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## District-Level Support for Site-Based Renewal: A Case Study of Secondary School Reform

*Previous studies of secondary school reform have not given as much attention to the role of the district as is warranted by its potential influence on change processes. This study examined the role of district-level factors in enabling eight secondary schools to restructure their positions of added responsibility. After two years there was significant change on five of six indicators of organizational health. The district-level factors that contributed to the change were the actions of a central steering committee (consisting of administrators, union representatives, and support staff), an emerging image of professionalism in the teacher union, district history, individual personalities, and a shared sense that the district was unique in its region. The findings differed from the results of previous research in that leadership was more broadly distributed, a combined industrial-professional conception of teacher unionism contributed to innovation, and a strong and continuous central presence was required to support a decentralized change model.*

*Les études antérieures sur la réforme de l'école secondaire n'ont pas accordé assez d'importance au rôle du district malgré son influence potentielle sur le processus de changement. Cette étude a analysé le rôle de facteurs au niveau du district dans l'habilitation de huit écoles secondaires à restructurer leurs positions en situation de responsabilité accrue. Deux ans après le début de l'étude, on a noté des changements significatifs sur cinq des six indicateurs de bonne gestion organisationnelle. Les facteurs au niveau du district qui ont contribué au changement étaient les suivants: les démarches d'un comité d'organisation central (y siégeaient administrateurs, représentants syndicaux et personnel de soutien), l'émergence d'une image de professionnalisme dans le syndicat des enseignants et une vision partagée de la spécificité du district dans la région. Les résultats divergent de ceux des études antérieures sous trois aspects: le leadership était plus réparti; une attitude vis-à-vis du syndicalisme des enseignants qui liait des conceptions industrielles et professionnelles a contribué à l'innovation; et le modèle décentralisé de changement nécessitait une présence centrale et continue.*

Constant change has not been part of the self-image of secondary schools (Hannay, 1995). In Cooley's (1997) aphorism, "all this talk about waves and

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waves of reform really refers to trends in the reform literature, not changes that are actually taking place in schools" (p. 18). A recent call for papers about replacements for traditional secondary schools generated few reports of models in place and many accounts of why secondary school change is so difficult (Raywid, 1997). Even successful exemplars decay, for example, when key personalities leave (Brouillette, 1997). In this article we describe a school district where leaders attempted to energize its eight secondary schools by giving teachers and principals the mandate and resources to restructure on the basis of criteria they determined themselves. After summarizing evidence that change occurred in the district, we identify some of the district-level factors contributing to reform.

### *Literature Review*

#### *Taxonomy of Approaches to School Reform: Perspective of the Study*

Reformers share a common end. The goal is to improve the breadth and depth of student achievement so that all students (not just the university-bound) develop deep understanding (not just recitational knowledge) of fundamental concepts, principles, and habits of mind. But reformers differ on the means. Perspectives vary on three dimensions.

One dimension distinguishing reform approaches concerns the role of subject departments. Teaching-for-understanding proponents argue that improvement comes by strengthening teacher capacities in strong departments. For example, Kennedy (1998) sees the tasks of reform as the clarification of subject-based standards, creation of teachers' disciplinary knowledge (central ideas and the relationships among them), development of pedagogical content knowledge (the ability to represent complex concepts in understandable ways), and enhancement of attitudes to the subject (e.g., valuing the norms for creating knowledge in the discipline). In contrast, other reformers see departmental structures as inimical to teacher growth. Departments are said to create cleavages among teachers, imprison student learning in disciplinary cells, limit curricular options and the transfer of teaching ideas, and constrain the development of school vision (Hargreaves, 1994; McLaughlin & Talbert, 1990; Siskin, 1994).

The second dimension distinguishes centralizers from decentralizers. Centralizers emphasize coordinated efforts to improve preservice training, career induction, certification of teachers on the basis of research-based behaviors, and integrated professional development (Darling-Hammond, 1998). Decentralizers advocate site-based management in which liberation from bureaucratic control enables autonomous schools to define their vision, recruit teachers, manage their resources, and take responsibility for the performance of staff and students (Ogawa, 1994).

The third dimension concerns conception of change. Change theorists focus on the nature of specific innovations and the role of change agents in adoption, implementation, and diffusion (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991). Organizational learning theorists argue that the ability of individuals to learn new behaviors accumulates into a capacity of the organization to respond to changes in its environment, a capacity that is greater than the sum of its parts (Cohen & Sproull, 1995). Fullan (1997b) defined a position between the poles in which a

focus on change processes is embedded in a learning organization perspective. Fullan (1997a) argued that systemic reform involves an integrated set of changes in structures, cultures, and the use of time. When successful it creates a professional community that builds professional skills while supporting individual teachers' efforts to cope with change.

The perspective on secondary school reform taken in this study emphasizes the search for alternatives to departmental structures, decentralizing forces, and embeds change theory in an organizational learning perspective. Our focus in this article is on district-level factors contributing to reform.

*Previous Research on District Level Factors Influencing School Reform*

Previous accounts of secondary school change emphasized the role of national/provincial reform agencies (Knapp, 1997), networks of schools (Wasley, 1994), or individual schools (Johnson & Pajares, 1996). District-level factors have been included on the periphery in this research, but only rarely has the district been the main focus of the inquiry.

Studies of site-based reform suggest that most schools lack the capacity to reform on their own (Walberg & Niemiec, 1994). Yet Knapp (1997) found that schools in "ripe" districts responded more quickly to reform opportunities and Louis and Miles (1990) found that reform was more likely to occur when the district and school worked together in a dynamic, ongoing negotiation of the change process.

The district superintendent has been cited as the critical district variable (Prestine & Bowen, 1993). The problem in relying on the superintendent as the key agent of change is that superintendents spend little time on teaching and learning issues (Blumberg, 1985; Cuban, 1988). Those who do focus on curriculum can exercise a profound influence on schools, but they need to be skillful change agents, in place for an extended period (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991). Superintendents may stimulate and support school change through interaction with principals. Their impact on teachers is typically indirect. The mechanisms of superintendent influence include involving principals in district goal-setting, frequent communication on instructional issues, and feedback on school growth plans that link school activities to district priorities (Hopkins, Ainscow, & West, 1994; LaRoque & Coleman, 1989; Rosenholtz, 1989). Other superintendent strategies associated with site-based reform include capacity-building activities such as the provision of funds for between-school visitations and the creation of a competitive pool of resources for school improvement projects (Darling-Hammond, 1995). Policy-making may not be sufficient to mandate reform, but there is ample evidence that district policies can frustrate it. For example, district standardized testing programs have been found to inhibit teacher movement toward authentic assessment and teaching for understanding (Grossman & Stodolsky, 1994).

In addition to administrator interventions, other district characteristics may contribute to reform. The most powerful of these is district history: the extent to which teachers have experienced previous change efforts as a positive force enabling them to increase their professional efficacy. For example, professional development schools are more likely to be established in districts with a history of site-based management, a record of innovation through a national network

of schools, or prior establishment of a professional development academy for district teachers (Grossman, 1994; Miller & Silvernail, 1994; Whitford, 1994). Huberman (1995) also cited district history, although he focused on individual teachers and drew different conclusions about the history's impact. He found that the prime determinant of an optimal career path for secondary school teachers (leading to experimentation and serenity rather than reassessment and conservatism) was the avoidance of major implementation efforts sweeping their districts in favor of individualized tinkering.

History interacts with leadership. Superintendents with a commitment to building district capacity are more likely to leave a history of innovation that provides a foundation for a district that is moving forward, detects new student and community needs, mobilizes resources to respond to them, and appraises the outcomes of new initiatives. However, leadership in a district can be exercised at more than one level. For example, Heller and Firestone (1995) found that much of the leadership for change was provided by teachers in schools.

Teacher leadership can be exercised in many ways. Of particular interest as our study unfolded was the involvement of union officials. Previous research has typically portrayed teachers' unions as an impediment to change. For example, Snyder (1994) found that attempts to introduce an internship program were hampered by union demands that interns be paid almost as much as first-year teachers, a move that rendered the innovation too costly to be implemented in many sites. But some unions combine concern for bread-and-butter issues (such as salaries and benefits) with a push toward professional issues (such as curricular changes, Bascia, in press). Professional unionism emphasizes the collective aspect of work in schools, blurs distinctions between workers and management, and flattens hierarchies (Kerchner & Cauffman, 1995). Bargaining is organized around the need for improvements in schools, with contract negotiations including curriculum issues with economic items. Professional unionism emphasizes protection of the teaching profession over the defense of individual teachers and integrates self-interest and public interest in internal quality control processes (such as peer review). Few districts have enacted this conception of professional unionism, and the results in terms of teacher commitment and curriculum renewal have been mixed (Bascia, 1994). District union locals are influenced by the beliefs and actions of their national (and in the present case, provincial) leaders. For example, at the time of our study Ontario union leaders were considering bringing curriculum issues (such as destreaming/untracking) to the bargaining table (Martell, 1995).

In summary, although few studies have investigated district-level influences on school change, several factors (the role of the superintendent, district history, and conceptions of unionism) have been identified as possible contributors.

### *Research Question*

Given the scarcity of studies of secondary school reform, we undertook a longitudinal case study of a district that adopted a site-based approach to change. Few district-level prescriptions constrained what schools could do. We previously reported between-school differences in response to reform opportu-

nities after one year (Hannay & Ross, 1997). The main research question guiding the research reported in this article was "What district-level factors contributed to secondary school renewal?" We wanted to understand why this district was able to devolve power to schools, an approach to reform not taken by any of the districts that surrounded it. In answering this question we focused particularly on the actions of key actors, especially senior administrators and union officials, and we were attuned to the potential impact of past experiences with change on contemporary reforms in the district. Before addressing this question we summarize quantitative evidence about the impact of reform efforts after two years to substantiate our claim that these schools were changing.

### *Method*

Our research was conducted in eight secondary schools with 500 teachers in a central Ontario district. A ninth school, a secure facility operated on behalf of the Ministry of Corrections, was excluded, as were the elementary schools in the district. The district stretches for 850 square miles, encompassing small cities, towns and countryside, with no distinct center. Student populations were growing in the west, stable in the east. The district enrolls few nonwhites, although students came from a spectrum of economic backgrounds.

In September 1994 district officials agreed to maintain the resources allocated to positions of responsibility (department heads and assistant heads), despite other budget cutbacks.<sup>1</sup> Each school was encouraged to exercise its discretion in reallocating release time and administrative stipends previously assigned to department headships. School Restructuring Committees, each headed by two teachers, developed a school plan for implementation in September 1995.<sup>2</sup> In March 1995 we were invited to collect formative data about the schools' use of their reform mandate and to provide inservice on change strategies.

We conducted a case study of the district using an interpretive research design in which we investigated the actions of participants from the perspectives of the actors (Erickson, 1986). We built the credibility of our interpretations around qualitative research principles such as prolonged engagement in the site, persistent observation, constant comparison, progressive subjectivity, and member checks (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1990; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). A central component of our method was triangulation among data sources and investigators.

We were also participants in the change process. Our main contribution was to promote a culture of inquiry. We did this by feeding back to the schools quantitative and qualitative data (described below) about processes in the district and in individual schools. In addition to providing data summaries and our interpretation of them, we also modeled how co-chairs of school planning committees could help their staffs construct their own interpretations of the data. We provided inservice on action research strategies, supported teacher inquiries, and enlisted several district staff in research apprenticeships. We advised school and district planners on findings from research studies of secondary school change and delivered inservice sessions on instructional

improvement issues such as methods for implementing curriculum integration.

#### *Sources of Data*

*Main qualitative data.* Evidence about district-level influences came from two sources. The most important source was individual interviews with eight members of the Steering Committee: two supervisory officers (equivalent to assistant superintendent), three union leaders, one secondary principal (who chaired the district's Secondary School Principals' Association), and two district support staff. We also interviewed the director of education (CEO, equivalent to superintendent). Before the interview, participants completed a self-administered questionnaire by rating (on a 1-10 scale) the extent to which the Steering Committee fulfilled eight leadership-for-change functions (adapted from Firestone, 1989). They rated their personal contribution to each function. Some wrote in additional functions. Each informant was interviewed for 45-60 minutes in November 1995. The interview was opened by asking for details about the three leadership functions given highest ranking in the survey. Subsequent questions probed rationales for site-based decision-making and teacher leadership, the extent to which new conceptions of unionism had emerged in the district, and facilitators and obstacles to project progress. Interviews were transcribed and entered into ATLAS/ti, a qualitative data analysis software program (Muhr, 1995). The coding scheme was developed from the data through analytic induction. The final version provided codes for leadership functions, history, personalities, rationales for features of the project, the new teacher unionism, facilitators, obstacles, and project outcomes.

Additional data were obtained from focus group interviews with the restructuring committees in each of the eight schools. Each of the focus groups averaged five teachers, equally divided between members of the 1994 (preimplementation) and 1995 (first-year) committees. The 60-minute sessions (in November-December 1995) probed successes and obstacles, explanations for events, personal meanings attached to committee membership, and linkages between restructuring and reculturing, while providing opportunities for each group to pursue its own agenda. Audiotapes were used to create detailed session notes that included selected verbatim quotations and interpretive notes generated immediately after each taping.

*Additional qualitative data used for triangulation.* Each of the findings from the two sets of qualitative data collected in late 1995 was tested against other qualitative data collected in 1996 and 1997: interviews with teachers appointed to new positions of added responsibility ( $N=35-37$  depending on the year), principals ( $N=8$ ), co-chairs of school restructuring committees ( $N=16$ ), and field notes created during inservice sessions and meetings with members of the central Steering Committee, school restructuring committees, and Principals' Association. None of these additional qualitative data is cited directly in this article.

*Quantitative data* embedded within our qualitative argument are quantitative evidence of school change from every-teacher surveys administered before the implementation of new organizational structures (1995), after one year (1996), and after two years (1997). The instrument consisted of 49 Likert items

representing six indicators of organizational health. The internal consistencies of the scales ranged from .59 to .82 (average alpha across all scales and years was .75). The indicators were as follows.

- *School goals and priorities*, that is, consensus about directions, especially continuous improvement goals, and the use of school priorities by teachers when making professional decisions (Darling-Hammond, 1995; Hannay, 1995; Hopkins et al., 1994; Rosenholtz, 1989).
- *Shared decision-making*, that is, teachers feeling well prepared to participate in key school issues and having opportunities to deliberate with colleagues with different expertise than their own (Heller & Firestone, 1995; Louis & Smith, 1990; Ross & Webb, 1995).
- *Positive attitudes to school change*, that is, teachers' belief that past attempts to bring about change had beneficial outcomes (Anderson & Fullan, 1989; Darling-Hammond, 1995).
- *School culture*, that is, teachers' support for collaborative inquiry, dedication to constant improvement, and to mutual self-help (Cousins, Ross, & Maynes, 1994; Hannay, 1995; Hopkins et al., 1994; Little, 1982; McCartney & Schrag, 1990).
- *Access to resources for professional learning*, that is, teachers' belief that they have adequate resources (materials, budget, and supportive colleagues) to change their practice (Darling-Hammond, 1995; Fullan, 1993; Huberman, 1995).
- *School and community*, that is, teachers' belief that the school and community share a common purpose (Darling-Hammond, 1995; Epstein, 1988; Fullan, 1990; Louis, 1989; Rosenholtz, 1989).

## Results

### *Evidence that Change Occurred*

Figure 1 summarizes the results of the annual surveys. The graph shows that there was a statistically significant change in all measures. In 1997 teachers reported greater consensus about school goals, greater participation in school decision-making, a stronger belief that past change efforts in the school had beneficial outcomes, and belief that there were stronger ties between the school and the community. On all these indicators the trend was flat in the first year (means and standard deviations for the 1995 and 1996 surveys were reported in Hannay & Ross, 1997); the differences became statistically significant only after two years in the project (i.e., in 1997). There was also a significant decline in teachers' perception of the availability of resources to bring about change. This decline occurred between 1995 and 1996 following the election of a government committed to reducing educational costs.

The quantitative data corroborate qualitative data from the first full year in the project (Hannay & Ross, 1997). Although there were variations between schools, interviews with teachers indicated that structures that cut across subject departments were created, new ways of interacting within these models developed, and the role of school administrators changed. Reculturing was underway as new images of teaching and learning emerged, support for a culture of inquiry grew, and cross-department collaboration increased. Finally, there was evidence that schools were exploring new ways of using time.

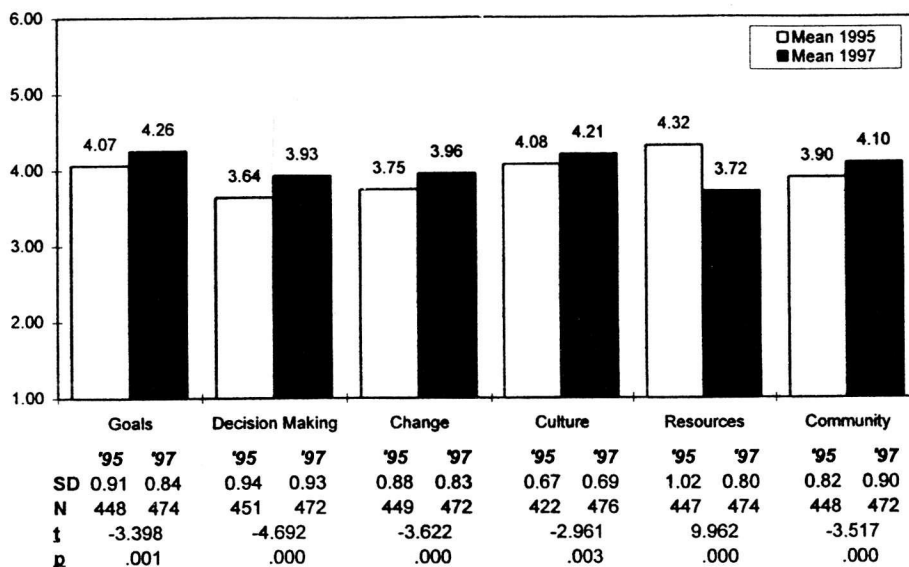


Figure 1. Indicators of organizational health (1995 vs. 1997).

#### District-Level Influences on School Reform

The quantitative data and the larger bank of qualitative data indicate that change was occurring. To understand why this district was able to change when districts around it were not, we examined the district leader interviews and school focus groups. The following district-level factors contributed to secondary school change.

*Leadership of the central Steering Committee.* Although the Steering Committee (a representational group made up of senior administrators, union officials, a school administrator, and district support staff) did many things, a few leadership for change functions stood out. The first was the articulation and maintenance of a vision of the initiative as a site-based, program-driven, teacher-led reform of secondary schools. Committee members described a framework for change. Supervisory officers said, "We only had broad parameters in our minds as to what that would be ... our visioning was about the visioning of change [rather than] the vision of what a structure would look like at a school" (SO1).<sup>3</sup> Central leaders avoided providing specific models, despite strong pressure from some teachers to do so, because they believed "a template would have been counterproductive" (SO2). The committee articulated a rationale for restructuring department heads ("the job really had changed, the job wasn't counting test tubes and typewriters, etc.... it really was a job that was based on people" (union2), defended site-based change, and promoted teacher leadership.

Providing resources, particularly to help teachers enact the vision in their own schools, was the second contribution. Teachers found it helpful to "hear what was happening in other schools and receive guidance and assistance" (SRC-J). All Steering Committee members visited schools to support local planning.



Third, the Steering Committee provided encouragement and recognition. For example, the co-chairs of school restructuring committees received awards from the district's Staff Recognition Program, symbolizing the approval of their peers and trustees. A union officer emphasized the importance of giving "people a pat on the back that they're on planning committees, to point out that we recognize this is not an easy task" (union2), a theme also prominent in reports from administrators and support staff.

The fourth key function was adapting standard operating procedures, especially modifying the collective agreement. In a time of shrinking budgets trustees guaranteed unreduced funding for positions of responsibility and gave schools control of the funds. School restructuring committees believed this was crucial to their credibility. "It helped us in this school in terms of [those] people saying that there was a hidden agenda and that they were trying to save money. If we had not had that money we would have been dead" (SRC-A). Site-based decision-making created conflicts that the Steering Committee resolved on a case-by-case basis. An administrator reported that the Steering Committee also created guidelines by "sit[ting] down with [co-chairs of school restructuring committees] in a very democratic and open forum and set[ting] some basic ground rules for how those funds were to be used, monitored, and accounted for" (SO2).

The Committee monitored progress by devising tasks that enabled schools to reflect on their progress, created summaries facilitating data interpretation, and developed with school representatives rubrics for assessing school plans. Support staff regarded "that kind of self-monitoring [as] ... the quintessential assessment routine" (staff1). All Steering Committee members, particularly union officials, visited schools to talk through problems ("we've had to put out a lot of brush fires" [staff2]). For example, department heads experiencing an erosion of titles and allowances or the phasing out of their positions needed to be heard. Steering Committee members also spent time promoting a culture of inquiry in which thoughtful data-collection informed site-based decision-making. Although support staff wondered whether reculturing could be done by outsiders ("it would be arrogant to suggest that we would be involved in much that is overtly changing culture" [staff1]) they felt that the Steering Committee could lead by example in its own procedures.

*District history.* History contributed to initiation and continuance. First, previous experience brought administration, trustees, and union leaders together. They suspended their doubts about the motives of others because trust had been established. The previous CEO initiated a productive relationship by working with union leaders to eliminate a backlog of grievances, finding face-saving compromises. As the current CEO continued the practice of resolving disagreements with a minimum of rancor, informal procedures began to replace legalistic moves. One senior administrator described the process this way:

We started to do little things like going down to the [union] offices to negotiate ... There are always ... stories of hardship ... in dealing through a lot of those, the [union], the leadership of it, began to realize that indeed we did have a heart. And there were some real success stories, that is, placing teachers that had to be laid off and working hard to make sure that they got back into positions,

working with long-term disability teachers to see what their problems were and how we could help them. So that evolved over several years. (SO2)

Resolving these issues enabled teachers and administrators to minimize disruptions ensuing from government edicts. One policy (The Transition Years initiatives) could have been used to eliminate department-based positions of responsibility, but the Board did not do so. Another policy (the social contract) made it possible for the district to wrest concessions from its employees, but both sides agreed to mute the policy's impact on the work lives of teachers. This decision had a lasting impact on the trust among partners. The spirit of compromise begun 10 years earlier enabled the union and administration to develop agreements outside the collective bargaining process, bringing issues (e.g., staffing for adult education) to the formal table only after understandings had been reached.

The district also had a history of site-based management. For example, the director of education involved principals in resource allocation.

E[ducational] A[ssistant]s are deployed on a site-based level, whereas they used to be deployed by the most senior of administration. The chief superintendent used to guard it all and would meter them out according to ... who is the loudest ... who's the favorite son today ... We've moved away from that totally ... There's the dollars. Now you sit down with your colleagues, led by the superintendent of schools ... You work out the protocol and how you are going to handle it. (CEO)

The district had a history of defining policy parameters in which schools developed local variants on homework policies, codes of behavior, and student assessment. According to one supervisory officer, "We provided a guideline and they put the meat on it based on their school-community's context" (SO2).

The second historical factor was the collective memory of bad times. One year the district accounted for one third of all secondary teacher grievances in the province. A union official observed, "There were enough teachers around who remember the days 10, 15 years ago when there was a tremendous amount of conflict ... we had a couple of strike votes" (union3). Both sides recalled distasteful events from this period and worked hard to prevent such a climate from returning.

Memories of top-down failures ("we laid down a universal plan and it was just a disaster" [union1]) encouraged solutions that involved each school finding its own path. Recalling the past also contributed to decentralized teacher leadership. An earlier attempt by district union leaders to distribute resources led to accusations of self-interest. In addition, attempts to tinker with departments had not worked. From a senior administrator's perspective, "Whenever changes did take place it was kind of 'change the name but nothing really fundamental' changes" (SO1). A district support staff member observed that "most teachers who are dynamic in doing something creative with their classes ... have come up against the organizational structure of schools a number of times and been frustrated by it" (staff2).

Although memories of the past supported project initiation, history was sometimes an obstacle, particularly when teachers recalled government initiatives that disappeared after many fanfares. A district consultant noted, "Those who had the longest tenure ... and had seen the secondary system buffeted by

[failed initiatives]; I think there was a degree of cynicism on their part that this too shall pass" (staff2). Some recalled situations in which teachers were given decision-making authority that was subsequently taken away. But shared history was more a positive than a negative factor in creating the conditions for the project.

*The key role of personalities.* The ability of administrators, union leaders, and trustees to work together was critical.

The CEO proposed the project during contract negotiations and enlisted the support of trustees and supervisory officers. Teacher leaders were struck by the willingness of senior administrators to rewrite policy.

Most certainly this wouldn't work without the support of the two top [supervisory officers]. The money wouldn't flow, the priority for the time and the PD wouldn't be there and the fact that they've ... got the trustees on side. It was probably for them a bigger step than it was for us because they gave up control ... Had it been a real disaster the teachers would have walked away, hurt and damaged, but it would have caused more damage to the two [supervisory officers] with the trustees. (union1)

Senior administrators said they could be flexible because trustees allowed them to be.

They didn't meddle in the day-to-day mechanics of this restructuring. They trusted the employee group and the senior administration would work cooperatively and things would flow out nicely ... when they saw the process unfolding they were very complimentary, very supportive, and continue to be. (SO2)

Union leaders felt their support was essential because "if this process ever loses the support of the executive of this district it will die" (union2). A key factor was the continuance of particular individuals in key roles "that allows for just the opportunities to work together and to have some success and to build the trust and resolve the problems" (union3).

Local union leaders took risks. Most respondents believed that provincial union officials were opposed to the project. The regional union representative "said clearly to us that he didn't agree" (union1) with the district leadership's stand. Provincial union leaders were concerned about the difficulty of writing contract language for such a complex and dynamic innovation. For example, they were concerned about "two people at different schools doing exactly the same job and receiving different pay ... that could ... discourage transfers" (union2). Provincial leaders worried that "it's decentralized bargaining with people that really have not been trained to bargain ... the federation has lost the power to regulate that change" (union2). District officers were also criticized by other union affiliates, as indicated by a principal who reported that "there would be many districts in the province that would like to shoot us if they could." Opposition from provincial officials focused on bread-and-butter issues like the threat to department head entitlements. They also feared that cross-departmental structures might reduce the solidarity of like-minded teachers united by disciplinary identity.

Pressure from provincial union officials was mitigated by other factors. The district local had a history of successful independence. For example, they participated in a teacher evaluation policy that deviated from provincial union

ideals. This policy was viewed as a success, encouraging local leaders to continue on their own path. Provincial union officers respected local leaders and never publicly disagreed with their positions.

Union leaders were also pressured by teachers who lost money or status. A principal reported, "There is some feeling among current department heads ... that the federation is selling them out; they should be protecting their positions as opposed to encouraging change." Pressure from teachers was assuaged when union leaders visited schools to respond to concerns.

Although district union leaders continued to follow conventional union practices, they added a commitment to change that was not previously part of their role. They helped develop a collective agreement that encouraged between-school variation, puzzled over strategies to help slowly moving staffs accelerate their pace, and celebrated when school teams broke new ground. A new conception of teacher unionism was emerging in the district. Relationships among union leaders, administrators, and trustees were less confrontational, and employers and employees were making a common cause for education in the community, for example, resisting together plans to amalgamate school districts. In dealing with individual grievances and teacher policy breaches the union was motivated by a concern for the teaching profession as well as with its obligation to defend individual teacher rights.

There were some counterindications. Union leaders did not include curriculum items in collective bargaining, believing they should be determined at a provincial level. In addition, union leaders felt they "must support even the individual member who you might want to shoot, who has done something really unprofessional" (union3). Teachers at risk of discipline received full support to ensure due process, although that "doesn't mean we are going to ... come up with an OJ [Simpson] defense" (union2). District officials saw their affiliate as an industrial union fighting for its members, even as they were experimenting with new images of how they could serve a broader array of stakeholders. As one put it,

You have an obligation to represent your members when it comes to the crasser things such as salaries, and benefits, and working conditions, and a number of other things. That because you have this good working relationship, perhaps even on a personal level, does not mean that you should somehow soften your principles on other issues, and in fact if you do so, it's a disservice to your members. (union2)

*Institutional self-consciousness.* The shared history and union-administrator partnerships combined in an image of their district as unlike others. This view gave teachers (first quotation below) and administrators (second quotation), a shared identity.

The more we went out and ... discovered there were other areas where things were happening ... most often boards were saying We've got to cut the budget by 50% ... we are going to reduce from 18 positions to 8 ... and no surprise to anybody, there was outrage all around. (union3)

There are other [districts] in the province struggling with this ... some [districts] who possibly have not garnered the trust that they need with their unions

because they have moved quickly to make it a win-lose, so that they win and the [unions] lose, and whenever that happens you'll find them pushing back. (CEO)

Project participants shared a sense that education was under siege and that they were providing a model for other districts.

### *Discussion*

The survey results in Figure 1 and the qualitative evidence (Hannay & Ross, 1997) indicate significant changes occurred in school culture and processes. However, we collected no student outcome data for this portion of the study (we are doing so now), so we cannot claim that the reform has led, at this time, to improvements in the depth and breadth of student achievement. What we can claim, and substantiate, is that a first step—measurable changes in teachers' attitudes to their organizational roles—has occurred.

In this study we found that a combination of factors enabled this district to be a beacon of secondary school reform. Some of the factors contributing to this district's ability to implement secondary school reform (e.g., the specific strategies undertaken by the Steering Committee) could be transplanted to other jurisdictions. Other factors (e.g., the district's history of union-management cooperation and the willingness of individuals to take professional risks) need to be found or developed at the site or replaced with alternate forces of similar impact. Our data suggest one set combination of factors contributing to district support for secondary school reform. We are certain other models are possible.

Our results confirmed findings from previous studies, particularly the contribution of superintendent leadership and a shared history supportive of change. Nevertheless, our results differed in three ways.

First, leadership in these schools was more broadly distributed than in other studies. The CEO worked through supervisory officers (three assistant superintendents); union officials were full partners in setting project directions; key decisions were made in schools by restructuring committees dominated by teachers and by teachers appointed to new leadership roles. Ample redundancy was created—each leadership function was fulfilled by more than one agent. In addition some of the leadership tasks (e.g., monitoring the effects of the project and providing inservice on change processes) were shared with outsiders (university researchers).

Second, previous researchers have argued that teachers' unions are more likely to contribute to change when a professional model is adopted. In this conception of unionism the union defends the profession rather than individual teachers (Kerchner & Kaufman, 1995). In our study union officials provided leadership for change from within an industrial union model. Images of a new unionism had begun to emerge: Union officials adapted the collective agreement to allow for flexibility among schools, thereby challenging the subject department structure of the conventional high school. However, union leaders were punctilious about staying on their side of the table. Industrialism and professionalism represent ends of a continuum with many gradations. Our findings suggest that a mid-point on the scale may be more conducive to change than the ideal types at either pole. Rigid industrialism is unlikely to foster the collaborative labor relations associated with reform (Bascia, in press),

and it is difficult for unions to maintain a professional stance over an extended time (Kerchner, 1996). Another possibility is that multiple models of unionism may exist at the same site, with union leaders shifting among them in response to specific issues.

Third, we found that a strong and continuous central presence was required to support a decentralized change model. Subject departments persist because they meet an array of administrative and teacher needs and are supported by vibrant subcultures. Without vigorous intervention by central agents, it is likely that local reformers would have been worn down like the reformers in the high schools studied by Isaacson and Wilson (1996). A central presence was also important in giving control to teachers. Although site-based decision-making has been motivated by a desire for stronger teacher leadership (Ogawa, 1994), it may have the effect of consolidating principal control (Taylor & Tashakkori, 1997). We found that principals were given virtually no official role in the determination of local changes, in contrast to other studies that found that interaction between superintendent and principal was crucial to success (Rosenholtz, 1989). By bypassing the principal the district was able to engage teachers in an exploration of alternate ways of conceptualizing secondary school education, thereby building the capacity to change in all secondary schools. As the project unfolded we became aware that differences among schools were related to what individual principals did to support, ignore, or thwart the exercise of teacher leadership in their school (Hannay & Ross, 1997). Innovations tend to come in pairs, alternating as the deficiencies of one side of the pair become known (Morris, 1997). It would not be surprising if there were a swing toward greater principal control of site-based events. Our observations to date suggest that the district—its agents and history—will play a key role in determining how teachers and principals share power.

Our continuing case study demonstrates that secondary school reform occurs in districts populated by purposeful individuals imbued with the memory of past events. These conditions provided the foundation that enabled schools to develop structures and ways of operating that cut across subject departments. In January 1998 the Ontario government merged this district with an adjacent board of similar size, a district with a different array of administrators, trustees, union officials, and a distinct history of response to change opportunities. Although the districts opposed the merger, their CEOs and trustees moved swiftly to integrate their cultures. Our longitudinal study is now focusing on the impact of the merger on the 16 secondary schools of the consolidated district. Although the context in which they work will be far more complex and conflicted, we anticipate that district-level factors will continue to exert a powerful influence on how these schools respond to calls for reform

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#### *Notes*

1. Before the initiation of secondary school renewal, the district exercised fairly tight control over schools. Key decisions about staffing, resource allocation, and curriculum were made

- centrally by supervisory officers following prescriptive formulae. However, it will be argued in the district history section of the Results that the district had been moving toward a site-based approach for some time.
2. The site-based reform or devolution movement has been associated in the United States, United Kingdom, and New Zealand with the neoconservative agenda for schools. Proponents argue that giving schools control of their resources will make them more accountable. If parents are able to choose which school their children will attend, effective schools will strengthen and inept schools will wither away. Recent reviews (Whitty, 1997) suggest there is little evidence to support this claim. We found no evidence to suggest that the site-based reforms in this district were motivated by the neoconservative agenda.
  3. Quotations from Steering Committee members are identified by role (i.e., CEO, SO [supervisory officer], union, principal, staff [district support staff]). If more than one individual in the role was interviewed, they are designated as SO1, SO2, and so forth. Members of School Restructuring Committee focus groups are identified by school (e.g., SRC-A for school A). Teachers appointed to new positions of responsibility are identified by role and school (e.g., POR-A1).

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