PLANNING TO CHANGE: STRATEGIC PLANNING AND COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL REFORM

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ABSTRACT

While organizational change theory has been available to school leaders for the past forty years, few have attempted to consciously transform this theory into practice to overcome the plethora of problems that exist in many schools (Joyner, 1998). This paper examines the change process at two schools implementing comprehensive school reform models. The findings of this study suggest that the use of strategic planning models that emphasize initial planning activities can make the change process for schools less daunting. In our perpetually changing world, educational organizations will continue to be bombarded with the pressure to transform. For these changes to take place smoothly and efficiently, educators need to develop a greater understanding of strategic planning and the change process. They must embrace the adage that "those who plan to learn, must learn to plan."

PLANNING TO CHANGE

Those who plan to learn must learn to plan

Public outcry about the continued poor performance of the public education system has led to repeated calls for changes to improve student success (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). For years, interested stakeholders have waited for change, often pleading for improvement (Cuban, 2003). Despite these frequent calls for change, the public education system has remained virtually unchanged and unable to generate comprehensive improvements. Repeated tinkering, an outcome of a haphazard change process, has not been sufficient to overcome the significant shortcomings that exists in many schools. For significant change to occur there must be a plan.

Decades of ongoing mediocrity highlights the need for strategic guidance in approaching educational change (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). While organizational change theory has been available to school leaders for the past forty years, few have attempted to consciously transform this theory to practice (Joyner, 1998). This paper examines the change process at two schools attempting significant transformation through the implementation of comprehensive school reform models. Of primary concern were the initiating activities that were guided by the strategic planning literature. The goal of this research was to examine how these initiating activities affected the level of implementation of the proposed changes.

This exploration was guided by the assumption that planned change is superior to un-planned change or changes implemented in a haphazard manner. For planned change to be successful it must be built on a foundation of sound strategic planning theory that emphasizes initiating planning activities. The initiation phase is key to the institutionalization of the desired change (Berman & McLaughlin, 1976) as it provides a means to explore the context of the change, the organization's capacity to change, and the level of commitment toward the proposed change.

The educational sector has frequently relied on changes in policy to transform the way schools operate. While changes in policy are typically quite easy to enact, changes in practice do not always follow. While desirable, policy makers cannot simply mandate what matters (McLaughlin, 1987), as mandates alone are not sufficient to create the conditions that enable individuals and groups to develop the skills and deep understandings that foster the necessary cultural changes that support a change in practice (Fullan, 1997).

The current No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation is a prime example of the difficulty of using policy to evoke changes in teaching and learning. While the goal of the NCLB policy is to improve student achievement, the policy's emphasis on standardized testing has resulted in a regime of high-stakes accountability measures that reward superficial change that may temporarily appease policy makers but do little to foster the comprehensive changes necessary to truly improve teaching and learning (Cuban, 2003).

The strategic planning literature details steps required to foster profound change (Bryson, 1995). It is by providing guidance as to how best to engage in a process of large-scale change that the area of

strategic planning can be of assistance to educators.

While there is a plethora of different definitions of strategic planning, one that is readily applicable to educational organizations and served as the foundation for this study is from the work of Peter O'Brien (1991). From O'Brien's perspective, strategic planning involves defining the organization's mission and developing strategies and plans to align resources with environmental opportunities and threats in such a way as to achieve its mission in the most effective way (OBrien, 1991). Educational organizations that follow a strategic planning formula, instead of relying on haphazard change, benefit from several of the advantages of engaging in planned change. The promotion of strategic thought and action; improved decision making; enhanced organizational responsiveness and improved performance are just a few of the positive outcome of a strategic planning process (Bryson, 1995). Despite these benefits one must remain cognizant that participation in a strategic planning process in itself is not enough to guarantee a successful change. It is paramount that the individuals directing the planning process follow a planning model that meshes with the culture and environment in which the change is proposed. Criticism of past planning efforts in education can be considered a direct result of an over-reliance on hyper-rational models that emphasized plan development and strategy implementation (OBrien, 1991), while failing to acknowledge the context in which the change was to occur. The positivistic orientation of these overly rational models failed to work in the often non-rational environment of the schoolhouse (Rieger, 1993).

Unlike planning models espoused by the corporate sector, planning for educational institutions must be more dynamic and constructivist in its orientation. D'Amico (1989) suggested that strategic planning used in educational settings must be different from that used in corporate contexts because the organizational structures of schools and corporations are vastly different. One difference is that political factors have greater influence in educational settings than in the corporate environment. Corporate planning is primarily profit driven. Many early planners failed to account for this fact when trying to implement business planning models in educational environments (D'Amico, 1989). Strategic planning in educational settings also requires a greater degree of participation from the organization's stakeholders, as only the stakeholders can accurately determine if the changes being proposed are technically workable, politically acceptable, and fit the organization's core values and philosophy (Bryson, 1995).

A review of change models for educational organizations reveals a number of commonalties. The work of Berman & McLaughlin (1976), Bryson (1995), Conley (1993), Ferrara (2000), Fullan (1997), Joyner (1998), and OBrien (1991) all suggest that the strategic planning process can be divided into three distinct phases: initiation, implementation and institutionalization. While the various authors may have different names for the phases, the processes that occur highlight a consensus about the change process continuum. The initiation phase includes all activities that lead up to and include a decision to adopt or proceed with a change (Fullan, 1997). The implementation phase is marked by the transition from planning to the execution of the strategies that were conceived in the initial stage (Bryson, 1995). Consequently, the final phase of institutionalization occurs when the innovation or change implemented in the previous stage loses it "special project" status and becomes part of the routinized behavior of the organization (Berman & McLaughlin, 1976).

It is because the initiation phase directly impacts the success of later phases (Berman & McLaughlin; Ferrara, 2000; Fullan, 1997) that the activities that take place during this initial phase serve as the primary focus of this study. In Berman and McLaughlin' s (1976) landmark study of the implementation of educational innovations it was determined that the nature of what took place during the initiation phase was a major influence on the prospect of successful implementation.

Despite this guidance, provided decades ago, contemporary research indicates that most attempts at educational change still largely ignore the importance of initiating activities in determining effective implementation resulting in successful institutionalized (Ferrara, 2000; Fullan, 1997). Initiating activities must address the questions of whether and how to begin implementation, and what readiness conditions might be essential prior to commencing the implementation process (Fullan & Stieglebauer, 1997). To answer these questions, issues relating to context, capacity, and commitment need to be explored thoroughly.

Context

Traditional and contemporary planning models are consistent in that the context of the change must be investigated prior to initiating the change process. This includes an assessment of the external political, economic, and social forces and trends that influence the manner in which the organization operates as well as the internal resources and limitations that are present (Bryson, 1995). Traditionally this assessment was completed by performing a SWOT analysis that examined the internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as the external opportunities and threats (Bryson, 1995; OBrien, 1991; Taylor, 1987). Just as important as the results of the SWOT analysis is who is involved in the analysis process. A failure to involve all stakeholders can drastically skew the results. A successful analysis begins with a shared assessment by power groups and stakeholders, as both power brokers and stakeholders need to assume collective responsibility for identifying and defining the issues related to the change effort. The sharing of responsibility for a problem is imperative if all parties are to share the responsibility for its resolution (Joyner, 1998).

If a SWOT analysis is to be an illuminating instrument in the exploration of the context of change, its focus must penetrate past the surface of simple demographics and into the inner-workings of the organization. Along with a review of the demographic issues affecting changes in educational organizations, Hopkins (1998) asserted that relational and leadership factors must also be thoroughly examined. Relational factors include the extent to which cliques and specific interests groups exist within a school and often serve as the "gas" or "break pedal" of an organization. If stakeholder groups have significantly different ideologies, the organization's response to change can be greatly fragmented (Hopkins, 1998).

When assessing available resources, leadership must be counted as an essential element. This includes the extent to which the administration has historically employed a leadership style that is collegial and distributes ownership and leadership throughout the school (Hopkins, 1998). This notion is supported by the work of Berman & McLaughlin (1976) and Smith, Maxwell, Lowther, Hacker, Bol & Nunnery (1997) that observed that the implementation of a reform was greatly enhanced by strong administrative leadership within the school. The findings of these studies noted that in schools where there appeared to be strong commitment and support by the principal, general support from district officials, high faculty morale, and the presence of a faculty-elected leadership council, there was a greater perception of implementation success (Berman & McLaughlin, 1976; Smith et al., 1997). Thus, one could conclude that if these elements are not present, change efforts are likely to break down or be implemented symbolically without significant change occurring (Berman & McLaughlin, 1976)

Capacity

In addition to an exploration of the context of change, the initiation phase of strategic planning should include activities that examine an organization's capacity to change. Most school innovations over the last decade have been entered into as a "knee jerk" reaction to calls to reform. As a result, planners charge full speed ahead when confronted with the pressure or mandate for change without pausing to assess the system's capacity for change (Ferrara, 2000). An examination of organizational capacity should include a comprehensive understanding of the change being proposed and the change process itself. Just as important as the acquisition of information, the organization's readiness to accept change must also be examined. For the change process to be successful there must be sufficient understanding about the requirements of change. Smith et al. (1997) found that schools that struggled with implementing a significant change were generally those in which teachers lacked a sufficient understanding of the change process.

In an attempt to ensure schools understand the requirements of the change process, the creators of a number of school reform models suggest that as part of the initiation phase, school staffs must be provided with enough time and information to thoroughly learn about the change model. This includes an opportunity to discuss the model among themselves and an opportunity to observe the model in action. When these capacity building activities have not taken place, staff members often have little confidence in the ultimate success of the change effort, and thus the likelihood that the reform will be institutionalized is greatly reduced (Nunnery, Bol, Dietrich, Rich, Kelly, Hacker, et al., 1997).

A key component in examining organizational capacity is an assessment of the organization's readiness to engage in the change process. The work of Slavin (1998) noted three different categories of readiness based on capabilities, relationships, and immediate past history of a school that is contemplating a significant change. Slavin uses the terms "seed" schools, "brick" schools and "sand" schools to differentiate the level of readiness to successfully engage in change (Slavin, 1998). The seed analogy refers to the notion that the soil is fertile and the seed has within it the capacity to grow. "Seed" schools have an extraordinary capacity to translate a vision into reality. The staff are cohesive, excited about teaching, are lead by a visionary leader willing to involve the entire staff in decisions, and there is a broad awareness of research trends and ideas being implemented elsewhere. In contract, school staff in "brick" schools, would like to do a better job and are willing and able to engage in a reform process if they are convinced that it would work, but they are unlikely to create their own path to reform. There is a good relationship among staff and leadership in brick schools, as well as a positive orientation towards change and some degree of stability in the school and its district. Although the foundation of brick schools is not as fertile as seed schools, there is a sufficient base on which to build on if the bricks are brought in from outside designers. These bricks can then be used in conjunction with detailed blueprints to construct the desired change (Slavin, 1998).

"Sand" schools are the least ready for change. Sand schools are complacent institutions where the faculty feel they are doing a good job, or where they feel there is no way to improve on current performance levels. These are schools in which even the most heroic attempts at reform are doomed to failure. Trying to implement change is like trying to build a structure out of sand. Even if something can be built, the slightest breeze or wave will cause it to collapse. Sand schools require fundamental changes before they can support any type of comprehensive reform (Slavin, 1998).

Commitment

Before planners proceed to the implementation phase of the strategic planning process there must be a clear understanding about the organization's level of commitment toward the change process. This includes the allocation of resources as well as the emotional desire to support the necessary changes for successful implementation and institutionalization to take place. The level of commitment to a change process is greatly influenced by the reasoning as to why a change is being proposed. Berman and McLaughlin (1976) noted that the reasoning behind why a change process was initiated greatly affected the success of the implementation and in turn the final outcome of the innovation. In their study of the implementation of federal educational programs, Berman and McLaughlin found that the motivation supporting the initiation processes could be separated into two types: opportunism or problem solving. Programs that were motivated by opportunism grew out of a response to available federal funds. Despite having adequate resources, these programs were characterized by a lack of interest and commitment on the part of local participants. As a result, participants were often indifferent to project activities and outcomes, and little in the way of serious change was ever attempted or occurred (Berman & McLaughlin, 1976). Programs that grew out of a problem-solving motive emerged primarily in response to locally identified needs and were associated with a strong commitment to address these needs. Consequently, Berman and McLaughlin concluded that a problem solving condition might be a necessary condition for institutionalization to take place (1976).

Before an organization begins a change effort there must be consensus among the stakeholders about whether the change is desirable in relation to the desired goals and whether it is implementable (Fullan & Stieglebauer, 1997). If the values and goals implicit in a project's design are not congruent with those of the project participants, the innovation is likely to be either symbolically implemented or not implemented at all (Berman & McLaughlin, 1976). Change efforts that have developed a critical mass of support and commitment are more likely to result in successful implementation (Berman & McLaughlin, 1976).

Full commitment grows out of an informed choice to participate in the change process. This is greaty influenced by the opportunity to explore diverse options and choose a change strategy that is believed to be well matched to the needs of a particular school (Stringfield & Ross, 1977). Stringfield & Ross (1977) found that one of the precursors to successful implementations was the opportunity to

choose. When teachers are not fully informed about the change process, or they are not provided with enough time to review the information about the change process or reform model, they will typically express little enthusiasm for the change being implemented (Stringfield & Ross, 1977).

METHODS

This article examines the change process that took place at two schools that implemented two different comprehensive school reform models. The models implemented are the Coalition of Essential Schools and ATLAS Communities. Sunshine High was a member of the ATLAS Communities, while Lone Star Middle School was part of the Coalition of Essential Schools. Both reform models are similar in that they are built on guiding beliefs rather than a prescriptive implementation plan.

ATLAS is an acronym for Authentic Teaching, Learning, and Assessment for All Students. The ATLAS Communities approach is based on the belief that all students can and must reach their full potential. To facilitate the ability of students to reach their potential, schools follow pathways that focus efforts to improve learning for all students by focusing on teaching for understanding; evaluating student work through standards and authentic assessments; engaging teachers in serious, sustained professional development through whole-faculty study groups; involving families and other community members in the education of their children; and reorganizing the internal structures and decision-making processes of schools and districts to support the above goals (AASA, 2002).

Schools that become members of the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) follow a set of "Common Principles" that guide school reform. These principles suggest that the school should focus on helping children learn to use their minds well. The school's goals should be simple; each student master a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge and the school's goals should apply to all students. When possible, teaching and learning should be personalized to the maximum feasible extent. CES recommends that graduation diplomas be awarded upon demonstration of mastery of the central skills and knowledge of the school's program. They also suggest that the tone of the school should stress un-anxious expectation, trust and decency, and that the principal and teachers should perceive themselves as generalists first and specialists second. To that end, teacher loads should be 80 or fewer pupils, and per-pupil cost should not exceed traditional school costs by more than 10%. Finally, the model designers, require that their schools demonstrate non-discriminatory and inclusive policies, practices, and pedagogies (AASA, 2002).

Both Sunshine High and Lone Star Middle School were part of a longitudinal study that investiated the questions of why and how some external reform designs succeed at school improvement and others do not. Data was collected over a four-year period where researchers made annual visits to the schools to conduct interviews with school staff as well as district administrators. Interviews were based on a semi-structured protocol that queried participants about the initiation and implementation process, as well as the impact the reform models had on student achievement, school culture, and teachers' lives.

The data from 33 interviews at Sunshine High, and 26 interviews at Lone Star Middle School were analyzed and coded using HyperResearch, a qualitative research software program. HyperResearch enables the user to code, retrieve, and analyze large amounts of data. The interview data from Sunshine High included interviews with the school district superintendent, the current and former school principals, two assistant principals, and twenty teachers. The interview participants at Lone Star included the current and former principals, two assistant principals, a para-professional, two teacher focus groups, as well as 15 teachers. Numerous participants were interviewed on more than one occasion.

FINDINGS

Both ATLAS and CES require significant changes in policy, practices, and perceptions. For these changes to occur, the operational context at the school must be one that is conducive to change. The school must have the capacity to change, and all stakeholders must be committed to the change process. The pre-implementation activities that took place at these schools were examined to determine the impact the initiation phase had on the change process. Initiation activities that are associated with context, capacity, and commitment of the change process were examined.

Context

The context of change at Sunshine High was rather dire. Before beginning the change process, state education officials considered Sunshine High to be a failing school and gave the school a grade of "D" on its accountability report. The community that surrounds Sunshine High was also operating under dire circumstances. Sunshine High was part of a small rural community that was in a steep economic decline with no prospects of improvement. The majority of the students in the school district were from low socioeconomic households, with more than 60% of the students qualifying for free or reduced-priced meals at school. Parent involvement at the school was severely lacking. School officials considered this to be a result of the low level of educational attainment of most parents in the area. Community support was further hampered by a lack of financial resources and racial divisions that have persisted for decades. The economic decline and low tax base of the community resulted in a lack of sufficient educational funding to support the upkeep of the educational facilities. Consequently, the school was in poor shape with older buildings in disrepair. In addition, teacher salaries were the lowest in the county. In an attempt to become more fiscally efficient, the newly-elected superintendent decided that Sunshine High would be amalgamated with the local middle school to become a comprehensive 7-12 school. The superintendent claimed that this amalgamation would result in the high school being filled to capacity and would force the state to provide the funding for new facilities to be built.

There was no evidence in the interview transcripts to suggest that a needs assessment or SWOT analysis was performed by school or district officials prior to initiating the change process. If a SWOT analysis had been performed during the initiation phase, it would have revealed a school with few strengths or positive opportunities and an overwhelming number of weaknesses and threats. One of the only pre-existing strengths was the school and district veteran administrators. The district superintendent had been in office for eight years, while the school principal had been in charge for the past seven years. Unfortunately, this apparent strength of leadership also highlighted some troubling weaknesses. The long-time superintendent chose to retire from the position midway through the change process due to ongoing conflicts with the school board that she described as two years of "hell." In addition to this weakness, the surrounding community and the school itself, was described by interview participants as being insular, rampant with nepotism, wary of outsiders and resistant to change. At the school level, the lack of parental and community support was exasperated by low teacher morale which was evidenced by high teacher turnover. The greatest concern to Sunshine High was the ongoing threat of state takeover if student performance on state achievement tests failed to improve.

Just as with Sunshine High, the data from the Lone Star Middle School revealed that a formal SWOT analysis was not performed there either. Had the analysis been performed the results would have indicated a healthy balance of positive and negative attributes. When the school was first opened, it was a predominantly White, middle- to upper-middle class school. Over the previous decade the school became increasingly diverse, to the point that the school had become predominantly Hispanic with large numbers of African-American and Asian students and only a few remaining White children. The diversity of the school was more than racial, as the students that attended Lone Star were from varied ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Although the presence of children from middle class households contributed to the diversity of the school, the majority of the students qualified for free or reduced-priced meals at school. Along with the school's slide down the socioeconomic scale, the reputation of Lone Star also experienced a decline. This negative reputation was bolstered by repeated poor performance on state standardized achievement tests. As is typical in many poor areas (Kerbow, 1996) there was a high level of student mobility at Lone Star. The transitory nature of the student population greatly affected the level of performance on state accountability tests. Continued low performance on these mandated tests was an area of great concern for district and school officials alike.

Fortunately, the weaknesses of low academic achievement and student mobility were tempered by high levels of teacher support and a relatively stable teaching staff. The presence of an onsite parent center and a community outreach program created positive opportunities to turn the already high percentage of parents that attended school functions into engaged stakeholders that could help turn the school around.

Capacity

Slavin's readiness scale would indicate that Sunshine High was a "sand" school. Their lack of readiness was highlighted by a high degree of complacency, as few in the school or community truly felt that the school could improve. In addition to complacency, the low morale and high staff turnover rate created a toxic combination that retarded any chance of growth instead of nourishing a capacity to change.

Despite a lack of readiness, there is evidence that school officials did try to develop their capacity to change, by increasing their knowledge of change models. The interview data indicated the leadership team at the school was charged with searching out information about various comprehensive school reform models. The team, comprised of the principal, the chairman of the school improvement committee, and a few teachers looked at several reform models. They reviewed information that noted the ATLAS model was successful in raising achievement levels and thus contacted the ATLAS design team to garner more information. Although the leadership team received a great deal of information from ATLAS, and even visited a number of ATLAS schools, the principal reported that they were not given enough information on which to make an informed decision. This sentiment is echoed by a number of teachers interviewed whose lack of understanding was exposed by their inability to articulate what it was that made Sunshine High an ATLAS school.

Lone Star could be considered a "seed" school as the staff were cohesive, excited about teaching, and were led by a principal that was willing to involve the entire staff in the decision-making process. A district curriculum director described the staff at Lone Star as being "sponges that are willing to try new things." This willingness to try new things highlights the school's capacity to change. With a common understanding that the school needed to change, a committee was created that invited all interested teachers to research the available reform models. The teachers noted that during their search they repeatedly found references of the positive impact of the Coalition of Essential School on school reform, leading them to request more information about the model. After contacting the CES creators, and beginning a dialogue with them, the CES design team came to the school and held a one-day retreat with the staff to explain the model in greater detail. While the interview data indicated the staff at Lone Star were actively engaged in the change process, many teachers still found it difficult to accurately recite the key CES principles that drove the change process.

Commitment

The work of Berman and McLaughlin (1976) highlighted the importance of stakeholder commitment towards the change process. A greater level of commitment is achieved when the decision to engage in change grows out of a desire to solve local problems, rather than opportunism. It was evident that the change process at Sunshine began out of opportunism. It was the opportunity to receive federal funding that moved district officials, not the school staff, to being the change process in the school. Numerous sources at Sunshine High revealed it was the district's Title I coordinator that first initiated the change process when she became aware of the available federal funds. Without the "carrot" of federal funding, it is unlikely that Sunshine High would have contemplated attempting any significant changes.

The lack of commitment to the change process at Sunshine High was further exaggerated by a lack of choice in the matter. The principal claimed the school was not given the opportunity to decide if they wanted to initiate a change process, rather district officials mandated the school undergo reform. A large number of the staff interviewed was not clear as to how or why the ATLAS reform was adopted, although they acknowledged that they signed an agreement to adopt the reform. Although the ATLAS design team required the majority of the school staff vote in support of change, there is little sense that teachers at Sunshine High were ever committed to the change process. Numerous teachers commented that they had received little or no training related to the change process and that they knew very little about the ATLAS model. Interestingly, none of these teachers indicated that they had any desire to learn more about the reform model that was guiding the change process at their school.

In contrast to the initiation process at Sunshine High, a number of Lone Star teachers indicated the change process at their school grew out of a problem-solving framework. The Lone Star principal at the time stated that prior to initiating the change process, the school experienced large turnovers of staff each

year due to the negative reputation of the school and the challenging nature of the students. The principal felt the only way to "change that turnover was to change the nature of the school, change the reputation of the school, and change the mindset of the community." This sentiment was echoed by a veteran teacher that stated, "we knew we needed to change as teachers to meet the needs of our students." The interview data did not indicate the staff at Lone Star formally voted on the decision to join the Coalition of Essential Schools, but despite the lack of formal consensus, several teachers commented that the reform initiation process was teacher-led rather than mandated by the administration.

CONCLUSION

There was little evidence to suggest that following four years of implementation, the ATLAS model had any impact on the school. A statement made by a teacher at the school substantiates this claim.

After three years of ATLAS, this is the third year working on it, you would think we would see something and say, 'Oh this has happened because of ATLAS.' No. There's nothing. I mean there's been no improvement because of ATLAS. None. In fact, there's been more negative than positive.

When asked if the students knew what ATLAS is, another teacher replied, "No. ATLAS is doing nothing for the students. ATLAS for the school is just trying to get us to work together but every time they do it they come up with a different plan." The only facet of the ATLAS program that was evident at the school was the study groups. Unfortunately, these study groups never operated as prescribed by the design team. Several teachers described the study group meetings as "gripe sessions," with little being accomplished at the end of the meetings. It should now be apparent that the change process at Sunshine High was not successful, as no positive changes took place and the ATLAS reform model was not institutionalized.

In contrast to Sunshine High, Lone Star Middle School successfully completed the change process. There was enough evidence to suggest that the necessary changes in practice and policy occurred to support the institutionalization of the CES reform model. More important than the successful implementation of the model are the numerous improvements that have taken place at the school. One teacher stated that, "ever since we started our reform, I haven't seen anything but improvement in our school." There was also evidence of increased cooperation and cohesiveness among the staff in addition to a greater sense of professionalism and teacher empowerment. These improvements were noted by the former principal, who commented that Lone Star had become a school where "people understand their clientele, people are willing to reach out to the community, and people are interested in improving, continually improving the academics here in the school." These changes in staff attitudes and actions had significant impact on student attitudes. One teacher noted "you see a lot more of the respect shown to the students, and therefore the students show it to the adults." The end result of these changes has been an increase in student achievement. After four years of implementing the CES model, Lone Star middle school was named a Texas Monthly Five Star School. The Five Star rating is based on the schools' performance on state accountability tests in relation to the demographics of the school. A five star ranking is given to schools that rank in the top 20% of their respective demographic grouping.

It is now evident that the initial planning activities or lack thereof had a significant impact on the implementation of change at these two schools. If district officials and school administrators at Sunshine High had reviewed the strategic planning literature they would have surmised that Sunshine High was not the least bit ready to engage in a change process. Participation in a few of the recommended initiation activities would have quickly revealed that the context in which Sunshine High operated was not conducive to change, the school did not possess the capacity to change, and there was a lack of commitment towards the change process. A significant amount of time, money, and energy would have been saved if district and school officials had used planning theory to determine that Sunshine High was not ready to engage in change.

Despite not participating in a formal planning process, the success of the change process at Lone Star Middle School highlight the benefits of using strategic planning theory to guide the change process. Initiating activities would have noted that the environmental context at Lone Star was one that had enough positive attributes to limit the impact of negative factors. In addition to a supportive context, the staff at Lone Star possessed a great capacity to change and was fully committed to the change

process. Consequently, a SWOT analysis would have foreshadowed a successful change process.

Regardless of the context, organization change is always an arduous task. The finding of this study suggests that the use of strategic planning models that emphasize initial planning activities can provide the necessary assistance to make the change process less challenging. In our perpetually changing world, educational organizations will continue to be bombarded with pressure to change. For these changes to take place smoothly, educators need to develop a greater understanding of the change process and strategic planning. They must embrace the adage that "those that plan to learn, must learn to plan." To support change, district officials must play a greater role in the change process, by providing schools with the necessary resources to support the change process. This includes moral was well as financial support. School district officials should acknowledge that they cannot mandate real change, but they can create an environment that will foster change. To ensure that all schools have the capacity to change, district administrators must be cognizant of the context in which their schools operate and closely monitor the balance between strengths and weaknesses. While reform designers can do little to influence the context of change, they need to be more particular in deciding which schools will implement their design. Greater attention to an assessment of school readiness and stakeholder commitment may reduce the number of schools engaging in comprehensive reform, but it should also increase the likelihood of success.

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