Stakeholders' perceptions of local school enabling learning environment and policy: a pilot survey

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Stakeholders' perceptions of local school enabling learning environment and policy: A pilot survey

by

Robin Leigh Maas-Galloway

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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2003

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation of

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has met the dissertation requirements of Iowa State University

Signature was redacted for privacy.

Major Professor

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For the Major Program
DEDICATION

To my mother and father, Dr. Meridean Maas and Dr. Richard Maas, who have always generously encouraged and supported me. To my husband Rick and my children, Lara, Reid, and Ryan, who patiently and lovingly supported me and accepted the commitment that sometimes took me away from them.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

| LIST OF FIGURES | vi |
| LIST OF TABLES  | vii|
| ABSTRACT        | viii|

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION  
Statement of Problem 4  
Study Purpose and Objectives 5  
Significance of Study 9  
Limitations of the Study 10  
Conceptual and Operational Definitions 12  
Summary 16

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW  
A Context for Education Policy 17  
Systems Change Policy 24  
Mission/Philosophy 25  
Beliefs and Values 26  
Culture and Climate Policy 32  
Policy Development 39  
School, Family, and Community Partnership Policy 42  
Summary 51

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY  
Semistructured Interviews 53  
Sample Selection 53  
Limitations of the Participant Sample 55  
Human Subjects Procedures 55  
Procedures 55  
Data Management and Analysis 57  
Findings 59  
Construction of Self-Report Questionnaire 59  
Pilot Study 65  
Research Design and Sample 66  
Data Collection 66  
Data Management 69  
Data Analysis for the Pilot Study 69  
Summary 70

CHAPTER 4. ANALYSIS OF THE DATA  
The Sample 72  
Description of the Sample 73  
Pilot Study Findings 77  
Reliability 78  
Content Validity 81  
Clarity 82  
The Survey Findings 91  
Summary 113
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Role Groups 74
Figure 2. Stakeholder Age Groups 76
Figure 3. Stakeholder Education Groups 77
Figure 4. Stakeholder Income Groups 78
Figure 5. Frequencies of Mean Scores for Total Enabling Environment Instrument 92
Figure 6. Familiarity Means for Stakeholder Groups 94
Figure 7. Culture Means for Stakeholder Groups 97
Figure 8. Alignment Means for Stakeholder Groups 104
Figure 9. Alignment Importance Mean Scores for Stakeholder Groups 105
Figure 10. Involvement Means for stakeholder Groups 108
Figure 11. Influence of Culture on Achievement for Stakeholders Groups 112
Figure 12. Influence of unwritten Policy on Achievement for Stakeholder Groups 112
Figure 13. Influence of Partnerships on Achievement for Stakeholder Groups 113
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Policies and Practices that Affect Definitions of Purpose 22
Table 2. District Sites and Demographics for Interviews 56
Table 3. Items and Subscales of the Self-Report Questionnaire Measurement Study Variables 65
Table 4. School District ITBS/ITED Scores, At-Risk Indicators, and Enrollment 67
Table 5. Survey Test and Test Retest Respondent Rates 73
Table 6. Stakeholder Sample Demographics 75
Table 7. Internal Consistency And Test – Retest Reliability Coefficients for the Self-Report Questionnaire 80
Table 8. Participant Difficulty Understanding Items/Concepts of the Self-Report Questionnaire 83
Table 9. Stakeholders’ Comments about the Completeness of the Self-Report Questionnaire 86
Table 10. Stakeholder Type, District Enrollment, District At-Risk, and District Achievement Familiarity Group Means 94
Table 11. Average Stakeholder Ratings of Their Perceptions of Each Item on the Self-Report Questionnaire Measure of an Enabling Learning Environment 98
Table 12. One-way ANOVA Statistics for Subscale and Total ELE Perceptions by Type of Stakeholder Groups 99
Table 13. T-Test for Difference between, District Enrollment, District At-Risk, and District Achievement Group Mean for Stakeholders 100
Table 14. Stakeholder Type, District Enrollment, District At-Risk, and District Achievement Culture Group Mean 101
Table 15. Stakeholder Type, District Enrollment, District At-Risk, and District Achievement Alignment Group Means 105
Table 16. Stakeholder Type, District Enrollment, District At-Risk, and District Achievement Alignment Importance Group Mean 106
Table 17. Stakeholder Type, District Enrollment, District At-Risk, and District Achievement Involvement Group Means 108
Table 18. Stakeholder Type, District Enrollment, District At-Risk, and District Achievement Influence Group Means 111
ABSTRACT

This dissertation research investigated stakeholders' perceptions of the alignment, and the importance of the alignment, of policies with elements of education policy that are consistent with an enabling learning environment that supports student achievement. A self-report questionnaire was constructed and piloted to measure local school district stakeholders' (administrators', teachers', school board members', parents', and community members') perceptions and to collect preliminary data describing these perceptions using a statewide purposive sample of stakeholders. A subsequent survey using the self-report questionnaire, if demonstrated to be reliable and valid, to be conducted with a larger, statewide representative sample of stakeholders, is intended to inform policymakers and stakeholders. Using data from the pilot study, the self-report questionnaire demonstrated high internal consistency for the total scale and for all subscales except Influence, so separate items were used to measure perceived influence on policies. Although the magnitude of Cronbach's alpha coefficient of reliability for the total score was higher than the alpha values for most of the subscales, there were no significant differences in total scores among stakeholders grouped by role, district, or demographics, unlike a number of significant differences in subscale scores. These results indicate that while the total instrument measures an underlying construct—enabling learning environment—the subscales measure important discriminating subconcepts, describing specific elements of the more general construct. Test-retest values for the total score and the subscales were of magnitudes adequate for stability of the instrument for subsequent use. Content
analysis of two open-ended items on the questionnaire suggested several revisions of the instrument to be considered and tested for subsequent use.

The pilot survey findings suggest several implications for education practice, research, and policy development that should be considered for future programming, systematic studies, and policymaking. Attention to these implications and recommendations will contribute to movement of the discipline forward in providing enabling learning environments for optimal student achievement in all Iowa school districts.
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the last two decades, the question of how to improve the achievement of students in our nation's schools has gained increasing attention (Greenwald, Hedges, & Laine, 1996). Beginning in 1983, with the National Commission on Excellence in Education's release of *A Nation at Risk*, and continuing with the *No Child Left Behind* 2002 federal legislation, PK-12 educational institutions have been bombarded with increasing demands for accountability (Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Danielson, 2002). The vision for reform is supported by a foundation of new assumptions about education outcomes, human and organizational behavior, and institutional performance and change (Lane & Epps, 1992). Schools must ensure that all students acquire a solid basic education, acquire the knowledge and skills to be eligible for higher education, and are aware of their career options and how to gain access to them (Danielson, 2002; Edmonds, 1979).

Although monetary support of schools over this period has increased, it is not apparent that student achievement has improved significantly. The lack of improvement in achievement prompted the research community and the federal government to question whether monetary support is warranted and whether monetary commitments are likely to result in schools meeting society's expectations for increased student achievement. Danielson (2002) asserts that most of the factors contributing to student learning are a matter of attitude, rather than money. Danielson (2002) argues that priority must be given to the most effective ways of
allocating resources that will develop high-quality teaching and learning, and a culture of success in every aspect of a school's operations.

Research addressing the effectiveness of money spent on student outcomes is mixed and inconclusive. One review spanning two decades of research concluded that variations in school expenditures are not related systematically to variations in student performance (Hanushek, 1998). Conversely, a meta-analysis using 60 education production function studies spanning the 1970s through the 1990s indicated that school resources are related systematically to student achievement and that these relationships are large enough to be important educationally (Greenwald et al., 1996). The more recent Greenwald et al. study indicates that per pupil expenditures; teacher/pupil ratio; class size; and teachers’ experience, education, and ability, each can have a significant impact on student achievement. Increasingly, however, it is recognized that it is not just money that makes the difference. Rather, what matters is where and how the money is spent, including how it is used to provide incentives for students and teachers (Greenwald et al., 1996).

During the 1990s, federal and state education policy reflected these latter findings. Several recent recommendations by education reformers also are consistent with the findings, including the creation of state or national curricula, establishing state or national achievement tests, and linking state or national tests with curricula to achieve improved teaching and learning. State and national agencies increasingly are mounting efforts to marshal a more consistent and powerful direction for education (Cohen & Spillane, 1993). After 20 years of effort to
improve student learning, however, there is little sustained improvement. The policies that are being proposed now reflect the public's frustration over the lack of positive outcomes of the investment in education (Danielson, 2002).

In 1989 a blue ribbon study conducted in the Boston, Massachusetts public schools concluded that the schools were not fulfilling their mission. As to the nature of what caused this problem, the issues receiving the most attention included weak governance, inadequate school programs, and limited finances (Koven, Shelley, & Swanson, 1998). The majority of policy debate has centered on the question, "Does money matter?" rather than, "How does money matter?" Educators must address this question and its implications for education policy if they are to meet the educational needs of students. Researchers must address how money matters and what can and should be the role of local school policy in the effort to improve student achievement. As recently as the mid-1990s, most education researchers either ignored school districts as insignificant organizations or made them out to be the villains in impeding change (Elmore, 1993; Spillane, 1996). Generally, districts have been described as centralized, hierarchical, and disconnected from teaching and learning, with prescribed divisions of labor and set rules and procedures (Hightower, 2002). School improvement with the goal of high student achievement depends upon thinking differently about teaching, learning, public engagement, self-development, and teamwork, and the meaning of achievement for every child must be considered by the entire community of stakeholders (Goodman & Zimmerman, 2003).
Statement of Problem

Elmore (1995) considers “the gap between best practice and ordinary practice, and the lack of closure between policy and practice,” to be “a recurring problem that reveals a deep incapacity of schools to engage in cumulative learning over time directed at tangible results for students” (p. 357). A clear understanding of the ways that policy affects performance can enhance the potential for policymakers to improve student achievement. The research focusing on the influence of education policy is incomplete. Educators know little about the actual effects of local education policy on student achievement and little about how policy drives behavior in the school district. Often policy is criticized for being irrelevant to the field of education generally, and irrelevant more specifically to the classrooms, the programs, or the institutions’ practices. Policies can be inappropriate, restrictive, and even contradictory, rather than facilitative. Having no policy may be better than having a bad policy (Evans, 1996; Mitchell, Blaeser, Chilangwa, & Maimbolwa-Sinyangwe, 1999).

To develop more relevant policies, information needs to be gathered from superintendents, teachers, board members, parents, and community members regarding how they perceive beliefs and school district conditions, practices, and culture that are consistent with an enabling learning environment in schools, the importance and alignment of these elements with policies, and how policies affect student achievement. The views of these stakeholders are needed because in democratic societies factors such as public opinion, political philosophy, and interest-group behavior all shape policies, and it is these stakeholders who are key
to the development and implementation of local school policy that will support an enabling learning environment for student achievement (Koven et al., 1998).

A survey was developed for the purpose of gaining the views of stakeholders to inform policymakers. The survey approach was the most cost-effective method of collecting representative data from several stakeholder groups. To construct a survey with items that gathered the most salient and useful information, however, in-depth interviews with key stakeholders were warranted (Fontana & Frey, 1994). The interviews served to elicit information from the stakeholders and state-level educators as to what they felt needed to be asked about stakeholder views of the alignment and importance of aspects of school environments and local school policy and to whom the survey should be administered statewide. The data collected from the statewide administration of the survey are meant to provide a pilot test of the self-report questionnaire and to provide important preliminary information to inform the development of local school policy.

Study Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this dissertation research was to investigate stakeholders’ perceptions of the alignment and importance of alignment of policies with the elements that are consistent with an enabling learning environment that supports student achievement. A self-report questionnaire was constructed and piloted. To construct the self-report questionnaire, in-depth interviews were conducted with key state and local policymakers (representatives from the School Administrators of Iowa and the Iowa Association of School Boards, superintendents, and board of education members) and citizen stakeholders (teachers, parents, and community members).
Interviewees were queried about what policy-related issues are important for student achievement in PK-12 school districts that should be included in the survey and to whom the survey should be administered.

Using data collected in the interviews the specific aims of the study were to:

1. Describe themes in the interview data regarding the perceived characteristics of local schools (e.g., mission/philosophy, policies, culture, climate, relationships with students, families, and communities) that affect students' achievement;

2. Describe the recommended local stakeholder groups to be included in the representative survey sample; and


The description of the results of the qualitative analysis of the interviews and use of the data to construct the questionnaire are reported in Chapter 3.

The study aims of the pilot survey were to:

1. Pilot test the self-report questionnaire with a purposive, convenience sample of 200 stakeholders (40 superintendents, 40 school board members, 40 teachers, 40 parents, and 40 community members) to assess clarity, estimate reliability, and describe recommended revisions;

2. Describe the extent that stakeholders perceive that they are familiar with school policies, the culture of the school district, the school’s beliefs and values, and mission for:

   (a) the total sample
   
   (b) each type of stakeholder
(c) stakeholders in low- vs. high-enrollment districts

(d) stakeholders in low- vs. high-student-achievement districts,

and

(e) stakeholders in low- vs. high-at-risk factors districts;

3. Describe stakeholders' perceptions of the culture and climate of the school for:

   (a) all stakeholders

   (b) each type of stakeholder

   (c) stakeholders in low- and high-enrollment districts

   (d) stakeholders in low- vs. high-student-achievement districts,

   and

   (e) stakeholders in low-at-risk factors vs. high-at-risk factors districts;

4. Describe stakeholders' perceptions of the alignment, or lack of alignment, of beliefs/values, conditions of local schools, mission, and culture with school policies, and their perceived importance of alignment for student achievement for:

   (a) all stakeholders

   (b) each type of stakeholder

   (c) stakeholders in low- and high-enrollment districts

   (d) stakeholders in low- vs. high-student-achievement districts,
5. Describe stakeholders’ perceptions of their involvement in the development of school district policies, mission, and partnerships for:

(a) all stakeholders

(b) each type of stakeholder

(c) stakeholders in low- and high-enrollment districts

(d) stakeholders in low- vs. high-student-achievement districts,

and

(e) stakeholders in low-at-risk factors vs. high-at-risk factors districts;

6. Describe stakeholders’ perceptions of the influence of school district culture, partnerships, and mission on student achievement for:

(a) all stakeholders

(b) each type of stakeholder

(c) stakeholders in low- vs. high-enrollment districts

(d) stakeholders in low- vs. high-student-achievement districts,

and

(e) stakeholders in low-at-risk factors vs. high-at-risk factors districts.
Significance of Study

A substantial amount of research is reported on the effect of state and federal policies on student achievement, but there is a substantial gap in the research on the effects of local school policies on student achievement. In Iowa, this research is even more important because of the state’s historical commitment to local control of education, from prekindergarten to twelfth grade (PK-12).

Historically, Iowans have fought consistently to maintain local control of their PK-12 public school institutions. Education institutions are scrutinized nationally for their lack of accountability regarding student achievement. Many states have adopted a mandated state test for PK-12 graduation, while Iowa resisted this policy. Because local control is important to Iowans, and therefore local education officials retain considerable influence over the formulation and implementation of education policy, there is a compelling need to understand local PK-12 school stakeholders’ perceptions of existing efforts to enhance student outcomes. Given current pressures both nationally and within the state, Iowa’s education policymakers need to identify policies that can be demonstrated to have the most beneficial influence on student achievement. PK-12 education is costly and resources are scarce, so available resources need to be used efficiently to achieve the best possible student achievement outcomes. This dissertation research was conducted to contribute to the state’s ultimate aim to ascertain the relative effectiveness of local school policies in promoting enabling learning environments in schools and student achievement.
Limitations of the Study

The respondents who were interviewed to construct the survey instrument were not selected at random; therefore, the resulting qualitative data may not be representative of the attitudes of all local education stakeholders in Iowa. The self-report questionnaire was piloted with a purposive, convenience sample selected from 14 of the 15 existing Iowa Area Education Agencies chosen for their representation of PK-12 school enrollment and diversity of demographic characteristics and school types. The ability to select a representative sample of state of Iowa stakeholders was constrained because the researcher did not have a complete and accurate list of the settings and subjects of Iowa PK-12 school stakeholders for random selection of stakeholders. Therefore, the questionnaire was not tested with a randomly selected sample from which results could be generalized to all Iowa stakeholders and schools. Further, because reliability and validity of the self-report questionnaire were not demonstrated prior to the survey and the size of the sample of stakeholders was limited and potentially not representative, no firm conclusion could be made based on the pilot study results alone.

The use of a self-report instrument was another limitation of the study. The disadvantages of self-report questionnaires are grouped under three headings: sample-related, questionnaire construction, and administration. The number of persons who returned completed questionnaires was less than the number to whom questionnaires were mailed, and this nonresponse may erode further the extent to which results are generalizable. The literacy and language level of the targeted population also can be a potential barrier to collecting adequate and accurate data.
Some language familiar to educators may not have been familiar to some respondents. Second, the self-report questionnaire should be used only when the objective is clear and not complex. The format needed to be clear, with noncomplex data-collection objectives. Thus, it was shorter than questionnaires administered in other ways, most of the questions were close-ended, and all of the directions that the respondent needed to answer the questions were provided on the questionnaire itself. The researcher using a self-report questionnaire cannot control the order in which the questions are answered. Respondents could have completed sections of the questionnaire in any order they chose, could have referred to other sections in providing answers, and could have completed the questionnaire over a series of days or even weeks. Self-report questionnaires should not be used when one set of questions is likely to bias or contaminate answers to another section of the questionnaire. However, this was not expected to be a limitation of this study.

A third limitation of using a self-report questionnaire is that once the questionnaire left the surveyor's office, the researcher had no control over who filled it out and whether that person consulted with others when completing it. Generally, it took a minimum of two weeks after each mailing for completed questionnaires to be returned to the researcher. To maximize response rates follow-up mailings were used, as well as an incentive of a small amount of money ($1 bill) when the completed questionnaire was returned to the researcher. Consulting with others to fill out the questionnaire was not considered to be a serious problem for this study, although social desirability was anticipated potentially to influence participants' response. Many participants may have been aware of the responses that would be
most consistent with current thinking among education professionals about what is important for student achievement.

The great advantage of a self-report questionnaire is the relatively low cost per unit of data that can be obtained. A questionnaire completed by mail costs significantly less than one administered by telephone or administered by personal interview. The lower unit cost of a mailed questionnaire, combined with its ability to cover a wider geographic area with little additional cost for respondents at a distance, allowed the researcher to study a larger sample of persons or groups than with other research strategies. Self-report questionnaires are relatively easy to administer. All members of the sample received the questionnaire at essentially the same time, and many researchers believe that people are more likely to give complete and truthful information on sensitive topics if a self-report questionnaire is used rather than an interview (Bourque & Fielder, 1995).

**Conceptual and Operational Definitions**

**Iowa Education Policy:** a statement of purpose and one or more broad guidelines as to how that purpose is to be achieved that, taken together, provide a framework for the operation of a school or program (Caldwell & Spinks, 1988).

**Iowa's Local Education Agencies (LEAs):** PK-12 public schools often are referred to as local education agencies, which are responsible for providing an education program to all PK-12 students who reside within predetermined boundaries. These boundaries may or may not be within a county, city, or town.

**Large LEAs:** School districts with 900 or greater student enrollment.

**Small LEAs:** School districts with 899 or lesser student enrollment.
**Iowa PK-12 Education:** the learning process and methods of developing knowledge or skill provided at the PK-12 level.

**Stakeholder:** one who has a share or an interest in the outcomes of the PK-12 school district, operationally defined as superintendents, teachers, and school board members of LEAs, parents of children attending the schools, and community members residing in the LEA school district.

**Superintendent:** an administrator responsible for overseeing the administration of an elementary and secondary education program to students who are attending a PK-12 school district, operationally defined as the chief administrator in the specific PK-12 school district sampled.

**School Board Member:** an elected person holding a seat on a local board that oversees a PK-12 school district, operationally defined as a member of the school board of a specific PK-12 school district sampled.

**Teacher:** a professional school staff member responsible for providing instruction as part of the education program to students, operationally defined as a professional school staff member, certified for instructing in a PK-12 district, employed to provide instruction during a particular time period or in a particular discipline in a specific PK-12 school district sampled.

**Parent:** an individual having parental or legal guardianship responsibility for a child, operationally defined as a person having parental responsibility for a child who is attending or has attended a specific PK-12 school district sampled.
Community Member: one of a group of people living within the predetermined boundaries of a PK-12 school district, operationally defined as a member of a community of a specific PK-12 school district sampled.

Perceptions of Enabling Learning Environment: views of the beliefs, values, conditions, mission, and culture that are conducive to students gaining knowledge and skills, operationally defined as responses to items of the self-report questionnaire, “Survey of Perceptions of Local School Policy Effects on Student Achievement” (Appendix G).

Perceptions of Beliefs: views of ideas or convictions of stakeholders about what constitutes an enabling learning environment, operationally defined as items 2-12.

Perceptions of Conditions: views of leadership, staff development, human relations programs, and other practices in a school organization that support an enabling learning environment, operationally defined as items 14-20.

Perceptions about Mission: views about the purpose and beliefs/values that determine the services the school district desires to provide to attending students of a PK-12 school district, operationally defined by items 22-27.

Perceptions about Culture and Climate: views about the totality of a PK-12 school district’s socially transmitted behavior patterns, beliefs, and prevailing conditions, or the set of attitudes regarding human work and thought that bring into being student achievement, operationally defined by items 29-34.

Perceptions about Partnerships: views about relationships between the school, family, and community that are marked by mutual cooperation and
responsibility, whereby all members have equal status and are united with one another or others in an activity or sphere of common interest, operationalized by items 35-41.

**Familiarity with Policies:** the extent that stakeholders feel that they know the guidelines, which provide a framework for the operation of a school or program, defined operationally as the responses of stakeholders to items 1, 21, 22, and 29.

**Perceptions of Culture and Climate Valuation:** the views regarding the totality of a PK-12 school district’s socially transmitted behavior patterns, beliefs, and prevailing conditions, or the set of attitudes regarding human work and thought that bring into being student achievement as constructive or not constructive, operationally defined as the responses of stakeholders to item 30.

**Alignment of Beliefs, Conditions, Culture, and Mission with Policy:** the extent to which stakeholders view that beliefs, school conditions, culture, mission, and partnerships of an enabling learning environment are consistent with school district policies, operationally defined as the responses of stakeholders to items 2a-13a, 14a-20a, 23-25, 31-33, and 39.

**Importance of Alignment:** the extent to which stakeholders feel the guidelines regarding beliefs, school conditions, culture, mission, and partnerships of an enabling learning environment should be consistent with one another to provide a framework for the operation of a school or program, operationally defined as the responses of stakeholders to items 2b-13b and 14b-20b.

**Influence of Policy on Achievement:** the extent to which stakeholders believe that the guidelines providing a framework for the operation of a school or
program affect student achievement, operationally defined as the responses of stakeholders to items 27, 30, 34, 38, and 39.

**Involvement in Policies**: the extent to which stakeholders feel they are included in the development and/or implementation of the guidelines which, taken together, provide a framework for the operation of a school or program, operationally defined as the responses of stakeholders to items 26, 35-37, 40, and 41.

**Summary**

Chapter 1 discussed the necessity of developing a survey to gain the views of stakeholders to inform education policymakers. A clear understanding of the ways that policy affects performance can enhance the potential for policymakers to improve student achievement. The research focusing on the influence of education policy is incomplete. Educators know little about the actual effects of local education policy on student achievement, and little about how policy drives behavior in the school district. The chapter also described the purpose of the proposed dissertation research: to investigate stakeholders' perceptions of the alignment and importance of alignment of policies with the elements that are consistent with an enabling learning environment that supports student achievement. In addition, potential limitations of the study were outlined. The chapter concluded with the aims of the study and the conceptual and operational definitions.
Chapter 2

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter provides the background and theoretical framework for the study. The literature review was organized by the themes identified in the interviews. Interviewees were queried about what policy-related issues are important for student achievement in PK-12 school districts that should be included in the survey and to whom the survey should be administered. First, literature addressing the context for education policy is presented. Next, literature that describes mission, beliefs, and values considered important to be considered for system change is reviewed, followed by literature noting the importance of policies that account for culture and climate in school systems. Finally, reports explaining PK-12 policy development and implementation and the role of family and community partnerships in school systems are summarized.

A Context for Education Policy

Policy is a statement of purpose and one or more broad guidelines as to how that purpose is to be achieved, which, taken together, provide a framework for the operation of a school or program (Caldwell & Spinks, 1988). Education policymaking in the United States seems to be made up mostly of a series of actions responding or reacting to a state of crisis. Since the early 1970s, thousands of documents about crises in education have been disseminated that describe crises in every aspect of the educational system: enrollment, personnel, curriculum, funding, organization, and functioning (Cizek, 1999). These areas of crises had serious implications for an educational institution's ability to develop policy that effectively supported education
reform. Cizek suggested, "The literature within the field reveals that crises are rarely foreseen, never reported as being prevented, and, despite an apparent multitude of opportunities, almost never solved" (p. 741). In reaction to these claims of crises, education policy during the last two decades has focused on monetary allocations to drive incentive structures for school reform at the federal and state levels.

Recent reform proposals offered plans and proposals to move toward greater national, state, or local control of education. Most of these proposals represented an effort to use policy to guide instructional practices more powerfully. Several questioned the success of education policy in increasing central control of instruction, and argued that this development had greatly complicated governance and administration (Cizek, 1999; Cohen & Spillane, 1993; Slavin & Madden, 1991). Accountability guidelines helped to focus educators on the outcomes of Chapter 1 programs, federally funded programs for PK-12 at-risk students, which provided additional help with the basic skills, but they also may have rewarded counterproductive practices and discouraged early interventions like preschool, kindergarten, and first-grade programs. A new approach to policy development would not involve reacting to suggested crises. Rather, effective policy development would target identifying and refining the roles that schools can perform well and for which they can be accountable (Cizek).

Some individuals advocated more accountable education governance and planning at the level of local districts and schools (Clune, 1993; Koven et al., 1998). Lack of a national system of education, the involvement of multiple layers and agencies in policymaking, and unmanageable top-down regulation resulted in
fragmentation and dilution of the power of the delivery system. Clune argued that the challenge was to design policies that combined the high standards of systemic policy with a broad diversity of curricular options and a powerful delivery system. Financial incentives for accomplishing particular educational outcomes were promoted widely by the National Governor's Association in its "1991 report" and by other educational policymakers as a method to increase teacher and administrator productivity (National Governors' Association, 1996).

Also open for debate is how best to focus school improvement goals to enhance student achievement. One line of thought is that if what students think and do is central to student achievement, their actions and beliefs also will be central to the way schools operate. Historically, focusing on students' actions and beliefs was the way schools operated. Public schools in general did little to promote a passion for attending school and learning. Most failed to motivate teachers to have a zeal for teaching (Toch, 1991). Educators had a tendency to flirt with new initiatives without changing how they managed the core functions of teaching and learning (Danielson, 2002). These new initiatives without new teaching and learning approaches were the primary reasons for poor performance in the nation's public secondary schools and were major constraints on achieving the goal of broadening public education's academic effectiveness. The many reforms could not succeed if teachers and students were not motivated to learn.

Most of the policy attention about schools has focused on such matters as curriculum, teachers, school organization, or governance. Policies in these areas were presumed to yield changes in what students thought and did. In a review of the
literature, Nolen and Nicholls (1994) concluded that the most effective strategies had to do with treating students as capable persons, capitalizing on their knowledge and interests, and involving students in determining goals and methods of learning. Leaders in educational research emphasized that school reform should focus on several broad areas. Thus, school districts worked tirelessly to implement a school improvement plan that encompassed many areas, including leadership, teacher knowledge and skills, motivation, evaluation, curriculum development, assessment, and community involvement, to name a few. Because districts focused on many areas of school improvement in their plan, it was difficult to develop policy that had a clear effect on student achievement. Kelley (2000) proposed:

... Aligning policy is an art that combines policy, leadership, and management at the state, district, and school levels to create the knowledge, skills, motivation, and context that will result in meaningful interaction between teachers, students, and instructional materials in the teaching moment. (p. 70)

Policymakers focused policy in a variety of ways to enhance student learning. The foci included teachers and schools, students, and strategic choices regarding governance and educational approaches. Evidence of the effects of these policies on student achievement suggested that they had a small, but significant, impact on student learning. Promising teacher policies related to standards and assessment policies (Archbald, 1989), incentives and accountability policies (Kelley, 2000), and teacher pre-service training and licensure policies (Darling-Hammond, 1998). There was mounting
evidence to suggest that teacher knowledge and skills may be the single most important determinant of differences in student achievement. It was clear that effective teachers had a profound influence on student achievement and ineffective teachers did not (Marzano, 2003). Yet, teacher knowledge and skill policies were weak and poorly enforced (Darling-Hammond, 1998). Promising student-focused policies included high-stakes examinations (Bishop, 1998), graduation standards (Clune & White, 1992; Smithson & Porter, 1994), stronger school-to-work connections (Shapiro & Goertz, 1998), and more stringent education testing and admissions policies (Shapiro & Goertz). Strategic choices included magnet schools, charter schools, and support for the adoption of education reform models, such as the New American Schools Design (Odden, 1997). District-level management played a significant role in molding students' learning environments, and thus promoted student achievement. Ideally, the district management plan, based on beliefs, values, and educational theory, served to organize, lead, and control the behavior of individuals, groups, and organizations to develop an enabling learning environment to attain individual, group, and organizational effectiveness (Gibson, Ivancevich, & Donnelly, 1991; Maehr & Midgley, 1996).

Table 1 outlines areas in which action taken is particularly important in defining the purpose of schooling for students. Ames (1990), Brophy (1987), and Epstein (1998) (see also Maehr & Midgley, 1996) conducted research concerning how certain policies and practices were most likely to lead students toward fulfilling the purpose of schooling.
A comprehensive study by Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1993) examined the results of three comprehensive studies and developed a list of 228 variables.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Activities and Tasks</td>
<td>What is the student asked to do?</td>
<td>Memorize labels for plant phyla. Write a letter-critique in response to an editorial on the failure of schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>What do assessment grading procedures imply about school objectives?</td>
<td>All students receive A's if they behave. Effort is the primary basis for grades. “Grading on the curve” The use of portfolios to assess student progress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rewards and Recognition</td>
<td>What outcomes and behavior are especially attended to? What reward and recognition schedules are followed?</td>
<td>The predominance of athletic awards diminishes Academics at the honors convocation. Students are given a $25.00 check for reading 25 books. Grades are posted for all to see.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom, Autonomy, and Responsibility</td>
<td>Emphasis on staff control versus student autonomy- what kinds of choices are student given? How is student sense of responsibility enhanced?</td>
<td>Faulty makes the rules. Students obey-or else. School emphasizes student growth in handling freedom and responsibility. Conflict resolution programs that encourage student involvement are in place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing Students into Groups</td>
<td>Is the ability grouping an implicit or explicit policy? Is learning viewed as an individual and/or social constructive structure? Are interdisciplinary and thematic teaching encouraged?</td>
<td>Sixth graders who are thought to have math who are taught in separate classes. Cooperative learning, group projects, and learning opportunities are a regular part of instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduling</td>
<td>Is the 40 - 50 minute instructional period sacred? What flexibility is there for accommodating the need for larger blocks of time? How is the school building used throughout the full course of the day-and year?</td>
<td>“Blocking” and teaching are encouraged and practiced. After school and summer programs are promoted. The schedule is readily adjusted to accommodate needs for field trips.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>What are the rules by which equipment, in-service opportunities, and supplies are distributed? Who gets what and for what reason?</td>
<td>Computers are the exclusive property of advanced math classes. Seniority or equity determines who will receive a budget allotment. Programmatic efforts directed toward school improvement claim the lion’s share of discretionary funds.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Maehr & Midgley, 1996
affecting student achievement. The researchers asked 134 education experts to rate each variable's impact on student achievement. Classroom management was rated first. A 1998 study confirms the link between order in the classroom and academic achievement (Barton, Coley, & Wenglingsky, 1998). This study used the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1998 (NELS: 98) to measure the relationships among disciplinary policies, student delinquency, and academic achievement. NELS: 98 surveyed 25,000 students during their 8th, 10th, and 12th grade school years. The information collected included self-reported delinquency, mathematics, reading, science, and social studies test performance, and demographic characteristics. The study found that implementing student disciplinary policies was related to lower levels of student misbehavior. The authors suggested that a variety of innovative practices were tried in schools to manage student behavior, but that only with new data would it be possible to supplement the existing policies with measures that were likely to affect student achievement positively (Barton et al.).

The Center on Education Policy (2001) reviewed a variety of studies and test data to understand better the nation's racial/ethnic gap in student achievement. The study results indicated that there are several factors that may contribute to this gap, including a school climate that is not conducive to learning, student performance anxiety, negative peer pressure, teachers with low expectations, watered-down instruction, limited learning supports in homes and communities, and lack of access to parenting education. In addition, the study suggested that improvement through comprehensive school reform, a supportive and motivating culture, extended community learning activities, parent education and involvement, and improved
social conditions are some of the strategies that could help close the gap in student achievement.

Systems Change Policy

A system is a perceived whole with interconnections that continually affect one another over time (Fullan, 1999; Senge, 2000). In every school district, community, or classroom, there might be several different systems: the governance process of the district, the effects of specific policies, the labor-management relationship, the approaches to disciplining students, and the behavior of staff. School improvement must begin with confronting the discrepancy between a community’s vision for its schools and its current reality. Organizations are governed by a set of guiding principles, that is, concepts and statements that define what an organization stands for and what its members hope to create (Caldwell & Spinks, 1988; Senge, 2000). Schools must have a clear understanding of their fundamental purpose to best enable learning and achievement and a set of guiding ideas that govern them (Burrello, Lashley, & Beatty, 2000; Maehr & Midgley, 1996; Ramirez, 1995; Senge, 2000). An Iowa study, conducted by the Iowa State Department of Education, asked district educators to identify the characteristics that made their Success4 work successful. Success4 is an initiative of the Iowa Department of Education, using federal monies to increase the capacities of Iowa schools, families, and communities to meet the social, emotional, intellectual, and behavioral needs of all youth. At one site members emphasized the importance of focusing together on the right things with the best supports available. Participants suggested that
implementation of major educational changes should be supported by a compelling vision and challenging expectations (Holly & Munger, 2000).

Mission

Most authors agree that an institutional mission statement that serves to produce strong statements of common purpose is important for the success of schools. The literature suggests that the articulation of what all of the stakeholders want as goals for the school and for the students provides a map for everything else the mission statement seeks to achieve. Without clarity of purpose it was extremely difficult for a school to focus its energy to support what it wanted to achieve. The mission statement served as a foundation for the future and as a framework for growth and change. It must capture and express basic beliefs and values of the school district community as a whole. The mission, core ideology, or principles of practice provided the standard by which to analyze whether established policies and practices were helping the school achieve its goals (Collins & Porras, 1996; Danielson, 2002; Elmore, 1995; Evans, 1996; Fullan, 1999; Senge, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1996; Wald & Castleberry, 2000).

A Rand Corporation study examined school effectiveness and school culture in ten inner-city high schools (Hill, Foster, & Gendler, 1990). The results of the study determined that effective schools were strong organizations with clear and uncomplicated missions centered on the experiences they intend to provide their students; the capacity to initiate action in pursuit of their missions, and the abilities to sustain themselves over time, solve their own problems, and manage their external relationships (Hill et al.). In effective schools people worked out what the district
stood for and what was to be accomplished. A binding, solemn agreement must emerge that represented a value system for living together and formed the basis of decisions and actions. The binding agreement was the school district's mission. The mission and purpose gave guidance to what people worked toward and what defined success. Strong schools defined what actions ought to occur, and they motivated staff and students about what was important and who or what would be rewarded. Strong schools steered the allocation and distribution of resources depending on what was considered important or valuable (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Sergiovanni, 1992). Effective school districts that valued and believed in their mission found that teachers and students responded with increased motivation and commitment, and their performance supported what they hoped to accomplish as a district.

Understanding how change takes place in a system is vital to those who are concerned about achieving success with policy initiatives. Senge (1990) suggested that "systems thinking" is summarized in the belief that "structure influences behavior." It is a body of knowledge, attitudes, tools, information, and processes that help a learning organization discover its underlying operational patterns and how they can be changed. These underlying patterns can impede substantive change in an organization. Systemic structures tend to cause particular patterns of behavior. These underlying operational patterns are supported by the policies of the system. One such typical policy statement is the mission statement.

Beliefs and Values

Few reports of empirical research were found that examine the effect of policy on a school district's ability to implement its mission, beliefs, and values effectively,
and in turn improve student achievement. Research is difficult, as Lewin (1995) observes, because, "The field of education is littered with educational reform proposals that either have not been implemented, or that have been overtaken before their effects were apparent" (p. 427). Withrow (2002) conducted a year-long study that identified 16 characteristics divided into 12 categories of schools and school systems capable of preparing students for a global knowledge/information age. Twenty-one leaders in business, education, government, and other fields met to identify more than 250 characteristics of schools and school systems capable of preparing students for a global society. A follow-up survey asked members of the council, an extended council of advisors, and representatives of school systems what they believed to be "ground breaking" and to place the items in priority of their potential impact on student achievement.

Three categories of the identified 12 were of interest in the Withrow (2002) study: responsive governance, student-centered systems, and school-community linkages. Priority items of responsive governance were: (a) the entire educational system, from the classroom to the federal government, is focused on the needs of learners, parents, and society; (b) stable governance, with school boards focusing on the common goal of providing quality learning environments; (c) teachers and principals have flexibility and control over what they need to run their classrooms and schools effectively; (d) the system's central office focuses on facilitation and capacity-building, rather than command and control; (e) well-managed, empowered staff are consulted in decision-making; (f) administrators are skillful leaders who win the respect of other professionals; (g) decisionmaking is collaborative and exhibits a
balance of power; (h) education is increasingly deregulated, allowing excellent teaching to replace mediocrity; and (i) accomplishments of students and staff are celebrated (Withrow).

Student-centered systems are those with students: (a) valued and provided the individual resources they need; (b) as the primary focus of teaching and learning; (c) as the focus of flexible curriculum that is purposefully designed to help students achieve; (d) working together with teachers, parents, and others to address development of the whole child; (e) of low income having as many advantages in schools as wealthy students; (f) treated with respect; (g) given high expectations; (h) challenged to grow and improve by learning experiences; and (i) having equal access to technology resources.

School-community linkages were reflected in items noting that: (a) parents are engaged in children’s and their own learning process; (b) schools are around-the-clock hubs of community lifelong learning; (c) investing in education is supported by all corporate and community leaders; (d) teachers and parents work together to increase student performance; (e) schools linked to healthcare, housing, social service, and other community agencies; (f) parents clearly understand their responsibilities; and (g) learning experiences occur within a framework of real life (Withrow).

The Iowa Association of School Boards’ (IASB) Lighthouse Study (2000) was conducted with six Georgia school districts. These districts were selected because they ranked either very high or very low for three academic years from 1995-1998 on a variety of indicators as well as the Iowa Test of Basic Skills administered to third-,
fifth-, and eighth-grade students, and the Georgia High School Graduation Test administered to high school students. Researchers conducted 159 interviews with board members in three high-achieving and three low-achieving districts over the course of two years. IASB used the Council for School Improvement database to ensure that the differences between the selected schools were not a product of demographic characteristics of the students. The researchers used data to ensure that the districts were comparable to districts in Iowa in terms of enrollment, percent of children living in poverty, spending per student, household income, and other factors.

Each interview included about 25 questions and lasted about one hour. The study found that school boards in high-achieving districts were significantly different in their knowledge and beliefs than school boards in low-achieving districts (IASB). In the high-achieving districts, the board/superintendent team and school personnel consistently expressed an "elevating" view of students, were constantly seeking opportunities to improve, and showed greater understanding and influence in each of the seven conditions for effective schools. In the low-achieving districts, the board/superintendent team and school personnel accepted limitations in students and the school system, tending to view students as limited by characteristics such as their income or home situation, and accepted school as they were. In the low-achieving districts board members, as a whole, were only vaguely aware of school improvement initiatives (IASB).

The following are conditions that research has shown to be essential for developing a successful district (Iowa Association of School Boards, 2000): (a)
emphasis on building a human organizational system, defined as a continuous focus on improving education with high levels of involvement and shared decisionmaking; (b) ability to create and sustain initiatives, defined as an understanding of how to organize the people and the school environment to start and sustain an improvement effort; (c) a supportive workplace that enables all staff to succeed in their roles; (d) regular schoolwide staff development that is focused on studying, teaching, and learning; (e) support for school sites through data and information, defined as using data on students' needs to make decisions and modify actions at the district and building level; (f) community involvement, defined as a close connection between the school, parent, and community; and (g) shared leadership, defined as a focus on student learning through a shared clear vision, high expectations, and dynamic leadership among all involved in the development and implementation of education policy (IASB).

A study prepared by the Center on Education Policy (1997) examined several recent opinion polls and studies that have explored parent, teacher, and student attitudes about higher academic standards and increased student achievement. The study concluded that parents, teachers, and students strongly supported steps to increase academic standards and to make the high school diploma a meaningful credential, yet they seemed less committed to changing their own behavior to attain high academic achievement, and overall were suspicious of people who were well educated. While teachers and parents supported school improvement, a large percentage of them did not believe that students really needed to achieve at high levels to be successful in their careers (Center on Education Policy).
After examining the last 20 years of research on policy development and implementation, as well as experiencing work with a large number of schools in a number of countries, Hall (1992) contended that all involved in the development and implementation of education policy need to work together, develop a holistic view of the system, and work with an approach that engaged interactive partners in the education change process. Further, Hall also suggested that to accomplish this approach to the implementation and development of education policy: (a) there must be fewer regulations, rules, and policy mandates; (b) policy must shift from prescribing a practice to stating goals or performance outcomes; (c) educators must think more systemically and in multivariate ways; (d) policy must be developed and implemented in terms of what it really requires and costs; (e) educators must look at large-scale innovations that break the structures and limitations of our traditional models of schools; and (f) all stakeholders need to believe and trust that they are part of the system and players in the system.

Research on effective schools has established that strong leadership influences student achievement, at least indirectly (Andrews & Soder, 1987; Hallinger & Murphy, 1987), although leadership rarely was defined in studies as specific policies, practices, and behaviors initiated by the leadership (Hallinger & Murphy, 1987). When leaders failed to understand the nuances of school improvement efforts, school reform efforts failed (Conti, Elsasser, & Griffin, 2000; Danielson, 2002; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991). Effective district management strategies must negotiate the loosely organized, bottom-heavy structure of educational organizations by establishing clear student achievement goals and
decentralizing decisionmaking power to the school level rather than implementing hierarchical strategies (Boyd, 1988). Site-based management approaches are more effective when districts share knowledge, information, rewards, and decisionmaking power with teachers at the building level (Mohrman, 1994).

The research on leadership supported the conclusion that school leadership required the ability to develop, communicate, and put into place a vision for school improvement that rallied the staff around common goals (Caldwell & Spinks, 1988; Heifetz, 1994). An ethnographic study of norms of inclusion and cooperation in a multiethnic middle school determined that strong leadership by the principal contributed to the development and maintenance of a cooperative and inclusive school culture (Deering, 1996). The study found that the principal’s commitment to the norms of cooperation and inclusiveness, her collaborative leadership approach, and the congruity of inclusion and cooperation with peer culture and parents’ expectations made them a very real part of the school’s culture.

Culture and Climate Policy

Every organization has a culture, history, and underlying set of unwritten expectations that shape everything about the school. It is commonly held that schools have a culture (Deal & Peterson, 1990; Evans, 1996; Sergiovanni, 1994). Culture has been defined as a system of attitudes, actions, and artifacts that endures over time and produces among its members a unique psychology (Vaill, 1989). Likewise, culture has been defined as a set of unwritten rules, traditions, customs, norms, expectations, and values that govern the way people behave, the way they dress, what they talk about, whether they seek out colleagues for help, and
how teachers feel about their work and student. Climate refers to the way the PK-12 stakeholders feel about the culture of the school (Deal & Peterson, 1999). Schein (1992), an authority on organizational culture, defined culture as, "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" (p. 6). These assumptions and beliefs permeated throughout an entire organization; they became invisible and accepted, automatic, and ingrained in the day-in and day-out practices of the organization that they were taught automatically to its new members, by rules and example, as the correct way to think and feel (Paul, Berger, Osnes, Martinez, & Morse, 1997; Schein, 1990, 1992; Triandis, 1996).

A school with a psychologically nurturing and educationally exemplary culture and climate permits parents and staff to support the overall development of students in a way that made academic achievement and desirable social behavior possible (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Evans, 1996; Haynes et al., 1996; Sergiovanni, 1994). This approach speaks to the terms, *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*, attributed to the sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies. Tönnies used the term *gemeinschaft* for bonding together of people that resulted from their mutual binding to a common goal, shared set of values, and shared conception of being that strengthened the "we" identity. *Gemeinschaft* was essential to building a sense of community within schools. It represented the truly human and supreme form of community (Sergiovanni).

According to Tönnies (1957), the modern Western corporation was an example of *gesellschaft*. In the corporation, relationships were formal and distant,
prescribed by roles and role expectations. Circumstances were evaluated by criteria clarified by policies, rules, and protocols. Acceptance was conditional and relationships were competitive. Sergiovanni (1994) suggested:

In modern times the school has been solidly ensconced in the gesellschaft camp with unhappy results. It is time that the school was moved from the gesellschaft side of the ledger to the gemeinschaft side. It is time that the metaphor for school was changed from formal organization to community. (p. 14)

Research on the brain and learning indicates that the best learning takes place when students experience low threat and high challenge. This research has implications for the entire school culture and how it affects the learning environment (Caine & Caine, 1997). The culture and climate of a school largely develop from the beliefs of the school staff, students, and parents. Schools must become purposeful communities, where members have developed a community of mind that bonds them together in special ways and binds them to a shared way of believing. Schools cannot become caring communities unless caring is valued and unless norms are created that point the way toward caring, reward caring behaviors, and frown on non-caring behaviors (Sergiovanni, 1994). It is the unique common way of thinking, feeling, perceiving, and valuing that gives meaning to the attitudes, actions, and artifacts of a school's culture (Evans, 1996). Studies of curriculum reform repeatedly found that new ideas failed to take root in the practice of teachers because those ideas were not reinforced in the work environment of the students and the teachers (Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988; Elmore, Skyes, & Spillane, 1991).
Danielson (2002) suggested that there were several components of an orientation that fostered success and could have a significant impact on the culture and climate of an organization, including the beliefs that human beings are learning organisms, success in all endeavors is the result of hard work, success breeds success, adults influence student confidence, schools control the conditions of success, the bell curve mentality must be abandoned, schools must cultivate a culture of respect, schools must be responsive to their "clients," a sense of democracy should affect decisionmaking, all work has value and dignity, and competition generally is damaging to both students and teachers.

School leaders face the need to bring back an ethic of caring to schools (Beck, 1994; Noddings, 1992). By establishing schools as caring places, the culture can become only more humane and kind (Peterson, 2002). A school that appears to have a caring, cooperative, and inclusive culture could be riddled with undercurrents of indifference, hostility, and stratification. A school with a negative culture does not value professional learning, resists change, or devalues staff development (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Peterson, 2002). The beliefs held by a school's staff and community are argued to be the most important elements of the culture, policies, and practices of a school; the mind and heart are key to how we feel the world works. These understandings and beliefs function as theories of practice that provide the foundation for everything that occurs (Danielson, 2002; Maehr & Midgley, 1996; McKibben & Joyce, 1980; Sergiovanni, 1994).

With few exceptions, most teachers have values that are middle class and mainstream. Kahne (1996) suggested:
Rhetoric that pays lip service to valuing all individuals equally and to appreciating diversity is common and generally not controversial. Much less common were policies which confronted the structural forces and institutional arrangements that both depended on and promoted unequal valuing of individuals. Such proposals often encountered resistance. (p. 15)

Teachers' own experiences and beliefs are shaped by acculturation, a process that is unconscious and rarely provokes questioning or awareness. Schools must examine their collective stereotypes and misconceptions about other groups that are a part of this enculturation process (Kahne).

One of the most damaging beliefs arose from attitudes about limits on achievement. Greenbaum, Yolanda, and Baber (1997) suggested that if students from different ethnic backgrounds, children of poverty, or children with disabilities are relegated to a lower category of expectations, their performance was likely to match those expectations. There often existed a power hierarchy in schools that is used to determine who fit the definition of "normal," and as a result this hierarchy often dictated who would receive an equal allocation of the resources. Establishing a cultural norm of equity for all required thoughtful and caring leadership with decisionmaking committees, where the policies governing the allocation of resources and establishing the social architecture of schooling were developed. In turn, this norm of equity appeared to have the potential to bind all students, irrespective of their special needs, into a learning community (Greenbaum et al.). In a related study, Jordan and McPartland (1994) found that within-school factors, such as relationships
with teachers, were cited more frequently in all racial/ethnic and gender groups than were out-of-school factors, such as needing a job, as the cause for student dropouts. School practices such as suspension/expulsion also have been identified as practices that pushed students out of school because students were convinced that administrators no longer wanted them in school (Murphy & Hallinger, 1988). Students became more disruptive, were absent more frequently, gave up trying, and eventually many dropped out of school. In a 1988 study of 12 instructionally effective school districts, Murphy and Hallinger found that these districts shared some common features, including conditions that affect the culture and climate of the schools, such as labor peace, board support, and community acceptance. Also evident were foci on productivity, improvement, problem solving, and data-driven decisionmaking. Similarly, in a study conducted in a New York school district, Elmore (1997) found that the characteristics that affected student achievement were strong leadership, a strong instructional focus, and a clear human resource management strategy.

The link between what happens to teachers and what happens to students must be nurtured for schools to be successful. A school culture that fails to promote discourse among teachers will have difficulty promoting discourse among students. The idea of making classrooms into learning communities for students will remain just an idea unless schools become learning communities for teachers, too (Sagor, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1996). Teachers have functioned historically in isolated classrooms, without meaningful connections with their colleagues. At the heart of this concept of building a learning community is a culture that values wholeness and
connectedness, grounded in relationships that are embedded in a sense of shared identity. Developing a culture and climate for learning requires learners to understand their motives, thoughts, and beliefs, as well as the motives, thoughts, and beliefs of others. It required the development of a collective aspiration to support the mission and a collaborative way of being that created relationships of trust, belonging, and shared purpose among the group members (Sagor; Sergiovanni).

Bryk and Schneider (2002) combined the results of teacher surveys administered in 1991, 1994, and 1997 with student achievement data assembled by the Consortium on Chicago School Research. Test results for 100 schools with the largest and smallest annual gains on standardized tests were matched against the survey data on trusting relationships. Bryk and Schneider found that schools performing in the top quartile on standardized tests more often were schools with high levels of trust than were those performing in the bottom quartile. The researchers concluded that without trusting relationships among teachers, principals, parents, and students, efforts to improve the quality of instruction and reshape education governance were likely to fail. Trust reduced the sense of vulnerability that came with the risk of change and facilitated the collective decisionmaking necessary for such change. Trust helped staff perform well without intensive monitoring, and it sustained their ethical imperative to advance children’s best interests.

Bryk and Schneider cautioned policymakers not to lose sight of the importance of trust in the drive to deliver results, and they believed that from a policy perspective educators needed to ask constantly whether any new initiative was likely to promote interdependence within communities or undermine it. Although lacking in
empirical validation, Covey (1989) defined interdependence as "the paradigm of we—we can do it, we can cooperate, we can combine our talents and abilities and create something greater together" (p. 49). Covey further suggested, "Interdependence opens up the possibility for increased productivity, for serving, for contributing, for learning, for growing" (p. 187).

The development of a culture and climate for learning for the school staff in turn models the culture that educators hope to develop for students, to enhance their capacity for higher achievement. Much of a school's culture is a function of its policies and practices regarding students. Policies regarding discipline, attendance, homework, and grading, for example, all convey much about the school's beliefs and values. For example, a school communicates student learning largely through its approach to grading. A bell curve policy suggests to students that only a few of them deserve high grades regardless of how much they have learned (Danielson, 2002; Kohn, 1993; Marzano, 2000). A negative staff culture, in which certified and noncertified staff members feel that their opinions do not matter and that they are treated in a punitive manner, can poison the entire school culture. Policies that affect how decisions are made in the school, how the budget is handled, how staff development is offered, and how personnel are evaluated all can affect the school's culture significantly and contribute largely to an enabling learning environment.

Policy Development

Otto von Bismarck, first chancellor of the German Empire from 1871 to 1890, characterized policymaking as being similar to making sausage: a very messy process that nevertheless can produce very favorable outcomes (Koven et al.,
A society based on equity should be viewed through the lens of participation, mutual recognition, and negotiation. Using a participatory process of policy development can connect social meaning to the everyday experience of ordinary people through the creation of policies. A practice of translating policy language into the ordinary practice of policy development would provide stakeholders with the information necessary for meaningful participation in decisionmaking (Stauch, 1992). This in turn would increase the popular support for progressive perspectives and approaches, and enhance the institution's ability to communicate social change missions and strategies (Marinoff, 1997). Koven et al. (1998) asserted that for a policy to be considered seriously, proposals must be technically feasible, must fit in with the dominant values, must be congruent with the current national mood, must have workable budgets, and must have political support. If education policies are well designed they must penetrate administrative layers, but district management must reinforce, accommodate, and not conflict with these policies. Teacher knowledge and skills, motivation, and school context must support policy implementation, for teachers to incorporate these policies purposefully and effectively into their teaching practice and internalize them enough to draw on them while engaging with students in the curriculum (Kelley, 2000).

School boards and community advisory groups need to invent the kinds of communities they desire by living them. They will have to be communities of character. Public policy, especially at the local level, is shaped far more by community and character than by political movements and political elections (Fashing, 1997). Setting effective policy is a fundamental responsibility of school
boards and is crucial to the school system's success. Dysfunction in a system is often attributed to many things, but these are merely symptoms of the lack of an effective and systemic process for policy development. Unless the school board is willing to reform existing practices that no longer serve the schools, and face the challenge of creating a positive organizational culture and learning environment, policies that would sustain school improvement cannot be developed (Ramirez, 1995).

Data from a three-year study of a federally funded program to develop and implement community-oriented social studies curricula and curriculum-based assessments in three culturally diverse regions of the country found that the goals, policies, procedures, fiscal regulations, and other matters had to be formulated by the project director to create the cohesion necessary to win grant funding from the federal agency and then had to be imposed on teachers to fulfill promises. This imposition on teachers became the force for fundamental educational change of involving practitioners (Fullan, 1991, 1993; McLaughlin & Oberman, 1996; Sarason, 1990) and the groundswell of pressure for teacher empowerment (Astuto, Clark, Read, McGree, & Fernandez, 1994). As is often the case, the quality of communication became an important variable in effecting both trust and problem-solving (Mabry & Ettinger, 1999).

Developed from work on decisionmaking, Ravitch (1998) suggested that there are four attributes that give policies influence: prescriptiveness, consistency, authority, and power. A policy is prescriptive when it is clear in describing what is desired. Consistency is apparent when policies reinforce one another. Policies are
authoritative in that they operate through persuasion and are implemented by entities that have the power to force compliance. Ravitch stressed that a policy failing to meet all these attributes is likely to be ineffective. For example, policies that are intended to be effective through power may force compliance without changing the conceptions of those who are expected to carry out the policy. Failure to change the conceptions of those who are expected to carry out policy could create conflict, and the policy likely would not have a continuing effect.

Most schools that are committed to student learning allow students to participate in the formulation of policies and practices (Danielson, 2002). Sharing the development of policy with the people who are expected to carry out its intent promotes ownership of the process necessary to carry out the policy and increases that likelihood that the policy will be institutionalized.

School, Family, and Community Partnership Policy

Decades of research indicate that strong, continuous links between home and school that are focused on the practices and attitudes of parents exhibit long-lasting positive effects on student achievement (The National Education Goals Panel, 1995). According to the United States Department of Education (1994), 30 years of research has shown that greater family involvement in children's learning is a critical link to achieving a high-quality education and a safe, disciplined learning environment for every student. There is a remarkable consistency with the idea that the closer the parent is to the education of the child and the more involved in the child's education the greater the impact on child development and student achievement (Fullan, 1991; Henderson, 1987).
Title 1 dollars of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) target federal funds to high-poverty communities to provide educational services to low-achieving students. Previous to the ESEA, schools had complete discretion over Title 1 dollars. Reflecting the research on school, family, and community partnerships, the ESEA, renamed the No Child Left Behind Act, signed into law by President Bush January 8, 2002, required that all schools receiving Title 1 dollars have a written school, family, and community involvement policy. The policy must be developed jointly with, agreed on, and distributed to parents of participating children. It must ensure that successful strategies that encourage and sustain active parent involvement are in place in every school (National PTA, 2002). If public schools mean little more today than schools supported by taxes and controlled by boards of citizens, then no plan for reform or reorganization should be attempted without looking at its impact on a very fragile relationship linking the public to the schools (Mathews, 1996).

Haynes et al. (1996) assert, “It takes a whole village to raise a child. It takes a whole village of the administrator, staff, parents, external change agents and community members to facilitate the highest levels of development among the students” (p. 43). A publication entitled “Addressing Barriers to Student Learning & Promoting Healthy Development: A Research-base for Success” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000) stated:

As schools develop continuous school improvement plans in keeping with higher standards and expectations and increased accountability, most recognize they must include a comprehensive focus on
addressing barriers to student learning and promoting healthy development. This recognition stems from an extensive body of literature pointing to the value of schools, families, and communities working together to provide the type of supportive programs and services that enable students to learn and teachers to teach. (p. 1)

Mitchell, Blaeser, Chilangwa, and Mainbolwa-Sinyangwe (1999) determined that one key factor contributed to the development of a national policy initiative to promote girls' education in Zambia involving governments, donor organizations, teachers, and girls. To ensure that institutions, stakeholders, and local communities will implement the new or revised policy, policymakers must maintain an on-going dialogue about the purpose of the policy (Mitchell et al.). Because parents and the community at large are essential school clients and partners, educators must be responsible for keeping parents and the community informed about instructional programs and the progress the school is making toward its school improvement goals. Educators also must develop opportunities for parents and the community at large to participate in meaningful conversations about the school's programs and goals (Epstein, 1997).

Schools, which constitute the only institution in the United States with the explicit purpose of preparing students for a democracy, often operate in ways that demonstrate the lack of belief in such collective participation. Most schools do not include faculty, students, parents, and the community in democratic decisionmaking (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2001). Educators have received mixed messages about whom to include in the process of making decisions that affected
the school district. On the one hand, local educators have been excluded from decisions about policies and programs that they are expected to carry out, and the opportunity to become committed to the change has been taken from them. Failing to involve local stakeholders in the process of school reform set up the conditions for failure of school reform (Sarason, 1990). All stakeholders should have the right to participate in the decisionmaking about the local school. Should local school teachers, administrators, parents, students, and community members be the ones entitled to be at the table to make school reform decisions, and determine school policies to optimize student outcomes?

It has been easy for school cultures to become exclusionary, distant, and isolated from the community. Some school cultures were supportive of drawing together, and they sometimes shut out parents. Different ethnic backgrounds, interpersonal styles of communication, and education beliefs and values have created some sharp divides between school personnel and parents (Peterson & Deal, 2002). While most schools are doing everything they can to involve parents, the reality is that some dread the prospect of more parental involvement and actually adopt a protective stance that does little to welcome parents (Decker, Gregg, & Decker, 1993).

The effectiveness of educators’ efforts to establish and maintain links with the families of their students was borne out in research. Several studies found that effective schools seek out relationships with parents and the community (Epstein, 1997; Finn, 1998; Fullan, 2000; Peterson, 2002). Policies and assistance supporting school, family, and community partnerships are required to raise expectations and
possibilities for schools to extend their boundaries (Epstein, 1997; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998). Listening to the needs of parents, teachers, and community representatives to identify the educational and social problems are that might be addressed by partnerships, and then jointly developing and carrying out implementation plans, appeared to hold great promise in meeting the needs of all students (Davies, 1994). Partners should be involved in all school processes through participation in school improvement committees and school and district advisory committees. Partnerships can be formed with a long-term objective of designing, developing, and supporting reorganization, curricular changes, and improvements in methodology. Partnerships do not work if they are short-lived. The longer a partnership continues, the more the partners respect each other’s environment (Whiteford, 1996).

Sixteen (16) years ago, Henderson (1987), a recognized authority of school, family, and community partnerships, reported there to be many gaps in the research concerning building strong relationships between school, family, and the larger community. This gap included little known about what should be the most appropriate roles for government agencies at the federal, state, and local levels in encouraging, nurturing, and expanding partnerships. More recent research has shown that trust, open communication, and shared decisionmaking are important characteristics of effective school, family, and community partnerships. Callahan (1995) found no significant difference in the perceptions of business people and educators concerning the value of involvement in a partnership. The longer individuals were involved in partnerships, the more positive were their opinions
concerning their partners with regard to respect, communication, openness, and honesty. The longer business people or educators were involved in partnerships, the better they understood their partners and their partners' work. The more that power, leadership roles, and decisionmaking were shared between the two partners, the more positive were their perceptions of the value of the partnership. The perceptions of business people and educators varied based on the type of partnership.

Bobosky (1998) surveyed 306 superintendents and business/education partnership committee members in large districts in Illinois to identify and describe significant differences in the essential criteria perceived to be mutually beneficial. The survey questionnaire was distributed initially to a small sample of businessmen and educators on the Business/Education Partnership Committee. The purpose of the pilot survey was to test the adequacy of the survey instrument and to test the validity and appropriateness of the question set. A total of 45 completed surveys with comments were returned to the researcher. Content validity was ensured by basing items on issues identified as important by current members of the Business/Education Partnership Committee. The analysis of data indicated that both education and business professionals' decisionmaking and shared power were viewed as important. They also agreed that a sense of trust must exist for partnerships to be successful. Written mission and goals also were found to be important components of partnerships. The data also showed that the superintendents and business professionals felt that it is important to communicate the importance of partnerships to the community and stressed the need for parents to be involved in partnerships (Bobosky).
In a qualitative study conducted with six Wisconsin districts, Brittingham (1998) sought to describe the characteristics, processes, and strategies used to develop the most fully implemented school, family, and community partnerships. An expert panel was asked to identify the six most fully implemented partnership school districts. In-depth interviews were conducted at three of the identified school districts and focus groups were conducted at the remaining three districts. There were nine participants from each district, for a total of 54 respondents selected by the district superintendent and the local school, family, and community coordinator. In each district a superintendent, parent teacher organization president, teacher union president, teacher, school counselor, school board member, local newspaper editor/reporter, local government leader and local school, family, and community partnership coordinator participated. Findings indicated that school, family, and community partnerships generally are developed in a collaborative environment using a locally adapted partnerships framework that is based on trust, shared governance, and honest communication (Brittingham).

Epstein (1992) surveyed teachers, families, and students at six high schools in Maryland to learn more about desired types of school partnership practices. Two city high schools, two suburban high schools, and two rural high schools were chosen to participate in the project. Parents and teachers representing these six high schools were given questions that had been used with parents and teachers in other studies and were asked to contribute ideas and items for new surveys for high school teachers, parents, and students about their views, experiences, and needs for high school-level family involvement. Questions on each survey also asked the
participants to respond to a series of statements reflecting their attitudes about their high schools and the importance of family involvement. The questions aimed to identify the similarities and differences in parent, teacher, and student beliefs and attitudes regarding school and family involvement at the start of the project.

The suggestions were incorporated in a subsequent survey that was administered to 1,300 ninth grade students, 420 families, and 150 teachers in all six project schools. According to Epstein, the following activities promoted parental involvement at school and at home: parent education, communication between the school and the home, volunteering, learning at home, shared decisionmaking, and collaboration with the community. Over 90% of the parents and teachers agreed that parent involvement was important for a good high school, teacher effectiveness, and student success. Most students (82%) agreed that even in high school their parents needed to be involved in their education. Most parents (80%) reported that they wanted to be more involved than they currently were, and many students (50%) wanted their parents to be more involved, but only 32% of teachers believed it was their responsibility to involve families. Large numbers of parents reported that they were not contacted by high school, even in common ways. Approximately 40% of parents were never telephoned by the school, over 50% never were contacted to schedule a formal conference with a teacher, and about 67% never met formally with any of their teens' teachers. The data suggested that under present policies, high schools contact families mainly to discuss serious problems of students. Contacting them only when there is a problem ignores parents' need to know more so they can interact with and guide their teens about school and decisions for the future. The
patterns of responses at the high school level indicated that most families were poorly connected with their children's schools (Connors & Epstein, 1994).

According to a review published by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (Henderson & Mapp, 2002), the following were key findings concerning building strong relationships between schools, families, and communities: (a) directly link the school's parent involvement efforts to student learning; (b) develop families' sense of confidence and power by engaging families in planning how they would like to be involved at school, consulting a representative sample of parents and families, not just the PTO leadership, about school policies and proposed actions and making it easy for parents to meet and discuss concerns with the principal, talk to teachers and guidance counselors, and examine their children's school records; (c) support families' efforts to improve the school and community by giving families information about how the education system (and local government) works; and (d) develop the capacity of school staff to work with families and community.

In summary, although research has filled some of the gaps concerning building strong relationships between school, family, and the larger community, there is still a gap concerning what should be the most appropriate policy role for government agencies at the federal, state, and local levels in encouraging, nurturing, and expanding partnerships. Research has provided ample evidence that policies that expect and promote community, family, and school partnerships positively influence student achievement. What is not known is how best to construct these policies so that they are aligned to influence student achievement. The research suggests that community and school stakeholders should be familiar with policies
and that their beliefs and values, and their views of partnership and of the school's mission and culture must be aligned with policy to produce the best results in student achievement. Further research is needed, however, to determine if this relationship holds in all communities and schools and to describe other characteristics of stakeholders that may influence the relationship.

Based on the literature review and interviews with local and state stakeholders, the concept of an enabling learning environment was developed to guide the research. An enabling learning environment is defined as a context of school and community member agreement on and participation in the development of expectations, surroundings, practices, and policies that support learners to be motivated by their individual achievements. Key elements of an enabling learning environment are: familiarity of all stakeholders with school policies, involvement of all stakeholders in the development of policies, a school culture viewed as positive for learning, and policies closely aligned with beliefs, school conditions, mission, partnerships, and culture that are consistent with an enabling learning environment.

Summary

As noted earlier, the governance structure of PK-12 school districts has been under scrutiny in the quest to improve student achievement. Districts have been described as centralized, hierarchical, and disconnected from teaching and learning, with prescribed divisions of labor and set rules and procedures (Hightower, 2002). Previous studies have acknowledged the importance of district policies aligned with the district's beliefs and values, school conditions that generate successful school
culture and climate, and the development of school, family, and community partnerships to improve PK-12 student achievement.

There is a substantial gap in empirical research regarding whether local stakeholders perceive district policy in these areas as important to the district's ability to affect student achievement. To inform school policy development better at the PK-12 level, research must be conducted to determine the PK-12 stakeholders' perceived (a) alignment and importance of PK-12 school policies, beliefs, conditions, culture, mission, and partnerships, (b) valuation of success-generating PK-12 school culture/climate, and (c) PK-12 school, family, and community partnerships. Further, policymakers need to understand better stakeholders' extent of perceived, familiarity with, involvement with, and perceived influences of policies and all of these characteristics on student achievement in local school districts.
Chapter 3
METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this dissertation research was to investigate stakeholders’ perceptions of the alignment and importance of alignment of policies with the elements that are consistent with an enabling learning environment that supports student achievement. A self-report questionnaire was constructed and piloted to prepare for a subsequent mailing to a representative sample of local school stakeholders (superintendents, school board members, teachers, parents, and community members). A survey design was the strategy selected for preliminary semistructured interviews and for the pilot test of the self-report questionnaire. Results of data analysis from the semistructured interviews were used to construct the self-report questionnaire. This chapter first presents the methods used for the semistructured interviews and the results of the analysis of the interview data, followed by the methods used to construct and pilot the self-report questionnaire.

Semistructured Interviews

Sample Selection

Four school districts (Table 2) and 22 stakeholders were selected purposively for the sample of interviewees. Twenty of the 22 interviewees represented 4 Iowa school districts and were members of their district’s school improvement team. Two of the four districts chosen were involved in implementing Success4, and the remaining two districts had not been involved in implementing Success4, which is an initiative of the Iowa Department of Education, using federal monies to increase the capacities of Iowa schools, families, and communities to meet the social, emotional,
intellectual, and behavioral needs of all youth. Five qualitative interviews were conducted in each district, with the interviewees representing the following roles: superintendent, school board member, teacher, parent, and community member. These five roles were chosen because it was felt they represented the diverse experience of local stakeholders. Superintendents were selected to represent the administration and leadership of the school. Students were not included in the list of stakeholders interviewed. A committee, representing the Bureau of Children, Family and Community Services, of the Iowa Department of Education, suggested that the stakeholders interviewed not include students because of the Iowa Department of Education's efforts to reduce the number of times students are surveyed. In addition, to acquire the perception of educators at the state level, one member of the Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB) and one member of the School Administrators of Iowa (SAI) were interviewed.

The four schools were selected based on their geographic location, size (measured by PK-12 enrollment), classification into high and low levels of Iowa Test of Basic Skills/Iowa Tests of Educational Development (ITBS/ITED) scores, and high and low 10% of an at-risk list developed by the Research Institute for Studies in Education (RISE), Iowa State University, for the Iowa Department of Education. The at-risk indicator list of districts was constructed using data from district-level sources, from aggregated individual student records (Iowa Youth Survey), and from county-level sources. Variables used to create the at-risk list (dropout rate, limited English proficiency, minority enrollment, child poverty, high school graduation, domestic abuse, alcohol-related motor vehicle deaths, juvenile arrests, juvenile vandalism,
child abuse and neglect, teen unmarried births, weapons-related expulsions, public school dropout rates, and results of related questions on the Iowa Youth Survey) were selected by the Iowa Department of Education and the RISE faculty and professional staff who were engaged in the research as essential to achieve a high degree of face validity and concurrent validity. AEA vicinity and school PK-12 enrollment are provided in Table 2.

Limitations of the Participant Sample

Table 2 indicates that district selection was limited. The researcher was unable to match high- or low-achieving districts by grade span, enrollment, or AEA proximity. The at-risk variable used was consistent across all four districts selected. Generalization of the interview data, however, must be made cautiously beyond the districts and subjects sampled.

Human Subjects Procedures

Approval was obtained from the Human Subjects Research Office, Iowa State University, to conduct the interviews (Appendix B). Each interviewee was invited to participate and to sign an informed consent/release form to be interviewed (Appendix D) and to allow the use of his or her recorded statements for research purposes.

Procedures

A 45-minute, taped, semistructured interview was conducted with each of the 22 interviewees. Fontana and Frey (1994) state that:

Through polyphonic interviewing, ... the voices of the subjects are recorded with minimal influence from the researcher. The multiple
perspectives of the various subjects are reported and differences and problems encountered are discussed, rather than glossed over. (p. 62)

Table 2

District Sites and Demographics for Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Districts</th>
<th>Top 10% ITBS/ITED Grades 4,6,8</th>
<th>Bottom 10% ITBS/ITED</th>
<th>Top 10% At-Risk Indicators 15th from top</th>
<th>Bottom 10% At-Risk Indicators</th>
<th>District Enrollment</th>
<th>AEA #</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District A</td>
<td>Grades 4,6,8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>559</td>
<td>15th from top</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District B</td>
<td>Grade 11</td>
<td></td>
<td>13th from Top</td>
<td>668</td>
<td>10th from top</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District C</td>
<td>Grades 4,6,8,11</td>
<td>2nd from Last</td>
<td></td>
<td>1199</td>
<td>11th from Last</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District D</td>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td></td>
<td>11th from Last</td>
<td>1051</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The at-risk indicator list of districts was constructed using data from district-level sources, from aggregated individual student records (Iowa Youth Survey), and from county-level sources. Variables used (dropout rate, limited English proficiency, minority enrollment, child poverty, high school graduation, domestic abuse, alcohol-related motor vehicle deaths, juvenile arrests, juvenile vandalism, child abuse and neglect, teen unmarried births, weapons-related expulsions, public school dropouts, and results of related questions on the Iowa Youth Survey) were determined by the Iowa Department of Education and the faculty and professional staff who were engaged in the research as essential to achieve a high degree of face validity and concurrent validity.

More breadth and depth of information can be gathered using semistructured interviewing, as opposed to structured interviews, because of the qualitative nature of the data gathered and the interviewer not imposing predetermined categories on the data (Fontana & Frey). The semistructured interview approach was chosen to optimize true and unbiased responses by the interviewees. That is, the interviewer
wanted to be as certain as possible that respondents would not "say what they thought others wanted them to say" due to any signals that might be given by more structured questions. This was especially important because the objective of the interviews was to obtain as much depth and breadth of information as possible for the later construction of a structured questionnaire for a mailed survey. The questions used during the interview are provided in Appendix A.—"In what ways have you become familiar with your local school policies?"—is an example of one of the questions used during the interviews. The superintendents of each of the four district sites were contacted. Each superintendent provided the names of the representative stakeholders to be interviewed and their telephone numbers. The representative stakeholders were contacted and an interview time was scheduled. The interviews were conducted at a convenient location (often at one of the district buildings) for the interviewees.

Data Management and Analysis

The tape-recorded statements from each interviewee were transcribed in Microsoft Word and entered into the QSR NUD*IST (NVivo) program for analyzing qualitative data. NVivo is a very richly featured and highly advanced program for handling qualitative data analysis research projects. Whole documents or nodes within a document are coded with regard to their specific content and overall emergent themes, and those results may be integrated with other nodes or documents. The resulting documents are searched for any occurrences of text strings or concepts (see http://www.scolari.com/).
The data were analyzed to determine what policy-related issues reported by the informants should be addressed in the policy survey and to whom the survey should be administered. After completion of the interviews, 310 pages of data were coded by the interviewer. Appendix C includes four examples of coded interviewee transcripts. Interrater reliability of coding was checked by asking the debriefers—an educational leadership doctoral student, a professor in education, and a RISE graduate student—using established coding schemes to classify the data independently of the researcher, to determine whether they drew the same conclusions (Krathwohl, 1998). The peer debriefer—the doctoral student in curriculum and instruction—covered the coding marked on each page and read each response. First, she categorized the narrative on her own and then compared it to the coding by the investigator. After getting a general coding, she reread the response to see if other coding matched. Finally, she wrote her coding in pencil next to the responses.

Having the report read by gatekeepers and subjects of the study, a process referred to as member checking, provides a useful review of both the data and their interpretations (Krathwohl, 1998). Each of the 22 interviewees was mailed a cover letter (Appendix E), asking him or her to review an enclosed copy of the interviewee's transcribed interview to confirm responses and to obtain any revisions determined by the interviewee. There were no such suggestions for changes in the transcripts.

The method for analyzing the data consisted of determining the number of times that a node/code occurred in the data analysis. The three theme categories
coded most often were determined to be the targeted theme categories. Within each of the top three theme categories the nodes/codes receiving 10% or more of the hits were determined to be the targeted nodes/codes of the interviewees.

Findings

Analysis of the interview data identified several common themes. Thematic categories included: (a) the school improvement process; (b) community collaboration; (c) leadership; (d) state and federal policy; (e) local district policy; (f) personnel; and (g) the school board. Within these categories subthemes emerged as the focus for the groups identified.

Analysis of the data also showed that the 22 interviewees felt that the policy survey, to be developed based on the results of the semistructured interviews, should be administered to a diverse representation of the school district community, including superintendents, school board members, teachers, parents, community members, and students. Appendix F indicates the number of times data occurred in the data analysis by interviewee/district, district variable, and category/theme coded.

Construction of Self-Report Questionnaire

Analysis of the interviews suggested that both the district interviewees and the state organization representatives were concerned in general about three major education policy areas' intent and impact. The 22 interview participants consistently stated that they felt it important that the self-report questionnaire be administered to a diverse representation of school district stakeholders statewide, to include superintendents, board members, teachers, parents, and community members. Questionnaire items were developed to query the stakeholders about each of the three major themes.
The first major theme about which the interviewees expressed concern targeted the school district's mission of education, what school district beliefs and values supported that mission, and, in turn, how these beliefs and values resulted in behaviors that supported the school district's mission. Based on responses arranged by theme, items were written to obtain subjects' descriptions of the ways alignment of school policy was important to the implementation of the school district's mission.

The following two quotes were representative of a number of stakeholder interviews that noted the importance of identifying the district's values, beliefs, and mission/philosophy as the foundation for developing the district's policies:

If the values and beliefs and how boards talk, if that's the most powerful policy level influence. You know, if board members believe all kids can learn, and are just on this relentless pursuit to make sure that conditions exist in their schools and principals and teachers have the tools and knowledge they need to improve achievement for the students, then how can we make that less people-dependent? The turnover rate of school board members is high. How can we get something from this unwritten level into a more formal policy level so that it doesn't throw your district into a tailspin? That it embeds the improvement work into the system in ways that might not happen if it's nested in a person rather than in something more permanent. - State Educator

I think that it's important that specific instances don't create policy, but that policy is generated and then when a specific instance, that policy
is applied to that instance or that specific situation. I think too often we do the reverse. Policy should be based on the mission, based on some broader goals and broader objectives that you've got. These policies should be devised in a way that helps make those broader kinds of, the direction that you are heading, make it easier to reach those goals or those objectives. - Parent

The self-report questionnaire section pertaining to the school district's beliefs, values, and mission (Appendix G) offered seven items. Based on the context provided by the above quotation, a relevant question in this section was: To what extent is the district's mission statement reflected in local school policy development?

A second major theme described respondents' concerns about the relationship between the district's culture and climate and the school districts' unwritten and written policies. Interviewees expressed concern not only for the ability of the school culture and climate to support learning, but added to this was concern for the power of both written, and perhaps even more concern for the ability of unwritten school policy to affect the school culture and climate. The following two quotes are representative of a number of stakeholder interviews that noted the importance of a school culture and climate conducive to student learning and the relationship to school policy:

How do you begin to help make people aware of the culture in which they live all the time and think is normal? And what inherent and unwritten policies that they are basing their lives on? So I think it's
probably the ability to step back and try to see the big picture of what’s going on. Is policy creating the conditions for people to excel, or is it dampening aspiration and increasing compliance? - State Educator

I’ve found that if the staff all in all feel good about the board and that the board policy is written with the best interest of everyone at heart, that teachers feel more comfortable working in that district and they tend to stay in that district, even if they have a chance to move. They feel secure. They feel comfortable. They don’t feel board policy is written to ‘get’ them. Board policies typically dealt more with structure and foundation of how to operate a school. It hasn’t typically involved a lot in regard to the culture. We are seeing more board policies in relationship to how we deal with people. - Superintendent

As a school district made the effort to move to a culture and climate that supported community, the question became: What written and unwritten school policies support this move? The self-report questionnaire section pertaining to the school district’s culture and climate (Appendix G) offered seven items. A question in this section based on quotations like those above was: To what extent do you believe the culture and climate of your school district reflect the school district’s mission statement?

The third theme identified by the analysis of the interview data targeted the concern with stakeholders’ familiarity with local school policy, whether and to what extent stakeholders should be involved with policy development, how the school district best communicates with community stakeholders concerning policy, and the
importance of developing school, family, and community partnerships. The following two quotes were representative of the stakeholder interviews that noted the importance of the school district sharing information with the community and involving stakeholders in decisionmaking:

The two best ways to find out about policy are through the grapevine. I work out of town. I don’t have a lot of social groups that I belong to. My network is not so much the grapevine, but you do hear about … The folks that sit out here, that have coffee. And the downtown restaurant, and church, and you do hear of people that are associated with card clubs and things like that. Also through our children, what they bring home. What they bring home is not always …, um …, is their perception of, or what they have heard through the rumor mill. And of course, the younger the child the more likely it will be distorted. And probably the older the child, the more likely it’s more their opinion.
- Parent

I think the school sometimes tries these certain trends, whether at the high school or the elementary, and I think the parents and the people in the district need to know when they’re going to try these new things and also if they quit, when they’re going to quit it. To know what the evaluation was. Was it successful or not? Were they just quitting it because they ran out of money, or what? Or it wasn’t successful. Sometimes I think there needs to be a little more input into programs and the way things are done before a decision is made.
- Parent
The self-report questionnaire section pertaining to the school district's school, family, and community partnerships (Appendix G) offered seven items. An example of a question in the section of the self-report questionnaire pertaining to school, family, and community partnerships, based on these quotations, was: To what extent do you feel your local school district is involved in partnerships with the community?

The self-report questionnaire was constructed to measure the extent that stakeholders were familiar with policies; the extent that stakeholder's perceptions of beliefs, school conditions, mission, and culture in school districts were aligned with policies; their perceived importance of alignment; and their perception of the influence of culture, partnerships, and mission to effect a learning environment that enables student achievement. Subscales of the instrument were formed for stakeholder familiarity with policies; alignment of beliefs, school conditions, mission, and culture with policy; the importance of alignment; and influence of culture, partnerships, and mission on student achievement (Table 3). The questionnaire contained 68 items, including two open-ended items and six demographic items (Appendix G). Perception of school culture was measured with a single item. Survey items were developed using concepts recommended by Bourque and Fielder (1995) to gather data on the issues identified as important in interviews. The overall instrument was conceptualized as measuring the elements consistent with a school district's enabling learning environment that supports student achievement.

Based on the review of literature and the interview data, subscales of the total instrument were identified, composed of items measuring alignment of beliefs, school conditions, culture, mission, and partnerships with policies; importance of
alignment, culture, familiarity with policies, and influence in the development of policies. Items were closed-ended, most using a four-point Likert-type scale, with responses ranging from "very much" to "very little." An additional open-ended comment section was included (Vogt, 1993).

Table 3

*Items and Subscales of the Self-Report Questionnaire Measuring Study Variables*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enabling learning environment</td>
<td>1-41</td>
<td>Enabling learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familiarity with policies</td>
<td>1, 21, 22, 29</td>
<td>Familiarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alignment of beliefs, school conditions, mission with policy</td>
<td>2a–13a, 14a–20a, 23–25, 31–33, 39</td>
<td>Alignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of alignment with policies</td>
<td>2b–13b, 14b–20b</td>
<td>Alignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of culture, partnerships, mission on school achievement</td>
<td>27, 30, 34, 38</td>
<td>Influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture and climate</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Culture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pilot Study

Research Design and Sample

A purposive convenience sample of 200 stakeholders was selected from 40 Iowa school districts representing 14 of the 15 Iowa Area Education Agencies (40 superintendents, 40 school board members, 40 teachers, 40 parents, and 40 community members). Five (5) of 20 subjects in each stakeholder group were chosen from a district with less than 800 total student enrollment, and five of 20 in each stakeholder group were selected from a school district with 900 or more total
student enrollment (Table 4). Two hundred (200) participants purposively selected with an equal number of larger and smaller school districts were expected to be somewhat representative of school districts, communities, and stakeholders in Iowa and to comprise a sample of sufficient size with a 50% return for psychometric evaluation of the self-report questionnaire. Names and addresses of school superintendents were selected for this study from all Iowa Area Education Agencies (AEAs) except AEA Three and were obtained from the 2002-2003 Iowa Educational Directory, Iowa Department of Education. Names and addresses of the school board member, teacher, parent, and community member were obtained from the Iowa Association of School Boards, Department of Education databases, and the District Comprehensive School Improvement Plans. A random sample was selected from the sampling frame for each stakeholder group. Sampling frames were not inclusive for all stakeholders. Districts also were selected from all but one AEA and based on: high and low ITED and ITBS scores, high and low at-risk indicators, and high and low enrollment (Table 4). Approval was sought and obtained from the Human Subjects Research office, Iowa State University, for administering the self-report questionnaire (Appendix J), which included 60 close-ended questions divided into six sections, two general open-ended questions, and six stakeholder demographic questions (Appendix G).

Data Collection

A cover letter (Appendix H) was prepared for each of the stakeholder groups to be surveyed, explaining the purpose and importance of the survey pilot study. The letter
asked the participants to complete the enclosed questionnaire and return it in one week in the enclosed, self-addressed, stamped envelope. In addition, the

Table 4

**School District ITBS/ITED Scores, At-Risk Indicators, and Enrollment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Districts</th>
<th>AEA #</th>
<th>High Mean Range 56-70 ITBS/ITED 4,6,8,11 1995-2000</th>
<th>Low Mean Range 36-55 ITBS/ITED 4,6,8,11 1995-2000</th>
<th>Top 47% Low # At-Risk Indicators</th>
<th>Bottom 30% High # At-Risk Indicators</th>
<th>District Enrollment Range 958-8804</th>
<th>District Enrollment Range 290-754</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>1,4,7,10,11</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>2,9,11</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>10,11</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>2,9,15,16</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>1,2,5,12</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>2,6,7,12</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-35</td>
<td>2,5,10,13,15</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-40</td>
<td>2,5,14,15</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The at-risk indicator list of districts was constructed using data from district-level sources, from aggregated individual student records (Iowa Youth Survey), and from county-level sources. Variables used (dropout rate, limited English proficiency, minority enrollment, child poverty, high school graduation, domestic abuse, alcohol-related motor vehicle deaths, juvenile arrests, juvenile vandalism, child abuse and neglect, teen unmarried births, weapons-related expulsions, public school dropouts, and results of related questions on the Iowa Youth Survey) were determined by the Iowa Department of Education and the faculty and professional staff who were engaged in the research as essential to achieve a high degree of face validity and concurrent validity.

letter explained that enclosed with the participant’s questionnaire was a $1 bill, and that returning the completed questionnaire indicated consent of the recipient to participate in the study. Participants were informed that their responses would be
kept in confidence by the researcher and shared only in the aggregate following data analysis. To optimize participation, Dr. Troyce Fisher, Executive Director, School Administrators Association of Iowa, Dr. Ron Rice, Director, Iowa Association of School Boards, and Lana Michelson, Bureau Chief, Children, Family and Community Services, State of Iowa Department of Education, agreed to draft and sign a letter of support to be mailed out with the cover letter and self-report questionnaire, legitimizing the pilot study and subsequent mailed self-report questionnaire (Appendix I). A questionnaire, cover letter, three support letters, $1 bill, and a self-addressed stamped return envelope were mailed to 200 participants (40 superintendents, 40 school board members, 40 teachers, 40 parents, and 40 community members).

Self-report questionnaires must be translated, and some mechanism devised for ensuring that each respondent receives a questionnaire in the correct language, when necessary, and/or contains the correct information needed to allow the respondent to complete the self-report questionnaire (Bourque & Fielder, 1995). The aim of the researcher was to attain at least a 50% response rate, using followup notes to those in the sample who had not returned a completed questionnaire, if needed.

Five weeks after the original set of questionnaires were mailed a second self-report questionnaire was mailed to 123 of the participants to assess test-retest reliability. A cover letter explaining the retest (Appendix K), a questionnaire, a $1 bill, and a self-addressed, stamped, return envelope were sent to each of the 123 respondents who returned the original questionnaire. Response rates of mailed
questionnaires can be improved through the use of followups, incentives, and addressing targeted populations with specific interest in the subject area. Even in the best circumstances, however, the response rate was expected to be lower than what would be obtained from telephone and face-to-face interviews.

Data Management

A computer database of responses to the closed response items of the self-report questionnaire was created using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The data were entered and verified. The data and outliers identified were examined carefully to ensure that they did not indicate an error in the data. Responses of the subjects were entered for each item on the questionnaire. Computed variables for each of the subscales were created, and one item (Item 34) was recoded to reverse the scale. Written responses to the open-ended items were typed, compiled, and entered into a Microsoft Word file for content analysis.

Data Analysis for the Pilot Study

Qualitative data were examined, compared, and interpreted using content analysis to determine the themes that occurred in the stakeholder groups from the participants’ responses to the self-report questionnaire’s two open-ended questions. Matrices that display the interrelationships among variables, persons, and situations are helpful when organizing the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A set of categories describing the themes was determined, and each of the narrative responses was placed in the appropriate category.

Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS, version 11.5. Internal consistency reliability of the self-report questionnaire scales and total instrument was
assessed using Cronbach's alpha, and Pearson correlations were used to estimate test-retest reliability of the instrument. Frequencies and descriptive statistics were computed to describe the demographic characteristics of the sample and to summarize and describe responses for Aims 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 of the study. One-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) and t-tests were used to determine differences among stakeholder groups grouped by role, between schools grouped by district, high- vs. low-achievement districts, high- vs. low-enrollment districts, high- and low-at-risk districts, and categories of the demographic variables. Statistical significance was based on probability less than .05.

Summary

This chapter described the methods and procedures that were used to conduct semistructured interviews to obtain the content for construction of the self-report questionnaire used in the pilot study. Included in the section on the semistructured interviews was a discussion of the sample selection, limitations of the participant sample, procedures, data management and analysis, and findings. The second section was devoted to the construction of the self-report questionnaire. In the third section, the design and methods for the pilot study were detailed, including limitations of the study.
Chapter 4

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The purpose of this dissertation research was to investigate stakeholders' perceptions of the alignment and importance of alignment of policies with the elements that are consistent with an enabling learning environment that supports student achievement. A self-report questionnaire was constructed and piloted to measure local school district stakeholders' (administrators, teachers, school board members, parents, and community members) perceptions regarding characteristics and importance of an enabling learning environment and policies for student education, and to collect preliminary data describing these perceptions using a statewide purposive sample of the stakeholders. A subsequent survey using the self-report questionnaire, if demonstrated to be reliable and valid, with a larger, statewide representative sample of stakeholders is intended to inform policymakers.

To construct the self-report questionnaire, in-depth interviews were conducted with key state and local policymakers. Interviewees were queried about what policy-related issues should be included in a survey and to whom the survey should be administered. The results of the interview analysis suggested that both the district interviewees and the state organization representatives were concerned in general about three major education policy areas' intent and influence. The first major theme about which the interviewees expressed concern targeted the school district's mission of education, what school district beliefs and values support that mission, and, in turn, how these beliefs and values result in behaviors that support the school district's mission. The second major theme described the respondents' concerns
about the relationship between the district's culture and climate and the school
district's unwritten and written policies. The third theme identified by the analysis of
the interview data targeted concern with the stakeholders' familiarity with local
school policy, whether and to what extent stakeholders should be involved with
policy development, how the school district best communicates with community
stakeholders concerning policy; and the importance of developing school, family,
and community partnerships. The interview participants consistently stated that they
felt it important that the self-report questionnaire be administered to a diverse,
statewide representation of school district stakeholders, to include superintendents,
board members, teachers, parents, and community members. The self-report
questionnaire items were developed to query the stakeholders about each of the
three major themes. Complete results of the qualitative analysis of the interview data
are reported in Chapter 3 along with a description of the development of the self-
report questionnaire.

The Sample
Two hundred surveys were mailed to district stakeholders, including 40 of
each of the following subject groups: superintendents, teachers, school board
members, parents, and community members. One hundred and twenty-three
questionnaires were returned, for a return rate of 62%, with a 50% or greater return
rate for each stakeholder group (Table 5). Of the 200 questionnaires mailed to each
of 40 persons in each stakeholder group, 30 (75%) were returned completed from
superintendents, 22 (50%) from teachers, 26 (58%) from school board members, 23
(65%) from parents, and 22 (50%) from members of the local communities. Because
some of the stakeholders reported more than one role these percents add to more than 100 percent. Items requesting demographic information were included in the survey (Table 6). The questionnaire was mailed again to 123 of the sample subjects five weeks following the initial mailing to assess test-retest reliability. Because greater than 50% response rate was obtained, with 63 total questionnaires returned by the end of two weeks, no follow-up reminders were sent to those who did not return a completed questionnaire (Table 5).

Description of the Sample

Statistics describing the demographics of the total sample of stakeholders are presented in Table 6. The stakeholder groups were coded as follows for analysis: superintendents = 1, parents = 2, board members = 3, community members = 4, and teachers = 5 (Figure 1 & 2). Stakeholders who returned completed questionnaires represented all school districts in the state except schools in Area Education Agency 3 (AEA 3). When asked to report their role in the school district, a number of participants indicated multiple roles. For example, several participants were a

Table 5

Survey Test and Test-Retest Respondent Rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder Participants</th>
<th>Superintendents</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Board Members</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Community Members</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N return</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N return</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N return</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Original Test</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test-Re-Test</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

...
teacher and a parent, a board member and a parent, a superintendent and a parent, or any of these roles and a community member. Thus, there is some redundancy in the reported stakeholder roles, with 30 participants reporting the role of board member, 29 administrators, 26 teachers, 39 parents, and 44 community members (Figure 1).

Figure 1.

Stakeholder Role Groups

Overall, participants were distributed across the age groups as expected, with 10 participants in the 25-to-34 year-old and six in the 60 or older group (Table 6). Forty-seven of the participants were 45-54 years of age and 28 were 55-64 years old. The majority of superintendents and teachers were in the age range of 40-64 years, while the age range for the majority of parents and board members was 35-54 years and for the majority of community members from 45-54 years (Figure 2).
Table 6

**Stakeholder Sample Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholders</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>% Responding</th>
<th>Iowa 2000 Census</th>
<th>% State of Iowa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Sample</td>
<td>123</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>119</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25-44</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>45-64</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 and older</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>65 and older</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>119</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed H.S./GED</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Completed H.S./GED</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 yr. college grad.</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4 yr. college grad.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some work on adv. degree</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed adv. degree</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Completed adv. degree</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than $5,000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$5,000-$9,999</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Less than $10,000</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,000-$19,999</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>$10,000-$14,999</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20,000-$29,999</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>$15,000-$24,999</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$30,000-$39,999</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>$25,000-$34,999</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$40,000-$49,999</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>$35,000-$49,999</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000-$74,999</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>$50,000-$74,999</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$75,000-$99,999</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>$75,000-$99,999</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000 or more</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>%100,000 or more</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have children</td>
<td>118</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child now attending in</td>
<td>116</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>school district</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>49</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child previously attended district</td>
<td>118</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years lived in district</td>
<td>118</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; than 1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-10</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 or &gt;</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All of the participants had completed high school, and all but five had some form of post-high school education (Figure 3). More than one-half of the participants had some college work toward a post-baccalaureate degree, and 61 had completed a master's or doctoral degree (e.g., PhD, MD, OD). Because of the educational requirements for the position, superintendents as a group had the highest average level of education.

Participants also represented higher levels of household incomes overall (Figure 4). Thirty-two percent (32%) reported household incomes of $100,000 or more annually, while only 15% reported that their household income was $39,999
or less annually. Seventy-seven percent (77%) of the stakeholders noted household incomes of $50,000 or more annually. As a group, more superintendents reported

Figure 3

Stakeholder Education Groups

1 = No formal education, 2 = less than 8th grade, 3 = completed 8th grade, some high school, 5 = completed high school, 6 = some college or A.A. degree, 7 = 4-year college graduate, 8 = some work toward advanced degree, 9 = Master’s, PhD, or other doctorate.

the highest annual household incomes and more parents reported the lowest annual incomes. Almost all of the participants (92%) reported that they had at least one child, and 71% noted that at least one of their children had attended school in the school district. Almost ½ (49%) had a child currently attending a school within the district.

Pilot Study Findings

Aim 1. Pilot test the self-report questionnaire with a purposive, convenience sample of 200 stakeholders (40 superintendents, 40 school board
members, 40 teachers, 40 parents, and 40 community members) to estimate reliability and validity, assess clarity, and describe recommended revisions.

Figure 4

Stakeholder Education Groups

1 = less than $5000, 2 = $5000-$9,999, 3 = $10,000-$19,999, 4 = $20,000-$29,999, 5 = $30,000-$39,999, 6 = $40,000-$49,999, 7 = $50,000-$74,999, 8 = $75,000-$99,999, 9 = $100,000 or more.

Reliability

Internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) and test-retest reliability procedures were conducted to assess the reliability of the self-report questionnaire. The Cronbach's alpha value for the total instrument was 0.93 for the pilot survey participant data. Although this indicates a high level of internal consistency among
the questionnaire items and supports the conceptualization of the instrument as measuring a single underlying concept or construct, "perceptions of an enabling learning environment," the large number of items in the instrument also would tend to increase the Cronbach alpha coefficient. Alpha coefficients for each of the subscales of the instrument (Familiarity, Alignment, Alignment Importance, Involvement, and Influence) also were obtained and are displayed in Table 7. Overall, the subscale coefficients indicate adequate internal consistency. The alpha coefficient for the Influence subscale (0.33), however, did not indicate sufficient internal consistency among the items to justify use of the scale in subsequent analyses. Thus, each item of the Influence scale was analyzed separately.

Participants' description of the culture and climate of the local school district was measured by the single item 28, Culture, in the questionnaire, and was analyzed as a single item.

Test-retest reliability indicated that the total scale measure and two of the subscales, Familiarity and Alignment, were quite stable, with correlations between time one and the second administration of the instrument ranging between .78 and .70 (Table 7). For the Total scale the test-retest coefficient was .74 (p < .01).

Alignment Importance, Involvement, and Influence subscale stability coefficients were somewhat lower, ranging from .51 to .62. Scores for Culture, measured by a single item, also was quite stable for the test and retest, with a Pearson r value of .72. The test-retest coefficients for the separate items of the Influence subscale ranged from r = .47 to .33. Midrange test-retest correlations for measures may indicate several factors that are important to consider. First, trait
characteristics of subjects are expected to be stable over time. Thus, for measures of traits, high-magnitude correlations between data collections are expected and the traits are not expected to be influenced easily by interventions or other potential influences in the interim between rounds of data collection (Speilberger, 1975).

Perceptions of certain characteristics about schools, such as the conditions, regular staff development that is focused on studying, teaching, and learning, or the ability to create and sustain initiatives extant in the school, may be similar to traits in that conditions would not be expected to change much over short periods of time, and, therefore, little change in individuals' perceptions of them would be expected.

On the other hand, measures of state characteristics are expected to be less stable over time with repeated measurements reflected in lower and more mid-range

Table 7

Internal consistency and test-retest reliability coefficients for the self-report questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale/Measure</th>
<th>N Items</th>
<th>Cronbach's Alpha</th>
<th>N Subjects</th>
<th>Test-Retest Pearson r</th>
<th>N Subjects r</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total scale</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>.74*</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familiarity</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>.72*</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alignment</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>.78*</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alignment Importance</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>.62*</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>.52*</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>.51*</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence culture (item 30)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.47*</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence culture (item 34)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.47*</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence mission (item 27)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.33*</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence partner (item 38)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.47*</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture (item 28)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.70*</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Correlation significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed).
between-measurement correlation coefficients (Speilberger, 1975). Perceptions of the importance of alignment of beliefs, policies, and conditions in schools may be viewed more as states that are likely to change fairly quickly due to interventions of information, self-exploration, or some other influence.

Finally, the first experience of responding to these measures also may have stimulated the participants to think more about the items on the questionnaire that addressed these variables, causing them to change their responses more in the interim. Outcomes measures that are sensitive to change are needed when interventions are tested. Test-retest coefficients for outcomes that are more sensitive to change are more likely to be of midrange magnitude (Carver, 1974). For persons interested in influencing school district learning environments, the more “state-like” perceptions may be those that should be considered for measurement of the effects of interventions designed to move school districts toward more enabling learning environments (Speilberger, 1975).

Content Validity

Content validity of the self-report questionnaire was assessed by a panel of experts. The panel consisted of the executive director of the School Administrators of Iowa, an Iowa Association of School Boards research team member, and one Iowa State University research and evaluation professor with expertise in survey development and education policy. The experts reviewed the content of the instrument and reported that they believed it to be measuring adequately the scope and depth of the concepts intended.
The self-report questionnaire included two open-ended questions (Table 8). The first question asked respondents to note any questions on the survey that were unclear or that they had difficulty understanding. Of the 123 respondents, 5 (2 community members, 2 parents, and 1 teacher) noted that they had trouble understanding items 7a & 7b ("To what extent do you believe your school district’s local policies reflect that the bell curve mentality must be abandoned?" and "How important do you believe it is for your school district’s policies to reflect that the bell curve mentality must be abandoned?"). Several respondents (4 superintendents and 1 board member) shared that they had concerns with the relevance of the beliefs and values listed on page 2 of the questionnaire (items 2a-13a and 2b-13b) with school policy (Appendix G).

Question the appropriateness of many of the 12 items in section one for board policy - Superintendent

Sometimes I wonder what some of these have to do with the price of tea in China - Superintendent

Page 2’s statements are difficult to even relate to local school policies. The language of those statements does not appear in school policy language. - School Board Member

Three respondents (1 community member, 1 teacher, and 1 superintendent) noted that they had difficulty understanding item 27 ("To what extent do you believe unwritten policies of your local school district influence student achievement?") and 2 respondents (1 community member and 1 superintendent) noted that they had
trouble with item 34 ("To what extent do unwritten policies negatively affect the culture and climate of your local school district?"). Three respondents (1 community member, 1 teacher, and 1 board member) noted that they had difficulty with item 34.

Table 8

Participant Difficulty Understanding Items/Concepts of the Self-Report Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire item</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Issue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Abandon the bell curve mentality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7a, 7b</td>
<td>2 community members, 2 parents, 1 teacher</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a-13a, 2b-13b</td>
<td>4 superintendents, 2 board members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>1 community member, 1 teacher, 1 superintendent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>1 superintendent, 1 community member</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18a, 18b</td>
<td>1 community member, 1 teacher, 1 board member</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13a</td>
<td>2 board members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18a ("To what extent do you believe the following condition: support for school sites through data and information, defined as using data on students needs to make decisions and modify actions at the district and building level, is reflected in your district's policies?") and 18b ("How important do you believe the following condition, support for school sites through data and information, defined as using data on students needs to make decisions and modify actions at the district and building level, is reflected in your district's policies?")
level, promotes student achievement?”). Two school board members felt unclear about item 13a (“To what extent do you believe your school district policies reflect that competition is generally damaging to both students and teachers?”).

After examining the comments offered by respondents, the researcher reviewed the survey and recommended the following revisions: (a) change item 7a from “The bell curve mentality must be abandoned” to “Grades assigned to students based on a predetermined distribution (bell curve) must be abandoned”; (b) change item 27 from “Do you believe unwritten policies of your local school district influence student achievement?” to “Do you believe unwritten policies (guidelines and rules that are not officially written down but that stakeholders know are the way things are done in the district) of your local school district influence student achievement?”; (c) change item 34 from “Do unwritten policies negatively affect the culture and climate of your local school district?” to “Do unwritten policies (guidelines and rules that are not officially written down but that stakeholders know are the ways things are done in the district) negatively affect the culture and climate of your local school district?”; and (d) add a definition of student achievement to the list of definitions on the first page of the self-report questionnaire.

Two superintendents and one board member indicated concerns about the relevance of the beliefs and values (items 2a–13a and 2b–13b) to school policy. Because these comments did not address the clarity of the instrument, no revisions were recommended.

The second question on the self-report questionnaire asked key respondents to share what questions they thought were omitted from the survey to get a better
idea of how local school district policy affects student achievement (Table 9). The following questions concerning policy were raised or suggested by the respondents, and are listed here for consideration in future revisions of the self-report questionnaire:

How do state and federal unfunded mandates affect policies and learning?

What are your "perceptions" of ways unwritten policies affect student achievement?

As a parent or community member do you think you can affect local school policies?

In what ways do school personnel solicit input and involvement from the community in the development of school policies?

How can policy direct assessment data to measure student achievement?

Can staff evaluation policy link to student achievement?

Are teachers and administrators following school policy?

Do you feel your school board does an adequate job of enforcing district policy that affects student achievement?

What is an example of a policy in your district that positively affects student achievement?

What is an example of a policy in your district that negatively affects student achievement?
In response to the second open-ended question of the self-report questionnaire, stakeholders suggested areas they felt may have been omitted from the self-report questionnaire concerning how local school policy affects student achievement. Superintendents shared that they were concerned over testing and assessment, funding for special needs students, and teacher training. Teachers expressed additional concerns about whether schools were working to improve or change the culture and climate of the school district and what the school districts were doing to work with students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Board members shared concerns about whether school boards developed effective school policy and the lack of parent and community involvement with the local school

Table 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
<th>Areas omitted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superintendents</td>
<td>Testing and assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Funding student’s with special needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developing more effective teacher training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of parent/community involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Improvement of culture/climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meeting needs of students from low economic background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board Members</td>
<td>Effectiveness of board in developing effective policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of parent/community involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Effective teacher evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knowledge of teaching best practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School’s commitment to improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of parent/community involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Funding for education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>District morale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of parent input in school issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Double standard for discipline of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Standards for students different than standards for teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Members</td>
<td>Preparing students for the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers not teaching in their area of strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meeting special needs of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Impact of extra-curricular activities on achievement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
district. Parents shared multiple concerns, including teacher evaluation, best practices in teaching, school district commitment to district morale, lack of parent input, double standards for student discipline, and differing expectations for students versus district staff. Community members shared their concern about preparing students for the future, whether teachers were teaching in their areas of strength, meeting students' special needs, and the impact of extracurricular activities on student achievement.

While a number of the questions suggested by respondents reflect the purpose of the self-report questionnaire, the majority appear to reflect additional concerns that stakeholders have in regard to PK-12 education, such as: special education needs, socioeconomic background, state and federal mandates without funding, district expectations for the staff, and competitive job preparation. The two open-ended questions in the self-report questionnaire appeared to be cathartic for stakeholders in that many respondents shared at length their concerns about many education issues. Fourteen parents responded to the second open-ended question. Many of the additional comments offered reflected stakeholders' concerns about their district's lack of behaviors that are consistent with the district's stated mission, the culture and climate, and parent and community empowerment and involvement.

Several parents and one teacher shared their concerns about inequity. Their comments reflected their concerns that students/families with special needs or cultural differences may not receive equal services in their districts:
Decisions in this district are influenced heavily by "in" groups and "out" groups based on economics and race. Unintentionally sometimes, but it happens. - Parent

Schools in this area have more than the usual number of special education students and this poses some special, and very costly problems. - Parent

Families with children in special education may perceive situations differently than families with children in the gifted programs or families with children in the general education setting. I have a child in special education and a child in the gifted program and my perception is different if I isolate my experiences to either child. - Parent

To be perfectly honest as a teacher who works with special needs students I am continually frustrated with the bureaucracy and job justification that goes on at a higher level. I fully believe in developing vision and mission statements as guiding principles in the development of a nurturing environment. The problems lie in the fact that if you develop poor policy, or develop quality policy, but lack the follow-through to insure their implementation or the focus becomes semantics involved with the vision and mission statements versus actual interaction with those the policies are intended to serve, we are underserving our intended audience. The aforementioned bureaucracy filters away from school programs. - Teacher
Parents also shared that they have concerns with adult behavior in their school district and a desire for more effective adult role modeling of behavior:

In reality the policies may not govern the actions of the administration and faculty of the school. So you can have the most wonderful policies and the teachers can completely ignore them. It seems to me most administrators allow this type of action. - Parent

We expect certain standards for students and allow teachers and coaches not to be accountable as mentors. - Parent

Four board members responded to the second open-ended question with additional comments on the self-report questionnaire. These comments tended to be positive in regard to the performance of the districts and problems tended to focus on what was perceived as outside forces that affected PK-12 education:

I wish there was something the state could do to encourage parents to support their children and school. - School Board Member

Our small schools do an outstanding job of educating our students and preparing them for their future education. Our statistics show the excellent job we are doing. - School Board Member

One board member shared concern with the effectiveness of the school board.

Culture and climate can have a negative or a positive effect. Part of our culture is negative. As a board member I’m as involved as anyone in policymaking, but I’m one of seven. I don’t think our board makes
effective policies to drive support of school improvement or make positive changes in culture. - School Board Member

Four superintendents responded to the second open-ended question with additional comments. Two of the superintendent respondents expressed their views concerning policy:

I believe the leadership of the district, the superintendent and building level principals impact student achievement at a much higher level than does policy. The very best policy is only words on paper and does not reflect the actual actions of individuals responsible for implementing policy. -Superintendent

Policy and interpretation of those policies and implementation can vary greatly. The intent of the policies is the true factor for consideration. - Superintendent

Two superintendents shared their concern about community involvement. Our district policymakers seem to want to distance themselves from the community, even though they represent the community. - Superintendent

When up to ¾'s of all community members do not have children in school it is difficult to equate community/school involvement with achievement. - Superintendent

Nine community members responded to the second open-ended question with additional comments. These community members expressed their concern over several education issues, including: the use of technology, the use of student
achievement data, the influence of unwritten policy on culture, the influence of extracurricular activities, parental/community involvement, ineffective school policies, and the impact of teacher seniority. The following are comments that pertained in particular to issues of policy:

I believe a majority of parents cannot truly affect policies due to teacher and administration bias and control. - Community Member

Unwritten policies affect climate so much at a school, which in turn affects student achievement. - Community Member

Our district has a very significant number of policies. If a district doesn’t use/believe in them then why have them? Policies should reflect the core values and beliefs. - Community Member

The Survey Findings

The distribution of total mean scores for all stakeholders on the self-report questionnaire is shown in Figure 5. Mean scores for each item are shown in Table 11. Among stakeholder groups there were no statistically significant differences in mean scores on the total Enabling Learning Environment (ELE) Questionnaire. The findings for perceptions of specific dimensions of an ELE, however, reveal some differences among types of stakeholders and among stakeholders with different demographic characteristics.
Figure 5
Frequencies of Mean Scores for Total Enabling Environment Instrument

TOTAL

1.00 1.25 1.50 1.75 2.00 2.25 2.50
1.13 1.38 1.63 1.88 2.13 2.38

1 = highly enabling environment; 2 = fairly enabling, 3 = fairly nonenabling; 4 = highly nonenabling

Aim 2. Describe the extent that stakeholders perceive that they are familiar
with school policies, the culture of the school district, the school's beliefs and
values, and mission for:

a) the total sample
b) each type of stakeholder
c) stakeholders in low- and high-enrollment schools
d) stakeholders in low- vs. high-student-achievement schools
e) stakeholders in low- vs. high-at-risk factors districts.
As might be expected, slightly more than 88% of the participants rated their perceived familiarity 2 or higher on the 4-point scale (1 = very much familiar, 4 = very little familiar). Overall, most stakeholders reported that they were very familiar with school beliefs and values, the culture and climate, and policies. The mean score on the Familiarity scale for the total sample was 1.6, indicating that on average the stakeholders perceived that they were very familiar (Table 10).

There was a significant difference, however, among age groups in regard to their perceived familiarity \( (F(4,103) = 5.074, \ p = .001) \). Stakeholders in the younger age groups (25-34 and 35-44) each had significantly higher average Familiarity scores than those in each of the 45-54, 55-64, and > 65 age groups \( (p = .05) \). Income groups also differed significantly on perceptions of Familiarity \( (F(4,103) = 3.190, \ p = .001) \). Stakeholders with household incomes of $100,000 or more reported significantly more familiarity with school policies than those in each group with lower levels of household income, and those with incomes of $75,000-$99,999, $50,000-$74,999, and $30,000-$49,999 each had significantly more perceived familiarity with policies than did the stakeholders with incomes of $29,999 and less \( (p = .05) \).

There was a trend, although not significant, for mean differences in perceptions among stakeholders with different amounts of education \( (F(2,112) = 2.717, \ p = .07) \). The stakeholder group that completed an advanced degree reported the highest perception of familiarity with policies followed by the group that had some work toward an advanced degree and then by the group that had completed college or had less education. There also was some trend of a difference between
Table 10

Stakeholder Type, District Enrollment, District At-Risk, and District Achievement Familiarity Group Means

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Sample</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendents</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Board Members</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Members</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-At-Risk Districts</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-At-Risk Districts</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-Enrollment Districts</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-Enrollment Districts</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-Achievement Districts</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-Achievement Districts</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

stakeholders grouped by those who had children and those who did not have children in the mean perceptions of familiarity with policies ($t (112) = 1.717, p = .089$). Those stakeholders who had children reported that they were more familiar.

Figure 6

Familiarity Means for Stakeholder Groups

1 = superintendents, 2 = parents, 3 = board members, 4 = community members, 5 = teachers.
with policies than were stakeholders who did not have children.

However, there was a statistically significant difference among the different types of stakeholders ($F (4,113) = 7.512, p < .001$) (Table 12) (Figure 6). As might be expected, mean perception of familiarity with beliefs, culture, and policies was highest for superintendents, teachers, and school board members. Superintendents' mean perceptions of their familiarity was significantly higher than parents' ($p = .023$) and community members ($p < .001$). School board members' perceptions of their familiarity were significantly greater, on average, than community members' perceptions of their familiarity ($p = .028$), while community members' mean perceptions of familiarity was significantly less than those of teachers ($p = .004$), as well as those of superintendents and board members. Based on the standard deviation for each group, superintendents and teachers each were more in agreement with one another regarding Familiarity. Stakeholder perceptions for the total instrument and subscales were not statistically significantly different among school districts. Also, there were no statistically significant differences in Familiarity for stakeholders in high- versus low-at-risk school districts, high- versus low-enrollment districts, or for high- versus low-student-achievement districts (Table 13).

Familiarity was moderately correlated with Alignment ($r = .32, p < .01$) and Involvement ($r = .37, p < .01$) scales. This may suggest that the more familiar participants are with policies, the stronger is their perception of alignment of the elements of an enabling learning environment with policies, and the more likely are they to perceive themselves as being involved with policy development and school, family, and community partnerships.
Aim 3. Describe stakeholders' perceptions of the culture and climate of the school district for:

a) all stakeholders
b) each type of stakeholder
c) stakeholders in low- and high-enrollment districts
d) stakeholders in low- vs. high-student-achievement schools
e) stakeholders in low-at-risk factors vs. high-at-risk factors districts.

Stakeholder group member perceptions of the culture and climate of their local school districts overall described the learning environments for all learners as positive (Figure 7) (Table 14). Stakeholders grouped by age were statistically significantly different among groups in their perceptions of Culture ($F(4,106) = 3.710$, $p = .01$). Persons who were 35-44 and 45-54 were more positive about the culture and climate of the schools than those, age 25-34, 55-64, and 65 and older ($p = .05$). Mean perceptions of stakeholders with children were significantly higher regarding the culture and climate of the district, with more positive views ($t(114) = 2.97$, $p = .004$) than those who reported that they did not have children.

Among the stakeholder groups, school board members described the culture and climate most positively, followed by superintendents, teachers, parents, and community members, respectively. There was a significant overall difference in the degree that the environments were rated as positive among the types of stakeholders ($F(4,115) = 4.509$, $p < .01$) (Table 12). Post hoc contrasts indicated
Figure 7

Culture Means for Stakeholder Groups

1 = superintendents, 2 = parents, 3 = board members, 4 = community members, 5 = teachers.
Table 11

Average stakeholder perceptions for each item on the self-report measure of an enabling learning environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Familiar policies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19a. Aligned community involvement</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a. Aligned can learn</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>20a. Aligned shared leadership</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3a. Aligned learning organism</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>14b. Important building human system</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4a. Aligned success hard work</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>15b. Important create/sustain initiatives</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5a. Aligned success-success</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>16b. Important supportive work place</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6a. Aligned student confidence</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>17b. Important staff development</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7a. Aligned school success</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>18b. Important data-decisions</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8a. Aligned abandon bell curve</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>19b. Important community involvement</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9a. Aligned culture-success</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>20b. Important shared leadership</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10a. Aligned responsive to clients</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>21. Familiarity beliefs/values</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11a. Aligned democracy decisions</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>22. Familiarity mission statement</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12a. Aligned work value/dignity</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>23. Aligned mission-beliefs/values</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>.60</td>
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<tr>
<td>13a. Aligned competition damaging</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>24. Aligned mission-policy development</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b. Important can learn</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>25. Aligned mission-local policy</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3b. Important learning organism</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>26. Involvement-development local policy</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4b. Important success hard work</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>27. Influence unwritten policy-achievement</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5b. Important success-success</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>28. Culture perception culture/climate</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6b. Important student confidence</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>29. Familiarity culture/climate</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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Total mean score (listwise) 96 2.5 .45
Table 12

One-Way ANOVA Statistics for Subscale and Total ELE Perceptions by Type of Stakeholder Groups

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<td>56</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
that the mean of board members' descriptions of culture and climate was significantly more positive than the means of parents' ($p = .04$) and community members' ($p = .003$) descriptions, and superintendents' descriptions were significantly more positive than those of community members ($p = .03$).

Stakeholders' descriptions of culture and climate did not differ significantly when grouped by high and low enrollment, high and low achievement, or high-and low-at-risk school districts (Table 13).

There was a strong correlation between Item 28 (positive or negative perception of culture) and Alignment ($r = .45, p < .01$), Involvement ($r = .52, p < .01$) and Familiarity ($r = .33, p < .001$). Though at a low magnitude, item 28 also correlates significantly with item 30 ($r = .18, p = .01$), Item 34 ($r = .17, p = .01$), and Item 38 ($r = .26, p < .01$).

### Table 14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder Type, District Enrollment, District At-Risk, and District Achievement Culture Group</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Sample</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendents</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Board Members</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Members</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-At-Risk Districts</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-At-Risk Districts</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>.55</td>
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<tr>
<td>High-Enrollment Districts</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>.69</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low-Enrollment Districts</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-Achievement Districts</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-Achievement Districts</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Aim 4. Describe stakeholders' perceptions of the alignment, or lack of alignment, of beliefs/values, conditions of local schools, mission, and culture with school policies and their perceived importance of alignment for student achievement for:

a) all stakeholders
b) each type of stakeholder
c) stakeholders in low- and high-enrollment districts
d) stakeholders in low- vs. high-student-achievement schools
e) stakeholders in low-at-risk factors vs. high-at-risk factors districts.

Stakeholders as a total group tended to perceive that beliefs, school conditions, mission, and culture that are consistent with an enabling learning environment are reflected in and aligned with school policies (Figure 8) (Table 15). Stakeholders in different income groups differed in their perceptions of Align (F (3,92) =3.56, p = .02). Stakeholders with annual household incomes of $100,000 or more had significantly higher perceptions of the extent of alignment of beliefs, school conditions, mission, and culture with policies than did those stakeholders with annual incomes of $50,000-$99,999 (p = .05).

While the overall F test was nearly statistically significant (p = .058), there were no statistically significant differences among the separate categories of stakeholder education. Persons with a four-year college degree or less had the highest perception of the extent of alignment, followed by those who had completed
an advanced degree, and finally those who had some work toward an advanced degree. There were no significant differences in these perceptions among stakeholder types or when the stakeholders were grouped by high- and low-at-risk school districts or high- and low-achievement (Tables 12 & 13). Stakeholders in high- versus low-enrollment districts did differ significantly in these perceptions ($p = .03$) (Table 13). Those in high-enrollment districts perceived significantly more alignment than did those in low-enrollment districts. It may be that high-enrollment districts have overall more effective organization and leadership that results in schools with more developed elements of enabling learning environments, including alignment of the elements with policies.

The test of the difference between persons who had children currently attending school in the district and those persons who did not was statistically significant ($t (99) = 3.33, p = .001$). Persons with no children attending school in the district perceived alignment of beliefs, conditions, mission, and culture with policies as more important than did persons with children attending the district. There were no statistically significant differences among the types of stakeholders (Table 13).

All stakeholders also rated their perception of the importance of alignment of school policies with beliefs and school conditions of an enabling learning environment high overall, with the means among stakeholder groups ranging from 1.4 to 1.6, which falls within the “very much believe important” range (Figure 10) (Table 16). The test of the difference of level of education among groups of stakeholders revealed a statistically significant effect ($t (102) = 2.07, p = .04$). Persons who completed high school or less perceived alignment of beliefs,
conditions, mission, and culture with policies as less important than did those with some college or more. Stakeholders did not differ significantly among role groups in the perceptions of the importance of alignment (Table 12). Stakeholders grouped by high and low enrollment, at-risk district, or achievement also did not differ significantly (Table 13).

There is a strong, significant correlation between Alignment and Involvement \((r = .60, p < .01)\). Correlation between Alignment and items 30 and 38 suggests that participants see that culture \((r = .52, p < .01)\) and partnership \((r = .26, p < .01)\) with the notion of alignment with policies is important for student achievement.

Figure 8

Alignment Means for Stakeholder Groups

![Alignment Means for Stakeholder Groups](image)

STAKGRP

1 = superintendents, 2 = parents, 3 = board members, 4 = community members, 5 = teachers.
Figure 9

Alignment Importance Means for Stakeholder Groups

1 = superintendents, 2 = parents, 3 = board members, 4 = community members, 5 = teachers.

Table 15

Stakeholder Type, District Enrollment, District At-Risk, and District Achievement Alignment Group Means

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Sample</td>
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<td>1.7</td>
<td>.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendents</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Board Members</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Members</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-At-Risk Districts</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-At-Risk Districts</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-Enrollment Districts</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-Enrollment Districts</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-Achievement Districts</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-Achievement Districts</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 16

Stakeholder Type, District Enrollment, District At-Risk, and District Achievement Alignment Importance Group Means

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Sample</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendents</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Board Members</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Members</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-At-Risk Districts</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-At-Risk Districts</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-Enrollment Districts</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>.34</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low-Enrollment Districts</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>.33</td>
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<tr>
<td>High-Achievement Districts</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-Achievement Districts</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Aim 5. Describe stakeholders' perceptions of their involvement in the development of school district policies, mission, and partnerships for:

a) all stakeholders

b) each type of stakeholder

c) stakeholders in low- and high-enrollment districts

d) stakeholders in low- vs. high-student-achievement schools

e) stakeholders in low-at-risk factors vs. high-at-risk factors districts.

On average, stakeholders perceived that they were fairly highly involved in the development of school district policies, mission, and partnerships ($M = 2.0$, $SD = .57$). On the specific items (26 and 35) stakeholders rated the perceptions of their involvement even more highly ($M = 1.86$, $SD = 1.1$ and $M = 1.59$, $SD = .68$). Board
members' perceptions of involvement in the development of policy were the highest, followed by superintendents and teachers, respectively (Figure 10). As expected, teachers felt that they had less involvement in the development of policy than administrators and board members, although they perceived slightly more involvement than parents and community members (Table 17).

There was an overall difference, however, among stakeholders grouped by annual household income in their perception of involvement in the development of policies ($F (4,105) = 3.07, p = .02$). The mean perceptions of involvement of those with annual household incomes of $100,000 or more were statistically significantly different than the mean perceptions of those who earned $75,000–$99,999 annually ($p = .05$). Stakeholders in the highest and lowest income groups had the highest perceptions of their involvement in policies. Although not statistically significantly different from any of the stakeholders grouped by income, the mean perceptions of those in the lowest income group ($29,999 or less) had the next highest perception of involvement in the development of policies.

For the total group of stakeholders, the average perceived involvement of parents ($M = 2.2, SD = .62$) and community members ($M = 2.1, SD = .63$) in developing school policies was lowest. Parents and community members had less perceived involvement than superintendents, teachers, and school board members; however, there were no statistically significant mean differences between types of stakeholders (Table 12). Likewise, there were no statistically significant differences between stakeholders, on average, in high- versus low-risk school districts, high- and low-enrollment districts, or high- versus low-achievement schools (Table 13).
Involvement Means for Stakeholder Groups

1 = superintendents, 2 = parents, 3 = board members, 4 = community members, 5 = teachers.

Table 17
Stakeholder Type, District Enrollment, District At-Risk, and District Achievement Involvement Group Means

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Sample</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendents</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Board Members</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Members</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-At-Risk Districts</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-At-Risk Districts</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-Enrollment Districts</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-Enrollment Districts</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-Achievement Districts</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-Achievement Districts</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Aim 6. describe stakeholders' perceptions of the influence of school district culture, partnerships, and mission on student achievement for:
a) all stakeholders
b) each type of stakeholder
c) stakeholders in low- and high-enrollment districts
d) stakeholders in low- vs. high-student-achievement schools
e) stakeholders in low-at-risk factors vs. high-at-risk factors districts.

Mean scores for the four Influence items for stakeholders' grouped by role, high- and low-enrollment districts, high- and low-at-risk districts, and high- and low-achievement districts are shown in Table 18. Among the stakeholders grouped by their roles (superintendents, teachers, board members, parents, and community members), there was an overall statistically significant difference in the average ratings of perceptions of the extent that culture and climate influence student achievement ($F(4,117) = 2.96; p = .02$) and the extent that unwritten policies influence student achievement ($F(4,117) = 3.29; p = .01$) (Figures 11 &12) (Tables 11 &12). Board members, superintendents, and parents perceived the culture and climate of a district as having more of an effect on student achievement than did teachers and community members, respectively. Superintendents, parents, and community members perceived unwritten policies of the school as having more of an effect on student achievement than did board members and teachers (Table 18).

The overall test for difference in means of perceptions of stakeholders grouped by education was statistically significant ($F(2.116) = 3.567, p = .03$). Those with some work toward an advanced degree perceived that unwritten policies had
more influence on student achievement compared to those who had completed an advanced degree and those who had completed a college degree or had less education ($p = .05$). Persons with children who had attended the district and those who had never had children who attended the district were statistically significantly different in their perceptions of whether unwritten policy negatively affected the culture and climate of a school district ($t (116) = 2.76, p = .007$).

Persons with children who had attended the district perceived unwritten policies as having more of a negative effect on the culture and climate of a school district than did persons who never had children who attended the district. There were no significant differences among the stakeholders' mean perceptions of the effect of school, family, and community partnerships on student achievement or among stakeholders' mean perceptions of the negative affect of unwritten policies on the culture and climate of schools (Table 18) (Figure 13). It is interesting to note, however, that superintendents perceived the least effect of partnerships on achievement and community members perceived the most effect.

There also were no statistically significant mean differences for high- versus low-enrollment, high- versus low-at-risk, or high- versus low-achievement stakeholder groups, except for high- versus low-achievement groups on the extent that unwritten policies negatively influence the culture and climate of a learning environment ($t (121) = 2.61, p = .01$). Stakeholders in low-achievement districts viewed unwritten policies as more negatively influencing the culture and climate than did those in high-achievement districts.
Table 18

Stakeholder type, district enrollment, district at-risk, and district achievement influence group means

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder Group</th>
<th>Item 30 (culture)</th>
<th>Item 34 (culture)</th>
<th>Item 27 (mission)</th>
<th>Item 38 (partnership)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>S.D.</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total stakeholders</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendents</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Board Members</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Members</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High At-Risk Districts</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low At-Risk Districts</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-Enrollment Districts</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-Enrollment Districts</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-Achievement Districts</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-Achievement Districts</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 11

Influence of Culture on Achievement for Stakeholder Group:

![Graph showing the influence of culture on achievement for stakeholder groups.](image1)

1 = superintendents, 2 = parents, 3 = board members, 4 = community members, 5 = teachers.

Figure 12

Influence of Unwritten Policy on Achievement for Stakeholders:

![Graph showing the influence of unwritten policy on achievement for stakeholders.](image2)

1 = superintendents, 2 = parents, 3 = board members, 4 = community members, 5 = teachers.
The purpose of this dissertation research was to investigate stakeholders' perceptions of the alignment and importance of alignment of policies with the elements that are consistent with an enabling learning environment that supports student achievement. A self-report questionnaire was constructed and piloted to measure local school district stakeholders' (administrators, teachers, school board members, parents, and community members) perceptions regarding characteristics and importance of an enabling learning environment and policies for student education, and to collect preliminary data describing these perceptions using a statewide purposive sample of the stakeholders.

Summary
Internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) and test-retest reliability procedures were done to assess the reliability of the self-report questionnaire. The Cronbach’s alpha value for the total instrument was 0.93 with the pilot survey participant data. Although this indicates a high level of internal consistency among the questionnaire items and supports the conceptualization of the instrument as measuring a single underlying construct, "perceptions of an enabling learning environment," the large number of items in the instrument also would tend to increase the Cronbach alpha coefficient. Test-retest reliability coefficients for the total, subscale, and single-item measures of elements of the questionnaire indicated adequate stability of the measures with the potential to capture within-subject changes in response to interventions. Content validity of the self-report questionnaire was assessed by a panel of three education experts. Qualitative data were examined to assess clarity and understandability. The data were compared and interpreted using content analysis to determine the themes that occurred in the stakeholder groups from the participants’ responses to the self-report questionnaire’s two open-ended questions.

Among stakeholder groups there were no statistically significant differences in mean scores on the total Enabling Learning Environment (ELE) Questionnaire. The findings for perceptions of specific dimensions of an ELE, however, reveal some differences among types of stakeholders and among stakeholders with different demographic characteristics.

Overall, the subscale coefficients indicate adequate internal consistency. Most stakeholders reported that they were very familiar with school beliefs and values, the culture and climate, and policies. Stakeholder group member perceptions
of the culture and climate of their local school districts were described overall as positive learning environments for all learners. Among the stakeholder groups, school board members described the culture and climate most positively, followed by superintendents, teachers, parents, and community members, respectively. Stakeholders as a total group tended to perceive that beliefs, school conditions, mission, and culture that are consistent with an enabling learning environment are reflected in and aligned with school policies. Stakeholders in different income groups and level of education groups differed in their perceptions of alignment. On average, stakeholders perceived that they were "fairly highly" involved in the development of school district policies, mission, and partnerships. As expected, teachers felt that they had less involvement in the development of policy than did administrators and board members, although they perceived slightly more involvement than parents and community members. There was an overall difference among stakeholders grouped by annual household income in their perception of involvement in the development of policies. Among the stakeholders grouped by their roles (superintendents, teachers, board members, parents, and community members); there was an overall statistically significant difference in the average ratings of perceptions of the extent that culture and climate influence student achievement and the extent that unwritten policies influence student achievement. The overall test for difference in means of perceptions of stakeholders grouped by education and the overall test for difference in means of perceptions of those grouped as having children and those grouped as not having children were statistically significant.
Chapter 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary of the Study

This dissertation research was a pilot survey of PK-12 education stakeholders in Iowa to describe their perceptions of enabling learning environments in Iowa schools. The self-report questionnaire used for the study was developed from 22 interviews. Twenty of the 22 interviewees represented four Iowa school districts and were members of their district's school improvement team. To acquire the perception of educators at the state level, one member of the Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB) and one member of the School Administrators of Iowa (SAI) were interviewed. Questionnaires were mailed to 40 school superintendents, 40 teachers, 40 school board members, 40 parents, and 40 community members purposively selected from all but one of the Area Education Agencies in Iowa. Completed questionnaires were returned by 30 superintendents, 22 teachers, 26 board members, 23 parents, and 22 community member stakeholders, for a 62% overall response rate. Some participants from each type of stakeholder group from each Area Agency sampled returned questionnaires. The aims of the study were to:

(1) Pilot test the self-report questionnaire with a purposive sample of 200 stakeholders (40 superintendents, 40 school board members, 40 teachers, 40 parents, and 40 community members), to assess clarity, estimate reliability, and describe recommended revisions;

(2) Describe the extent that stakeholders perceive that they are familiar with school policies, the culture of the school district, the school's beliefs and values, and
mission for: (a) the total sample; (b) each type of stakeholder; (c) stakeholders in low- vs. high-enrollment districts; (d) stakeholders in low- vs. high-student-achievement districts; and (e) stakeholders in low- vs. high-at-risk factors districts;

(3) Describe stakeholders' perceptions of the culture and climate of the school district for: (a) all stakeholders; (b) each type of stakeholder; (c) stakeholders in low- and high-enrollment districts; (d) stakeholders in low- vs. high-student-achievement districts; (e) stakeholders in low-at-risk factors vs. high-at-risk factors districts;

(4) Describe stakeholders' perceptions of the alignment, or lack of alignment, of beliefs/values, conditions of local schools, mission, and culture with school policies and their perceived importance of alignment for student achievement for: (a) all stakeholders; (b) each type of stakeholder; (c) stakeholders in low- and high-enrollment districts; (d) stakeholders in low- vs. high-student-achievement districts; and (e) stakeholders in low-at-risk factors vs. high-at-risk factors districts;

(5) Describe stakeholders' perceptions of their involvement in the development of school district policies, mission, and partnerships for: (a) all stakeholders; (b) each type of stakeholder; (c) stakeholders in low- and high-enrollment districts; (d) stakeholders in low- vs. high-student-achievement districts; and (e) stakeholders in low-at-risk factors vs. high-at-risk factors districts; and

(6) Describe stakeholders' perceptions of the influence of school district culture, partnerships, and mission on student achievement for: (a) all stakeholders; (b) each type of stakeholder; (c) stakeholders in low- vs. high-enrollment districts; (d) stakeholders in low- vs. high-student-achievement districts; and (e) stakeholders in low-at-risk factors vs. high-at-risk factors districts.
Discussion of the Study Findings

Evaluation of the Survey Instrument

Internal consistency reliability findings indicate that the instrument items as a whole measure a single, underlying construct of an enabling learning environment in schools (Table 8). Internal consistency of four subscales that measure specific dimensions of an enabling learning environment also was demonstrated: (a) familiarity with school policies (Familiarity), with a Cronbach's alpha value of .75; (b) alignment of beliefs, school conditions, mission, and culture with policies (Alignment), with alpha = 0.93; (c) the importance of the alignment of beliefs, school conditions, mission, and culture with policies (Alignment Importance), with alpha = 0.84; (d) and the involvement of stakeholders in developing policies (Involvement), with alpha = 0.74. The influence of culture, written and unwritten policies, and school and community partnerships on student achievement subscale (Influence), with alpha = 0.33, was abandoned due to the low internal consistency of the items. Thus, the concept of Influence was measured by the separate items 27, 30, 34, and 38. The perception of the school's culture and climate as positive or negative (Culture) also was measured by the single item 28.

Test-retest reliability also was assessed for the total instrument, each of the subscales, and the individual Influence and Culture items. These Pearson correlation coefficients and a description of the test-retest procedure and results are presented in Table 8, Chapter 4. The results indicate that the total instrument, its subscales, and single-item measures of the dimensions of an enabling learning environment are moderately stable over time, and that the instrument and its
subscales have substantial potential to capture changes in stakeholders' perceptions when changes are made in policies and programs or when interventions to enhance the learning environments of schools are tested (Carver, 1974; Lipsey, 1983; Overall & Woodward, 1975).

The qualitative assessment of two open-ended questions to evaluate the clarity of the questionnaire and to identify potential revisions needed in the instrument revealed concerns about a few items. Respondents expressed problems of clarity or understanding with the following concepts: (a) bell curve mentality; (b) relevance of beliefs and values to policy; (c) effect of unwritten policy; (d) use of data to inform decisions; and (e) effect of competition. The lack of clarity with concepts used in the instrument may be due to the use of education jargon and may indicate the need for continued efforts to improve the knowledge level of all stakeholders concerning the characteristics of an enabling learning environment. This lack of clarity suggests the need for the use of more common vernacular in stating the items.

After examining the comments offered by respondents, the researcher reviewed the survey and recommended the following revisions: (a) change item 7a from "The bell curve mentality must be abandoned" to "Grades are assigned to students based on a predetermined distribution (bell curve)"; (b) change item 27 from "Do you believe unwritten policies of your local school district influence student achievement?" to "Do you believe unwritten policies (guidelines and rules that are not officially written down but that stakeholders know are the way things are done in the district) of your local school district influence student achievement?"; (c) change
item 34 from "Do unwritten policies negatively affect the culture and climate of your local school district?" to "Do unwritten policies (guidelines and rules that are not officially written down but that stakeholders know are the ways things are done in the district) negatively affect the culture and climate of your local school district?"; and (d) add a definition of student achievement to the list of definitions on the first page of the self-report questionnaire.

Two superintendents and one board member indicated concerns about the relevancy of the beliefs and values of an enabling learning environment to school policy. Their comments may indicate a lack of understanding concerning the link between the school district's values and beliefs and the school district's policies. This may indicate the need to improve the knowledge level of some superintendents and board members regarding the notion of an enabling learning environment and the concepts that are inherent in it.

Survey Findings

Overall, most stakeholders reported that they were very familiar with school beliefs and values, the culture and climate, and policies. Mean perception of familiarity with beliefs, conditions, mission, culture, and policies was highest for superintendents. There was a significant difference among age groups in regard to their perceived familiarity with stakeholders. The younger groups (25-34 and 35-44) perceived that they were more familiar with school policies than were those in older groups. Stakeholders with household incomes of $100,000 or more reported significantly more familiarity with school policies than did those in each lower-level household income group. Differences among participants grouped by education
approached statistical significance. The stakeholder group that had completed an advanced degree reported the highest perceived familiarity, followed by those with some graduate study and those with a college degree or less, respectively. Stakeholders who had children reported higher perceptions of familiarity with school policies than did stakeholders who had no children.

It may be that most stakeholders overall reported a perception of familiarity because of specific personal experiences with attending school and because a majority of the stakeholders have children of their own. As expected, superintendents, teachers, and school board members reported the most familiarity with school policy because their work is aligned closely with school policy. The trend toward the highest perceived familiarity reported by those with advanced degrees is likely due to the disproportionate number of superintendents in the sample. A difference in perceptions of familiarity among stakeholders grouped by age with those stakeholders ages (25-44) who had the highest mean perceptions may reflect that they are typically the age of parents of PK-12 school age students.

Current parents of school-age children may have more interest in school policies and more direct experiences with the effects of the policies. Those stakeholders with annual household incomes of $100,000 reported more familiarity with PK-12 school policies, on average, than stakeholders with incomes of $75,000-$99,999, $50,000-$74,999, and $30,000-$49,999, although each of these groups reported significantly more perceived familiarity with policies than did the stakeholders with incomes of $29,000 and less. A majority of these stakeholders with higher annual household incomes responded that their role was that of
superintendent, board member, or teacher, suggesting by the very nature of their roles with the district that they likely would be more familiar with school policy. Generally, high scores across the sample may reflect not only social desirability, their role, and sampling bias. Perhaps people most interested and engaged in the school district completed and sent the questionnaire back to the researcher.

While stakeholder groups overall rated their perceptions of culture and climate of their local school districts as positive learning environments for all learners, there were some significant differences when grouped by role. Among the stakeholder types, school board members described the culture and climate more positively, followed by superintendents, teachers, parents, and community members, respectively. Again an overall positive perception may be a reflection of the personal school experience of each of the stakeholders who responded to the self-report questionnaire, and/or overall positive responses may reflect a need of respondents to be seen as answering in a socially desirable way. It is important to note that a positive perception appears to be linked to respondent role.

As with familiarity with school policy, positive perception of the culture and climate of the school was highest among respondents in the roles of superintendent, teacher, or school board member. Persons who were 35-44 and 45–54 were more positive about the culture and climate of the schools than were those 25-44, 55-64, and 65 and older. Of respondents ages 35-54, a majority served the district as a superintendent, teacher, or school board member. Respondents with children had a significantly more positive perception of the culture and climate than did respondents without children. These responses may indicate more of an ownership and desire on
the part of respondents with children to reflect a positive attitude about the school district where their children are attending or had attended. These stakeholders also may have some need to believe that the culture of the school district that their children are attending is positive for learning.

Stakeholders as a total group tended to perceive that beliefs, school conditions, mission, and culture that are consistent with an enabling learning environment were reflected in school policies. Stakeholders with annual household incomes of $100,000 or more had significantly higher perceptions of the extent of alignment of beliefs, school conditions, mission, and culture with policies than did those respondents with an annual household income of $50,000-$75,999. Twenty-four of the 36 respondents with an annual household income of $100,000 or more served in the role of superintendent or school board member, while 15 of the 26 respondents with an annual income of $50,000-$75,999 responded as parents and community members.

Stakeholders in high- versus low-enrollment districts differed significantly in their perception of alignment of beliefs, school conditions, mission, and culture with policies. Stakeholders in the larger-enrollment districts perceived more alignment, on average, than did those in the smaller enrollment districts. These responses could be due to more resources, more and better prepared staff, more and better development programming, and stronger leadership, although implementation of staff development programs also can be more difficult in large-enrollment districts because of the number of staff involved.
Stakeholders also rated their perceptions of the importance of alignment of school policies with beliefs and school conditions, mission, and culture of an enabling learning environment high overall, although persons who completed high school or less perceived alignment of beliefs, conditions, mission, and culture with policies as less important than those with some college or more. These responses may indicate that persons who completed high school or less have had less opportunity for exposure to the knowledge base concerning school beliefs, conditions, mission, and culture of an enabling learning environment. It is surprising that persons with no children attending the district perceived the alignment of beliefs, conditions, mission, and culture with policies as more important than persons with children attending the district. These responses may be explained by the need for persons with children who currently were attending the district to rationalize a lack of importance of alignment that they knew was compromised in the district attended by their children.

Overall, respondents perceived that they were fairly highly involved in the development of school district policies, mission, and partnerships. An overall difference occurred among stakeholders grouped by annual income in their perceptions of involvement in the policies. Stakeholders reporting an annual household income of $100,000 or more (24 of 36 served in the role of superintendent or school board member) perceived themselves as more involved than did stakeholders with an annual household income of $75,000-$99,999 (7 of 24 served in the role of superintendent). Thus, role is related to income, and both role and income are associated with the extent of involvement. Clearly, it is not surprising
that superintendents and board members, who are the principal policymakers in local school districts, report a high degree of involvement. These responses suggest that they may have more of a vested interest in the district.

Among the stakeholders grouped by role, there was an overall statistically significant difference in the average ratings of perceptions of the extent that culture and climate influence student achievement and the extent that unwritten policies influence student achievement. Board members, superintendents, and parents perceived that the culture and climate of a district had more of an effect on student achievement than did teachers and community members, respectively. Superintendents, parents, and community members perceived unwritten policies of the school as having more of an effect on student achievement than did board members and teachers. Likewise, persons with children who had attended the district perceived unwritten policies as having more of a negative effect on the culture and climate of a school than did persons who never had children who attended the district. This may reflect that those persons with children who have attended the district have been exposed more intimately to the culture and climate of the school district, and thus are more aware of the impact that culture and climate can have on a student's ability to learn.

Persons with some work toward an advanced degree perceived that unwritten policies had more influence on student achievement than did those who had completed a college degree or had less education. A few respondents shared that they had difficulty with understanding the concept of unwritten policies. Persons with at least some work completed toward an advanced degree may have had more
exposure to the concept of unwritten policy and how this might affect student achievement.

Study Implications

The results of this dissertation contribute to closing the gap in current research by: (a) developing and pilot testing an instrument for subsequent surveys of stakeholder attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions to inform policymakers and provide a measure for evaluating the effects of interventions; (b) reporting the effects of interventions; and (c) reporting preliminary data on stakeholder perceptions. The preliminary findings will need replication before firm conclusions and recommended actions may be formed. The preliminary findings, however, contain suggested implications that can be pursued for improved educator professional development, practice, research, and education policymaking.

Implication for Preparation of Educators

If policies of local school districts are going to be developed to align better with the elements of an enabling learning environment, state institutions of higher learning, offering PK-12 teacher and administrator preservice certification programs, should examine the emphasis their current programs place on developing teachers and administrators with a knowledge base around the characteristics of an enabling learning environment. Also needed is an emphasis on skills development of strategies to use in developing an enabling learning environment and methods to evaluate the extent that they are appropriate environments that positively affect student achievement. In a theoretical discussion Sagor (1995) and Sergiovanni (1996) note these same concerns.
Implications for Education Practice

Education leaders of Iowa's school districts must strive continually to improve the capacity of all stakeholders in the community to support the beliefs, conditions, mission, and culture of an enabling learning environment, so that energy is focused on efforts that align with this mission. Educators no longer can afford to profess a school mission that fails to be supported by an infrastructure of rules, regulations, and policies that countermand the mission, thus encouraging behaviors that are a detriment to providing an enabling learning environment for all learners. What schools need are policies that confront the structural forces on institutional arrangements that both depend on and promote unequal valuing of individuals (Kahne, 1996).

If the school officials believe that an enabling learning environment is important for school improvement, leaders must have the knowledge and skills to support the district's efforts to build a supportive, caring, and humane culture and climate for all stakeholders. An enabling learning environment benefits students, teachers, board members, parents, and community members in that they are given the opportunity to learn in a culture that promotes shared decisionmaking, taking risks, trust, and learning alongside one another rather than competing with one another. Studies of curriculum reform repeatedly found that new ideas failed to take root in the practice of teachers because those ideas were not reinforced in the work environment of the student and the teachers (Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988; Elmore et al., 1991). A school with a negative culture does not value professional learning,
resists change, or devalues staff development (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Peterson, 2002).

Education leaders must facilitate ongoing conversation in the district concerning what policies effectively promote behaviors that are supportive of the district's beliefs, values, and mission. Regular formal and informal conversations including all stakeholders consistently should address the district's mission, policies that support the mission, and behaviors that reflect the policies.

**Implications for Education Research**

Although the literature reviewed revealed a number of studies that examined the themes identified in the interviews with key education leaders by the investigator, no studies were located that described the perceptions of stakeholders regarding the alignment and importance of beliefs, conditions, culture, partnerships, school mission, and other policies for an enabling learning environment and student achievement. Comparative qualitative studies were most common. These studies served to expand the body of knowledge concerning the characteristics of effective schools. The three large data set studies examined the link between order and academic achievement and the nation's racial/ethnic gap in student achievement, but were limited by the variables in the particular data set. There were few surveys, and none specifically addressed stakeholders' attitudes about the elements needed for an enabling learning environment or the relationship to policies on student achievement, with the exception of Epstein (1992), who identified the similarities and differences in parent, teacher, and student beliefs and attitudes about school-family involvement. No intervention studies were found that used experimental designs to
test effects on the attitudes and behaviors of stakeholders, the learning environment, or student achievement.

Future studies are needed to revise and further evaluate the self-report questionnaire measuring perceptions of an enabling learning environment. A particular need is to evaluate the validity of the measures. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis should be conducted with separate participant samples to evaluate the construct validity of the total scale and the subscales identified and analyzed in this study. Future research also is needed to develop and test interventions designed to implement enabling learning environments in PK-12 schools and to evaluate the intervention effects on student achievement.

*Implications for Developing Policies that Promote Learning in PK-12 Schools*

Overall, survey findings would indicate that stakeholders perceive they are familiar with the policies of the school district, that it is important for district policies to align with the beliefs and conditions stated in the self-report questionnaire, that the policies reflecting the beliefs, conditions, mission, and culture of a district do influence student achievement, and that they are to some degree involved in the development of district policy. The survey finding reflects perceptions of participants and may indicate a need for research that more directly examines the behaviors of participants that promote an enabling environment.

Development of policies that reflect the values, beliefs, and mission of a school district and that are aligned with one another are important to stakeholders but often are difficult to achieve. School districts are steeped in tradition, and the idea that this is the way things always have been done makes change difficult. While
districts appear to be able to develop a set of beliefs, values, and a mission statement, districts have difficulty with developing policies that consistently support an enabling learning environment. For example, a district may value parent involvement with their children’s education, yet the policies of the district may fail to recognize that parents may have varying time, economic, transportation, language, or cultural constraints, or that a district may profess to believe in the necessity of providing students with resources to meet their individual needs yet the rules, regulations, and policies of the district create learning environments that do not provide them. Often excuses are used for why elements of an enabling learning environment, such as constrained resources, fail to be developed, but this is a simple answer. The development of school, family, and community partnerships is an example of how efforts to develop an enabling learning environment can provide additional resources for the district.

Districts must work to inform stakeholders better who represent the diversity of the entire community. The survey findings may indicate that more efforts are needed to inform stakeholders about local district policies and include stakeholders in the development of local school policy. In particular, parents and community members representing individuals who come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, have completed less formal education, and are older and no longer have children attending the school district need to be empowered so they feel more ownership with the school district. The issue of empowerment addresses the need for better representation of stakeholders who represent the diversity of the community in all aspects of the school district. The stakeholders selected for the
administration of the self-report questionnaire held a built-in bias, in that board
members and community advisory committee members selected at random from a
database may not represent the diversity of the community. Also, if community
member and parent names were not available from the district's Comprehensive
School Improvement Plan, the researcher contacted the district to get a complete list
of the committee members. In some cases a partial list was provided leading the
researcher to believe that the names offered may have been selected purposefully.
Often the board members, community members, and parents identified by school
administrators as spokespersons for the school represent only a part of the diversity
of the entire community. This selectivity could be a conscious or unconscious
attempt to represent the school district in a certain way.

The values, beliefs, and mission of the school district developed by
stakeholders who represent the diversity of the community must be the focus
whenever local school district policy is developed. Only in this way can alignment of
policies be achieved and implementation of these policies more positively affect
student achievement.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Recommendations for Revision and Use of the Self-Report Questionnaire

Use the instrument to evaluate current perceptions of a learning environment
and areas needing development so results of the measurement could inform the
process of developing an enabling learning environment.

Revision of the self-report questionnaire could include more specific items
concerning the three themes addressed in the survey. Withrow (2002) identified 16
characteristics divided into 12 categories of schools and school systems capable of preparing students for a global knowledge/information age. Three categories of the identified 12 were of interest in this study: responsive governance, student-centered systems, and school-community linkages. Included in the three categories are priority issues that could be considered as items on the self-report questionnaire. These items perhaps would provide more specific information concerning stakeholders’ perceptions of characteristics of an enabling learning environment.

The following items could be included in the self-report questionnaire related to policies, beliefs, conditions, mission, and culture of a responsive governance: (a) focus of the school board is on providing quality learning; (b) teachers and principals have what they need to run their classrooms and schools effectively; (c) leadership focuses on facilitation and capacity-building, rather than command and control; (d) well-managed, empowered staff are consulted in decisionmaking; (e) decision-making is collaborative and exhibits a balance of power; (f) accomplishments of students and staff are celebrated; (g) all students are valued and provided the individual resources they need; (h) the primary focus of the school is teaching and learning; (i) the curriculum is flexible and purposefully designed to help students achieve; (j) teachers, parents, and others work together to address development of the whole child; (k) low-income students have as many advantages in schools as wealthy students; (l) all students are treated with respect; (m) all students are given high expectations; (n) all students are challenged to grow and improve by learning experiences; (o) all students receive equal access to technology resources; (p) learning experiences occur within a framework of real life; (q) parents are engaged
in children’s and their own learning process; (r) schools are around-the-clock hubs of community lifelong learning; (s) investing in education is supported by all corporate and community leaders; (t) teachers and parents work together to increase student performance; (u) schools are linked to healthcare, housing, social service, and other community agencies; and (v) parents clearly understand their responsibilities.

In addition, revisions of the self-report questionnaire could include items that would investigate further the concept of unwritten policies and their effect on student achievement. The survey might ask for stakeholders’ perceptions of traditions practiced in the school district or the way things are done in the district and how stakeholders perceive this as affecting student achievement.

Consideration should be given to the structure of the questions to avoid social desirability bias in survey responses. In an effort to clarify the perceptions of stakeholders following administration of the self-report questionnaire, researchers may want to consider conducting follow-up interviews with a random sample of stakeholders who better represent the diversity of the district. Greater efforts need to be made and strategies developed to engage individuals with more diverse socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender, age, education, and single versus two-parent families.

A change in the title of the self-report questionnaire is suggested to eliminate the potential for biasing responses. Before changing the title of the self-report questionnaire, however, consideration needs to be given to any changes that might use sensitizing language that could provide clues to the participants as to what or how they might think they should respond.
Recommendations for Practice

Some recommendations for practice arise from these preliminary findings.

Organizations and institutions that offer in-service workshops and trainings should examine the level of emphasis in their current professional development offerings placed on developing an understanding of the elements of an enabling learning environment and mechanisms to develop those elements in Iowa's schools.

Organizations and institutions such as the The Iowa Association of School Boards and the School Administrators of Iowa should continue with their work to build the capacity of school board members, administrators, teachers, parents, and community members to work collaboratively in an effort to improve schools.

More attention must be given by the State of Iowa Department of Education to the importance of developing policies that align with the beliefs, conditions, mission, and culture of an enabling learning environment.

There are indications in the data, despite a likely overall social desirability response effect, that improvements are still needed in school, parent, family, and student cooperative partnering for the development and implementation of school policies that are aligned and that promote an optimally enabling learning environment and improved student achievement.

Summary

This dissertation research has investigated stakeholders' perceptions of the alignment and the importance of alignment of policies with elements that are consistent with an enabling learning environment that supports student achievement. A self-report questionnaire was constructed and piloted to measure local school
district stakeholders’ (administrators’, teachers’, school board members’, parents’, and community members’) perceptions and to collect preliminary data describing these perceptions using a statewide purposive sample of stakeholders. A subsequent survey using the self-report questionnaire, if demonstrated to be reliable and valid, with a larger, statewide representative sample of stakeholders is intended to inform policymakers and stakeholders. Using data from the pilot study, the self-report questionnaire demonstrated high internal consistency for the total scale and for all subscales except Influence, so separate items were used to measure perceived influence on policies. Although the magnitude of Cronbach’s alpha for the total score was higher than the alpha values for most of the subscales, there were no significant differences in total scores among stakeholders grouped by role, districts, or demographics, unlike a number of significant differences in subscale scores. These results indicate that while the total instrument measures an underlying construct—enabling learning environment—the subscales measure important discriminating subconcepts, describing specific elements of the more general construct. Test-retest values for the total score and the subscales were of magnitudes adequate for stability of the instrument for subsequent use. Content analysis of two open-ended items on the questionnaire suggested several revisions of the instrument to be considered and tested for subsequent use.

The findings of the pilot survey indicated overall high stakeholders’ perceptions of their familiarity with policies, alignment, and the importance of alignment of beliefs, school conditions, culture, mission, and partnerships with school policies to create an environment that enabled student learning and
achievement. Overall, all stakeholders indicated that they were very familiar with school policies, quite highly involved with community and school partnerships and with the development of policies, and in general reported a positive view of the culture of schools. The data from the preliminary survey also indicated, however, that teachers, parents, and community members perceived less involvement in partnerships and policies.

There were significant differences among stakeholders' perceptions of their familiarity with policies; involvement in the development of policies; their perceptions of the alignment and importance of alignment of beliefs, school conditions, culture, mission, and partnerships; and in some aspects of influence in policy development. These included: (a) persons who were age 35-44 and 45-54 were more positive about the culture and climate of the schools than those age 25-34, 55-64, and 65 and older; (b) mean perceptions of stakeholders with children were significantly higher regarding the culture and climate of the district with more positive views than were those who reported that they did not have children; (c) board members and parents perceived the culture and climate of a district as having more of an effect on student achievement than did superintendents, teachers, and community members, respectively; (d) superintendents, parents, and community members perceived unwritten policies of the school as having more of an effect on student achievement than did board members and teachers, (e) stakeholders grouped by some work toward an advanced degree perceived that unwritten policies had more influence on student achievement, compared to those who had completed an advanced degree and those who had completed a college degree or had less education; and (f)
persons with children who had attended the district and those who had never had children who attended the district were statistically significantly different in their perceptions of whether unwritten policy negatively affected the culture and climate of a school district.

The pilot survey findings suggest several implications for education practice, research, and policy development that should be considered for future programming, systematic studies, and policymaking. Attention to these implications and recommendations that are described above in this chapter will contribute to moving the discipline forward in providing enabling learning environments for optimal student achievement in all Iowa school districts.
REFERENCES


Appendix A

Interview Guide
Interview Guide

Review consent form with the interviewee and seek signature.

Offer definition of education policy: a plan, course of action, or contract chosen to guide people in determining decisions and actions in education.

Interview Starter:

What should educators know more about in regard to local school policy?

Follow up Questions:

In what ways have you become familiar with your local school’s policies?

What concerns do you have in regard to specific local school policies?

What areas in particular do you feel educators need to know more about in regard to education policy?

School Board policies
Discipline policies
Attendance policies
Graduation requirement policies
Evaluation policies
Curriculum and Instruction policies
Teacher/Administrator Staff Development
Teacher Evaluation
Student Incentives
Teacher Incentives
Etc.
What thoughts, concerns, and questions do you have concerning written education policy vs. unwritten education policy in your school district?

What questions do you have about how national, state, and local education policy influence one another?

Concluding Questions:

To whom do you feel the education policy survey should be administered?

What do you feel is the most important thing we need to learn from the education policy survey?
Appendix B

Human Subjects Research Approval for Interviews
Iowa State University
Human Subjects Review Form
(Please type this form & submit the original & two copies with three copies of all attachments)

1. Title of Project: Canstone Project: Presurvey to Offer Feedback for Policy Survey Development

2. I agree to provide the proper surveillance of this project to ensure that the rights and welfare of the human subjects are protected. I will report any adverse reactions to the committee. Additions to or changes in research procedures after the project has been approved will be submitted to the committee for review. I agree that all key personnel involved in conducting human subjects research will receive training in the protection of human subjects. This also includes all PI's and Co-PI's. Access to the 45 CFR 46, Belmont Report, and ISU’s Federal Wide Assurance is available to all PI’s via the WWW. http://grants- srv.admin.iastate.edu/VPR/humansubjects.html. I agree to request renewal of approval for any project continuing more than one year.

Robin L. Mass - Galloway
Typed name of principal investigator

College of Education,
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
Department
641-322-3112, richas@netins.net
Phone number and email

4/20/02
Date
Signature of principal investigator

16302 170th St., Rockwell, IA 50469
Mailing Address for Correspondence

2a. Principal investigator
☐ Faculty ☐ Staff ☐ Postdoctoral ☒ Graduate Student ☐ Undergraduate Student

3. Typed name of co-principal investigator(s) Date

3a. Co-Principal investigator(s) (check all that apply)
☐ Faculty ☐ Staff ☐ Postdoctoral ☐ Graduate Student ☐ Undergraduate Student

3b. Typed name of major professor or supervisor (if not a co-principal investigator) Date

Dr. Mack C. Shelley II

Signature of major professor or supervising faculty member

4. Typed names of other key personnel who will directly interact with human subjects, (all key personnel must have training before approval will be made)

5. Project (check all that apply)
☐ Research ☐ Thesis or dissertation ☒ Class project ☐ Independent Study (490, 590, Honors project)

6. Number of subjects (complete all that apply)

# adults, non-students # ISU students # minors under 14 # other (explain)

# minors 14-17

7. Status of project submission through Office of Sponsored Programs Administration (check one)
Information to be presented to facility

Declaration of Conflicts of Interest: no conflicts of interest.

The proposed investment should send a copy of this form to the appropriate Health and Safety 13 Agreement Lab for

Decision on the submission of the proposed study protocol:

Informed Consent:

INFORMATION OF SUBJECTS (when more than one subject)

1. Declaration of Conflicts of Interest: no conflicts of interest.

2. Written Informed Consent:

a. Provided to the Subject

b. Authorized by the Subject

3. Authorization by the Subject:

a. A legal guardian authorized to act on behalf of the Subject

b. A duly authorized agent authorized to act on behalf of the Subject

4. Consent Form:

a. In English

b. In the primary language of the Subject

5. consent form:

a. Signed by the Subject

b. Signed by the Authorized Agent

6. Consent Form:

a. At least two copies of the Consent Form are kept at the study site.

7. Record of signing:

a. Date and time of signing

b. Signature of the Subject

8. The consent form is signed in the presence of another person who witnesses the signing.

9. Consent Form:

a. Signed by the Subject

b. Signed by the Authorized Agent

10. Consent Form:

a. In English

b. In the primary language of the Subject

11. Consent Form:

a. Signed by the Subject

b. Signed by the Authorized Agent

12. Consent Form:

a. In English

b. In the primary language of the Subject

13. Consent Form:

a. Signed by the Subject

b. Signed by the Authorized Agent

14. Consent Form:

a. In English

b. In the primary language of the Subject

15. Consent Form:

a. Signed by the Subject

b. Signed by the Authorized Agent

16. Consent Form:

a. In English

b. In the primary language of the Subject

17. Consent Form:

a. Signed by the Subject

b. Signed by the Authorized Agent

18. Consent Form:

a. In English

b. In the primary language of the Subject

19. Consent Form:

a. Signed by the Subject

b. Signed by the Authorized Agent

20. Consent Form:

a. In English

b. In the primary language of the Subject

21. Consent Form:

a. Signed by the Subject

b. Signed by the Authorized Agent

22. Consent Form:

a. In English

b. In the primary language of the Subject
SECTION II: Continuing Review

8. Have there been any serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences since the last review?
   □ Yes, please explain.  □ No

9. Previously approved procedures and measures will remain the same.
   □ Yes  □ If no, please fill out section III.

SECTION III: Modifications (A modification is required whenever a change is made to the approved project, whether it be a title change or change in investigators, resubmission of a grant proposal involving changes to the original proposal, or changes in the funding source, etc.)

10. The following modification(s) are being made (check all that apply):
   □ Change in type of subjects (i.e. minors 14-17 to minors under 14); changed from Key Iowa Educators to
   In addition to the Key Iowa Educators I will be interviewing a total 24 stakeholders representing four
different Iowa School Districts. Interviewees will represent one of the following: clergy, industry/business,
teacher, school administrator, parent and school board member.
   □ Change in informed consent document; attach copy with changes highlighted.
   □ Change in principal investigator, requires signature of new PI and verification of human subjects training,
and signature of DEO for new PI.

   New PI typed name       New PI signature
   DEO signature____________________

   □ Change in co-principal investigator(s); requires signature of new co-PI and attach verification of human
subjects training

   New co-PI typed name       New co-PI signature

   □ Change in total number of subjects; changed from 25 to 40

   □ Inclusion of additional key personnel; type names and attach human subjects training verification

   □ Change in project sponsor (attach complete grant application for new or additional sponsor)

   □ Other (e.g., change in project title, adding new materials)

11. Describe the modification(s) indicated above in sufficient detail for evaluation independent of any other
documents.

   In addition to the key Iowa Educators listed with the original Human Subjects Review Form I will be
   interviewing 24 stakeholders who represent four different school districts in Iowa. Each interviewee will represent
State University Human Subjects Review Form

PI Last Name: Mass-Galloway
Title of Project: Cancer Project: Presurvey to Offer Feedback for Policy Survey Development

Checklist for Attachments
The following are attached (please check):

13. ☑ Letter or written statement to subjects indicating clearly:
   a) the purpose of the research
   b) the use of any identifier codes (names, #s), how they will be used, and when they will be removed (see item 18)
   c) an estimate of time needed for participation in the research
   d) if applicable, the location of the research activity
   e) how you will ensure confidentiality
   f) in a longitudinal study, when and how you will contact subjects later
   g) that participation is voluntary, nonparticipation will not affect evaluations of the subject
   h) contact information of the P.I. and if a student project, the major professor or supervising faculty member’s contact information

14. ☑ A copy of the consent form (if applicable)
15. ☑ Letter of approval for research from cooperating organizations or institutions (if applicable)
16. ☑ Data-gathering instruments
17. ☑ Recruitment flyers or any other documents the subjects will see

18. Anticipated dates for contact with subjects. Allow at least two weeks for review of your proposal before your anticipated start date.

First contact: 5/6/02
Last contact: 5/24/02
Month/Day/Year
Month/Day/Year

19. If applicable: anticipated date that identifiers will be removed from completed survey instruments and/or audio or visual tapes will be erased:

    7/1/02
Month/Day/Year

20. Signature of Departmental Executive Officer

    Date

Department or Administrative Unit

If the PI or co-PI is also the DEO, a Dean signature authority must sign here.

21. Initial action by the Institutional Review Board (IRB):

☑ Project approved
☐ Pending Further Review Date
☐ Project not approved Date
☐ No action required Date

22. Follow-up action by the IRB:

Project approved Date

Project not approved Date

Project not resubmitted Date

Rick Sharp
IRB Chairperson
Signature of IRB Chairperson

Date 5/1/02
Iowa State University

Continuing Review and/or Modification of Research Involving Human Subjects

(please type the information on this form)

One copy of this form and changed documents should be submitted to the
Human Subjects Research Office, 16 Pearson
http://grants-svr.admin.iastate.edu/VPR/humansubjects.html

SECTION I: PI/Project Information

1. I agree to provide the proper surveillance of this project to ensure that the rights and welfare of the human subjects are protected. I will report any adverse reactions to the committee. Additions to or changes in research procedures after the project has been approved will be submitted to the committee for review. I agree that all key personnel involved in conducting human subjects research will receive training in the protection of human subjects. I agree to request renewal of approval for any project continuing more than one year.

2. Type of Submission: □ Continuing Review (fill in sections I & II) (Continuing Review can only be approved up to 30 days prior to the project’s original approval date)
   □ Modification (fill in sections I & II)
   □ Continuing Review & Modification (fill in sections I, II, & III)

3. Date of Last IRB Approval: 5/21/02

4. IRB ID #: 02-485

5. Title of Project (if title has changed since original approval, please provide both titles): \textbf{Feedback for Policy Survey Development}

6. Funding Source: ______

7. Have key personnel been added since last approval? □ No □ Yes If yes, please list (see part III for signature requirements) ______

Robin L. Moss-Galloway
Typed name of principal investigator

ELPS
Department
641-822-3112, ricka@netins.net
Phone number and email

If student project:

Typed name of major professor or supervisor

Dr. Mack C. Shelley II

IRB Approval:

Rick Sharp
IRB Chair

Date: 5/21/02
Signature of IRB Chair

Date: 5/21/02
Signature

IRB Review Date: 6/4/02
Appendix C

Complete Transcripts of Four Interviewees
When we think about policy, it can be written or unwritten in a school district. And it can be an action plan that's written, a contract that's made, your handbook, and all of those kinds of rules and regulations. And it can be more traditional, something that's been kind of the way it's always gone for 20 years and it's unwritten policy and nobody's probably going to change that policy. So, does that fit with your description of what policy would be?

HT: Yes, but I think we try to write down most things around here. Even if it's one of those tradition things, we still try to write it down.

R: And why would that be do you think?

HT: So that each person can't make up their own. I think we've found in the past that if you don't write it down, if it's not in a handbook somewhere, someone will attempt to say that well, "We used to do it this way at the last school I was at, it worked real well, so therefore that's the way I want to do it here".

R: So the unwritten policy can kind of take over.

HT: Yeah.

R: And you are not comfortable with that.

HT: I'm not comfortable with that. Our principal's not comfortable with that either. He likes to have control and know what's expected of everybody.

R: Would you say that's a district feeling, or just at the high school level?

HT: I feel that's a district feeling. I think that's more prevalent at the high school because of the attitude our principal has.

R: The leadership?

HT: The leadership role he attempts to take on. He likes to have control. He likes to know what's happening, versus...

R: Doesn't like anybody guessing?

HT: Doesn't like a lot of guessing going on. Doesn't like a lot of people going off on tangents. He likes them to stay pretty much to the straight and narrow.

R: What should educators know more about in regard to local school policy? "Policy" is kind of a word out there. Think again how we define policy. What do we need to know more about in your opinion?

HT: I think a teacher that has been around awhile has been subjected to most of the policies.

R: And is that you?

HT: Oh ya, I've been around a while. Simply because of the fact that you get put on different committees, you are a part of things, so therefore since your facility is not as large, that means more people are involved in a lot more of the policy-making issues. There are people who are not involved in policy-making issues. But, that's the nature of the person they are. You know that when you are a teacher you ask certain students to help you, because you know if you ask them it will get done.
and it will get done properly. Every faculty no matter what size it is has members that you would just as soon not have on policy making boards. So those people don’t get put on them. And they tend to be the ones that are the least knowledgeable. That’s just the way it is. They tend to be the least knowledgeable people about what’s going on in their district.

R What do you see as the ramifications of that?

HT- They tend to walk into mine fields. They tend to say things unknowingly. If they don’t know how some things are run, or don’t know the policy on certain things, they may make off-the-cuff comments to community members who regard every teacher as being extremely knowledgeable about their district and so they take what that teacher says as the gospel. If that person doesn’t know the policy and makes a comment, then he gets himself into trouble, or the district into trouble, where they have to start explaining things where they should never have had to explain in the first place.

R So it affects public relations.

HT- Effects public relations. Effects the personality within the school district. If there are people that don’t know the policies, they tend to fly off the handle, or feel alienated because they don’t know the policies. Everybody else knows what they are supposed to be doing and they just go ahead and do it. Whereas, one or two people may not know the policies and they feel alienated. “Why wasn’t I involved?” Well, you weren’t involved because of this. I think for the most part if you hang around a school district for awhile, they policies become almost obvious. I really do. There’s not much that is hidden.

R How do you think that happens?

HT- It’s just a part of being here. You see things happen for a couple of years and you see how it’s run. For a first year teacher, it’s just as confusing as it can be. They just have no idea. And each district does things differently, so if you come into a district, that’s probably the hardest things. How do you handle passes in the hallways? How do you handle National Honor Society? How do you handle fieldtrips? And each school district does things differently. And there is no orientation process that can prepare a person for it. They have those first 3 or 4 days before classes start. Oh, here’s all of our policies, memorize these, and go ahead. Well nobody does. They’re so worried about everything else, that you don’t learn the policies. I think you have to live your way through it before you actually become a part of it. I can remember not showing up to walk through graduation with all the teachers. I was never told.

When thinking about policy. Well, I think you’ve answered the question about how you became familiar with policies. You just sort of had to live it. And it’s very difficult for first year teachers.

The question that came to me was, do you feel that policy dictates the culture of a building or do you feel that the culture of the building dictates the policies that get written or unwritten?

HT- I think originally the culture dictates your policies because a lot of policies are reactions to events that happen. We do it this way because this happened back in ‘92 and therefore we don’t want that to ever happen again so therefore we’ll write a policy to cover it. So,
I am especially interested in your views on the matter of pollution, and your ability to write about this topic would be greatly appreciated.

In particular, I would like to know your thoughts on the following aspects of pollution:

1. The extent to which pollution affects our daily lives and the environment.
2. The role of government and industry in regulating pollution.
3. The effectiveness of current pollution control measures.
4. The potential long-term effects of pollution on human health and the planet.
5. The importance of public education and awareness in combating pollution.

Your insights on these topics would be invaluable for a comprehensive understanding of the issue. Please feel free to elaborate on any aspect that you find particularly relevant or interesting.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,
[Your Name]
In what regard do you have concerns about your ability to write policies that effect your school district's vision or mission, beliefs and values. I'm not sure how your district.

Translate that again.

Well, does your school district have a mission statement?

Yes, we do.

Do you know what it is?

Well, I can't say it for you, but ya I know what it is. It's pretty much a standard mission statement. If you read 10 mission statements, you're not going to see a lot of difference in all of them, in the 10. I've been on NCA evaluation teams where you read their mission statements and they are all the same. There's not a lot of difference.

Does it reflect what you feel you really want as a community for the kids?

Ya.

Knowing that, do you feel your district conducts itself in a way that your policies indeed reflect your mission?

Yes, they do.

Can you elaborate on that a little bit?

Well, our mission statement, like I said, is very broad and very general and states something to the effect that an education appropriate to each student is available that will guide each student in the direction they want their lives to go. That we have an education here that is suited for the lowest level students and the highest level students at the same time. Each student will derive from their education the background for the rest of their lives. That's kind of the general idea. Taking that as your general mission statement, the policies we created, for instance, just here in the last 6 or 7 years. You know I've been here a long time, so time's relative. In the last several years here, we have added AP classes. We have added lower level classes. We have added AP classes because our students and parents were saying, "We'd like to have more college prep. offerings. We like to have the ability to take college-credit hour tests." So we sat down, and the teachers in those areas, mostly math and English, sat down and decided how we could best get our students into those areas. How we could pick and choose the students we wanted to come to those areas. How we could make it possible for a student who didn't get chosen to make it into those classes. Anyway, by their sheer determination to get into the class. How we would talk to the parents. We created all of these possibilities. When you are targeting student set the upper classes, you have one set of problems. Then when you are targeting students in the lower set of classes, you have another set of problems.

As far as instructions.

Ya. We have the AP Calculus kids and then we have our general math kids. How do you differentiate the two? And if they go to the general math, are they stuck? Do they just take general math one and general math two and that's it?
R: How do you decide what basic, fundamental math standards are appropriate for all kids?

HT: That part did.

R: So, I'm assuming that speaks to your tracking.

HT: Yes. Do you do it by test? By teacher recommendation? How do you do it? So, we had to come up with all of these policies.

R: I'm assuming that.

HT: Because often in a culture of a district you'll have unwritten policies that are fairly traditional, and one of the things that can happen is some tracking. Right off the bat you were fairly strong about the fact that your district likes to keep things written down.

HT: And we do have that down. We have it written how we do track these kids. Of course a lot of it is by the student's choice. They sit down with a guidance counselor and they say, And you'll have to forgive me for my lack of knowing what the word is. But we have this booklet of career choices that the students can make. And at the 8th, 9th, 10th grade. The guidance counselor relooks at this every year with each kid. He'll say, "Well, I want to be an Engineer." So the guidance counselor has it and can pull it out and say, "Engineer. Look this is what the math people say you need to take. This is what the science people say you need to take. Here's what the English people say you need to take." So we've written it down. Each department has written it down, OK, if they want to be an engineer this is the classes you have to take. If they want to be a contractor, these are the things you have to take. If they want to be a plumber, these are the classes you have to take.

R: So what you are trying to do is... A policy, written or unwritten, is your decision that students need this information so they can make good choices about which classes to take.

HT: That was something we did 3 years ago now. We sat down with the guidance counselor. We had some teacher meetings where each department sat down and divided up into areas for each of our students. So, that's one way that the students can track themselves.

R: And part of the policy you decided. Students need this information.

HT: Yes, we decided pretty quickly that the students and the parents. Because the parents would come in and say, "Johnny wants to be a hairdresser. What does he have to have? Suzie wants to be a math teacher. What does she have to have?"

R: Do you have in particular any concerns about any policies that you are aware of in your district, either district level or building level, written or unwritten, that you're thinking maybe they don't really support your vision or your district's mission? And that can not necessarily be student policy, but teacher policy. Teacher evaluations, etc.

HT: I'm trying to think of policies that would be detrimental to students, or teachers. There are certain policies that are open to interpretation. Individual interpretation by the administration. It hasn't been a real problem that I can see. The principal we have right now, one of his favorite sayings is, when you go in to talk to him about making a change. For instance, there was conversation a long time ago, we had a 7 period day versus an 8 period day. And he just came right out the first meeting we had about it and he just said, "The only concern
I have about it is how does this affect our students.” He, himself, that’s what guides everything he does. Everything comes down to, is this in the best interest of our students? If this is not in the best interest of our students, then we are not going to do it. I really believe that a lot of our policies are driven by that fact. We don’t make policies based on what’s best for the teachers. Students first, teachers second, which I think is the way it should be.

R And his written or unwritten leadership helps you know how to interpret if there is some flexibility in policy.

HT- Well, if you understand, and he doesn’t leave any gray areas as far as how he believes. If you understand his belief, it makes in pretty easy for you to understand the policy and makes it pretty easy for you to understand your chances of getting a policy changed. It doesn’t leave any question.

R You gotta know why?

HT- If you want to do something, and this is a very simple thing to say. If you want to do something, say you want to take a field trip, there’s a lot of people who want to take a field trip sometimes. And you want to walk in to the principal and say, “I want to take a field trip, next Tuesday with 8 kids.” First thing he’s going to say is, “Why do you want to take these kids there?” And if you are going to justify it, you had better be able to justify it educationally.

R Somewhere in the curriculum.

HT- Somewhere in the curriculum. If it’s just, “Well, my kids deserve a day off and this would be neat for them to see.”, that’s not going to cut it. It’s going to be, they need a day off is fine, and this field trip is going to show them how we use math in this area. Then we can go with it, but it’s going to have to be justified.

R A little different atmosphere’s fine, but...

HT- but, it better be educationally sound.

R What is your knowledge in regard to, or your understanding of, what the “Success 4 Initiative” is?

HT- I want to that. I went to a “Success 4” meeting in Cedar Rapids. That’s the background of my knowledge.

R What did you think?

HT- We went to this “Success 4” meeting. A committee of folks. I think it was kind of a hand chosen committee. One of those. These are the people who will probably get something out of it. The superintendent went with us. The guidance counselor went with us. And about 3 or 4 teachers. We had been there maybe about 2 or 3 hours and I turned around to the superintendent and I just said, “Do you know why we are here?”. And that was the general consensus of the entire group. He wasn’t really catching anything out of it either. I think the lady who was putting it on (there were two women putting it on) thought we knew what we were doing. They must of thought we knew what “Success 4” stood for and what its purpose was. We didn’t even know what “Success 4” stood for. We didn’t know why we were there. It was 3 or 4 hours into the meeting before I started to get a grasp of what the whole process was.

R So there were real organizational misunderstandings. Were you given
the information that "Success 4 Initiative" is really a philosophy, not a program? Was a model for school improvement?

RHT- We were given the booklet, the huge booklet. And after a while we started to understand that, yes, a way of guiding your school improvement. At least that's how we felt it was. When we walked away from it, we felt it was very "pie in the sky". And we felt it was very unapplicable to our situation.

R That was my question, as to why did you choose to not participate?

RHT- Horribly enough, I think one of the reasons we chose not to participate was because of the people who were running the "Success 4" meeting. They just didn't back it up a little bit. They spent too much time talking about irrelevant things, like when lunch was, and not enough time talking about, okay, this is why you're here.

R This where we've been. This is where we're at.

RHT- This is what you would expect a good teacher to do when they walk into a classroom. First day of class, you say, this is the name of class... (END SIDE ONE)

(SECOND PAGE)

RHT- and go from there, which they never did. They never explained themselves. It took us a couple hours just to get into the thing. So, part of the reason we didn't do it was just because of that. We walked away from the meeting not knowing what it was about. Our elementary guidance counselor walked away from the meeting thinking it was the greatest thing she'd ever heard of. The rest of us didn't.

R Because it revolved around emotional, behavioral, etc.

RHT- Ya, and I think she had studied it a little bit. I think she had sort of prepared herself for this thing. I think she had gone to some "Success 4" things in the past.

R Was this a State meeting or a AEA Regional meeting?

RHT- AEA Regional meeting.

R So, from that level, when they brought it back as consultants, that was confusing for you as to how you would use it.

RHT- Oh, it was terrible.

R In regard to understanding that we are going to use this information that we come away with, 24 interviews, to help us determine what questions should be on this policy survey. What do we need to ask people. Who do you think we should administer a policy survey to? Should it just be teachers? Should it be administrators and teachers? Should it be definitely just those folks, or should we also ask community folks too?

RHT- I think you should ask community folks about policy. The problem with asking community folks is that you have to speak a different language with community people than you do with administrators and teachers.

R Watch the jargon.
"Ya. If you start talking education-ese it immediately turns them off because they don't know all the phrases, the terms, the reasonings behind all these things.

R What if we don't use the jargon with administrators and teachers? Would that be a problem?

HT I think you almost have to have two separate surveys. And I'm not saying the teachers are going to understand all of the jargon either. If you are going to administer it to the general population, there are a lot of things they just aren't going to understand because they are not subjected to it daily. And for especially those teachers that don't get involved, who might not have a full picture.

R Any other concerns you see in regard to local school policy that you feel you haven't had an opportunity to share that you feel we need to know more about that we might find more out about in a survey and how policy plays out.

HT I think the importance of a lot of policies is over-played.

R Could you elaborate on that?

HT In the end what makes a difference is the interaction of the teacher and student in the classroom. A lot of policies have very little to do with that. The policies are written to cover the crap you don't want to see happen again, the once a year stuff. Very little policy is written concerning what happens between the teacher and the student in the classroom. I think as far as education goes, the importance of the teacher handbook, the importance of the student handbook, is greatly exaggerated. It seems as if the State and Federal people tend to put so much importance on, "If we pass this law, it's going to change all of the educational processes that happen in our State." No, it's not. The educational processes in your State are controlled by the teachers you have in your classrooms and the interactions they have with the students. And anything you can do to improve the teachers in your classroom or the interaction with student is going to be more directly effecting the students.

R If you had to pick one, what would be the most important policy, written or unwritten, in your district?

HT Probably, and I'm just going to pick this off the top of my head, probably our attendance policy. Quite a large attendance policy, which dictates students have to be here. It very specifically dictates how many days you can miss, what reasons you can miss for, how you have to have yourself covered if you do miss. You have to have letters from parents. If you go to the doctor, you have to have letters from the doctor. We used to have students that would miss 30 or 40 days in a year. I think our last numbers were that our attendance was at 96% now. And I think the change in that policy I think really did a lot to change our attendance. You can't teach a student if they aren't here.

R So, in regard to student achievement policies affect on student achievement, you see that one as really having an impact?

HT It's had as big an impact as anything we've done in the last 5 years.

R As far as the culture of your staff, at the building or district level, are there any policies that are particularly effecting how you work with one another?
HT: They aren't or are?

R: Either. Positively or negatively.

HT: I can't think of anything.

R: Staff meetings? Staff development?

HT: Our staff development has really not been very good lately because we spent a whole year getting ready for this OE visit. Boring stuff. You can't make that fun. And before that most of our staff meetings, in-service time, was spent on standards and benchmarks, and writing policies, basically. We've spent a good 5 years here simply having our meetings to fulfill State mandates. If you are taking all of your meeting time fulfilling State mandates, you're not taking a lot of your meeting time making your staff better. I don't think it has a lot of impact on what's been done in the classroom. And we're spending all of our free time fulfilling State mandates. Ya, we have something to do.

R: The things that you decide as a local district have more impact than the things that someone else decides for you?

HT: At least the last 5 years we've been spending on these standards and benchmarks, all the State mandates, school improvement. Prior to that we were spending time having district-wide curriculum meetings. We would have a K-12 math meeting, or a K-12 science meeting. And we could sit down and make sure our math curriculum correlated, K-12. Not necessarily the same books, but so that we knew what we were teaching and how we were teaching it and how we were moving the students through our curriculum. Or building-wide meetings, curriculum meetings and general staff meetings, working on discipline, working on all those things. And we haven't been able to do that lately. I miss that. That was what was impacting our students more. Doing all this other stuff has not impacted our students. When you can get together as a local staff and talk about local problems that you have and local solutions you can make, that helps the kids.

R: With resources less and less, that becomes harder and harder.
R: Before we start is to explain to you our definition of policy as we are looking at it. We think of it as being fairly general. We are not looking at Federal policy for educators and we are not looking at State policy. There’s been a lot of research in those areas. There’s been less research in regard to local school policy. When we think of policy, we think about, it could be a contract, it could be rules, norms spelled out in your handbook, in your board policies.

SBM: Not necessarily formal policies, but...

R: It could be unwritten even. You went to school here and you would know that a lot of people would know that that’s just the way we do things. It’s the unwritten policy as well as the written policy. So, it is pretty broad. This exercise is all about... I’ll actually end up interviewing about 22 people total. I’m also interviewing some folks at the Iowa School Board Association and SAE. When we get all of these analyzed together and sort of the generalized themes, I’ll go and also show this material and get some input from the Department of Education.

R: So, it’s an effort to find out what you folks think we need to know more about in regard to local policy. I think to do that we’ll talk about this evening what your concerns have been, your experiences, both as a student, as a parent, and as a school board member. So, you have a wealth of what you have experienced in the school system. I start with just a general question with everyone in asking what do you think educators, meaning any of us at the State level, at the local level, administrators, teachers, everybody, what do we need to know more about in regard to local school policy?

SBM: Well, I think it’s important to have local control because every school has its own personality. It has its own ethnic mix. It has its own socioeconomic mix of people. The local policies help manage to that and customize to their needs. Where some of the policies sometimes conflict is when you’ve got funding in different things. You’ve got the categorical funds that say it can only be used here or can only be used in this way. And if you don’t use it, you’ll lose it. So, you better use it real quick. So those are when the needs and the source of the money conflict.

R: Let me expand on that a little bit. Or ask you to. When you said you better use it or lose it, can you give an example of perhaps when you the district ended up not wanting to lose it, and so they used it, but they used it in a way that might have been contrary at all?

SBM: It only happened once, so it doesn’t happen very often. Special ed. monies are paid in arrears. So, if you have 4 special ed. children this year and next year you only have 2, then you may have a surplus of money that following year. So, that is what happened and we were able to do good things with it. Anything that was special needs related. We were able to get a van that transported them. We were able to get things we were not normally able to get or spend money on. We were able to get some computer systems for them and some technology that really assists with the special needs kids. But at the same time we wouldn’t have been able to get them any other way. We were able to do really good things with it, but we weren’t used to spending in that kind of way.

R: The Federal and State mandates for the policies allow you to do some things that were good for kids. You didn’t go against your mission for your district. But, it maybe forced you to operate as a district in a little different way than you would have. You wouldn’t have knew that
money necessarily.

SB*- Oh, no, because normally there's so many times where... And the thing is if you don't use it in that same year, you then lose it. So, even though there's several years that we operate at a deficit because we may only be getting paid for 2 students, but we have 4 students coming in. So that in those years we operate at a deficit and that's the norm usually that we operate that way. Every now and then it just comes that you have less that you had the year before so you just have a little bit of extra.

RCH- Have you seen any repercussions when you talk about how you've used the money and there's a misunderstanding in the community about how they money's been used? Or, has that been understood?

SB*- Not so much with the Special Education moneys. The whole physical plant equipment levy versus the general fund, that's very confusing for people. So, the overal budgeting of the way schools budget their money. With the bond issue that's something we explained over and over and over again. And some of them still come back and say, "Why are you laying off teachers when you want to build a new high school?" We go round and round with that issue all the time. It's just hard for people to understand.

RCH- School funding is complex.

SB*- It is. My husband was reading the other day about the University of Iowa and he goes, "I can't believe they are building more buildings when they are having all these cuts!", I said, "Hello! I can answer that. These are two different budgets and they can't be spent ?????..."

Even someone who hears it at home for the last 3 years.

RCH- So, financial policy has created some misunderstandings, but not necessarily had an effect on student achievement? I haven't heard you say that's had any effect.

SB*- The budgeting? Well it can. In a district where your district doesn't have solid goals. We have just in the last few years started to head in that direction. We weren't always going in that direction.

RCH- School improvement goals, you are referring to?

SB*- Our school improvement goals. We as a board sit down every year and do the goals of the things we want to accomplish and everything we do... We have on our placard with our name plates we have a little, from a little label maker, it says, "How does this impact student learning?". So everyday we make a decision, whether it be about buses or custodial services or curriculum or behavior issue, its "How does this impact student learning?", so that we are bringing it back to the student level.

RCH- How does that, little, semi-formal policy that your are making your focus in decisions, parallel with your mission statement or is that what your mission statement is about?

SB*- That's mostly our mission statement. We've never really formalized a mission statement. Our school has one, but we as a board have never formalized one because our mission really is to do what's best for kids.

RCH- Sounds like that's what you've made it.
SBM- Yeah. So that has just become what we are about. And that’s
starting to become the language in our school district. When a custodian
comes in and says, “That’s not my job!”. Really, how does that impact
student learning? And they don’t think that their job does. And when
you start pulling them back in and when you say, “When you don’t clean
that room or when you don’t do some of these things, kids don’t have the
best environment to learn in and that’s unacceptable.”

RCH- What other way have you seen that evolve. You gave an excellent
example with the custodian. You said it’s starting to maybe change
attitudes or actions.

SBM- A little bit. Good and bad. I mean there’s people that don’t like
to see it. But, with budget cuts that was the thing we looked at. We
wanted to make all of the cuts we needed to make, but we did not want to
effect student learning if at all possible. We did not want to cut
programming. We did not want to cut anything that would effect student
learning.

RCH- So you set out those priorities.

SBM- Right. So when we went through we tried to look at things that
were outside of curriculum. We prioritized trying to keep licensed
teachers first. So, our para-professionals were the first to go before
our teachers with degrees. Is that the right thing to do, I don’t know?

RCH- Again, those were state mandates forcing you to cut.

SBM- Right. And we sat there and looked. The para-professionals truly
have the most one on one with kids a lot of times. They are the ones
helping the kids with reading. And they were able to do really good
things for kids; but in some instances we felt that maybe the teachers
were getting a little bit lazy, you know whatever. It’s kind of like...
I guess I kind of likened it to. If you were able to have a cleaning
lady come in, you maybe don’t clean as well as you normally would. You
just do what you need to get by or right before they come.

RCH- Concentrate on other things.

SBM- If you suddenly aren’t able to have that person anymore, you get
back in there and clean. “I can do this.”. That’s just kind of what
it’s like. So there were some issues there. Some people got very upset
that we were taking away the “Para’s”.

RCH- Was having to make that decision based on budget cuts or did you
make that decision based on, “Well, this is what we are seeing happening
and this is what we need to do.”.

SBM- It was based on budget cuts. We had to remove out of our
budget. So, that was an area that had been covered under a grant. It
was the dual language program. It just happened to be paid out of that
grant. So, it was just kind of a no-brainer that that would be where it
came out. We looked at other ways. We did save some paras, but just not
just not as may as we had.

RCH- You were able to reframe it in that there were some concerns that
you had and so it kind of killed two birds with one stone in some
respects it sounds like.

SBM- And we looked at... We eliminated a bus route. We did some
different things with the lunch program. We tried to do things that
truly didn’t effect classroom time and things they were doing in the
classroom. We did for the most part. Probably one of the most conflicting things that we had going on through budget cuts was the master contract because it dictates who you get rid of. It’s seniority and its... So, we had some great, great first year teachers that we had to let go of. That was very frustrating for us at a couple different levels because at one level they’re very energetic, they had so much to offer, they were doing great things for kids, and on another level, every now and then you’ll get a teacher that maybe is very tenured that is making a significant amount of money who might not be pulling their weight anymore. So that would be someone that you could say, “With that salary, I could replace these 4 paras.”.

RCH- So, that policy locked you in.

SBM- Right. It totally locked us in. Even in the negotiations they said, “We want X%.” And so we... I was on the negotiation team too. We turned around and said, “Which 5 teachers are you willing to get rid of then?”. And they said, “Well, none of them.” Well, that’s what you are saying then, because we’ve already cut out of our budget. Which ones are you willing to get rid of because that’s what it ultimately means. — Oh okay. So we sat down and worked it out very amicably in the end.

RCH- You also have policies as a transition from what you are talking about from arbitration, that is you have evaluation policies for your administrators and there is now going to be a State mandate. Do you know much about that process? Do you have some feelings and concerns or some things you are happy about? What have you been thinking?

SBM- Well, right now we have started... We felt it was important to start from the top and move down. So, we started with our superintendent who is brand new. As part of the interview process we came up with our criteria of what we were looking for and what was important, kind of did all that with, um... I can’t think of his name... doctor from UMI who’s wonderful...

RCH- Oh, I’d probably recognize the name if you said it... { }?

SBM- Yeah, { }, and he was fantastic. It really... getting us narrowed down on what our goals were. { } met every single one of those and it’s been a very good fit.

RCH- So you felt that your policy needed to role model to the district, to the teachers that were starting with our leaders and...

SBM- And be consistent. That’s something that our district has been lacking, consistency from the administrative level. That ultimately came from the superintendent because what’s unfortunate the principals can be doing everything that you ask them to do, but if the superintendent isn’t there to back them when that teacher gets angry or whatever, then you can just throw it out the window. That’s kind of what was happening before we started this. So we want ahead and met with, we pulled the AEA in and we started doing the superintendent, like how can we do a better evaluation.

RCH- Making sure that those things like role modeling is reflected in th...

SBM- Right. In all the different areas, like professional development and her communications with the community. Did all the different aspects and from those we came up with all the different criterion and we figured out what the action steps were and you know, how to measure them and all
that. We kind of got into it and had a couple meetings. Well then IESB
(-) did one, did a seminar, and two of us went up to that and realized
that they were working on it too, so we kind of backed off. And then
they came up with one and we just kind of took the two... We were
actually kind of ahead of the curve because we were doing it so that was
kind of exciting.

RCH- Especially if you develop on your own.

SBM- Yeah. Because we did, we developed it on our own. And then it was
confirmation that we are on the right track. So then we took theirs and
we took ours and just kind of made our own and came up with an evaluation
model for her. Then what it does it kind of aligns... the principals and
the other administrators know, ( ) can say, "Here's where I'm being
measured. Here's the criterion the board's look at. Here's what CSIP is
looking at." And so everyone can align their goals together and that's
something we had clearly been missing.

RCH- How about the... Are you aware of the new teacher standards of the
State?

SBM- Yeah. The thing that worries me about the standards. I think it's
great up to the point that it's going to make some teachers perform that
maybe weren't performing before. I worry that some people will start
performing to the tests to some degree, the standardized testing. They
will just teach kids, "This is how you take this test and here's how you
can do them better."

RCH- How do you think your policy at the district addresses that issue?

SBM- I think our focus will still be on CSIP.

RCH- Is that unwritten or written?

SBM- Unwritten. I would say it is unwritten. But I think when funding
starts dictating how things go, in order to do good things for kids, you
still need the funding. Unfortunately there's going to be some
cross-over at that point.

RCH- When you are going to have to pay attention to State mandates, but
you want to keep your focus clearly on student instruction, student
achievement.

SBM- Right. And I think also where it conflicts when you are totally
trying to... and I guess it's kind of a merit pay concept... what I see a
lot sometimes is that some of our best teachers that we have in our
district are also the ones that take the more difficult students. The
ones with possibly more disabilities, things like that and...

RCH- Over use them.

SBM- Uh, huh. And their scores are going to reflect those kids. And so
their scores may not be as high because you've got more difficult
children and they can handle them.

RCH- Catch 22.

SBM- Yeah. And so while their scores look lower, they've probably made
huge progress because that teacher does good things for them. But yet
that teachers isn't going to get recognized because their scores are
lower.
RCH- Which speaks to your policies on assessment. With comprehensive school improvement, you know that you need multiple assessments. Do you feel like you’re getting some policies written in regard to assessment and the very issue you were talking about?

SEM- To some degree. Again, I’d say they are more unwritten policies. We try to look at several different ways of assessing.

RCH- Is this the feeling that you get from your board, that they are emphasizing these kinds of things? You seem very confident that your board, your district, is going to emphasize those things even though it’s not written policy. I’m wondering where that’s coming from.

SEM- I don’t know exactly because, yeah, it’s not really a written policy. But I guess our population is so different. We have a 25% transient rate and over 50% minority rate.

RCH- At risk. And we have some language barriers and different things. We’ve also got several 3rd and 4th generation Hispanic families that are people that I went to school with. It’s a fun place to grow up. With that, with some of those changes and so forth, we’ve had to look at other ways to measure our kids. Even though we are doing very well on our standardized test and things like that, with the transient rate you have to look at progress. You have to look at... start pulling some of those, to segregate the data, to see are we really making progress with the kids that we have all the time. Then how are we doing with the kids that are in and out. How are we meeting their needs. So I guess that’s just something that is evolving and hasn’t been formalized yet.

RCH- With the school improvement process and the semi-formal mission statement for your board?

SEM- Uh, huh.

RCH- Okay. You are a school board member so this is maybe fairly obvious and you’ve also been a student here. Are there any other ways that you have become familiar with the local district’s school policies?

SEM- I think there’s always, like when you hear about stuff in the paper. It’s just a small town and everything comes out in the “Index”, whether it’s... We have a journalism class that does the “Blue and White” and I used to be on that. You’d write about certain policies, like the lunch hour not being long enough. And you hear a lot about what’s going on in school through those policies. The other way, I guess our community learns about it would be through, we do a newsletter that’s month and that comes to everyone in the district. The elementary school does one every week in their Friday folders that they send home. So there’s a lot of communication that goes on through our schools. But people are still very selective in what they hear.

RCH- And what they read and what they—

SEM- And the policy general doesn’t become pertinent until it has something to do with them. That makes sense. I wouldn’t volunteer to read that policy manual... (inaudible). But we had to this last year. It has to be revised every 5 years and last year was the year to do it, so we had to read the whole policy book. Now we are breaking it up into sections and just doing a little bit every year and just doing it on a rolling schedule.
RCH - The language can just about drive you nuts.

SBM - Yeah.

RCH - In thinking about all of these policies that you are aware of, (inaudible), and thinking about the mission you have as a district, do you have any concerns about any of policies, unwritten or written, that you now have existing and its effect on that mission?

SBM - The one policy we talked about earlier with the master contract. I think that's one that's always a hard one that I think teachers kind of feel like it doesn't matter if I work hard or don't work hard, I'm still going to get paid the same as this person on this pay schedule for being here as long as... you know. It's already kind of predetermined what they are going to make salary-wise based on the steps that they go down and the ways that they change.

RCH - And what effect do you think that has on, repercussions, for the district?

SBM - I think that people become maybe a little bit more mediocre than they would normally be. People that would excel if they were able to create their own destiny. In other ways it can be good because they share more. I've heard both sides of the argument. If you are just doing it on your own, you are going to keep all of your resources to yourself until you maybe get to where you want to be and then maybe you'll share them.

RCH - Promotes peer... working with one another. The culture? Does it have any effect on the culture in ways?

SBM - I think in some ways. I know I get frustrated from my perspective when I see teachers that have been there when I had them and I didn't think they were that great then and they are still there and they have maybe lost some of their enthusiasm. And you think, "You know, we can't get rid of that." Even though we get complaints from people all the time, unless they do something really bad, commit a crime...

RCH - Does that, the fact that it exists in your district and there is some frustration, does that trickle down in any other way with any other repercussions?

SBM - I think it does because people in the community don't understand it. That is probably how I got on the board because I was like, "Why can't this run like a business?". You tell them at the beginning of the year, "Here is your objective. Here are your goals. Here's what we are going to work on." And at the end of the year we are going to sit and say, "Did you meet those goals? Where did we do well? Where didn't we do well?". And if they are not performing and they are not meeting those goals, then you start putting them on a plan to either phase them out or they decide to step up to the plate and get going.

RCH - Do you wish you had that process in your evaluation system?

SBM - Oh yeah. I just think it's a logical approach.

RCH - That's the new state process that's coming.

SBM - Uh, huh. It's going to take awhile.

RCH - Yeah, it is, but it should make you smile.
SBM— Uh, huh, it will.

RCH— How about any trickle down effect with the students of this frustration that you are feeling?

SBM— I think they get frustrated too. Especially when a teacher has been in the community as long, they know. Or that’s the teacher that does this. Or, that the teacher that doesn’t give any As. They kind of learn their quirks. So I don’t know that that’s effective teaching either. It’s not that kids are learning what they are supposed to be learning. They are just working the system. Not to say that that’s not a valuable lesson at some point in life, I mean— but not that that’s a good thing but kids learn on those things.

RCH— You’ve mentioned a couple times and talked about it. You have a concern about teacher quality, the district’s ability because of teacher quality to meet its goals and how that effects your mission, which is student achievement. Is that a fair thing to say?

SBM— It’s a fair thing. I think those teachers are very—we don’t have a whole lot of Ineffective teachers, which we are fortunate, but I think you could really get in a rut with some of those policies. We’ve just been lucky, I think, and fortunate. I think some people have seen the writing on the wall and said you know, “I don’t want to be a part of this,” and we are glad to see that too. The board has come up with another informal policy that we want teachers who are above average and if they are not above average we don’t want them teaching our kids.

RCH— That’s interesting. You said you could really get in a rut, but your district hasn’t, though your policy at this point formally in the evaluation process isn’t meeting what you feel the district’s needs should be. However, unwritten policy, with some of the things the board’s doing with school improvement process, you feel is having some powerful effect on teachers staying in the district or not. Their feeling that the winds are changing.

SBM— I think we are setting the tone.

RCH— More powerful than the written policy in regard to teachers staying?

SBM— At times. I think maybe. The climate, yeah. I think people are understanding that we are changing and we are going to move forward and we are going to do good things for kids. And they are either going to be a part of that or they make some decisions on their own to leave.

RCH— So if there is pressure out there to either get with the game or leave, it’s not coming from the written procedures or policy as much as the way you are articulating your mission and moving forward.

SBM— And we really want it to be their decision to say, “You know what, it is time for me to do something different.” Or, I’ve enjoyed this— And we value people who have put in time. Like I said, we have some great ones who have been here 33 years and we’d keep them 33 more if we could too. We have some really, really good ones. I don’t know how they do it.

RCH— Who’s the most vocal about articulating that message to the staff?

SBM— Of?

RCH— Of, you know, this is the train we are getting on, if you are not going to fit, maybe you should be moving on.
SUR- Last year, it was the board that communicated the message because we felt very strongly about that. This year it's (superintendent). She's not afraid to get up there and say those kinds of things, and some people, like the (inaudible), don't like her for it. But it's also very much what the board wants to see.

RCH- (inaudible) . .with the district mission.

SUR- Uh, huh.

RCH- Has the board done a community assessment? Have you involved the community in your school improvement?

SUR- Uh, huh. Yeah, we have community members that do that and then we've got them on... We have all kinds of little committees where people are drawn in and involved. We just started up with PTO and that's going really strong in the elementary.

RCH- Do you have a policy written in regard to community involvement?

SUR- We do. We have some policies in regard to community involvement. I'm not sure. All of us board members, we have to be, we're all on...

RCH- Well there is a State mandate that says you have to have an advisory committee, uh, community involvement.

SUR- Right, and we've got that. And then we have different ones. We have little ad hoc committees for curriculum and we have one for, um... Like when we interviewed the superintendent, we had a group from the community come in, we had a group of teachers, and then we had the school board. Each one of them had criteria of what they were looking for and then added up a score and we all put it together. Then we also had them meet with the community. We had a little wine and cheese for them to meet the candidates. So we involved the community in things like that. But we are all on these committees, so we work with like the parks committee and so we are doing things with the City Council and the Chamber of Commerce. What we've found in this community is everybody's working in a vacuum. The City's off doing their thing. The Chamber's out here. And the Economic Development board and... When we went to do the bond issue, the Chamber wouldn't support us. And so now there's three of us on the Chamber board and...

RCH- Working for better communication and...

SUR- Yeah just trying to get everybody working together instead of against each other.

RCH- So there's a large outreach and that does take a lot of time.

SUR- Uh, huh.

RCH- Let me run by some of these and again thinking about any concerns at all that policies that are written, what you've seen happen to kids, what you've seen happen to teachers, what you've seen in your district. We talked a little bit about school board policies. Think about discipline policies, attendance policies, graduation requirements. We talked about evaluation. Curriculum and instruction you've touched on with CSIP. Staff development for teachers and administrators and keeping up with professional knowledge. Student incentives, teacher incentives. Any of those kinds of things you wish the policies.. You'd like to know a little bit more because you're not sure they are working for kids.
SEM- Well one of the policies I guess right now that we are really working on. I just went to a "Safe Schools" conference, and it was all——.

RCH- Culture?

SEM- Yeah. And just making sure that we are building safe schools. That was one of the things I was looking for in building a new high school that we don't have little alcoves where people can have——. (END OF SIDE A)

(SIDE B)

RCH- (inaudible, cut short)

SEM- In some ways I think that our policies are outdated because there's too much of this stuff that comes up with kids that they've just gotten more creative. Like with drug use and huffing and all these things. They talked about gangs, like all your graffiti, and what it could mean. I'm not sure that our policies totally——.

RCH- In particular in regard to at-risk situations or (inaudible) safety?

SEM- At-risk kids or just even. And being proactive I think. Like trying to understand what the best way——. It was literally just frightening to go to that conference. I mean, I came back so paranoid thinking, "Have we thought of all this stuff?". Because, and you know, a lot of it is just preventative and the more you have in place when a crisis happens, you can react quickly and a little more smoothly than you would had you not had anything planned. Just things like you don't disclose the area where all the kids would be evacuated to because that's where they would put peripheral bombs.

RCH- Policy effect for that?

SEM- Yeah. And it's like, who would have thought of that? I would have thought you would have told everybody, "Hey, meet us at the Methodist church, or whatever, to get your kids." And they say no you don't announce that until the last minute because if the bombers know where that is, that's where they would put it. Just stuff like that. Oh wow, this takes it to a whole new level.

RCH- We don't think like a bomber.

SEM- Right. And hopefully our kids don't either. That's the kind of thing that in a small town you just kinda get thinking, "We're safe.", and we don't always look at those things. But you know, it can happen anywhere. When you think the Post Office stuff with the (inaudible).

RCH- That was your professional development that you got a chance to take part in?

SEM- Right.

RCH- Are there any other teacher's professional development or any at the—— Special education is not on there. That's special needs children——.

SEM- Attendance policies. That one is another interesting one like with at-risk kids with the new alternative schooling. They may not have the same attendance——. Like we have a very strict attendance policy, but yet we're still trained to get kids to graduate. Our CSIP rule # 4 is to make sure all kids graduate. In doing that it's trying to be flexible
potty training because we've been doing it together and it's how we've been doing it.

So there's nothing to be a secret about and let's be more transparent about it. You can read about the steps and how it works. The key is consistency. The more consistent you are, the better off the kids will be. The kids need to be consistent, too. If you're inconsistent, they won't be able to follow through.

In September, one of the kids started potty training because they were looking at it and thinking about it. They started seeing other kids in the neighborhood doing it, and they thought it was cool. They wanted to be like the other kids and do the same thing.

Some things about each work and facilitation...

There are very good facilitators because there are a lot of different ways to do it. You can do it in different ways, and it works. You just have to be consistent and have a plan. The kids need to be involved and be a part of the process. It's important to have a positive attitude and be encouraging.

The kids have been doing it for a while now, and we've been doing it for a long time. We've been consistent, and it's working. We've been seeing progress, and the kids are happy. They're doing a great job.

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were trying to accomplish. I think it is a good idea that we write some of that down and get it a little bit more solidified.

RCB- And you feel that that would give a little bit more power, as far as, keeping, staying with the policy, then, if it were written?

SBM- I think keeping the direction and keeping us focused. I think that's been the... When you just break it down to that simple statement, "How does this impact student learning?", it takes some of the emotion out of it, it takes... I mean, we have meetings that go to 12 o'clock at night. It's just because we have so much to cover, with the bond issue and all that. They would go probably much longer if we didn't comb it, "Okay, how does this impact student learning. Okay what's the best one? Okay fine, let's just go with it and not spend any more time on this."

RCB- How did that come about?

SBM- IASB

RCB- Helped you? Facilitated that conversation? Who came from IASB?

SBM- Usually it's (?

RCB- or... (??)

SBM- They do seminars almost once a month all over and our board has been very good about participating in that. We've gotten (inaudible) going to those.

RCB- It's worked for ya?

SBM- It's been great because they teach you how to be a school board member.

RCB- Well, their "Lighthouse" study has been (inaudible) shown some... Mary is one of the people that I'm going to be interviewing and she's kind of part of this process.

RCB- (garbled, both talking at same time)

SBM- (garbled, both talking at same time)

RCB- You've talked a little about National, State, and Local education policy influencing one another with resources and so forth. In thinking about this policy survey that we are putting together for the Department of Education and our efforts to try to ask the right questions about policy once we've talked to a lot of folks, you included. Who do you feel like in the State we need to be sure to administer this survey to?

SBM- Whoever, I'm guessing, I think she does. She's with... And I believe that she's the one that takes care of it. They have most of the policies on line for your schools and stuff like that. School board policy. And so you can kind of benchmark off of those. We do that. Like if we are in question over a policy, we'll go and, you can't check all of them, but we'll go maybe reference one of theirs to see, "Are we covering the right things? Are we updated? Are we...?". Um, and they do a lot of that. They have lawyers that sit there and do that all day long. So, we use that as a resource.

RCB- What we are wanting to do with this survey is to ask the right questions, first of all, when we develop it, but we want to find out from
districts around the State, statewide, what their policies are and how they are affecting student achievement. So who do you think we need to ask in regard to finding that out?

SBM- I think it would be interesting to talk to someone from like ACT, to find out, because they're kind of the ultimate, "How'd we do?". And I think that would be an interesting test. I also think...

RCH- You need to know that we are not using ACT scores, but we are using ITBS and ITEDs scores as indicators as part of the whole evaluation, especially when we look at the "Success 4" schools and their initiatives versus non-"Success 4" schools and if that's had an impact. Their action plans and the initiative they've done. So we are looking and we do have permission to use ITEDs and ITBS scores.

SBM- Okay.

RCH- Do we need to ask any community members at all about what happening in their districts? Do we need to ask administrators?

SBM- I think it's important to just have a good cross-section among administrators, teachers, even some students. Parents with kids in the system. Parents with kids out of the system.

RCH- Uh. Parents in and out?

SBM- Uh, huh.

RCH- Administrators and teachers you said.

SBM- I think it is always good to get different demographics. Some Hispanic, some Asian, some...

RCH- Mixed demographics? Diversity?

SBM- Uh, huh. I just think that gives you the truest picture of what you are trying to measure.

RCH- And what's your feeling about... Can we... We're trying to decide whether to have a generic survey, and obviously the people that develop surveys all the time will have to really decide this, but do you think it would be really... Your experiences with the jargon and so forth, is it really important to ask administrators in a different way than to ask community member or parents or school board members. Or should they all be asked in the same way?

SBM- It shouldn't make a big difference. I mean, you're sometimes dealing with egos, but technically it shouldn't have any difference on the outcome.

RCH- We don't necessarily have to use jargon with teachers and administrators either.

SBM- Well, I think bottom line you're wanting to know student achievement and is it working and is it effective for kids. And they should be able to answer that in simpler questions.

RCH- Based on their... what experiences and what knowledge they have about what's going on. It should be really fun to hear what people say.

SBM- It will be. Their answer may be much more complex, but I think that the question itself doesn't need to be.
RCH- Just to wrap, a general question again, and to give an opportunity to maybe... Anything you haven’t had a chance to talk about in regard to your experiences. What do you think is the most important thing we need to learn from this survey we are going to develop?

SHN- About policies? Uh, I think truly what is working and what is not working for kids. You know, what kind of we talked about, that there’s a conflict with what the needs of the students are and what we need to be teaching kids, versus, the funding of how we do it. I mean we’re constantly bombarded with mandates from the state and from the government saying, “We need to do this. We need to accommodate these kids.” We need to educate all kids. Which is great, but then the money gets tighter and tighter and tighter. Sometimes I think schools become a dumping ground for society. Okay, you know what, we need to take care of this population. We don’t have an agency to do that anymore, so let’s put them in the schools. And here, we’ll throw you a bone every now and then, but then the money goes away and you’re still sitting back there with those mandates and those policies saying we will take care of those kids even though we don’t have the funding and the ways to do it. So I think that’s something that you just want to beat your head up against the wall.

RCH- And that’s a particular State and Federal policy. Is there any particular local policy?

SHN- Ours is our open enrollment. Well, it’s a State policy, but it affects us differently than almost everybody else in the State. Our open enrollment policy. We have a district just over 1000, 1200 kids. We had kids open enroll out of our district.

RCH- A lot of money.

SHN- Which is a lot. It’s a lot of money that goes out every year. And of the go to And they are predominantly people from ( ), which is one of the three towns in our district. Did you read about this?

RCH- No.

SHN- Okay. There’s ( ), ( ), and ( ).

Back in the 50s they were districted with ( ) and then in the 1990s somewhere, we closed down their school. We being the district and the school board at that time closed down their school and said, “We need to consolidate.” and do all this stuff, whatever. So, they brought them all to ( ) and then right after that they asked to go pass a bond issue because they were getting cramped for space in there. So, they said you lied to us. You told us you were... You couldn’t keep the building open, that there was too much building out there. Now you’re saying you need more building because you can’t accommodate us.

RCH- Hard feelings?

SHN- Right. So there’s still some major bitter feelings. I mean, without that group we would have passed both bond issues, but we failed. But our open enrollment policy doesn’t allow us to say ‘no’, necessarily. Like when they come and say we’d like to open enroll out to Lone Tree, as long as they meet the criteria, we as a board again... (garbled, coughing)

RCH- Before your data that you have to have...
SEM- As long as they have all the criteria, we will approve it. But if they don’t meet any of those criteria. I mean, if there is something that is missing, we will deny it. But, it goes to the State level, gets overturned, and comes back to us and they still get to leave.

RCH- It’s pretty open.

SEM- It is and they don’t have to tell us why they are leaving. Now if they were coming into our district, and we didn’t have enough, you know...

Let’s say there were 3 kids coming into the 5th grade and it just pushes us over the edge as far as class size, we could deny them coming into our district. We cannot deny them going out of our district. So those are our tax dollars here in our community that are going to another school. So when we are asking tax payers here to now raise our tax to build this new school, but oh, by the way, you know...

RCH- We have to allow this population to go...

SEM- Take $4500 times students, but sending it down to ( ). And their not supporting it, but we still want to build this school for the kids that we have.

RCH- Frustrations for everybody.

SEM- It is and it’s (open enrollment) just a policy that our Governor didn’t understand. It’s a policy that our local Congressman didn’t understand until we met with him just recently. So that’s been an effort we’ve been trying to do, is become a little bit more political, which is not something that I never thought I would do. But, it’s been interesting.

RCH- It is interesting. And it’s really a State policy that you’re...

SEM- It’s a State policy, but it affects us so differently because it’s such a large issue for us. Especially when we are trying to pass a bond issue. Here we have this school from — and they’re saying why would we pay for that when we are sending our kids somewhere else, and at the same time we are sending our, everybody’s tax money, over there to educate their kids. Yet, they still retain the right to vote.

RCH- Very frustrating. Especially when you have not passed 2 of them and trying to do what’s right for kids. Again, just coming back to that question, what’s the most important thing we need to learn from the education policy survey. ANYTHING else that you haven’t had a chance to... concerns? What you would like us to learn more about that could be really useful to your district. What’s on the front burner for education issues that you feel will really be important upcoming, that we need to know more about, thinking of the CHIP and that kind of thing.

SEM- Uh, well, it’s pretty much a policy... It’s one of our CSI goals, but we have like a major focus on reading and that’s been kind of a statewide and a nationwide thing. But really make sure that that’s being effective. That kids are reading...and I think they are, I believe that we are seeing a little bit of progress here. When they are doing the silent sustained reading and that they’re doing, spending more time on literacy and incorporating some of their literacy in like their mathematics and making sure that... I think, if nothing else, the awareness of it has been a very good thing because it makes teachers and parents and kids very aware that literacy is not just during reading time. You’re gonna (?) in math, when you go to work. We work with a little boy that has some special needs. I mean, he’s not very high on the rating chart. He’s not weighted very heavily. Just has a few
special needs in reading and he’ll get real frustrated. And so as he
started working with us, with our business, he’s really like, “You have
to be able to know. You have to be able to read the different types of
siding.”. And why would it be important to know your angles and things
like that? “I don’t know.”. Well, roof pitches.

RCB- Really applicable.

SBM- Oh, because he said he wanted to be in construction. Well, being
in construction doesn’t mean that you can just walk out of school. It
means that you still need to know these kinds of things and you need to
be able to communicate with your customers.

RCB- That was great for him.

SBM- Ya well, ...(inaudible) he’s just adorable.

RCB- One more question. Are there any kids getting hurt in your
district?

SBM- Getting hurt in your district?

RCB- In any way.

SBM- Well, not physically. Well, yes.


SBM- In a couple ways, yes. I think every time a bond doesn’t pass, our
community is telling them that we don’t care about them. That we don’t
think they are good enough to have a good school. I think that’s a clear
message that gets sent to them, which I find very frustrating. I think
kids come first. I that there are safety issues in that school, that we
are putting kids at risk. I mean, everything meets code. We’re safe in
those types of areas, but... I went to school there and my kids will
still go there if it’s still there. I just think that having a three
story building with no fire escape on it and I mean we still have two
egressed ways of exiting the building, but it’s just not the best
environment for kids. I just think that’s a complete disservice. As far
as, what was the other one...?

getting hurt in any way? Is anything hindering them from succeeding in
your district?

SBM- It think sometimes there are programs for the upper-levels kids.
We have like TAG and ways to stimulate kids that are really doing well.
Then we’ve got kids to the lower end, like Reading Recovery to get them
going and things. I think sometime the middle kids, the average kids,
get lost in the mix. They are not either really stellar or struggling,
they don’t get anything extra or maybe they are not developing in one
area but they get overlooked because they are pretty much average.

RCB- Kind of get lost in the shuffle.

SBM- I would say that would be our biggest area.

RCB- I need to tell you that you mentioned students, but because of the
crack down on administering surveys to students, we will not be surveying
students.

SBM- Sure. That makes sense.
RCH- But, I'm excited about what you said with diversity in community and lots of different populations. That seems to be what everybody thinks needs to be done, as opposed to, just asking educators and that kind of thing. You have been very generous with your time. We talked about how precious your time is. I want to thank you very much.
RCH: My first question is very general, and it's taken me in many different questions, so whatever you come up with is great. What do you feel educators should know more about, that we don't know, in regard to local school policy?

SPT: Well, I guess I would have to say that, I'm not going to answer it in the direction that you might think. What we actually did a few years ago was write some policies in our handbooks at that point, and then what I think goes hand in hand with that is training on how to do those policies and what works well for us. And I'm not sure if you're familiar with it or not, but we've inserviced all of our staff on APL, which is a group that comes out of New York, and APL just simply stands for the first initial of their last name. But that went hand in hand with what we looked at with success 4, what was acceptable behavior and what was not acceptable behavior, and so we spent a lot of time, I don't recall exactly when it was, probably about 4 years ago, laying those policies out, and then getting them into the handbook at the conclusion of the year. And now what we do each year and the elementary, middle school and high school staff sit down with the administrators and we basically go through those policies that deal with behavior issues. Some of the difficulty that we still have is that we don't have uniformity from all staff members on the policies. For example, we had a couple new staff members that came on board a year ago and we had a policy as far as 'top lip touching bottom lip', in other words their quiet in the hallways as they pass from a classroom to a special activity such as PE, lunch or that sort of thing, so tape flip. Some of our staff has become somewhat lax on the enforcement of it. And I think that's probably an unwritten policy that needs to take place. Everyone needs to follow through on the expectations.

RCH: So, I heard you say several things, correct me if I'm wrong, but you were concerned, first of all what staff development works in writing policy that's effective. And then you were concerned about the follow up every three years and re-examining the policy and what process works there. And then you see some inconsistency in implementation. And so, do you feel you need to go beyond the policy that's written right now?

SPT: I don't think we have to go beyond the policy right now. I think where we have a little break down is the fact that somebody has to take the responsibility, and I would think the building principal would be the person to take that responsibility of making sure that the actual expectations are being followed.

RCH: Who has the most effect on the implementation of policy and yeah, how do you make that happen?

SPT: Then that's the difficulty and that's the difficulty that I have also, because I don't want to overstep my bounds, but these are things that bother me, because if it breaks down one spot it's going to continue to break down as we move along.

RCH: And then if there is that inconsistency, how much concern do you have about how, when that kind of thing happens, how that might affect student achievement?
SPT- Uh, those things probably not directly affecting student achievement per se, although school climate, in a sense, it's tough to measure that, but if school climate breaks down, it does have an effect on student achievement...uh

RCH- Do you think we know at this point the policies that affect culture and climate, how it affects...?

SPT- I don't think we have enough research out there to actually put a number to it and say, "This is not happening, or because this is happening it's a direct link to student achievement."

RCH- Let alone the policies that might support the things that are happening.

SPT- Right. Yeah. Probably indirectly, my belief system would be, especially in the classroom setting, that if you have an orderly classroom, and you're following the expectations, there's no doubt in my mind that there's going to be more learning that takes place. But how to actually measure that, it's very difficult to establish your control group and your non-control group.

RCH- Do you have any concerns that either support, or don't support that happening?

SPT- Uh, I think we've got the policies in place that support everything. I guess my main concern would be everybody taking their role and not just turning over to an administrator or that teacher in the classroom, especially when we get into, for example, basketball games, our expectation is that the students remain in their seat and pass between quarters. That doesn't always happen and it becomes up to the administrator to enforce that rather than everyone buying into that, including parents. We probably haven't done the best job of educating parents. We did a good job initially when we really focused on it. And then we haven't spent the time re-doing that although we do send a letter out at the elementary level, every year, acquainting parents with that, that they sign, so they do know it's there.

RCH- Do you have a school, family, community partnership policy at all?

SPT- No. We do not have nothing written, per se.

RCH- Do you think that would make a difference, or do you not know?

SPT- Well, the problem, we hear so much from the state as far as developing this community partnership, but what I've found in this district is that a lot of our patrons feel very good about our school and believe very strongly in the school and the people that are connected with the school...

RCH- Pretty supportive?

SPT- They'll support us. But they really feel that we're going to let you do your job and we don't need to be involved in that kind of stuff.

RCH- Well, you do have, it's my understanding from talking to ( ), that you do have a really diverse representation on your school improvement team?

SPT- Yeah, we've worked at that.
BCH - Does that come about because of any policies that you're aware of, or superintendent leadership?

SPT - Probably... my leadership on that, not a policy per se. Because basically what I did two years ago was I examined that list and then came up with some student representatives...

BCH - First one I've had by the way, where there's student representation?

SPT - Excuse me?

BCH - First one of the districts we're reviewing.

SPT - Oh, really. Yeah. And we've had some student representation in the past, but they haven't always been real active. This year we always have students at our meetings, and not only were they at those meetings, but they spoke out at those meetings also.

BCH - Now is that in any regard affected by written or unwritten policy about how those meetings operate? Has anything changed with the culture of those meetings that would precipitate that?

SPT - Uh... I don't really think so. Although I think our Success 4, we've really pushed hard to get students involved and so some of that maybe a transfer over just about how students are feeling in general.

BCH - Feeling more comfortable.

SPT - And I suppose part of it could be, I've been around here a long, long time. All of the kids know me because I was their elementary principal and now their in high school. And so there may be enough comfort with leadership that they know they can be listened to.

BCH - They know, based on the relationship, they know how you're going to respond to them.

SPT - Yeah. Right. We've promoted, or at least tried to promote, "We're going to listen to you, we're going to be fair. You won't necessarily have what you want when it's all said and done." But we've at least promoted, or at least I've tried to promote an aspect of fairness.

BCH - That leads me to when you were chosen as a superintendent for this district, and then you looked at your job description, and then you looked at whatever policies revolved around your school board, and so forth. Did you get it in the hiring process? Is there anything written to say that the skills you brought into this district is what they're looking for in this mission?

SPT - Uh... well, partially it's written. In the job description for the superintendent there is a very, I think there's 27-28 statements in there as far as that's concerned. I think there is a lot of unwritten expectations.

BCH - And how did you become aware of that? You'd been here for a few years.

SPT - Well, probably one of the things that serves me well, perhaps, is that I can relate to a lot of the people on the board. Farmers I also farm. So I understand where they're coming from and what they consider important. Finances how they look at finances and that sort of thing.

BCH - But I also hear you stressing not only those kinds of needs for
your board members, but like needs for your staff and student body, a
listening culture that's respectful, those kinds of things. Am I reading
too much into what you're trying to precipitate, or would you say that
was true? To precipitate a culture that's real open?

SPT- I think that would be expectations as far as the board is
concerned. That's my make-up.

RCH- Did you get that from your job description?

SPT- No. Not from my job description, per se. I think there's items
that allude to it as any job description, there's a lot of interpretation
there.

RCH- So, you think that it was a real advantage for you, you knew what
the position looked like, and what the expectation, I'm getting at
written policy, or the necessity of written policy as far as choosing
leadership for a district. There's been lots of problems. Expectations
for superintendent and then you get that person in and I understand that
that presents a lot of problems. I think that would have been quite
different for someone brand new to the district coming in?

SPT- It could be. When I interviewed for that position, I guess I'm a
very forthright individual, I mean, basically I said to them, "You know
how I operate. I'm not going to change. That's my mode of operation.
If it fits, we'll make it work. And if it doesn't, and I'm open to
change as well, but there are some things that I won't compromise on."
They knew what they were getting. I knew where they were coming from.
Also, interesting enough, I was just reading the paper, ten years ago the
sharing arrangement that we had that I was assistant superintendent was
abolished at that point because our present superintendent took a job at
Storm Lake. The natural thing to have happened was for me to walk into
the superintendent's seat. We had a business manager, who very much was
a control person. The restructuring took place that morning, I was out
of town. I was contacted, by that evening, they already had a
superintendent in place from a neighboring district. That's how fast
that moved. Because she felt that her and I would not work well
together. That relationship lasted for two years. At that stage,
another opening came up again. At that stage, one of the board members
asked me to apply, but I was very certain that I wouldn't have a 7-0
vote, so I said "No, not unless everyone wants me." I wasn't going to
take the risk at that point. Then we had another superintendent for two
years, and that's when the building process took place, be it right or be
it wrong.

RCH- You had a bond issue

SPT- We had a bond issue, actually we had had several bond issues prior
to that, and the recommendation of the administrators prior to that was
that it all ought to be at one location from an educational standpoint,
that failed miserably. I think the board was ready to not consider a new
bond issue. And at that point, our new superintendent came on board and
he promised both communities some things and the bond issue was passed on
the second try then. That whole process kind of degenerated also. He
left after two years, was basically asked to leave. And again at that
point, I chose not to enter the realm. We had a superintendent who did a
good job, but then we had a lot of financial problems come down and we
had to cut an administrator and so he saw the opportunity to move on for
himself and saw some needs that the district had and so then the position
became open. I still have one board, that one board member that's been
on there over the years, that's caused some conflict over the years, but
otherwise, as I looked at the last minutes, all of our motions were very
successful. The board is working very well. I feel very comfortable with the board at this point. I have a great deal of confidence; at least that’s my perception.

RCH: When you entered into this, what’s the biggest kind of change that you had to make?

SPT: Uh...

RCH: If any.

SPT: Uh, probably, I’m not a very public oriented person, I’m more of a private person. So, probably the biggest change for me was just to be a little more visible as far as the public was concerned. Discuss things. Be aware of what seems so obvious to me, isn’t obvious to the public. I still struggle with that on some of these issues. It just seems that it’s so obvious, and it’s not.

RCH: How about the school improvement process, have you initiated any change in how that’s playing out?

SPT: Yeah. I would say that where I’m going with that is a much closer tie in with the comprehensive school improvement plan, and the goals, and that sort of thing.

RCH: And that’s the success 4 model, or what you call the school improvement model?

SPT: Well, uh...I don’t know what you call the success 4 model, the success 4, as I look at it, pulls all the climate together. The changes that we’ve made as far as school improvement, I would look at curricular areas. For example, we have really focused back on curricular groups within our curricular committees. So, I have a science committee, the math committee and the reading committee present to the advisory program committee and then provide them with suggested goals. And then the school improvement committee makes recommendations about specific goals at that point and then bring it up to the boards. We’ve probably, in my opinion, put a little more meat into it. Instead of a process of step, step, step we’ve really had them...

RCH: Alignment with the goals?

SPT: That would be perhaps, the major change.

RCH: What would you say as the most effective way for students, parents in the community, to become aware of local school policy?

SPT: Newsletter articles are one of the ways. We do hand every parent a handbook and stress portions of the handbook. As far as really getting them involved, their not, perhaps faculty at the elementary and at all levels, if they have problems, we really encourage the staff to have the support in the handbook ready to show the parents so that we’ve covered the bases.

RCH: That’s an unwritten cultural kind of expectation. What I’m hearing you say is that you’d like that to be a little more effective?

SPT: Yeah. I guess, and probably I’m a bit of a perfectionist.

RCH: You never fit the old math teacher stereotype, do you? (laughing)

SPT: I believe people should be accountable and other things that we do,
parents ought to be involved.

RCH- Involved.

SPT- Parents ought to be involved and knowing what's there. On the other hand, I am also a realist in the fact that, even though it's near and dear to me, parents have a lot of other things going on.

RCH- Let me ask you, would you say that there’s any initiatives going on to encourage disenfranchised parents? To do that in a way that feels safer for them, than possibly it was for us as parents?

SPT- Probably not for all parents. A couple years ago, we had a special education teacher who spent some time inviting parents in for an evening. They had their children out in the commons area and she did some things.

RCH- Was that elementary level?

SPT- Yeah, that was elementary level. The other area that we do a fair amount of that in would be the title programs where their advisory, they invite parents in to be acquainted with the classroom, what they're doing in the classroom both curriculum wise and expectation wise. And even, I guess as I look at the elementary, they do a good job of inviting parents in from time to time as far as special programs, plays, and stuff they put on. And indirectly, I think they're doing some education of expectations. I certainly think they do a good job of that as far as modeling expectations from the children and the behavior.

RCH- Do you think we really know, most all of us would say, "Oh, yeah. It's so important for parents to take on that responsibility." Do you think we know enough about if a policy were written in regard from encouraging a lot more participation from the community and parents in particular, would it make a difference?

SPT- The written policy wouldn't. I think what would make the difference would be teachers, administrators, and so forth going out of their way to make that contact.

RCH- Taking that initiative. Kathy mentioned to me, and I think it's OK for me to mention that you have on the computer a way to communicate in regard to the percentages and so forth the student has. What percentage of your community would you say wouldn't have access to the Internet in their home.

SPT- My guess would be 30-40%. The advantage that we have here is that not only do you have to have a computer on Internet to do it, but you can also do it by phone.

RCH- That's what ( ) mentioned.

SPT- In actually, 98.

RCH- Was that done because of that?

SPT- Yeah, that was part of the design of it. I would say that 98-99% of our patrons can correspond with the school in some form or another.

RCH- And why would the 2% you think maybe not.

SPT- There's a couple homes that maybe do not have phones.
RCB: When you think about local school policies, are there any school policies, and I'll list a few just to get a spark, are there any policies that you think might be at this point, it's an "all kids will succeed" mandate now at the federal level and many of our mission statements may, do you have any policies that are hurting kids, not just academically, but emotionally, physically, might be a minority of kids, but?

SPT: I can't think of anything...

RCB: Well, what I do is just throw out some. Discipline, attendance, graduation requirements, teacher evaluation, teacher staff development, special education, how it's happening in the classrooms for students, those kinds of things.

SPT: I guess I would have to say that both of our principals believe so strongly in going the extra mile with these kids. Our dropout rate is, we only had one this past year, and especially at the high school level. I'm not sure if you're familiar with the transitional alliance in special ed program, has really assisted us, because what we've done with some of the students who really aren't interested in school, we've given them some real life applications. We have an apartment downtown that we take them and they cook. And that's really helped us, we have an agreement with BCIS and and? for an alternative high school and so that's helping another segment of our students. There's just a lot of opportunities.

We have a program with seniors as far as working in the community and getting some skills there, so the thing that we're finding...

RCB: I understand that you have some AP classes as well.

SPT: Not advanced placement, per se. What we do is contract, well, we don't contract, or we do I guess, with college credits. So there are college credits as well. What we're finding is our kids don't want to leave the school. We had nobody sign up this year; we had one student do it last year. In the past that wasn't true. We used to have a lot of students that would sign up post-secondary.

RCB: But you must offer calculus, and some advanced courses.

SPT: Yeah, we do offer...

RCB: Some science and math.

SPT: We do offer psychology as a college course. We do have the fourth year math, the advanced math, pre-calculus as a college course. I'll be teaching the calculus course next year, that's a college level course.

RCB: Sounds like you're, well, I hear you saying that the leadership has been significant for ensuring inequity for all kids.

SPT: Yeah, I would say that sometimes they go further than what I think they would have to. An example, we had a student that basically, because of behavior, the high school principal told him that the only way he could remain in school was to go to the alternative high school, it was just basically prescribed. OK, so the student started out there and then he kind of somewhat dropped out. In the meantime, he lost his license, because we don't provide transportation. Prom came along, and I think that was a driving force, he wanted to go to prom. "Are you enrolled in the alternative school?" "No because I can't get there because I don't have my license." We have an obligation to furnish him transportation. The fact that he does not have a license now, prevents him. It's those kinds of things...
The system, well, he created the situation, but the system created it as well.

Right. And adjusted to it. I guess we just felt that we had an obligation there that needed to be followed through on it. The board supported it. The board is very good about making sure that students have their needs filled.

Is there a policy written that supports that?

No. It's not a policy per se. It's just one of the perceived sorts or things.

Unwritten. And how is that culture been precipitated in this district?

Well, I've always known this community as having a high concern about what their children do, where their children go. They place a high value on education. When I moved here 28 years ago, that feeling was prevalent. And actually, I've seen it before. Because I taught in South west Iowa and we lived on the Minnesota border and we drove through Holstein. And I said, "Wouldn't it be nice if we could settle in that community."

It was apparent just driving through.

Just as a parent driving through. You could just see the neatness, the cleanliness and so forth.

So, pride in the community.

Yeah. And then, after we were actually in the community, these parents had expectations for their children. They just expected that their children were going to go on to higher education, that they were going to go out and do something with their lives. That was somewhat foreign to me growing up and it was also somewhat foreign in ( ) Iowa, where I taught at, the expectation was at 18-19, you get married, raise a family, and live here forever type of thing.

So, the generational traditions in the community have had an impact.

Very much so.

Whatever policies you have written, how they get played out.

Right. The community is not afraid to support the school. The school is the center point as far as the community is concerned. There's a lot of respect for education in this community.

I'm sure you did your homework, but when you came and you moved 28 years ago, it's nice that what you saw when you drove through was reflected in what you found.

I guess at that point, we were just looking for a place closer to home at that point. And when we had family, all of a sudden those things became important, because we wanted our family to have those same things. There wasn't any looking around, in my mind, for a different position at that point. We felt very good about.

Have you, I know the answer to this, because I've looked at your indicators. You don't have a high SEL; second language population and
you're pretty low minority. I don't remember your SES, but you're pretty agriculture?

SFT- Yeah.

RCH- The people getting poor is the school district, right?

SFT- Oh, you have a number of factory workers. We have BT industry, Cherokee has some industry as well. Our agriculture is actually diminishing at this point.

RCH- That's been real important for your community to get the factories in.

SFT- But the interesting thing is that I haven't seen the value system change over.

RCH- And it has in some communities. is one, but they have a very high minority population.

SFT- It's interesting. We had some minorities at school this year. The teachers adjusted to them. They met their needs. They met the parents needs.

RCH- Accepting.

SFT- Not just accepting, but helping. I guess I just feel very strongly on our staff that they'd go the extra mile.

RCH- And it sounds like your principals would expect that.

SFT- Yeah. That would be an expectation. I would say.

RCH- What thoughts, concerns, questions do you have concerning what's more powerful, written policy or unwritten policy?

SFT- I think it takes a combination of the two. The written policy is there to help you with the unwritten policy. You can always look back and use the written policy as a backbone. A lot of the things that we have unwritten is alluded to by the written policy. I think you have to have the written policy there, just as general guiding principals. My concern is, with the unwritten, everything changes with the administration and so forth.

RCH- I was just going to say, comparing yourself to the examples of leadership change in the last six years, prior to when you came, my assumption based on what you said, you have a real advantage, as we said earlier, interpreting unwritten policy in a way that it supports the culture. Whereas the other superintendents might not have and it would have gotten themselves in trouble because of the expectations.

SFT- Yeah. I would have to. I have a good pulse on the community and what they like and what they don't like, what their expectations are. And what I've found with a lot of superintendents over the years, boards of education and even community can be very naive to think that an individual comes in, has all the answers and so forth, about a year later the money runs over and things start falling apart.

RCH- Forget to listen, but you had had 20 years or 26 years to listen. I could see that having an impact working with people. And trust, too. That you had already established. What questions do you have, now this opens a real can of worms, about local, national, and state policies
Influence on one another? No feelings on that one huh? (Laughing)

SFT- (Laughing) Uh, perhaps the major concern that I have, I don't know whether it's the area or not. I'm really concerned about the accountability, the testing. It's...

RCH- In Iowa or state?

SFT- It's filtered down. It came all the way from federal government. And my major concern is supposedly, Iowa has been a leader, and now all of a sudden Texas has all the answers and that sort of thing. And we have to follow that model. And what I've been hearing, we had a consultant that's a hometown girl, that's in Texas that's come up in the past two years, and basically what we're hearing from her is a lot of teaching to the test. And a lot of patrons in the community that talk about their children and they've been in Texas and the focus is on the test. We just hired a Spanish teacher this year that's been a teacher in Texas for a number of years; she was very open about it. And when we described our education and where we're going with that, just like this interview, we explore areas instead of being so focused on just knowledge sorts of things. That's a real concern of mine that we're going to lose that. Because to me, there's a lot more to education than just what you know. To me, education is teaching people how to think, how to question, how to examine, and how to interact with others and so forth.

RCH- So your concern is the focus on assessment and where that's going to lead us. If that's going to lead us to a one test serves all answers. Kind of like, we know ACT and SAT don't tell us everything.

SFT- And then, I take it down to the state level, in the fact that I do handle a progress report each year. We've been encouraged to establish high goals, and then when we don't meet those goals we have to come in and explain why and how we're going to do things differently. And that makes me extremely nervous, to the point where now, we're writing goals to make sure that we can meet it, we're just manipulating words around rather than having anything meaningful come out of it.

RCH- What's the incentive there? What's the outcome of the way the state is handling that and forcing you to...you're not comfortable with it but you don't want to jeopardize where the district is at.

SFT- We're a top school, but we don't meet some of our goals. We will meet them in the future, because we've fixed it in the wording that we can meet it, but that's playing games.

RCH- Interestingly, are you concerned, it's a catch 22 for you, because you've been doing so well, but now you see yourself and the district having to adjust goals to be sure that you meet them. What kind of an impact do you think that will have on the districts striving to meet a higher goal?

SFT- I think the district will continue to do the best we can.

RCH- forge ahead?

SFT- Yeah. I don't have any concerns in that area. But as far as meeting state requirements and so forth, they're not going to put the effort into it. I think the district will go ahead with it's own belief about what's best as far as education is concerned. We'll deal with the expectations that come from the state, we'll take them seriously, but we do laugh sometimes at some of the comments that we get back and some of the things that are somewhat meaningless.
RCB: Heard it many times, that same, even before the goals were written, before CSIP came out, people were saying, "This is what it’s going to cause us to do in regards to our goals." In relation to that conversation, you have your monthly newsletter, and you’ve always had to put out your annual progress report. And when it goes to the community, and you had your goals that was quite high and you might not have met them vs. when you had your goals a little lower but you met them, does the community have the sophistication and the knowledge to know that difference?

SPT: Basically, no. I put the report out two years in a row. Forty page report that’s patterned after the ISAB with the figures and so forth. And, the community doesn’t spend a lot of time reading that.

RCM: Pretty technical.

SPT: Even our newsletters don’t get read the way I would like them to get read.

RCM: Do you think the school board does a nice job of getting the message out there about those kinds of issues if you’ve had to clarify?

SPT: Yeah. I would say we’ve got school board members who talk about these sort of things. Perhaps the other thing I should mention on part of the school board, I don’t know how familiar you are with the Iowa Association of School Board. Table meetings and so forth, we have a high percentage of school board members that participate.

RCM: That participate and go.

SPT: Yeah and so as a result of those kinds of things, they’re aware of what’s going on and they’re not afraid to share with the community.

RCM: You must treasure that?

SPT: Yeah.

RCM: Just to end with a couple of questions. We’re taking the information we get from some 22 interviews and looking for themes, looking to see if we get saturation on these themes and developing a survey hopefully to give us some input on, OK, what local school policy does have an effect on student achievement. Who do we need to make sure that we administer this survey to to make sure that we get the answers that we need to get?

SPT: Staff, certainly has a big role in that. I would have to go to the top of the ladder. The staff, administration, and school board. And then I think there has to be a slight group out of the community, whether it be a school improvement committee or success 4 or a combination of those two.

RCM: Those are two different committees?

SPT: Mm hm. And again, as I look at Success 4, when I took over two years ago, I kind of shied these kind of things. I did the leadership as far as the agendas, etc. I’ve since of moved out of that realm. ( ), who you are going to talk to, is very much sold on success 4, and has been in it from ground zero. I’ll be honest with you, I wasn’t in it from ground zero. Two superintendents ago, he took a number of people, including a number of administrators at that time to (Peter Holly?) I didn’t want anything to do with it. I’m a traditional sort of a person.
You have to prove something is going to work before I'll use it. Because I've seen too many fads come and go and we've gone in too many circles. Jane has been in all the way, and she's very much sold and a believer. I've turned that completely over to her and she's done a marvelous job as far as leading is concerned.

RCH- So when you took it over, it was because that was traditionally who had done it?

SPT- Well, yeah. I'd say it was probably the superintendent before me who spent a lot of time on it. He had a different focus than me. He looked more at it from an inserviceing teachers, we followed a manual and tried to build skills up from a teaching standpoint. I looked at it more from a school climate standpoint. I had a different focus.

RCH- For the success #?

SPT- Yeah.

RCH- How would you describe your style of leadership?

SPT- Direct. I hope not too much authoritative anymore, although I can be that way. I like to see things get done. I like to see things get done well.

RCH- You have that expectation, but it does not seem, correct me if I'm wrong, it does not seem like you're you let go of control.

SPT- No, I don't like to let go of control.

RCH- I said that wrong. You do let go of control.

SPT- To a degree. I continually watch these things and I'm slowly learning that others can do the job well, if not better than I can.

RCH- Do you facilitate the school improvement team or?

SPT- To a degree. There again, I also, the first year, I pretty much facilitated the whole thing. This year, Gretchen, I'm not sure if she's one you're talking to today, I don't think she is. But she's a parent that's been very actively involved in the community. I asked her if she would feel comfortable leading that. So she facilitates that now. I have my report; the other one has their report. So we sit down, I said "I'll help you, as far as putting together an agenda, but I really don't want it to be me. I want it to be you people."

RCH- Well, I think you've had a bad rap. Because probably as a math teacher you always felt like you had...but it seems to me, as many administrators as I talked to, and it only took you a year to give it up to a committee, I'd say you're doing a wonderful job of control. You easily gave that up. And that's complimenting you. What do you feel, this is back to the original question, just in case you haven't had a chance to share something. What do you feel is the most important thing that we need to learn from the education policy survey that will be administered? If you had to pick one thing that could be learned.

SPT- Can it be applied to the situation? Is it going to be something that's usable? I guess I don't want it to be something that takes place that we don't have an application for, that we can't use it.

RCH- So in other words, what we learn can hopefully be applied to, specifically, is there an area that you think we could really benefit
RCB- Heard it many times, that same, even before the goals were written, before CSIP came out, people were saying, "This is what it's going to cause us to do in regards to our goals." In relation to that conversation, you have your monthly newsletter, and you've always had to put out your annual progress report. And when it goes to the community, and you had your goals that was quite high and you might not have met them vs. when you had your goals a little lower but you met them, does the community have the sophistication and the knowledge to know that difference?

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SFT- I really don’t know. I don’t have a way of judging the schools around. I really feel that we’re told that, but I don’t really have any way of telling that. We have excellent discipline, excellent interaction. I just don’t have much as far as fights, problems, that sort of thing. I hope hearing that other schools do. To me that’s part of the school climate. If you have a safe and orderly environment where people respect each other, and I really feel that our students for the most part do respect each other, respect the teachers, they don’t always show that. But underneath there’s that element of respect.

RCH- Would it be helpful to know if there is a policy that’s written that has made a significant difference in getting to that kind of culture in some districts, even though you already feel you’re there?

SFT- I think probably to me, the policies that we have in those handbooks are the beginning, even though I still don’t think we’ve accomplished that to the level. I still think we have room to grow.

RCH- You mean student handbook?

SFT- Student handbook. There’s an elementary section that basically spells out the behavior in the playground, spells out the behavior in the classroom and so forth. The same thing at the middle school. The same thing at the high school. The elementary was very quick to take off on this. The middle school came along fairly quickly. The high school has really just come aboard the last two years. Two years ago they sat down and then this year, they’re really evaluating that. The staff is kind of bought into it at that point. It’s been harder to get the high school staff to buy into it. Part of it is just the nature of the high school staff. They’re much more independent, don’t have to work together as closely.

RCH- Do you feel at a k-12 level you’re getting more aligned with what your mission is?

SFT- Very much so. I really feel good. We just redid our handbooks again. Each of the areas, elementary, middle and high school had representation of their ideas in the handbook. It’s part of their ideas. It’s not coming top down. It’s coming from them.

RCH- It’s not just the high school’s handbook, it’s comprehensive all levels.

SFT- Yes. What we have is a general handbook that’s separated elementary, middle and high school. And as my daughter always tells me, you have to have the stakeholders involved, and possibly the only way we could go further on that is to have some student and parent representation in that.

RCH- I would say you and your daughter could be an excellent resource for one another.

SFT- (laughing) Well...you would be shocked. Two years ago the CSIP was dumped in my lap in the summer when I became the new superintendent, had to be cut by the 15th of September. She spent the weekend supposedly vacationing, we spent the weekend here, writing that. She helped me write the plan.

RCH- But marvelous that you had that kind of help.
SPI: We appreciate the assistance that she's provided. We've always had strong beliefs about...End of tape
Parent

RCH- Researcher
CH- Parent

RCH- So, as a parent and as a community member, and your kids are what age?

CH- , so we have three in school.

RCH- You're pretty busy.

CH- Yeah, I'm pretty busy.

RCH- I should ask, where's the two year old?

CH- There's no two-year old coming. The four is the end of the line.

RCH- Every two years. Boy, you were...I start with a really general question, and that is, what do you feel like your experiences, concerns, with the district you attended as well as the district your children attend. Are you an alumni of this district?

CH- No, no I'm not from this area.

RCH- So thinking about policy experience, what do you think educators need to know more about in regard to local school policy. Have you had certain concerns about certain school policies?

CH- Well, I think the school sometimes tries these certain trends, whether at the high school or the elementary, and I think the parents and the people in the district need to know when they're going to try these new things and also if they quit it, when they're going to quit it. To know what the evaluation was. Was it successful or not? Were they just quitting it because they ran out of money or what? Or it wasn't successful.

RCH- So what I hear you saying is some concern that the school district isn't communicating enough.

CH- Yeah, sometimes I think there needs to be a little more communication. I mean, I realize there is a lot to communicate. There's so much going on.

RCH- Would you like to see parents and community members have more input into programs and the way things are done before a decision is made?

CH- I think so. Yeah.

RCH- What's your feelings in regard just connected to what you're saying in regard to school board's input and their representation of community?

CH- I think that they're really trying, the ones we have. I feel free to call any of them, tell any of them what my opinions are. Whenever I talk to them, or one of them comes into my husband's office, he often asks my husband about different issues. So, I think they're really trying, but you can't know everything.

RCH- They're still within reach, but you wish there was more.

CH- Mm hmm.
RCM- Any other concerns when you think of local school policy and their affect on kids.

CM- Um... I can't really think of anything right now. Just that they get quality teachers in. I don't know how they interview them or how they hire them or whatever. They're getting a diverse group, I guess.

RCM- Would you like to know a little more about that process?

CM- Yeah, a little bit. I think that would be interesting.

RCM- Have you had concerns about some hiring or firing, or not firing?

CM- Well, one thing, and this is probably not something they can do anything about. Is get more teachers that live in the district. They can't say that in the interview. But I think that would be more helpful if the teachers were actually a part of the community life. That's not something, I don't think they can do anything about.

RCM- How do you think that would help?

CM- I think that they understand the lives of the parents and the children more when they're living in the community.

RCM- Easier to address individual needs.

CM- Yeah.

RCM- In what ways do you find out about school policy as a parent and community member?

CM- Read the school board minutes. And like I said, my husband, he's a veterinarian and he talks to a lot of people through his work and when he goes out on calls, he often talks to people about different school issues. He has more. And then I volunteer at the school, and since I used to teach, I know a lot of the teachers. And so I'll ask them, not to pry, but just to know about different issues. I'll say, "Oh, what's going on with this?" We really like to try to be involved.

RCM- So a lot of the way you find out about school policy is from your own initiative?

CM- Yes.

RCM- Not necessarily by what the school generates?

CM- Right. They do send out a school newsletter once a month, and that's been very good.

RCM- Are there other initiatives that you see the school working on to develop partnerships with the community, or?

CM- Well, they're trying to have "Latino Voices" where they're trying to get the Hispanics involved, and I think that's very good. Try to get their input. They have a meeting with the Hispanic parents so I think that's great.

RCM- They're involved with the diversity?

CM- Mm hmm. Mm hmm.

RCM- Is there any population that you feel like is not getting enough information about the school district and it can affect the school
district's ability to do?

CM- I don't think so. I think the school district is trying it's best as they can. I think the parents have to take the responsibility themselves. Reading the school newspaper, and so I think it's a lot of the parents.

RCH- Community folks can find out if they...

CM- If they're trying really hard to get it.

RCH- If you think about some of these, this is just a minute list, but they come to mind when you think of policies. Look through that list, and when I ask the question, do you think there are any policies the district presently has, or has had in the past that are hurting, intellectually, physically, socially emotionally, any kids?

CM- um...I don't think so. Student incentives are maybe a little bit overdone maybe at times. Sometimes kids think that everything is going to have a reward. And sometimes you have to do things just for the sake of doing things. I think that's overdone, somewhat.

RCH- Rewards and stickers, and that kind of thing.

CM- Mm hmm. Mm hmm. There doesn't have to be a reward for everything you do. Sometimes personal satisfaction, especially when you grow up. Some of that is OK. But that's one concern I have.

RCH- Any of the other areas? Special education needs being met?

CM- I think they're really trying to do a good job with that, in my experience. Graduation requirements, I'm not real familiar with. I hope they're doing enough to get kids into higher level colleges and stuff.

RCH- At this point in your life, you're not sure.

CM- Right. (Laughing) I'm not paying any attention to that too much.

RCH- How about evaluation of teachers? Are you comfortable with that?

CM- I think they're trying to stay on top of that and evaluate what they're doing.

RCH- How about other parent. Are you aware of the school districts school improvement initiatives and their writing of standards and benchmarks and how aligned curriculum is with...

CM- I knew they were working on it, but I don't know what they end result was, or how far along they were on that.

RCH- So you haven't seen, for your children's grades, the standards and benchmarks for each of those classes.

CM- No. No we haven't. And I know one thing on the teacher evaluation they do on, is choose the teachers. Which I think is great. Then you can choose, you can put your input on which teacher you think would be great for your children.

RCH- Input their personality. Would that be difficult for some folks to answer?

L - I think so. And not everybody has to do it. But I'm glad they give
us the option to do that. Because it really does make you think about who is a good teacher. We've done that every year.

RCH- Does that input that the district gets on who you want have any impact on teacher evaluations?

CM- I don't know. I don't know if it is or not. You have to have firm reasons. You can't just say, "I like them so I want them as my child's teacher." I mean, so I'm not sure on that.

RCH- So it's only taking into regard if you have a definite reason.

CM- Right. Right.

RCH- The ways children are disciplined, attendance issues. Do you agree with the policies?

CM- I think they're really trying to get attendance. A lot of these families, their children aren't attending and I think they're really trying to work with that. So I think that's great.

RCH- How do you see them doing that?

CM- I think if the kids miss, they're really trying to contact the parents. Through newsletters and personal contact, they're really trying to emphasize that attendance is extremely important part of success.

RCH- Now, the district has a mission statement. Do you know what it is?

CM- I've read it, but I can't remember. I just can't remember it off hand.

RCH- I wouldn't expect you to. I mean, I wouldn't even expect ( ) to. Do you know what the intent of it is?

CM- Well, it's something about providing a learning environment that's conducive to helping the child as a whole, quality learning environment, something like that.

RCH- Would there be, what do you see as the basic, when you look at what the district is doing, and the decisions it makes, what do you feel like the basic focus of this district is? Or does it have a focus?

CM- Well, sometimes it seems like it's going different directions. But I feel like the focus should be more on academics. There's so many social issues. My husband and I talked about this this morning. There's so many social things that sometimes I think they're working on all of those. And I know that's part of making a child successful in all ways, but I think they need to keep focusing on the academics. Even though the social is is important, the main purpose is academics.

RCH- As a parent, as a community member, can you say that you have a good handle on how well the district is focusing on academics?

CM- Um...Well, I think, I don't know if the curriculum is equal. What each teacher teaches. They all have standards, they have to do this in third grade, they have to do this is fourth grade. But I don't know if they all have the same books that they're using, so I think consistency that way needs to be worked on a little bit.

RCH- Could be a problem.
CM- But I mean, overall, I think we've been pleased with the education our kids have gotten.

RCH- How do you see the district focusing? What lends you to believe that the focus is on some of the social issues more than academics?

CM- Um, well just the emphasis on... and these are good things, I don't mean that. But the emphasis on conflict management and counselor time, which I know is important. But just different things that the kids seem to spend their time on.

RCH- Are those the kinds of things that you would like a little bit more input on as far as what your child is doing during that time?

CM- Yes.

RCH- Because what I'm reading from you, is that you would be unwilling to say that it's not valuable.

CM- Right. Right.

RCH- But you're not sure how valuable (social programs). And if you had to make a choice, you'd like to know what you're giving up.

CM- Right. Right.

RCH- I can understand that. It's difficult to know exactly what's going on. And you're an educator, so you can kind of wield the system. Do you feel like there are some unwritten policy, procedures in your district that pretty much everybody knows that that's the way it goes in this district? Or is everything written down?

CM- Well, not everything is written down. One thing, a couple years ago, such as sports and events on Sunday. That is kind of an unwritten policy. And we tried to get a policy implemented, and they said they couldn't do that. That's an unwritten policy, that... well, there used to be an understanding that there wouldn't be things, and now they're kind of wavering because there isn't a policy. You know what I mean? They're not doing it, but they're doing some things because there's not a policy written. That's one I can think of. Other than that, there's probably more things I'm unaware of.

RCH- So which do you think is more powerful, written policy if there is one, or unwritten policy?

CM- I think the unwritten policy. Because it's kind of who's on the board now and what they think. Some people think they should have stuff and other people don't. So it just kind of depends who's on the board and the administration, I think.

RCH- And even in the case of you folks who were trying to get a policy implemented or made, unwritten policy took over?

CM- Yeah. They said it would cause too many more problems than the way it is now. So that's the only one I can think of.

RCH- Is there a church night policy?

CM- No.

RCH- During the week?
CM: No. It's like an unwritten, one that is understood. But if you get somebody in that doesn't see that thing...

RCH: And what day of the week is that that you're not supposed to do...?

CM: Wednesday.

RCH: So it's understood...

CM: Right depending on the priorities of the...

RCH: Does that make you uncomfortable?

CM: A little bit. But they said because it's a state school, they can't specify Sunday as a separate, you know what I mean, that would be pushing toward religion too much.

RCH: Church vs. State

CM: Right. So, and there's probably others, but I can't think of any others.

RCH: My next question is national and state affect on local school policies. And in your case, you had a perfect example of the powers that be at the local level quoted federal policy to you and it dictated whether or not you could have a local policy.

CM: Right.

RCH: Did they show that to you in writing?

CM: No, I don't think they did. And since that time, I think they really are trying to curb away from having events as a consideration to the community and churches and things, so but we learned a lot by doing that about the policy and how it works.

F: And what influences that. And you felt, did you feel it was more the federal policy or the agenda of the school board?

L: I think they just didn't want to get into a quandary later. They were afraid it would cause complications.

RCH: In the legal aspect.

CM: Yes. And they handled it very well, I thought. Overall.

RCH: What other unwritten policies have you noticed maybe...

CM: I was trying to think... boy I just can't think of any...

RCH: Your experiences.

CM: I'm sure there's others, I'm just drawing a blank.

RCH: Any questions that you have at all about how you see national and state policy affect local school policy?

CM: Um, well, I guess I don't know, national can have standards and stuff, but I think it should be more the local people that are deciding on the education for the most part.

RCH: Can you share why you think that is so important?
CM - Because the national, they don't know what's going on in each individual district. And local control, not in every situation, but in most situations is—if you own it; you're going to take care of it better than somebody who doesn't. You know what I mean? That's never been here or whatever. No stock in it.

RCH- Well, you said it. The more ownership we have, the more we'll truly try to implement what we say we believe rather than this federal law just saying...

CM- I mean, I think they should be somewhat involved, they're trying to encourage different reading things. They're trying to promote education, which I think is great, but they just need to be careful how much they're involved, I guess.

RCH- So, that local district continues to own the problem.

CM- Right. Government by the people, I guess, instead of a bureaucracy or whatever.

RCH- Any other concerns about national and state and local influence on one another?

CM- The only thing, sometimes the state standards are difficult. The school has to implement and it's maybe not the best for the school, you know what I mean?

RCH- Do you have an example?

CM- Well, for instance, they have the inservices every month and maybe that's more advantageous for them to have it every other month. But since the state mandates it, they have to do it.

RCH- Do you have any knowledge at all about what the district goals are?

CM- No I don't.

RCH- Well, has only been here a year, so I know they're fairly new.

CM- Yeah, I know he's been working on it.

RCH- Do you have any knowledge at all, or do you feel that community gets a good handle on what staff development on those days teachers are involved in and why?

CM- I think they usually try to put that in the paper about every time. I've seen it before. Different things that they've been doing.

RCH- Does it make sense to you, or?

CM- Well, I think it does. But sometimes having all that extra knowledge isn't going to help you as much as working with the kids more, you know, with personal experience I guess.

RCH- So, what you're concerned about, well, you're an educator. Have you been in some inservice that wasn't helpful, would you say yes or no?

CM- I probably have. It's been a while since I was teaching, but...

RCH- Some that wasn't' very helpful?
CM- Yeah, and you’re going to have that with anything, I guess. Some is helpful, some is not.

RCB- You don’t see it as definitely job imbedded, where they’re using the time given to look at student data and make instructional decisions. It’s not one spot stuff? Would it make more sense for you if staff development was used for teachers to work together looking at student artifacts, looking at student data, setting the rules, instructional decisions?

CM- Yeah. Yeah. I think that’s a good idea.

RCB- Well we’ve got a ways to go in general...

CM- I know. I know. That’s a big issue that probably not going to put a dent in.

RCB- It’s just difficult with resources to...

CM- Yes, it is.

RCB- I don’t know about you, but when I started teaching it was a one shot, let’s have an inspirational speaker at the beginning of the year and hope it lasts...

CM- Right. And that’s not the answer either.

RCB- Well, just a couple last questions. We’re going to try to focus on some specific questions when we compile. The thirty interviews. So, I can’t tell you specifically what this policy survey will be in it. But the intent of it is to find out local school policies affect on what hurts and what helps in regard to students succeeding. If we want to get the reality of what the answer is to these questions, who do we need to be sure to administer this survey to? Who are the people that need to answer the questions?

CM- Well, I think teachers, because they’re the ones directly involved, so you need to know their input on what they think should be done and what’s working, what’s not. Do they think the inservices are helping or do they think every other month is sufficient?

RCB- What’s the policy in regard to staff development?

CM- Right. Right. Um...and then the parents. I just think there’s always more need to get parents involvement. But that’s their responsibility and in a lot of ways they need to take initiative. Because the school can’t drag them over here, so...I think they’re doing what they can to try to get them involved. It’s always put in the paper, if you want to come to a school board meeting you can. So I think parents need to take more initiative to be involved.

RCB- Do you think we need to know what parents’ perception is on the affect of policy?

CM- Yeah, I think so.

RCB- And they could tell us?

CM- Well, some could.

RCB- We’ll find out how daring the perception is. Anybody else need to
CM- Well, the administrators I guess. Because they're the ones directly dealing with all these standards from the states. They have to pass it down and everything. I guess that kind of covers all of them.

RCH- Any other community folks, or not really?

CM- Well, anybody that's paying tax dollars. There's a lot of people in the district that don't have kids going to school here. But yeah, anybody who has an interest in education should be able to.

RCH- Do you feel like your own experiences in regard to this question, if you think about what your experience is from people in this district that don't have kids, but are paying with tax dollars, if you think about what their perception is of this school, does their perception vary from your perception?

CM- I think sometimes. They started a volunteer program at the school and I think that has helped a lot. Because they've got a lot of retired people involved in the school and I think that has changed people's perceptions. Because otherwise, "Oh, the kids are all bad." But after they've been in here.

RCH- A good PR tool?

CM- Yes.

RCH- Again, I'm not sure if I asked you this. If I have, I apologize. Are you aware of whether or not there is a policy that supports getting community involved in this school process?

CM- No, I'm not sure. I guess I thought that they had grant money which usually dictates what they're doing.

RCH- What gets done is whether there are resources. That's an important comment to hear from you. Your perception of...

CM- That's what my husband and I were talking about this morning. He said, "They get a program." and this isn't just in this district, but others as well, "they get the money so then they do something, then the money runs out and they quit." There's no consistency.

RCH- Do you see the district when that happens, do you see them really finding out, well did this work or not?

CM- Well, that's what we're not sure. Maybe they are, but we're just not aware of it.

RCH- You're a taxpayer too, right? And your children are...And, thinking about this survey that we're going to be administering, and thinking about your experiences, if you had to pick one thing that you think would be the most important thing that we could learn about local school policies affect on student achievement, what would be that one thing you would hope we would learn?

CM- Let's see here. Well, I guess I think that it's important that we have policy but that it needs to be stressed by the people that are in control. You know the administrators and it doesn't really do any good to have a policy unless it's really emphasized.

RCH- Thank you.
Appendix D

Interview Informed Consent Statement
Informed Consent Statement

Thank you for agreeing to visit with me and to participate in this research project. This project is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the degree requirements for my doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies for Iowa State University and as part of the Success4 evaluation being conducted by the Research Institute for Studies in Education, Iowa State University for the Bureau of Children, Family and Community Services, Iowa State Department of Education.

As part of the evaluation a survey is to be developed to determine what federal, state, and local policies support the capacities of Iowa schools, families, and communities to meet the social, emotional, intellectual, and behavioral needs of all children and youth. The intent of this study is to conduct interviews with stakeholders of Iowa school districts as well as key state and local education policy makers. I will be asking you open-ended questions in a semistructured interview format in an effort to determine what policy-related issues should be included in the policy survey and who the survey should be administered to (teachers and or administrators).

Our conversation will last approximately 30 minutes, depending on your responses and any additional questions. With your approval, I would like to audio tape our conversation for the purposes of accurately capturing and retaining your comments for analysis. All of the interview tapes will be erased immediately following their transcription. Expected completion of transcription is June, 2002. Because your participation is strictly voluntary, you may choose not to answer a particular question or to withdraw from this research project at any time.

Your participation is confidential and this confidentiality will be maintained through: storage of data and notes in a secure location accessible only to the researcher; use of personal and organizational pseudonyms in written reports and oral presentations of this research; and removal of personally identifiable information from fieldnotes, transcripts, and research reports submitted to my doctoral committee and the Bureau of Children, Family and Community Services, Iowa Department of Education.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you as a participant in this research. Benefits to be gained from your participation should result in the development of a policy survey that will address policy-related issues that can better inform policy development effecting PK-12 education.

If at any time you have questions about this research or your participation, you may contact me (Robin Galloway, 16902 170th St., Rockwell, IA 50469; 641-822-3112; rickg@netins.net). You may also contact (Dr. Mack C. Shelley II, Director of the Research Institute for Studies in Education, E005A Lagomarcino Hall, Iowa State University, Ames, IA, 50011-3190; 515-294-9284; MackCShelley@iastate.edu).

I consent to participate in the research study named and described above. I retain my right not to answer a particular question(s) or to withdraw from this research project at any time:

Name: (printed) ___________________________ Date: __________
Signature: ________________________________ Date: __________
Researcher Signature: ______________________ Date: __________
Appendix E

Interview Member Check Letter
Dear Interviewee:

Enclosed you will find the transcript of the interview you participated in for the Department of Education Success4 research project. In order to protect the validity of the research we are asking you to read through your transcript checking to make sure that your responses are correctly recorded. If you feel your response to an interview question has been incorrectly transcribed please note in the margins any corrections that you would make.

If after reading your transcript you have noted any corrections that need to be made please fill out the form below and return with your transcript by mail in the enclosed envelope.

If no changes to your transcript are necessary please fill out the form below and return by mail in the enclosed envelope.

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this project. Your time spent is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,
Robin Galloway
Research Institute for Studies in Education
Iowa State University

---

After reading your transcript please check below the appropriate response:

☐ I have read the transcript of my responses for the Success4 Interview. No changes to my transcript are necessary. (Please mail this form in the envelope provided.)

☐ I have read the transcript of my responses for the Success4 Interview. I have noted on my transcript the necessary changes. (Please mail the transcript and this form in the envelope provided.)

Signature ____________________________
Appendix F

Interview Theme Category and Sub-Codes/Nodes
To Inform Development of the Self-Report Questionnaire: Theme Categories and Sub-Codes/Nodes from 22 Interviews

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| School Board | 0      | 3     | 7      | 4       | 3     | 17    | 1    | 0   | 1     | 8        | 9       | 17   | 0   |
| Communication| 0      | 0     | 5      | 0       | 0     | 5     | 0    | 0   | 0     | 0        | 5       | 0    | 5   |
| Policy       | 0      | 0     | 11     | 2       | 3     | 16    | 0    | 0   | 0     | 3        | 13      | 11   | 5   |
| Purpose      | 0      | 0     | 1      | 0       | 0     | 1     | 0    | 0   | 0     | 0        | 1       | 0    | 1   |
| Professional | 0      | 0     | 6      | 0       | 1     | 7     | 2    | 0   | 2     | 1        | 6       | 6    | 1   |
| Development  |        |       |        |         |       |       |      |     |       |          |         |      |     |
| Member Turnover |      |       |        |         |       |       |      |     |       |          |         |      |     |
| TOTAL         | 0      | 3     | 30     | 6       | 7     | 46    | 4    | 0   | 4     | 13       | 33      | 35   | 11  |

<p>| DISTRICT SUPPORT SYSTEMS |        |       |        |         |       |       |      |     |       |          |         |      |     |
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| IASB                     | 0      | 0     | 4      | 0       | 6     | 10    | 0    | 1   | 1     | 1        | 9       | 8    | 2   |
| SAI                      | 0      | 0     | 0      | 0       | 1     | 1     | 0    | 0   | 0     | 0        | 1       | 1    | 0   |</p>
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Appendix G

Self-Report Questionnaire
Survey of Perceptions of Local School Policy Effects
on Student Achievement

Following are questions concerning your local school district’s policies. Please read carefully the definitions that have been provided before answering the survey questions. Please be sure to erase cleanly any answer that you wish to change. Thank you for your time and consideration in answering the survey.

Definitions:

District Mission/Philosophy Statement: the service that the K-12 school district desires to provide to attending students based on the fundamental beliefs of the stakeholders of a K-12 school district.

Local School Policy: a statement of purpose, guidelines, or rules as to how that purpose is to be achieved that provides a framework for the operation of the school.

Unwritten School Policy: guidelines and rules that are not officially written down but that stakeholders know are the way things are done in the district.

School Culture and Climate: the totality of a K-12 school district's socially transmitted behavior patterns, beliefs, and prevailing conditions, or the set of attitudes regarding human work and thought that bring into being student achievement.

School, Family, and Community Partnerships: relationships between the school, family, and community that are marked by mutual cooperation and responsibility, whereby all members have equal status and are united with one another or others in an activity or sphere of common interest.

1. How familiar do you feel you are with your district's school policies?
   □ Don't know about them at all
   □ Know little about them
   □ Fairly familiar with them
   □ Very familiar with them
   □ Completely familiar with them
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<th>Statement</th>
<th>To what extent do you believe your school district's local policies reflect the following values/beliefs?</th>
<th>How important do you believe it is for your school district's policies to reflect the following values/beliefs?</th>
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<td>2a. All students can learn</td>
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<td>Very Much 1  □  2  □  3  □  4  □</td>
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<td>3a. Human beings are learning organisms.</td>
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<td>6a. Adults breed student confidence.</td>
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<td>8a. The bell curve mentality must be abandoned.</td>
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<td>9a. Schools must cultivate a culture of success.</td>
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<td>11a. A sense of democracy should affect decision-making.</td>
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<td>12a. All work has value and dignity.</td>
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<td>13a. Competition is generally damaging to both students and teachers.</td>
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<td>To what extent do you believe each of the following conditions is reflected in your district's policies?</td>
<td>How important do you believe the following conditions are to promote student achievement?</td>
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<td>14a. Emphasis on building a human organization system: defined as a continuous focus on improving education with high levels of involvement and shared decision-making.</td>
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<td>15a. Ability to create and sustain initiatives: defined as an understanding of how to organize the people and the school environment to start and sustain an improvement effort.</td>
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<td>16a. A supportive workplace that enables all staff to succeed in their roles.</td>
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<td>17a. Regular school wide staff development that is focused on studying, teaching, and learning.</td>
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<td>18a. Support for school sites through data and information: defined as using data on students needs to make decisions and modify actions at the district and building level.</td>
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<td>19a. Community involvement: defined as a close connection between the school, parent, and community.</td>
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<td>20a. Shared leadership: defined as a focus on student learning through a shared clear vision, high expectations, and dynamic leadership among all levels.</td>
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### Mission Statement, Values and Beliefs

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5. Do local school policies reflect the school district’s mission statement?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6. Are you involved in the development of your district’s local school policies?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7. Do you believe unwritten policies of your local school district influence student achievement?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Culture and Climate

28. How would you best describe the culture and climate of your local school district?
☐ Positive learning environment for all learners
☐ Positive learning environment for some learners
☐ Negative learning environment for some learners
☐ Negative learning environment for all learners
☐ Don't know

To what extent...........

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Very Much</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Very Little</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29. Are you familiar with the culture and climate of your local school district?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Do you believe the culture and climate of your local school district influence student achievement?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Do you feel the culture and climate of your local school district reflects the district's mission?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Do you believe the culture and climate of your local school district reflects the beliefs and values of your district?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Do you feel the development of a culture and climate that is conducive to learning is reflected in your local school district's policies?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. Do unwritten policies negatively affect the culture and climate of your local school district?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### School, Family and Community Partnerships

To what extent..........

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Much</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>Very Little</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>35. are you involved in school, family, and community partnerships?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. do you feel your local school district is involved in school and family partnerships?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. do you feel your local school district is involved in school and community partnerships?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. do you believe school, family, and community partnerships affect student achievement?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. do you feel your local school district's policies support the development of school, family, and community partnerships?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. do you believe parents are involved in the development of your local school district's policies?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41. do you believe community members, who are not parents of children that are attending school, are involved in the development of your local school district's policies?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Open Ended Questions

1. Please note any questions on the survey that were unclear or that you had difficulty understanding.

2. What questions do you think were omitted from this survey, and should be asked to get a better idea of how local school district policy affects student achievement?
Just a couple of quick questions describing you.

1. How long have you lived in your current school district?
   ____ years

2. In which of the following age groups do you belong?
   □ 18-24
   □ 25-34
   □ 35-44
   □ 45-54
   □ 55-64
   □ 65 or older

3. Which of the following best describes your role? (Please check all that apply.)
   □ Board Member
   □ Administrator
   □ Teacher
   □ Parent
   □ Community Member

4. Do you have any children?
   □ Yes □ No
   If yes, have they attended school in this district?
   □ Yes □ No
   If yes, do you have a child presently attending school?
   □ Yes □ No

5. What is your highest level of formal education?
   □ No formal education
   □ Less than 8th grade
   □ Completed 8th grade
   □ Some high school, but no diploma
   □ Completed high school/GED
   □ Some college (including A.A. Degree)
   □ 4-year college graduate
   □ Some work toward an advanced degree
   □ Completed an advanced degree (Master’s, Ph.D., M.D., etc.)

6. For calendar year 2002, what would you estimate your total household income to have been, from all sources?
   □ Less than $5,000
   □ $5,000-$9,999
   □ $10,000-$19,999
   □ $20,000-$29,999
   □ $30,000-$39,999
   □ $40,000-$49,999
   □ $50,000-$74,999
   □ $75,000-$99,999
   □ $100,000 or more
Appendix H.

Cover Letter Mailed with Self-Report Questionnaire
Appendix H

February, 2003

Dear

I am conducting a study as part of the Success 4 evaluation being conducted by the Research Institute for Studies in Education, Iowa State University, for the Bureau of Children, Family and Community Services, Iowa State Department of Education. Enclosed are letters of support for this study from Dr. Lana Michelson, Iowa Department of Education, Bureau of Children, Family and Community Services; Dr. Troyce Fisher, Executive Director, School Administrators of Iowa; and Dr. Ron Rice, Director, Iowa Association of School Boards. This study also is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for my doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies for Iowa State University.

To develop more relevant and effective local school policies, information needs to be gathered from superintendents, teachers, board members, parents, and community members about how policies affect student achievement. The views of these stakeholders are needed because they have a vested interest in the development and implementation of local school policy. A survey developed for this purpose is needed to inform policymakers of the views held by stakeholders. As part of this evaluation, the enclosed questionnaire has been developed to determine what local school characteristics support the capacities of Iowa schools, families, and communities to meet the social, emotional, intellectual, and behavioral needs of all children and youth. The evaluation also includes a survey addressing how well local community members are acquainted with school characteristics.

Sixty stakeholders (superintendents, teachers, board members, parents, and community members) representing twelve Iowa school districts are being asked to fill out the enclosed questionnaire in an effort to pilot the survey. Your participation is confidential. This confidentiality will be maintained through storing data and notes in a secure location accessible only to the researcher, using personal and organizational pseudonyms in written reports and oral presentations of this research, and removing personally identifiable information from field notes, transcripts, and research reports submitted to my doctoral committee and to the Bureau of Children, Family and Community Services, Iowa Department of Education.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you as a participant in this research. Benefits to be gained from your participation should include better-informed local school policy development affecting PK-12 education. Please return the completed questionnaire in the enclosed stamped addressed envelope by . Return of the completed questionnaire indicates your consent to participate in this study. Upon the receipt of your completed questionnaire a $5 bill will be mailed to you to compensate you partially for your time and cooperation in completing this instrument.

If at any time you have questions about this research or regarding your participation, you may contact me (Robin Galloway, 16902 170th St., Rockwell, IA 50469; 641-822-3112; rickg@netins.net). You also may contact Dr. Mack C. Shelley II, Research Institute for Studies in Education, E005A Lagomarcino Hall, Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011-3190; 515-294-9282; mshelley@iastate.edu.

Thank you very much for assisting me with this important project.

Sincerely,
Robin Galloway

16902 170th St
Rockwell, Iowa 50461
Appendix I

Letters of Support for Research
March 20, 2003

Dear School Stakeholder,

I am pleased to write in support of Robin Galloway’s efforts to research characteristics that assist schools in meeting the social, emotional, intellectual, and behavioral needs of students. This type of research is needed to help determine the key issues that policymakers must consider as they work to support and improve school systems. The development of policies and practices that support students in these areas are critical to the creation of a safe and supportive learning environment and academic achievement.

Please let this letter serve as my message of encouragement to you to participate in this effort. Your participation is important to the overall project to ensure that a diverse and representative sample of districts is included. Of additional interest is the fact that your school may have been a Success4 site. The information you provide will also be of help to inform the future of that departmental initiative.

Thank you in advance for your contribution to this effort.

Sincerely,

Lana Michelson, Bureau Chief
Bureau of Children, Family,
   and Community Services
Iowa Department of Education
February 5, 2003

To Iowa Educators:

SAI is very supportive of the research being conducted by Robin Galloway concerning how public policy can support important school improvement initiatives. All stakeholders have a vested interest in the development and implementation of local school policies that will promote learning for all, yet this whole area has not received the research attention it should, considering its importance in the entire school improvement picture.

The educational community needs coherent and supportive policies that help districts link their mission statements, beliefs and values, school culture and climate and school – family - community partnerships with the efforts to improve learning and achievement for all of our students. Administrators who are charged with implementing policies will benefit from the findings of this research as they continue their work to develop systems that are aligned.

Please give your valued perspectives by responding to this pilot survey instrument.

Thank you for your dedication to Iowa's schools.

Sincerely,

Troyce Fisher
Executive Director
February 12, 2003

To Whom It May Concern:

The Iowa Association of School Boards endorses the study of “Perceptions of Local School Policy Effects on Student Achievement,” being conducted by Robin Galloway. We feel the study can assist in making local K-12 school policy more relevant and effective.

Research tells us that the district’s mission statement based on beliefs and values, the culture and climate of school, and family/community partnerships all effect student achievement - so discovering what policies are important in these areas is necessary.

There is a need to conduct research to better inform local school policy development at the K-12 level, so completing the survey Ms. Galloway has presented you is worthy of your time in completing it. What will be learned will be helpful to the work of your Association as we strive to assist you in assuring high and equitable achievement to the students of Iowa’s public schools.

Sincerely,

Ronald M. Rice
Executive Director
Appendix J

Human Subjects Research Approval for Self-Report Questionnaire
The project, “Dissertation Research: A Self-Report Questionnaire to Describe Stakeholders’ Perceptions of Local School Policy Effects on Student Achievement” has been declared exempt from Federal regulations as described in 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2).

(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects’ responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects’ financial standing, employability, or reputation.

To be in compliance with ISU’s Federal Wide Assurance through the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) all projects involving human subjects, must be reviewed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Only the IRB may determine if the project must follow the requirements of 45 CFR 46 or is exempt from the requirements specified in this law. **Therefore, all human subject projects must be submitted and reviewed by the IRB.**

Because this project is exempt it does not require further IRB review and is exempt from the Department of Health and Human Service (DHHS) regulations for the protection of human subjects.

We do, however, urge you to protect the rights of your participants in the same ways that you would if IRB approval were required. This includes providing relevant information about the research to the participants. Although this project is exempt, you must carry out the research as proposed in the IRB application, including obtaining and documenting (signed) informed consent, if applicable to your project.

Any modification of this research should be submitted to the IRB on a Continuation and/or Modification form to determine if the project still meets the Federal criteria for exemption. If it is determined that exemption is no longer warranted, then an IRB proposal will need to be submitted and approved before proceeding with data collection.

cc: Mack Shelley
    EELP
Appendix K

Cover Letter Mailed with Retest of Self-Report Questionnaire
May 2003

Dear

Thank you for participating in this survey, which is a key part of the Success4 evaluation being conducted by the Research Institute for Studies in Education, of Iowa State University, for the Bureau of Children, Family and Community Services, Iowa State Department of Education. Enclosed are letters of support for this study from Dr. Lane Michelson, Iowa Department of Education, Chief, Bureau of Children, Family and Community Services; Dr. Troyce Fisher, Executive Director, School Administrators of Iowa; and Dr. Ron Rice, Director, Iowa Association of School Boards. This study also is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for my doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies for Iowa State University.

To develop more relevant and effective local school policies, information needs to be gathered from superintendents, teachers, board members, parents, and community members about how policies affect student achievement. The views of these stakeholders are needed because they have a vested interest in the development and implementation of local school policy. A survey developed for this purpose is needed to inform policymakers of the views held by stakeholders. As part of this evaluation, the enclosed questionnaire has been developed to determine what local school characteristics support the capacities of Iowa schools, families, and communities to meet the social, emotional, intellectual, and behavioral needs of all children and youth. The evaluation also includes a survey addressing how well local community members are acquainted with school characteristics.

Two hundred stakeholders (superintendents, teachers, board members, parents, and community members) representing forty Iowa school districts have been selected through a rigorous process and are being asked to fill out the enclosed questionnaire in an effort to pilot the survey. Your participation is confidential. This confidentiality will be maintained through storing data and notes in a secure location accessible only to the researcher, using personal and organizational pseudonyms in written reports and oral presentations of this research, and removing personally identifiable information from field notes, transcripts, and research reports submitted to my doctoral committee, the Bureau of Children, Family and Community Services, Iowa Department of Education, the Iowa Association of School Boards, and the School Administrators of Iowa.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you as a participant in this research. Benefits to be gained from your participation should include better-informed local school policy development affecting K-12 education. In an effort to test the survey for reliability you are being asked to complete the survey a second time. Please return the completed questionnaire in the enclosed stamped addressed envelope by May, 2003. Return of the completed questionnaire indicates your consent to participate in this study. Enclosed please find a one-dollar bill as a small token of appreciation for your willingness to participate in this important study.

If at any time you have questions about this research or regarding your participation, you may contact me (Robin Galloway, 16902 170th St., Rockwell, IA 50469; 641-822-3112; ricka@netsins.net). You also may contact Dr. Mack C. Shelley II, Research Institute for Studies in Education, E005A Lagomarcino Hall, Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011-3190; 515-294-9282; mshelley@iastate.edu.

Again thank you very much for assisting me with this important study.

Sincerely,

Robin Galloway
16902 170th St
Rockwell, Iowa 50469
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you, with all my love, to my mother, Dr. Meridean Maas, for patiently
and lovingly sharing her time and expertise.

A special thank you to my major professor, Dr. Mack Shelley, for his
continued support, encouragement, and expertise.

Thank you to the past and present members of my dissertation committee,
Dr. Fenwick English, Dr. Anne Foegen, Dr. Don Hackmann, Dr. Susan Hegland, Dr.
Barbara Ohlund, Dr. Betty Steffy, and Dr. Janice Walker, and for their dedication to
excellence. My doctoral education has enhanced my life academically,
professionally, and personally.

I gratefully acknowledge support for my doctoral education from a Richard P.
Manatt Fellowship awarded through the Department of Educational Leadership and
Policy Studies, and a graduate assistantship from the Research Institute for Studies
in Education, Iowa State University, College of Education.

A big thanks to my sister, Regan Maas, for her love, support, and willingness
to word process transcripts and hunt down relevant literature.

Thank you to my brother, Rich Maas, for his pride in my accomplishments.

To Dr. Janet Specht, a dear family friend, thank you for always role-modeling
caring, generosity, and a pursuit of excellence.

Thank you to Dr. William Nelson, who supported me as a colleague as we
traveled the doctorate path together and for his time spent editing.
My heartfelt thank you to Dr. David Reed, Dr. Toni Tripp-Reimers, Rachel Lovegrove, and Julia LaBua for their time and expertise with data input and analysis.

Thanks to Andrea Janssen, for her willingness to transcribe and retrieve literature.

Thank you to Dr. Troyce Fisher, Executive Director, for being such a supportive friend and mentor and as executive director, School Administrators of Iowa, for her letter of support in behalf of my research.

In addition, I want to thank Dr. Ron Rice, Director, Iowa Association of School Boards, and Lana Michelson, Bureau Chief, Children, Family and Community Services, State of Iowa Department of Education, for their letters of support in behalf of the research for this study.

A very special thanks to the many Iowa stakeholders of Iowa’s local school districts who willingly volunteered their time to the research for this study and to the improvement of Iowa’s PK-12 education system.