

MEASURING SCHOOL DISTRICTS' IMPACT ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT:

A Survey Development Project

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Executive Summary

Since the 1950's, the federal government has played a role in improving education through increasing student performance, or "raising the bar", and minimizing inequity in performance between different groups, or "narrowing the gap". The federal government's efforts began with the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* case, and culminated with the most recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in its current form, No Child Left Behind.

No Child Left Behind, or NCLB, has once again drawn the nation's attention to increasing student achievement and minimizing the discrepancy between high- and low-performing groups of students. With the increased accountability brought on by NCLB, it has become vital for educators to recognize the important role played by all members of the educational community.

Until recently, the role of the school district has been underrepresented in research and studies on the subject of increased student achievement for all. A few recent authors have emerged that have begun to study the role of the school district, and how the district impacts student achievement. Recently, Rorrer, Skrla, and Scheurich have compiled the works of these researchers, and have developed a framework presenting four key roles that the district plays in improving achievement and advancing equity. These four roles are ***Providing Instructional Leadership, Reorienting the Organization, Establishing Policy Coherence, and Maintaining an Equity Focus.***

Using the framework created by Rorrer et. al., and drawing upon the research of previous researchers, I have developed a survey instrument that will measure how well districts are fulfilling the four roles outlined in the Rorrer article. The survey was developed by creating

questions from concepts covered in both the Rorrer et. al. article and the literature used to support the framework. I have also developed a matrix that shows how the foundation literature supports the framework, and what questions were derived from these sources. This survey could be used to help districts conduct self-audits to determine what they may focus on to improve their support for increased student achievement and equitable educational access and outcomes.

The survey has already been tested for content validity by a panel of experts that are familiar with the framework. Further field testing should be done at a later time to further ensure reliability and construct validity. This survey should be field tested with building administrators.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of my study is to provide a tool that can be used to assess how school districts are fulfilling the four major roles of *establishing policy coherence, reorienting the organization, maintaining an equity focus, and providing instructional leadership*. These four roles are established as vital by Andrea Rorrer, Linda Skrla, and James Scheurich in their 2004 article *School Districts' Roles as Institutional Actors in Improving Achievement and Advancing Equity*. The article by Rorrer, Skrla, and Scheurich provides an extensive compilation of ideas taken from existing literature on the subject.

This tool is a survey instrument that could be used to assess a school district's ability to fulfill these roles by asking questions that measure the concepts outlined in the Rorrer article. Schools and school districts could use such a tool to assess the degree to which districts are supporting their schools in their attempts to increase student achievement in the most effective ways possible.

This study and the accompanying survey would be used primarily by district and school level administrators, as well as lead teachers in schools within the district. These administrators and teachers are targeted because they have the best knowledge of both district leadership and policy, as well as an intimate knowledge of how that leadership affects schools and student performance.

This tool could be used as one type of "district audit". It could be administered to both building and district level administrators, as well as lead teachers in district schools who would take the survey in the prescribed manner. The results could then be analyzed to determine in which areas the district is performing at high levels, and what areas still require additional attention.

This tool would not only be unique by using research that covers a topic that, as I will explain later, has largely been ignored, but it would also be an effective way to turn away from case study, superstitious learning, and misattribution of cause and effect. In our current educational climate, with a renewed emphasis on increasing student achievement, such a tool could help turn attention to the influence districts can have on schools and teachers, helping the educational system to more fully take advantage of this often neglected, yet vital piece of the educational puzzle.

Background

“The No Child Left Behind Act is the most far-reaching attempt by the federal government to alter American public education in the last thirty years” (Beaver, 2004, p.15). While NCLB is seen by many as far reaching, and to some as even intrusive, the ideas behind educational accountability are neither new nor transient. NCLB is not the first time the federal government has pushed to make educational professionals and schools more responsible for their students and their achievement. The tenets of NCLB, however, have greatly narrowed the focus into two main ideas: raising performance standards on testing to be more competitive with other industrialized countries, and minimizing the disparity in scoring that often occurs with students in different demographics. While these ideas have been clearly enumerated and defined by NCLB, these two ideas, and the federal government’s relationship with them, have a long history.

History

The ideas of raising the bar and narrowing the gap in student educational achievement can be traced back fifty years to the landmark *Brown vs. Board of Education* case of 1954. In his article “Anniversaries: Once More Once,” author Denis Doyle reflects on the case and comments

“as a statement of high moral purpose and resolve, the NCLB act is the logical sequel to the Brown Case” (Doyle, 2004, p. 96).

In 1954, the federal government took a major step towards narrowing what they saw as a tremendous gap in educational opportunities for African American and white students. Despite heavy resistance from local school districts and communities, the federal government stepped in to overturn the long-accepted policy of separate but equal. Ten years after the Brown case, the federal government again entered the educational arena, this time with the 1965 passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). This new act picked up where the Brown case left off and continued the federal government’s efforts to narrow the gap and raise the bar.

During this era, President Johnson saw education as an important part of the “War on Poverty”. In her book *Education for Children of the Poor: A Study of the Origins and Implementation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, author Julie Roy Jeffrey points out that the Johnson administration believed that achievement in school was directly related to a student’s future economic status (Jeffrey, 1978). President Johnson believed that by passing the ESEA, steps could be taken towards decreasing the economic gap between minorities and whites by narrowing the performance gap in education.

It is from these beginnings that NCLB got its start, and from this original act that the federal government has moved toward having a greater impact on public education. The original tenants of the ESEA were again brought to national prominence in 1983 with a report from the National Commission on Excellence in Education, called “A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform.”

The report, commissioned by the Reagan administration, discussed “broad recommendations regarding the curriculum, standards and expectations for students, time

devoted to learning, the status of the teaching profession, and leadership and fiscal support of schools” (Goldberg, 1984, p. 85). This report again focused attention on educational accountability and student achievement, this time in the context of a country in the middle of a cold war with the Soviet Union. The competition between these two countries permeated nearly every aspect of life, including education.

With the reauthorization of ESEA scheduled for every seven years, another step toward greater federal governmental involvement was taken in 1994, ten years after the publication of “A Nation at Risk.” This step occurred when ESEA was revisited, and the Department of Education enacted amendments to help advance its reauthorization. The goals of these amendments are described in “The Companion Document: Cross Cutting Guidance for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act,” published by the Department of Education in 1996. “Amendments to the ESEA enacted in 1994 make it easier for states and school districts to use ESEA resources to augment, expand, and support state and local reforms that will help move every child toward high standards and move the nation toward realizing the goals of National Education.” (D.O.E. 1996, p. 6). These amendments passed with little of the fanfare that has accompanied NCLB, although they also focused national attention on student accountability, raising the bar, and narrowing the gap.

As the year 2000 approached, ESEA reauthorization again became an issue. With the act due to expire during the 1999-2000 congressional session, many writers began supporting the reauthorization of this act, and the federal attention to achievement that would accompany it. In his article “Title I: Its Legislative History and Its Promise,” John Jennings writes, “the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, the principal embodiment of the national commitment to help disadvantaged students, expires in the 1999-2000 congressional session.

The basic issue that national leaders must address in their review is whether it is still in the national interest to help ensure a good education for such children. Clearly, the constitutional, social, and other rationales that prompted the creation of Title I of the act and other related programs are still valid. Failing to reaffirm such federal commitment would not be in the best economic, social, and moral interests of the country” (Jennings, 2000, p.518).

How has history affected current educational practice?

In keeping with this sentiment, the Bush administration reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in its current form, No Child Left Behind. Kenneth Dodge commented on this culmination of events in his article “Coming of Age: The Department of Education” for *Phi Delta Kappan* magazine. “The signing of the Leave No Child Behind Act of 2001 by President George W. Bush was a defining moment in the 29-year evolution of the U.S. Department of Education. The act, which reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, implied an obvious move from the department’s initial role as data keeper and dispenser of student-aid funds, to its budding position as predominant education policy maker and reformer” (Dodge, 2002, p.674).

As more and more attention has been directed at achieving equity and improving student performance, many educational professionals have begun to look for direction on how to make these goals a reality. By constructing legislation that provides specific bench marks and expectations, the current incarnation of the ESAE act hopes to direct educators in ways that will enable them to reach 50 years of educational goals (Dodge, 2002).

Current Legislation

While NCLB is definitely an act that was years in the making, it is much more specific than its predecessors. “The statute formalizes the development of national standards, including

content standards, performance standards, and opportunity-to-learn standards. These standards aim to ensure that all students have the opportunity to meet raised performance standards, and present new tools for accountability” (Lewis, 2004, p.179).

Although its requirements are very specific and in some ways intimidating to many educational professionals, the ideas behind NCLB are not new. Indeed, they are a culmination of fifty years of effort by the federal government to bring achievement and equality to education. As stated by Karin Chenoweth in *Black Issues in Higher Education*, “Current education policy might complete the work commenced with *Brown v. Board of Education*. Specifically, the No Child Left Behind Act may possess the ability to eliminate the achievement gap that exists in schools today” (Chenoweth, 2004, p.42).

“NCLB has much that is worthy of praise. It stays the course on standards-based reform and encourages states to adopt ambitious subject matter standards. It is also praiseworthy for the emphasis on all children and particular attention it gives to promoting the learning of groups of students that have lagged behind in the past” (Linn, 2003, p.4). NCLB has four main areas of focus, or as Secretary of Education Rod Paige states, four pillars based upon common sense (US Dept. of Ed., 2003). These pillars are increased accountability for results, practice based on scientifically supported and well researched ideas, expanded parental options, and expanded local control and flexibility. These four pillars support the goals of increasing student achievement, or raising the bar, and minimizing the disparity in performance between different groups, or narrowing the gap (US Dept of Ed., 2003). By ensuring that all students are taught by highly qualified teachers and providing strict consequences for failure, proponents of NCLB believe that all students will eventually be able to perform at basic proficiency levels (NCLB, 2001).

Increasing Standards

While many people, such as Mark Goldberg of the *Education Digest* have chronicled increased concern about new performance standards (Goldberg, 2005), others have recognized the need to improve educational standards. “No reasonable person is against accountability that enhances the quality of education” (Linn, 2003, p. 3). Current NCLB legislation hopes to bring about this enhanced quality of education by requiring schools to show that they are making marked progress in increasing the number of students performing at acceptable levels. Bringing about this increase in performance is often referred to as “raising the bar.” NCLB outlines the steps for raising the bar by building upon past legislation.

“Each state shall demonstrate that the state has adopted challenging academic content standards and challenging student academic achievement standards that will be used by the state” (NCLB, 2001, p. 12). Although states may vary in how they will prove they are addressing this challenge, most states are using the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessment tool to gauge their results, concentrating primarily on reading and mathematics.

Achieving Equity

Raising the bar is a major tenet of NCLB, as is emphasizing educational opportunity and attainment for all students. “The emphasis on achievement for all students and special attention given to groups of students who have had the lowest achievement in the past are especially worthy of praise” (Stecher, 2001, p.17). NCLB identifies student demographic groups that have not achieved at high proficiency levels in the past, and focuses attention on them in an attempt to bring their achievement levels to a more competitive level. The idea of raising performance levels in these groups is known as “narrowing the gap.”

Defining the importance of all subgroups reaching Adequate Yearly Progress, the legislation states “The AYP definition must apply the same high standards of academic achievement to all public elementary and secondary school students in the state; is statistically valid, and reliable, and results in continuous and substantial academic opportunity for all students” (NCLB, 2001). By including all students in its measurements, NCLB makes efforts to ensure that formerly underrepresented subgroups will receive the educational attention that they need to bring their performance scores up to comparable levels.

Who Is Responsible?

While the tenets of NCLB are clearly defined, there are some definite questions as to how much the federal government can really do to bring about these substantial changes in education. There are limits to the power that the federal government has in the field of education. Financially, the federal government provides a small part of the money spent on public education, with a large portion of that federal money being spent specifically at Title I locations. While the effects of federal funding may be felt more dramatically at schools that qualify for these funds, most schools do not rely on a great deal of federal funding in comparison to state funding (Vesely, Crampton, 2004). This greatly limits the financial impact the federal government has on schools as a whole.

Also, politically the federal government has relatively limited authority over education. Centuries of tradition demand that education be run on a local level by local government. This is pointed out by O’Day and Smith: “Because of American traditions of local control, arguments about what schools should teach are generally confined to localities” (O’Day, Smith, 2002, p.252.). While it is true that the federal government can pass legislation such as ESEA, it is

ultimately the states and local governments that wield the power of setting standards and determining resource usage.

While states play a key role, they can only do so much in helping to reach these goals. States are more likely to set standards, provide funding, and let local school boards and superintendencies determine the best ways for their individual districts to go about reforming practice in ways that will meet the requirements of federally imposed legislation. While states most often set funding for weighted pupil units, or WPU, how that money is divided is left largely to the discretion of local districts. This is evident in a study done by Faith Crampton examining the number of bills passed by each state defining how state funds are spent in relation to education. Crampton notes that in 2000, thirty-three states passed ten or fewer bills regarding state education funding, with five states passing no bills at all (Crampton, 2005). On average, states passed only ten bills regarding educational funding in 2000, with most of these bills relating to special education services and employee compensation (Crampton, 2005).

At the most local level, schools are also limited in how they can best meet the requirements of NCLB. While schools are most directly responsible for the success or failure of their students in meeting NCLB standards, schools are bound to live within the limitations placed upon them by their district and state leadership.

Most notable are the financial limitations placed on schools. While schools are given the directive to meet NCLB, they must always work with resources allotted by their states and districts. While states provide the funding for each student (Crampton, 2005), it is primarily the responsibility of each district to determine money provided to schools by student FTE and to create budgets governing how money can be spent, determining everything from textbook funds to building maintenance money. In such tightly governed organizations, money that is available

for improving student performance is also closely monitored. Charles Finn calls these limitations placed on schools “old-fashioned bureaucracy” and states that “schools and the consumers of education are no match for the system” (Finn, 1991 p.3).

Meeting school’s needs in hiring highly qualified teachers is also a matter that is greatly controlled by local districts, which often create hiring pools from which school administrations must select when hiring teachers. Districts also largely determine courses that can be offered by local schools, making schools more or less attractive to applicants in certain fields. And perhaps most importantly, teacher salaries and bonuses are by and large the decision of school districts. By determining salary scales, districts are largely responsible for attracting highly qualified teachers to local schools. Schools must then work with the applicants attracted by and determined qualified by their governing districts. In their book *Better Teachers, Better Schools*, Marci Kanstoroom and Chester Finn emphasize these limitations placed on schools, concluding that only states and districts could get rid of the hoops and hurdles preventing principals from hiring the teachers they need (Kanstoroom, Finn, 1999).

Local school districts are also largely responsible for the quality of professional development opportunities available to local schools. Funding available for professional development, professional support services, and even funds available for continuing education are determined most often by local school boards (Kanstoroom, Finn, 1999). Therefore, opportunities for current teachers to receive the credentials needed to become highly qualified are more likely to be provided by local districts than by local schools. Kanstoroom and Finn examine local schools’ lack of power in determining professional education, and how these programs are almost always regulated by bodies outside of the schools, bodies that tend to focus

on things they called inputs , such as courses taken, requirements met, and time spent in educational activities (Kanstoroom, Finn, 1999).

For all of these previously stated reasons, it is easy to see that local school districts play perhaps the most important role in ensuring that the goals of raising the bar and narrowing the gap outlined by NCLB and other state or federal educational requirements are met. Without the direction of the local districts, schools are not nearly as effective at constructing plans for meeting standards. States, while wielding the power of educational funding, rely on the expertise of district officials to ensure that goals are met. The federal government that has set such mandates is restricted by traditions dictating that education is largely a local affair.

Related Research

While research is available to help guide educators in achieving the two principle goals of NCLB, there is very little research available to help understand the importance of the school district's role in meeting these two goals. In fact, quite often the district's role in student achievement has been ignored. A recent article by Rorrer, Skrla, and Scheurich points out this dearth of research on the role of the school district, stating "Intermittent attention to the district as the unit of study has left a void to date in our understanding of the complexities of districts' ability to contribute to a successful, systemic reform" (Rorrer, Skrla, Scheurich, 2004, p.2).

Perhaps even worse than ignoring the role of school districts, researchers have not only overlooked this role, but have often minimized that role to the point of making it seem inconsequential. "School reform, improvement, and effectiveness research over the past two decades has routinely overlooked, ignored, and even dismissed the potential of school districts to contribute in any substantial way to school improvement" (Rorrer, Skrla, Scheurich, 2004, p.3).

By overlooking or minimizing the role of the district, true reform in education becomes very difficult. With the states and the schools each providing important yet limited roles, it becomes evident that true reform must incorporate all players in the field of education, including district-level administration. Without looking at the district as a key component, a great deal of potential can be overlooked. “This lack of attention to school districts’ potential to enable and enhance reform efforts, including those mandated from the state and federal level and implemented on the individual campus level, leaves unexplored a significant and powerful force” (Rorrer, Skrla, Scheurich 2004, p.4).

Recognizing the District’s Role

In 2004, Rorrer, Skrla, Scheurich compiled a critical review of 20 years of research on the school district’s role as an institutional actor in improving achievement and advancing equity. This review includes several critical works, such as Jacobson’s idea of the superintendent as a community educator (1986), Peterson and his belief in superintendent’s vision and leadership (1999), Firestone’s views on district leaders’ roles in relation to state and national policy (1987), and Cawelti’s belief in equity focused strategic plans (2001).

Rorrer found that while this research into the district’s role did exist, it tended to be too specific in its focus, and that said research “provides insight into discrete functions of the district,” but lacked a clear, overall picture of the district and its impact upon education, stating “a specific, coherent understanding of the role of districts as institutional actors in this efforts has not existed” (Rorrer, Skrla Scheurich, 2004, p.23).

By using ideas presented by previous authors and researchers, these authors created a theoretical framework that highlights four essential roles that districts must play to improve achievement and advance equity. These four roles are: 1) providing instructional leadership, 2)

reorienting the organization, 3) establishing policy coherence, and 4) maintaining an equity focus.

Compilation of School District Research

Rorrer, Skrla, and Scheurich have presented what may be seen as a critical compilation of these previously mentioned works, and many others that will be outlined later. Their compilation addresses the research of these previous authors, assembles their main points of focus, and establishes a picture of local school districts playing the role of a critical actor in educational institutions. As actors in these institutions, the school district plays a vital part in allowing the institution to grow and change. Scott (2000) identifies the institutional nature of a school district, and the roles of actors within that institution, as “pivotal to understanding how we conceive intentionality, influence, and coherence through leadership for instruction, organization, policy, and equity (Rorrer, Skrla, Scheurich 2004, p.7).”

As previously mentioned, Rorrer incorporates the work of these other scholars to define the district’s role as an institutional actor. Working within the educational institution, Rorrer states that the district is responsible for providing four key roles. District leadership, starting with the Superintendent, is responsible for providing the district with *policy coherence*. The district must also convey *instructional leadership*. The district must also fill the critical role of *reorienting the organization*. The district should also be responsible for *maintaining an equity focus* within the organization. By occupying a critical leadership role, the district is in a position to ensure that these roles are fulfilled in a way that the schools, states, and federal governments never could. By successfully fulfilling these roles, a school district can more effectively ensure that the goals of raising the bar and narrowing the gap can be met.

The ideas presented in the foundation literature are very effectively summarized and synthesized in the Rorrer paper. Rather than review all of the separate works covered in the Rorrer article, I have created a series of tables that show the alignment between concepts examined in the foundation literature, the elements of the conceptual framework, and the questions developed for the survey. These tables can be used by the reader to provide validation for both the conceptual framework developed from the Rorrer article, and the survey that follows later in this paper. These tables can be found in the conceptual framework section of this paper.

Conceptual Framework

It is important that all levels of the educational community recognize the critical role school districts play in educational reform and improvement. The research done by Rorrer, Skrla, and Scheurich presents a framework for evaluating the actions school districts are taking to foster school improvement and reform, particularly in the areas of increasing student achievement and ensuring equity in education. Concentrating on the four previously identified areas of *providing instructional leadership, reorienting the organization, establishing policy coherence, and maintaining an equity focus* creates a framework of study in which a district's impact can be identified. Rorrer identifies important subgroups to these four areas that help to more clearly define them. By using these four areas and their accompanying subgroups, a complete framework emerges.

The first area incorporated in this framework is *providing instructional leadership*. According to Rorrer, a district that effectively provides instructional leadership accomplishes two critical things: *generating will* and *building capacity*. *Generating will* is the ability of a district to focus on a decision that is best for student achievement, build support for that decision,

and stand strong in that decision despite contrary external influences. *Generating will* also includes educating the community and school board about decisions, and generating support for those decisions by showing they are decisions the community *should* want. The concept of *generating will* is supported by the works of Cuban, Firestone, McLaughlin, and others listed in Table I.

Building capacity supports and defines the area of *instructional leadership* by showing that if a district is to truly support a reform to improve student achievement, they must also have the ability to implement such reform. The Rorrer article identifies the three vital parts of *building capacity* as having the ability to mobilize personnel, maintaining functions related to change, and making district and school relationships. By doing these things in support of a given reform or decision, a district exercises its instructional leadership not only by providing the means to achieve reform, but also by showing its commitment and dedication to the reform by awarding it much needed attention and emphasis. Cuban, Elmore, and Spillane and Thompson all provide supporting literature on this topic. Their works and the works of others are all listed in the following table.

Table I – Providing Instructional Leadership

Ties Conceptual Framework	Author	Key Concepts	Questions on Survey (Domain=Dm, Part=Pt., Question=Qu.)
Generating Will	Desimon, Porter, Birman, Garet, Yoon (2002)	District alignment affects professional development opportunities.	Dm. I, Pt. I, Qu. 9

Generating Will	Elmore (2003)	Districts must provide knowledge of good instructional practice; district officials must model effective learning in professional work.	Dm. I, Pt. I, Qu. 9 Dm. I, Pt. I, Qu. 10
Generating Will	Elmore, Burney (1997)	Districts should focus leadership on improvement; districts must provide means and desire to improve; district level professional development improves instruction.	Dm. I, Pt. I, Qu. 1 Dm. I, Pt. I, Qu. 9 Dm. I, Pt. I, Qu. 10
Generating Will	Firestone (1989)	Districts must maintain commitment to a decision; districts will foster and maintain a long range vision of improvement.	Dm. I, Pt. I, Qu. 2 Dm. I, Pt. I, Qu. 3 Dm. I, Pt. I, Qu. 5
Generating Will	Jacobson (1986)	Districts must educate the community as to what effective education is and why they should want it.	Dm. I, Pt. I, Qu. 4
Generating Will	McLaughlin, Talbert (2003)	Districts must support professional learning and instructional improvement.	Dm. I, Pt. I, Qu. 9 Dm. I, Pt. I, Qu. 10
Generating Will	Pajak, Glickman (1989)	Districts must instruct all parties in good practice.	Dm. I, Pt. I, Qu. 9
Generating Will	Spillane, Thompson (1997)	Districts must build strong desire to improve instruction; district decisions should be based on goals of improving instruction.	Dm. I, Pt. I, Qu. 6 Dm. I, Pt. I, Qu. 7

Building Capacity	Cuban (1984)	Districts must provide incentives, sanctions, leadership, and agendas; districts can set mandates on what is to be accomplished in each school.	Dm. I, Pt. II, Qu. 2 Dm. I, Pt. II, Qu. 3 Dm. I, Pt. II, Qu. 5 Dm. I, Pt. II, Qu. 6 Dm. I, Pt. II, Qu. 7
Building Capacity	Elmore (2003)	Incentives to improve should benefit entire educational communities.	Dm. I, Pt. II, Qu. 7
Building Capacity	Elmore, Burney (1997)	Economies of scale favor districts over schools; incentive programs and monitoring assist in improved performance.	Dm. I, Pt. II, Qu. 5 Dm. I, Pt. II, Qu. 6 Dm. I, Pt. II, Qu. 7
Building Capacity	Firestone (1989)	Districts must provide resources needed to implement a decision; district must provide necessary linkages with schools to implement decisions and communicate its vision.	Dm. I, Pt. II, Qu. 1 Dm. I, Pt. II, Qu. 2 Dm. I, Pt. II, Qu. 3
Building Capacity	Marks and Nance	Districts must create and monitor district and school level “contexts of accountability”.	Dm. I, Pt. II, Qu. 6
Building Capacity	Massell (2000)	Districts must utilize capacity building strategies to implement improvements.	Dm. I, Pt. II
Building Capacity	McLaughlin (1992)	District leadership should create a district wide culture and build a shared sense of community; districts should maintain open lines of communication.	Dm. I, Pt. II, Qu. 1 Dm. I, Pt. II, Qu. 2 Dm. I, Pt. II, Qu. 3 Dm. I, Pt. II, Qu. 4

Building Capacity	McLaughlin Talbert (2003)	Districts must establish systems of accountability.	Dm. I, Pt. II, Qu. 6
Building Capacity	Pajak, Glickman (1989)	Districts must engage in strong instructional dialogue.	Dm. I, Pt. II, Qu. 1 Dm. I, Pt. II, Qu. 2
Building Capacity	Spillane, Thompson (1997)	Districts must examine their capacity for change; districts must use all aspects of their capital to increase achievement; continually increase capacity to provide effective instruction.	Dm. I, Pt. II, Qu. 1 Dm. I, Pt. II, Qu. 2 Dm. I, Pt. II, Qu. 3
Building Capacity	Thompson, Sykes, Skrla (2004)	Will for improvement must be generated district wide.	Dm. I, Pt. II, Qu. 1 Dm. I, Pt. II, Qu. 4

The next area identified by Rorrer as a crucial role a district must assume is *reorienting the organization*. For a district to adequately fulfill this role, they must start by refining organizational structure and process. Rorrer points out numerous ways districts can promote student achievement by *refining their structure and process*. This refining process must always ensure that changes in structure will support and make effective the districts goals for improvement.

Rorrer cites a study by George Peterson that identifies personnel hiring, involvement of school board members, sharing decision making and implementing instructional strategies as critical actions a district may take to refine their structure in a way that will support reform. Other things such as alignment, coordination, involving various stakeholders in decisions, and providing need-based professional development are also actions a district must take to *refine*

structure and process. Other works on the subject, such as those of Jacobson, Pitner and Ogawa are listed in the Table II.

The next step in reorienting the district organization is to *change the district culture.* Rorrer emphasizes the need for district leadership to establish a culture that has set values and expectations that support increased student achievement and equity education, and are accepted by district employees. These values are then maintained through a positive relationship developed between districts and individual school sites. These norms and values are expressed through clear, open lines of communication. Effective district leadership is essential in creating and maintaining these lines. Kirp and Driver; Murphy, Hallinger and Peterson; and Pajak and Glickman all have written on this subject, as well as others listed in Table II.

Table II – Reorienting the Organization

Ties Conceptual Framework	Author	Key Concepts	Questions on Survey (Domain=Dm, Part=Pt., Question=Qu.)
Refining Organizational Structure and Processes	Cuban (1984)	Achievement goals are to be established district wide through superintendents and school boards; district must provide monitoring to insure quality instruction; hiring, licensing, and evaluating are critical functions; superintendent must work with board to ensure good instruction exist in schools.	Dm. II, Pt. I, Qu. 1 Dm. II, Pt. I, Qu. 3 Dm. II, Pt. I, Qu. 4 Dm. II, Pt. I, Qu. 5 Dm. II, Pt. I, Qu. 6
Refining Organizational Structure and Processes	Driscoll, Halcoussis, Svorny (2003)	District size effects implementation of decisions; economies of scale help large districts.	Dm. II, Pt. I, Qu. 6
Refining Organizational Structure and Processes	Jacobson (1986)	Districts must educate the community as to what effective education is and why they should want it.	Dm. II, Pt. I, Qu. 1

Refining Organizational Structure and Processes	Kirp, Driver (1995)	Districts must redesign structures to implement decisions;	Dm. II, Pt. I, Qu. 2 Dm. II, Pt. I, Qu. 3
Refining Organizational Structure and Processes	Peterson (1999)	Superintendents must provide district with an instructionally focused vision that permeates the districts mission; hiring practices and procedures should support districts visions and goals.	Dm. II, Pt. I, Qu. 2 Dm. II, Pt. I, Qu. 3 Dm. II, Pt. I, Qu. 4 Dm. II, Pt. I, Qu. 5 Dm. II, Pt. I, Qu. 6
Refining Organizational Structures and Processes	Pitner, Ogawa (1981)	Superintendent must fill the role of the instructional leader of the organization.	Dm. II, Pt. I, Qu. 3
Refining Organizational Structures and Processes	Spillane, Thompson (1997)	Districts should create positions and fill openings with people needed to support their goals.	Dm. II, Pt. I, Qu. 3 Dm. II, Pt. I, Qu. 4 Dm. II, Pt. I, Qu. 5
Changing the District's Culture	Desimone, Porter, Birman, Garet, Yoon (2002)	Stakeholders must have a part in planning for improvements to be successful.	Dm. II, Pt. II, Qu. 1. Dm. II, Pt. II, Qu. 2.
Changing the District's Culture	Elmore (2003)	Districts must strive for continual improvement of practice; districts must set and establish norms of good practice.	Dm. II, Pt. II, Qu. 1 Dm. II, Pt. II, Qu. 2
Changing the District's Culture	Kirp, Driver (1995)	Districts must support ideas from all parts of the district structure.	Dm. II, Pt. II, Qu 1
Changing the Districts Culture	Marks and Nance	District norms and expectations should be established and disseminated.	Dm. II, Pt. II, Qu. 2
Changing the District's Culture	McLaughlin (1992)	District communication must be used to create, communicate, and reinforce district goals; districts must monitor all schools to ensure district goals are met.	Dm. II, Pt. II, Qu. 1 Dm. II, Pt. II, Qu. 5 Dm. II, Pt. II, Qu. 6
Changing the Districts Culture	McLaughlin, Talbert (2003)	Districts must create a shared, coherent focus on teaching and learning.	Dm. II, Pt. II, Qu. 2
Changing the District's Culture	Murphy, Hallinger, Peterson (1985)	Superintendents provide “key links”; ensure school – district coherence.	Dm. II, Pt. II, Qu. 5

Changing the District's Culture	Pajak, Glickman (1989)	Districts strong supervisory support and instructional leadership should support good practice among teachers.	Dm. II, Pt. II, Qu. 5 Dm. II, Pt. II, Qu. 6
Changing the District's Culture	Peterson, Murphy, Hallinger (1987)	District structures must support instruction.	Dm. II, Pt. II, Qu. 3
Changing the District's Culture	Pitner, Ogawa (1981)	Superintendent must work as a mediator and conciliator of district goals in all district capacities.	Dm. II, Pt. II, Qu. 3

The next critical area in constructing this framework is to examine how well the district is *establishing policy coherence*. Two subgroups in this area will also help in the development of this framework. These are *mediating federal, state, and local policy* and *aligning resources*.

Rorrer explains that the idea of *mediating federal, state, and local policy* is a role that a district must take seriously. An ineffective district functions only as an instrument in carrying out state or federal educational policy. An effective school district works to ensure that higher-level policy fits a district's vision, and adapts policy to fit the district's long-range goals. An effective district will also actively oppose legislation and policy that it sees as harmful to the district's established vision. *Mediating policy* is reviewed extensively in the works of Cawelti; Hannaway and Kimball; and Mayo and McIntyre. Again, these works and others are listed in the Table III.

In addition to *mediating federal, state, and local policy*, Rorrer's article points out that the district's role in *aligning resources* is also an important subgroup in *establishing policy coherence*. The aligning of resources around a particular agenda shows a district's willingness to support such an agenda, and also helps to show a district's priorities. If those priorities are an increase in achievement and advancement in equity, an effective district will direct its resources

toward those goals. This supports policy coherence by showing that the district is willing to fund projects that are in line with its visions and goals. *Aligning resources* is written about by Desimone, Porter, Birman, Garet, and Yoon; Price, Ball, and Luks; and Purkey and Smith. The works of these others are listed in Table III.

Table III – Establishing policy Coherence

Ties Conceptual Framework	Author	Key Concepts	Questions on Survey (Domain=Dm, Part=Pt., Question=Qu.)
Mediating Federal, State, and Local Policy	Cawelti (2001)	Districts must develop programs, policies, and strategies that lead to higher learning; districts must align state and local curricula.	Dm. III, Pt. I, Qu. 4 Dm. III, Pt. I, Qu. 5
Mediating Federal, State, and Local Policy	Elmore (1993)	Districts can mobilize support for policy; districts can buffer schools from policies; districts adapt policies from different levels of government.	Dm. III, Pt. I, Qu. 1 Dm. III, Pt. I, Qu. 3 Dm. III, Pt. I, Qu. 4
Mediating Federal, State, and Local Policy	Hannaway, Kimball (1997)	Districts play a role in learning about and participating in reforms; Districts are highly successful at implementing reforms in states that are seen as progressive.	Dm. III, Pt. I, Qu. 1 Dm. III, Pt. I, Qu. 2
Mediating Federal, State, and Local Policy	Mayo, McIntyre (2003)	Districts respond well to high accountability; districts in states that stress high stakes testing provide more instructional leadership, particularly in settings with high rates of poverty.	Dm. III, Pt. I, Qu. 4 Dm. III, Pt. I, Qu. 5
Mediating Federal, State and Local Policy	Murphy, Hallinger, Peterson (1985)	Superintendents maintain key links to schools through principal supervision and evaluation.	Dm. III, Pt. I, Qu. 4
Mediating Federal, State and Local Policy	O’Day, Smith (1991)	Districts must function within state educational systems; superintendents must provide coherence at district, state and national levels.	Dm. III, Pt. I, Qu. 3 Dm. III, Pt. I, Qu. 4

Mediating Federal, State and Local Policy	Spillane (1996)	District policy making effects school and state level policy implementation; districts can increase coherence to signals within the educational system.	Dm. III, Pt. I, Qu. 1 Dm. III, Pt. I, Qu. 5
Aligning Resources	Desimone, Porter, Birman, Garet, Yoon (2002)	Larger districts, particularly districts with high levels of poverty, utilize strategies and economies of scale to align resources, opportunities, and increased abilities around improvement, especially in areas of professional development. Large districts in poverty have additional funding and staffing advantages.	Dm. III, Pt. II, Qu. 3 Dm. III, Pt. II, Qu. 4 Dm. III, Pt. II, Qu. 5 DM. III, Pt. II, Qu. 6
Aligning Resources	Elmore (1993)	Districts can utilize resources to support schools in meeting educational policies.	Dm. III, Pt. II, Qu. 2
Aligning Resources	Murphy, Hallinger, Peterson (1985)	Superintendents should use evaluation opportunities to develop skills needed achieve goals of student achievement	Dm. III, Pt. II, Qu. 5 Dm. III, Pt. II, Qu. 6
Aligning Resources	Price, Ball, Luks (1995).	District administrators have the ability to influence and set particular agendas through the direction and allocation of resources.	Dm. III, Pt. II, Qu. 7 Dm. III, Pt. II, Qu. 8 Dm. III, Pt. II, Qu. 9
Aligning Resources	Purkey, Smith (1985)	Boards of education should blend local, state, and national interest when implementing decisions and staffing; districts exist within nested layers that all impact one another.	Dm. III, Pt. II, Qu. 4 Dm. III, Pt. II, Qu. 5
Aligning Resources	Spillane, Thompson (1997)	Districts with financial advantages are able to hirer greater numbers and higher quality employees that can further their efforts at improvement and reform.	Dm. III, Pt. II. Qu. 3 Dm. III, Pt. II, Qu. 4 Dm. III, Pt. II Qu. 5
Aligning Resources	Wenglinsky (1997)	Decisions districts make regarding allocation of resources increase with the amount of money being spent on that district.	Dm. III, Pt. II, Qu. 1 Dm. III, Pt. II, Qu. 8

The final part of the framework taken from Rorrer’s work is evaluating the district’s role in *maintaining an equity focus*. This part is also broken into two subgroups. These groups are *owning past inequities* and *foregrounding equity*. The ideas of *maintaining and equity focus* are covered extensively by O’Day and Smith; Skrla, Scheurich and Johnson; Rorrer; and Cawelti.

Owning past inequities shows a district’s willingness to recognize mistakes that have occurred in the past. Rorrer explains that districts that are truly interested in *maintaining an equity focus* do not look for excuses to explain away previous ineffectual practices, but instead look for solutions to fix such problems. Effective districts are in tune to the needs of all of their constituents and recognize when they have failed segments of that constituency in the past. Districts that possess this type of vision recognize past problems, and focus on developing solutions that will lead to equity.

Owning past inequities fits hand in hand with the next subgroup to *maintaining an equity focus*, which is *foregrounding equity*. The Rorrer work points out that foregrounding equity is a conscious effort to draw attention to the fact that inequity does exist, and that programs, policies, and strategies will be implemented to bring about a more equitable environment. Foregrounding equity means that a district does not avoid or hide problems of inequity, but clearly recognizes and attacks the problem, leading to solutions.

Table IV – Maintaining an Equity Focus

Ties Conceptual Framework	Author	Key Concepts	Questions on Survey (Domain=Dm, Part=Pt., Question=Qu.)
Owning Past inequities	Cawelti (2001)	Effective districts have highly focused plans and policies based upon equitable education and high levels of achievement for all groups and students.	Dm. IV, Pt. I, Qu. 4

Owning Past Inequities	O'Day, Smith (1991)	Districts must recognize and be responsible for past inequities in education; all children should have access to challenging content; districts must realize that different children may require different educational practices to overcome external factors; districts must provide additional help for students in the greatest need.	Dm. IV, Pt. I, Qu. 1 Dm. IV, Pt. I, Qu. 2 Dm. IV, Pt. I, Qu. 3 Dm. IV, Pt. I, Qu. 4 Dm. IV, Pt. I, Qu. 5 Dm. IV, Pt. I, Qu. 6
Owning Past Inequities	Rorrer (2001)	Districts maintain an ability to change or disrupt district practices and structures that have caused educational inequality to continue.	Dm. I, Pt. II, Qu. 1
Owning Past Inequities	Skrla, Scheurich, Johnson (2000)	Accountability systems play a key role in achievement for all district students; effective districts do not try to explain away problems of past inequities.	Dm. IV, Pt. I, Qu. 1 Dm. IV, Pt. I, Qu. 2 Dm. IV, Pt. I, Qu. 3 Dm. IV, Pt. I, Qu. 5
Foregrounding Equity	Cawelti (2001)	Effective districts have highly focused plans and policies based upon equitable education and high levels of achievement for all groups and students.	Dm. IV, Pt. II, Qu. 1 Dm. IV, Pt. II, Qu. 2
Foregrounding Equity	O'Day, Smith (1991)	Districts must provide professional development opportunities for teachers to aid in overcoming external factors contributing to inequities; districts must provide different education strategies for students with different needs; students in high need may require additional resources; performance based accountability must be present for all students, throughout the educational community.	Dm. IV, Pt. I, Qu. 1 Dm. IV, Pt. I, Qu. 2 Dm. IV, Pt. I, Qu. 3 Dm. IV, Pt. I, Qu. 4
Foregrounding Equity	Rorrer (2001)	These changes can be charted through a progression of stages, starting at the perpetuation of inequity and progressing through the eventual disruption of inequity.	Dm. IV, Pt. II, Qu. 2

Foregrounding Equity	Skrla, Scheurich, Johnson (2000)	Effective districts stress accountability for all students, without excuses.	Dm. IV, Pt. II, Qu. 2 Dm. IV, Pt. II, Qu. 3
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While these four ideas are presented as separate and distinct, there is a great deal of overlapping from one idea to the next. As can be seen in the tables, several of the listed authors have written articles that touch on multiple parts of the framework. These authors present ideas that might be assigned to any number of the concepts covered in the framework. This overlap of ideas has led to several survey questions that occur in different domains that are similar to each other. While these questions may seem repetitive, their similarity is a result of the close relationship between all four parts of the framework.

The four areas identified by Rorrer, *providing instructional leadership, reorienting the organization, establishing policy coherence, and maintaining an equity focus* and their accompanying subgroups very effectively establish a framework for examining how school districts improve achievement and address inequity. My capstone project is based upon this framework established by Rorrer.

Methods

As mentioned previously, for my work I have developed a survey instrument that can be used to measure a school district's leadership capacity by assessing its effectiveness in *establishing policy coherence, reorienting the organization, maintaining an equity focus, and providing instructional leadership*. A survey instrument typically measures concepts that are not always readily observable, such as people's attitudes, perceptions and experiences. This questionnaire has been developed following the instruction given by Borg and Gall in their book,

Educational Research, An Introduction. Careful steps have been taken to avoid wording that might influence answers, and to ensure that each question measures only one concept.

The questionnaire was designed to measure Rorrer's four constructs. In order to measure each construct, questions were created from each of the underlying subgroups, or dimensions of the construct. These questions were developed using the ideas presented in the Rorrer article, as well as from extensive study of the source material listed in the table found in the appendix of this paper.

After a careful reading of the source material, questions were formulated to measure the degree to which districts are achieving the goals of each subgroup. As the Rorrer article provides an excellent compilation of the key ideas presented in the literature, questions were created from concepts in the literature that most closely related to Rorrer's work. These questions were developed from statements taken from both the Rorrer article and from the other source material. How each question relates to both the source material and the conceptual framework can be seen in the matrix.

For example, how well a district *establishes policy coherence* would be measured by questions about how well a district *mediates federal, state, and local policy* and how effectively it *aligns resources*. Sample survey questions were created to measure these two subgroups, like "My district takes a proactive stance in ensuring that federal, state, and local policies support their own educational goals" and "My district provides adequate fiscal resources needed to support their stated goals." The matrix shows that these questions measure the concepts of *mediating federal, state, and local policy* and *aligning resources* and are supported by the works of O'Day and Smith and Wenglinsky respectively.

The final survey is divided into four domains, each one correlating with one of the four constructs. Each of these four domains is broken into at least two parts. Each part is assessed by at least six questions. The survey as a whole consists of four domains, eight parts, and sixty total questions. How each of these questions relates to the conceptual framework and the source material is illustrated in the matrix.

Of these sixty questions, seventeen questions measure domain one, *providing instructional leadership*, with ten questions dealing with the subgroup *generating will* and seven questions addressing the subgroup *building capacity*. Domain two, *reorienting the organization*, is measured by thirteen questions, with seven measuring *refining organizational structure and processes*, and six measuring *changing the district's culture*. Domain three, *establishing policy coherence* is measured by fifteen questions, six for the subgroup *mediating federal, state, and local policy*, and nine measuring *aligning resources*. Fifteen questions measure domain four, *maintaining an equity focus*. Six of these questions measure *owning past inequities*, and nine measure *foregrounding equity*.

Each question solicits a six-point scaled response, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” An even number was chosen to force respondents to strongly consider each question and decide whether they agreed or disagreed. There is no option for a neutral response. A six point scale was chosen over a four point scale because a greater number of responses lead to more discriminating items and greater variability in measurement.

After the completion of the survey, it was given to a panel of experts in the field of education administration. This panel consisted of two elementary principals, one junior high assistant principal, one junior high principal, two high school principals, and two district-level administrators. These administrators were selected from three different school districts.

The panel was asked specifically to address content validity. That is, the panel of experts were asked to assess to what degree the items reflected the content of the conceptual framework.

These administrators, who were made familiar with the framework, reviewed the survey, looked for potential problems, and gave feedback on whether the questions are correctly measuring what they are stated to measure.

The panel originally looked at the framework and the survey individually. I met with each member of the panel, answered questions that they might have regarding the framework or the survey, and asked them to assess each individual question. After meeting with them individually, all but two members of the panel were able to meet together as a panel to discuss the framework, and the questions from the survey. They discussed the merits of each question, and assessed how well the questions measured the parts of the framework they were purported to measure. Notes were kept to record their opinions and suggestions.

Improvements and adjustments have been made according to the recommendations of these administrators. Wording of several questions was altered to ensure clarity. Three items were removed from the survey because the panel felt they did not correctly measure the part or domain. The panel also added two questions. Each member of the panel was then given a copy of the completed survey for their final approval. The completed survey follows.

District Quality Survey

Instructions: Check the box that best represents your views of your school district.

Domain I: Providing Instructional Leadership

Part I: Generating Will: The ability of a school district to not only make a commitment to a decision, but to also educate the entire community as to the type of educational services they <i>should</i> want.						
	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Somewhat Disagree 3	Somewhat Agree 4	Agree 5	Strongly Agree 6
1. My district has clearly defined goals involving student achievement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. My district aggressively pursues goals of student achievement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. My district effectively communicates what its goals of student achievement are to all constituents.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. My district does things to educate the community as to what effective education is.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. My district solicits input from constituents to learn new ways to improve student achievement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. My district utilizes every opportunity to foster a desire amongst the community to improve student achievement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. My district makes all major decisions based upon its goals of student achievement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. When making decisions, my district values its goals of student achievement over other considerations (e.g. political pressures, public opinion, economic concerns, etc.).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. My district has a strong program of professional development centered on effective teaching and instruction.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Instruction-centered professional development programs are required of my district's teachers and administrators.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Part II: Building Capacity: An organization's ability to implement the decisions and commitments it has made.						
	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Somewhat Disagree 3	Somewhat Agree 4	Agree 5	Strongly Agree 6
1. My district consistently communicates a shared vision of how to increase student achievement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. My district has open lines of communication necessary for disseminating its vision of improved student achievement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. My district has methods of communication in place to ensure that ideas regarding student learning are solicited and accepted from all sources.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. The schools in my district all share a common vision of how to increase student achievement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. My district has programs in place to ensure that teachers have the abilities needed to promote increased student achievement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. My district closely monitors its teachers to ensure that they are utilizing practices that promote student achievement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. My district frequently recognizes and honors educators that are reaching goals of improved student achievement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Domain II: Reorienting the Organization

<u>Part I: Refining Organizational Structure and Processes:</u> Changing the organization's structure and processes to fully support the district's goals for improvement.						
	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Somewhat Disagree 3	Somewhat Agree 4	Agree 5	Strongly Agree 6
1. Administrators in my district guide and direct school board members as to what effective instruction is.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Direction given by my district's administrators to school board members always places student achievement goals over other concerns (e.g. managerial or fiscal concerns, etc.).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. District administrators encourage our school board to create employment policies that best support goals of student achievement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. My district administration articulates specific hiring guidelines that will ensure candidates are chosen that will enhance student learning.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. My district's hiring guidelines are clearly communicated to all district schools.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. My district's commitment to improved student achievement is clearly reflected in how my district is structured and organized.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. My district's priorities regarding student achievement are carefully woven into every aspect of the district's plans and decisions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<u>Part II: Changing the District's Culture:</u> The creation of a district wide community that shares norms, expectations and values.						
	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Somewhat Disagree 3	Somewhat Agree 4	Agree 5	Strongly Agree 6
1. My district has created systems of professional dialogue so professionals in all positions can share in the creation of goals.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. My district has established norms, expectations, and values that are shared district wide.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. My district's norms, values, and expectations are apparent in the function of all schools in my district.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. My district's goals of student achievement are clearly communicated to all constituents.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. My district actively monitors every schools progress towards achieving its goals of student achievement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. My district's goals of student achievement are reinforced at all district functions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Domain III: Establishing Policy Coherence

Part I: Mediating Federal, State and Local Policy: Using a district’s political abilities to help guide policy making to ensure a district’s educational goals are supported.						
	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Somewhat Disagree 3	Somewhat Agree 4	Agree 5	Strongly Agree 6
1. My district creates opportunities to educate legislators as to what quality education is.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. My district creates opportunities to educate legislators to how quality education improves student achievement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. My district takes a proactive stance in ensuring federal, state, and local policies support their own educational goals.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. My district actively educates its employees about federal, state, and local educational policies.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. My district offers concrete instruction to schools regarding how to align instruction to meet federal, state, and local educational policies.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. My district administration takes advantage of opportunities to show legislators how district policies are in line with federal, state, and local educational policies.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Part II: Aligning Resources: The conscious actions of a school district to target both fiscal and human resources to achieving district educational goals.						
	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Somewhat Disagree 3	Somewhat Agree 4	Agree 5	Strongly Agree 6
1. My district provides adequate fiscal resources needed to achieve its stated educational goals.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. My district assists its schools in finding additional resources needed to achieve goals of student achievement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. My district ensures that schools have adequate human resources needed to support improved student achievement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. My district acquires personnel necessary to support district decisions and goals regarding student achievement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. My district supports its personnel in ways that ensure they are able to meet their goals of student achievement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. My district has programs that help to develop personnel necessary to accomplishing goals of student achievement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. My district finds ways to provide its employees with the time necessary to accomplish their goals of student achievement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Employees in my district have the resources needed to reach district goals of increased student achievement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. My district marshals the resources of time, materials and staff around agendas that support student achievement goals.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Domain IV: Maintaining an Equity Focus

Part I: Owning Past Inequities: A district's ability to recognize inequity in student performance, and take responsibility for that inequity.						
	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Somewhat Disagree 3	Somewhat Agree 4	Agree 5	Strongly Agree 6
1. My district recognizes the educational inequity that exists between high- and low-achieving students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. My district takes responsibility for inequities in student performance.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. My district does not blame external factors such as parents or legislators for inequities in student achievement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. My district institutes instructional practices that minimize educational inequity between high- and low-achieving students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. My district incorporates practices to minimize external inequities among high- and low-achieving students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. My district realizes that resources must be distributed differently in order to address issues of inequity.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Part II: Foregrounding Equity: Developing programs, policies, and teaching strategies that ensure that all students can learn.						
	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Somewhat Disagree 3	Somewhat Agree 4	Agree 5	Strongly Agree 6
1. My district deliberately increases attention to inequity in higher- and lower-performing students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. My district fosters the belief that through correct educational procedures, all students can learn regardless of external factors.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. My district provides educational procedures needed to overcome possible external factors associated with low student achievement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. My district recruits people uniquely qualified to instruct groups of lower-achieving students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. My district provides opportunities for employees to improve their instruction for groups of lower-achieving students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. My district requires that teachers be instructed in educational practices needed to improve learning for groups of lower-achieving students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. In my district, the most skilled teachers teach the students with the highest needs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. My district uses assessment data to identify a wide array of groups of students that are in need of greater educational attention.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. My district provides specifically designed materials needed to improve the learning of lower-performing students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Recommendations for Next Steps

The previous survey has been tied to the conceptual framework, with special attention being given to ensure content validity. The questions have been created to measure specific ideas presented in the supporting literature. There are however, things that can be done as “next steps”. The questions can be fleshed out further to measure specific district actions, rather than just broad, conceptual ideas. Each domain, part and question can be further assessed by identifying specific indicators that the presence or absence of show how well that part or domain is being accomplished. For example Domain III Part II Question 3 states that “My district ensures that schools have adequate human resources needed to support improved student achievement.” This question could be made more specific, with indicators like “My district sets student teacher ratios at a maximum of 1 to 25.” Each question could yield itself to additional specificity in district’s behaviors that could even better assess the levels of their performance.

In order to assess instrument reliability and validity, this survey should be pilot tested using school administrators, preferably with an N of at least 300. Participants selected to complete the pilot survey instrument should be building administrators. Building administrators are selected because they are the most direct link between the school district and the local schools. Building administrators have direct dealings with district-level administrators, are regularly briefed on policy and procedure changes, and have the greatest opportunity to see how these policies and procedures are being applied in local classrooms. (Classroom teachers will not be included because they have limited direct dealings with district-level administrators or policies.) Anonymity could be guaranteed through the use of a code for respondents, with a closely monitored master code sheet.

Construct validity should be assessed using a factor analysis to confirm that the items appropriately load on the constructs of the conceptual frame work. Reliability (internal consistency) of each construct or variable scale should be tested using Cronbach's Alpha.

Significance

As more and more pressure is applied to schools to increase student performance and improve equity in education, it becomes more and more important for the educational system as a whole to recognize the roles that all actors play in the education of our children. Until recently, the role of the school district as a key actor in this system has been largely ignored.

The emergence of a new body of work, such as the Rorrer article, has helped attract new attention to this subject. It is becoming more important for school districts to have tools available to them to help measure the impact of their efforts. I believe that this questionnaire can help provide local school districts with a tool that they can use to measure this impact. This tool provides districts with the opportunity to perform internal audits of their performance; and can help districts decide where their efforts and resources may need to be directed to best meet their goals of advancing equity and increasing student achievement. Such a tool can only help to further the understanding of the important role a school district can play in raising the bar and narrowing the gap.

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