The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the experiences of principals leading implementation of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in North Carolina. In a dynamic time in school leadership in which initiatives are introduced at a rapid pace, it is critical to support school leaders in navigating the change process. Implementation of CCSS in North Carolina, as well as in a number of states throughout the nation, provides an opportunity to explore the leadership of a change initiative aimed at instructional improvement, with the potential to inform the work of principals moving forward. Their successes and challenges are considered through the lens of a conceptual framework developed based on relevant change research and divided into quadrants including Setting the Stage for Change, Aligning Resources in Support of Change, Monitoring and Evaluating, and Refocusing and Sustaining.

In an effort to gain greater understanding of the challenges of leading change, specifically CCSS implementation, 12 principals were interviewed using a semi-structured protocol, and their experiences were considered in light of an evolving conceptual framework. This framework, accompanied by the voices of principals as they describe the challenges and successes of leading CCSS implementation, are provided in an attempt to better inform school leaders as they move forward with implementation of change initiatives aimed at instructional improvement.
LEADING IN COMMON: PRINCIPAL PERSPECTIVES
ON CCSS IMPLEMENTATION

by

Rhonda Cox Schuhler

A Dissertation Submitted to
The Faculty of The Graduate School at
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Approved by

Committee Chair
This dissertation is dedicated to my daughters

Sarah Kate and Zoe

who inspire me each day to be my best self
This dissertation, written by Rhonda Cox Schuhler, has been accepted by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair ________________________

Committee Members ________________________

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Public education is an arena in which external forces encourage continuous reform to meet changing societal needs. As a result there is a steady stream of innovations introduced to help satisfy these demands within the context of a structure that has historically rewarded uniformity through existing bureaucratic constraints. Consequently, although change initiatives are introduced, they are often either assimilated into existing structures without significantly impacting teaching or learning, or they fall by the wayside in the midst of a prevailing culture that believes that “this too shall pass.”

The challenge of making change initiatives “stick,” leading to a meaningful difference in the teaching and learning process, is uniquely difficult considering the context of public education. The role of school leader in navigating the implementation of a change initiative aimed at instructional improvement is of great interest to me. The introduction of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in North Carolina, as well as across 44 other states, has provided me with an opportunity to explore the role of the principal in leading a change initiative that is focused and intended to impact instructional practice at the classroom level.
Statement of the Problem

In consideration of the change process, there are a number of educational leaders who speak in broad terms to the role of the principal in supporting change. Very little research exists, however, that examines the role of the principal in leading an initiative focused on changing instructional practice in the classroom. The implementation of CCSS, both in North Carolina and in states across the country, provides a unique opportunity to look at implementation of a national instructional improvement initiative within the context of local school districts in North Carolina.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore the role of the principal as leader of an instructional change initiative, that of CCSS implementation. Change theory and accompanying research (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; DuFour & Marzano 2011; Evans, 1996; Fullan, 2001, 2010a; Reeves, 2009, Schlechty, 2009, Marzano et al., 2005) point to the complexity of navigating the change process and the ability of the principal to lead a change initiative such as CCSS, in which the innovation is intended to have a direct impact on classroom instruction. Leadership of this initiative and the challenges that ensue provide an opportunity to examine the change process more closely. In this study, data gathered through in-depth interviews were considered within the context of the established conceptual framework, and results were analyzed to be shared with principals in the field. These results can potentially inform principals of best practices and pitfalls as they move forward with change initiatives focused on instructional improvement.
Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it focuses specifically on the role of the principal in leading a change initiative intended to impact instruction in the classroom. CCSS have been adopted by North Carolina, one of 45 of the states moving forward with these new standards. In a broad sense, this research hopes to inform the reader of the challenges and successes of leading innovation focused on instructional change. Another critical consideration is that this change is perceived as “top-down” in nature, in that the national initiative has been adopted in states such as North Carolina, who have in turn required schools within the state to move to CCSS. Examining the role of schools in supporting implementation of a top-down initiative such as CCSS can help to inform policy makers and educators regarding the successes and challenges of moving this type of work forward.

Research Questions

1. What do principals do to set the stage for implementation of an instructional change initiative such as the new CCSS? In regard to implementation of this new initiative, how has the principal evaluated school readiness and how has this informed the “stage setting” process?

2. What resources and support systems are put in place to support implementation of new standards? How has the principal determined and prioritized resources and support systems based upon the unique needs of his/her staff?
3. How do principals monitor and evaluate progress in implementation of new standards? What processes exist (either formally or informally) that support progress monitoring? As a principal, how do you know that standards are being implemented with fidelity?

4. How do principals refocus and sustain implementation of new standards?

5. What do principals perceive to be the intended (or unintended) successes of implementation of new standards?

6. What do principals perceive to be the challenges of implementation of new standards?

**Limitations**

This study has the following limitations:

1. Research on implementation of CCSS was limited to schools in central North Carolina. As such, although the standards themselves are consistent across 45 states, the circumstances around implementation may vary depending upon the state. It would be difficult to make generalizations regarding results from states with differing approaches to implementation.

2. It is difficult to consider CCSS implementation and the challenges associated with change solely based on these new standards, as a number of changes are taking place at the state and local levels that have the potential to magnify the challenges of new standards implementation.
Delimitations

The delimitations utilized by the researcher in this study developed out of a commitment to gathering perceptual data from principals leading implementation of CCSS at their schools. Because of this, the data that were gathered through the interview process focused on analysis of principal perspectives on this process, without taking a broader look at how their perspectives were either congruent/incongruent with the perspectives of the teachers with whom they lead. Additionally, since this perceptual data has been gathered during the initial implementation phase, actual impact on student outcomes was not considered within the context of this study.

Assumptions

Several assumptions have been made on the part of the researcher in consideration of this study: (a) the selected principals openly and accurately represented their perceptions of the change process; (b) principals who participated in this study had a clear understanding of CCSS and how instruction should begin to look different in the classroom in light of this shift; (c) the data gathered were accurately interpreted within the context of the established conceptual framework.

Organization of the Study

This research study has been delineated into nine distinct chapters. Chapter I provides background on the study, a statement of the problem, purpose and significance of the study, definitions of key terms, the conceptual framework and accompanying explanation, research questions, limitations and delimitations, and assumptions of the study.
Chapter II provides a review of the literature within the context of the emerging conceptual framework. It is organized in this manner, with focus areas of (a) setting the stage for change; (b) aligning resources in support of change; (c) monitoring and evaluating progress; and (d) refocusing and sustaining. Chapter III describes the methodology for the study, including selection of participants, data collection and analysis.

Chapters IV–VII provide an analysis of the findings, including a revised conceptual framework in light of new developments. Chapter VIII summarizes the results of the study and the Final CCSS Implementation Framework. Chapter IX describes the emerging conceptual framework in light of research conducted through this study. Chapter X provides implications and recommendations for future work for principals, central office leaders, and policy makers implementing a change initiative geared towards instructional improvement.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The old adage “the only thing you can count on is change” seems especially apropos in the realm of public education. Schools operate in a constant state of flux. New initiatives, imperatives, and ideas abound, driven by external political and social forces. Schools are expected to be dynamic and responsive to these forces, and the focus of much of the work at the national, state and local levels is in support of changing the way that we do business as an educational system.

And in spite of this, in my role as a district level leader I find that another adage, that of “the more things change, the more things stay the same,” is also very appropriate in characterizing the work of our schools. Despite recurring rhetoric around school change, and external pressure to reform schools to reflect the changing demands of our society, classrooms look very much as they have for the past ten, twenty, forty years. Instruction is still very teacher-driven, students still often sit in rows, classrooms are quiet and orderly, and the list goes on.

So why is this? Change is tough. It is complex and dynamic. It requires individuals to fight human nature, to step outside of their comfort zones, and to consider and employ new ways of doing business. As a result, many change initiatives aimed at impactful improvement end up either failing or being implemented on a superficial level.
“The success rate of planned organizational change initiatives has been dismal. Looking back to the end of the twentieth century, several researchers claim that, of the organizational change efforts studied, more than half do not succeed” (Szabla, 2007, p. 526).

In order for a change initiative intended to have a positive, substantive impact on student achievement to take hold, it is essential that leadership at the school level be prepared to support this work. Leadership must understand the change process and the complex role that the human element plays in either embracing for success or thwarting for failure. A review of the literature demonstrates that every step of the change process (however characterized) requires relationship building and an awareness of and responsiveness to the context in which the change is taking place. Additionally, orchestration of this relationship building and contextual understanding falls squarely on the shoulders of the school principal. As Fullan (2007) described:

The principal is in the middle of the relationship between teachers and external ideas and people. As in most human triangles, there are constant conflicts and dilemmas. How the principal approaches (or avoids) these issues determines to a large extent whether these relationships constitute a Bermuda triangle of innovations. (p. 155)

The powerful role of the principal in nurturing innovation aimed at instructional improvement, coupled with the complexity of navigating the human element in implementing substantive change, is of great interest in informing my work. As a district level leader charged with initiating and supporting change in light of North Carolina’s unprecedented adoption of new standards and accompanying instructional strategies and
practices in every content area for the 2012–13 school year, I am uniquely positioned to explore the complexity of large scale change aimed at instructional improvement within the context of the current reality of our schools. Through my research, I engaged principals in consideration of implementation of these new standards, and the role that they have played in leading this change initiative.

In order to lay a clear foundation to support my work, I have provided background on the national movement towards CCSS and the potential impact of this shift in instructional improvement. I dug more deeply into North Carolina’s push towards CCSS, and the additional emphasis of this state’s work in changing instructional practice. This knowledge provided a context for my research in considering leadership of change.

After providing context for this shift, I explored change research, most specifically as it relates to the field of education. I characterized change based upon its impact, and have developed a working definition of change for the purposes of my research. I explored the challenges associated with change, both in a global sense and as they pertain to the educational setting.

From there, I synthesized a review of the literature into phases that I established based upon common threads within existing research. These included (a) setting the stage for change, (b) aligning resources in support of change, (c) monitoring and evaluating progress, and (d) refocusing and sustaining the work that is taking place around implementation of the change initiative.
In considering my dissertation work, I then explored the implications for school leadership. What does the research tell us that should inform the work of school leaders charged with change implementation? Based upon my review of the research, I considered existing models of change, and have provided a conceptual framework of change as it relates to school leadership that guided my preliminary research.

**Common Core State Standards**

**The Promise of Common Core**

CCSS, developed through a joint effort between the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), is one of a series of efforts to move towards national standards in the United States. This attempt has taken hold, with 45 of 50 states having formally adopted CCSS for the 2012–13 school year. The focus of these standards is to prepare students to be career and college ready. According to the CCSS Initiative (2012a), the standards:

- Are aligned with college and work expectations;
- Are clear, understandable and consistent;
- Include rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills;
- Build upon strengths and lessons of current state standards;
- Are informed by other top performing countries, so that all students are prepared to succeed in our global economy and society; and
- Are evidence-based. (paras. 5–10)

Advocates for CCSS are committed to common metrics and expectations for all students, allowing states to share expertise and resources, and providing for a common set of expectations by which individual states can determine the effectiveness of instructional initiatives aimed at gains in student achievement. As former Governor Jeb Bush and
former New York Schools Chancellor Joel Klein stated in an op-ed for The Wall Street Journal in 2011 (as referenced in Bell & Thatcher, 2012), “We must insist on standards that will prepare our high school graduates for the demanding challenges they will face . . . Recognizing our great need for more rigorous academics, state leaders and educators have come together to create model content standards” (pp. 13–14).

The standards that have been developed are specifically designed for two core content areas: English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics. The emphasis in ELA is in the areas of Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, Language, and Media and Technology. Reading standards are described as “spiraling” in nature, with the expectation that students build upon a foundation of understanding of literacy concepts with increasing complexity. The standards do not dictate specifically which books will be read and when, with the understanding that the classroom teacher will utilize a variety of texts in support of meeting these standards. These texts should include various types of literature and historical documents, both fiction and non-fiction. This emphasis on varied, more complex text is intended to help students develop capacity and stamina for reading. Research has demonstrated that even students who have basic word recognition skills often lack the stamina to continue to read when passages become more difficult or lengthy (Valencia et al., 2010). This can be supported through development of research skills across all content areas, including understanding of maps, charts and graphs, biographies and autobiographies, journals and technical manuals (Gewertz, 2012).

Writing is also a key area of focus in the Common Core ELA standards. Students are expected to make persuasive and logical arguments in writing and to effectively
develop opinion writing even in the early grades. Narrative writing is required, encouraging students to engage in the complexity of establishing sequence and detail that will provide an essential foundation for later writing (Alberti, 2013). Research writing is also emphasized, both small and large scale.

Speaking and listening is also a critical component of literacy in support of 21st century learning. Students are expected to be able engage in formal presentations, as well as informal academic conversations with a variety of audiences. This requires the student to be able to evaluate and synthesize resources, utilize appropriate tools, and gauge speaking and listening to a variety of situations. These skills build in complexity across the K–12 spectrum within the standards. For instance, students at the third grade level are asked to “report on a topic . . . with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking clearly at an understandable pace” (ELA-Literacy SL.3.4; Larmer & Mergendoller, 2013, p. 75).

In the area of Mathematics, CCSS are focused on a balance of mathematical concepts as well as practices. These standards are identified as “Standards for Mathematical Practice” and “Standards for Mathematical Content.” “Standards for Mathematical Practice” are the same across all grade levels, and these describe the “expertise that mathematics educators at all levels should seek to develop in their students” (CCSS Initiative, 2012d, para. 1). These include:

1. Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them.
2. Reason abstractly and quantitatively.
3. Construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others.
4. Model with mathematics.
5. Use appropriate tools strategically.
6. Attend to precision.
7. Look for and make use of structure

The “Standards for Mathematical Content” are broader in scope and focus on what students should know and be able to do. Conceptual understanding and application to new situations is a critical component of these standards. New concepts are introduced and built upon in a strategic way, without asking that students be taught the same concepts year after year. A foundation in a concept is established (e.g., numeracy) and then as new concepts are added, the teacher is expected to build upon previous knowledge of the concept.

The Challenge of Common Core

Since its inception, implementation of Common Core State Standards has faced its share of challenges and has received its share of scrutiny and criticism. First of all, both ELA and Math CCSS require a shift in approach for teachers in several ways. The content is very different from what teachers have historically been asked to teach. ELA standards are perceived to be more rigorous in nature, with some educational advocates deeming the standards at the early grades to be confusing and potentially developmentally inappropriate. For example, Yatvin (2013) described several real-world/classroom scenarios based upon ELA CCSS that could potentially be deemed unbeneficial in developing student literacy. In one such example, students in first grade are asked to use inflections and affixes as a clue to the meaning of an unknown word. In considering the example of “recheck,” leading a class through an examination of the
prefix “re” has the potential to be unfruitful and potentially confusing based upon the students’ developmental and cognitive levels of understanding (p. 43).

In North Carolina, for instance, specific math concepts are being focused on at new grade levels. Much work has been done to prepare students to fill gaps between the old set of standards and the CCSS. For example, the course “Common Core Transition from Algebra I” was developed in the state of North Carolina as a temporary course to fill gaps in preparing students for a move from Algebra I to Honors Geometry. Algebra II standards are currently under debate, as states grapple with whether to make Algebra II a requirement for graduation. The increased rigor of this course, with a greater number of embedded Pre-Calculus concepts, has led to a national discussion on the merits of requirement of this course in preparing students for career and college. Although CCSS does not clearly delineate requirements by course, there are recommendations for Math I, Math II, and Math III (Math III being the traditional Algebra II course). “Mastery of Algebra 2 is widely thought to be a prerequisite for success in college and careers,” says a report issued by the National Center on Education and the Economy, a Washington-based research and advocacy group. “Our research shows that that is not so” (Robelen, 2013, p. 29).

The readiness of teachers for implementation of new standards has also been called into question. CCSS require teachers to instruct in new ways. The standards, with their emphasis on speaking, listening, and writing, use of media and technology, and conceptual understanding, make it difficult for teachers who have a more traditional teaching style (perhaps lecture, for example) to continue instructing in this manner. In
the haste to move forward with CCSS, the work needed to prepare teachers for this shift has been minimal at best. “While we are promoting radical change in creating a coherent national framework for what students should know and the way that they learn, we have not yet committed to offering teachers the deep learning they will need to transform the way they work” (Hirsh, 2012, p. 22).

There is also concern that teachers, especially those without a clear understanding of the new standards and accompanying expectations, will assimilate the changes in minor ways without true implementation. The intent of these new standards is to challenge students in new ways, with a focus on higher level thinking, problem solving, communicating, and making connections. For teachers who have operated in a system in which adoption of new standards is commonplace, it becomes easy for teachers to shift into an “I’m already doing this” mindset and overlook the power of these new standards as a tool for transforming instruction in the classroom. In “The Common Core Ate My Baby and Other Urban Legends,” Shanahan (2013) described Legend 5: Most schools are already teaching new standards. In working with a group of principals and sharing the big changes associated with CCSS, he was surprised when everyone began to laugh.

Why the raucous response? The principals explained to me that officials from their state’s education department had assured them that they were already meeting most of the Common Core requirements and that no big changes were necessary. My guess is that some harried official was trying to motivate them by claiming the changes wouldn’t be that hard. (p. 15)

Implementation of CCSS requires greater degrees of communication vertically (across grade spans) and horizontally (across content areas and specialty areas within a given
grade span). The spiraling nature of the ELA standards establishes an expectation that teachers understand where students have been and where they are headed in terms of text complexity, reading comprehension, writing, etc., so that they can provide appropriately rigorous instruction. Additionally, a focus on text complexity and writing across content areas requires horizontal conversation, as teachers must plan together and collaborate in support of increasing student opportunities to engage with text and writing in appropriate ways. In mathematics, students do not formally revisit the same concepts year after year. Not only are the standards not necessarily taught at the same grade level to which a teacher is accustomed, they must also understand the foundation that students have received in a particular concept in order to build on prior knowledge without re-teaching. This requires communication across grade levels. Additionally, an instructional shift from teaching mathematical practices to mathematical concepts requires teachers to think differently about instructional practice, especially at the secondary level. In order to best support these efforts, communication between math teachers is critical.

Finally, external forces have the potential to complicate implementation of CCSS. There are concerns being voiced that range from “too much, too fast,” to financial efficacy and infrastructure to support, to the idea of unprecedented reach of federal government into the teaching and learning process. These concerns, at the very least, may create distraction from full implementation. There is also the potential that some states may back-pedal and discontinue adoption of CCSS altogether.

As of early June 2013, Pennsylvania and Indiana had halted CCSS implementation, and the state Senate in Michigan has passed a budget that prohibits
funding of CCSS. According to Stancill (2013), North Carolina has also expressed concerns of late, with Lt. Governor Dan Forest posting a four-minute YouTube video titled “My Concerns with Common Core.”

By virtue of his job, Forest serves on the state education board. He said the standards have not been field tested and implementation costs are unknown. He compared Common Core’s adoption to the FDA “rolling out a new drug with no testing and no idea of side effects and then telling the public to ‘Trust us. Everything should be just fine.’” (para. 5)

**Defining Change**

**Definition**

Change theory has a broad research base (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; DuFour, 2011; Evans, 1996; Fullan, 2001, 2010a; Reeves, 2009; Schlechty, 2009; Marzano et al., 2005). The concept of enacting change has implications across all aspects of the human condition. As an individual, my ability to cope with change will impact the personal and professional paths that I take. As a community, we must face change and evolve in order to continue to make advances that will provide us with a collectively higher quality of life. In the business sector, change management can mean the difference between the success and failure of a company. In the public sector, institutions must continue to adapt to changing external forces in spite of bureaucratic structures that have historically rewarded conformity and consistency. Each of these examples illustrates a space in which change research can inform and be informed. As a result, the current body of change research is large and broad in scope.
In addition, there are many facets of educational knowledge that involve some level of change. Consideration of school improvement efforts, teacher leadership, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), school reform, transformational leadership, and collaborative leadership, to name a few, all hinge on some foundation in understanding and navigating change.

In consideration of change as a broad construct, it is defined as “to make or become different” (Change, n.d.). This seems to imply that change, by definition, is transformative in nature. A review of the research indicates that there are varying degrees of change, and the significance of the innovation on the lives of those who experience it firsthand has implications for planning and implementation. There are also competing perceptions of change, both positive and negative.

**Types of Change**

In planning for and establishing processes to support effective change, Fullan (2007) delineated between two key types of change: *innovation-focused* and *capacity-focused*. An *innovation-focused* approach would be initiated in support of implementation of a specific program or initiative. A *capacity-focused* approach would be employed in an effort to change the culture within the organization.

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) conducted a meta-analysis of 69 studies focused on school level leadership and its effects on student achievement (Waters et al., 2005) and from this meta-analysis drew conclusions regarding change and its impact on school improvement efforts. For the purposes of this research, I will use McREL’s characterizations of change as either *first order* change that
is “an extension of the past, within existing paradigms, consistent with prevailing values and norms, and implemented with existing knowledge and skills,” or second order change that is “a break from the past, outside of existing paradigms, conflicted with prevailing values and norms, and requiring new knowledge and skills to implement” (p. 28).

In *Shaking Up the Schoolhouse*, Schlechty (2001) described types of change within the context of education as change projects, change programs, or change adept organizations. Change projects are defined as “specific streams of action designed to address a particular problem or need” (p. 41). These projects are generally short term, stand-alone efforts that do not greatly impact the culture of the school and require little in the way of changing ways of doing business. Change programs are interrelated projects that are intended to have an impact on the culture of the school. These programs can be successful in impacting school culture but must be thoughtfully planned and executed, with capacity and buy-in built and sustained within the school culture. Change-adept organizations are cultures that are responsive and dynamic in nature, with an existing collective understanding of the value of change in continuous innovation and advancement.

**Perceptions of Change**

The concept of change conjures both positive and negative perceptions. Evans (1996) posited that there are two existing perceptions of change, that of the *public ideal* and the *private reality*. According to Evans (1996), the *public ideal* that exists around change is that of growth and renewal. Although the actual definition of change is
neutral—neither positive nor negative in nature—the educational community espouses that change is a positive construct. And the linkage of school improvement and school reform to change, coupled with the accompanying demands for an educational system that reflects the changing face of our society, makes it essential that change be something that we explore.

The *private reality* speaks to our conservative impulse to maintain existing structures and processes. Evans described the “public ideal” of change as growth and renewal, juxtaposing this with the “private reality” of conservative impulse. He illustrates this impulse:

> But most changes are slow, incremental, often barely perceptible; they are rarely rapid, formal or overt—and they are almost never sought. We know that life requires us to adapt, and we sometimes long for a change in our circumstances or in the way others treat us, but for the most part we cling reflexively and tentatively to things as they are. (Evans, 1996, p. 25)

**Call for Change**

The structure that currently exists in American public education was not designed to support divergent thinking, inquiry based learning, and creating understanding in support of just and caring democratic principles. The current system of schooling, at its earliest inception, focused much more on establishing and enforcing societal norms for behavior than on fostering democratic ideals and independent thought. Horace Mann, one of the early champions of the Common Schools Movement, described the dynamic that must exist in introducing controversial political topics in the classroom:
When the teacher, in the course of his lessons or lectures on the fundamental law, arrives at a controverted text, he is either to read it without comment and remark; or, at most, he is only to say that the passage is the subject of disputation, and that the schoolroom is neither the tribunal to adjudicate, nor the forum to discuss it. (as cited in Spring, 2005, p. 81)

As our nation grew and changed, numbers of students accessing public schools also increased rapidly. Out of a compelling need to establish structures to manage the masses, while preparing students to meet the late 19th century world outside of the classroom (a world focused on industry and factory work), the system of public schooling created bureaucratic structures that are still highly recognizable in our current education system. These include:

1. A hierarchy with a superintendent at the top and orders flowing from the top to the bottom of the organization
2. Clearly defined differences in the roles of superintendent, principals, assistant principals, and teachers
3. Graded schools in which student progressively moved from one grade to another
4. A graded course of study for the entire school system to assure uniformity in teaching all grades in the system
5. An emphasis on rational planning, order, regularity, and punctuality. (Spring, 2005, p. 150)

In addition to an emphasis on avoidance of controversial discourse and establishment of bureaucratic principles, the system that exists has done little to embrace the richness of diversity in support of democracy. The melting pot mindset has led to a focus on deculturalization in public schools, in which Native Americans, African Americans, Mexican Americans, and a host of other ethnic groups have been stripped of their
language and an understanding of their culture in exchange for an opportunity to access public education.

The effort to maintain conformity has been evidenced in a number of hallmark challenges over the past century. The special education movement emerged out of the need to classify and segregate students who did not fit the traditional mold of the typical student. Courtroom challenges to textbook content perceived as incendiary or controversial have led to books being pulled from classroom shelves. Issues of student freedom of expression continue to arise, many around use of technology (e.g., texting, Facebook).

As illustrated, we have created a system of public schooling that was not intended to inspire students to think independently, to embrace differences, and to collaborate to solve the problems that face the next generation. This system has never fully supported the school as a center of inquiry or a beacon of social transformation based on democratic principles.

For this reason, we must think in term of transforming our schools instead of reforming them. Schlechty (2009) made a compelling statement:

It is time reformers quit “tinkering toward utopia,” grafting one reform after another onto a tree that is planted in soil deficient of the proper nutrients. It is time to acknowledge that the education of children in America is now rooted in infertile soil and to recognize that if education is to be improved, schools must be transplanted into a more nourishing environment. Schools must be transformed from platforms for instruction to platforms for learning, from bureaucracies bent on control to learning organizations aimed at encouraging disciplined inquiry and creativity. (p. 5)
Change in Support of School Reform

Several types of change have been described, from those in which the change is *first order* in nature, potentially introducing new materials or ideas within the context of the existing structures, to change as being *second order* and requiring the organization to begin to transform the school culture in support of new ways of doing business.

In order for schools to continue to progress, the change work that is most impactful challenges existing paradigms in an attempt to create structures that support increased opportunities for students to receive a high quality education. Change initiatives must focus on efforts to begin to shift away from traditional approaches to schooling, towards opportunities that engage students at high levels.

Challenges of Change

Personal Aversion to Change

Change is difficult, primarily because it involves affecting the habits of individual people. In *The New Meaning of Educational Change* (2007), Fullan began by considering the meaning of change and the corresponding challenges that exist as a result of the emotional power that change has on those that it affects. He illustrated the fact that real, not superficial change is painful, and leads to feelings of loss, anxiety, and struggle (p. 21). Ignoring these feelings in an attempt to forge ahead with a change initiative can have counterproductive results. Fullan (2007) cited Marris (1975) as he considered the negative consequences:

When those who have the power to manipulate changes act as if they have only to explain, and when their explanations are not at once accepted, shrug off opposition as ignorance or prejudice, they express a profound contempt for the
meaning of lives other than their own. For the reformers have already assimilated these changes to their purposes, and worked out a reformulation which makes sense to them, perhaps through months or years of analysis and debate. If they deny others the chance to do the same, they treat them as puppets dangling by the threads of their own conceptions. (p. 166)

This realization informs the larger body of work around change. Change is about people, and a recognition that there is a human element that must be understood and supported is a thread woven throughout change management research.

Douglas Reeves, founder of the Leadership and Learning Center and author of numerous books and articles on leadership and organizational effectiveness, also spoke to the natural human instinct to avoid change. In *Leading Change in Your School: How to Conquer Myths, Build Commitment, and Get Results* (2009), Reeves pointed to the work of Deutschman (2007) to illustrate this challenge:

> We like to think that our conception of our personal identity does not change direction with the wind but rather remains stable over time. The loss of this sense of individuality is threatened by change even, as Deutschman notes, when the change is tremendously positive. Thus change is defeated by anxiety almost every time. In fact, he concludes, the odds against change—even when change is literally a matter of life and death—are a staggering nine to one. (p. 9)

Evans went further, describing the challenge of groups in confronting change. The tendency of established school cultures is to preserve what exists at all costs.

Understanding the organizational culture of the school is a critical component in tackling a change initiative.

Evans (1996) referred to Edgar Schein’s (1985) definition of organizational culture, the deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of
an organization, that operate unconsciously, and that define in a basic “taken-for-granted” fashion an organization’s view of itself and its environment. These assumptions and beliefs are learned responses to a group’s problems of internal integration. They come to be taken for granted because they solve those problems repeatedly and reliably.

In *Presence* (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2004), the consequences of this type of preservation of the past, in reaction to change and innovation, are described. In what is characterized as “reactive learning,” we cling to mental models and processes that are familiar in order to find solace in light of change. As Senge et al. described:

> Our actions are most likely to revert to what is habitual when we are in a state of fear or anxiety. Collective actions are no different. Even as conditions in the world change dramatically, most businesses, governments, schools, and other large organizations, driven by fear, continue to take the same kinds of institutional actions that they always have. (p. 10)

**Complex Nature of Change**

Change is a complex construct. There are essential components of any successful change initiative (as described later in the chapter) that can be identified and implemented, but the dynamic and situational nature of the change initiative within the context of a school or system requires constant monitoring and adjustment. Fullan (2007) described the phenomena of *objective reality* in consideration of change, and its importance in recognizing that change is a multidimensional construct. Although we can delineate aspects of the change process, it is difficult for us to identify this construct in a linear fashion. To believe that there is an objective reality that governs the work of an organization may be naïve and/or dangerous in conceptualizing change.
Superficial Nature of Change Initiatives

As stated in consideration of types of change, there are varying degrees to which change can impact the work of a school. The tendency is that change initiatives, even those intended to transform the culture of the school, often become superficial in nature. Clarity is a critical component of successful implementation. Clarity of purpose may exist, but too often being clear on what it is that teachers must do differently is not. Fullan (2007) described “false clarity” (p. 89) as a means by which well-intentioned reform efforts may fall flat in implementation. False clarity is when an educational initiative is oversimplified to promote ease of understanding, and the intent and power of the initiative itself becomes “watered down” in implementation. As a result, the complexity of a change initiative is oversimplified, leading to surface implementation of something new without truly influencing the beliefs, behaviors, and instructional approaches that were at the heart of the initiative.

Other Challenges of Change

Factors affecting whether an innovation takes hold are numerous, and include the existence and quality of innovations, access to the innovation, advocacy from central administration, teacher advocacy, external change agents, community pressure/support/apathy, new policy and funding, and problem-solving and bureaucratic orientations. From a leadership standpoint, the implementation process and how it is executed can have major implications for the success of the innovation and larger perceptions about the processes by which decisions are made at the school level, and
what these processes say about the mission, vision and goals of the school and how they are operationalized (Fullan, 2007).

The complexity, quality, and practicality of the innovation all have implications for the success or failure of the initiative. In addition, the school’s and district’s commitment to and support of the initiative plays a critical role in its success or failure. Finally, the human element (teachers, principal, community) and their buy-in to the initiative play a significant role in the effectiveness of implementation efforts (Fullan 2007).

Institutionalization or continuation of the innovation is reliant on the commitment of the school and, in some cases, the larger school community. Issues of funding, staff turnover, and shift in focus can easily derail innovations.

**The Change Process**

An extensive review of the literature illuminates the fact that although there are many different moving parts with regard to change implementation, there are also common components of change initiatives that exist across the research base. For the purpose of my work, and as a result of a review and synthesis of change literature, I have delineated these components into four critical areas: (a) setting the stage for change (b) aligning resources in support of change, (c) monitoring and evaluating progress, and (d) refocusing and sustaining change.

**Setting the Stage for Change**

Setting the stage for change involves understanding change, creating a demand through engaging moral purpose in support of a new innovation and through identifying
gaps between the vision of the work of the organization and its existing reality, fostering coherence-making in light of the competing demands for time and focus, and establishing trust relationships that prove necessary in supporting and sustaining innovation. This work on the front end of a change initiative can mean the difference between the success and failure of a change initiative, but elements are often overlooked due to the frenetic pace with which we often must adopt new initiatives.

**Understanding change.** We have considered definitions of change, scope of change, and challenges associated with the change process. As stated, there are a number of descriptions from varying theorists regarding the process of change and each of its components. Regardless of the theorist and the terms in which the change process is described, Fullan (2001) points to several universal considerations for understanding change. These include:

- The goal is not to innovate the most.
- It is not enough to have the best ideas.
- Appreciate the implementation dip.
- Redefine resistance.
- Reculturing is the name of the game.
- Never a checklist, always complexity. (p. 34)

These understandings speak to the complex and responsive nature of the change process. School leaders moving forward with a change initiative must understand, prepare for, and respond to change in a dynamic way in order for this work to be successful.

**Establishing and communicating a vision.** In order for a change initiative to take hold, it is essential that demand be created through establishing a clear vision.
Schlechty (2009) described the importance of a “future orientation” for the work of the school. A future orientation requires school leaders to determine a sense of direction for the work of the school, and then to be able to articulate this vision to others. Schlechty posed two key questions for consideration in charting a course for the school: What business are we currently in, and to what extent do our customers and clients value what we do? If we want to become highly valued by our customers and clients, what business do we need to be in? He emphasized that our tendency as an education system has historically focused on compliance, and in order to break this cycle and truly focus on school transformation, the work of the school must factor in the critical importance of engaging students. This characteristic must be clearly stated in our vision. The development of a shared understanding of the need for change is also evident. Schlechty described the role that the principal must play in determining the readiness of the school culture to support the proposed innovation. If the capacity to support the innovation exists, resources must be in place to successfully move forward with the innovation. If the capacity to support change is not evident, the school leader must work to build this capacity by focusing on the future, including communicating the beliefs that gave rise to the innovation in a way that inspires and motivates others, developing a shared vision with key leaders to support the innovation, assessing the current classroom and school settings to gauge readiness and enact mechanisms that will help build capacity, and creating a consensus around and commitment to the development plans so that buy in can continue to grow.
**Engaging moral purpose.** Fullan argued that *moral purpose and high expectations* must anchor the work of the organization. This must be imbedded in all strategies and actions, and each of the other components should be driven by this moral purpose and high expectations for all. Fullan echoed this call for moral imperative in *Leading in a Culture of Change* (2001), describing the ability of the change leader to not only have a moral purpose, but to convey this in a way that inspires others to join forces moving forward in support of this purpose. Fullan (2001) pointed to an interview of Sir Michael Bichard, Permanent Secretary of England’s Department of Education and Employment (2000), in which he described this phenomenon:

For me, leadership is about creating a sense of purpose and direction. It’s about getting alignment and it’s about inspiring people to achieve . . . [There is a] need to enthuse staff and encourage a belief in the difference their organization is making—whether it is a school or government department. We can do a lot by making heroes of the people who deliver. It’s important to make people feel part of a success story. That’s what they want to be. (p. 19)

**Identifying gaps between vision and current reality.** Once a moral purpose and vision for the work is clear, it is essential that demand be created through identifying the incongruence between the vision and moral direction of the organization and the current reality. Evans (1996) described this process as “unfreezing.” Identifying gaps between vision and reality, *unfreezing* is the concept of helping lessen the anxiety and resistance associated with change. This involves encouraging people to see the need for change without placing blame. This can be accomplished by helping staff to understand how current practice is misaligned with the beliefs of the organization. This approach points to the need for clear vision and direction. The unfreezing process is challenging,
because the school leader must strike a balance between being caring and thoughtful and creating a sense of urgency that will motivate staff without alienating them.

**Fostering coherence-making.** In a time in which schools are inundated with new initiatives and directives, it is essential that the nature of the change and its connection with the work of the organization be clearly articulated and supported. This is an ongoing process, as Fullan, Cuttress, and Kilcher (2009) described:

> Change coherence is a never-ending proposition that involves alignment, connecting the dots, and being clear about how the big picture fits together. Above all, coherence making involves investing in capacity building so that cultures of learning and evaluation, through the proliferation of leadership, can create their own coherence on the ground. (pp. 14–15)

This coherence-making also helps to bridge the newness of change with the work of the past. The ability to connect the old with the new creates a bridge between what is known and safe and what is unknown. As Evans (1996) explained:

> A vital function of an authentic leader’s vision is to do . . . this and, in the process, to provide the psychological safety that permits people to take the risk of trying new competencies. It is best accomplished when the leader’s vision overtly emphasizes continuity, making change more familiar by linking the future to the past and emphasizing existing strengths. (p. 221)

Establishing a *direction and focus* is critical to the successful initiation of a change effort. In education, it is essential that this clarity of focus be aligned to the intended work in improving learning opportunities for all students. Schlechty (2009) emphasized the importance of embedding a focus on students and quality work in order to ensure that the innovation is focusing on the “right things.” He described this imperative:
If leaders accept the premise that the core business of schools should be designing educational activities for students that command attention and commitment, as well as leading and supporting students in the pursuit of such work, then it should be clear that the focus of schools should be on students and their motives. In other words, the business of schools is designing engaging work for students. It should therefore be clear that engaging work is the primary product of schools and that students are the first-line customers of schools. Given clarity on these matters, one of the first results that should be assessed is the ability of school leaders and those who teach to focus attention on creating engaging work for students. (p. 230)

**Establishing trust relationships.** Relationships are essential to the work of any organization. In considering change, the success of a new initiative hinges on whether the members of the team have established trust relationships that individuals have a level of confidence in the school leader’s vision, motivation, and ability to lead the staff in supporting a new innovation. As Bryk and Schneider (2002) described, “only when participants demonstrate their commitment to engage in such work (focused on school improvement) and see others doing the same can a genuine professional community grounded in relational trust emerge. In this respect, principals must take the lead” (p. 139).

In addition, these relationships must exist between and among teachers. Fullan (2010a) described this as collective capacity building.

The power of collective capacity is that it enables ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things—for two reasons. One is that knowledge about effective practice becomes more widely available and accessible on a daily basis. The second reason is more powerful still—working together generates commitment. Moral purpose, when it stares you in the face through students and your peers working together to make lives and society better, is palpable, indeed virtually irresistible. The collective motivational well seems bottomless. The speed of effective change increases exponentially. Collective capacity, quite simply, gets more and deeper things done in shorter periods of time. (p. 72)
In *Leading in a Culture of Change* (2001), Fullan reiterated the role of relationships in support of collective capacity building. The work of schools is not just about people; it’s about the ways in which people interact and form critical relationships. Fullan (2001) referenced *The Soul at Work*, by Lewis and Regine (2000), in which they described complexity science:

This new science, we found in our work, leads to a new theory of business that places people and relationships—how people interact with one another, the kinds of relationships that they form—into dramatic relief. In a linear world, things may exist independently of each other, and when they interact, they do so in simple, predictable ways. In a nonlinear, dynamic world, everything exists only in relationship to everything else, and the interactions among agents in the system lead to complex, unpredictable outcomes. In this world, interactions, or relationships, among its agents are the organizing principle. (pp. 18–19)

**Aligning Resources in Support of Change**

Aligning resources in support of change involves ensuring that teachers are equipped with the proper tools to successfully implement the proposed innovation. This includes providing appropriate professional development that meets the needs of diverse learners, being research-based, and being ongoing in nature. Resources and tools for instruction, whether they are tangible (technology tools, materials) or intangible (time to plan, support from leadership) are also critical to the success of the change initiative. Finally, deliberate structures in support of problem solving and collaboration are a necessity in order for a prevailing culture to evolve that moves the change initiative forward. Teachers must not operate in isolation if the reform initiative is to be pervasive.
Providing Appropriate Professional Development

Professional development for teachers is critical to the success of a new change initiative. In order to impact instruction in the classroom, teachers must be effective in providing quality instruction. According to Sparks in DuFour and Marzano (2011, p. 15):

When you talk about school improvement, you are talking about people improvement. That is the only way to improve schools, unless you mean painting the buildings and fixing the floors. But that’s not the school: it is the shell. The school is people, so when we talk about excellence or improvement or progress, we are really talking about the people who make up the building. (Sparks, 1984, p. 35)

This professional development must not be a “one-size-fits-all” model. Instead of asking that teachers participate in a lecture on new instructional practices, they must engage in opportunities to collaborate with peers, determining a professional development focus that is supportive in meeting the unique needs of the individual school. Areas of priority should center around what to teach, how to teach it, how to meet the needs of individual students, and how to build internal capacity for improvement (DuFour & Marzano, 2011, p. 63).

This work evolves from a mindset in which the principal acts as a “leader of learners,” ensuring that opportunities for continuous training and development are infused into the work of transforming the school. This professional development must focus on enhancement of skills, attitudes and knowledge needed to operationalize new mental models aimed at instructional improvement (Schlechty, 2009, p. 130).
Providing Appropriate Resources and Tools

In order for teachers to be prepared to successfully move forward with change, they must have resources and tools that are appropriate to the expectations of the new innovation. This does not necessarily mean that what they receive is cutting edge. It simply implies that in order to alleviate anxiety around a new initiative, it is critical that the technical expectations of the initiative are met so that the teacher can feel confident that the necessary tools are in place in support of the change so that they can focus on associated practices and behaviors without distraction.

Teachers and administrators have identified specific areas of need in light of CCSS, as illuminated in research conducted by the Association for the Supervision of Curriculum Development (ASCD, 2012). These include guidance and resources to support job-imbedded professional development aimed at understanding new standards and accompanying instructional shifts, as well as professional development aimed at building capacity to engage the larger school community in these efforts. Development of professional learning communities (PLCs) was also identified as necessary in support of new standards, along with the recognition that there is work to be done in creating high functioning PLCs that will require additional targeted staff development. Differentiated professional development based upon the unique needs of teachers at varying levels of understanding of new standards was also an identified area of need.

A shift to new assessments and accompanying technologies was also a source of anxiety for educators. An understanding of the scope and implications of these new assessments will require professional development, as well as a determination as to the
types of new technology that will be necessary and how these resources will be funded and supported, is critical in ensuring successful implementation of new assessments and use of accompanying technology as an instructional tool.

Time was also something identified as a need for educators in support of new standards implementation. Anecdotally, I witnessed this first hand in our first year of district implementation of new standards. The biggest complaints being voiced were that teachers are “overwhelmed” and that they lack sufficient time to collaborate and plan with one another.

Creating Structures to Support Collaboration and Problem Solving

Historically, isolation has existed in the teaching profession. The tendency has been for teachers to view their classroom as their territory, and to perceive intrusion into the world of the classroom with distrust and suspicion. As the teaching profession has increased in complexity, and models have emerged that hold teachers accountable for student results in a transparent way, it has become evident that the need exists to collaborate in pursuit of instructional improvement. The focus of building collective capacity is intended to build teacher knowledge in instructional practice, while increasing student outcomes.

As is evidenced by a long history of isolation in the teaching profession, these types of collaborative opportunities do not develop in a consistent and sustained way without an intentional plan to build and support this work. The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (NCTAF, 2003) reiterated the importance of this focus in improving schools:
Quality teaching requires strong professional learning communities. Collegial exchange, not isolation, must become the norm for teachers. Communities of learning can no longer be considered utopian; they must become the building blocks that establish a new foundation for America’s schools. (p. 17)

The research bears this out as well. Schmoker (1999) pointed to the research of Little (1990), which indicated positive correlations between collegiality and:

- Remarkable gains in achievement
- Higher-quality solutions to problems
- Increased confidence among all community members
- Teachers’ ability to support one another’s strengths and accommodate weaknesses
- The ability to examine and test new ideas, methods and materials
- More systematic assistance to beginning teachers
- An expanded pool of ideas, materials and methods (as cited in Schmoker, 1999, p. 12)

The Professional Learning Communities (PLC) model focuses on creating structures for teacher collaboration in support of student learning. The DuFour model (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004) for PLCs laid the foundation for teacher collaboration as including:

- Shared mission, values, vision and goals
- Collaborative teams
- Collective inquiry
- Action orientation and experimentation
- Continuous improvement
- Results orientation (pp. 2–6)

Each of these foundational components has critical implications. In order for a school to move forward as a learning organization, it is essential that individuals operate based
upon a common sense of purpose and community. If individual teachers work within
their own mission, values, and goals in isolation, it becomes very difficult to create and
support a school culture that collectively embraces democracy, social justice and inquiry.
One teacher’s incongruent actions outside of established norms could potentially create
unrest and distrust in the eyes of students and peers. For example, in a school in which
inquiry may be a focus, but this norm is not expressly developed as the result of
collaboration, one teacher who shuts down dialogue in her classroom would undermine
the greater good of the school in promoting this focus. Taking time to establish collective
norms and expectations helps to ensure that the school operates as more than a collection
of classrooms.

The principal plays a critical role in this work by ensuring that a clear vision is
established and articulated. Ideally, this is established through a PLC process in which
all stakeholders are involved in discussion and deliberation, culminating in the
establishment of a vision in which every team member had a voice, takes ownership, and
can articulate within and outside of the school community (Hall & Hord, 2006).

Collaborative teams are at the heart of PLC work, and these teams must be
intentionally established, along with the creation of a schedule that supports this
collaboration. Teachers may be members of multiple PLCs, which might include content
specific, grade level specific, and other function specific teams. These teams must
engage in establishing their own internal norms based upon the purpose of the team, and
they must create an atmosphere that is safe and that encourages dissent and exchange of
opinion. Venables (2011) described this necessity:
For a PLC to be effective, teachers must have some common vision to improve teaching and learning. They must become a united whole, willing to put personal agendas aside for the good of the group, toward the goal of really improving teaching and learning. This happens by building a team, by validating individual voices within the group, and by each participant seeing the work as greater than—indeed, more important than—individual needs and concerns. (p. 24)

Through this work, teachers can gain first-hand experiences that can then be seamlessly applied to development of opportunities for student collaboration. Helping teachers not only move beyond a culture of isolation, but also to recognize the value in working as a team, will enhance the teacher’s ability to support this type of work in the classroom setting.

Collective inquiry (posing questions) and active orientation and experimentation (exploring solutions) are not only critical components of the work of the PLC—they have dramatic implications in changing the approach to instruction in the classroom. In the PLC model, teachers engage in a cycle of examination of student data, posing questions and strategizing, testing new approaches, and then revisiting results to determine effectiveness. This collaborative problem solving cycle challenges and energizes teachers to think critically and analyze results to draw conclusions. Schlechty (2009) described the potential of empowering teachers:

One of the most exciting aspects of transforming schools into learning organizations is empowering teachers to learn what it might mean if they were challenged to be leaders and designers rather than skilled workers on an assembly line—or clinicians who are expected to administer prescribed lessons to students. (p. 127)
In a school that is focused on providing students with opportunities to participate in authentic inquiry-based learning, teacher experience in this type of work lays a strong foundation for problem solving in instructional practice. Teachers who are given opportunities to explore this type of learning first-hand are much better equipped to support the school as a center of inquiry for students.

The concept of continuous improvement and results orientation implies that we are constantly in a state of learning and growth. This mindset helps to tamp down the culture of mediocrity that tends to develop in schools in which the attitude is our students are performing “good enough.” A focus on continuous improvement enhances learning opportunities for all students, with a focus on ongoing academic growth. The PLC structure, when implemented effectively, has the capability to empower teachers to take initiative for their own professional growth. Hiebert and Stigler (2004) described the impact of this knowledge:

When teachers recognize that knowledge for improvement is something they can generate, rather than something that must be handed to them by so-called experts, they are on a new professional trajectory. They are on the way to building a true profession of teaching, a profession in which members take responsibility for steady and lasting improvement. They are building a new culture of teaching. (p. 15)

This focus on continuous improvement and collaboration in teaching practice also has powerful implications in preparing teachers to support systemic school improvement. Elmore (2000) spoke to this power:

People make these fundamental transitions by having many opportunities to be exposed to the ideas, to argue them into their own normative belief systems, to
practice the behaviors that go with these values, to observe others practicing those behaviors, and, most importantly, to be successful at practicing in the presence of others (that is, to be seen as successful). In the panoply of rewards and sanctions that attach to accountability systems, the most powerful incentives reside in the face-to-face relationships among people in the organization, not in external systems. (p. 31)

**Monitoring and Evaluating Progress**

The reality of implementation of any change initiative is that if it is not monitored and evaluated to determine effectiveness, it will likely fall flat. It is human nature to want to avoid change, and without some accountability measures in place, the change initiative will likely only be embraced by a few. Within the realm of education, the potentially most impactful way to monitor and support effective implementation of an instructional initiative is through instructional coaching and feedback.

**Accountability**

In order to monitor change initiatives to support and monitor their effectiveness, accountability models must exist. Schlechty (2009) emphasized that structures must be created that support results-oriented decision making. He insisted that in order to maintain direction and ensure that an innovation does not end up as a fad or superficial initiative, accountability mechanisms must be in place that monitor progress along the way. Test scores are just one piece of the puzzle. In addition, perceptual data, student products, observations, and other tools must be employed. Structures for continuity are also essential. Too often, Schlechty posits, we allow initiatives to fall by the wayside. Turnover in school leadership is often the culprit. In order to offset this challenge, he emphasizes the importance of building broad-based support, and considering succession
planning. These considerations, when built into a long-range plan, will help to counter the “this too shall pass” culture that often thwarts school reform.

In *All Systems Go: The Change Imperative for Whole System Reform*, Fullan (2010a) described this focus on “intelligent accountability.” He posited that there are six key characteristics of accountability at the heart of any reform effort aimed at instructional improvement. These include:

1. It relies on incentives more than on punishment.
2. It invests in capacity building so that people are able to meet the goals.
3. It invests in collective (peer) responsibility—what is called “internal accountability.”
4. It intervenes initially in a nonjudgmental manner.
5. It embraces transparent data about practice and results.
6. It intervenes more decisively along the way when required. (p. 66)

**Instructional Coaching and Feedback**

Creating an environment in which students are challenged to think critically, to problem solve, and to tackle issues of social justice and democracy in the context of the school setting requires teachers and school leaders to think dramatically differently about their role within the organization. Historically we have buffered teachers from professional guidance aimed at increasing quality teaching and learning, even though logic would dictate that constructive feedback would potentially have a significant positive impact on student outcomes. Schmoker (2006) shared Tony Wagner’s reflection on his teaching career. “I was proficient at everything, it seemed . . . A unique experience? Hardly. Many veteran teachers chose the profession because they wanted
security and autonomy, and so most schools and districts are organized to maintain this status quo” (p. 27).

The evaluation systems that have historically existed for teachers have been very superficial in nature, and have provided teachers with little valuable information to support sustained instructional improvement. “Evaluation seldom changes the ‘prevailing norms of non-interference, privacy, and harmony’ that prevent instructional improvement” (Little et al., 2003, p. 187).

In order to move past this culture of mediocrity, school leaders must act as instructional leaders in support of continuous improvement. Principals must recognize the critical role that they play in creating an environment that challenges each staff member to stretch and grow professionally. This requires a relationship that supports collaborative conversation around instructional improvement. Blasé and Blasé (1998) shared Reitzug’s (1994) taxonomy of empowering principal behavior that includes several key components of effective principal-teacher collaboration:

- Support: Creating a supportive environment for critique of instruction by educators
- Facilitation: Stimulating critique of instruction by educators
- Possibility: Making it possible to give educators voice by publishing and acting on results of critique (p. 12)

Teachers need to be given constructive feedback and opportunities for self-reflection on a regular basis. The principal’s work in creating opportunities for continuous improvement is paramount to the success of a school as a learning organization.
In order for the principal to recognize the role that he/she plays in this work, it is also critical that they have an understanding of the leadership shift that must occur—away from the role of principal as manager and towards leader of leaders in a learning organization. Schlechty (2009) described:

As leaders of leaders, principals must learn how to provide direction as opposed to how to exercise control; they must learn to lead rather than simply manage. They must be clear about their own mental models and able to communicate these images to others in persuasive ways. In a learning organization, the principal would view teachers as leaders and would understand that much that is done by the principal has to do with ensuring that disciplined conversations take place regularly among staff. Especially important are conversations about progress and lack of progress in pursuit of an agreed direction. (p. 129)

In addition to the traditional occasional classroom observation, principals must find more meaningful ways to give feedback to teachers regarding instruction. Classroom walkthroughs are one way to support a more organic approach to feedback based on observation. Regular time spent in classrooms—not just a “snapshot” approach—allows the principal to observe instructional patterns that can be discussed through ongoing dialogue with the teacher around instruction.

The PLC structure can also play a role in the process of progress monitoring. Teams can work to determine artifacts that demonstrate a focus on instructional inputs and student outcomes. These artifacts can become a part of the evaluation process. North Carolina’s Teacher Evaluation Process includes the expectation that artifacts be incorporated into the evaluation process. When this model can be “owned by teacher teams,” and teachers can be evaluated based upon their work with peers in supporting
gains in student achievement, the potential for school improvement is great (Marshall, 2005, p. 732).

As we consider the role that evaluation can play in support of teacher improvement, we must also provide professional development that can help build on areas of concern or need for growth. Teachers must recognize that they are in a profession that requires lifelong learning. Arthur Wise (2004) described professional growth through a cycle of collaboration and feedback:

Professionals do not work alone; they work in teams. Professionals begin their preparation in the university but do not arrive in the workplace ready to practice. They continue their preparation on the job. In medical, legal, and architectural settings, services are provided by experienced and novice professionals working together to accomplish the goal—to heal the patient, win the lawsuit, plan the building. The team delivers the services . . . the novices learn by doing with feedback and correction. (p. 43)

Principals must support these efforts by providing targeted professional development in support of continuous improvement. This professional development should be job-embedded, ongoing, and meaningful to the teacher based upon his/her area of perceived need.

**Refocusing and Sustaining**

In order for an innovation to take root and become part of the work of the school, it is essential that efforts be made to continually refocus and sustain. The ultimate goal is for what Fullan (2007) defined as “institutionalization” of the change. Huberman and Miles (1984) articulated changes that are a part of the fabric of the organization have accomplished the following: (a) the change gets imbedded or built into the structure, (b)
the change has generated a critical mass of teachers and administrators who are skilled at and committed to the effort, and (c) procedures have been established to continue to prepare and support new members of the organization to support this change.

**Responsiveness**

Organizations must be responsive and adaptable in order to support a change effort long term. Implementation will look different from school to school and district to district based upon the unique needs and culture of the organization. Because of this, taking a “one size fits all” approach to change is not recommended. The complexity of the organization requires continuous reflection and responsiveness. As Mintzberg, Ahlstand, and Lampei (1998) concluded:

> Strategy formation is judgmental designing, intuitive reasoning, and emergent learning; it is about transformation as well as perpetuation; it must involve individual cognition and social interaction, cooperation as well as conflict; it has to include analyzing before and programming after as well as negotiating during; and all of this must be in response to what can be a demanding environment. Just try to leave any of this out and watch what happens! (pp. 372–373)

**Tri-level Development of Support**

Ideally, the work of the school is, at the very least, supported by larger efforts at the district, state, and/or national levels. The importance of support outside of the school setting becomes evident in considering not only the ways in which schools are assisted in moving forward with change, but also the struggles that exist when schools are working towards change and are thwarted through counterproductive efforts at the district, state and national levels. Fullan (2010a) described the role of the district in effective change leadership:
In the partnership, the district presses forward; it is responsive to schools; it fosters transparency of results and of practice; it provides good and timely data on how schools are faring; it intervenes in a non-punitive manner in schools that are struggling. (p. 12)

**Emerging Model for Change Leadership**

The Conceptual Framework that has emerged was developed from the research regarding change implementation (see Figure 1). An explanation of the literature illuminates the fact that although varying researchers have differing ideas on the stages and aspects of change, there are common threads that exist. Initially change was considered through the lens of Horsley and Loucks-Horsley’s (1996) “Concerns-Based Adoption Model (C-BAM)” examining change within the context of several categories including awareness, informational, personal, management, consequence, collaboration, and refocusing. From there, characteristics uniquely linked to leadership in supporting change were highlighted. Although several of the characteristics were found in the “management” category, a number of these crossed over categories. The most glaring take-away from this exercise was a clear connection between leadership and change implementation at all stages and within all categories of the process.

From there, a conceptual framework was developed for initial use that includes elements existent in all examined change research, with the recognition that leadership influences and is influenced by all aspects of the change process. This framework is cyclical in nature, with the understanding that although change implementation can be perceived as linear, there are elements of the change process that are fluid and must be responsive to internal and external forces that impact implementation.
This model, titled Initial CCSS Implementation Framework, was built upon elements of the work of Michael Fullan, Doug Reeves, Phillip Schlechty, Mike Schmoker, Robert Evans, and Rick DuFour. For the purpose of my work, I have considered this body of research and have delineated these elements into four critical areas: (a) setting the stage for change, (b) aligning resources in support of change, (c) monitoring and evaluating progress, and (d) refocusing and sustaining change.

The initial CCSS implementation framework was developed from concepts from prominent change researchers, including: *understanding change* (Fullan, 2001); *future
orientation (Schlechty, 2009); moral purpose and high expectations (Fullan, 2010a); purpose and direction (Fullan, 2001); identifying gaps (Evans, 1996); fostering coherence-making (Fullan et al., 2009); direction and focus (Schlechty, 2009); trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002); collective capacity-building (Fullan, 2001, 2010); aligning resources (Boyer, as cited in DuFour & Marzano, 2011); creating structures to support (DuFour et al, 2004; Schlechty, 2009; Schmoker, 1999); accountability (Fullan, 2010a; Schlechty, 2009); coaching and feedback (Schmoker, 2006); refocusing and sustaining (Fullan, 2007; Huberman & Miles, 1984); tri-level development of support (Fullan, 2010a).

Setting the stage for change involves understanding change, creating a demand through engaging moral purpose in support of a new innovation and through identifying gaps between the vision of the work of the organization and its existing reality, fostering coherence-making in light of the competing demands for time and focus, and establishing trust relationships that prove necessary in supporting and sustaining innovation. This work on the front end of a change initiative can mean the difference between the success and failure of a change initiative, but elements are often overlooked due to the frenetic pace with which we must adopt new initiatives. Within “Setting the Stage,” areas of focus include understanding change, establishing and communicating vision, engaging moral purpose, identifying gaps between vision and current reality, fostering coherence making, and establishing trust relationships.

Aligning resources in support of change is the next critical area of change implementation. This involves ensuring that appropriate resources and support systems
are in place that will allow for as smooth a transition to the new innovation as possible.

The natural aversion to change that many experience can be alleviated to some degree by providing individuals with the tools that they need to effectively support the initiative. Examples of resources include: *providing appropriate professional development*, providing appropriate resources and tools and creating structures to support collaboration and problem solving.

During the implementation process, a critical but often overlooked component of leading change is ensuring that of *monitoring and evaluating progress*. This includes *accountability and instructional coaching and feedback*. Test scores are just one piece of the puzzle. In addition, perceptual data, student products, observations, and other tools must be employed. Structures for continuity are also essential. Teachers need to be given constructive feedback and to practice self-reflection on a regular basis. The principal’s work in creating opportunities for continuous improvement is paramount to the success of a school as a learning organization.

In order for innovation to take root, it is essential that efforts be made at continually *refocusing and sustaining* the work. This includes *responsiveness* to changing demands and circumstances as part of a reflective process within the organization. *Tri-level support* is also valuable in ensuring a sustained commitment, both philosophically and in terms of resources, to a particular initiative. In the case of implementation of CCSS, the initiative currently has both federal and state backing, however, there is growing dissent around CCSS that has the potential to impact levels of support.
Summary

The principal plays a critical role in leading staff through change. An understanding of the complexity of change, as noted throughout the research, can help to provide the school leader with guidance in leading complex change in the school environment. Implementation of CCSS, if undertaken with a focus on instructional improvement, has the potential to affect positive change in instruction at the school level. This change initiative is significant in nature, and implementation of new CCSS will provide insight into leadership of change in support of instructional improvement.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Introduction
The primary goal of this study is to examine change leadership around implementation of the CCSS. The methodology is outlined in this chapter. The chapter contains six sections: (a) description of key concepts (b) setting and selection of participants, (c) data collection, (d) data analysis, (e) subjectivity, and (f) trustworthiness.

Description of Key Concepts

Common Core State Standards
Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are curricular expectations for student learning as defined through a joint effort between the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). This initiative is intended to support a move towards national standards in the United States. To date, 45 of 50 states have adopted or are in the process of moving towards adoption of these standards for English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics. These standards are designed to be more rigorous in nature than many previous state standards, with the expectation that they will increase college and career readiness for all students (CCSS Initiative, 2012c).
Race to the Top

Race to the Top (RttT) is a federal grant funding initiative that emerged out of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. This fund was designated to “encourage and reward States that are creating conditions for education innovation and reform,” with an emphasis in these four key areas:

- Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy;
- Building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction;
- Recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most; and
- Turning around our lowest-achieving schools. (U.S. Department of Education, 2009, p. 2)

RttT was introduced with a great deal of anticipation, as the need for continued funding sources for states in support of public schools is great. On July 24, 2009, President Barack Obama set the stage for state application for RttT funding:

America will not succeed in the 21st century unless we do a far better job of educating our sons and daughters . . . And the race starts today. I am issuing a challenge to our nation’s governors and school boards, principals and teachers, businesses and non-profits, parents and students: if you set and enforce rigorous and challenging standards and assessments; if you put outstanding teachers at the front of the classroom; if you turn around failing schools—your state can win a Race to the Top grant that will not only help students outcompete workers around the world, but let them fulfill their God-given potential. (White House Fact Sheet, 2009, para. 1)

North Carolina was one of 12 states to be awarded RttT funding in 2010, resulting in over $400 million in addition appropriations for state use in meeting federal RttT criteria. The
state’s plan includes new standards in every content area, a new teacher effectiveness model linked to student achievement, and a new accountability model for students.

**End of Grade (EOG) and End of Course (EOC) Assessments**

North Carolina’s accountability model includes End of Grade (EOG) assessments in grades 3–8 in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics, as well as in Science in grades 5 and 8. End of Course (EOC) assessments are also administered in Algebra I, Biology, and English II.

**Vertical Planning/Alignment**

Vertical Planning and Alignment refers to the concept of working across grade spans to examine and support progression of understanding and skill in a particular content area.

**Horizontal Planning/Alignment**

Horizontal Planning and Alignment refers to the concept of working across a particular grade span or course to engage all stakeholders in supporting learning (EC, Academically/Intellectually Gifted, ESL), and to plan for integration of content for students across a grade span as appropriate to increase meaningful connections for students.

**Common Exams/Measures of Student Learning (MSLs)**

Common Exams, or Measures of Student Learning (MSLs), were introduced in fall of 2012 in the state of North Carolina as the means by which data could be gathered on teacher effectiveness based on student outcomes in historically non-state-tested areas.
PLAN/ACT

PLAN and ACT are national assessments that are currently being administered as part of North Carolina’s new accountability model for high schools. All tenth-graders take PLAN, which provides information regarding student readiness for ACT. In 11th grade, all students take the ACT. Colleges use the ACT for admissions decisions, course placement, academic advising and loans and scholarships (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction [NCDPI], 2013).

Individual Growth Plan (IGP)/Professional Development Plan (PDP)

Individual Growth Plan (IGP) and Professional Development Plan (PDP) are terms that refer to the individual teacher plan that is developed each year as a part of the teacher evaluation cycle. This plan focuses on areas for continued individual professional growth for each teacher. The current designation for this plan is “IGP,” but previously was labeled “PDP.” These terms are used interchangeably.

Response to Intervention (RTI)

Response to Intervention is a multi-tiered support system for students, intended to provide high quality core instruction, moderate intervention, and more dramatic individualized intervention based upon determined need through careful monitoring diagnostic determination. This model is increasingly being utilized in North Carolina as a means to provide more strategic classroom instruction and create multiple systems of support instead of over-referring students to receive EC services.
Case 21

Case 21 is a product that is used by a number of districts that provides benchmark assessments and resulting data for instructional planning.

READY

READY is the branding mechanism that North Carolina has used to encompass all of the changes that have taken place in support of implementation of RttT and the state’s focus on meeting established goals for teaching and learning.

Selection of Participants

The target population for this study was principals within the Piedmont-Triad Region of North Carolina. These principals work in public schools, and were expected to implement CCSS for the 2012–13 school year based upon a mandate by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. The study was conducted with a group of 12 principals (representing three districts), including male and female principals with varying years of experience, and at multiple levels (K–5, 6–8, 9–12) with the intent of getting a true cross-section of experiences within the scope of implementation. Districts were selected with consideration given to the researcher’s understanding of district work in preparation for CCSS, with the districts being selected having demonstrated a perceived level of foundational work with staff on new standards. This was important so that as research was conducted and principals were interviewed, there would be a level of understanding of what CCSS implementation should mean in terms of change of instructional practice in the classroom. Three districts were chosen with the hopes that this would provide differing perspectives on implementation that may emerge based upon
the unique approaches by district. Interestingly, very little emerged in terms of distinctions between districts’ experiences, perspectives, or challenges.

Participating districts provided an opportunity for all interested principals to volunteer to participate in the study, so an open invitation was extended. The hope was that the self-selected group would represent a cross section of principals, with a level of diversity in terms of race, gender, age, level (K–5, 6–8, 9–12) and years of experience. Fortunately the self-selection process was effective in soliciting a cross-section of administrative participants. Pseudonyms were used to de-identify districts, schools, and individual participants (see Table 1).

Table 1. Study Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Participants (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>School (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>School District (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Years of Experience as Principal</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sarah Evans</td>
<td>North High School</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Katie Simms</td>
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<td>Kristy Knowles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lindsay Jones</td>
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<td>Robert Smith</td>
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<tr>
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Table 1. (Cont.)

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<td>Steven Moore</td>
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<td>Carthage School District</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Black</td>
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</table>

**Instrumentation**

The study was conducted using semi-structured, open-ended interviews, with twelve participants from multiple school districts. These interviews were conducted with principals of varying professional and personal experiences leading up to implementation of CCSS. The semi-structured interview process allowed for a level of both consistency of focus and flexibility to explore questions and thoughts more deeply with follow-up questioning. All interview questions were directly aligned with the “Initial CCSS Implementation Framework” conceptual framework (see Figure 1). (See Appendix A for interview questions.)

**Data Collection**

The qualitative method of data collection utilized semi-structured interviews. The process for data collection included:

1. District processes were followed to allow for interviews of principals to take place. Once approval was granted, an open invitation (in line with district protocol) was given to participating districts’ principals.
2. Twelve principals (from three districts) self-selected based upon an open invitation process, with the intent that participants from within each district demonstrate a level of diversity (race, gender, age, level of experience (K–5, 6–8, 9–12), and years of experience). For the purposes of this study, a representative cross-section of school leadership agreed to participate.

3. Willing participants were contacted via email to invite their participation in a semi-structured, face-to-face interview, lasting approximately 1.5 hours. A description of the study, along with consent forms, was sent electronically to each participant.

4. During the semi-structured face-to-face interview, respondents were asked to share their perspectives on leading implementation of the new CCSS.

Interviews were taped and transcribed.

**Data Analysis**

The qualitative analysis of data consisted of exploration of linkages between principal experiences related to leading implementation of CCSS and the “Initial CCSS Implementation Framework” (see Figure 1). Data for each individual principal were coded in relationship to this model and a revised conceptual framework emerged based upon data gathered from this process. Using this revised framework as an anchor, an analysis of this data was compared to change theory from cited prominent educational researchers. This comparison provided a practical experiential lens through which to consider theoretical understanding of leadership of a key instructional change initiative.
Researcher Subjectivity

It is important, for the purposes of this research, that I disclose that my professional experiences as an “impatient progressive” educator likely color my perceptions of this research to some degree. Ever since I entered education over 20 years ago, I have found myself struggling with the “status quo” and lack of sense of urgency mindset that I believe has proliferated public education. I have always considered change as something that needs to happen in order for us to continue to move forward as a part of a progressive educational system.

Throughout my career as a teacher, an assistant principal, a principal, and in several roles at the district level, I have been heavily engaged in work on the front end of various change initiatives. I have not acted passively in these efforts, and as a result of that I have a difficult time understanding and empathizing with those who perceive change as something that has been “done to them.”

With regard specifically to implementation of new CCSS, I have led these efforts at our district level, so I have been purview to a great deal of information on the front end of this work. I have had the opportunity to process these changes, strategize and structure our work as a district around these changes, and as such have likely had a broader understanding of this shift and its implications than others who may not have had the same level of exposure. As a result of my heavy personal and professional engagement in leading district efforts for implementation of CCSS, and in recognition of the strong opinions that I have around implementation based upon personal experiences, I have
made a conscious choice to let the data speak clearly for itself as appropriate throughout this work.

**Trustworthiness**

In consideration of the trustworthiness of this study, several supports were put in place to ensure that the research exhibits a commitment to painting a complete portrait of instructional leadership of CCSS. Data were collected from 12 principals. All interview data were transcribed in an effort to accurately quote participating principals. Interviews were conducted using questions developed around the preliminary framework, however, the questions were open-ended enough to allow the participant to venture outside the scope of the framework as needed to reflect their personal perspectives on the CCSS implementation process. Research questions were reflected in the initial flow of the framework, but as interview questions were developed it became evident that it was also necessary to consider principal perceptions of change, from a personal and professional standpoint, as well as to consider principal perceptions of CCSS, as these areas had the potential to impact the approach the principal has taken/will take moving forward with CCSS implementation. Data analysis was conducted with the conceptual framework as a guide, but consideration was given to an emerging model based upon research gathered within the context of the study. Research was conducted beginning in late March of the CCSS implementation year, providing time for principals to begin to reflect on the implementation process. As a result, the first two phases of change were more clearly defined through the research, whereas the last two were still very early in consideration and were less clearly defined.
Principals were very direct in their feedback regarding CCSS implementation. They expressed opinions on both the positive aspects of implementation, as well as the many challenges that have been created. At times, there was contradiction between their own perspectives. For instance, the data at times spoke to principals wanting help, while at other instances there was a clear belief that external entities such as central office needed to be less intrusive. Conflicting feelings of positives regarding teacher performance were juxtaposed with feelings of frustration with teachers not being more on board. Much ambiguity emerged around how schools and school leaders can gauge teacher effectiveness in implementation of CCSS.

Subcategories emerged from within the preliminary framework, and in one instance the category was redefined to reflect the researcher’s changing perspective as a result of data analysis and reflection.

**Benefits and Risks**

The primary benefit to principals participating in this study was the opportunity to gain new knowledge regarding the most critical elements of effective leadership for instructional improvement. This information will be shared with all participants. There is also benefit to being interviewed, as this creates an opportunity for personal reflection that otherwise may not take place due to the day to day demands of the principal role.

The only real risk of participation in this study was that of self-disclosure, which was guarded against with all practical measures. Confidentiality of interview tapes and notes, use of pseudonyms for principal, school, and district, and a relatively large pool of interviewees across multiple districts helped to ensure anonymity.
Limitations

The primary limitation of this study was that the principals’ perceptions of implementation of new standards is subjective in nature and is seen through a personal lens. The study was limited to the principals’ perceptions of implementation of the change initiative, and consideration was not given to the perceptions of teachers and other stakeholders within the context of this study.

Summary

The focus of Chapter III is to clarify the process of research conducted in support of this study. As stated, 12 principal participants from three districts within the Piedmont-Triad Region of North Carolina were selected for participation in this research. This study, focused on understanding the change leadership experience as it relates to implementation of CCSS, included conducting and analyzing the results of semi-structured interviews in which principal perspectives were considered. Data analysis involved a comparison of principal perspectives in relation to the Initial CCSS Implementation Framework (see Figure 1). Based upon this data, a revised framework emerged, which will be revealed later in this dissertation. Additionally, this data analysis helped to provide a practical lens through which to consider the work of key change leadership theorists.
CHAPTER IV

PRINCIPAL PERCEPTIONS OF COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

In consideration of leading change, it became evident that principal perceptions of the initiative itself could have a potential impact on the ways in which they approach implementation. With that in mind, and in an attempt to ensure that the research questions around successes and challenges with CCSS were effectively answered, principal perceptions of CCSS were examined as a part of the interview process. These perceptions of implementation of CCSS are varied, and are complicated by the fact that in North Carolina CCSS is one of several interrelated initiatives resulting from receipt of RttT dollars. Based upon interviews with a cross-section of principals, it is evident that these initiatives impact perceptions of CCSS implementation.

A number of principals interviewed spoke to the positive aspects of implementation of Common Core, with several emerging themes identified as a part of an evolving conceptual framework: (a) interconnectedness on national stage, (b) increased rigor and opportunity for students, and (c) increased demand and opportunity for teacher collaboration.

Interconnectedness on National Stage

One oft-cited reason that CCSS are purported to be a positive national undertaking is that they create the ability for states to have a level of common expectation and language, and to share resources and ideas. Two state consortia—the Partnership for
the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA) Consortium, are examples of this national interconnectedness. Both consortia are in the process of creating assessments in ELA and Mathematics in grades 3–8 and high school, including performance tasks, with these assessments being administered online. In addition to the assessment components, these consortia have utilized federal funding to support development of digital libraries for sharing curriculum frameworks, sample instructional units, and formative assessment tools (Rothman, 2013). The concept that individual states can speak the same language, can develop and share resources, and can potentially tap into assessment data to gauge student performance in relation to national norms is appealing to many supporters of CCSS. This sentiment was reinforced through feedback provided by principals in the interview process. Lindsay Jones, principal at Mission Elementary, described:

I think that children will be academically ready for college, career . . . another goal of our state is to be more in line with the nation, to work so that we can grow and we can compare ourselves to other states more realistically than when you compare without a common curriculum . . . We can look at Tennessee or Georgia . . . that to me is a huge positive. We’re sharing a wealth of resources . . . just the ability to truly compare.

Allen Burns, principal at West Elementary, echoed this sentiment:

I think it levels the playing field. I think that a lot of states being on the same standards and moving towards the same goals, is important because we can compare—prior when you just had this state doing what they want to, another state doing what they want to do, you didn’t have that consistency. And if kids move from state to state, they came in and were on a completely different page. This way when somebody comes from us to another state . . . we can pretty much know where they’re at or what they’ve studied that year.
These quotes illustrate the extent to which principals perceive that CCSS implementation could positively impact the work of the school. CCSS implementation provides teachers and principals with a better sense of how students are performing compared to their peers across the nation, as well as creating opportunities for resource and idea sharing.

**Increased Rigor and Opportunity for Students**

Across the board, principals perceived that implementation of CCSS increased or has the potential to increase the level of academic rigor and opportunity for student academic success. This perception has been perpetuated by the authors of CCSS, who have considered scholarly research, surveys on career and college entry expectations, and data identifying readiness for successful college and career performance as part of the standards development process (Dunkle, 2012). For some, this has presented itself through the chance for students to lead and interact in new ways. Fairbanks (2013) described one teacher’s experience in meeting the demands of new standards that require that the teacher facilitate learning in the classroom, “It’s less of kids sitting in rows and listening to the teacher from Charlie Brown, than a teacher on the sidelines who is listening to what kids are doing and saying and providing that guidance” (p. 56). Many of the principals interviewed had a similar perspective on shifts in classroom instruction. Allen Burns of West Elementary described:

I feel like this has opened the door for them to be able to do more research, able to present things, able to just talk and to communicate, because prior to, it was a system in most classes where the teacher sat in the front and teacher lectured the classroom. The teacher had some hands-on activities, but now we’re asking students to turn around and be the leaders and be productive and be able to create things themselves and we’ve seen that.
Kristy Knowles has seen students at North Elementary grapple with content at higher levels:

But the standards, the way they are now with Common Core are causing students to again, think outside the box. They’ve been very comfortable . . . they’re used to having the content given to them or taught to them. And now when there are questions well, you need to find it for yourself. There’s an answer, but how did you arrive at this answer? What do you think the answer should be, and why? And I like the fact that it’s challenging kids to think critically. To use skills that have for some of them just been dormant up until this point.

Bill Windsor articulated a perceived shift from a multiple-choice mindset towards instruction in the classroom, leading to deeper understanding of content at McCray Elementary:

That they can show that they truly master more than a multiple choice test, a deeper understanding of connections and building that. That wait time doesn’t have to be three to five seconds, but it can be three to five weeks . . . And it can be that it takes a longer time for it to spiral around and for you to let it stew over and figure things out. And that thinking and the process of developing thought is more important than the product.

Kristy Knowles described a dramatic change in level of classroom engagement as a result of process vs. product mindset:

I did an observation two weeks ago, and I just kind of stood there mesmerized because the kids were totally, totally authentically engaged. I mean they were throwing up their hands. They were jumping up and down and it was not just to give the right answer. It was to tell the teacher how they got to that place and that was excellent . . . and it worked, it was like magic. And it had been a while since I’ve seen that kind of enthusiasm and jot in the whole teaching and learning process.
Allen Burns reinforced this sentiment in terms of leadership expectations for classroom practice:

I’m looking for students to be more involved in being more of the leaders in the classroom and the teachers kind of sitting back facilitating . . . helping the students learn what they’re learning. It’s more engaging for the kids. Teachers aren’t just sitting at the front, lecturing and telling them, but it’s very involved and students are making and having aha moments as they are going through the curriculum. So that’s what I expect to see when I go in the classrooms.

These principals spoke to the increased levels of rigor demonstrated through CCSS. Instructional practices that are more engaging and relevant, and that create greater expectations for critical thinking and problem solving, have the potential to significantly impact student performance in a positive way.

**Challenges Teachers to Work Collaboratively and Intentionally**

The need for a collaborative, intentional focus was also a theme woven through the discourse around CCSS implementation. This has taken place both within grade level/content teams as well as vertically (across grade spans). Debbie Snyder, principal at West High School described:

And so now, it’s not just about those EOC teachers . . . we all have to come together and know what each other is doing and if we don’t, then that’s all going to be fragmented when it really needs to be continuous. It’s a seamless kind of progression from that 9–12 curriculum.

Angie Barnes, principal at South Elementary, articulated a commitment to vertical alignment:
I’ve seen them work together a lot across grade levels. I . . . could see them going to the grade above and going to the grade below and saying, “Hey, you all need to do this before they get to me” and then the upper grades telling them the same thing . . . when I talked to them the first time I said, “You know, no shingles are hanging outside of these doors. All shingles need to come down if they are up because we’re not in private practice. We work together.”

Bill Windsor described the “big picture” focus and its potential for vertical alignment at McCray Elementary:

But in terms of Common Core, I think if you look at the map it shows the verticalness of it throughout it, it’s doing a better job of how A leads to B, not only for your year, but throughout the kid’s existence.

Principals spoke to the opportunity that has been created for collaborative learning of teachers as they tackle new standards. This collaboration has taken place within and across grade levels and content areas.

**Too Much, Too Soon**

Not all feedback shared regarding CCSS implementation was positive. Two themes emerged that indicated a clear concern with this initiative and its impact on teaching and learning. These included a belief that (a) we (specifically North Carolina) have tried to tackle too many things too quickly, with Common Core implementation being one of those things, and (b) we are running the risk of being too prescriptive in what is being expected of schools through this process, potentially leading to a lack of buy-in and innovation based upon the unique needs of individual schools.

As previously stated, North Carolina moved forward with several initiatives in addition to CCSS implementation, all within a relatively tight timeframe. North
Carolina’s RttT proposal, which afforded the state over $400 million in funding earmarked for instructional improvement, included not only adoption of CCSS; it also included implementation of new Essential Standards in all other content areas, new assessments in historically tested areas, new Measures of Student Learning (MSLs) in historically non-tested areas to correlate teacher effectiveness to student success as part of a comprehensive educator effectiveness model, and a new technology infrastructure/student information management system. All of the work to develop and support efforts at implementation of the state’s plan for meeting RttT requirements has taken place in a short period of time. As a result, a level of frustration with these initiatives has impacted principals’ perceptions of new standards. Steven Moore, principal at Clayton High School, spoke to this frustration, particularly the concern with moving quickly without a clear plan.

I think they had an excellent opportunity and didn’t follow through. And it’s a shame because with the Common Core I don’t necessarily blame North Carolina for it, but we had the opportunity for a collective vision and we stopped. We went out and as a group we said, “We want world peace, but you all figure out how to get there.” Well, that’s where we were before . . . What should this look like? Before we roll this out, let’s layer it. Let’s figure out a recipe before we send it out and tell people, “Here, go make it.” And it was unfortunate.

Debbie Snyder, also a principal at the high school level, had mixed feelings about CCSS. Although she saw potential benefits, she was concerned that we are moving too fast as a state.

We have to work together, whether we like it or not, in my opinion, we have to work toward what the state wants us to be and I understand where the state wants
us to be. It’s just the time it takes to get there. I don’t think they’ve allotted enough time.

Bill Windsor, principal at McCray Elementary, expressed frustration with the correlation of CCSS to new assessments that are linked to teacher effectiveness in a public way in North Carolina.

I think the connection with the teacher effectiveness and the Common Core assessments is ridiculous. I think it’s poor judgment. I think it’s political and I think it’s unfortunate again that we are using data this year that is going to be irrelevant and trying to judge people by that in giving schools grades. Based off of that, it has taken the ability of developing inquiry and turned it into—instead of inquiry-based education, it’s just an inquiry of your own existence and your value and that’s the wrong way to look at education.

Katie Simms, principal at East Elementary, was also frustrated with the state’s adoption of multiple new initiatives, with some aspects of those being mischaracterized and, as a result, creating distrust.

I’m also concerned that there are some initiatives that are kind of spiraling off of this national curriculum that states are taking on board, like Powerschool for example, that I’m coming to find out that we’re thinking—there’s this thinking that because it’s a national curriculum that there’s also going to be components embedded where we’re going to be able to talk nationally together through avenues like Powerschool, but coming to find out that’s not the case. So I think there’s going to be some misperceptions along the way that are going to unintentionally spiral off from Common Core . . .

These quotes speak to principal perceptions that specifically in North Carolina, too many things are being implementing simultaneously and very quickly. The challenge of leading in the midst of a variety of initiatives, especially when these are still in the process of being defined, creates a specific leadership challenge.
Too Prescriptive

In addition to concerns that the implementation of CCSS was being complicated by adoption of multiple other initiatives simultaneously, there was also apprehension around the adoption of Common Core leading to micromanagement by external forces outside of the school. This concern has also been echoed on the national stage. Zhao (2009) cautioned against a move to nationalization of standards, curriculum, and accompanying assessments. In Catching Up or Leading the Way, he juxtaposes the educational state of China and the United States, emphasizing that our nation may be traveling down a path that China is now attempting to abandon.

I realized that what China wants is what America is eager to throw away—an education that respects individual talents, supports divergent thinking, tolerates deviation, and encourages creativity; a system in which the government does not dictate what students learn or how teachers teach and culture that does not rank or judge the success of a school, a teacher or a child based on only test scores in a few subjects determined by the government. (p.vi)

The ability of teachers and schools to make decisions based upon the unique needs of their students has the potential to be minimized by implementation of a national model for teaching and learning. For instance, “publishers’ criteria” were developed by two writers of the CCSS for ELA in an attempt to interpret the standards and their subsequent impact on classroom instruction. These “criteria” have received criticism because they cross the line into informing curriculum and pedagogical practice (Gewertz, 2011, p. 16). Several interviewed principals articulated a similar mindset, as they have struggled with concerns that CCSS may limit their ability to innovate at the school level. Bill Windsor described this concern:
I think the challenge is how do I give you enough structure to allow you to create? So, if I build the frame and allow you the interior to determine the rooms and the size of each, or if I need to determine the size of the rooms do I allow you to paint the walls? But if I give you the frame, the walls, the size of the rooms, the colors in each room, the flooring that’s being used, the lighting, the furniture and then saying, “And now do what else you need to do to build your school,” it’s too much. There is nothing else because you’ve taken away the opportunity to be a community and developed the cookie cutter subdivision. And so the trick as a nation is how can we provide enough structure to encourage people to become creative and not stifle the art of teaching?

Katie Simms also cautioned against too much national control:

The way I see Common Core coming down from the national level is beneficial in the sense that it is going to provide an “apples to apples” piece that we never had in the United States around grade level curriculum, but at the same time, as long as it’s just an overarching kind of framework, I think that’s okay. But if it was—if we were also being provided—there’s pros and cons to this—but if we were also being provided with a pacing guide from the federal level then I think the more it’s micromanaged. I think that it stifles that grassroots effort of being responsive to the needs of your population which—what’s happening at this school is very different than what’s happening at other schools in other areas of the country.

Ironically, frustrations around lack of clarity are coupled with concerns that in the end, CCSS implementation may end up being too prescriptive in nature. These quotes illustrate the principals’ viewpoints that even though national standards can create a common language for instruction, they must not dictate instructional practice in a way that would lead teachers and principals to no longer make smart instructional decisions based upon the unique needs of their schools.

Based upon the principals’ impressions of CCSS, it was clear that these school leaders exhibited mixed feelings regarding this initiative. Principals clearly recognized the value in being able to access a pool of resources and teacher tools to support
improved instruction, and that the ability for districts and states to share ideas and speak a common language around instructional standards has its potential benefits. There was also an understanding that new accompanying assessments would provide a level of national norming that otherwise may not exist, allowing districts and states to track progress without an “apples to oranges” approach.

The increased level of rigor and opportunity for student learning was also highlighted. Although changing assessments make it difficult to examine whether students are learning at higher levels, several principals shared anecdotal evidence from visiting classrooms and observing instruction, describing more highly engaged and interactive classrooms.

Principals described increased demand and opportunity for teacher collaboration. The importance of considering vertical alignment, especially in light of spiraling ELA standards and shifts in mathematics content, have created a greater demand for teachers to work together to plan.

Several negatives with CCSS were also identified by principals in the interview process. The impression that we (specifically the state of North Carolina) are attempting to implement too much change, too quickly, was prevalent. North Carolina’s adoption of CCSS as part of a larger RttT funded movement has made it difficult for teachers and school leaders to delineate which challenges are specific to CCSS, and which are related to accompanying initiatives. This lack of clarity was echoed throughout the course of the interviews, not just as part of the discussion about positives and negatives of CCSS.
Several principals also voiced the concern that CCSS may evolve into an initiative that is too prescriptive, eliminating the ability to be creative and to innovate at the school and classroom levels based on the unique needs of the learner. This concern is likely being reinforced by the accompanying assessments (current EOCs, future Smarter Balanced Assessments), and new Measures of Student Learning to gauge teacher effectiveness, which have the potential to further dictate instructional practice.

Sarah Evans, principal at North High School, summarized both the positive and negative feelings regarding implementation of CCSS from a principal standpoint:

I think there are some advantages to the national change movement in that the resources—there’s a wealth of resources. We’re not having to create them all our own, like with the writing plan. We’re out there hunting down this piece and that piece and I found this online and I found that one, but, we’re really making a plan unique to our school. So I think that’s a little more challenging than taking something where there’s all this wealth of resources and everybody in the system is doing it and everybody’s going to work on it. It’s not just us in isolation. So, maybe sharing the load, but I also think there are some dangers doing that. I think that whole, “If we’re going to standardize the curriculum, we’re going to standardize the kids.” And then it’s more about products and not people that we’re turning out. It’s more about test scores and data than it is about well-rounded students. That’s concerns me a little bit. Are we going to have—national assessments come down the road. We have those now, but are they going to be, instead of the state test at some point, everybody in the country is taking the same reading test kind of thing. That’s a little scary, but so far I haven’t heard anything about that, so that’s just a thought.

In consideration of an evolving conceptual framework (see Figure 2), it seems appropriate to include principal perceptions of CCSS, both positive and negative, as having a potential impact on the leader in supporting implementation efforts. Principal-identified positives included (a) interconnectedness on national stage, (b) increased rigor and opportunity for students, and (c) increased demand and opportunity for teacher
collaboration. Negative aspects of CCSS were noted as (a) too much, too soon in terms of implementation of new standards and accompanying initiatives, and (b) the potential for CCSS to become too prescriptive in dictating instructional programming.

Figure 2. Evolving CCSS Implementation Framework: Leadership Perspectives on CCSS.
CHAPTER V

SETTING THE STAGE FOR CHANGE

Introduction

In light of an evolving conceptual framework in which to consider CCSS implementation, four key quadrants were identified based upon a review of the literature on leading change. These quadrants include (a) setting the stage for change, (b) aligning resources in support of change, (c) monitoring and evaluating, and (d) refocusing and sustaining. In Figure 1, these quadrants are delineated in simple terms based upon the preliminary literature review. As a result of the analysis of data gathered through the principal interview process, these quadrants were more clearly defined and additional subcategories were identified. I discuss these changes in the framework throughout the chapters that follow, and summarize the evolving framework at the end of each chapter.

Chapter V focuses on quadrant one, “Setting the Stage for Change,” and the three subsequent chapters focus on the remaining three quadrants. Each chapter begins with an overview of the preliminary categories, and supporting/conflicting research resulting from principal interviews and other pertinent sources. A new model of the respective quadrant is then introduced and described to demonstrate the evolution of the researcher’s understanding of the change process as a result of principal interviews.
Setting the Stage for Change

In order for change to be effective, it is critical that a foundation be laid that will support the innovation that is taking place. This first step in the change process, as identified in Figure 1, included (a) understanding change, (b) establishing and communicating vision, (c) engaging moral purpose, (d) identifying gaps between vision and reality, (e) fostering coherence making, and (f) establishing trust relationships. Through an examination of the data, an evolving framework for “setting the stage for change” emerged.

Understanding Change

The ability of the principal to lead a change initiative is impacted by his/her understanding of the change process. In interviewing principals, it was evident that as individuals they have personal views and opinions of change that affect their day-to-day lives. Sometimes these perspectives are congruent with that of their staff; other times these are in conflict. Regardless, principals articulated thoughts on the change process and how it impacts implementation of an innovation such as CCSS.

For school leaders, the lens through which they view change has the potential to impact the work of the principal in spearheading a new initiative. For some, change is embraced. Kristy Knowles spoke to this in simple terms:

I know there are a lot of folks who are afraid of change. I’m one of these people who thrive on change and challenge. I get bored and lose interest if things aren’t constantly moving and evolving. So change is good and I welcome it.
Katie Simms also described:

Well, some like it and some don’t. Personally, I do well with change. I probably crave change more than others because if I feel like I’m not changing, I’m not growing but I also recognize that change requires someone who can lead that initiative in a way that makes it almost kind of simple and takes something that’s very—that seems overwhelming and very complex and bring it down for people who need to be a part of that process. That makes it somewhat systematic, understandable, easy to digest, chunk it. Make it attainable. Make it not seem so overwhelming.

Bill Windsor spoke to change as being conditionally positive:

I think change is good as long as it’s—if it has anything that could hurt another person then it’s fully thought through. If it’s something just to try, I’m good—let’s go try it. But if it’s something that could be detrimental to somebody, then I want us to make sure that we’re thinking through all the consequences prior. So I guess, I wouldn’t want to go oil drilling just to go oil drilling. I’d want to research it a bit more. But if it’s “Hey, let’s go try a new restaurant,” let’s go do it. Let’s try it. It’s not hurting anybody.

For one principal, a defining life experience led to a new acceptance of change:

Change happens like that and you have to figure out how to roll with the punches and you take what you’ve got and you move on. I mean, sometimes you’re the windshield, sometimes you’re the bug and that’s just the truth and change is inevitable and you can resist it or you can figure out how to handle it and that’s my personal perspective.

It is clear that principals have definite feelings regarding change. For some, it is embraced. For others, appreciation of the change process is highly conditional based upon the nature of the change and personal based upon individual perspective.
Regardless of personal perspective, principals recognized the challenges of leading change at the school level. The ability of the principal to create a positive culture that supports risk taking, and to recognize that teachers have varying degrees of acceptance of change and are in need of differentiated support in moving forward with change, are paramount to negotiating change.

**Creating a Safe Environment for Risk-taking**

Change is difficult, as it takes individuals outside of their comfort zones and asks that they change behaviors. As Reeves (2009) noted, “Change means loss, loss means abandonment” (p. 9). Even change that can be perceived as positive or beneficial is a break with the past, and it creates a level of anxiety that must be mitigated in order for the change to take hold. For the school leader, it is critical that teachers be supported and reaffirmed as they take steps in the process. In order to accomplish this, a culture that creates a safety net for risk taking is important.

Debbie Snyder, principal at West High, described the importance of creating an environment where taking risks was valued:

> I think our teachers would tell you it’s okay if—I want them to take risks and in order to be successful, you have to fail and that has been the hardest thing to get across to them. I have failed in front of them on purpose sometimes and not on purpose, but I’ve done it on the stage so they could see it’s okay. It’s okay. The sun will shine, we’re going to be fine.

Allen Burns also described the importance of supporting risk-taking:

> So it’s one of those, you just keep monitoring and moving, monitoring and moving and when something doesn’t work, you drop back. And at this point and time, you can’t since it’s brand new, you can’t be, “You’ve got to do it this way.”
You’ve got to be open to explore and give them the ability to go out and try new things and not be punished for it.

Steve Moore talked about the principal as playing a pivotal role in the change process:

I think principals have to be that change agent. I don’t think people from the outside get change. What’s going on inside the school, it has to be driven by the people in the building. That’s why I’m really protective. It has to be us. It has to be about the principals, the teachers the kids, the parents, the community in driving that change. Unfortunately, when it’s somebody from the central office, the staff and school will see it as it’s just one more program. There’s one more thing coming in the door.

Debbie Snyder framed leading change in terms of fostering a learning culture in their school:

The kids are pushing the adults in this building a lot and I think that culture—sometimes I talk about culture too much, but I believe it has a big impact on how your school, your kids and your staff handles change. And if you have a learning culture and you really believe that you could always learn, then change just becomes a part of that learning process and that’s what I’ve tried to establish here.

Principals interviewed recognized the importance of “leading the charge” in terms of change at the school level. Creating an environment in which risk-taking is not only allowed, but encouraged, is critical.

Recognizing the Personal Side of Change

Several principals spoke to the reluctance of staff in embracing change. Allen Burns described the challenges of moving forward with change, especially with veteran staff members, “Change is hard . . . and when you change a teacher’s perspective for the
last 30 years or 20 years and you change what they’ve been trying to do in the classroom, it’s hard.”

Kristy Knowles discussed the challenge of dealing with a staff that is made up of individuals with varying levels of acceptance of change:

I think it’s about evenly split. There are some folks who are of like mind and welcome being able to do things differently. And then there are others who have been doing the same thing for years and years and years and just don’t want to do things any differently and are very uncomfortable. One thing that we kind of talked about recently is, and it may sound a little crazy, but there are some folks who have not and are not accepting the change. They seem to be going through like a grieving process and it’s not surprising to me, because different people react to things differently.

Angie Barnes described the challenge of bringing teachers, especially veteran teachers, along with change:

It’s not easy and it’s not accepted very well . . . in any school environment you of course have seasoned teachers that have been here since the beginning of time. Change is not easy for those folks. They think their way is the only way and it’s worked for 20 years. You have to show them that if we change up and do it a different way, it might be a much better way than what they have used for umpteen million years and the kids will pick up quicker.

This concern was echoed by Lindsay Jones of Mission Elementary:

So they’re either young or inexperienced and unsure of themselves, or more experienced and sort of, “Oh well, I’m not sure if this is going to stick around or not.” It ends up sometimes being the same thing, or “We’ll just let her tell us what to do,” instead of looking for—like knowing what needs to happen and knowing they need to change, but sometimes they’re not real confident in making that change . . .
Debbie Snyder has determined that it is difficult to bring everyone on board with change, and this requires that the school leader support those who are willing and ready for change:

So change is part of the learning process and I approached it from a learning process with this group of teachers. I won’t say they are all comfortable with it, but I have always told myself, I told them the first day I met them, “Once I feel like I have 75–80% of the people on board, I’ll move. I ain’t going to wait for the other 20%.”

Interviewed principals expressed the level of variance in acceptance of change within their schools, with each staff member approaching the process with differing needs and comfort levels. Change has seemed particularly challenging for veteran teachers who have seen a number of initiatives come and go.

**Establishing and Communicating Vision**

A key component of setting the stage for change is operating with a clear vision and “future orientation” (Schlechty, 2009). This future orientation requires school leaders to determine and articulate a clear vision for the direction that the school must move. The initial conceptual framework (see Figure 1) identified (a) establishing and communicating vision, (b) engaging moral purpose, and (c) identifying gaps between vision and reality as sub-categories of the larger element of “Setting the Stage.” Based upon interviews with principals, I have reframed these sub-categories. “Establishing and communicating vision” seemed to imply that the principal is determining this vision and communicating it out, whereas the reality, as indicated through principal interviews, is that in order for a vision to take hold, there needs to be a level of teacher involvement in
determining the school vision. In terms of communication, the school leader plays a critical role in this, but vision is something that should evolve and the communication element is not passive for teachers either. In other words, there is a level of give and take within this communication process. Kristy Knowles, one of the principals interviewed, described an evolving vision in light of CCSS implementation, “As far as my vision for this school, it’s evolving. I know where we need to go, where we should go. How we are getting there with the implementation of Common Core some days quite frankly, is just not as clear.”

She went on to recognize the importance of a collective vision that everyone can buy into:

So we built the vision together because I feel like if we build it together then it’s going to be important for all of us, not just me, because it’s not just me, it’s all of us. I want the vision to reflect what everybody feels like is important. For the most part, giving these kids the best education we can is number one that is our most important goal is to make sure everybody is educated and will be successful.

In addition, instead of considering “establishing and communicating vision,” “engaging moral purpose,” and identifying gaps between vision and reality” as separate sub-categories of “Setting the Stage for Change,” I began to recognize that “engaging moral purpose” and “identifying gaps between vision and reality” cannot be separated out from the visioning process; they are critical elements to creating demand that must be imbedded within the establishment of a vision. This recognition evolved from hearing principals discuss their perceptions of leading change, and determining that a vision that
is divorced from “moral purpose” would be hollow and would not motivate teachers to move forward. Steven Moore, principal at Clayton High, described in simple terms:

I’m being very careful here. I know the political background at this school. I know the background of this school so you got to be real careful not to tell them what you’ve been doing the last 30 years is wrong. You’ve got to show them what’s the positives of the change for the kids.

Thomas Anderson, principal at Benson High, reinforced the notion of moral purpose as part of a bigger construct:

I’m in a position now where the culture and the climate is still important, but instructional rigor is absolutely paramount and everything else falls kind of in a distant third place to instructional rigor. And while I believe that instructional rigor is completely important, I mean, instruction is the whole purpose and the reason why we’re here and the reason why we exist, I think that to build a stronger school, we have to have a strong climate, a strong culture within the school and then I think our faculty will work harder when they feel that sense of buy-in, and I think they’ll be a little bit more intrinsically motivated when they feel like they’re being valued and they have an opportunity to excel and find their niche and really explore that.

In terms of “identifying gaps between vision and current reality,” it is clear that in addition to gaps being identified to create a sense of urgency, it is critical that school leaders look to strike a balance between identification of gaps and closing those gaps incrementally, so that teachers have the confidence in their own ability to tackle change without feeling overwhelmed by it. “If the change . . . threatens my whole self, I will deny the data and the need for change. Only if I can feel that I will retain my identity or my integrity as I learn something new or make a change, will I be able to even
contemplate it” (Schein, 1992, p. 300). Steven Moore described this in the context of professional growth for teachers:

One, people need it in smaller chunks. Look at this, try this, go back to your room and try this. Bring it back and let’s talk about it. When I say, ‘small chunks’ because next year our staff development is going to a complete different—even our faculty meetings will look different. We’re going to do all our faculty meetings on staff development during planning periods, during the course of the day instead of trying to do it after school. So, in other words, one time a month we’re going to have—during their planning period, we’re going to do our faculty meeting. In there, we’re going to give them a nugget of staff development. We’re going to talk about it, work on it, take it back, try it, bring it back to the next faculty meeting and talk about it. How did it go for you, what did you learn, what would you throw out? It’s fine if you throw that out. Let’s talk about what was another option for you?

The fluidity with which the school leader must collectively engage staff in development of a vision that has moral purpose, that challenges them to reach and grow without discounting where they’ve been, and that pushes them forward without feeling alone or overwhelmed, indicates that these individual elements should not be perceived in isolation. With that in mind, analysis of the research has evolved, and “Establishing and Communicating Vision” has now been identified as “Building and Supporting a Collective Moral Vision.”

**Building and Supporting a Collective Moral Vision**

In order for change to take hold, it is critical that staff recognize the need for change. Creating this demand for change, or “unfreezing,” as characterized by Evans (1996), involves increasing the fear of not trying, as well as reducing the fear of trying (p. 56). Based upon principal interviews, this demand for change has been created by (a) changing external expectations and (b) an ethical commitment to continued improvement
(engaging moral purpose). Once that demand has been created, it becomes easier to identify gaps between vision and current reality.

**Creating Demand**

**Changing external expectations.** For several principals, the shift to CCSS has created an opportunity for change. Kristy Knowles described the shift and the sense of urgency that has been created as a result:

Some folks, like I said earlier, are just so comfortable doing what they’ve been doing and it hasn’t been helping students. The implementation of Common Core has shaken some folks up and some have kind of stood up and said “I’m going to do this. I’m going to do this and it’s a good thing.”

Steve Moore described the principal’s role in meeting the external demands of Common Core implementation:

They have to be the flagship. They have to be out front talking. They have to be that consistent builder. They have to be the one piece of it all together for everybody helping them see the common goal. It’s not enough for a principal to sit back and tell this all the time; the principalship is not a spectator sport. You can’t just sit back and hope that Common Core will get infiltrated through the school.

Allen Burns spoke to the role of implementation of an external initiative, and the frustration that comes with this approach:

It’s been tough. That’s been a real challenge for me, on how to develop that sense of urgency, but one of the things that the district’s doing is that it’s coming through with its own initiatives. So the sense of urgency in that respect, because the district has been coming in with a lot of initiatives on their own, I’m more middle management in terms of just making sure that the tasks get done, rather than the creational piece of it. So at least on that end its not—I can make things
happen not by sense of urgency, but that’s what we’re told to do, we’re going to do it.

As described, the perspective that CCSS implementation has created external pressure for change was, for some principals, a critical leverage point in the implementation process. For others, it became a source of frustration as autonomy was lost in driving school focus and goals.

**Ethical commitment to improvement.** Other principals articulated the sense of urgency less around implementation of CCSS, focusing more on the larger ethical obligation to provide students with a high quality education. Bill Windsor articulated this need for a collective vision of success for all students:

I’m more of—we’re here for the kids, just making sure whatever tasks need to get done get done. It really doesn’t matter whose job it is. The job is making sure that our kids are successful and whoever can make that role happen—let’s do it. I’m someone that is full of ideas and okay with hearing “no,” and I’ll just keep shooting them out, but when we hit a direction, my main focus is that we all need to be on board together. That we’re a collective mom and dad and we need to speak the same language all the way through.

Angie Barnes, new to their role at this school this year, has taken a very direct approach in setting the stage for her staff:

I’m here to make sure that you give them the very best education you possibly can. If you don’t want to work this way, you need to tell me now because I always carry letters of resignation with me and I will give you one, you can sign it and take it to Central Office and I’ll get somebody that will work with me to get this job done.
This commitment to continued improvement taps into recognition that the work of educators must be driven by a moral purpose. Moral purpose involves having a clear vision and direction that is morally sound and that has the potential to inspire others to move forward in support of this vision and direction. In speaking to principals grappling with leading change, the importance of moral purpose was evident. Bill Windsor described the impact of moral purpose in leading his staff, and in turn having them lead him:

But I think that modeling helps to . . . inspire others to become greater than that. Really, that’s the hope because there are teachers out there that are far better and I just want them to become those people. I don’t want them to become me. There’s people far better and you need to be following them; I just want you to be inspired enough the go that path.

Lindsay Jones spoke to the commitment to continuous improvement:

I feel good when I see people growing. I think in this role—like I love that about my classroom and I think it’s taken me a while to see that I really like that in teachers. That’s the part that I really like; when teachers take a lot of ownership in their classroom and you’re able to help them do that.

Debbie Snyder spoke to the challenge of shifting a high school away from a testing focus, instead emphasizing the importance of quality teaching and learning:

And I am fighting them. They want to buy those damn work books and I tell them every time, sorry about the recording, but I have stood firm, no. I don’t care how many free you can get, it is not about the workbook, it is about the teaching and learning in our building and if we will move in that direction, then they will do fine on the ACT.
Angie Barnes described her “no nonsense” approach to creating a culture focused on doing what is best for the students in her school:

That’s what I’ve been putting up with, but I can see it getting better anyway. They just had to learn me, I guess is the best way to put it, to realize that I’m a no nonsense person. I am certified middle school, so elementary school is kind of fluffy to me and I just expect the teachers to do their job. That’s what they’re hired for, that’s what the parents send their kids here for, and my number one concern in this building is one thing—and that’s the children that we serve and I expect them to do their job and if they don’t, then they answer to me.

Debbie Snyder described the feeling of disillusionment that came when she realized that not everyone has the same moral barometer in supporting teaching and learning:

And I think that’s just administration in general, I’m learning ulterior motives. I never fully understood that that people were in education for different reasons. But they’ll say it to your face that we’re all here to report for duty, but when you really push, no you’re not. Your true colors start to show when you start to push people as to what are you here for. And it’s just interesting that the more I get involved at the various levels, of where people’s hearts are, I wasn’t used to that. It was just you just thought, “Don’t we all want to make the world a better place? Isn’t that why we’re all here? Why are we fighting?” How do you fight over making the world a better place?

The commitment to the moral obligation that student needs are met was clearly evident throughout principal interviews. For many, CCSS implementation provided a means by which to reaffirm this commitment.

**Identifying Gaps between Vision and Current Reality**

Once a clear moral purpose and direction is determined, teachers must understand that the status quo can no longer be maintained. This involves the leader helping staff recognize that there is a disconnect between the vision for where the school needs to be
and the reality that currently exists. The challenge that comes with this understanding is that the leader must strike a balance in illuminating gaps between vision and reality without alienating teachers who have lived and worked in the reality as it currently exists. This process of “unfreezing” (Evans, 1996) encourages recognizing the need for change without placing blame.

Kristy Knowles identified this need at North Elementary School, highlighting decreased performance over time:

Our number one focus is on growing our students. For the past four years or so scores have been sliding downward. And our focus has been this year so far, has been to put interventions in place that will help our students grow. We’re working on closing the gap between various subgroups and just trying to implement Common Core, which we’ve have to do this year, and to make it work so that our students do grow and our scores are better.

Lindsay Jones spoke to the shift in focus in recognizing where the school can and must go in relation to where it has been:

I think here at Mission Elementary School—thinking back, originally, one of the goals was to shift the culture at Mission Elementary School to one of sort of this learned helplessness to we can do this. Yes our children are coming to us with lots of issues—and helping teachers to understand their role and the amount of power that they have during the six-and-a-half hours that they have them. I feel like we’re well on our way towards that goal. There’s very little of the, “These poor kids,” and you know the little things that I heard that told me that there wasn’t a lot of hope. They didn’t see themselves as hopeless at all but there was a lot of comments that pointed toward that, and very little teacher initiative.

She went on to discuss a culture of compliance that the principal perceived as a barrier to continuous improvement:
Well right now we have a lot of goals focused on academic improvement because our scores are not where we want them to be. We are very excited—I mean our benchmarks that our district provides. Our second and third grade is above the district average. The problem is our district is not really out performing. So our fourth and fifth grade students are not performing above the district average, but they are making improvements. We can see where there’s pockets of students that are really moving up. We’re trying to help all of our students move forward and to grow academically. At the same time, helping them become good people, which a lot of our kids need to know. Not that their parents are bad, but they need to know how to be good people. What do you do when you meet someone you’ve never seen or known before or what do you do when someone drops a dollar and you find it on the floor? So we’re really trying to help our children become productive citizens academically and socially.

Debbie Snyder discussed processes and how they have been reconsidered in an effort to move student learning ahead:

And now that that’s kind of in place, I’m hoping that we can continue to kind of support each other with the instructional shifts. I’m really kind of beginning to think—although I’ve seen a lot of those instructional shifts being put into practice this year and great conversations, not only with the teachers but also conversations among the students talking out the content and their conceptual understanding of learning. I still think that there might be room for maybe a little bit more strategic process of how to roll out those instructional shifts, so maybe something along those lines, before we can get there. We’re in the process right now of having conversations about what drives our master schedule. West High in the past has been driven mainly by enhancements in lunch and recess schedules. So we’re having conversations about that. We’re having conversations about how West High traditionally has set up class roles not necessarily for academic needs but more for behavior needs. And so once we get all those structural components in place, I think that we’ll be able to then focus more on kind of our next steps with our instructional practices. So that’s kind of where we’re at right now.

Bill Windsor emphasized the importance of effective communication and consensus building, while also recognizing that not all teachers will be on board at McCray Elementary initially.
In our jobs, we see the bigger picture more. So, I talk through what I’m doing, as to why I’m doing this and try and gather input. But at the same time, if I feel like I’m going to move in that direction, then that’s what I’m going to do regardless if the group believes that or not. And for the most part, 99% of the time they’re going to be fine. But for me, our focus needs to be on K–1 literacy. That’s where all of this, it’s the closest our kids will ever be to equal, is when they start kindergarten. It’s because once they start kindergarten, it just becomes exponential. It’s not that there wasn’t already a gap, it’s just it becomes exponential, those kids that are already reading go “whoosh,” those kids that struggle are hurt and it just gets larger and larger. So let’s fix it right there.

Creating a sense of urgency for the work through helping teachers recognize the gap between vision for the school and current reality was an ongoing process for interviewed principals. CCSS implementation has provided a vehicle for this conversation at the school level, as standards focus on higher levels of rigor in the classroom. Striking a balance between validating the work that has taken place in support of student learning while also highlighting areas for needed improvement poses a continual challenge for principals.

**Fostering Coherence-making**

Creating “change coherence” is critical in helping to unfreeze staff members may have a difficult time moving forward with change. This coherence works to provide clarity around change, especially when multiple initiatives are being implemented simultaneously. In North Carolina, where CCSS implementation is taking place in addition to several other initiatives related to RttT, this is seen by principals as an area of particular importance. Interestingly, much of the coherence-making discussed by principals focused on not just making sense of key initiatives within the context of the work; it also involved a heavy commitment to protecting teachers from external forces
Thomas Anderson, principal at Benson High, has worked to not make CCSS and implementation of these other initiatives appear as disjointed or additional to the work of the school:

So as a principal, I have a really hard time connecting all of those dots of how it all fits together other than, I’ll tell you the way we do it at Benson High, is we just keep the main thing the main thing, which is we boil it down into its simplest terms. We are trying to prepare our students to be responsible productive citizens in a 21st Century workplace, which is going to require us to teach and learn in completely different ways than what we were taught and how we learned even coming up through. And all of this other stuff, sometimes, I feel like it’s clutter. Sometimes I feel like there are a lot of unfunded mandates and different things, and it can be very distracting and can bog us down.

In an effort to build coherence at the school level, Steven Moore described the protective nature of preventing too many things taking place in their building. This attempt to create coherence at Clayton High has meant that district level initiatives may take a back seat to the critical work of the school:

Well I don’t think—I don’t mind being considered a control freak from a district level perspective because there are some many things that if it goes wrong it’s all going to fall on my lap and there are certain things I don’t allow central office, so to speak, people to come in and say were going to do this, we’re going to do this. For instance, the director of secondary education whatever position it is, emailed me about some new writing program and told me and said, “I need you to pick out some teachers that this writing program will go well with.” I emailed back and said no, “I won’t pick out any teachers. Me and my teachers will come to you and you demonstrate this writing program and we will decide whether or not we want to do it.”
Robert Smith, principal at Rosemont Elementary, reiterated this protective approach as he described advice he received early on that has guided his work in building coherence at the school level:

What the person told me was that you have to be able to decide what the critical parts are because a lot of stuff is going to come down, and that person was being fairly blunt with me about this. They were basically saying that you’ve got to decide what you’re going to put on these teachers shoulders and what you’re going to hold back. Because in the end, it’s about them in this building and us together as a team in this building working for these four hundred and ninety-five students plus seventeen Pre–K students.

Thomas Anderson expressed concern about his ability to create coherence in the midst of a heavy load for teachers at Benson High:

I’m trying to be positive, but my outlook on this one is not quite as rosy. It’s just realistic. Is that’s been really tough for us because I do think teachers feel very bogged down and they feel supported. It’s not that they don’t feel supported. I think it’s just a matter of them feeling overwhelmed and I’m not sure how to protect them from that. The only way that I know to protect that them from that is to take things from their plate and I can’t take anything off their plate. We are stripped down to the bare bones. I’ve taken everything off of their plate that I can take off and they still have plenty, plenty to do. So I don’t know. I’m just being realistic when I say that it seems that no matter what we do, no matter how much we try to plan ahead and feed it to them in pieces, bite-sized pieces and boil it down just to the essential core stuff we need to convey, it’s still is hard for them to digest all of it.

Allen Burns described the need to prioritize and focus:

So some of it has been necessary, but it’s all about prioritizing what’s important. And for us, here, it’s what has the biggest impact on kids at this point in time. And we’ve maintained that focus and when a concern comes up or a question comes up or anything comes up out of the ordinary where teachers are just stressed, they’re like, “Well what do we do?” I say, “What’s going to help the kids most?”
Bill Windsor spoke to the challenge of fostering coherence at McCray Elementary in light of a changing external landscape:

Well, I think the year before, because I think all the districts were in the same boat. You have a year of these extra Common Core days and thank you, thank you, but not knowing where you’re going and trying to figure this out and spending too much time on unpacking. And I’m like, “Okay, we’ve unpacked, let’s move forward.” But, not knowing where you’re at and not having a very good road-map, I didn’t feel confident enough opening it up and saying, “This is the direction we’re moving in,” because you weren’t sure is that really the direction you want me to move in. So I think if I could go back knowing now, it would be less on the unpacking and “let’s understand the Common Core” to “let’s understand how we’re going to change as teachers, not what we’re teaching.”

Debbie Snyder spoke to fostering coherence through clear communication at West High:

Yeah, I mean, they don’t have time, that’s my job and so whenever I get something, I give it to them immediately and I don’t just it in e-mail, we talk about it. We meet and I go through it and I take their questions and then I tell them how we’re going to get through it and I make sure that our leadership team is always up to date, the most up to date with what I know.

I’m thinking about the state kind of visions and programs or processes, in addition to kind of state, district initiatives but I try to be very careful, like we do with children. I don’t want children to see things segmented and so therefore teachers, I try to be very careful that teachers don’t see that—different processes or programs or initiatives as separate components, that does need to be supportive and seamless, and that’s very hard to do, especially when I’m trying to undo things here that weren’t done right to begin with.

Bill Windsor described grappling with changes specific to implementation of CCSS, and the perceived challenges to McCray Elementary in light of uncertainty themselves:

To me, it’s continuing with high expectations of our teachers. It is getting them to analyze their students more. It’s trying to find connections to what they’re doing to the grade level below you and the grade level above you so that you understand where is this coming from, so that we have a common vocabulary and where are
we’re going to, so that what I’m giving you is something that you can use. But getting that sense going across, it’s allowing teachers the opportunity to question, and question them the same way that everyone wants to question their students, to ask why and make them think about it and target their thinking more. Well, we talked through the major shifts and really did some analysis on that. We did what does Common Core classrooms look like and sounds like, feels. What should we see? We looked at sharing writing samples with each other. I think there were a lot of parts to building it, but at the same time you still even on the district end, I mean they were trying to blend as well as to how the parts can fit together. But is it right?

The challenge of creating coherence around CCSS implementation was clearly articulated by principals throughout the interview process. New state standards in North Carolina in every content area (including CCSS), educator effectiveness performance indicators linked to student data, new information management systems, and several other key initiatives, all implemented simultaneously and at a rapid pace, have often left principals working to build coherence while grappling with understanding these changes themselves.

**Establishing Trust Relationships**

Relationship building is key to building collective capacity in support of change. This is noted throughout the research and it appeared as a recurring theme in principal interviews. Several themes emerged in consideration of relationship building, including (a) mutual trust and collaboration, (b) safety in taking risks, and (c) balancing high expectations with creating trust relationships.

**Mutual Trust and Collaboration**

Thomas Anderson spoke in broad terms to the importance of relationship building to the success of Benson High School:
See I think that there are two camps on this, because some people will say in this age of accountability, we don’t have time for relationship-building. That we need to get more cold and calculating and more quantitative and more data-driven and there’s no time for relationship-building. I actually subscribe to the complete opposite of that philosophy. I think there’s no time for us to not to build relationship-building because I think we’re going to see the best work out of our teachers when we do value that.

He went on to describe collaboration in the decision making process:

I have kind of an open-door policy with the faculty and staff. It means that I don’t get nearly as much done during student hours as I would like, so I put in a lot of night and weekend hours. But I think the benefit of that or the payoff is that I think we’re building a pretty close, tight-knit team and in the long run, I think our trajectory, as far as the success of our school, is going to be a lot better just by trying to build relationships and be more collaborative with decision-making as far as the role that our leadership team plays. And so, I think there are a lot of pressures and stresses out there that are working already counter-productively and counter-intuitively against us. So I think we have to, now more than ever in the history of public education, we to have some solidarity and work collaboratively and build relationships. And as part of relationship-building, I think we’re also going to build the leadership capacity of our staff, and it all ties together because we know from research that our staff are going to do a better job when they feel like they are a teacher-leader and they feel like they have a stake in this. So I think relationship-building is absolutely crucial to it.

Bill Windsor spoke to the collaborative decision-making process at McCray Elementary School:

And I like to involve the staff in decision making so it is very diplomatic decision making. We talk about everything before we make decisions and we work towards what’s the best for the kids. There are some things that are non-negotiable from the get go, but the most important thing is that we keep the students and the kids moving in the right direction.
He also described modeling as critical to creating a collaborative environment:

I think it’s relationship building initially, with your staff, it’s in your actions. You’re not just saying, “Yes, this is what I think,” then do something different. It’s by having collaboration time, by giving people the opportunity to develop in ways that you may not have thought of but allow it to happen because it may be better than what you thought of and that’s the hard one. It’s the ones when you’re not in total control, but still it still bothers me, but at the same time I have to. For me, I try and treat it like I would teaching, that even though the paper doesn’t look exactly like I want, they’re expressing themselves and how they’re doing it I have to allow that to happen and facilitate them growing on their own and not just how my pattern leads but they going to find their own.

Kristy Knowles described relationship building as providing a support system for North Elementary School that is grounded in mutual trust:

The first thing is communication, is being open upfront and really working hard not to spring surprises on them, not to overload them, to get them to a point where they’re informed about the changes, but also made aware we don’t have time for you to sit and think about it. This has to happen. It has to happen now. And as an administrator, my question is what do I need to do to help you to move forward? What can I do? What should I do? That’s been almost the number one question in this building this year. What do I need to do? How can I help you get through this?

Trust was described as essential to the process of CCSS implementation. This trust runs from principal to staff, and between staff. Creating an environment in which the lines of communication are open and opportunities for collaboration and problem-solving are frequent are essential based upon principal feedback.
**Safety in Taking Risks**

Human nature tends to gravitate towards stability, and as a result, asking individuals to change means taking risks that can create discomfort and fear. Evans (1996) described this conservative impulse:

>This is not to say that people and patterns never change; they do. But most of these changes are slow, incremental, often barely perceptible; they are rarely rapid, formal or overt—and they are almost never sought. We know that life requires us to adapt, and we sometimes long for a change in our circumstances or in the way others treat us, but for the most part we cling reflexively and tenaciously to things as they are. (p. 25)

Teachers who are being asked to make changes, especially significant changes, in their instructional practice are likely to experience a lack of confidence in their ability to make the required change take place. Hoffer (1967) stated that “every radical adjustment is a crisis in self-esteem: we undergo a test, we have to prove ourselves. It needs inordinate self-confidence to face drastic change without inner trembling” (pp. 2–3). In order teachers to overcome this conservative impulse, they must be allowed and encouraged to take risks without fear of failure. Sarah Evans, principal at North High School, talked about the importance of taking risks:

>We want to create that around where kids feel like it’s okay to take a risk and if you mess up, we’ll figure it out. We’ll start over and do something different. I’ve tried to create that type of relationship with the teachers is that, yeah, we’ve got high standards and yes, we’re going to set our goals very high—kind of like what we do in school improvement because they didn’t want us to put the numbers really high. It’s like, “Well I don’t know. We’ve got new tests this year.” I’m like, “Well let’s do it. If we fall short then we can use the same goal for next year and just say we didn’t get there.”
Allen Burns also expressed the need for teachers at West Elementary to feel comfortable with making mistakes:

It’s a big thing. If people feel judged, if people feel like they can’t trust you or if people feel like every step they make is the wrong step, then they’re not going to feel free to go out of their comfort zone and try anything. You have to support them and you have to be willing to pat them on the back and say, “I know you’re doing the best you can.”

The shift in expectations in terms of classroom practice based upon CCSS has required many teachers to think differently about instructional approach. In order to make this shift, principals articulated the need to ensure that teachers feel safe and supported as they take risks and step outside of their comfort zones instructionally.

**Balancing High Expectations and Trust Relationships**

The ability of the principal to challenge teachers to continue to evolve their instructional practice has been an ongoing challenge of the profession. Bill Windsor described the challenges of striking a balance between challenging teachers at McCray Elementary School at higher levels while speaking positively to their past accomplishments and establishing trust relationships:

It’s huge. I mean that’s always the case. In anything, it’s that we’re all in this together. And the hardest part I think with relationship building is the development of relationship building along with difference of opinion. So that you can’t always be positive with stuff like this when you’re talking about a change of instructional design, because really we’re just at the surface of Common Core when we’re talking about the objectives, but when you’re talking about instructional design, it starts to get personal. And how we can have a difference of opinion and still keep it positive? I think that’s critical in the design. That it can’t be that you’re always hi-fiving. That you have to hi-five with a question and developing that thinking. And for some people, it’s trying to find
what they need to be successful because not everybody sees relationships the same way.

Lindsay Jones of Mission Elementary School expressed a similar sentiment:

I think it’s important that the teachers know that there’s standards they have to teach and that they’re standards they’re going to be held to. You can’t decide that you want to teach something else because you’ve always done that. You can’t do that, and it’s not in your standard course of study. But I think it’s—like I said—it’s important to let teachers know when they’re doing a good job. But I think it’s also important not to give them this false sense of success when they need to continue working on it. Being there to support them and help them and when they do have success, sharing that and letting them know that you appreciate that, I think is really important. But I guess just sticking with them. I mean it’s a learning process; they have to have some support.

The ability of the principal to effectively lead change hinges a great deal on their success in setting the stage for change. This phase of change is complex and dynamic, and is, ironically, the phase that is often shortchanged in an effort to move forward with new initiatives at a rapid pace. Lighthall (1973) spoke to this tendency:

The tendency is widespread for problem-solvers to try and jump from their private plans to public implementation of these plans without going through the (number of realities) necessary to fashion them in accordance with the problems felt by the adult humans whose energy and intelligence are needed to implement the plans. (p. 282)

Principals interviewed shared a great deal of insight specifically as it relates to aspects of “Setting the Stage” for change, and as a result this phase of the change process is more fully conceptualized in the framework than the later phases.
**Evolving Conceptual Framework**

Through the research, principals echoed the construct that change is very personal, sharing their own feelings and perceptions of change and how those influenced the ways in which they lead change in their schools (see Figure 3). In “Understanding Change,” principals identified (a) creating a safe environment for risk-taking, and (b) recognizing the personal side of change as being critical to successfully beginning to set the stage for a new change initiative.

“Building and Supporting a Collective Moral Vision,” the next sub-category for “Setting the Stage for Change” was reconceptualized as a part of an evolving framework. The complexity with which change is considered, collective vision is established, moral purpose is engaged, and gaps between vision and current reality are negotiated must be evaluated from a more holistic perspective. With that in mind, “Building and Supporting a Collective Moral Vision” was identified, with elements that include (a) Creating Demand and (b) Identifying Gaps between Vision and Current Reality.

In “Creating Demand,” two new themes emerged: (a) changing external expectations and (b) ethical commitment to improvement. For several principals, the external pressure that has been created as a result of CCSS and accompanying initiatives has served as a leverage point for requiring new expectations for teachers. For other principals, an ethical commitment to improvement has been the driver for change. Some have used both of these in conjunction with one another to build a case for change. In “Identifying Gaps between Vision and Current Reality,” principals spoke to creating demand while also balancing new expectations with concerns for supporting teachers to
understand that this will be a process of improvement. Steven Moore, principal at Clayton High School, emphasized this, especially in consideration of apprehension from North Carolina teachers who will now have an evaluation process that is increasingly public and links teacher performance and student achievement:

In “Fostering Coherence Making,” principals worked to (a) make sense of key initiatives for teachers, and (b) protect teachers from external forces that might detract from the work of the school. Principals worked to “connect the dots” for teachers on CCSS and other new initiatives in North Carolina, often when they were still grappling with understanding themselves. Allen Burns, principal at West Elementary, spoke to this challenge:

We’re connecting the dots every single day and trying to—there’s a lot of talk about mClass, for example, because that’s a big assessment and it was a big change for some of these teachers, especially third grade, who hadn’t had such a structured modeled system from our county office. We were modeling it here and monitoring it and making sure that we had exactly what we needed in place, but it was a big change and it was a stressful change. A lot of things that have been—but as we’ve gotten into it and we downplayed the changes—because we have had to downplay some of the changes and not make them as big as what they really were in order to get involved—we’ve actually seen that we needed some of these changes... But the whole point is that we should have had representatives from all the states that were involved in Common Core to develop the whole process. What do assessments look like? What instructional design should we seek? What’s these things occurring? Because the teachers, I think they would—if we tell them this is what we’re looking for, they’ll meet it because they have high expectations coming along from race to the top or Common Core or something, we do what we need to do with it in terms of PD or introducing it or whatever it is that we need to be working with, but we try not to get bogged down in it, because I think it would be depressing if you got bogged down in it for themselves, they want it. Whatever we ask of them, they’re going to try and achieve. But when we don’t know and we’re asking them to figure it out, and on top of that teach kids, that’s a lot to ask of the people to do.
Although I expected a focus on making sense of key initiatives for teachers, especially in light of implementation of a number of accompanying initiatives in addition to CCSS implementation, the commitment to buffering teachers from external forces that may detract from the teaching process was evident. Thomas Anderson, principal at Benson High, described:

And so, I think a part of our job as administrators is to keep that burden off of our teachers as much as possible so that they can focus on teaching, because they’re already working on trying to change their teaching habits and the learning that’s going on in the classrooms and so as much as possible, I think we need to try to shield them and protect them from some of these other dots. So we just try to keep it in the simplest terms.

In “Establishing Trust Relationships,” (a) mutual trust and collaboration, (b) safety in taking risks, and (c) balancing high expectations and trust relationships emerged as recurring themes. These themes all centered around the importance of creating relationships that encourage individuals to step outside of their comfort zones while providing a support system to ensure their success. Werner (1980) characterized this “ongoing construction”:

Ideally, implementation as a minimum includes shared understanding among participants concerning the implied presuppositions, values and assumptions which underlie a program, for if participants understand these then they have a basis for rejecting, accepting or modifying a program in terms of their own school, community and class situations. To state the aim another way, implementation is an ongoing construction of a s shared reality among group members through their interaction with one another within the program. (pp. 62–63)
Figure 3. Evolving CCSS Implementation Framework: Setting the Stage.
CHAPTER VI
ALIGNING RESOURCES IN SUPPORT OF CHANGE

In order to ensure the success of a change initiative, it is critical that resources and tools for instruction be provided so that those who are being asked to innovate have the right equipment for the job. These resources and tools for instruction, whether they are tangible (technology tools, materials) or intangible (time to plan, support from leadership) are also critical to the success of the change initiative. For the purpose of this research, Aligning Resources was delineated as (a) providing appropriate professional development, (b) providing appropriate resources and tools, and (c) creating structures to promote collaboration. It was expanded upon through examination of additional data, described below.

Providing Appropriate Professional Development

Professional development that is high quality is essential for teachers as they move forward with new innovations that require instructional practice to change in the classroom. This high quality professional development must engage teachers in opportunities to collaborate with peers, determining a professional development focus that is supportive in meeting the unique needs of the individual school. Areas of priority should center on what to teach, how to teach it, how to meet the needs of individual students, and how to build internal capacity for improvement. According to Sawchuk (2012), evidence from a Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation study indicates that teachers
struggle with engaging students in the higher-order, cognitively challenging tasks that are required of CCSS. We have done little to prepare teachers for this shift. “While we are promoting radical change in creating a coherent national framework for what students should know and the way they learn, we have not yet committed to offering teachers the deep learning they will need to transform the way they work” (Hirsh, 2012, p. 22).

Principals spoke to the importance of professional development as they work to implement new standards. Several areas of consideration for professional development were identified through the interview process, including (a) scaffolding and differentiating professional development to make it more meaningful and less overwhelming, and (b) vertically aligning the professional development so that teachers can recognize the interconnectedness and relevance to instructional progressions.

Scaffolding and Differentiating Professional Development

Steven Moore shared insight that has been gained through reflection over the past year’s implementation at Clayton High School, pointing to more frequent, scaffolding professional development coupled with much discussion:

One, people need it in smaller chunks. Look at this, try this, go back to your room and try this. Bring it back and let’s talk about it. When I say, ‘small chunks’ because next year our staff development is going to a complete different—even our faculty meetings will look different. We’re going to do all our faculty meetings on staff development during planning periods, during the course of the day instead of trying to do it after school. So, in other words, one time a month we’re going to have—during their planning period, we’re going to do our faculty meeting. In there, we’re going to give them a nugget of staff development. We’re going to talk about it, work on it, take it back, try it, bring it back to the next faculty meeting and talk about it. How did it go for you, what did you learn, what would you throw out? It’s fine if you throw that out. Let’s talk about what was another option for you?
Lindsay Jones scaffolded professional development at Mission Elementary as well, ensuring that frequent discussions of changes were considered and discussed:

We did one week before school started and one week after school started last school year and then sessions every other month, that were Monday and Wednesday for two back-to-back weeks, three hours each. A lot of professional development went into the alignment of the Common Core—how it was different, what was new, what was changing and that kind of logistical stuff—but then how to help your kids achieve at a high level and knowing more than just algorithms.

Bill Windsor described the value of a collective, focused approach to professional development at McCray Elementary School that is also tiered to differentiate for staff at varying places in their professional growth:

Since I’ve been at this school, I’ve tried to work on empowering, when I wasn’t running the professional development as much. Thus allowing others to take on those roles and develop it. Again, which is hard because you want to see it a certain way but you have to allow people that opportunity. But I think for me, my ultimate goal on staff development is there should be a tiered staff development on three to four focus points, either as a district or as a school. And based off of the observations and the walk-through data, the conversations that you’ve set up with your principal, instead of an IGP or a PDP, which really becomes a sheet of paper that you go, “Oh yes, what was I working on again?” and you don’t look at it, you say, “Okay, based on what we’re seeing with you, these are the four areas of growth that we’re working on as a district that we can provide a year-long staff development. Which one makes the most sense from where you’re at?” and to have differentiation within that.

Steve Moore recognized the importance of moving forward with professional development, even if it means initially taking “baby steps”:

I think it needs to be manageable. It’s hard to sit in front of a classroom; for kids to sit there for an hour and half and get classroom instruction. Well, it’s all for the sake of kids. An hour and half or a whole day of instruction, I mean, they need small chunks. I think it is our responsibility to pull out the small chunks that
they need. Say, “Take these nuggets and see how it works for you. Bring it back and let’s talk about it.” And, of course, it’s non-negotiables in their life. I told my teachers, “They’re non-negotiable. You will try. Not trying is not an option. You will try.” They kind of jump on that. They understand.

For Katie Simms, the shift that took place with CCSS made professional development more challenging at East Elementary, as preparation was difficult because they were in the midst of implementing previous standards. She believed that it was important to create opportunities for teachers to dissect the standards and accompanying instructional practices while also juggling existing standards:

In the meantime, I kind of felt—and I was still at the other school at the time—I kind of felt like what I was hearing from my teachers was we needed to get through last school year. We were still teaching the standard course of study. We still needed to stay on track, to follow the course. The kids were still being measured with the standard course of study. So we tried to maintain that focus last year but yet at the same time, we didn’t want to not be prepared for August, knowing we were going to have that transition. So because we had this Common Core team in place in our school and hadn’t really done anything with that Common Core team, I took it upon myself to meet with those teachers and we decided collectively that we were going to figure this out the best that we could as a team and start kind of dissecting components of our grade level Common Core and then present and try to share it with our teachers over the summer. It wasn’t required. It was just kind of whoever wanted to come could come and share it to our teachers as, “Oh, we got this.”

She went on to describe the benefit of collaborative opportunities for professional development in the district, with a focus on teacher leadership capacity-building:

For the most part, I think the majority of our PD, so far, has been teachers sharing with other teachers and because we have teacher leaders within the district that are sharing best practices, I think that’s been positive. I think teachers have appreciated that opportunity because they’ve already kind of tried it out and they’re kind of taking it and tweaking it for their own so I think that’s been
received well. Teachers, basically they just—they want affirmation at this point. They want to know, is this what I’m supposed to be doing?

Allen Burns described the professional development work that took place in the Appleton School District in preparation for CCSS over the course of five professional development days:

Last year we started modules as a school system. Our director went through and, with a team, created modules for us to look at how the Common Core was going to be changing from the previous year. So we had five professional developments as a school where we sat and we analyzed different pieces of the Common Core and discussed the shifts that we’re going to be taking place. We also took and broke into grade levels on different days and looked at what was going to be different this coming year than what we had last year.

Although schools approached professional development around CCSS implementation in varying ways, there was a clear recognition that a level of differentiation was essential based on the varying needs of the staff. For many, this has meant providing general professional development through designated days /sessions and then creating opportunities for collaboration through PLC work.

**Vertical Alignment**

An emerging theme throughout principal interviews with regard to professional development was that of vertical alignment of professional development. Providing training that isolates a grade level or content area without creating a larger context for the progression of teaching and learning was perceived as less valuable in promoting teacher improvement. Lindsay Jones discussed the value of vertical alignment in professional development:
Another thing that professional development helped us with is—and because we were looking at it vertically as well—we always went back to okay, if a fifth grader had to know they have to know this, but in fourth grade this looked like this, and third grade and second grade and first grade. This is a fair share all the way up to fraction and multiplying, dividing and all that in fifth grade. So if they’re looking at work samples. Where’s the breakdown here? So that was just huge. That’s just good for professional development, but it helped our teachers to go back and look. They’re really kind of stuck in this—they’re in fourth grade, they’re stuck in this second grade right here. This is where they’re stuck. So how can we help them get stronger and better? It was very good.

Thomas Anderson reiterated the need for vertical alignment, especially at the high school level:

There’s a lot of vertical and horizontal planning going on. For example, tomorrow is a work day for us. It’s a mandatory professional development day, so a lot of our 9th grade teachers are going to be going over to the middle school across the street from here and they’re going to be acting as facilitators for some discussions and conversation. Again, this is about vertical alignment and trying to tie any loose ends that we have so that the bridge is a lot wider and bigger transitioning between the middle to high school in terms of curriculum.

He recognized the relevance in creating a vertically aligned approach to consideration of professional development, identifying its power in supporting reluctant teachers through professional growth:

We have at times sent some resistant teachers to some different trainings. Some teachers who feel like, “By God I’ve been teaching for the past 36 years and it’s been working for the past 36 years, so why do I want to change now? This Common Core stuff, even though 48 of the 50 states are on board with it, I think it’s probably just going to be a fleeting thing that’s going to be gone here within the next year or two, so why am I going to change my teaching style for that?” You have to have a lot of personal conversations and we’ve had a lot of teachers doing observations. We’ve been sending teachers into other classrooms here within our school and with other schools, so that they can see the way other teachers are doing it. And really, it has sparked some ideas and some interests and really brought some people back to life.
The spiraling and building nature of CCSS standards in both reading and mathematics has highlighted the importance of a clear progression across grade levels. Based upon feedback from interviewed principals, this progression has impacted the ways in which professional development is provided. There was a clear recognition of the need for teachers to venture outside of their classrooms and consider the “big picture” with regards to standards implementation.

**Providing Appropriate Resources and Tools**

Teachers must have the tools necessary to move forward with change. As Schlechty (2001) described:

> Among the primary tasks of leaders are to identify the technologies that are essential to the organization’s core business, and to endeavor to provide the tools, processes, and skills needed to employ these technologies. That means it is the task of leaders to see the development, control, and continuous improvement of the processes associated with the effective use of these technologies and to develop in themselves and others the skills needed to control these processes and to use the tools effectively. (p. 35)

These tools can include new technologies and instructional resources, but time is often cited as a critical resource that is in limited supply. In light of limited budgets in the arena of public education, principals are often forced to lead the charge in determining what resources may provide the greatest benefit to improving instruction. Several of the principals interviewed described this process. Allen Burns highlighted his approach to determining resource allocation at West Elementary:

> We look at how it’s going to benefit the whole. We start with what do we need, tell me the things that you need in order to be successful. Tell me the things that you need in order to help your students the most. And then we come together as a
set team and we prioritize where we are at, what we need. One of the first things was the non-fiction text. After looking at everything and teaching for years they just said, “We do not have enough non-fiction text,” because we want to support not only the whole group class, but the small group guided reading. We didn’t have any nonfiction text for small group guided reading. So we went and we purchased that first. And then it trickled down; what next is going to have the most impact? What can we buy next that’s going to do the most good for the whole group of students? And so we just kept prioritizing and moving ourselves down until we figured out what was the least thing that we needed and spent the most money first.

Katie Simms reiterated the importance of allocating resources at East Elementary in light of CCSS:

One of the things that I did do this year to help support our teachers because—and that kind of spun off of our summer—what do you need? We need resources, resources, resources. Even though I think that a lot—we do have a lot of resources that are adaptable and I’m thinking they probably—the gap is probably more or less with our essential standards more so with our Common Core because those are really instructional shifts, whereas Essential Standards really is moving content around and there are some new domains with our science, especially that we don’t have resources for.

Angie Barnes described a specific example in which funds might be requested from South Elementary School teachers:

Any pot of money I have I take it before the School Improvement Team. We discuss the goals that we’re trying to get to and based on the goals that we’re headed for. Then if like fifth grade just asked me this morning would I consider buying First in Math that they would really like to have that for next year. That they thought it would help their students more than a program we already have. So I told them, “That we would talk about it in School Improvement Team once I get my pot of money”.

Debbie Snyder also described engaging the School Improvement Team at West High School in resource determination:
Well, what the teachers ask for, number one. When we sit down and look at our school improvement plan and our results from the previous semester and that kind of thing, where do we need to work? Where are students struggling? Where are they doing well? We look at ACT results and PLAN results a lot because they’re taking college classes. So that has a huge impact, so even beyond Common Core, we’re looking at those kind of things.

Bill Windsor expressed frustration with coming in new to a school where finances had been divided by grade level, and then determining that a big picture approach should be taken to making resource decisions:

What is hard is, what was done prior was grade levels were given money and that’s how the budget was spent. And it’s hard to spend money for people and changing that system because they it’s almost like they see it as that we don’t have access to the money, but it was trying to get it as a bigger picture. You what I mean? And I don’t know when I was teaching that I understood the bigger picture.

Sarah Evans emphasized the importance of making wise decisions regarding resources instead of rushing to spend funds at North High:

Well, like I said, the resource I think, finding those resources and being attuned to if the teachers say, “We need help with . . .”—then getting that help as opposed to, “This is what we’re going to do this year because I had this money and bought these books.” So just trying to be very sensitive to where the stresses are, what they say they need. When they come in and say, “I really think we need this for this project or this plan or this is what I want to do because this is in our curriculum. Can we do this?” And trying to find it—trying to find ways to make that happen, allowing them to go to some training.

In addition to externally produced resources, several principals shared viewpoints on locally and site-based developed resources in support of implementation of CCSS. Katie Simms described Appleton School District’s resources for teachers:
I talked about all of the resources already that our district has provided, whether it’s PDs or our pacing guide. However, one of the things that I wanted to elaborate on with our pacing guide, that our district—it’s electronic—and so our instructional coaches are trying to keep it updated. So as teachers are sharing resources or units, lesson plans, etcetera, they’re posting those for the teachers, so they’re trying to make it a living breathing document for our teachers so that we’re trying to do a better job of sharing across our district resources that support that.

Robert Smith, principal at Rosemont Elementary School in the Benson School District, also reflected back on the district’s work in development of pacing guides, but he did express concern with implementation challenges:

So building the unit plans is something they have been working on for the past twelve months, twelve months or more. But that has come with challenges because they have had to transition from a style of instruction that they were used to, they had gotten used, pacing guides that they gotten used to, to a very different approach to teaching.

Bill Windsor highlighted district resources at Carthage, including technology tools, as being valuable in the face of CCSS implementation:

So at the district level there are two Google sites for a Google school district that house all of our pieces of the puzzle . . . But it just talks you through the common aspects of Common Core and what to look for and what assessment pieces we’re running and collecting those pieces of data and some great articles or examples of exemplars. So those pieces have been put into place.

Interviewed principals voiced a commitment to making sure that teachers have the appropriate tools and resources to provide quality instruction in light of CCSS implementation. Districts have provided ready access to new teacher-developed resources. Principals have supplemented these resources by working with leadership
teams to identify what additional tools may be needed to support this process. Technology was recognized as an ongoing need, especially in light of a shift towards technology-based assessments.

**Creating Structures to Support Collaboration and Problem Solving**

As the teaching profession has increased in complexity, and models have emerged that hold teachers accountable for student results in a transparent way, it has become evident that the need exists to collaborate in pursuit of instructional improvement. These opportunities for collaboration can take a variety of forms, with professional learning communities (PLCs) being one example. The principal must articulate a clear vision for this work, and expectations must be determined in order to ensure that these collaborative opportunities are productive and focused on improved teaching and learning. Through the interview process, opportunities for (a) site based collaboration (PLCs) and (b) district collaboration were identified as supporting instructional improvement efforts in light of CCSS.

**Site-based Collaboration**

Interviewed principals recognized the power of teachers working together with a focus on improving learning opportunities for students. As Milbrey McLaughlin described, “The most promising strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement is developing the ability for school personnel to function as professional learning communities” (as cited in DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. xi).

A firm research base exists that underscores the value of PLCs in improving the teaching and learning process. Vescio, Ross, and Adams (2008) described the meta-
analysis of research conducted by the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995), the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (Carroll, Fulton, & Doerr, 2010); the Annenburg Institute for School Reform (2005), the Wallace Foundation (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010); and the American Educational Research Association (Holland, 2005):

The collective results of these studies offer an unequivocal answer to the question about whether the literature supports the assumption that student learning increases when teachers participate in professional learning communities. The answer is a resounding and encouraging yes. (Vescio et al., 2008, p. 87)

Principals described their efforts in enacting PLCs in their buildings. Katie Simms, spoke to starting a PLC process at East Elementary by laying a foundation for working together:

So we did that as a staff and we identified who we were as a team player and who our team players are, not just as grade levels but we all serve in different in other capacities and other opportunities for us to come to the table and problem solve together. So that kind of set the foundation to help us know each other, our own team player style, and then the team players that we work with. So that was very helpful. And once we got that in place, of course we have protected weekly planning—well, they have it daily, but there’s actually a day that they formally get together, even though most of my grade levels are getting together pretty much every day and after school.

This process required reflection and support from the principal:

So there’s that opportunity for them to come together. I had to kind of help—they asked me to kind of reframe using data to drive instructional planning so I’ve been kind of providing some professional development for our leadership chairs at our leadership team meetings and then they go back and use those strategies with their own team based on where their team is at. I’ve had my leadership chairs do some diagnostic ratings of where their team is, as far as that
collaborative piece, and identify some goals that they want to put in place for their individual teams for this year and then at the end of this year they’ll redo that survey and come up with some goals for their team for next year so that they can continue to grow because I have some grade levels that are just knocking it out of the park and I’ve got some that are still trying to figure out where the bat and the ball is, so trying to work within those team dynamics.

Allen Burns elaborated on West Elementary’s approach:

We have common planning time. Every grade level has common planning time, even the specials have common planning time. Like I mentioned before we have hat we meet, pretty much every two weeks to discuss where our students are and collaborate about what can we do differently, what other things can we put in place to help students. In addition, we’ve had extended planning times five times this year already to where teachers can plan six weeks in advance to meet the needs of their students and to adjust the curriculum and adjust what they need to. We went over the pacing guides with the teachers at that time as well. And when we do that we invite our specialists to come in. We get one of the specialists every time to come to those extended planning times and they talk about how they can help us, what can we do in gym, what can we do in music, what can we do in computer lab and in the media center, to help support what’s going on in the classroom. And we’ve developed some research projects that way. We’ve worked to build that collaborative process throughout the school.

When he arrived new to his school several years back, Bill Windsor introduced a model for PLCs. He described his experience:

So I gave them a design template of “this is what it could look like.” And again, allowing them the opportunity to develop that. It’s always going back to the same PLC design, which is going back to the fore-step of what do we want the kids to know, what are we going to do with the kids that don’t know it, what are we going to do with the kids that know it? And just keep hitting that over and over again. It’s hard in the elementary level because PLCs at this level they’re still working on what does that mean. They see it as a grade level meeting, covering content, covering the stuff and it’s not covering kids, so it’s developing that piece too. But yes, I’ve tried to set up with my site an opportunity for all us to see their minutes and what’s going on and what are we doing with the kids, but it’s going to be a process that will take some time.
He went on to describe his vision for PLC work:

I think ideally it’s going to get to a point where you’re going to have targeted groups of kids that you’re talking about, that it almost becomes like an RTI model in terms of talking through. What do we need to do with this group of kids, who’s in charge of it, when are we going to revisit with them? Let’s go back to this piece. Let’s take ten minutes to talk about the assessment that we got coming up this week. Do we all agree that the questions are varied and offer students opportunities to show their mastering in different ways? What do we accept as being on grade level in this? How are we going to handle as a grade level?”

Lindsay Jones has also worked to establish PLCs at Mission Elementary:

We have PLC meeting times set up and we have only three days of specials. Our specials are only here three days a week, which limits the amount of planning our teachers get. But they get two 40-minute sessions and one 80-minute session. We have determined—the PLC meeting time—and they make the procedures for all that and we work together with them. It’s kind of their decision; their norms and stuff. But we have set that up to where one day—and it’s supposed to be day to day—we’ll talk about Common assessment data or whatever. Originally we had said let’s do ELA a week then math a week. We’d do ELA then math. They’ve been able to balance that and they’re doing both, discussing math projects or discussing ELA objectives during the PLC time. So that’s set up for the school’s collaboration. We have data days that we’ve added in, that we’ve given some coverage to teachers that were coming. That’s a time where everyone come together reading ESL, EC with classroom teachers to talk about grade level specific data. So that’s been really helpful too.

Principal Jones spoke to the challenge of incorporating specialists into the existing PLC structure:

Something that’s missing in our school is a way to get EC, ESL and reading into planning sessions during the day. I can’t figure in my head how to make that happen without them losing class time. I mean we’re using our people. I mean our humans are out there and I want them with kids. We have tried before to do afternoon times and for the most part what happens is they get together with their people. We have a schedule here in our building that kind of forces collaboration between second, third, fourth and fifth grade teachers. We have during every
single reading time an ESL teacher, a reading teacher and a classroom teacher in the room at the same time so they can pool their small groups. So that’s kind of a forced—it’s not a planning session or a collaboration but they have to be able to pull that off.

Introducing the PLC model at the high school level can be particularly challenging.

Debbie Snyder experienced difficulty moving West High School to a PLC model:

And then bringing that instructional and collaborative environment into the high school environment is very different than trying to bring it to middle school teachers. They’re used to that, they’ve got their little teams and they work in teams and the high school level is very departmentalized. So you have math and English, but they rarely talk. Math teachers and English teachers don’t normally get together. I’ve found that math teachers do a great job together, I don’t have to worry about them having a PLC, they love each other, but getting a math teacher and an English teacher and a social studies teacher to sit down, scheduling wise a little bit different, where at the middle level, that’s very easy.

As a result, she tried a different approach to PLCs to help bring teachers together across content areas in support of increasing opportunities for students:

Well, I did something very different last January. After I had had a semester year, I created a different PLC. It was all my EOC teachers, we all met after school every other week and I lead it and we teachers who were very good, but I would hear this name and this name and I was hearing the same names. And so I just brought them all together and created a PLC with my EC department chair and pulled her in so we could talk about strategies for kids with disabilities or just even learning difficulties and that has probably been the best thing I’ve ever done here right now—talked about data, we talked about kids. It was a middle school concept in a high school environment and because if you think—what was happening was I would go to an Algebra I meeting. They’re really good with data. I would go to an English II, English meeting, and they were okay but they didn’t really know what to ask.

Kristy Knowles described the positive bi-products of having a PLC structure in her school:
The collaboration is essential. It supports—too often we get new things to do and it’s just kind of pushed on us and we’re left to our own devices. One thing that our counselors do and all the collaborations in the building that people are not only talking about what they need to do and how they need to do it, but they’re sharing their fears and they’re sharing the good things. They’re sharing when the light bulbs come on and when something good happens. So it’s support. Everybody is supporting each other. And that is one of the best things that’s coming out of it is the support building wide. Even we have some naysayers. We’ve got some negaholics and I’ve watched how the most positive folks have kind of headed them off and not isolating them or turning backs on them, but always speaking positive and always being supportive.

PLCs were identified across the board as being critical to implementation of CCSS. The importance of collaboration, and a clear focus on data as a means by which to drive instructional decision-making, has resonated with principals as they seek ways to improve learning outcomes for students.

**District Collaboration**

In addition to PLC structures at the school level, principals spoke to the benefits of collaboration within the district. Kristy Knowles described the work of the Appleton District:

> We have done quarterly collaboration sessions at all levels; elementary, middle, and high throughout the district. That’s been a tremendous help because teachers are invited to present during those sessions. So in our district, our teachers are getting to hear from their peers and that’s a very positive thing and they’ve been very supportive to each other, especially in this building.

Robert Smith reiterated the importance of collaboration in the Benson School District:

> Most need to work through some things together. The district this year has also had, they’re called Vertical Planning Sessions, but it’s really just like our second grade here getting together with the other second grade teachers from around the district. So they, once a month, they try to make sure that going through this is
very much a collaborative effort. I just think it’s a lot easier to handle if you are going through it, if you going through with other people. Because they may be able to pull you along through the tough part.

Sarah Evans described the positive aspects of Appleton District collaborative opportunities:

Well, the district, we had—and it wasn’t new. We had high school collaboration sessions once a quarter last year. But this year, they have really focused those on Common Core. So, the PD, the collaboration when all the high school teachers get together and are able to collaborate with each other and go to some training and share best practices has really been aligned to Common Core. That’s been great because every time we’ve had it so far, teachers come back and go, “Oh, I’ve got this great idea.” I was in the English meeting this last week and our new English teacher was connecting with some teachers from other schools who were going to share some resources with her and told her about some things online that she could find. So just that they had the opportunity to collaborate around implementation of how it’s being done on each campus and share those best practices, I think is somewhat reassuring to teachers. Because, one, some of their ideas are getting validated when you’re talking informally with their colleagues. And two, they’re getting good ideas from people in other schools and they realize they’re not alone. Every high school out there is struggling with the same things we’re struggling with and that’s at the system level.

Districts of interviewed principals have worked to provide opportunities for collaboration and sharing of new ideas around CCSS implementation. The models for this collaboration have varied, but the structures exist and are supported.

**Evolving Conceptual Framework**

In “Aligning Resources in Support of Change” (see Figure 4), the three previously identified themes were supported and expanded upon through the principal interview process. These included (a) Providing Appropriate Professional Development, (b)
Providing Appropriate Resources and Tools, and (c) Creating Structures to Support Collaboration and Problem Solving.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 4. Evolving CCSS Implementation Framework: Aligning Resources in Support of Change.**

In “Providing Appropriate Professional Development,” (a) scaffolded and differentiated professional development, and (b) vertical alignment emerged as common focal points. The concept of differentiation of professional development centers around
meeting individual needs of teachers as learners, and it provides modeling of appropriate instructional practice for working to differentiate for student needs in the classroom.

According to the Learning Forward, “Standards for Professional Learning”:

> Like all learners, educators learn in different ways and at different rates. Because some educators have different learning needs than others, professional learning must engage each educator in timely, high quality learning that meets his/her specific learning needs. (Learning Forward, 2013, p. 3)

A focus on vertical alignment as part of CCSS professional development was also noted as critical. Principals wanted to ensure that there was a clear progression for learning that has been identified for students, and have recognized the value in vertical conversations to support these efforts. Thomas Anderson described the approach at Benson High:

> There’s a lot of vertical and horizontal planning going on. For example, tomorrow is a work day for us. It’s a mandatory professional development day, so a lot of our 9th grade teachers are going to be going over to the middle school across the street from here and they’re going to be acting as facilitators for some discussions and conversation. Again, this is about vertical alignment and trying to tie any loose ends that we have so that the bridge is a lot wider and bigger transitioning between the middle to high school in terms of curriculum.

In “Providing Appropriate Tools and Resources,” principals spoke to a commitment to making good use of internal resources, including processes for engaging staff in prioritization of in light of limited funding and new standards. There was also an emphasis on use of district and school-developed resources, both from a practical standpoint and the recognition that teacher buy-in will be greater if they have a level of ownership of the process of unpacking standards and developing accompanying resources.
Principals described a commitment to (a) site based collaboration, and (b) district collaboration in “Creating Structures to Support Collaboration and Problem Solving.” A high level of commitment to PLCs was noted throughout the interview process. Additionally, opportunities created at the district level for teachers to engage with and learn from one another were seen as valuable in supporting implementation of CCSS and improving outcomes.
CHAPTER VII
MONITORING AND EVALUATING PROGRESS

In order to appropriately support a change initiative to fruition, and to determine the effectiveness of this initiative in improving teaching, and ultimately student learning, it is essential that implementation be monitored and evaluated along the way. This can be accomplished through establishing measures of accountability for implementation and outcomes. In the case of an initiative such as CCSS, which is aimed at shifting standards and accompanying instructional practice, instructional monitoring and feedback should also be considered and supported.

Accountability

Accountability is essential to the success of a change initiative. This accountability can and should include multiple elements, including test data, perceptual data, student work products, observations, and other tools. The importance of assessing progress as part of the change process was evident in principal interviews. This monitoring is often neglected as part of change aimed at instructional improvement. As Elmore (2000) articulated, schools are “almost always aboil with some kind of ‘change’ but they are only rarely involved in any deliberate process of improvement, where progress is checked against a clearly specified instructional goal” (p. 7). In consideration of accountability, principals pointed to a lack of clarity due to changing external expectations (new state testing, MSLs). Those who felt most comfortable in determining
the success of implementation looked to internal measures of effectiveness, such as benchmark data.

**Lack of Clarity**

Specific to implementation of CCSS, and based upon principal interviews, it is evident that there is still a lack of clarity on how to monitor and consider outcomes in terms of the success of implementation. Thomas Anderson described the challenge of making sense of change and how it translates into clear expectations for accountability at Benson High School:

> I’m not sure how to do that because there’s so much going on. I think it would be really hard to just simply make some sort of a graphic organizer or something that makes sense of all of this, because there are pieces of this that are even changing on the fly and that makes it really hard. And on top of that, there are some pieces of this where there are constant assessments of how schools and LEAs are doing in terms of the implementation of Common Core, but really more the Race to the Top dollars. There’s just so much accountability there that I feel like there’s a lot of energy expended just simply to provide evidences and proof, and we’re going out of our way spending a lot of time with that, rather than on our work and if we could just simply show our work product in a lot of examples, it should suffice.

He did note several measures that exist for his high school, but expressed concerns about what that data actually means this early in implementation:

> Well, I mean obviously, the right answer is to say that we’re going to use all of our summative formal assessment data, EOCs, VOCATs, all of those types of things, there’s going to be other data assessment as well. Right now, I kind of question the validity of some of those a little bit as far as how they’re going. And so, I’d like to see those tests over the course of a couple of years and look at state averages and look at the state bell curve before we place all of our eggs in that basket.
Principal Anderson went on to describe his approach to gauging instructional effectiveness in light of lack of clarity of results from an external standpoint:

We’ve done several surveys and different things to try to get some feedback. We have all kinds of conversations and just qualitative feedback, a lot more than quantitative, but. I believe they would say that I’m at least open and willing to listen and that I strive to be fair and equitable and that I’m at least cautious or slow to make decisions. I want to gather as much information before coming to a conclusion and making a decision so that our decisions are as best informed as they can be. So I try to do that. But really, the starting place for our conversation is, “What are you doing with those assessments? How are you using those assessments to go back and evaluate student progress?” and then from that, “What are you doing to revise instruction, to go back and reteach?” whatever needs to take place when you get those common and formative assessments back in order to improve instruction moving forward. And to ensure that by the time we get to the end of the semester and we take those summative assessments that we’re going to score through the roof on those summative assessments because we’ve been doing what we need to do all along. So that’s another one.

Sarah Evans, principal at North High School, echoed the concern that data will not be readily available in determining progress with implementation of new standards:

The EOC data, obviously, for the English II and Math, in particular, and we’ll look at MSLs in all the other areas. We’ll also look at the ACT and the PLAN data because we, again, that’s part of what we look at anyway. I guess we’ll have to look at how the teachers feel about it because you’re going to have those teachers who really haven’t embraced it at all and they might do okay. So that will play in also. I’m just kind of hesitantly waiting to see because if—I had a conversation with one of our teachers about it. What if they do okay and they haven’t taught it at all? What does that say about the assessments? And we were talking about the assessment. I said, “That’s a little scary.” And I said, “I hope that’s not how it plays out.” Because, I really—number one, I want the teacher to have a wake-up call. But, number two, then I would feel like some of our efforts have been in vain.

Debbie Snyder, principal at West High, has focused less on the standards and more on instructional practice:
And I’ve told them. I’m not going to learn your content. That’s what they pay you to do. I will know bits and pieces of it. I’m not saying that I don’t know any of the content. I know bits and pieces of the content and I told my math teacher, I said, “I’m that kid sitting in the back. When I’m in there observing you, I’m the kid in the back who doesn’t understand math and if I’m bored, imagine the children and if I don’t understand and I’ve got a master’s degree, I’m not that stupid. Imagine the children.”

Principals voiced a level of apprehension regarding their ability to determine the effectiveness of implementation with limited external gauges on which to rely. State assessment data, usually an indicator of success for schools in North Carolina, will likely not have data released until late fall 2013. In the meantime, principals must consider other measures of success.

Reliance on Internal Measures of Effectiveness

Several of the principals interviewed cited data sources outside of the scope of state indicators, which have weighed heavily in gauging success in the past. These included qualitative data (teacher, student, stakeholder perspectives), benchmark data, and student work products. Steven Moore described consideration of qualitative data in gauging progress at Clayton High School:

I don’t know. I guess, I just take that qualitative data from my teachers and just know what they’re talking about. But I also look at the test results to see especially the second semester scores. I know with different kids, but I would expect to see increased scores from the second semester. One of the things because the teachers thinks that they’re new to me. They knew me as a principal, but they never worked with me. One of things, after I got the test results, each one of my department chairs are aligned. Well, how were the test results? What did you think? I said, “I don’t know. I’m just waiting to hear what you all think.” I want y’all to tell me what you think about the scores and they actually broke out what the issues were, what mistakes that they made. So the second semester, we had some sessions of movement in the right direction.
Angie Barnes, Principal at South Elementary, placed heavy emphasis on Appleton School District benchmark data to gauge progress:

Oh it’s great, I mean because they can see by the data. We use the data from the benchmarks and the benchmarks come from Case 21 which aligned with Common Core. So that data doesn’t lie. They can see if they are being effective or not in a classroom. I had some teachers upset this morning when they saw their data because I turn over my data to my intervention specialist and he makes my graphs and stuff for. When they saw they’re not doing as well as they should be, I had one teacher start crying and I said, “You know, you’re too old to cry and you’re supposed to be a professional. Data doesn’t lie. This is telling me you’re not teaching rigorous enough, so you’ve got to step it up. Time’s drawing nigh, you better be ready.”

Allen Burns, also of Appleton School District, appeared to be comfortable with the ability to monitor student achievement at her school:

PFSS definitely monitors. We use that to analyze what concepts students are getting and what concepts students aren’t getting. We develop pre and posttests. And then from that, that’s what we use to organize our enrichment and remediation timeframe. And we have a pre and posttest for those tests too. Just because a student didn’t do well on the test on Friday doesn’t mean that on a new pretest on Monday, they don’t do great. So when we regroup, which pretty much takes our groups to a one to six, one to eight ratio, depending on the need, we’re able to be accountable for where that kid is and try and make focused interventions in order to help them. We have mClass where we do progress monitoring that we’re using right now. And then with the PFSS,¹ we’re constantly assessing ourselves for what practices we use in the classroom, but also what the students have been able to give us as a result. And that’s been able for us to check and recheck where we’re at as teachers.

Robert Smith, principal at Rosemont Elementary School, has focused more on consideration of monitoring lesson plans that are aligned with standards:

¹ Planning for Student Success (PFSS) is a pseudonym for one district’s PLC model. It is a collaborative model for meeting and planning for instruction based upon student need.
I think it’s all about building your knowledge base and me trying to provide opportunities to ensure that they have had the time necessary to dig into the standards and understand their standards. When they turn in lesson plans, I do ask for a focus on their standards. I ask them to show me which standards they’re going to be addressing that week on their grade level. So I try to keep it tied to the standards as much as possible. I think that I have to make sure that they have a good handle on what the standards are. I try to do that by making sure that they are staying tied to their standards. Whether it’s on their whiteboard, whether it’s represented in their essential question of the day, whether it’s in their lesson plans that they turn in. I need to be sure they are tied to their standards in everything that they do. That’s the curriculum piece. Then the last piece is the assessment piece. I need to always foster their understanding of data and how to use their student data to make data driven decisions on a daily basis. That might be data that they collected at the guided reading table that may just be formative data that they collect on a particular task as they circulate around the room.

Allen Burns, principal at West Elementary, described a multi-tiered approach to determining effectiveness of CCSS implementation:

I think it’s a combination of things. We go in with our progress monitoring and our walkthroughs to see what they’re doing. The assessments, the common assessments that we’re getting into the classrooms, because fifth grade will get common assessments on Math, Science, Reading; fourth grade’s doing the same thing, common assessments. We use that data to see are they actually reaching a target. The benchmarks that we’ve been given this year, the Case 21 benchmarks, that’s been beneficial in looking back at, “Well did we really teach this concept correctly? Did we really do what we needed to do?” And then just the conversation with the teachers about—open and honest conversation about are we where we need to be has enabled us to really look at the fidelity of what we’re doing in the classroom.

In light of limited external data from the state level, principals described use of district benchmarks and teacher-developed assessments to gauge progress. These data, in

\[^2\] Case 21 is a benchmarking tool that is aligned with CCSS. It is utilized by a number of North Carolina districts to monitor student progress with mastery of standards.
conjunction with instructional monitoring based upon classroom visits, helps to paint a more comprehensive picture of progress with implementation of CCSS.

**Instructional Coaching and Feedback**

Principals must support the instructional change process by providing teachers with coaching and feedback to improve instructional practice. The instructional monitoring that takes place when a principal or other coach regularly spends time in the classroom to get a clear sense of what is taking place is also highly valuable in implementation of a new innovation, as it provides them with a sense of the work that is taking place in the classroom on a day to day basis. In simple terms, Lortie (1975) stated, “the monitoring of effective instruction is at the heart of effective instruction” (p. 41).

Bill Windsor, principal at McCray Elementary School, has focused heavily on providing support as needed for the individual teacher’s growth:

> If somebody is not on board with what we’re doing, I will provide the support needed to move them forward or I will move them in a different direction if that’s what they need to do. But they need to get on board, and so I will provide the support in terms of I will sit down with you if it’s lesson-planning stuff and let you do observations of classrooms. I’ll sit in your classroom more to see that those things are occurring, we can have conversations; or if you feel more comfortable having conversations with another teacher in the building again, we have some great teachers. I will love for you to talk to them because I’m sure they would have much more insight than I would. But at the end of the day, I mean that’s always been the case. If you’re not in the right place, it doesn’t mean you’re a bad person, it’s just this may not be the right fit for you.

He went on to speak to the differentiated nature of this support:

> So I can’t go in “Normal Bill” way with everybody, you have to figure out what is it that’s going to do it for them. Because some people, they want praise. And I mean, you’ll do whatever if it’s praise. Some people want no praise whatsoever.
You just tell them what to do. It just depends, what is it that’s going to make you push yourself a little bit harder? I mean that’s just coaching. That’s all it is, you’re just coaching people to set a goal that’s that much higher than where they were before. And then once you get the right level, okay let’s shoot for here now and just keep pushing them forward, and at the same time keeping the end result in mind and just knowing the steps that you want to go.

Allen Burns described some of the tough conversations that had taken place as a result of instructional monitoring:

Sadly enough last year I had to tell one teacher, “If someone told you that you gave it a 100% this year, they’d be lying to you.” And those are open, honest discussions that you have to have. And I think if you don’t do that and you don’t take a look at the data and you don’t take a look at where you are and what you did for the kids this year, then you’re not being realistic with yourself. So we just have open conversations and we’ll just decide what went well, what we need to work on, and where we can improve, and if we have to shift people around, who will do the best job in every avenue. So it will be a process, especially with no testing data. We’ll look at everything, the big picture.

Steven Moore, principal at Clayton High School, described his focus in setting the stage for classroom observations and feedback:

I tell my staff everything I’m looking for when I walk in their classrooms. I tell them. I said, “These are the things I want to see this year. Next year, it may be a little different.” One of the things I’ve had to do. I tell the teachers, “When I come in your classroom, unless I come in with a laptop, it means I’m not doing your evaluation.” I would not write in your classroom. I will come in—I gave them a list of questions that I will ask the students. These are the questions I’m going to ask the students about what’s going on in the classroom. You have to be transparent. Also, you have to understand this is a risky time for them. You’re talking about data being dropped down into their evaluation instrument. Like I told one of the initiatives with the one-to-one. I said, “We’re going to take baby steps. We’re going to take baby steps.”
Sarah Evans, principal at North High School, believed that providing feedback has been difficult this year in light of a knowledge gap on their part:

Whenever I’m doing an observation, I’m constantly looking up to try to figure out where does that align? Or if I look at a teacher’s lesson plans on Canvas it’s like, is that in there? Is that part of the new standards or is that something he’s still doing just because he likes that activity? And that was one of our discussions in the faculty meeting last week. If your teaching looks like mine did in 1984, we have a problem because nothing is the same as it was. And I’ll look back and those little activities I did every single year because I loved them and I was just, by God, we’re going to do them, but really probably didn’t have anything to do with the standard course of study, I got away with it. I’m not sure we can do that anymore . . . I do walkthroughs. I do visits in classrooms where I’m not really there to do a formal walkthrough—just sitting in. I look at teacher—we use Canvas. All the teachers have Canvas, so I look at lesson plans. I look at activities that are in Canvas. I feel like I’m doing a very poor job this year because I don’t know the standards because I’m constantly having to go back to the pacing guide myself and look things up. I feel much more comfortable with the English Language Arts in looking at that and having a talk with the teacher and really encouraging. But that’s right. That’s the extent—I was encouraging, that you need to do a better job.

Robert Smith described framing feedback to teachers at Rosemont Elementary School around actionable school goals:

Well, we’re improvement plan driven. We’ve got three performance goals that they know. We’ve got three actionable goals, improvement goals, if you will, that they know, that they have a good handle on. We keep coming back to when I ask for lesson plans and when I ask for their common assessments and their common assessment documentation that they do, I’m asking for those things and I look at those things and then I give feedback back to them. I think that that accountability keeps it all tied together.

Allen Burns was concerned about being too directive in this process:

So I find that everyone is stretched really, really thin, more so than even in a typical school. So I’m having to be a little more directive than I have been in the
past and I’m reflecting on that a lot right now—and maybe Common Core too. I can’t decide if part of it’s because we’re transitioning and really have to keep kind of cracking the whip—I feel like I’m cracking a whip because I’m constantly like, where are you in the pacing guide? Have you done this? Or is that really in our new standards? I just feel like I’m being more directive than I’ve ever been with teachers, but again, I haven’t—this is only my 5th year as a principal, so I don’t know.

Debbie Snyder worked to provide appropriate resources and ideas to teachers at West High as part of the evaluation process:

I think that as principals, we get so caught up in telling the teachers what they need to do. We forget to tell them how to get there and in every observation I’ve ever done, in the post observation, I always bring back resources for the teacher, whether it’s a rubric, a couple of websites for you to visit, to look at, whatever it is. And then I always approach the post observation book, I give feedback to everybody. If you choose to take it, that’s fine. If not, that’s on you. You know the content better than I do; I’m going to give you feedback on the instruction.

Finally, Katie Simms has looked to classroom walkthroughs and observations at East Elementary School as a way to get a better sense of not just individual teacher need, but larger school areas of strength and needs for growth:

When you’re afforded an opportunity to gather data, whether it’s through formal observation or walkthroughs, then it gives you an opportunity to kind of really gauge—kind of parallel to the last question—where your teachers are as individuals and knowing how to support their needs or to make recommendations for those individual teachers to make sure that number one, they really understand the shift, what the change is supposed to be about, and systematically try to come up with a solution now rather than later to make sure that we’re at least looking at a different approach than what we’ve done in the past.
Principals spoke to the importance of monitoring instructional and providing feedback as essential to their work as school leaders. These opportunities help principals gauge effectiveness of instruction “on the ground.”

**Evolving Conceptual Framework**

In “Monitoring and Evaluating Progress” (see Figure 5), it became evident that principals perceive themselves to still be very early in the implementation of CCSS, and a level of uncertainty in terms of determining effectiveness of implementation exists. In spite of this, two previously identified sub-categories, (a) accountability, and (b) instructional feedback and coaching aligned with areas of focus with principals.

The difficulty in gauging effectiveness of implementation in light of new accountability standards at the state (and as a result, district) levels left principals reaching for some sort of measures of success. The majority of interviewed principals are basing success on perceptual data from teachers, parents and students. Others are cautiously reliant on district benchmarks and internal assessments to determine success prior to the October release of EOG and EOC data.

Instructional coaching and feedback was discussed by principals as another way to help monitor and improve instruction at the school level, in addition to ensuring that CCSS are being implemented with fidelity.
Figure 5. Evolving CCSS Implementation Framework: Monitoring and Evaluating Progress.
CHAPTER VIII
REFOCUSING AND SUSTAINING

The challenge of initiating a new innovation is evident. The ability to then move that innovation forward long term requires a commitment to refocusing and sustaining the change until it becomes ingrained in the culture of the organization. This “institutionalization” requires that the organization continually revisit the change process, determining what is working and what is not, and responding accordingly. The potential for the success of a change initiative is also impacted by external forces. If those forces are in favor of the initiative, the likelihood that it may have the potential to increase. If external forces are either against the initiative or are indifferent to it in terms of support, the potential for success will likely decrease.

Responsiveness

The success of an initiative such as CCSS implementation requires that schools be responsive to potential barriers that may surface along the way. In order to be responsive, one must have a clear sense of the current reality. Sarah Evans recognized the value of gathering information at North High and responding accordingly:

Well, I think the timing is perfect because we have had this massive turnover and we’ve grown as a school and we’ve finished our first 5-year cohort. So the time is ideal to reflect on all the different things—new content, new assessments, end of the first 5-year cohort, lots of changes in leadership and in teaching staff. Let’s look back. What does this tell us? How do we do—what do we need to do differently? What are we about now? So I think that the timing is perfect for us because we need to revisit where we’re going anyway. I think refocusing, again,
is going to depend a lot on what the data looks like, especially in the cases where we know teachers are doing a great job with implementation. And you—kind of using that as a model, so you see the kind of results you can get if you do this like you’re supposed to—hopefully.

She went on to describe what this looked like for one teacher:

One teacher did say this year, “I’m really going to try to do more with the informational piece. That’s the part that’s going to be new to me and that’s the part that I’m going to try to really focus on and really incorporate and hit that one hard because I know that’s where I’m going to struggle.” But, I didn’t have those conversations with everybody. So I think if I had sat down and had that structured conversation with, “What do you think this is going to look like in your room? How is it going to change your practice?” and just had some of those upfront conversations, I would have a better idea when I walk in the room if I’m seeing what I was told I would see. Is this person practicing what they preached or did they just give me that because they thought that was what I wanted to hear kind of thing.

Debbie Snyder described the process at West High as being incremental:

Yeah, exactly, and I think that what I’ve tried to establish with them this year before we approach it next year is—and it was just me planting little seeds, they do a pretty good job of revise and resubmit. I mean, we already have that down. They understand that the learning is the most important goal, but one of the best articles I read with my middle school staff when we approached this was as for good behavior.

Katie Simms discussed teachers at East Elementary being at very different places in the implementation process:

So trying to find that balance, I guess because I do kind of—reflecting out loud, I do have teachers that are here with implementation and teachers who really only bit off a small piece. So I’m really going to have to reflect on how can I get that, those teachers? And then I have the ones that are in the middle, but I think pretty much we’re on track because I really don’t expect any teachers to be nailing it out of the park. And for some of my teachers who are nailing it out of the park, I
hope they haven’t missed components along the way because it is just the first year of implementation, but I guess I’m going to have to think more about how I’m going to be able to kind of get people at an adequate level of implementation for next year because I’m not so sure that everybody is proficient with implementation at this point.

**Tri-level Development of Support**

The ability of the school to enact change, specifically implementation of CCSS, is heavily reliant upon external forces. District, state level, and national support for Common Core is essential in order to optimize the success of a new initiative. According to Collins (2001), “The real path to greatness, it turns out, requires simplicity and diligence. It requires clarity, not instant illumination. It demands each of us to focus on what’s vital—and to eliminate all of the extraneous distractions” (p. 91). The benefit of clarity of expectation and focus externally has the potential to support change, whereas a lack of clarity has the potential to create distraction and thwart reform efforts.

Throughout the interview process, several principals spoke to the support that they have received externally. Angie Barnes described the support that her school has received from the Appleton School District:

I feel like that our district did a phenomenal job. Of course it was overwhelming to all of us, because it is new. But I feel like that we were prepared enough that when it actually came out, we weren’t totally blindfolded. We had a sense of what was expected of us and what we needed to do to implement it. I would just say that the teachers and the principals need to be trained as much as possible.

Thomas Anderson described the work of the superintendent in the Benson School District in laying the groundwork for change:
There is this unwritten rule of nature that teachers just want to be resistant to change. One of the ways we’ve done that, answering your question, in this district is our superintendent has been really strategic with the way she has gone about this and I think it’s been really slick, just really good. She’s had a lot of town hall meetings, and she’s done a lot of work with our board of education and there’s been a lot of opportunity for input from every stakeholder including teachers. Teachers have had opportunities to turn in surveys and attend town hall meetings and things.

Other principals described a level of frustration with lack of clarity externally. Sarah Evans, principal in the Appleton School District, expressed concern:

But, I really—I think maybe district-wide, it would have been nice to have had a little bit more on how to monitor, what to look for, how we’re going to do, what to expect. I don’t know. I just would have liked to have been sitting in a room with other administrators so that I could say, “Okay, does this sound like so-and-so to you? Is that what they’re telling us to do?” Or, “How would that look in your high school because we’re a little bit different, so I’m trying to wrap my around this for us.” That’s always helpful to me.

Steven Moore, principal in the Carthage School District, felt there was too much district involvement at the school level:

I think part of the problem is we have so many central office administrators who are working with different departments in the building. As a principal, we don’t know what they’re doing. We’re constantly playing catch up and trying to figure out what do they tell the teachers. Now, they told teachers something different than I’ve told them. I have to go back and fix that. That’s what I told my teachers, “Look, you listen to central if you want to.” I’m on this ship and the orders are going to come from me and I don’t mean to send that back to the control, to control the central office. I don’t mean to—I said, “You have anything in doubt that somebody from central office tells you, you need to come see me because I don’t want anybody falling off the bus.”
He recommended more of a “grass roots” approach to implementation:

I feel like North Carolina went really rapid. They have their ready meetings and they’ve had all these meetings state-wide. But how do you know, how do you ensure the people know? It’s more that we’ve had these meetings to let people know so they should know. But they don’t know. I would definitely do more of a grass root campaign to get information out and I’ll start educating the principals as well as central office a lot early on and let them know some of the pitfalls that the schools are facing, the state is facing at trying to implement Common Core. But it has to be much more with grassroots. I don’t know if the state could have done more. But I feel like it moving very rapid. I don’t feel like every state in our union is moving that rapidly with Common Core and I don’t know why we’re feeling so pressured and doing so bad. So I try to tell them to slow down.

Bill Windsor, also a principal in the Carthage School District, echoed this concern:

Because we needed to change our bandwagon mentality and we didn’t. And we jumped in and signed a bill of sale before knowing what we were buying into. And I think all this stuff is good but there was more work that needed to be done before we signed off on it. And then now we’ve just left it up to schools to deal with, or districts and we’re all just floundering through it. And sure, we’re all floundering through it, but why should we? If it’s a Common Core, why are we independently floundering? The whole thing is collaboration. Why aren’t we collaborating, you know what I mean? Why aren’t we bringing it all together and making those pieces fit?

**Evolving Conceptual Framework**

As noted earlier, interviewed principals still perceived CCSS implementation as being at an early stage, and the challenges that come with this implementation were not fully realized at the time of interviews. In consideration of “Refocusing and Sustaining,” (Figure 6), it was clear, however, that the importance of (a) responsiveness and (b) tri-level development of support were emphasized as principals moved through CCSS implementation.
The ability to be responsive and reflective in the midst of implementation of a change initiative was described by several principals. Fullan (2010b) spoke to this ability:

Our change leaders are parsimonious in using a small number of powerful forces that get breakthrough results—such as having immense moral commitment to a cause along with a clump of empathy with those they are dealing with. This combination of resolute leadership and empathy enables these leaders to find alternative ways when they get stuck. They demonstrate persistence with flexibility but never stray from the core purpose. (p. 23)

Figure 6. Evolving CCSS Implementation Framework: Refocusing and Sustaining.
CHAPTER IX
EMERGING MODEL FOR CHANGE LEADERSHIP

As a result of my research, a “Final CCSS Implementation Framework” (see Figure 7) has emerged that delineates the stages of change in relation to the school leader’s implementation of Common Core State Standards. Previous chapters speak to the (a) Initial CCSS Framework (Figure 1), (b) Principal Perceptions of CCSS (see Figure 2), (c) Setting the Stage for Change (Figure 3), (d) Aligning Resources in Support of Change (see Figure 4), (e) Monitoring and Evaluating Progress (see Figure 5), and (f) Refocusing and Sustaining (see Figure 6). The intent of this chapter is to consider larger observations and personal reflections as a result of the research and in relation to the initial research questions and the comprehensive final framework.

Consideration of Research Questions

What do principals do to set the stage for implementation of an instructional change initiative such as the new CCSS? In regard to implementation of this new initiative, how has the principal evaluated school readiness and how has this informed the “stage setting” process?

Interviewed principals recognized the importance of setting the stage for instructional change, and much of what they shared in terms of implementation of CCSS fell into the category of “stage setting.” Their personal perspectives on change, their perceptions of the school’s culture and readiness for change, and the external context
within which CCSS has been introduced, have all played a part in the school’s
determination of readiness and accompanying “stage setting.”

    Principals illuminated their own understandings of change as a construct, both
from a personal perspective and as the instructional leader of a school tasked with
implementation of new standards. As Katie Simms described:

        Well, some like it and some don’t. Personally, I do well with change. I probably
crave change more than others because if I feel like I’m not changing, I’m not
growing but I also recognize that change requires someone who can lead that
initiative in a way that makes it almost kind of simple and takes something that’s
very—that seems overwhelming and very complex and bring it down for people
who need to be a part of that process. That makes it somewhat systematic,
understandable, easy to digest, chunk it. Make it attainable. Make it not seem so
overwhelming.

In an environment in which many teachers have a level of comfort with old standards and
expectations, school leaders assessed school readiness for CCSS and recognized the
importance of creating an environment in which risk-taking is safe as teachers implement
new standards and accompanying instructional strategies. In addition to acknowledging
the need for supporting risk-taking, principals spoke to the personal nature of change and
the anxiety that comes with implementing new standards. “If the change…threatens my
whole self, I will deny the data and the need for change. Only if I can feel that I will
retain my identity or my integrity as I learn something new or make a change, will I be
able to even contemplate it” (Schein, 1992, p. 300).

    Principals interviewed recognized that as part of the earliest stages of CCSS
implementation, there was work to be done in creating a collective vision that included
recognition that external expectations had created a demand for change, and that the
school had a moral obligation to its students based upon a model of continuous improvement.

Once the collective vision has been determined, principals described the importance of creating a sense of urgency by helping staff to recognize how their vision may be incongruent with the current reality of the school. As Evans (1996) described:

> Someone must make the case for change by “disconfirming” people’s reading of their situation and their satisfaction with their current practices. This does not mean castigating or blaming them, but it often means challenging people to face realities they have preferred to avoid. (p. 57)

In addition to helping identify gaps between vision and current reality, principals clearly recognized the necessity and accompanying challenges of fostering coherence in light of rapid implementation of CCSS and other accompanying initiatives specific to the state of North Carolina. Thomas Anderson, principal at Benson High, described this challenge.

> “So as a principal, I have a really hard time connecting all of those dots of how it all fits together . . . sometimes, I feel like it’s clutter.”

The ability of principals to establish and support change relationships was highlighted as necessary to setting the stage for implementation of CCSS. Principals emphasized the importance of creating opportunities for relationship building in support of the collective vision. They also struggled with striking a balance between maintaining positive trust relationships while challenging teachers to grow in practice. Bill Windsor described, “I think that’s critical in the design. That it can’t be that you’re always hi-fiving. That you have to hi-five with a question and developing that thinking.”
In summary, “setting the stage” involved principals grappling with their personal feelings about change as well as staff receptiveness towards change, especially as they relate to CCSS implementation. In order to help bring staff on board with this change, they have worked to create a collective vision for the school, with CCSS implementation being part of a larger focus on improved opportunities for students. In addition to establishment of this collective vision, consideration has been given to the importance of creating demand for change, fostering coherence for staff (in spite of a number of new initiatives in North Carolina), and developing trust relationships that challenge staff to continue to grow without devaluing the past work that has taken place within their respective schools.

What resources and support systems are put in place to support implementation of new standards? How has the principal determined and prioritized resources and support systems based upon the unique needs of his/her staff?

In consideration of implementation of CCSS, interviewed principals described resources and support systems in terms of providing staff with appropriate professional development, resources and tools, and structures to collaborate to ensure progress. Determination and prioritization of these resources has been influenced by the relatively short timeline for implementation of CCSS and accompanying initiatives in the state of North Carolina.

In terms of professional development, several key considerations emerged from principal interviews. One was the recognition that there is a need for differentiation of professional development, not just from school to school, but within the schools they
lead. Principals described staff members who were in very different places in terms of acceptance of change, level of understanding of new standards, and variance in terms of classroom instructional practice. The concern that professional development be tailored to meet those needs was echoed throughout the interview process.

Secondly, a need to focus professional growth on vertical alignment was evident. Due to a commitment to focus on academic rigor, the new pace and sequencing of math content, and the spiraling nature of ELA standards, principals perceived that implementation of CCSS would require a greater level of cross grade level conversation and planning, as well as a more comprehensive understanding of learning progressions.

In terms of specific resource allocation, principals have recognized the challenges of implementation of new standards with old tools. They consistently spoke to working to provide teachers with appropriate resources, often engaging leadership teams and school improvement planning teams in the resource selection process.

The concept of “structures for collaboration” was highlighted throughout the interview process, with principals recognizing and supporting the need for staff to work together as one of the most critical aspects of implementation of CCSS. They described PLCs and other district and site-specific models for collaboration, with a focus on continuous professional growth and increased student outcomes.

In consideration of allocation of resources, including professional development, specific resources and tools, and structures for collaboration, principals highlighted district work that has taken place in each of these areas. Districts have provided specific
CCSS professional development, developed specific teacher resources for use in planning for instruction, and in some cases have participated in district level PLCs.

How do principals monitor and evaluate progress in implementation of new standards?

What processes exist (either formally or informally) that support progress monitoring?

As a principal, how do you know that standards are being implemented with fidelity?

The newness of CCSS was illuminated during the principal interview process, as they described the struggle with gauging the effectiveness of new standards implementation with little external guidance from the federal and state, and in turn, local, levels. New standards have led to new state level assessments in North Carolina, and results are not due for release until October 2013 at the earliest. Districts were in the process of developing new benchmarks and assessments based on these standards, but these were still in the early stages, and benchmark data for local district assessments had not been considered comparatively with state data.

As a result, schools were relying heavily on internal indicators such as classroom walkthrough tools and teacher evaluation instruments to help get a sense of what is working and what is not. Principals focused heavily on instructional monitoring as a tool to dialogue with teachers on what was working and what was not, and a number of interviewees described noted differences in the quality of classroom instruction as a result of new standards. Additionally, teacher made assessments and common formative assessments (CFAs) were being considered to try and get a sense of how students were performing in relation to the content. Principals also mentioned perceptual data
(feedback from teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders) as helping them to get a sense of how CCSS implementation was progressing.

Overall, a lack of confidence in predicting the level with which CCSS is being implemented was demonstrated through the interview process. Some principals even described concerns with instructional monitoring due to the fact that standards were so new that they were still learning themselves. This newness, coupled with the fact that in North Carolina all standards changed (not just CCSS for ELA and Math), has led principals to feel unsure about their ability to speak to the effectiveness of implementation.

**How do principals refocus and sustain implementation of new standards?**

Implementation of CCSS, or any substantive change, requires ongoing work to help the initiative take hold. In consideration of sustainability of CCSS, interviewed principals spoke to the need to be reflective and to create a culture in which reflection is the norm. The school environment is complex and dynamic, and a process of reflection and recalibration is critical in order to ensure success. Sarah Evans described this reflective process at North High as “Let’s look back. What does this tell us? How do we do—what do we need to do differently? What are we about now?”

One critical factor in discussion of “refocusing and sustaining” was external support from the district, state and national levels. Principals shared conflicting opinions on levels of support received within school districts, with some perceiving high levels of district support as a positive, others perceiving too much district involvement in school
level implementation, and, for some, the desire for more district involvement in leading CCSS.

As the researcher, and as an individual charged with oversight of district implementation of CCSS, I am especially concerned about the area of tri-level support moving forward. There is a great deal of unrest around implementation at the national and state levels, and the political wrangling taking place has the potential to negatively impact districts and schools working to implement CCSS.

**What do principals perceive to be the intended (or unintended) successes of implementation of new standards?**

Principals described several perceived successes associated with implementation of CCSS. The ability for schools in North Carolina to share resources and ideas with other states across the nation was highlighted. Associated assessments such as SBA create normative data for schools and districts to utilize in determining areas of strength and weakness.

All interviewed principals pointed to a higher level of rigor and opportunity for students based upon new standards. They described higher levels of student engagement, varied instructional practices in the classroom, and increased expectations for student outcomes as a result of CCSS.

Principals also articulated an increased commitment on the part of teachers for collaboration with their peers, both within grade levels and content areas and across grade spans with opportunities for vertical articulation. The increased demand for everyone to retool based on CCSS has opened the door for principals to create more structures for
intentional planning and examination of student data in support of instructional planning.

PLCs have become a prominent focus at the schools in which principals were interviewed.

What do principals perceive to be the challenges of implementation of new standards?

The greatest level of challenge expressed by principals around CCSS was that implementation in North Carolina “too much, too soon.” As a recipient of RttT, North Carolina has moved forward with CCSS along with several other supporting initiatives in a relatively short period of time, leaving principals describing feelings of frustration and overload. Principals regularly voiced apprehension around how to make all of the pieces fit together in terms of CCSS implementation. Unclear metrics in terms of state results has added to the level of anxiety. Principals were unsure as to how to gauge the effectiveness of implementation, relying on instructional monitoring and perceptual data as the means by which to determine whether CCSS was on track in their respective schools.

In addition to consideration of the research questions, several interesting themes emerged as a result of the research. These highlight a broader perspective on some of the additional successes and challenges of the principal in leading a change initiative aimed at instructional improvement.

Principals as Reflective Practitioners

One critical observation that I have made through the interview process is that overall, the principals interviewed were very reflective in considering CCSS implementation and their successes and challenges in leading this effort, even when those
areas point to strengths and deficits in their own leadership in a very personal way. They recognized their own feelings about change, as well as the feelings of their staff, and they navigated the challenges associated with leading change. As Allen Burns, principal at West Elementary, described:

So it’s one of those, you just keep monitoring and moving, monitoring and moving and when something doesn’t work, you drop back. And at this point and time, you can’t, since it’s brand new this year, you can’t be, “You’ve got to do it this way.” You’ve got to be open to explore and give them the ability to go out and try new things and not be punished for it.

**It’s Larger than CCSS**

One of the challenging aspects of hearing from North Carolina principals and their perceptions of implementation of CCSS was the interconnectedness with CCSS and related RttT initiatives such as a new assessments and accountability model, new teacher effectiveness measures linked to student achievement, and a new student information management system. Due to the nature of RttT funding, these initiatives were implemented simultaneously, and with very little lead time. So in discussing CCSS with principals, the line was often blurred between pure standards implementation and everything else. Steven Moore, principal at Clayton High, spoke to the confusion:

So the issue is because I don’t think there’s anybody can argue with the standards, the Common Core standards because I think they are great but I think what they are trying to implement other things is giving everybody a bad taste in their mouth about the Common Core.

Thomas Anderson, principal at Benson High, echoed this concern, especially as it relates to the role of principal:
But I’m telling you, we’re blowing some teacher’s minds, and what it’s causing for school administrations is that we are running around like crazy trying to support our teachers and it’s keeping us really, really busy. I feel like we are working now on a level that we have never worked before and our teachers and I think our site-based leaders feel like, sometimes, that we’re doing too much and not really able to do any of it to fidelity, versus focusing on less and doing a better job at it.

**Leadership is a Team Sport**

Throughout the interview process, I was struck by the emphasis on getting “buy in” from teachers, involving teachers in establishment of a vision and direction for the school, engaging teachers in making decisions regarding resources and professional development, and creating opportunities for teachers to participate in PLCs focused on improving instruction in the classroom. This commitment to collaboration was evident in examining every aspect of the “Final CCSS Implementation Framework” (see Figure 7). Thomas Anderson described his commitment to collaborative leadership:

So that’s kind of the model I’ve worked from. I have kind of an open-door policy with the faculty and staff. It means that I don’t get nearly as much done during student hours as I would like, so I put in a lot of night and weekend hours. But I think the benefit of that or the payoff is that I think we’re building a pretty close, tight-knit team and in the long run, I think our trajectory, as far as the success of our school, is going to be a lot better just by trying to build relationships and be more collaborative with decision-making as far as the role that our leadership team and some other committees and stakeholders within the school play.

**School Level Leadership Doesn’t Operate in a Vacuum**

A final observation that resonated with me as a result of the interview process was the extent to which external political forces are impacting the work of school leaders at the site level. As a former principal myself, I always had a level of awareness of external
political forces, and I considered myself to be relatively adept at the political function of being a school leader. But leading implementation of CCSS and other RttT driven initiatives in North Carolina, while being cognizant of the changing political climate, has created an additional layer of stress and challenge for principals working to create coherence and clarity in the work that takes place each day in every classroom. These principals have worked to shield teachers from the storm, and have tried to keep the work focused not so much on the initiatives themselves, but on the core values and commitments of the school to improving learning opportunities for all students. As Thomas Anderson, described it:

So as a principal, I have a really hard time connecting all of those dots of how it all fits together other than, I’ll tell you the way we do it at Benson High School, is we just keep the main thing the main thing, which is we boil it down into its simplest terms. We are trying to prepare our students to be responsible productive citizens in a 21st Century workplace, which is going to require us to teach and learn in completely different ways than what we were taught and how we learned even coming up through. And all of this other stuff, sometimes, I feel like its clutter. Sometimes I feel like there are a lot of unfunded mandates and different things, and it can be very distracting and can bog us down.

**Final Thoughts on the CCSS Implementation Framework**

The framework that emerged as a result of the interview process reflects a comprehensive examination of the role of the principal in supporting instructional change, in this case, that of CCSS implementation (see Figure 7). What it fails to demonstrate is the complex and dynamic nature of leading change. The concept of “Setting the Stage” for change involves not only preliminary work; it also requires that the principal continue to take a “temperature check” and make adjustments. There is a
need to regularly engage in collaborative efforts to keep the vision of the school at the forefront, despite distractors such as changing staff, competing and sometimes conflicting initiatives, and external political forces that can easily draw the focus off of the important work of the school. “Aligning Resources in Support of Change” also requires regular revisiting in light of changes in staffing, and reassessment of professional development needs. “Monitoring and Evaluating Progress” is impacted by external forces such as state accountability models that change over time. In some cases, these models may stand in conflict with the vision and direction of the school. For example, if the school is focused on student growth, but the state model rewards student achievement over student growth, the vision of the school may conflict with external forces. In considering “Refocusing and Sustaining,” principals may have to regularly revisit aspects of the other stages of change as part of a responsive approach. Finally, as part of “Refocusing and Sustaining,” the concept of “Tri-level Support” as either reinforcing or thwarting change efforts is clearly illustrated in the current national (and in North Carolina, state) backlash around CCSS and accompanying assessments. This creates an additional level of complexity that, dependent upon the direction that the tide turns with regards to CCSS, has the potential to either support or undo all of the groundwork that has been laid with CCSS implementation.

Kanter (1997) described the complexity of refocusing and sustaining change in the midst of implementation:

Predictable problems arise in the middle of nearly every attempt to do something new. Almost inevitably, innovation projects encounter shortages of time or resources because forecasts were overly optimistic. Unexpected obstacles have to
be removed for the project to proceed. Momentum is lost because of staff turnover. Morale dips because of setbacks or sheer fatigue. Or critics attack because they start to notice the project when it looks like it might succeed. Before that, it was not enough of a threat to arouse antagonism. (p. 11)

A review of the literature on change leadership illustrates the notion that change is tough, and it’s messy, and many efforts aimed at true reform fall flat. An exploration of the personal experiences of principal implementing CCSS illuminated this challenge. Although the model for CCSS implementation that emerged through this research is an oversimplification of the complexity associated with leading an instructional change initiative, it does illustrate the processes and challenges in an accurate way based upon gathered data. What remains to be seen is whether CCSS implementation will be a long-term success in these schools, these districts, across the state of North Carolina, and on a national scale. Time will tell.
Figure 7. Final CCSS Implementation Framework.
CHAPTER X

IMPLICATIONS

Lessons Learned

Implementation of CCSS has been one piece of a larger puzzle in states across the nation that have applied for and received RttT funding. In North Carolina, this has meant new standards in every content area, new accompanying assessments, a new accountability model, and a teacher evaluation process that is directly linked to student achievement. All of these initiatives have unfolded in an unprecedentedly short period of time, leaving districts and schools scrambling to put the pieces into place. As a curriculum leader in my district, I have been in a number of meetings over the past two years where the analogy “building the plane as we are flying it” has been invoked. This frenetic rate and scope of change has been daunting for educators working to adapt and adopt. Evans (1996) spoke to this challenge:

Perhaps the best way to achieve this balance is to ask, “How far, how fast?” To base plans and forecasts for change on need alone is futile. Few schools, no matter how desperate their shortcomings, are capable of rapid, radical transformation. The problems of loss, incompetence, confusion, and conflict, exacerbated by the problems of the veteran staff and of chronic, institutional stress, virtually rule out such turnarounds. Whatever one might wish for our schools, especially the most troubled, it is surely true that we must measure the magnitude of change in terms of the starting points of the individuals implementing it and that it is wise to do fewer innovations better rather than more innovations worse. (p. 291)
In addition to the challenges of implementation of CCSS, there have been a number of benefits. As interviewed principals described, this has been an opportunity to step back and take another look at content and instructional practice. In a sense, new standards have been a “reset” button for all teachers. Opportunities for collaboration have been created at the school and district levels, and even at the state and national levels, for professional development. Changes in accompanying assessments have led many teachers who may not be moved by new standards alone to revisit instruction in light of new tests that require increasingly complex and rigorous levels of student thinking. And teacher evaluation being linked to student achievement in North Carolina and other RttT states has led to increased dialogue around teacher ownership of student performance, including the role that specialists and support staff play in ensuring the academic success of all students.

But implementation has also brought its fair share of challenges. The sentiment of “too much, too soon,” that was verbalized by principals has also found a state and national audience. According to a report issued by the Center on Education Policy (Rentner, 2013), 34 of the states implementing CCSS have struggled with having the necessary resources to meet the demands of CCSS implementation. In considering connecting teacher performance with student achievement, 32 CCSS states have perceived this to be an area of challenge. An additional Center on Education Policy report, focused specifically on CCSS professional development, states that only ten of 40 surveyed states reported that more than 75% of their ELA and Math teachers and principals have received professional development on CCSS, indicating that a number of
individuals teaching and leading CCSS implementation may have lacked professional development in preparing them for this shift (Kober, McIntosh, & Rentner, 2013).

I have personally witnessed teachers as they have worked through the initial implementation process over the past year. Some of the earliest apprehension around new standards seemed to subside as the year progressed. Throughout the research process, interviewed principals also demonstrated an appreciation of the new standards themselves. But the fate of CCSS and accompanying assessments may rest outside of the hands of principals and teachers. Currently a storm is brewing around CCSS implementation at the state and national levels. In North Carolina, changing political forces have now called much of the state’s preliminary work with CCSS into question. When North Carolina Lt. Governor Dan Forest posted a four-minute YouTube video challenging the Common Core in June 2013, State Superintendent June Atkinson responded in dismay:

How can people argue against teaching North Carolina students to read, write, speak and listen? . . . How could that be of the devil? How can that be bad for kids? I am so disappointed people would want to make this a political football. If we stopped implementation of the Common Core—this is the first year—our teachers would be in a tizzy. (Stancill, 2013, “Common Core in NC,” para. 3)

This political wrangling is taking place in other states as well. Bills to revoke CCSS have been considered in Alabama, Georgia, Indiana, and Michigan (Long, p. 17).

Accompanying Smarter Balanced Assessments (SBA) and Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC) assessments aimed at measuring success on CCSS are also under fire. As of July 2013, Georgia, Oklahoma,
Pennsylvania, North Dakota, and Alabama have either scaled back or eliminated their participation in PARCC assessments (Seigel, 2013).

It is difficult to determine whether the current debate around CCSS and accompanying assessments will lead states to back pedal on CCSS implementation, and if they do not, whether the implementation process will become watered down and absorbed into the traditional ways of doing the business of public schooling. What is clear is that schools are working hard to make sense of and implement policies and initiatives that are being pushed down from the national and state levels, and these initiatives are continually changing.

**For Principals**

In leading any change initiative, it is essential that principals have a clear understanding of the change process and the challenges and opportunities that it creates for school leadership aimed at instructional improvement. This involves principals understanding their own personal perspectives on change, and considering the nature and context of the change that is being introduced. With CCSS implementation in North Carolina, for instance, principals expressed positive and negative aspects to this initiative. The fact that new standards bring higher levels of interconnectedness across states, as well as increased levels of rigor and demand for collaboration, is countered by concerns that this initiative has been introduced to rapidly, and that the potential exists for this top-down initiative to become highly prescriptive in nature. Being cognizant of the benefits and potential negatives in terms of implementation allows the principal to more carefully
navigate implementation efforts and more effectively support staff as they navigate the change process.

In addition to an awareness of the context of the change - potential positives and negatives that might be unique to a particular initiative- it is also helpful to understand the change process. As demonstrated in Figure 6, four key phases of change have been identified, including (a) Setting the Stage for Change, (b) Aligning Resources in Support of Change, (c) Monitoring and Evaluating Progress, and (d) Refocusing and Sustaining. Through the interview process, and in light of a review of the literature, implications for principals are identified based upon these key phases.

**Setting the Stage for Change**

In considering change, it is critical that the principal work with the staff to have a clear vision for the school that is based upon quality teaching and increased learning outcomes for students. Regardless of the external politics, a vision that focuses on this commitment to the core business of the school can withstand a changing tide. In research by Day et al. (2000), school leaders who were successful created school environments where:

There was a strong emphasis upon teamwork and participation in decision making . . . Goals were clear and agreed, communications were good and everyone had high expectations of themselves and others. These collegial cultures were maintained, however, within the contexts of organization and internal accountability set by external policy demands and internal aspirations. These created ongoing tensions and dilemmas, which had to be managed and mediated as part of the establishment and maintenance of effective leadership cultures. (p. 162)
Principals interviewed expressed a commitment to the work of the school in its simplest terms, with CCSS being a means to support this work, rather than as a means to an end.

Thomas Anderson, principal at Benson High School, described this work:

> So as a principal . . . we just keep the main thing the main thing, which is we boil it down into its simplest terms. We are trying to prepare our students to be responsible productive citizens in a 21st Century workplace, which is going to require us to teach and learn in completely different ways than what we were taught and how we learned even coming up through.

**Aligning Resources in Support of Change**

Providing resources in support of change involves more than putting textbooks into the hands of students. Creating collaborative opportunities for teachers to learn from one another and solve problems around implementation is critical to the success of an initiative such as CCSS. It is critical that principals create avenues for teachers to be empowered to improve learning opportunities for students. A focus on where the “rubber meets the road” in terms of classroom instruction will allow teachers to devote time and energy to the right things, the things that should not be influenced by competing external forces. The engagement and empowerment of teachers as leaders and learners within the school is a critical force behind school improvement, as noted by principals interviewed for this study. Thomas Anderson, principal at Benson High, described the importance of PLC work for the school’s continued growth in light of CCSS:

> We’re seeing departments work together on a level that they have never seen them work together before and that is good. In addition to that, them being collaborative with the lesson design, not that every teacher needs to be on the same place on the same page every single day. That’s not what we’re talking about, but just simply the idea that two heads are better than one. The more
teachers we can get within a department or subject area that are working together, the better and I think the stronger we’re going to be.

The literature supports this collaborative mindset as well. Kouzes and Posner (2003) spoke to the importance of collaboration:

In the thousands of cases we’ve studied, we’ve yet to encounter a single example of extraordinary achievement that didn’t involve the active participation and support of many people. We’ve yet to find a single instance in which one talented person—leader or individual contributor—accounted for most, yet alone 100 percent, of the success. Throughout the years, leaders from all professions, from all economic sectors, and from around the globe continue to tell us, “You can’t do it alone.” Leadership is not a solo act; it’s a team performance . . . The winning strategies will be based upon the “we” not “I” philosophy. Collaboration is a social imperative. Without it people can’t get extraordinary things done in organizations. (p. 22)

**Monitoring and Evaluating Progress**

The power of quality instruction on student achievement is rarely debated, yet often understated as we consider implementation of a change initiative aimed at instructional improvement. As Reeves (2009) described, “Teaching is the first and most important element of progress. Neither programs nor curricula nor assessments nor administrative mandates will replace the primacy of teaching effectiveness as the number one impact on student achievement” (p. 107). Principals must create opportunities to monitor instruction and provide feedback for teachers to improve. This can be challenging in light of an educational culture that has historically rewarded maintaining the status quo. Elmore described the tendency of administrators who have been “hired and retained on the basis of their capacity to buffer teachers from outside interference…to support the prevailing logic of confidence” (p. 7).
Principals must act as courageous leaders who have a finger on the pulse of classroom instruction, setting the bar high and supporting teachers in their professional growth through honest and constructive feedback.

In addition to providing instructional feedback based upon observation, teachers must also reflect on their practice based upon what the data tells them is working/not working in the classroom. Although currently available data external CCSS data on success of implementation is limited, principals who have engaged teachers in PLC work must support development of these collaborative opportunities as data-driven conversations about what students know and are able to do based upon formative assessment data.

**Refocusing and Sustaining**

Principals must balance the short-term challenges of implementation of a change initiative, while also thinking and planning for the long-term. In the case of CCSS implementation, it is difficult to determine the long-range impact and enduring power of this initiative. As already stated, this initiative is currently being debated at the national, state and local levels. There is no crystal ball to peer into the future and determine whether CCSS will “stick.” Because of this, it is critical that principals focus on the work of the school in terms of meeting the needs of students. “Although political variables may be beyond our control, at least in the immediate term, the decisions we make every day will determine what accountability really means in the eyes of our students and communities” (Reeves, 2009, p. 125). Political context cannot be ignored, but it can be
mitigated with a continued commitment to improvement and a focus on meeting the individual needs of students at the school and classroom levels.

**For District Leaders**

District leaders must model what is expected at the school level through the actions of the system. If principals are to emphasize clarity of focus and purpose based on a vision of improved teaching and learning, then the district must also provide this level of coherence and commitment to the core business of the district as a learning organization. This clarity of purpose from the district level makes it crucial that central offices work as a team, modeling collaboration and commitment to a common purpose in support of schools. Fullan (2010a) spoke to this district commitment:

> No silos of standards, curriculum and instruction, personnel, finance, and so on. No we—they mentality between the districts and the schools or across schools but rather vibrant two-way and multiway partnerships zeroing in on instruction and results. (p. 12)

**For Policy Makers**

Regardless of the fate of CCSS, it is essential that policy makers recognize the impact of their actions on students in our public schools. New standards, new assessments, and new teacher accountability models for student achievement in one year have created a strain on staff and students, but to shift gears and move in an entirely new direction, negating the work that has taken place around CCSS could also be disastrous. It is critical that policy makers take a long-range, big picture look at this and other instructional initiatives. This long-range thinking will require considerations beyond political party and current election cycle, but it’s the right thing to do for students. We
cannot continue to allow students, teachers, and administrators to act as pawns in a political game. And the stakes have never been higher, as calls for increased opportunities for choice outside of public schooling are on the rise. In order to survive, public schools must evolve, and this will not take place if we continue to create bureaucratic constraints that discourage innovation and change course with political winds. Schlechty (2009) posited this challenge:

> It is time reformers quit “tinkering toward utopia,” grafting one reform after another onto a tree that is planted in soil deficient of the proper nutrients. It is time to acknowledge that the education of children in America is now rooted in infertile soil and to recognize that if education is to be improvement, schools must be transplanted into a more nourishing environment. Schools must be transformed from platforms for instruction to platforms for learning, from bureaucracies bent on control to learning organizations aimed at encouraging disciplined inquiry and creativity. (p. 5)

**Conclusion**

It is often said that we are at a crossroads in public education. Rapid technological advances have led us to reconsider the ways in which we must teach and learn to ensure the success of all students in a dynamic global society. In an attempt to ensure that all students are prepared to be successful in a changing world, reform efforts such as RttT have been introduced to provide funding in support of change, while also holding states accountable for teacher performance and student achievement. As a recipient of RttT funding, North Carolina has put CCSS and several accompanying initiatives into place in a short period of time.

Interviews with principals leading implementation of CCSS this year indicated varying degrees of frustration with the rapid pace of change, success with changing
instructional practices as a result of new standards, and concern with how best to navigate this change within the context of the school, without losing focus on instructional improvement and student outcomes. These interviews create a subtext for the state and national conversations that are taking place around CCSS, new assessments, teacher evaluation processes, and the future of public education in a larger sense.

As I reflect on this process, I am struck by the unwavering commitment, despite the associated challenges, of the interviewed principals to creating school cultures in which their students can be successful. As a former teacher and principal, and a current district leader and parent of two daughters in public schools in North Carolina, I am concerned about what the future may hold, but heartened by the commitment of my colleagues. It is my sincere hope that public education can continue to evolve and flourish, and that our policy makers will recognize the value in continuing to work towards transforming, not abandoning, this system of schooling.
REFERENCES


guide.pdf


Zhao, Y. (2009). *Catching up or leading the way*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW GUIDE

Research Questions

What do principals do to set the stage for implementation of an instructional change initiative such as the new Common Core State Standards? In regard to implementation of this new initiative, how has the principal evaluated school readiness and how has this informed the “stage setting” process?

What resources and support systems are put in place to support implementation of new standards? How has the principal determined and prioritized resources and support systems based upon the unique needs of his/her staff?

How do principals monitor and evaluate progress in implementation of new standards?

What processes exist (either formally or informally) that support progress monitoring?

How do principals refocus and sustain implementation of new standards?

What do principals perceive to be the intended (or unintended) successes of implementation of new standards?

What do principals perceive to be the challenges of implementation of new standards?

Interview Questions

Background

Could you begin by telling me a little bit about yourself and your background?

What led you to the role that you are currently in now?

What are your professional goals?

How would you describe your leadership style?

How do you think stakeholders within your school (students, teachers, parents) would describe you?

How would district level leaders describe you as leader of your school?

What goals do you have for your school moving forward?
What are your feelings about the course that North Carolina has taken in implementation of Common Core State Standards?

What do you see as the intended outcomes of this initiative?

How does this fit with your vision for your school?

How are the English Language Arts (ELA) standards different from what we have been doing in the past?

How are the Math standards different from what we have been doing in the past?

How should instruction look different in terms of implementation of new standards?

Beyond actually changing the content that teachers are teaching, what are the broader implications of new standards from an instructional standpoint? How does this inform the work of the school leader?

**Setting the Stage**

What work has taken place in your district in preparation for Common Core State Standards?

What is your perspective on change?

What do you perceive to be the role of the principal in leading an instructional initiative such as implementation of Common Core? How does this perspective inform your work?

How have you, as principal, set the stage for implementation of Common Core State Standards at your school?

In looking at where your school was at the outset of this new initiative, and in considering where they need to go as a result of these new expectations, how have you worked to help bring staff on board with this change? What has the reaction been?

What role does relationship building play in these efforts?

New Common Core State Standards are one piece of the instructional improvement puzzle. What have you done to help connect the dots for your staff?
Aligning Resources in Support of Change

What resources and support systems exist in support of implementation of Common Core State Standards? What have you put in place to support implementation of new standards?

How have you, as principal, determined and prioritized resources and support systems based upon the unique needs of your staff?

What is your perspective on professional development? How has the professional development that has taken place around Common Core State Standards impacted your efforts at implementation?

What structures for collaboration exist in your school? How do these structures impact your efforts at implementation?

What have you determined to be the most critical resources needed in support of implementation of new standards? Why are these most critical? What have you done to ensure that these resources (specific tools, time) are being used effectively?

Monitoring and Evaluating Progress

How do you, as principal, monitor and evaluate progress in implementation of new standards?

What processes exist (either formally or informally) that support progress monitoring?

What structures exist to provide instructional feedback and coaching?

As a principal, how do you know that standards are being implemented with fidelity? What data sources tell you the story on a day to day basis?

What happens when a teacher is not implementing new standards?

After the first year of implementation of new standards is complete, what will you consider in determining how successful your school was in this process? What data sources?

Refocusing and Sustaining

After you reflect on this first year of implementation, how will you use that information to move forward on a path to continued improvement?
Based on your school’s progress to-date, where do you think you will be as a school after year one?

What do you anticipate that next year will look like in terms of implementation? How will you continue to support these efforts?

Wrap Up

What do you perceive to be the intended (or unintended) successes of implementation of new standards?

What do you perceive to be the challenges of implementation of new standards?

What are the benefits to implementing a national/state initiative such as Common Core, as opposed to implementing a strictly site-based initiative? What are the challenges?

If you rewind and go back to the year before new standards were implemented, how would your planning process for implementation and the first year of actual implementation look different?

Administrators from 45 states are in varying stages of implementation of Common Core State Standards, with some of them in the planning phase of coming on board. What advice can you give district leaders in helping prepare for this shift? School level principals?
APPENDIX B
IRB APPROVAL

OFFICE OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY
2718 Beverly Cooper Moore and Irene Mitchell Moore
Humanities and Research Administration Bldg.
PO Box 26170
Greensboro, NC 27402-8170
336.255.1482
Web site: integrity.uncg.edu
Federalwide Assurance (PWA) #216

To: Ulrich Reitzug
Ed Leaship and Cultural Found
366A School of Education Building

From: UNCG IRB

Authorized signature on behalf of IRB

Approval Date: 2/14/2013
Expiration Date of Approval: 2/13/2014

RE: Notice of IRB Approval by Expedited Review (under 45 CFR 46.110)
Submission Type: Initial
Expedited Category: 7. Surveys/interviews/focus groups, 6. Voice/Video research recordings
Study #: 12-0042
Study Title: Implementing Common Core State Standards: Change Leadership in Support of Instructional Improvement

This submission has been approved by the IRB for the period indicated. It has been determined that the risk involved in this research is no more than minimal.

Study Description:
The purpose of this study is to examine the implementation process of the Common Core Standards, with the intent of informing what we know about effective principal instructional and change leadership.

Study Specific Details:
- Your study is approved and is in compliance with federal regulations and UNCG IRB Policies. Please note that you will also need to remain in compliance with the university Access To and Data Retention Policy which can be found at http://policy.uncg.edu/research_data/

Regulatory and other findings:
- If your study is contingent upon approval from another site (such as the school district or school in which you will be conducting research), you will need to submit a modification at the time you receive that approval.

Investigator’s Responsibilities

Federal regulations require that all research be reviewed at least annually. It is the Principal Investigator’s responsibility to submit for renewal and obtain approval before the expiration date. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without IRB approval. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in automatic termination of the approval for this study on the expiration date.

Signed letters, along with stamped copies of consent forms and other recruitment materials will be scanned to you in a separate email. These consent forms must be used unless the IRB has given you approval to waive this requirement.

You are required to obtain IRB approval for any changes to any aspect of this study before they can be implemented (use the modification application available at http://www.uncg.edu/ori/irb.htm). Should any adverse event or unanticipated problem involving risks to subjects or others occur it must be reported immediately to the IRB using the “Unanticipated Problem/Event” form at the same website.

CC:
Rhonda Schuhler
ORI (ORU), Non-IRB Review Contact
Informed Consent Form

Project Title: Implementing Common Core State Standards: Change Leadership in Support of Instructional Improvement

Project Director: Rhonda Schuhler

Participant's Name: ____________________________

What is the study about?
This is a research study that examines leadership through implementation of a change initiative. The principal plays a critical role in leading staff through change. An understanding of the complexity of change, as noted throughout the research, can help to provide the school leader with guidance in leading complex change in the school environment.

Implementation of Common Core Standards, if undertaken with a focus on instructional improvement, has the potential to affect positive change in instruction at the school level. This change initiative is significant in nature, and implementation of new standards for the upcoming year will provide insight into leadership of change in support of instructional improvement.

This research study is intended to examine the principal’s perspective on implementation of the Common Core State Standards initiative. It is the intent of the researcher to examine this process through the vantage points of a number of principals in the Piedmont-Triad Region of North Carolina, and to gain insight into the challenges and successes of change leadership of a key instructional initiative that can be shared with other educational leaders attempting to lead complex change.

Why are you asking me?
Several districts within the Piedmont-Triad Region of North Carolina have been selected for participation. Dependent upon the district’s specific process for conducting research, principals have been provided with an opportunity to participate in this study.

What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?
Study participants will be asked to complete a semi-structured interview, approximately 1.5 hours in length. The interview will be conducted at the principal’s school, and will be scheduled at the convenience of the principal.

Is there any audio/video recording?
Interviews will be audio recorded. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the tape, your confidentiality for things you say on the tape cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the tape as described below.

Research will be stored on a secure external drive. Once audiotapes have been uploaded electronically, the original disks will be erased. Data will be stored for three years and then deleted from any electronic file. If the need for a transcriptionist arises, they will sign a Statement of Confidentiality that includes an agreement to delete any data stored on their personal hard drive, transcriptions will be delivered on a USB drive that will be reformatted after data is entered into the secure server.

Analysis and reporting of findings from interviews will not include identifying information.

What are the dangers to me?

UNCG IRB
Approved Consent Form

Valid 2/14/13 to 2/13/14.
The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants.

If you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Dr. Rick Reitzug at 336.334.3460. If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study please contact the Office of Research Integrity at UNCG toll-free at (855)-251-2351.

Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research?
There are no direct benefits to participants in this study. Participating in this study may help to inform leadership development opportunities and practice.

Are there any benefits to me for taking part in this research study?
Through sharing personal experiences regarding the challenges and successes of implementation of new standards, administrators may find that this process helps them to better understand their role in leading change at their respective schools.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?
There are no payments and no costs associated with participation in this study.

How will you keep my information confidential?
Research will be stored in on a secure external disk. Once audiotapes have been uploaded electronically, the original disks will be erased. Data will be stored for three years and then deleted from any electronic file. If the need for a transcriptionist arises, they will sign a Statement of Confidentiality that includes an agreement to delete any data stored on their personal hard drive, transcriptions will be delivered on a USB drive that will be reformatted after data is entered onto the secure external disk drive.

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

What if I want to leave the study?
You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state.

What about new information/changes in the study?
If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:
By signing this consent form you are agreeing that you read, or it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate, or have the individual specified above as a participant participate, in this study described to you by Rhonda Schuhler.

Signature: __________________________________________________________ Date: __________________

UNCG IRB
Approved Consent Form
Valid 2/14/13 to 12/13/14.
Recruitment Letter/Email

<DATE>

Dear <INSERT PARTICIPANT’S NAME>:

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I am conducting as part of my dissertation research in the Department of Educational Leadership and Cultural Foundations at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro under the supervision of Dr. Rick Reitzug. I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you decide to take part.

The principal plays a critical role in leading staff through change. An understanding of the complexity of change, as noted throughout the research, can help to provide the school leader with guidance in leading complex change in the school environment.

Implementation of Common Core Standards, if undertaken with a focus on instructional improvement, has the potential to affect positive change in instruction at the school level. This change initiative is significant in nature, and implementation of new standards for the upcoming year will provide insight into leadership of change in support of instructional improvement.

This research study is intended to examine the principal’s perspective on implementation of the Common Core State Standards initiative. It is the intent of the researcher to examine this process through the vantage points of a number of principals in the Piedmont-Triad Region of North Carolina, and to gain insight into the challenges and successes of change leadership of a key instructional initiative that can be shared with other educational leaders attempting to lead complex change. You are being asked to participate due to the fact that you are currently serving as a principal in North Carolina who is experiencing leading implementation of new standards this school year.

Participation in this study is voluntary. There is no compensation provided for participation in the study. It will involve an interview of approximately one hour in length to take place at your school site (or other location based upon your preference). You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences by advising the researcher. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in the dissertation. Data collected during this study will be retained for three years. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at 336-512-9308 or by email at rhonda.schuhler@gmail.com. You can also contact my supervisor, Dr. Rick Reitzug, by phone at 336-334-3460 or by email at ureitzu@uncg.edu.
I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and has received IRB approval through the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. However, the final decision about participation is yours. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact the Office of Research Integrity at orc@uncg.edu.

I hope that the results of my study will be of benefit to those organizations directly involved in the study, other voluntary recreation organizations not directly involved in the study, as well as to the broader research community.

I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Yours Sincerely,

Rhonda Schuhler