supported and are provided with the right staff to help them engage in their work. One of the areas that the principal pointed to as having a great impact on the school was the larger number

of newcomers to the country. Due to the large number of newcomers the district provided the school the opportunity to hire a newcomer counselor. Unfortunately, the candidate they wanted for the school was not eligible to be hired by the district. This is a consistent story and pattern expressed by the three schools in the study. This context is an important part of this study, specifically when thinking about the importance of having appropriate staff to address the needs of students. Resilient High's leadership team is aware of these challenges but they have been focused on addressing their most immediate needs. The school has enacted a number of steps important to instructional improvement but this has not lead to measurable improvement on standardized tests. Additionally, they are met with systemic obstacles (e.g., staffing processes) that make the work more difficult. Ultimately, despite them not having ultimate control of the conditions for teaching and learning at their school, they are the ones that are seen as ineffective or low performing.

Spirited High School

Leadership team members from Spirited High School contextualized their formal accountability data around the high number of students with disabilities and overall low academic skills. They also pointed to issues with dislocation and gentrification, charter schools, adequate data and professional development, the lack of resources and qualified and effective teachers. Teachers also spoke to issues of trauma and overall access to the right supports needed to foster the right conditions for teaching and learning. Kathy shared the reality of her school saying, "So we're at 98% poverty rate, and so we're number 15 on the Title 1 ranking out of all the schools in PNUSD. There is a lot of transiency in terms of family stability.

Kathy added: "We have a lot of students who've experienced a lot of trauma, we have a lot of undocumented students who have been separated from their families." She continued,

"There are a lot of cases of sexual abuse and in a small school, students become more comfortable and willing to share." Eunice also pointed to student homelessness as being an issue at the school: "Something that is impacting our attendance data is homelessness. We have a lot of homeless students." She shared her frustration in trying to get resources from the district for students "the homeless liaisons for the district are really understaffed, I think there are only like 11." The lack of support from the district means that teachers and school sites have to do what they can to address the needs of these students. Elisa voiced similar concerns and shared how she feels this impacts a students' ability to learn. "Well if I don't know where I am sleeping, there's abuse, violence all of these things, school is somewhere on the bottom of the priority list." Elisa expressed the need for more resources in order to help support students and families.

When it came to attendance issues team members all expressed the fact that students often serve as babysitters for younger siblings. Eunice shared a recent experience involving a student who never returned from break. She shared "I had to do a home visit. He told me "oh well, we haven't had a babysitter, so I have to stay with my siblings." These circumstances have a direct impact on school data.

In addition to this, the team pointed out issues connected to dislocation due to gentrification. This has impacted school enrollment, which has impacted access to resources. Eunice stated "We connect losing enrollment to families not being able to afford the neighborhood anymore. 'Cause a lot of 'em are not homeowners." Kathy believes this has had a real impact on data

> I think that's had an impact. I do think there's a perception that this neighborhood is becoming the next neighborhood nobody can afford. So there are a lot of students who are committed and try, like they'll move away and still try to come or take the bus or

whatever. That creates more of a problem. Or they'll go to another school and then try to figure out a way to come back, because they miss what they have here.

In addition to being impacted by these varying needs the team is also dealing with a high number of special education students.

High percentage of special education students. Spirited High School felt that the impact of their students with disabilities population, which currently sits at 21% of the student body compared to the district's 3% high school average, has dramatically impacted a majority of their data. Leadership team members perceived that this disparity in special education data is caused by the enrollment or access practices from the competing charter schools that share the same campus. This addresses two claims in the study that teams feel that they serve a distinct group of students and that this is caused by larger systems outside of the school's immediate control.

According to Kathy, students with disabilities have attempted to enroll in the charter school and have been told, "We can't offer that program. We can't help you. We don't do this; we don't do that." I think it's created a perception that the public schools, the PNUSD schools on the campus are the schools of last resort." She continued by stating:

> I think we've had a lot of students who've come to us, special education students, who have not been served properly with their IEPs. I think charter schools can easily move them . . . They'll just tell a parent, "We don't have that kind of special education program." And the parents just say, "Okay." They don't say like, "You should have that." Or, "My child deserves that." They'll say, "But you can just go right next door and they'll enroll you because they have to." So there's some of that.

Marco expressed a similar sentiment "It seems like there's a trend with, or maybe it's even access with parents, as far as like certain schools want certain model students, with certain abilities and skills." He continued, "Some of the students that don't have that, might be challenged in those environments and the data can prove that, when you see our percentages in students with individual education plans that we have compared to what they have." Elisa expressed frustration with the competitive nature present in today's public schools: "It's really hard to compete with what they offer the students or parents. They're misleading, parents don't research, so if the packaging looks good they go for it." She added, "We feel sometimes we're fighting with one hand tied behind our back, because it is not apples to apples." She continued, saying, "On our site we have two charter schools, and you can see how the numbers get distributed, somehow we end up with a high population of students in special education or EL students."

Through her lens, Kathy, principal of Spirited High School explained how a high percentage of students with disabilities impact the school's data. When referring to graduation data as captured by the district, Kathy described the following:

> Part of the issue was that we had a lot of special education kids who graduated A through G but had taken a waiver for Algebra 2 and it wasn't reflected in the final data, which I think was higher. I would say that, so it actually should be higher than this. Our graduation rate has historically been like 10 percentage points higher than the district. I would say that that's pretty good.

This means that district data does not accurately reflect a school's graduation rate, specifically when special education students use course waivers that they have a right to access. For schools with a high number of students with disabilities, this becomes an unfair hurdle and

statistical irregularity that shapes they way in which the school is perceived. In addition, team members expressed a lack of district support in addressing the high needs of students with special needs.

In addition to the impact of not having the right instructional support, Eunice expressed frustration in not being able to meet the needs of one of their more important subgroups, students with disabilities. Eunice stated, "We don't have a nurse. We don't have a psychiatric social worker. You look at our percentage of special education students. We need a psychiatric social worker here. We need a school psychologist with all of the IEPs that take place." Marco said the school is doing all they can to provide support or fill in the gaps in order to support students. "And what we've done as a staff, is we've just with our capability and our time, we've tried to intervene as much as we can, but I think it's a larger . . . If we look at this, it's systematic." Teachers all expressed frustrations with larger systems that seemed to not make sense to them. They all understood and were willing to take on additional roles to make sure that they cover those gaps as best as possible.

EL students. In addition to meeting the needs of special education students, team members also spoke to having to address the needs of English Learners. Kathy shared this about the EL population of students:

> The EL piece too is interesting because we have a lot of newcomers and they come at different stages, so we'll have a 17-year-old show up, put in as a sophomore based on what we can figure out, and then they're working, they're living with somebody who's saying, "You have to pay us rent to stay here." We're having those conversations about they can't be working during school, and then some of them will eventually just stop coming to school.

Eunice mirrored the same sentiment during the focus group interview saying,

> The biggest thing that hurts us here are the EL students, once they hit 19, . . . We just had one this year. She was the semester away from graduating. But for her, it was like, "No. That's it. I'm gonna start working.

According to Eunice this student ended up dropping out and not graduating. Elisa also echoed this concern saying, "Also some of our ELs, they have jobs outside of school, . . . They're tired. They're not invested in school."

Students' low skill levels. Teachers also speak to the low skill level of students at the school site as directly impacting formal accountability data. Merry framed it this way:

> Most of our students read at the third and fourth grade level when they start in the ninth grade, and so I think our teachers who are not really teachers that know how to teach reading. It's kind of trying to figure out how do you develop a high school curriculum that both teaches all those standards at that level, but also recognizes that students are reading at a level that's so much below the level they should be coming in at.

In trying to make sense of the schools' data and the low skills of students, members of Resilient High School created a survey for incoming ninth grade students, which was administered during the schools' summer bridge program. They wanted to get a better sense of the type of student they were serving. According to Kathy, "Ninety percent of the kids who came to bridge—and bridge was probably about 70% of our ninth grade incoming students—had not culminated in middle school." This means that a majority of incoming freshman failed a majority of classes during their eighth grade year. This connects to the low skills that teachers are seeing in their classrooms. Marco also spoke of students' skill levels, saying, "Students are coming in with very low academic skills and that ranges from reading to writing to math . . . . it's

very hard to get them to grade and have them perform well on state test." Understanding this issue is critical in improving data especially considering this school is providing a service to some of our neediest students. The issues brought up by team members are systemic and cause inequity at this specific site. The solution to them lies beyond the boundaries and capacities of the school. The stress experienced by school team members is additionally compounded by the way in which the district pressures schools to meet data benchmarks without providing the right resources and support to address these needs.

Aligning goals to the realities of the school. Members felt that current dashboard data only reaffirms what they already know about their schools. They already know that subgroups are underperforming and that they have issues with attendance and reclassification. They feel pressure to address district targets and feel that they don't have the opportunity to talk about root causes of data with district leadership. When discussing reclassification data and district goals, Kathy expressed this:

> So they'll say, "This is the reclassification goal." But they don't say why. Is that based on some metric that people study to determine like, if you have this percentage of EL students at this level, you should be able to reclassify this number? No. They just create a blanket like EL count number and then they just kind of say, "This is what should happen across schools." So I do think part of the frustration is it's more like you're saying back to that local piece, it may make sense for you to have a lower reclassification number one year than the next. The people who support you don't care or look at that, right?

Kathy would prefer to have meaningful conversation around data that align to the realities and reasonable growth for the school. She suggested, “Let's create reasonable targets. We do it for our SPSA.”

When discussing having accurate data and professional development aligned to the needs of the school, Marco expressed these sentiments: “There's no data that tells you, "What are the needs of the community?" We're looking at measures at the end, right? But, What is it that the students need to get to that end? There's no insight.” This was a recurring theme at all schools, team members expressed frustration about not having formative data available to help them understand where their students are and what they need in order to improve. In addition to not having valuable data, teachers also expressed concern about attending PD that was not aligned to the needs of their students.

Inadequate professional development and staff. Teachers expressed frustration in not knowing how to address the needs of students reading at elementary school level. Being able to address this need is critical in order to ensure that schools are given training aligned to the needs of their student populations. Eunice stated “And, even the PDs that are available, and we're talking about strategies that are effective for students that are at grade level. And well, we need our strategies for students that are severely behind where they need to be.” Elisa also expressed the need for additional training: “We're lacking a lot of that knowledge, and practice, and it's not being provided. Or, it's not being, you know? Really, it hasn't been much of a focus in development.” Teachers perceived that the district did not do an effective job in providing training and ensuring that schools have the correct resources and supports. Elisa said, “It comes down to that too. Right? The district not providing us maybe, the funds or support.” Aside from articulating the need for additional support, team members also spoke of the difficulty in staffing

their school with experienced and effective teachers.

When discussing issues with staffing their math department Eunice expressed this sentiment:

> So, our services are very, very limited. We miraculously have to figure out how to do a lot of things in-house. One of the things that I get really frustrated with [is] the district. They say, "Oh. Well, your math scores are terrible." But, nobody in the district is helping us get teachers. We are aware of that, but if they did a better job screening, or better job preparing the teachers to come into those roles, it would really help us out. Our school, we haven't had a stable math department in a long time. We just stabilized the English department.

Elisa described the situation this way:

> We have the dance of the lemon. Math department is the dance of the lemon. We definitely need a stronger math department. But, the pool of teachers that we've been getting has been from the list that the district has provided.

Team members not only understand that something needs to happen to address their low math scores, they also understand the larger systems at play that make it harder for them to achieve this.

Kathy detailed more specific instructional concerns and also articulated some system level frustration with the lack of effective teachers and the need for additional support staff to help in moving the formal data outcomes. She said:

> I think that, at our school for example, we know kind of what we need to do to support the kids, but I think that we need higher quality. We need a higher quality pool. I'm not going to say that so much for ELA as I am for math, because math I'm going to say, since

> we opened we have not had good math teachers. Not for lack of trying, and not for lack of like getting out there and trying to bring people in, but I think that math is like for us, I can't speak for everybody, has been sort of the major contributing factor to this. To our scores being so low.

This sentiment is consistently expressed by all of the schools in this study. Schools have had a difficult time hiring qualified math teachers. This is important because having access to effective teachers sits largely outside of the control of an individual school. Most of the time available teachers are connected to larger district and state policies including unions related processes. Kathy explained what she has resorted to doing in order to address this situation.

> You end up trying to protect. I've even done things where I've had a strong math teacher and a weak math teacher and I've been able to pull the strong one out one extra period to go support the weak one, and it doesn't make a difference. If they're not a good teacher, they're not a good teacher. You're not necessarily going to train them up. I had a couple [of teachers who] have been placed because I got to that place where I couldn't find a good person. They just put somebody [in place]. Some of them were my hires that I was just sort of like, "Okay, it's like the end of May, beginning of June, and they're not perfect but let's see how they do."

What is so compelling about this experience is how common it is across the schools in the study. All principals expressed limited options in hiring the best teachers who want to teach at their schools. This matters in schools with struggling populations who not only need good teachers but need great teachers in order to counteract the students' high needs.

Hope High School

Leadership team members in Hope High School pointed to issues of gentrification, a high influx of newcomers, concerns over accurate and timely data, staffing, aligned professional development and issues with school choice as contributing to formal accountability data results.

The gentrification effect. Gentrification is seen as having caused safety issues for students both in the community and in the school. Callie spoke of changes in local gang boundaries as being impacted by gentrification and leading to an increase in violence:

> So, there's some territory conflicts if that makes any sense. And that's playing out a little bit on campus and in the classrooms. So, in terms of restorative justice, which is what my job is, it's been interesting to deal with a lot of the conflict resolutions and off-campus fighting and I'm seeing the changing tagging that's going on in the neighborhood too. There's a lot more . . . You can see the territory disputes playing out in the graffiti around the neighborhood. So it's been interesting to deal with that from the restorative justice lens because there's some of that undertone happening.

Callie added, "Well, trauma impacts learning. If you don't feel safe in your community or you don't feel safe as a learner in your school, cognitively, it's impossible for your brain to be focused on anything longer than a few minutes to actually learn." In addition to the need for safety, teachers spoke about their student population as directly impacting their formal accountability data.

Newcomers and low literacy skills. Hope High School has experienced a high influx of newcomer students, as one of a few schools to offer an induction program, school data has dropped significantly with the increase of newcomers interested in receiving targeted services at the school. The high number of newcomers to the school has posed new challenges for the team.

Principal Sandra said, “Our newcomer population, we just have so many students that won't be eligible to reclassify. The majority of our students that are also special education.” This greatly impacts reclassification rates at their site. Although previous data captured on the accountability tool show the school as performing above the district average in reclassification, teachers and the principal explained that recent data has them now lagging behind the district. Something that has occurred with the rapid rise of their newcomer population.

One of the issues with newcomers expressed by team members is that of addressing the needs of English Learners. Callie explained it this way:

> So language, second-language acquisition impacts literacy across the board in my opinion. And then on top of that, our teachers are in transition in terms of learning the skills on how to even teach this population literacy skills, because literacy’s everyone’s responsibility now. It’s not just the English teacher’s responsibility. So we’re still dealing with all of those shifts at the school right now, instructionally.

She continued to detail the challenges of low literacy skills, “The challenges in writing literacy is that our students, a lot of our students don't have academic development in their L1.” Literacy cuts across all content areas. Edgar expressed the impact it has had on SBA math scores. He said, “It affects their ability to comprehend the typical SBA math question. It's a lot of reading and it's very difficult for them to comprehend the reading and then to comprehend the mathematics that's required of them from that reading.” Literacy issues have been a consistent challenge at all three schools. Teachers have a deep understanding of how literacy impacts their overall ability to move their data efficiently.

Issue of insufficient data. Another significant issue connected to addressing the needs of students, is the lack of sufficient data to inform the work of teachers. John put it this way:

> The problem with that is it's not real time and it's not for us, in terms of the people who use that data to make decisions, it's not, like what he was saying, you can't have graduation rates from three years ago and EL data from this year.

Teachers discussed the difficulties in having accurate and timely data that makes sense to those who are responsible for unpacking and using it. Callie said:

> You're creating your own data at your own school site, and you're beholden to the data of the state or the district. It takes a long time to get the data by the time you need it . . . to make decisions. And I also think that the systems that measure our students aren't egalitarian.

In order to address this issue members of the team have attempted to think of more strategic ways of gathering data as evidenced by actions being taken by some teachers. Callie shared some strategies being used by teachers. She said,

> So now what we're trying to do is we're trying to use more of the interim assessment blocks (IABs) to help prepare students. We're trying to spend a lot more time preparing students for the IAB and then coordinating and aligning our assessment to what it looks like on the IAB.

Interim assessment blocks (IABs) are assessments that teachers can administer several times a year that address the SBA. Teachers were also able to clearly articulate what they needed as support from the district in this area. John expressed the following need:

> If we are truly to hold ourselves accountable, we need to understand how to use the data to inform instruction. And teaching ourselves how to use the data is a very slow process. It's very slow. We get mandates, directives and money but no support on understanding data . . . I think that if we had more support on how to use the data to inform our

decisions, we would be less likely to just like give up on something and go try something else.

The trials of staffing and teacher exodus. Teachers in Hope High School also identified challenges when it came to staffing their schools. Although they did not express similar frustrations with staffing teaching positions, they did express difficulties in collaborating with the district on support personnel. John shared one experience. He said,

> We had a shared Title III coach. He was supposed to be a newcomer coach and we had this grand plan for him to work with teachers and the local district pulled him and replaced him with somebody else. Now, all the relationships he built, I'm afraid are gone. And, that plan is probably gone.

This sentiment was supported by the principal, Sandra, who also felt that district decisions often negatively impacted the school and its ability to meet the needs of students. Sandra said:

> We've had over the last couple years a revolving door without being able to get the teachers that we need. Spanish was 2 years of a painful process of trying to find a Spanish teacher. I have a teacher out . . . and I can't hire anybody, and I've had subs, a revolving door of subs for that. I think that makes students not want to go to those classes.

Sandra expressed concerns over the impact of not having sufficient and stable teachers in being able to improve academic data. In addition to this concern, Sandra expressed concerns over staff morale. She is concerned that these challenges and the way in which they are perceived are highly impacted by these formal measures and stated that several of her top teachers expressed an interest in leaving. She said,

> It hit the leadership team a lot more. In fact, like I said, like three of the people that you

> met with, actually one was out ill that day, but there are other ones looking to leave. I think for them, these are like the superstars, and they were probably never failed in their lives, and I think the others are kind of more long-term teachers and can weather the storm. These are like, "I'm a leader and I can't take this." It's really interesting. It's affected the leadership team a lot more than the staff as a whole, although I think the staff as a whole want to definitely improve.

Sandra feels the added pressure of preventing an even direr situation when it comes to staffing stability. She has reflected a lot on what she can do to re-energize the team, which was once seen as one of the highest performing schools on the campus. She has thought about her decisions and her teams' decision during the initial stages of the introduction of "choice" in schools. The expansion of school choice was a district initiative to give parents a choice within an option of schools in their neighborhood, instead of the limiting school options based on residential boundaries. She sees this as having had a dramatic impact on the students they serve as compared to the other schools in the neighborhood. She said,

> A part of me wonders, we obviously missed the boat on something. I don't know if rumors got out there that instruction wasn't as good as it needed to be or that we just didn't take the time to brand our school [as high performing], because again, at one point we were actually probably one of the stronger ones in the neighborhood, so I don't know what happened.

She recalls the day she had a very honest conversation with the staff regarding this issue:

> About a year ago, maybe 2 years ago, I told my teachers. I said, "I see the writing on the wall with one school targeting gifted students, and the other school marketing itself as this tie-wearing professional school." I said, "We are not gonna win in this war for kids.

> We're not gonna win in this war for the best of the best." We're still gonna get our kids that are passionate about helping the community that are also extremely diligent and good students, but I don't think we're gonna get them in the same numbers as the other schools. My challenge to the teachers was what should we do?

According to Sandra, teachers chose to not market themselves in ways that would only attract high performing students. They felt that maintaining an approach that made all students feel welcomed was central to the values of the school. Although this aligned to the schools' vision and mission around social justice, it has had real consequences on the schools' data. The team is now reevaluating their approach, especially after recent news that the district was in the process of rebranding a local high school as a magnet. These systems contribute to additional stratification of students in schools, which is perceived to have negative impacts on schools that service underperforming students or students with high academic needs. Understanding how systems impact the work of schools like this one is important if we are truly interested in expanding opportunities to all students and are truly committed to equity. In the next section, we look at district leadership. Information provided by directors provides insight as to how formal accountability data, specifically California dashboard data and LCAP goals shape the way in which they provide support to schools. This is important in order to understand how this addresses or fails to address the needs as expressed by leadership teams in high-need schools. Additionally, information about directors' own experiences working with high-needs schools will shed light on similarities and differences between their experiences and those of site team members regarding systemic challenges that impact the conditions for teaching and learning. This can further inform the way in which formal accountability systems support or hinder the opportunities of success in high needs schools. Understanding this can hold district and state

leadership accountable for creating the conditions for teaching and learning in ways that more authentically support school success.

District Leadership

In order to understand how district leadership assess school performance and provide high need schools support I interviewed 3 directors (who supervise principals) and a high level executive of Paso Nuevo Unified School District. Table 6 provides the names and positions of those interviewed.

Table 7

Paso Nuevo District Study Participants

Name	Position
Rafael	Director
Marylu	Director
Gabriela	Director
Ericka Simpson	Chief Executive of Instruction

Directors were asked about the context of their most struggling schools and how this context impacts the schools' performance on formal accountability measures. In addition, directors were provided with the three school leadership teams' explanations that sought to contextualize their performance on these measures. They were also asked the types of support that they provide struggling schools in creating the conditions for teaching and learning.

Inadequate staff. One of the major issues that was common among directors and school level educators were issues with staffing and overall support in the form of human capital, including the need for additional resources. District leadership were asked what they would provide schools if they had unlimited resources. These responses aligned more closely to the

actual needs expressed by schools. However, there was no expression of making this a reality. Gabriela stated:

> The schools are totally underresourced. They just do not have enough buildings and grounds, workers, for example, to clean the bathrooms, to make sure everything is tidy, to make sure everything is clean. They don't have enough cafeteria service. People are absent, people go out on leaves and then the principals are stuck with not enough people. The principals are operating with underresourced, and understaffed schools. And even when they do have the staff oftentimes these most struggling schools, the staff is just not adequately trained to meet the needs of the students.

When asked what additional resources these schools needed Rafael's responded:

> I would make sure that every school has a baseline of staffing. Every school, especially in this area, has a PSW. I used to not believe in them, and I see, especially if you get really competent ones, the value of having them. PSW to deal with mental health stuff. PSA to help with truancy and attendance. You have the RJ advisor to make sure that kids know how to deal with each other. You have academic counselors. You have a college counselor. You have an extra administrator because a lot of these small schools, they only have one there, and they can't afford to get all of those, so they become the psychologist, the PSA, the everything. But regardless of size, I would want to make sure that every school has that. And they'd have security to support supervision.

Ericka provided the following perspective of some of the districts' struggling schools:

> They're often struggling because of the need for wrap-around services that really meet the student needs, and so there may be mental health issues, community access issues, access to healthcare, eye care, dental . . . all of those things that are part of what's happening

socially in the community as well.

Marylu also spoke about struggling schools. She said,

> I'm thinking of my most struggling school academically. If there were a couple of really strong instructional coaches with a sufficient amount of time to be able to work with the teachers and doing instructional rounds or planning and modeling.

Teachers, principals and local district personnel were in agreement that schools are in need of more support both financial, human and community based in impacting the success of struggling schools.

Professional development. Aside from empathizing with the challenges identified by school leadership teams, directors also detailed concerns about some of their own struggling schools' inabilities to maintain a clear instructional focus or engage in meaningful professional development. Marylu expressed the following sentiment "They seem to try to do everything . . . They'll try something new. Implement a new initiative but they don't really see it through to allow that initiative to gain roots and to show some progress." She added, "I don't think the admin team is spending enough time visiting the classrooms and providing actionable feedback on whatever that professional development might be that they're working on and helping to focus the teachers to move forward." From her experience, Marylu deduced a shortfall. She said, "I think that there's just a lot of maybe not particularly coherent professional development without a coherent plan of follow-up and then therefore, there's little pockets of things that are being implemented but without focus or uniformity."

Rafael spoke of the use of instructional rounds as a practice in his local district. He described his findings:

> When we looked at content and language objectives, it's almost not there or there's confusion as to what they are even though the common core or state standards have been around about 5 years by now. So, we have to ask the principals, "You might want to consider doing a refresher on common core.

Gabriela expressed similar sentiments about the importance of an instructional focus. She said,

> The way that you get a school to focus on the academics once they have all those other foundational pieces in place, they try to identify, what are the instructional foci. I ask principals to identify two to three areas of focus, maybe four that can be used across all content areas.

Marylu spoke to a particular concern with one of her principals, "I think his time is taken up with a lot of other activities that don't allow him to get into the classroom to really observe and provide feedback." She described his other activities:

> Not a tremendous amount but a lot of outside organizations wanting to talk to him . . . important for the school and for the principal, but it dilutes his emphasis on the main work which should be helping him to get into the classroom."

District personnel understood that context along with system coherence all play a part in supporting the success of schools. They however did not articulate ways in which they can support school leaders to ensure that this is possible. Directors saw this lack of focus as a responsibility of the school and school leadership, school team members saw this is a problem as well, but felt that the district did not provide the right supports to address it.

While directors were clear that coherence and instructional focus was essential, they also acknowledged that this could only happen once schools demonstrated a level of stability to make this work effective. Rafael explained a recent experience with one of his schools, saying, "One

high school, they used to have, God, a lot of challenges, and things have stabilized. And then, you see their data starting to go up. Attendance, test scores, on track graduation rates. But it had to stabilize."

In the same vein, Marylu opined,

> Well, two things come to mind with that. One if they don't have all of the RJ practices and advisory and all that in place, the instruction is never going to come so you have to have the community together and we have a colleague who will always say, well, you have to address Maslow's needs before Blooms."

Limitation realities. District personnel understood the importance of addressing the basic needs of students as essential before engaging in more deep instructional and academic work. But they also understood some of the limits to accomplishing this.

Ericka mentioned the importance of not only having the right funding sources "but then also knowing what to do with those funding sources and having a system of supports around them." She also detailed some of the district's challenges in this way:

> The problem is we don't have adequacy to begin with. So if you're taking from one to give to another, the question is who gets what and why, and how do we make sure that we don't become a system of sorting, too? A certain school on the West Side doesn't have this resource and now parents are going to leave and go somewhere else . . . It's like there's so many pieces that folks are trying to balance, but they don't even have the right amount to balance to begin with.

Directors indicate that they provide schools support in areas they feel they can have the most impact. These espoused supports often did not align with the expressed needs of leadership team members. Although they might be effective actions, they are not the actions that school

teams expressed as being critical for their schools. This includes professional development on common core, instructional strategies and evaluating the effectiveness of the school site principal. According to directors' responses most conversations with principals regarding the schools' performance centers on formal accountability data, specifically quantitative data. These conversations include the review of weekly data tracking, in order to discuss the schools' growth and progress. While schools felt that data was inaccurate, invaluable and ineffective in being able to move the school, district leaders centered most of their work on these data points as ways to help schools improve. Marylu describes the support she provides her schools this way "We provide the principals a lot of work with our data coordinator to explore the different platforms and dashboards and everything that's available. We also put together tons of pivot tables for my school so they can actually drill down to specific students."

The use of accountability data. In terms of formal accountability data and its use, all directors discussed using the data dashboard systems to track the progress of schools. Formal accountability data is a district and local district priority. Rafael shared how the data was viewed. He said:

> Well, initially we'll look at the SBA at the beginning of the year. We have a database and that charts out the progress of our schools from last year, so it gives you a bar graph, which ones have met the targets, and which ones haven't. So, from SBA to reclassification rates to attendance rates, so those are kind of the benchmarks that we use.

Marylu shared similar sentiments about the data that her district uses to evaluate and identify supports for schools. She said, "I look at the various pieces of data, like the LCAP data and of course the schools that I oversee are heavily populated with English learners, so reclassification is a big focus area for us. Attendance, their SBA scores." Gabriela also spoke to data

evaluation, saying, “Some of the matrix that we use with them are EL reclassification, that's been a big one because our district is pushing reclassification. Graduation rates, SBA scores.” Considering that these are the data points that schools are evaluated by, schools that struggle in these areas are seen as needing more intensive support and intervention by the district.

Although Marylu felt that she had sufficient data on her schools, she felt that the data alone wasn’t sufficient and that the next step was to think through what to do with the data. She said, “I think that there's a lot of data now to really quantify the struggle. I don't know that we've moved to the point of taking specific focused action to make those improvements.”

Gabriela expressed some frustration with the use of data as the single factor in evaluating schools. She said:

> So, last year was really frustrating because I didn't think that only looking at reclassification gives a really good picture of a school's progress. It just didn't make sense to me. But, because the mother district or a central district office was asking all of us to show evidence of providing support to our schools who had the lowest reclassification rates, and because they were pushing us to make sure that we were getting those reclassification rates up, we tended to focus on those schools with the lowest reclassification. And even amidst our directors we'd had informal conversations like, "Well, you know, if we want to game the system, I'm not going to pick the schools with the lowest scores because it's harder to get them up to the goal of 20% reclassification rate. So, some directors picked schools that were right at the border, like 16%, 17% knowing that they can probably move them up a few percentage points.

This really speaks to a top down system that uses data to make assumptions about the needs of schools. Directors are a part of that system, and at least those in this study understood that they

too operated within this model, making it difficult for them to advocate effectively on behalf of their schools.

Rafael also spoke about this pressure when it came to district reclassification data. She said, “What happened during those points when you had a dip? And even if you look at reclassification rates, one year you can reclassify so much that you've plateaued that really statistically there's no way you're going to be able to sustain that.” When asked how the district sets its reclassification targets his response was, “It's probably arbitrary. You know?” He also expressed a desire to be able to look at data on a long-term basis, in order to identify trends. Ericka confirmed some of the arbitrary nature of these rates when she said:

> Some of the things about reclassification that we've been looking at and I've been pushing on the team that will be in the rewrite of the master plan, too, is the district is focused on this artificial number, whether it's 21% or in different years, different numbers. But the thing is I keep saying it has to be responsible reclassification, because you also don't want to reclassify too early and not give the students the support they need around language and literacy as well.

Ericka explains the way in which the district is moving toward creating more school specific goals around reclassification, so that the goals and targets are tailored based on student needs.

> One of the things we look at, then, is what would be responsible reclassification so you don't become a long term English Learner, but if you're a newcomer, what should that window look like, and then creating predictive models so that each school would know for this population you should be at 33%, this population 4%, depending on what your students' needs are.

Being able to do this would impact schools like the ones in this study, who have seen an increase in newcomer students but who are expected to meet district reclassification goals regardless of this context.

Accountability goals can obstruct the big picture. There was an understanding among these participants that progress can take more time and effort to achieve. Directors also expressed the challenges to engaging in deep work, such as developing the capacities of teachers and leadership team members, due to the pressure of having to make immediate gains. Rafael expressed some frustration with the pressure to see rapid growth and upward movement on a year-to-year basis. He said,

> It's just, for me, you don't want to look at just the growth within a one-year time period. You're going to have to look at it over time and to see the trends on a long-term basis, right, instead of shorter. . . . In our school district, there's always that, "Oh, did you improve from last year to this year?" You've got to look at like a 3-year, 4-year growth or failure rates, right, to learn from it.

Marylu expressed a similar understanding. She described one of her successful schools: "At this school, its been I think 8 years they've been working on that model and it's been constant revision, but steady progress forward for all subgroups too." Gabriela spoke of her frustration with the use of data because of the way in which it limits the district's ability to see a bigger picture of what can transform schools. She stated:

> So, we will continue to be measured by the district, by however the state decides they're going to measure growth and performance or adequate performance. I do think though that our district leadership is missing the bigger picture. So, there has been a big campaign to increase attendance. And it's fascinating to me that there seems to be a real

> disconnect with what the district thinks is going to get kids to come to school. On one hand, they have these big campaigns to say attendance is important, yet there are no music programs in the school, there is no art programs in the school, there is no inter-murals. High schools have athletic programs, but you don't see any kind of athletic program for middle school students in our district.

Measuring the effectiveness of programs that increase student engagement would allow schools like those in this study to be seen as addressing and meeting the needs of students. Although directors did speak to having access to a variety of data and engaging in continuous conversations about this data, they also acknowledged that some data goals could be arbitrary in nature. Even though these sentiments mirror those of school leadership team members, directors did not express having the ability to change these systems in meaningful ways.

Director's mixed reaction to accountability demands vs. site-based goals. Directors were presented with information regarding the school teams site-based goals. Although directors acknowledged the work of leadership teams in actualizing site-based goals, they continued to show a higher value to formal accountability data. They felt obligated to connect a schools' performance to the LCAP and specifically the areas that the LEA had prioritized. These were the data points that were of priority to them and how they would be judged as directors.

They also felt bound to look at performance data and data on program effectiveness. When asked about the possible positive impacts of schools articulating their priorities, Gabriela stated, "I think it might, but at the end of the day, what our district values is whatever the state is going to measure." She continued, "I don't feel confident that the district will want to put greater emphasis on the social and emotional piece until the state puts pressure on them to look at that data." Marylu described the issue this way:

> You have the foundation ready. Now the question of being able to transfer that to the academic. Number one, do they have an academic focus? Is the team setup to support that focus? Because if they let off the gas on the socio-emotional, things can escalate again.

Rafael also found it difficult to acknowledge work not connected to academic success and expressed that by saying:

> But in terms of the instruction, they have all these things and service and emotional health stuff might be happening in the classroom, but is that happening at the expense of math, science, history, English. . . . All of that [service and emotional health stuff] doesn't translate to achievement, right?

Ericka saw the importance of schools articulating what they do well. She said "when your school is performing and you can articulate your vision and how you hold yourself accountable to it, I've never seen a district get upset." She continued, "But I think, so often, it might be in our head, but folks don't always articulate it and say how . . . What are their performance indicators going to be? How will you know you're successful?" However, she acknowledged the importance of having both academic and nonacademic ways of showing the success of a school, stating, "There's hard and soft ways to show that, and I think you need both." Ericka also discussed the risk schools can fall into if they fail to articulate their work by saying "Otherwise, it's seen as the Christmas tree. It's a bunch of decorations, but it's not understood. A leader has to be strategic about how you leverage all of these to make a high-quality school, right?" She made some recommendation for acknowledging and building systems for this kind of work. She said, "I think part of what schools can do is they need to also be able to articulate that for themselves. I think there's some things we can codify as a whole

system, but then there's some things that are unique to the nuances of each campus because they understand the intricacies of that development." Being able to know and understand the context of formal accountability data and site-based priorities requires a process that acknowledges the voice of educators at school sites.

Directors also understood that the work of school teams was shaped by broader issues. These broader issues have had a real impact on a schools' ability to be successful. These issues include the recruitment and retention of effective teachers, specifically in hard to staff schools, the social-emotional needs of students, including issues related to poverty and underresourced communities. Directors acknowledged that these broader issues shape the experiences of educators at schools and directors were able to articulate these in clear and precise ways. However, they did not articulate responses or solutions to these problems. To directors, these issues seemed to be out of the realm of their scope of work or the priorities of the district.

Rafael voiced one challenge he felt principals faces at some of the district's low performing schools. He said:

> Yeah. Even the ones that really knew instruction, they really knew what their teachers needed to do in terms of their work together instructionally, there are other factors that kind of get in the way, like teachers quitting all of a sudden. Just out of the blue, "I can't take this anymore. I'm leaving. I'm retiring. I'm resigning," or, "I'm retired," or, "I don't want to be here anymore."

Although this might seem like a school level problem, schools in low-income communities are faced with additional pressures from broader issues. These issues present a different challenge to educators at these schools. This has a real impact on a school's ability to move school formal accountability data. Rafael also spoke of staffing issues at his school in this

way “Many of our schools, because they're in [South Paso Nuevo], they can't attract the best and the brightest teachers. They don't want to come to [South Paso Nuevo] schools.” He added:

> It's like a self-fulfilling prophecy. You don't get an effective teacher, and then you have kids that come from very challenging backgrounds, they come into a school setting needing all sort of support, but instead of getting that nurturing, that love, and all, that you get this environment where it's as crazy as what they see at home.

Rafael expressed some empathy with his schools and with what teachers' experience on a daily basis, as evidenced in this statement,

> Again, instructionally, they know it, but again, when you have hard-working people saying, "I don't know if I can take another case where I have to spend hours and hours with these families because the kids are just so challenged emotionally and everything else," because they're ending up having to provide those services. And many of them are small schools, and they don't have the budgets to get other resources in.

Rafael knows that these environments take a toll on those adults who work in them. He described what this looks like through the lens of his director role:

> In my talking to the principals, their body language, just the look on their faces. they're tired. They feel defeated. They're on the verge of burnout, right? They need help. They say, “We've done all of this; we can't give anymore. Everyone else here is spent. Their energy is just depleted. The deans and the APs who are dealing with discipline, they're getting sick. The principals, for whatever reason, either their own personal and professionals somehow, they're being affected and they're starting to get sick. The teachers are calling in sick more often than not.

There is common understanding that these broader issues shape the experiences and

successes of schools in these communities. However, there were no solutions posed by directors to address these problems. Although everyone acknowledged that these issues exist and are real, there are no efforts to address the root of the problem. Marylu expressed the same staffing issues when thinking about some of her struggling schools. She said, "Well, the lower performing schools are harder to staff because teachers will look, especially in demand teachers will look and say well why would I want to work there." She added:

> Especially with the low performing and hard to staff. I have a Reed school and that's the whole reason they got there, and they had all these openings. At Christmas break, a few teachers didn't come back, but you don't want those people to come back. If they quit mid-year. I know it's inconvenient at the moment that they quit, but in the long run it's probably better.

Not only are some of these struggling schools hard to staff but often they don't have access to the best teachers. These sentiments were consistent with all study participants. Gabriela also shared similar experiences in her role as a director. She said:

> So, there are schools that typically and historically have had problems with stability and staffing teachers . . . I think sometimes they don't have the skills or they haven't had the training, a combination of training, skills and desire to work with really difficult students.

Paso Nuevo's Chief Executive over instruction, Ericka, spoke of the larger district challenges in being able to staff schools, "When you have folks who are making $300,000 in private industry not having as challenging of a responsibility and you look at what educators . . . or the role of a principal, it's hard to keep that talent pool sometimes." She expressed her desire to have better trained and more effective leaders at schools and shared the districts movement toward the use of an equity index, which would assess larger community related issues that

would trigger additional funding and resources for schools. She said:

> Right. I know some of the things that the board members in our district are looking at is, as part of the equity index, it's not just about dollars but the human capital that accompanies that. So going back to teacher quality or administrative quality or psychiatric-social quality, how do we up the quality ratio around that? I think, also, part of it is also about helping folks feel committed to that school to get that sense of community.

The equity index will provide a more accurate picture of what is happening at schools to the district or larger public, however schools could already speak to these needs now. Although funding and resources are needed, when speaking of quality, the systemic problem still remains. How do you ensure that schools in low-income communities have access to effective teachers and leaders? The systems that make this difficult are not being addressed. It also does not address the fact that these schools serve a distinct group of students that have additional needs. In addition to that, there was no mention of systems that perpetuate this type of stratification both within low-income communities and throughout the district. Most importantly the language used by district leadership was void of responsibility for the structures, policies and decisions that sustain these problems.

After sharing the accountability tool with directors, which included teams' members contextualized data, directors were asked what salient points they agreed with or disagreed with. All three directors understood that community factors and other external factors played a major role, as expressed in their own assessments of struggling schools. In response to contextualized formal accountability data regarding attendance, reclassification and graduation, Rafael shared this:

> We try to advocate with our bosses, our superintendent, and then we also have monthly meetings with the division of instruction, and they bring other data people, and we bring that up as directors. Is there a way to talk to the state or whoever does the data reporting to really separate out, too, so you have a better sense of what's going on? So, I mean we do the best, and they do say that they're going to communicate it back and try to see what they can do.

When it came to SBA data, specifically better aligned training, Rafael said, "That might be something to really think about." He also shared some recent district plans to include more teacher voice in the process, saying, "We've looked at just turning everything upside down, where you allow the groups of teachers to experiment with potential solutions on how to improve achievement." Marylu's response after listening to the contextualized data was "Well, it is an honest conversation and it's maybe asking very uncomfortable questions because it does reveal a little bit about the teachers acknowledging they don't know what to do." She added:

> With the newcomers, to me it seems like it's perception among my secondary schools that they're the ones getting all the newcomers. However, if you look at it really, everybody is. I think they're struggling with how to meet everybody's needs because there just aren't enough resources.

Gabriela responded to the newcomer issue, saying:

> I think that these perspectives are actually really accurate in terms of their thinking about the factors that are related to struggling schools. Yes, so we know that the kids come in with very little skills, we know that there is violence in the community, and some of these communities are very scary. That's something really real that needs to be validated.

Directors were sympathetic with the contextual factors provided by school leadership teams and felt that schools needed additional resources and support in both staffing as well as developing more effective instructional plans. Gabriela said, "Teachers are telling us their concerns, if that's what they're sharing then we need to meet them where they are." Although district personnel understood the context provided by schools, they did not move away from the importance of making academic gains on formal accountability measures.

A part of contextualizing formal accountability data is believing the teacher voice matters in identifying their most pressing needs. When asked how the district includes the voice of teachers and whether there is value in including these voices when identifying school level supports, district personnel had several responses. Gabriela asked and answered: "Like if we lived in a world or in an environment where we took teachers' voices into consideration? Yes. Yeah, I think it would help." When asked if the current district is structured to engage in these conversations with schools and educators, Gabriela said, "The systems are not set up like that. The systems are very, like, industrial in nature. You train a whole group of teachers, 100 at a time, maybe in a smaller group, but might be 30 to 40, even that from my perspective is too much." She added, "If we look at the way PD is being done at most schools, it is a very top-down approach. And sometimes top-down isn't bad. What I mean is that, it is not a genuine learning environment."

Marylu responded to the question about including teachers voices by saying, "Well, I think it would change the nature of the conversation." When discussing whether directors were trained to find areas of priorities or strengths of a school she stated:

> Well, there's a variety of level of experience in the director position. The meetings that we have, and what we spend our time talking about isn't necessarily what would help

move our work to help the principals move their work. I assumed that most of my colleagues would be able to find the gems in each of their school but I'm not 100% sure.

Although she engages in conversations with principals she understands the reality of connecting these conversations to formal accountability measures as evidenced by this statement Marylu made:

> I do talk to my principals about that because I also want to get to know them and what they're all about and what their story is all about and then the school story. A lot of it is connected to the accountabilities because they know that's a reality.

Rafael acknowledged that site leaders are able to articulate and contextualize data and errors in the data effectively, "In talking to our principals, they've gotten savvy, much savvier than I was when I was a principal about really knowing their data. They even know the kids." According to Rafael, principals use this knowledge to interpret data in a variety of ways and often in ways that are not captured on the traditional dashboards. He said, "And they can say, 'If we remove that, this is our rate, and if you only look at the newcomer, that's their rate,' and then you combine this. So, we encourage them to tell that story." Rafael stated that although this interpretation is not seen on formal dashboards, his local superintendent allows these contextualized data narratives to play a role in conversations about a schools' performance. This provides a window of opportunity to perhaps formalize this process in a way that legitimizes the voice and experiences of those closest to the work.

When asked what protocols or practices they provide district leadership to include the voice of teachers, Ericka described a more global district wide approach about protocols: "Each local district with their autonomies engages their leadership strategy a bit differently. What we do is training around how do you coach a system, not just how you hold an individual

accountable to that work." She added, "You have to learn how to do it, how to coach principals. It's a very different skill set, and so . . . That's why I keep going back to that continuum of practice and how we develop leaders around that." She then stated:

> A lot of directors will lead how their directors led them or how they experience success as a principal. And sometimes the way you measure success is by what the system said the metrics were. So it goes back to, how do we think about the metrics in terms of how we define them?

The system Erika described speaks to coaching mechanisms to help leaders think through their work, which is valuable but does not address the need for conversation in which school leaders formalize the needs of their schools and the supports they need from the district.

There are currently no formal processes to incorporate the voice of educators contextualizing their school data. School teams are not asked to identify their more pressing needs in ways that trigger additional support and resources or in ways that shift the work and focus of directors and district leaders. Although district leadership understand and acknowledge the conditions that make teaching and learning difficult in some schools, there is no protocol to understand the differing needs from school to school or community to community.

Findings indicate that district leadership understand that a lack of resources and support impact school quality but were unable to articulate clear actions and supports to address and actualize them. In addition, site-based goals as expressed by leadership team members did not shape perceptions of school quality. This was due to the fact that district leadership is required to use formal accountability data that the district and state prioritizes to assess school quality. Both district leadership and school teams understood that school quality is in part shaped by broader issues but district leadership often focused on investment from the state while school

leadership teams often focused on a lack of support from the district. Although contextualization provided by school teams point to systemic issues that impact their ability to create the conditions for teaching and learning, there are currently no practices or protocols to inform district leadership when these systems hinder or prevent the conditions for teaching and learning. Finally, there is no way to hold systems accountable in how they shape and impact these conditions.

District personnel understood the nuances of some of their struggling schools. They described low-performing schools as having issues with staffing, student safety, poverty, lack of parent involvement, etc. There was high degree of agreement between what team members identified as their contextualized needs and what directors observed at the sites that they support and oversee. However, the responses to these needs were perceived differently between school-level educators and district leadership. When asked what resources or supports schools need, directors articulated needs similar to those of leadership team members, but did not speak to these needs in ways that could become a reality, or that they have power in shaping.

Conclusion

This study found that leadership team members prioritized goals unique to their student population and to the communities in which they serve. These goals and priorities focus on responding to social-emotional needs, addressing trauma and dislocation, reducing violence, and building community. Goals and priorities also focus on the development of career and life skills connected to the improvement of their communities, including instructional supports to help improve student learning outcomes. Leadership teams do not communicate the advancement of these goals because they are overwhelmed with addressing the immediate needs of students, the work is not valued by district leadership and leadership team members do not know how and

don't have metrics and ways to collect and present data. Although site-based goals reflect the California dashboard indicators around school climate and career, these indicators are not prioritized by LEAs. Additionally, school teams contextualized formal accountability as being impacted by the distinct group of students they serve. Systems have impacted the characteristics of who these students are and there is a lack of targeted support, training and resources to create the right conditions for teaching and learning. Data provided by the state and LEAs are not seen as valuable because it is perceived as inaccurate, not timely and does not help inform teacher practice and school level decision making. Data that addresses more immediate needs of schools was seen as having greater value to teachers and teachers expressed the need for additional support in interpreting data in ways that lead to targeted action and support.

Current formal accountability measures do not take into account the lack of quality conditions for teaching and learning. These conditions are perceived by leadership teams to be connected to larger systems outside of the control of schools and make it harder for them to meet formal measures. School level educators believe that formal accountability measures, when understood as an assessment of school performance, misrepresent the quality of the work done at the school.

District leaders understand that a lack of resources and support impact school quality but they were unable to articulate clear actions and supports to address these structural deficiencies. Site-based goals as expressed by leadership team members did not shape how district officials perceive school quality. This was due to the fact that district leadership is required to use formal accountability data that the district and state use to assess school quality. Both district leadership and school teams understood school performance on formal accountability measures is in part shaped by broader issues. However, district leadership often focused on investment from the

state or saw this as school level responsibility while school leadership teams often focused on a lack of support from the district. Contextualization provided by school teams point to systemic issues that impact their ability to create the conditions for teaching and learning. Unfortunately, there are currently no practices or protocols to inform district leadership when these systems hinder or prevent the conditions for teaching and learning and there is no way to hold systems accountable in how they shape and impact the conditions for teaching and learning.

Part of the goals of this study is to lend credibility to the voice of educators by having them contextualize their work as well as have them identify what they value and prioritize in their schools. Allowing those who work in schools to paint a clearer picture of what is taking place can change the way schools receive support. It can also force us to begin to question the systems that make it difficult for them to create the conditions for effective teaching and learning. This however cannot happen in isolation. In order to value this level of work the state has to find value in it as well. They also need to be willing to address broader issues that make this work more difficult, specifically in our most vulnerable communities.

Chapter 5

Schools located in low-income communities have historically struggled to meet formal accountability measures. These schools are often seen as ineffective and incapable of providing the conditions for effective teaching and learning. They face a variety of challenges, including trauma, poverty, violence, inadequate housing, insufficient health and mental health care, and lack of nutritious food. Schools in these communities are not only responsible for ensuring that students make academic progress but have to ensure this while mitigating the pressures students face. In addition to the barriers posed by the lack of services in their communities, schools often face their own set of hurdles, including limited access to experienced and effective teachers and insufficient resources to meet the needs of students. Formal accountability measures do not take into account how a school's outcomes are shaped by other conditions. Formal accountability measures can also foster false perceptions of effectiveness of school teams who work at these schools. These measures can be misleading and do not promote improvement.

This study sought to understand the goals of school leadership teams in low-income communities and how leadership teams contextualize formal accountability data. It also sought to understand how district leadership assess school performance and how they support schools in creating the conditions for teaching and learning. In order to answer my research questions, I conducted three focus group interviews with leadership team members from three schools that spanned across the PNUSD. I also conducted individual interviews with the principals for each school, as well as interviews with four district leaders whose primary responsibility is to provide support to schools in PNUSD.

In this chapter, I summarize the study's findings, including implications for practice. I will make connections between my findings and the literature and theories that ground this work.

Recommendations for improving practice will be made including any limitations of this study. I will conclude with suggestions for future research and a short reflection of this process.

Summary of Findings

Study findings suggest that leadership team members prioritize goals unique to their student population and to the communities they serve. These goals and priorities focus on responding to social-emotional needs, addressing trauma and dislocation, reducing violence, and building community. Goals also focus on the development of career and life skills connected to the improvement of their communities, including meeting the academic needs of students. Leadership teams do not communicate the advancement of these goals to the larger community and district leadership for three reasons:

1. They are overwhelmed with addressing the immediate needs of students;
2. The work is not valued by district leadership; and
3. They do not know how and do not have metrics and ways to collect and present data.

Site-based goals reflect the California dashboard indicators regarding school climate and career. However, these indicators are not prioritized by LEAs.

This study also found that school leadership teams explained their school's performance on formal outcome measures in light of other factors that school site educators could not control. This includes serving a distinct group of students, a lack of targeted support, training and resources to create the right conditions for teaching and learning to address students needs. When it comes to data, team members stated that data provided by the state and LEAs is not valuable, is perceived as inaccurate, not timely and does not help inform teacher practice and school level decision making. Data that addresses more immediate needs of schools is of greater value to teachers. Teachers also stated the need for additional support in interpreting data in

order to develop better action plans to support their work. Additionally, current formal accountability measures do not take into account the lack of quality conditions for teaching and learning. These conditions are perceived by leadership teams to be connected to larger systems outside of the control of schools and make it harder to meet formal measures. School level educators believe that formal accountability measures, when understood as an assessment of school performance, misrepresent the quality of the work done at the school.

Finally, district leadership understand that a lack of resources and support impact school quality. For example, when speaking of some of their struggling schools directors spoke of the need for additional campus aides, attendance counselors, psychiatric social workers and effective teachers. Although district leadership understood these needs, they were unable to articulate clear actions and supports to address them. District leadership felt compelled to use formal accountability data mandated by the district and state to make determinations about school success. School leadership teams contextualized outcome data in ways that shed light on their ability to create the conditions for teaching and learning. While district leadership similarly recognized that outcomes were related to conditions, they often explained poor conditions by highlighting either substandard investment from the state or inadequacies in school-level staff rather than a lack of support from the district. Although district action can have an impact in how schools receive supports, there are currently no practices and/or protocols to inform district leadership when these systems hinder or prevent the conditions for teaching and learning. Therefore, there is no way to hold systems accountable in how they shape and impact these conditions. Additionally, there are no protocols in place to distinguish between schools that are low performing and have failed leadership practices and those that do exhibit effective leadership practices but whose performance is impacted by failing systems out of the schools direct control.

Discussion of Critical Pedagogy of Place

The concept of critical pedagogy of place offers a framework for understanding how school site educators make sense of their goals and commitments. Critical pedagogy of place requires that educators have a critical understanding of the communities in which they work and use this understanding to engage in practices that will prepare students to make these communities better. It merges critical pedagogy and place-based education, which highlights the unique nature of schools and how location shapes the way in which educators and students interact with their learning. Critical pedagogy of place prompts educators to make students aware and take action against inequities, empowering students to understand and address local issues (Gruenewald, 2003).

Resilient, Spirited and Hope high schools all prioritized goals that build students' capacity in addressing the unique needs of their communities. This is one of the foundational elements of critical pedagogy of place. Resilient HS addressed these needs by focusing on restorative practices and emotional health courses, which address issues of safety, trauma and violence that are concerns in the community. Resilient principal Sofia framed it in the following way: "I think I've mentioned already, what calls people to this work here at this school are the core values that we have. Social justice, community collaboration, innovation, equity and access, those are our core values." These programs are seen as ways not only to build student self efficacy, but also, as teacher Eli put it, to make "students feel like they have the ability to effect change." Spirited HS, also prioritized needs specific to their community. These needs center on issues of dislocation and availability to healthy food. In order to address these needs, leadership team members prioritized career courses in agriculture and farming. Teacher Elisa described community connection: "And again, it goes back to like, honoring the knowledge that

they come with, from their communities, and then building upon that, and giving them those skills, to go back, and apply what they're doing here." Teachers at Hope HS spoke of issues with dislocation as impacting the community. In order to address this issue, the school uses restorative practices to create a sense of community. Callie spoke to the ways in which restorative practices address immediate community needs: "We're trying to do a lot more in terms of culture to blend the factions that have happened here and to create a more inclusive, welcoming environment where everybody feels like this is their community." Principal Sandra stated: "I feel like restorative practice is all about a having a strong community." Teachers build students skills in conflict resolution that they can take as they navigate community changes. Critical pedagogy of place acknowledges that the work of teachers is not disconnected from issues that persist in communities. In addition, critical pedagogy of place requires that educators not only raise awareness of issues but also build capacity in students to be able to affect change.

Discussion of Professional Learning Communities

Professional learning communities require that teams identify common values, a shared vision and a belief that all students have the capacity to learn (Buffum & Mattos, 2014; DuFour & Eaker, 2005; Fuller et al., 2014; DuFour & Marzano, 2007). Effective teams demonstrate an ability to solve problems and overcome obstacles. This was exemplified in the level of collaboration required to ensure that site-based priorities are supported and implemented. Eli spoke of the need to have a master schedule to "have actual classes set aside" including changes to the bell schedule. Changes in master and bell schedules require agreement, consensus and buy-in from staff. This can only be possible when team members work collaboratively to make informed decisions that will leverage their work.

The cycle of reflection and continuous improvement is a part of the PLC process. The identification of problems and strategic planning connected to this process (Buffum & Mattos, 2014; Darling-Hammond, 2002; DuFour & DuFour, 2013; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour & Marzano, 2007), was expressed by leadership team members when addressing site-based priorities and community and student needs. When speaking about fulfilling the needs of newcomers, Hope teacher Callie mentioned, "We're constantly doing that on this team of reevaluating our choices and is this really the best option, and then measuring quantitative and qualitative data." Team members also spoke to the distributed nature of ensuring the site-based priorities are actualized.

Discussion of Distributed Leadership

All three schools used a distributed leadership model. Distributed leadership fosters collaborative decision-making. Leadership does not come solely from holding positional power, instead it stems from the collective work of various members of the school community. This model allows for intentional participation and inclusion of voice from members of the school. (Brooks et al., 2007; Garmston & Wellman, 2009). Fostering the capabilities of educators to contribute in the development of school plans is essential in the distributed leadership framework (Garmston & Wellman, 2009). Sofia spoke of her school's leadership team this way: "Honestly, they are the backbone of the school because we're a pilot school, we're teacher led. I give them full range of what happens with PD especially." This level of trust is a crucial component of distributed leadership. Under this model responsibility is shared in order to create a sense of collective responsibility (Brooks et al., 2007; Garmston & Wellman, 2009). Schools demonstrated elements of professional learning communities and distributed leadership around site-based priorities. They had a more difficult time demonstrating the same

level of effectiveness in addressing formal accountability measures. Team member contextualization of formal accountability measures point to broad factors as impacting this work.

Educators at all three schools have enacted critical pedagogy of place, professional learning communities and distributed leadership theories. These frameworks speak to the unique nature and work of school leadership teams. They speak to the importance of addressing the unique needs of students and communities and address how teams work together to address these needs. Site-based priorities were connected to the needs of the local community and fostered collaboration and deliberation. Despite this work, these practices are not recognized by district leadership because they are not yielding improved formal outcomes. Consequently, there is a disconnect between practice and results.

Discussion of Creating the Conditions for Teaching and Learning

Team members from all three schools, principals' and district leadership were in agreement that broader factors have a direct impact on the ability to improve academic outcomes for students. Forces both within and without the schools shape these conditions. On one hand, students live in underresourced communities that fail to address issues of trauma, mental health, violence and poverty (Howard, 2010; Oakes & Lipton, 2007; Putnam, 2015). On the other hand, schools are not provided the resources and support to address the needs present within schools. The inability to provide schools adequate resources and supports to address the broad factors that impact learning contributes to unequal outcomes. This means that students in low-income neighborhoods have to contend with hurdles both in their communities and within their schools.

When school leadership teams are asked to explain their school's formal outcomes they point to a variety of issues that impact their schools' ability to create the conditions necessary for

teaching and learning. Eli cited one example of this at Resilient HS: "In addition to the community violence, there's family violence in some of our families as well, or there's poverty, its own form of trauma, that parents are struggling to make ends meet." These issues play themselves out in classrooms and teachers must have the capacity to navigate them as they engage in their practice. Educators at all three schools spoke about the impact that the socio-emotional needs of students have had on being able to meet formal accountability measures. At Resilient HS these needs impacted instruction on a daily basis. As teachers and staff moved to address student trauma, they often had to take a break from instruction. Isa from Resilient HS stated "It's hard to address these things on a daily basis, especially when we have a high number of students that have those needs." Eli stated, "It's Maslow's hierarchy. You can't learn if you don't feel safe." This included the impact of students' traumatic events on the opportunities for teachers to improve instruction through professional development. Isa shared,

> I'd say we also prioritize self-care. I think it's hard to do that when there are agenda items that are quite urgent but we've had instances where we have gone through a number of incidents that happened on school grounds…We circled up and we decided that was necessary, as opposed to just trudging through and carrying on with the agenda.

Marco from Spirited HS elaborated on the challenges that educators face in simultaneously addressing social-emotional and academic skills: "Those are the challenges that we, as educators face in a classroom. It's not just the skill ability, but the social and emotional support and instability of students." Callie from Hope HS framed it in this way when speaking about safety data for her school: "Well, trauma impacts learning. And, so if you don't feel safe in your community or you don't feel safe as a learner in your school, cognitively, it's impossible for your brain to be focused on anything longer than a few minutes to actually learn something."

Aside from external forces that impact the conditions for teaching and learning, there are internal systemic issues that make it difficult to create these conditions. Larger systems impact the distinct characteristics of the students in these schools. Examples of this include the introduction of choice programs within districts and charter schools. These can perpetuate inequity in schools. Teachers expressed feeling like higher performing students were often recruited and pursued under these systems. Generally, these compounded issues have real implications on a student's ability to learn. Included in this are also distinct characteristics around language, immigration status and special needs.

Sandra provided the following explanation to contextualize the distinct characteristics of the students at her school:

> I think we've had a lot of students who've come to us, special education students, who have not been served properly with their individual educational plans. You can tell that these are kids whose parents are not very involved and don't know the system.

These characteristics have real implications on schools. Students facing these systemic hurdles struggle academically. Elisa shared this about her students "the majority of my students are at a second- to maybe fourth-grade reading level. So, it's very hard to get them to grade, to have them perform well, in state standard testing." These distinct characteristics shape the ability to create the conditions for teaching and learning. Included in this are issues with adequate staffing of classroom teachers and support personnel. Study participants spoke of the difficulty in staffing schools in low-income communities. It is difficult to find staff that can address the multiple needs of students. The Broader, Bolder Approach (Noguera, 2011; Noguera & Wells, 2011) recognizes that both school and community needs impact a student's ability to learn. Districts invested in creating the conditions for teaching and learning will have to change they way they

approach their work. This approach should take into account these broader systems and should include the voice of those engaged in the work. Reciprocal intelligent accountability is one way that districts can begin to shift their practices.

Discussion of Reciprocal Intelligent Accountability

Reciprocal intelligent accountability refers to the process of turning accountability systems on their head. Traditional accountability posits the state and LEAs hold schools accountable for their performance. Reciprocal intelligent accountability (Darling-Hammond, 2010) gives the power of accountability to schools and it is the responsibility of LEAs and the state to ensure that schools are successful. This is done by providing schools the resources and supports they need. This form of accountability trusts teachers and schools to identify their needs. Districts are then responsible for ensuring that these needs are met (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Current forms of high-stakes accountability hold schools responsible for demonstrating growth around formal measurable outcomes without holding districts responsible for supporting the conditions to make these outcomes a reality. A critical finding in this study is exemplified in this comment from Sandra:

> My director has maybe been to our site twice this year, and I don't even know if I've talked to him at all this year about anything instructional. He sent me an invite. He's gonna come and we're gonna have a day to talk about chronic attendance, chronic absenteeism.

When asked about the way in which the district supports the school meeting reclassification goals, John from Hope HS stated, "The district response has just been more and more testing." Callie added, "more accountability and more testing." Instead of additional assessments and testing requirements, teachers felt they needed support in understanding and

unpacking data. John shared, "If we are truly to hold ourselves accountable we need to understand how to use the data to inform instruction." Callie concluded, "And teaching ourselves how to use the data is a very slow process." Merry from Spirited HS, which has a high number of special needs students, identified the following supports as critical: "We don't have a nurse. We don't have a psychiatric social worker." Eunice added, "We need a psychiatric social worker here. We need a school psychologist with all the IEPs that take place." Eunice continued, "So, our services are very limited. We miraculously have to figure out how to do a lot of things in-house. One of the things that I get really frustrated with is the district. They say, your math scores are terrible but nobody in the district is helping us get teachers."

Bottom-up accountability structures will help address some of the misalignment between school needs and district support. This approach would have a significant impact on schools like those in this study. First, schools would be able to hold themselves accountable to meeting the unique needs of their students. Second, schools would be able to identify necessary supports to address these needs and third, districts and states would be responsible for ensuring that schools receive these supports. Simply adhering to formal accountability measures can prevent more meaningful conversations about school needs. Sofia provided the following example regarding the districts use formal data to provide school site support:

> I think for the district it's compliance, so we just had this attendance meeting and it was a joke. We got grilled for three hours about our attendance data and they literally took out a list of responsibilities and they wanted us to fill in a person's name next to every responsibility. It was so demeaning. It wasn't supportive. Honestly, it felt like, okay, we can now say we can check that off. We met with the principals, we talked about their attendance, and when they don't improve we can say, well, we were there to support them

Kathy spoke about the use of data in the following way:

> This is where the district data kind of craziness happens, because the district sets goals based on, I'm not sure what, right? So they'll say, "This is the reclassification goal." But they don't say why. Is that based on some metric that people study to determine, if you have this percentage of EL students at this level, you should be able to reclassify this number? No. They just create a blanket like EL count number and then they just kind of say, "This is what should happen across schools." So I do think part of the frustration is it may make sense for you to have a lower reclassification number one year than the next. The people who support you don't care or look at that, right? It's just like you've gone down this year.

When asked about her school needs Kathy stated, “I don't think we have enough social-emotional support like a PSW, a PSA. We've talked a lot about trying to build these small support groups for kids so the issues that we can sort of tackle the issues that we are dealing with.”

Traditional accountability structures fail to take into account broader issues that impact student performance outcomes. Instead they continue to perpetuate assumptions about schools in the most vulnerable communities (Popham, 2001). It is no wonder that schools in these communities, who serve a distinct group of students and who find themselves in need of support and stability are further marginalized by these approaches (Boyd-Zaharias & Pate-Bain, 2008; Emery, 2007; Glassman & Patton, 2014; Heilig, 2011; Taylor, 2005). Formal accountability measures do not reflect the quality of educators’ work. They get in the way of conversations about core issues that directly impact a schools ability to demonstrate achievement. As an example, arbitrary reclassification goals center discussions around moving data by targeting a

few students instead of improving the quality of daily instruction for English Learners. Additionally, a focus on formal measures is not seen as useful and does not support improvement efforts. On the contrary, they often restrict school teams from engaging in meaningful work.

School teams serving low-performing schools in low-income areas need to develop more effective ways of communicating the needs of the students and the communities that they serve. Priorities and outcomes need to be formally communicated to students, families, community members, and district and public officials. School teams must also be unafraid to be clear about school needs. These needs should be communicated frequently to all stakeholders.

Implications for Districts' Leadership

If district leadership is invested in the academic growth of all of it's schools, it should move away from one-size-fits-all models and invest time in understanding the unique needs of schools and communities. Aside from using formal accountability measures to make most of its determinations about schools, they should create protocols that give school teams a structure to contextualize data. This approach may provide districts additional information that might point to systemic issues within the districts control. Engaging in this process may lead to districts developing new priorities and support mechanisms for schools. For example, understanding implications of trauma on student learning might trigger investments in mental health at early ages, including other socio-emotional supports for schools. Understanding the need to appropriately staff schools might lead to policy changes to ensure that our most vulnerable schools have access to effective teachers.

District leadership must not only focus on identifying problems in schools but also needs to do a better job recognizing the great things that schools do and make those a part of the narrative of a school. This is really important because teachers at low-performing schools get

little to no recognition for working in some of the toughest conditions. This lack of recognition and encouragement make it difficult to retain teachers who constantly experience disillusionment due to low performance outcomes. Among the leadership of the three schools, two principals expressed a desire to leave the profession due to feelings of inadequacy. The principal at Hope HS expressed similar concerns about some of her top teachers. Providing encouragement, acknowledgement and valuable support to school teams in these schools is crucial. LEAs should recognize school teams for their ability to address the needs of students, work in challenging environments and their ability to create collaborative and caring environments for students.

A focus on sustained growth and meaningful long-term action needs to be the districts' priority. Interpretation of data and the development of actions plans should be co-developed with teachers. This would ensure that all stakeholders share responsibility in moving school data. Districts need to move away from gimmicks that are intended to move formal data quickly without making substantial meaningful change. This not only creates unnecessary stress for schools, but also it does not allow for a sustainable coherent model to lead all schools toward success. Current formal accountability systems, as enacted my LEAs, put unnecessary pressures on schools and trigger ineffective actions by LEAs making them prioritize the wrong work. Both quantitative and qualitative measures should be used to provide a clearer picture of school performance. There needs to be deeper conversations that extend accountability beyond the walls of the school. Being able to assess for broader impacts of school performance is essential in correctly identifying the needs of schools. Doing this might allow the state and LEAs to distinguish between dysfunctional schools and schools that are a product of dysfunctional systems. Having information that clearly identifies these differences may trigger a change in supports provided to schools and communities. Most importantly, LEAs should assess how their

actions and their own priorities effectively support or harm schools. This includes the use of data and new choice systems that perpetuate inequity in schools.

District leadership must be creative and bold about solutions to core problems expressed by teams. This might mean shifting the way LEAs support schools. Enacting a bolder, broader approach will require that district leadership invest its energy in communities and not just in schools, transforming the role of district leadership from support and management of schools, to advocacy and community resource alignment. LEA's must also be willing to challenge and transform systems that reproduce inequity both within the district and outside of it.

Finally, district leadership must develop protocols to distinguish between schools that are inherently dysfunctional, with failing leadership structures and practices and those that are impacted by failing systems. These theoretical frameworks of professional learning communities and distributed leadership, which can be seen as essential elements in creating the conditions for teaching and learning are a starting point to inform directors of leadership effectiveness at school sites. The three schools in this study, although failing to make consistent gains on formal measures demonstrated elements of these theories in their practices. This is important because it separates these schools from schools that also fail to make academic gains in addition to failing to demonstrate their understanding of effective approaches both in theory and in practice. Currently the district has no formal way to distinguish between these schools. This means that all low-performing schools are painted with the same broad brush. Developing a protocol would in no way defend ineffective schools. As a matter of fact, it would force schools to be clear about their practices and how these practices might work for or against students. If we fail to develop a protocol that can distinguish between these schools, we will never get to the core issues that impact school improvement. This means we will continue to have persistently low-

performing schools and formal outcomes will continue to be shouldered by educators, protecting district leaders from sharing this responsibility.

Implication for the State

The state holds the power to shape what LEAs prioritize. In order to transform the way in which LEAs interact with schools, states have to change the way in which they hold LEAs and schools accountable. The new California Dashboard attempts to create a more holistic approach to school accountability. However, it is still not clear how this new approach will provide a more equitable account of school success. Schools in low-income communities will continue to be challenged by issues such as chronic absenteeism for example, due to a broad variety of issues. The state must be willing to look at these broader issues and create accountability systems that takes into account the impact of these broader issues on a school's ability to demonstrate continued growth. Reciprocal intelligent accountability would shift our focus from school accountability to accountability for districts and states in how they support schools. Holding the district and state responsible and accountable for adequate funding, resource alignment and policy that address the immediate needs of schools would shift the current accountability model. This should also include sharing responsibility in addressing the broader issues that impact vulnerable schools and communities. This includes broader policy that holds local leaders responsible for shaping healthier and safer communities.

Implication for Policy Makers and Public Officials

Policy makers need to develop indicators that hold public officials accountable for creating safe and healthy neighborhoods. This work should not be disconnected from what takes place in schools. There is a symbiotic relationship between communities and schools and current accountability systems are only holding schools accountable in that relationship. Public officials

must be included in conversations about school performance, specifically as it relates to issues of trauma, safety and access to basic resources. Policy must be proposed to appropriately fund schools, including changes in salary structures for educators who chose to work in some of our toughest communities.

Limitations of Study

Limitations of this study include drawing general conclusions based on lessons taken narrowly from the three participating schools. These schools differ from traditional schools in that they are small and autonomous. The study also does not account for low-performing schools that lack effective leadership and teacher collaborative structures. Additionally, schools in the study were chosen because they had participated in several years of leadership team training, hence principals were already engaging in distributed leadership practices. The sample of directors posed a limitation in the study. The directors did not directly oversee the participating schools. This was a restriction posed by the IRB process in order to protect study participants. Although directors oversaw pilot schools at some point during their directorship they responded to more general questions about school performance and supports. Questions were not specifically focused on pilot school autonomies since the current district structure treats pilot schools similarly to other schools in the district. It also points to the fact that schools that do not have the appropriate conditions for teaching and learning will continue to struggle unless their needs are addressed. This meant that they spoke about their experiences working with low-performing schools in general ways. Finally, the participation of leadership team members posed limitations in the study. Their responses could have been shaped by their heavy involvement in leading the core work of the school due to the fact that they take on additional supportive roles that are different from the majority of the school staff.

Recommendations for Further Study

There are a variety of opportunities for further study. Directors in my study often expressed wanting to do things differently or wanting to operate differently. They, however, seemed to be limited in their ability to shape the way they engage in their work. A study focused on a larger cross section of directors and district leadership responsible for overseeing schools would shed light on ways in which they interact with schools, including understanding the role directors play in providing support to schools and how this is shaped by both school need and district mandates. Since educators spoke of broader issues such as safety, trauma and dislocation as impacting their ability to create the conditions for teaching and learning, a study on the way the district prioritizes and funds offices that address these needs can shed light on district priorities. Further research on public officials' responses to ideas of shared responsibility is needed. This includes extending shared accountability of school performance to local, state and national public officials. This is important because unless public officials and community organizations see themselves as responsible for shaping the environments in which schools reside, schools will continue to experience the broader impacts of inaction. There is also an opportunity to study the impact of choice on schools in low-income communities, including the impact of increased disparities between schools servicing a disproportionate number of high needs students, specifically special education, English Learners and newcomers.

Reflection

My personal experience working in both low and high performing schools has given me a unique perspective on how data accurately or inaccurately reflects the work of schools. Some of the hardest working teachers I have come across teach in the most challenging environments. These teachers speak of students and communities with the most passion. This study gave me an

opportunity to immerse myself with individuals committed to their profession and committed to the idea of improving the lives of students and communities. This study captured the parking lot conversations I frequently have with colleagues who have dedicated their lives working in high need schools. I was grateful that through my interview process, teachers and principals were able to share their strengths in ways that excited them and also were able to contextualize their data in ways that made them be reflective of their work, including speaking openly about systems that make their work difficult. At the end of each interview site team members spoke of the process as being cathartic. They all expressed gratitude to speak openly about issues they are often not asked about but significantly shape their work. I've taken what I have learned through my study to formalize needs and make requests from my local district. I have also used my learning to shape the support I provide my teachers.

Conclusion

Formal accountability systems do not accurately reflect the work that is taking place in schools and negatively impact schools in low-income communities. These top-down forms of accountability measures ignore the realities faced by educators. These systems add additional pressures to schools without providing additional supports and/or addressing broader issues out of the schools control. Without a system that accurately assesses not only school outcomes but school needs, schools will find themselves trying to meet the needs of accountability systems while also trying to address the immediate needs of students. This additional stress leads to burnout, high teacher turnover and inability to maintain the stability needed to create the conditions for teaching and learning. In addition to that, low-performing schools have to address the needs of a distinct population of students, which require a significant amount of training support and resources. Despite the challenges that these environments pose, there are educators

who are committed and passionate about their work, who have managed to invest their time and energy in programs that value student voice and opportunity. This work is discounted when formal measures do not reflect their efforts.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Interview Protocol Focus Group Leadership Team

Part 1

We will begin by understanding aspects of the school that often go unnoticed or unacknowledged through formal accountability measures. These are activities or work unique to the school and developed by school site staff.

- Why did you choose to work in this community?
- Can you provide a description of the community in which you work?
- What have been some of the greatest challenges in working in this community?
- How have the challenges of this school and community influenced if at all, the priorities of the school?
- Can you provide a detailed description of the programs, partnerships, actions, and or activities that the team is most proud of?
- What values do these actions, programs activities or partnerships express and how important are they to the school?
- Do you consider these programs effective, if so can you describe why?
- What level of commitment, time and/or effort if at all, is required by the team to carry these out?
- Do you think this work is valued by the district and or state? Why or why not?
- How are these programs, actions, activities captured and shared to the larger public?
- In your opinion explain how the current California Dashboard captures or fails to capture the work that happens at your school?

- In your opinion explain how district structures accurately or inaccurately support some of the greatest challenges you face as a school?

Part 2

The following questions are around qualitative measures using the districts school experience survey.

Students feeling safe in school/ students feeling safe in their neighborhood

- How does the team explain students' response on feelings of safety in your school and in the community?
- What strategies does the school team engage in if at all to increase students' sense of safety?
- What challenges or obstacles if any, does your team face in addressing this need?
- How if at all, do you think this impacts students' ability to learn at high levels?
- Who do you believe shares responsibility in helping increase levels of safety at school and in the community?

School climate for staff and students

Teachers go out of their way to help students.

- What teacher actions if any, do you think impacted students' responses to this statement?
- How does this reflect the climate students experience at this school?
    a. This school promotes trust and collegiality amongst staff
- How does the school promote trust and collegiality amongst staff?
- What challenges or obstacles if any, does your team face in addressing trust and collegiality?
- Who shares responsibility in fostering trust and collegiality amongst staff?

Part 3

The following are formal accountability measures that are used by the district and state and are quantitative in nature.

- How does the team work together to meet formal accountability measures?
- How effectively does the team meet its formal accountability goals, if at all? If the team has not been able to meet formal accountability goals describe why this has proven a difficult task?
- When thinking about graduation rates, attendance and reclassification rates, what challenges if any, has the team faced in meeting or continuously meeting district and state targets? (Refer the team to each subset of scores)

    Graduation rates

    Attendance rates (96% or more)

    Reclassification rates

    - Who shares responsibility in addressing some of the challenges, if any, that you face in the area of graduation, attendance and reclassification?
    - What role does the district play in providing support and guidance in these areas?
    - How would you explain your SBAC ELA and Math scores?
    - What challenges, if any, did the school face in meeting these goals?

        SBAC ELA

            - SBAC Math

- Who shares responsibility in addressing some of the challenges, if any, that you face in consistently meeting this goal?
- What role does the district play in providing support and guidance in this area?

- How can the district and state more accurately support, if at all, formal accountability measures at your school?

Interview protocol for the principal of Resilient High School

- Why did you choose to become a principal at this school in this community?
- What are some of the greatest challenges you face in working in this community and in this school?
- What type of training, capacity building or skills if any, does the team posses that make them members of the leadership team?
- Take a look at the explanation that team members provided for some of the school data.
- What points of agreements if any, do you have with some of their assessments?
- What additional information if any do you think addresses some of the results?
- As a principal how do you know whether or not the team is working efficiently to address formal accountability goals?
- Let's look at the formal accountability measures around attendance.
- What additional information is pertinent in this area as an explanation of the data?
- Who do you believe shares responsibility around this data point?
- Let's look at the data around reclassification.
- What additional information is pertinent in this area as an explanation of the data?
- Who do you believe shares responsibility around this data point?
- Let's look at the data around SBAC ELA and Math?
- What additional information is pertinent in the area of ELA?
- What additional information is pertinent in the area of Math?
- Who do you believe shares responsibility for these scores?

- What information on formal accountability has not been addressed by your leadership team?
- What clarification can you provide around the schools' ability to meet or not meet formal accountability measures?
- What impact does the schools ability to meet or not meet accountability measures have on the functions of the school?
- To what extent does all staff share responsibility in lifting these measures?
- What type of support as a school leader do you receive from the district in meeting formal accountability measures?
- Your team identified the following site based measures as important to their work.
- How do these site-based measures accurately reflect some of the informal priorities of the school?
- To what extent do all staff share responsibility in lifting these goals?
- What rationale can you provide as to why these became priorities of the school?
    - CTE Pathway
    - Restorative Practices
    - Community Partnerships
    - Strong relationships
- How do you measure the success of some of these site-based priorities?
- What do you think accounts for the differences if any, for the teams' ability to move if at all, informal site based priorities and/or formal accountability measures?
- How does the district/state value if at all, the work exemplified in these informal measures?

- How do you communicate site-based performance to district staff and members of the community?
- Who do you believe shares responsibility for the success of the school?
- How would a system of shared responsibility impact your work as a principal?

Interview protocol for principal of Spirited High School

- Why did you choose to become a principal at this school in this community?
- What are some of the greatest challenges you face in working in this community and in this school?
- What type of training, capacity building or skills if any, does the team posses that make them members of the leadership team?
- Take a look at the explanation that team members provided for some of the school data.
- What points of agreements if any, do you have with some of their assessments?
- What additional information if any do you think addresses some of the results?
- As a principal how do you know whether or not the team is working efficiently to address formal accountability goals?
- Let's look at the formal accountability measures around the school experience survey.
- What additional information is pertinent in this area as an explanation of the data?
- Who do you believe shares responsibility around this data point?
- Let's look at graduation rate data.
- Who do you believe shares responsibility around this data point?
- Let's look at the reclassification rate data.
- What has impacted reclassification rates at the school?
- Who do you believe shares responsibility around this data point?

- Let's look at the data around SBAC ELA and Math?
- What additional information is pertinent in the area of ELA?
- What additional information is pertinent in the area of Math?
- Who do you believe shares responsibility for these scores?
- What information on formal accountability has not been addressed by your leadership team?
- What clarification can you provide around the schools' ability to meet or not meet formal accountability measures?
- What impact does the schools ability to meet or not meet accountability measures have on the functions of the school?
- To what extent do all staff share responsibility in lifting these measures?
- What type of support as a school leader do you receive from the district in meeting formal accountability measures?
- Your team identified the following site based measures as important to their work.
- How do these site-based measures accurately reflect some of the informal priorities of the school?
- To what extent do all staff share responsibility in lifting these goals?
- What rationale can you provide as to why these became priorities of the school?
    - CTE Pathway
    - Community Partnerships
- How do you measure the success of some of these site-based priorities?
- How does the district/state value if at all, the work exemplified in these site-based measures?

- How do you communicate site-based performance to district staff and members of the community?
- What do you think accounts for the differences if any, of the teams' ability to move if at all, site based priorities and/or formal accountability measures?
- Who do you believe shares responsibility for the success of the school?
- How would a system of shared responsibility impact your work as a principal?

Interview protocol for principal of Hope High School

- Why did you choose to become a principal at this school in this community?
- What are some of the greatest challenges you face in working in this community and in this school?
- What type of training, capacity building or skills if any, does the team posses that make them members of the leadership team?
- Take a look at the explanation that team members provided for some of the school data.
- What points of agreements if any, do you have with some of their assessments?
- What additional information if any do you think addresses some of the results?
- As a principal how do you know whether or not the team is working efficiently to address formal accountability goals?
- Let's look at the formal accountability measures around the school experience survey.
- What additional information is pertinent in this area as an explanation of the data?
- Who do you believe shares responsibility around this data point?
- Let's look at graduation rate data.
- Who do you believe shares responsibility around this data point?
- Let's look at the reclassification rate data.

- What has impacted reclassification rates at the school?
- Who do you believe shares responsibility around this data point?
- Let's look at the data around SBAC ELA and Math?
- What additional information is pertinent in the area of ELA?
- What additional information is pertinent in the area of Math?
- Who do you believe shares responsibility for these scores?
- What information on formal accountability has not been addressed by your leadership team?
- What clarification can you provide around the schools' ability to meet or not meet formal accountability measures?
- What impact does the schools ability to meet or not meet accountability measures have on the functions of the school?
- To what extent do all staff share responsibility in lifting these measures?
- What type of support as a school leader do you receive from the district in meeting formal accountability measures?
- Your team identified the following site based measures as important to their work.
- How do these site-based measures accurately reflect some of the informal priorities of the school?
- To what extent do all staff share responsibility in lifting these goals?
- What rationale can you provide as to why these became priorities of the school?
    - Restorative Practices
    - Newcomer Center
    - Mastery Grading

- Partnerships

- How do you measure the success of some of these site-based priorities?
- How does the district/state value if at all, the work exemplified in these site-based measures?
- How do you communicate site-based performance to district staff and members of the community?
- What do you think accounts for the differences if any, of the teams' ability to move if at all, site based priorities and/or formal accountability measures?
- Who do you believe shares responsibility for the success of the school?
- How would a system of shared responsibility impact your work as a principal?

Interview Protocol for District Personnel

Part A

- Can you begin by explaining your role/position, including the amount of schools that you work with?
- Why did you choose to become a director?
- How do you perceive your role or position? Would you describe your work more closely related to compliance or to support? And can you provide some examples?
- Can you talk to me about schools you oversee, what criteria do you use to assess the schools' performance, overall effectiveness or success?
- Within the schools that you support are there some schools that need more of your attention than others? if so, what information did you use to identify these schools?
- How would you describe some of your most struggling schools?
- Can you provide some of the quantitative data that makes these schools stand out as schools of need?
    - What support do you provide these schools? And what informs if at all, this support?
    - Do all schools with similar qualitative data points receive similar support?

    - How do you differentiate if at all, support to these schools?
- This question is about process/protocol. What process/protocol do you follow when meeting with your high need schools?
    - How often do you meet with these schools?
    - What are most of your conversations centered around?
    - Who participates in these conversations?
- What training if any, has informed the way in which you approach or work with schools?
- What qualitative measures if any, do you use to shape your assessment of a school?
- What is the district doing well when providing support to struggling schools?
- What are the most challenging aspects if at all, of being able to provide support to your most struggling schools?

Part B (Share formal accountability measures)

- To what extent does the contextualization around formal accountability measures shape your thinking about your own schools?
    - How if at all, does it change the type of support you would provide your high need schools? And what control do you have in providing that support?
- How does understanding context change if at all, your responsibilities as a director?

Part C (Share Site Based Priorities)- Effective

- How does understanding a schools site-based priorities help shape if at all, your perception of the school teams' ability to be successful?
- How could understanding these priorities be useful if at all, in supporting the success of a school?
- Based on your experience how does context and site based priorities currently inform the work of directors, local superintendents and the overall district?
- What value if any, do you see in understanding site-based priorities when working with struggling schools?
- What if anything would need to change in order to be able to engage in deeper understanding of site-based priorities in struggling schools?

- How can understanding context and site-based priorities shape a sense of shared responsibility for our most struggling schools?
- Who shares responsibility in a schools' success?

Chief Executive Officer

- How would you describe some of the most struggling schools in the district?
- Why do you think those schools are struggling?

- Review Accountability Tools and provide a glimpse of the context that was provided by schools.

- School team members and directors pointed to lack of quality teachers, access to resources, instability in staff both at the site level and at the director level as having an impact on formal accountability data.
- To what degree do you think the district has the capacity to address these areas of concern? And what systems are in place to hear from those closest to the work?

- In speaking to some directors I heard them say they look at formal accountability data and they have a deeper look and take into account other factors, allowing schools to use their own data tracking systems which allows them to look at a school on a case by case basis.
- Are you okay with them doing that and is there a way this can be done systematically?

- Both principals and directors stated that most conversations between them are focused on formal accountability measures.
- How does this focus on formal accountability data limit if at all a directors' ability to get to know the contexts in which schools operate and to identify the supports they might need?

- What value if any, is there in understanding how a schools site-based priorities come into conflict if at all, with larger district and state goals? (For example, at one school they have a large newcomer population and have developed a strong newcomer program, this however has caused their reclassification rates to plummet)

Go back to accountability report

- School teams and principals feel that current formal accountability systems shape the way their schools are perceived and that this does not allow them to showcase some of the site based priorities.
- They would like to share this type of work as evidence of the fact that they are doing good things and have talented educators at their schools, would these priorities be persuasive to you, your boss or the school board? Why or why not? What is the appropriate role for these type of internal metrics?
- How can we ensure that formal accountability data is not the only story being told? How would a different system of interacting with our most vulnerable schools provide a more accurate picture and therefore trigger more targeted supports? What role can school teams play in the process?

- Directors I spoke to provided different responses when asked what they currently do to support schools as opposed to what they would do if they had unlimited resources.
- What they would do if they had unlimited resources connected more closely to what teachers and principals at the sites voiced. What would be the message to the directors given their understanding that more needs to be done?

- I heard from some principals and teachers that they are ready to leave their positions, that part of what is leading them to that decision is a system that creates a sense of unhelpful stress, diminishes them and their schools and doesn't affirm that which they are doing well. In addition to this they feel that they are not getting the support they need to improve.

- What can the central administration do to improve that and to reaffirm the work of educators choosing to work in some of the districts toughest schools?

- What limits do state policies and funding models have on the districts ability to provide more targeted support to schools?

- What is the state doing right, when it comes to addressing the needs of our most struggling schools?

- f you had unlimited resources and could restructure the way in which schools receive support what would that look like? (Magical realism question)

APPENDIX B

RECIPROCAL ACCOUNTABILITY

RESILIENT HIGH SCHOOL

FORMAL ACCOUNTABILITY

DISTRICT DATA	SCHOOL DATA	How safe do you feel in your school?	Who Shares Responsibility?
68%	48%	Students feel safer in the school than they do in the community. Students will run back to school when they are assaulted or robbed. Student's safety is impacted by community gang violence. There aren't sufficient campus aides on the campus.	District Funding of Campus Aides
60%	38%	**How safe do you feel in your neighborhood?** Gang and family violence are persistent in the community. Unsafe street crossings Limited resources and green spaces for students. High levels of transiency make community building difficult. High levels of trauma experienced by students High levels of poverty	City officials Community Organizations Police Force Local District Representatives
83%	87%	**This school promotes trust and collegiality among staff.** Teachers are passionate about working in the community Everyone is here for students Overcome obstacles and hardships as a team Staff band together against negative influences and perceptions of the school Celebrate school accomplishments Being able to select out of classroom support staff The Elect to Work Agreement	Principal School leadership Teachers
61%	69%	**Teachers go out of their way to help students.** Teachers offer students voluntary tutoring afterschool, during their lunch and before school. Teachers run clubs. Teachers care about the emotional well being of students. Teachers help students with college application	Principal Teachers School Leadership

	DISTRICT	SCHOOL	Site-based Context	Who Shares Responsibility?
GRADUATION RATE	75%	56%	Students enter the school with low skills. Middle school students don't understand impact of failing courses.	District- Feeder patterns, transition expectations Housing access
ATTENDANCE	70%	64%	Students attending court Students dropping off siblings at school. Staying home to babysit younger siblings Personal day care issues Lack of a PSA	District City, State officials
RECLASSIFI-CATION	13%	13%	Students enter HS reading at 2nd grade level. Large influx of newcomers. Lack of resources and teacher training. Need clearer focus	District Zone of Choice
SBAC ELA	54%	45%	Students reading at 2nd grade level No access to incoming students reading levels. No formal articulation with feeder schools More training needed	District High quality professional development t
SBAC MATH	25%	2%	Adequate math training. Math teacher turnover. No access to quality math teachers	District Human Resources Teacher Recruitment and Placement

INFORMAL ACCOUNTABILTY

MEASURE	ACTION	RATIONALE
Restorative Practices	All staff is trained in community building circles. RJ coordinator Connected to supporting student trauma in school. Students engage in community circles with staff. Actively use harm circles to solve conflict Students are trained to lead circles in classrooms as peer mentors.	The primary goal is to shatter the school to prison pipeline. It reduced referrals and suspension rates since its' implementation. Restorative practices highlight the schools core values of social justice, equity and access.
Career Skills	Strong model career skills learning site Students take career skills courses. Students participate in internships connected to career focus. Students use content to self reflect	Developed to attract students to get specialized training in the field of trauma and health in order to address trauma and health needs in their community.
Community Partnerships	The school has strong partnerships that support linked learning (career pathways), restorative practices and community organization to provide students internships.	Partnerships have been key in a lot of the schools site based priorities. They provide support and funding that allow for the functioning of programs.
Strong relationships with students	Teachers really care for their students and focus strongly on socio-emotional supports. Teachers are passionate about working at this school and serving this community.	The school has a strong advisory program which allows the school to foster strong relationships with students

RECIPROCAL ACCOUNTABILITY

SPIRITED HIGH SCHOOL

FORMAL ACCOUNTABILITY

DISTRICT DATA	SCHOOL DATA	How safe do you feel in your school?	Who Shares Responsibility?
68%	67%	-Co-location between district and charter schools has heightened issues of safety after several high risk incidents. - Creating close relationships with students. -After school program -	-Administrators across both district and charter schools on campus
60%	62%	**How safe do you feel in your neighborhood?** -A strong connection to family -Close connections to friends as they transition through the k-12 pipeline	-Community Partners -School -Public officials
83%	88%	**This school promotes trust and collegiality among staff.** -Teachers are heavily invested in the school -Smaller staff requires interdependence -Friendships among staff allow them to focus on improving the school. -Principal trusts teachers' professionalism -Teachers help create vision and direction of the school, including innovative programs	-The principal -Teachers -Support Staff
61%	65%	**Teachers go out of their way to help students.** -All teachers provide free tutoring afterschool -Teachers go out of their way to support students. Including fieldtrips on weekends and after work hours. -Provide opportunities and build strong relationships	-Teachers -Elect to Work Agreement

	DISTRICT	SCHOOL	Site-based Context	Who Shares Responsibility?
GRADUATION RATE	75%	77%	-EL newcomers who are older than 18 often drop out of school to start working. -High levels of transiency that impact cohort rate -Impact of special education students (Certificate of completion) -Students who start in 12th grade graduate at 96%.	-District /State Graduation policies -Public Officials Housing policies -Charter Schools -Zone of Choice
ATTENDANCE	70%	58%	-No sufficient funding for PSA or PSW. -Students often serve as sitters for younger siblings. -Gentrification has pushed out families from the area. -High number of homeless students.	-Community Partners -Public Officials Housing policies Day care options -District Counseling Resources
RECLASSIFI-CATION	13%	16%	-Large portion of EL students are special education students -Receive largest portion of newcomers	-District policies -Zone of Choice
SBAC ELA	54%	38%	-Instability in staffing in ELA. -Have recently hired stronger teachers. -Lack of quality professional development -Elementary reading level	-District policies Human Resources UTLA Recruitment Targeted PD
SBAC MATH	25%	12%	-Lack of quality teachers in math -Must place teachers -Lack of quality professional development -Training not aligned to needs of schools.	-District policies Human Resources UTLA Recruitment Targeted PD

INFORMAL ACCOUNTABILTY

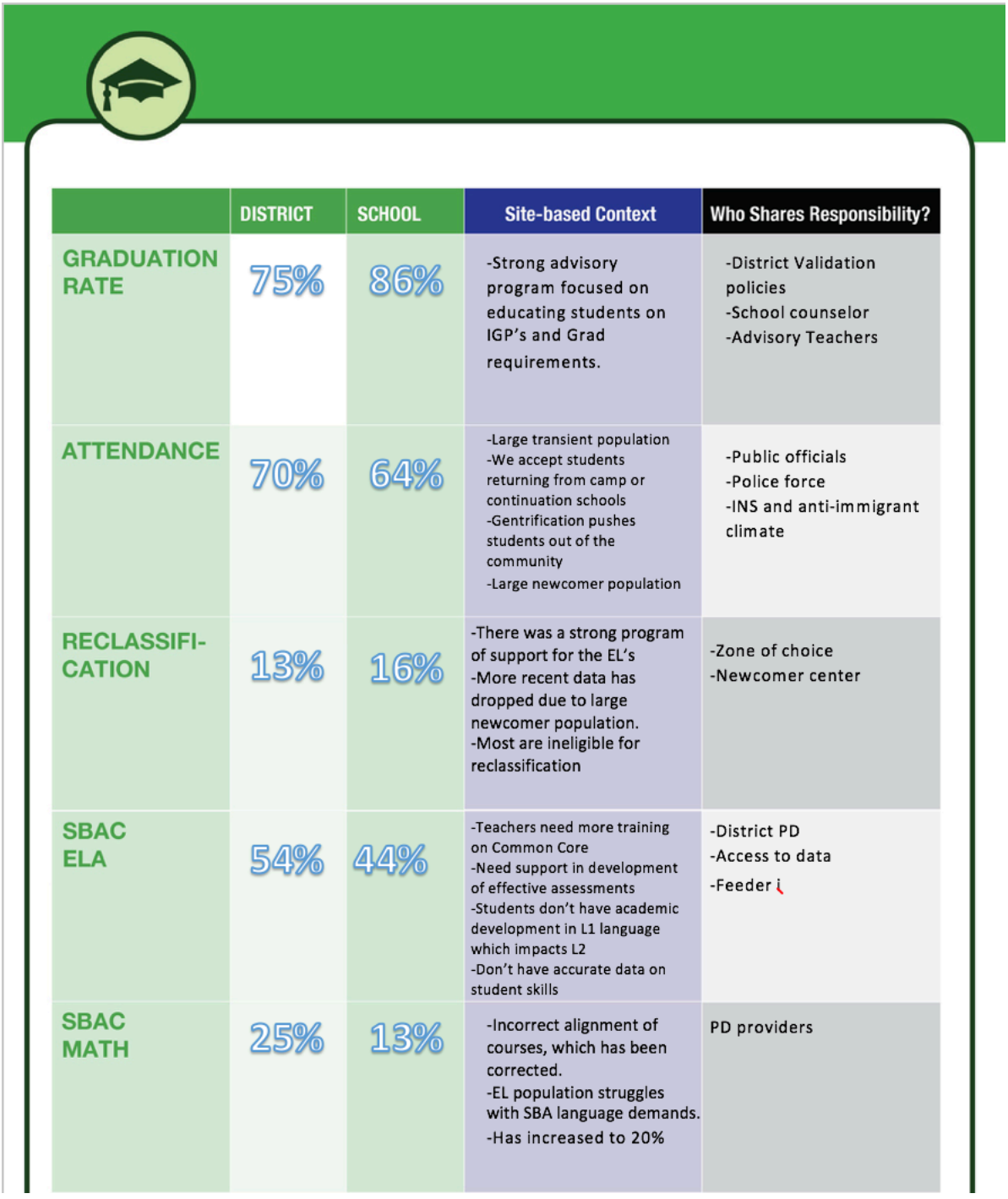
MEASURE	ACTION	RATIONALE
Career Skills	-Having a fully developed urban farm which is connected to a Career skills class and state grant funding. -Students grow crops and care for animals. -All students take Career skills courses including digital imaging, graphic design, podcasting, multi-media, agriculture, animal care and environmentalism.	-Creates cultural connections with students around the area of agriculture. -Allows students to feel pride and raise self esteem in something they can be good at while learning valuable work related skills. -Gives students ownership over their space and some stability. -Students are able to make real connections to science as they learn about animals, plants and vegetation. -Kids have learned how to trust each other and have demonstrated commitment in coming to feed animals during breaks. -Creates a sense of agency for students.
Partnerships	-Community based organizations -Grants and additional funding -Community Farmers	-Alignment of resources and content knowledge to support the Career skills work. -Leveraging community resources to provide unique opportunities.

RECIPROCAL ACCOUNTABILITY

HOPE HIGH SCHOOL

FORMAL ACCOUNTABILITY

DISTRICT DATA	SCHOOL DATA	How safe do you feel in your school?	Who Shares Responsibility?
68%	60%	-School experienced a high level of gang activity this school year. -Our school sits in a community that doesn't make our students feel safe. -The school dedicated efforts around RJ which brought scores up 15% from previous year. Students also feel safer at school than their community	Staff accepts all students given by Zone of Choice and do not reject or push out students as part of their philosophy. Staff-Needing to market themselves and compete as other on campus schools and local schools have.
60%	45%	**How safe do you feel in your neighborhood?** -Gentrification has played a big role in making parts of the community less safe. -It has forced communities out of usual territories. -Gangs in the community and territorial disputes between local gangs and international gangs has led to violence in the community. -High levels of trauma among students when they enter schools.	Staff accepts all students given by Zone of Choice and do not reject or push out students as part of their philosophy. Staff-Needing to market themselves and compete as other on campus schools
83%	93%	**This school promotes trust and collegiality among staff.** -Distributed leadership model empowers teachers in decision making. -Everyone contributes to the school. -Strong interpersonal relationships. -Impacted by conflicts with teachers placed at the school without a social justice philosophy.	Staff at the site are responsible for creating a positive work environment. Small environment Shared responsibilities
61%	65%	**Teachers go out of their way to help students.** -Students and teachers develop strong relationships. -Informal mentorships are a normal part of the school environment. -Teachers know all of the students on the campus.	School staff



	DISTRICT	SCHOOL	Site-based Context	Who Shares Responsibility?
GRADUATION RATE	75%	86%	-Strong advisory program focused on educating students on IGP's and Grad requirements.	-District Validation policies -School counselor -Advisory Teachers
ATTENDANCE	70%	64%	-Large transient population -We accept students returning from camp or continuation schools -Gentrification pushes students out of the community -Large newcomer population	-Public officials -Police force -INS and anti-immigrant climate
RECLASSIFI-CATION	13%	16%	-There was a strong program of support for the EL's -More recent data has dropped due to large newcomer population. -Most are ineligible for reclassification	-Zone of choice -Newcomer center
SBAC ELA	54%	44%	-Teachers need more training on Common Core -Need support in development of effective assessments -Students don't have academic development in L1 language which impacts L2 -Don't have accurate data on student skills	-District PD -Access to data -Feeder i
SBAC MATH	25%	13%	-Incorrect alignment of courses, which has been corrected. -EL population struggles with SBA language demands. -Has increased to 20%	PD providers

INFORMAL ACCOUNTABILTY

MEASURE	ACTION	RATIONALE
Restorative Practices	Use of restorative practices were integrated into the school. Peer Jury and Peer counseling were also developed at the site. The school holds restorative justice councils.	There was a need to bring the community together due to various divisions that occurred due to gang conflicts. The goal was to create a more inclusive and welcoming environments for students.
Partnerships	The school works with several community partners through their service learning projects. They also support the school in broader initiatives, including after school activities.	Used to support a strong advisory program strongly connected to student defense connected to service learning projects connected to community issues. Important to the social justice theme of the school.
Induction Center	The school has invested time and energy in training teachers on Kagan strategies and SDAIE strategies including creating newcomer lines in the mastery schedule.	The induction line was created to address the changing demographics of the neighborhood and accompanying changing student needs.
Mastery Grading	Teachers are committed to using mastery grading in order to accurately assess student learning.	One of the first in the district to adopt grading philosophy. Grading allows students to continue to demonstrate growth and to try again if they fail.

APPENDIX C

FORMAL ACCOUNTABILITY TOOL

Formal accountability are measures that are currently being used by local districts and/or the state to measure quantitative school performance.

Page 1 contains qualitative measures based on student and teacher responses from the School Experience Survey created by the local district and administered by schools.

The far left 2 columns indicates the data by comparing district data and school site data. The middle column illustrates the questions or statements used to generate data along with the school teams' narrative that contextualizes the data. The far right column asks focus groups members to think about who shares responsibility in that data.

The questions selected from the school experience survey connect with theories associated with Critical Pedagogy of Place.

Data Point 1- How safe do you feel in your school?

Data Point 2- How safe do you feel in your neighborhood?

Data Point 3- This school promotes trust and collegiality among staff?

Data Point 4- Teacher go out of their way to help students.

Page 2 contains quantitative measures that will be a part of the states new accountability dashboard and were collected from the districts *School Report Card* and the *California Department of Education* website. The far left 2 columns indicate data comparing the local district and school. The middle column contains a site based narrative to contextualize the data and the far right column asks focus groups to think about and articulate who shares responsibility.

The following data points will be used for purposes of this study:

1. Graduation Data- 4-year cohort data
2. Attendance Rates- Students with 96% attendance or higher. 96% percent attendance is equal to 7 days absent.
3. Reclassification Rates- Students who have reclassified
4. SBAC ELA- Students scoring Meets or Exceeds
5. SBAC Math- Students scoring Meets or Exceeds

Informal Accountability

Page 3 contains accountability measures developed by site leadership team members based on what they deem are priorities for their schools.

Informal accountability items will be generated by each schools' leadership team during focus group interviews. They will identify actions and measures they use to drive their work that are currently not formally measured by local and state accountability systems. Leadership team members will be asked to provide a rationale for each measure in order to understand why the team has prioritized this at their site. This will connect directly with the theory of Critical Pedagogy of Place, since each school team might select measures based on the specific needs of their schools and communities.

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