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**BRINGING AUTONOMY BACK TO THE SCHOOL LEVEL: A DESCRIPTIVE
ANALYSIS OF THE PHILADELPHIA SCHOOL REDESIGN INITIATIVE**

A Thesis in

Educational Theory and Policy

by

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the redesign plans of three schools that are a part of Cohort One for the Philadelphia School Districts School Redesign Initiative. This study particularly focuses on the goals of each redesign team and the strategies they are implementing to reach those goals. A qualitative approach was taken in this study using face-to-face interviews for data collection. Two members of the redesign teams at Tilden Middle School, John Story Jenks Academy of the Arts and Sciences, and Laura H. Carnell Elementary shared their knowledge of their schools' redesign plans. While there was similarity in the goals of each school's redesign plan, each school implemented a unique set of strategies to achieve those goals. This research provides the foundation for future research on the School Redesign Initiative.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

School reform has been a long discussed issue in the United States. Prior to 1960, most Americans assumed the educational system was sound. Their optimism derived from faith in a free market that increased steadily the supply of unskilled and semi-skilled jobs. These jobs provided upward mobility for most males, including those who never completed high school. The steady loss of such employment after 1960 undermined assumptions about the educational system (Smerdon & Borman 2009). The challenge to locally controlled schools began with passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, when legislators concluded that problems among the urban and rural poor were so severe that inadequate local systems required federal resources to provide greater equity (Mehta, 2013). Unfortunately, no consensus developed about the proper means to reform poor schools. Conservatives and liberals were divided over whether the problem was confronted most effectively by providing additional funding to poor schools or by instilling appropriate values among underprivileged populations (McGuinn, 2006).

Then, in 1983, *A Nation at Risk* altered the political landscape by proclaiming that the widespread failure of American schools represented a national security risk at a time of increasing foreign competition (Mehta 2013). In response, conservatives denounced as ineffective the welfare programs enacted during the Great Society. While George H. W. Bush proposed America 2000, a moderate proposal for federally sponsored school

reform, his efforts failed due to intense divisions between conservatives and liberals over funding and accountability. The impasse created an opportunity for President William Jefferson Clinton to create the centrist Goals 2000 policy. This policy challenged the interests of liberal supporters such as the National Education Association but gained support from business leaders by insisting that federal funding be tied to accountability and results. By the end of the Clinton presidency, Republicans and Democrats recognized the political value of establishing the middle ground in educational policy (McGuinn 2006). President George W. Bush institutionalized a new “policy regime” by securing bipartisan political support for No Child Left Behind. The legislation mandated policies for improving academic standards, for testing students, for school and district accountability, and for establishing penalties for failing schools (Mehta, 2013).

The passing of No Child Left Behind altered the fundamental idea of the sanctity of locally controlled school systems which was the basis for urban school governance since the nineteenth century (McGuinn, 2006). It was now believed that effective reform required a broad and sustainable coalition and “a master politician with an exquisite understanding of how to draw together disparate groups by providing clear and direct benefits to cooperation, defining an inclusive vision, and pragmatically zeroing in on doable tasks and realizable goals (Stone, et. al., 2001).”

The Philadelphia School District has followed a similar pattern in the history of school reform in the city. In 1994, David Hornbeck entered the Philadelphia School District as the new Superintendent, believing that all students can achieve at high levels

(Boyd & Christman, 2003). With this belief came his Children Achieving plan, which was a systemic reform agenda to improve Philadelphia public schools. Along with this plan, the district received the Annenberg Challenge grant which gave them \$50 million along with a matching \$100 million from Philadelphia corporations, foundations, and federal grants. Rather than taking a school-by-school approach, the Children Achieving plan relied on coherent policy, improved coordination of resources and services, content and performance standards, decentralization of decision-making, and accountability mechanisms to transform an entire school district (Gold, et. al., 2001). Unfortunately, Hornbeck's vision was not successful. Throughout the reform process, he was unable to get key players behind him such as the teachers and principals as well as the state legislature. In 2000, Hornbeck resigned, never seeing the fulfillment of the Children Achieving plan (Boyd & Christman, 2003).

Then, in 2002, after being passed through the Pennsylvania legislature, the School Reform Commission (SRC), took over the Philadelphia School district. The SRC was a group of five individuals, three appointed by the governor and two by the mayor of Philadelphia, which replaced the districts' school board and granted them much broader powers. In addition, both the city and state agreed to provide additional funding for the new reform (\$45 million from the city and \$75 million from the state). Later that year, the SRC announced that seventy schools would face one of four reform models; the named schools would either be reconstituted, made into independent schools or charter schools, or would be assigned to an entity outside the school district for management.

These were called partnership schools. At the time of the decision, no members of the SRC had engaged in any direct, formal communication with any school or any parent group nor had any Commissioner officially visited any of the schools targeted for reform (Peterson, 2007). These reforms, Children Achieve and the SRC take-over, followed the same pattern that was happening at the federal level. They had created a system with strong external decision-making and justification without considering the local players. However, in recent years, there has been push back against this system and an emergence of reform policies centered around autonomy and local control.

In Spring 2014, the Philadelphia School District implemented its Action Plan 2.0, which was formed around the vision, “The School District of Philadelphia will deliver on the right of every child in Philadelphia to an excellent public school education and ensure all children graduate from high school ready to succeed (Philadelphia School District, 2014).” In pursuing this vision, the district made one of their missions to identify and implement innovative approaches to instructional design and school operations. Rather than a district proposed redesign plan, the district created the School Redesign Initiative, which invited teams, made up of school partners to submit a proposal to redesign a school. These teams could include school administration, teachers, support staff, parents, or other community members. The district looked for plans that drew on innovative, research-based practices shown to improve educational outcomes for all students, engage all students in learning for the 21st century, and demonstrate a commitment to the school community. These areas were broken down into six specific design principals which the

teams were to consider: mission and culture, instructional model, youth development, talent, family and community engagement, and continuous improvement (Philadelphia School District, 2014).

Research Questions

The primary aim of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of the programs implemented through the Philadelphia Redesign Initiative. Data were collected from redesign team members at three of the participating schools. The following research questions guided this study:

- Q1. What are the goals of each schools' redesign plan?
- Q2. What strategies are the school redesign teams using to achieve the goals of the initiative?

Thesis Overview

The following chapters will address the two research questions. In Chapter Two, I review the literature around school redesign and reform focusing at the elementary school level. Chapter Three lays out the research design and methodology of the study. Chapter Four presents each of the three schools' redesign plans. Finally, Chapter Five discusses these plans and provides a conclusion with discussion of further research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The idea of school autonomy is beginning to become more prevalent again in educational reform strategies. These strategies aim to promote school improvement by changing schools' decision-making authority (van der Sluis, Reezigt, & Borghans, 2015). For example, new small autonomous school initiatives in many urban and suburban school districts have invited school teams to develop whole school reform plans or entirely new public schools (Honig, 2009a). The initiatives ask school teams to focus on providing excellent learning opportunities for all students and not to focus mainly on compliance with district and state rules regarding curriculum and instruction, budgets, human resources, facilities, or school calendar. In turn, policy makers promise to increase schools' autonomy or discretion in such areas to enable schools to implement their school improvement plans (Honig, 2009a). Like decentralization and site-based management reforms of the past, these policies focus on increasing schools' decision-making authority as a foundation of school improvement.

In the 1960s and 1970s, school decentralization reforms generally sought to increase school and/or community control over schools (David, 1989). By the late 1980s, many districts turned to other reforms often titled site-based management or site-based decision-making. Although their details varied, these policies typically stemmed from one common underlying assumption: if policy makers shifted authority for various school-related decisions from broader levels of government (e.g., from district central

offices) to individual schools and school communities, then schools would better be able to meet their students' needs than if district central office administrators or other policy makers made those decisions (Malen et al., 1990a; Peterson, 1991; Wohlstetter & Odden, 1992).

However, research on these initiatives did not support this assumption (Cotton, 1992; David, 1989; Malen et al., 1990a, 1990b; Murphy & Beck, 1995; Wohlstetter & Odden, 1992). For example, from their review of nearly 200 documents, including 98 policy reports and 8 systematic evaluations about school site-based management initiatives, Malen et al. (1990b) concluded that "there is little evidence that school-based management improves student achievement" (p. 56; see also Briggs & Wohlstetter, 2003; Cotton, 1992; Malen et al., 1990a; Peterson, 1991; Wohlstetter & Odden, 1992).

Researchers generally cited at least one of the following three reasons for these limited school performance results: a lack of focus on teaching and learning improvement both in the policy designs and on the part of participating schools during implementation; policy makers' inattention to building schools' capacity for using their new authority to realize improvements for students; and school district central office administrators' failure to play key support roles in implementation.

First, previous reforms did not place emphasis on teaching and learning improvement. For example, decentralization and site-based management initiatives generally emphasized changing the balance of authority between schools/communities and their district central offices or the creation of school-based governance councils as main outcomes in and of themselves, not necessarily as strategies for helping schools

improve teaching and learning (Arterbury & Hord, 1991). The development and management of these governing bodies consumed significant amounts of school staffs' time in ways that detracted from their focus on teaching and learning matters (Cotton, 1992; Hall & Galluzzo, 1991; Hill & Bonan, 1992; Leithwood & Menzies, 1998; Malen et al., 1990a, 1990b). When they did focus on issues beyond their own processes, school site management teams typically concentrated not on instruction but on “tertiary activities” (Peterson, 1991) such as student discipline, campus aesthetics, staff responsibilities, and the distribution of funds often from small discretionary budgets (Arterbury & Hord, 1991; Cotton, 1992; David, 1989; Peterson, 1991; Wohlstetter & Odden, 1992). These activities did not substantially alter or improve the quality of teaching in classrooms, let alone student learning outcomes, and they may have actually limited the time available for school staff to focus on instructional improvement (Cotton, 1992).

By contrast, the new autonomy initiatives emerged in the early 2000s in a context of heightened emphasis on the quality of teaching and learning in classrooms and schools' achievement of high performance standards. As a result, the policy designs of the new autonomy initiatives focus centrally on teaching and learning improvement and identify autonomy or new decision-making authority as one means to that end, not as an outcome in its own right. For example, the application process for the New Century High Schools initiative in New York City, launched in 2002, invited school teams to map out not their strategy for school governance but for improving student learning outcomes as well as for realizing the initiatives' focal ten principles of effective schools—six of which

directly related to teaching and learning improvement (New Visions for Public Schools [NVPS], 2007; Rubenstein, Reisner, Coon, & Fabiano, 2005). The school district offered schools various autonomies to assist schools in implementing their teaching and learning improvement strategies (Foley, Klinge, & Reisner, 2007; NVPS, 2007; Rubenstein et al., 2005). The new small autonomous school initiatives in Chicago, Oakland (CA), and other cities likewise invited schools to generate innovative approaches to teaching and learning improvement and offered new autonomy in areas such as human resources, curriculum and instruction, and budgets to help schools create conditions supportive of implementation (Little & Wing, 2003; Sporte, Kahne, & Correa, 2004). As the Oakland school board policy authorizing this initiative stated, “The primary purpose of developing NSA [new small autonomous] schools is to raise student achievement and close the achievement gap for under-served students” (Oakland Unified School District [OUSD], 2000, p. 5).

To reinforce their focus on teaching and learning improvement, some of these initiatives hold schools accountable for producing demonstrable improvements or risk losing their autonomy. For example, Boston’s Pilot Schools policy created a school quality review process whereby school district central office staff assess each participating school every 5 years. The assessment includes an internal self-study, an external review of student performance, and a school site visit, after which the external reviewers recommend the renewal or nonrenewal of the school’s status as a pilot school (Center for Collaborative Education, 2006). In Oakland, schools’ continued participation

in the initiative hinged on their achievement of student performance results (OUSD, 2000).

Second, implementation of the earlier reforms tended to falter in part because participating schools lacked the capacity to take on and make productive use of their new decision-making authority. As several reviews of school site-based management research concluded, principals, school staff, and teachers all needed additional training in this regard but rarely received it (Briggs & Wohlstetter, 2003; Clune & White, 1988; Cotton, 1992; Malen et al., 1990a). For example, Ogawa and White (1994) found that for the most part, school site-based management policies “simply [made] ... a general reference to the need for participants to understand the process of shared decision making” (p. 69). However, the policies rarely resulted in the actual allocation of time or other resources to help school staff build their capacity for convening and participating in site-based governance councils or for using their new authority in ways that promised to realize improved results for students (see also Clune & White, 1988; Malen et al., 1990b).

The designs of the new autonomy initiatives seem to anticipate school capacity as a main implementation impediment and promise targeted investments in building schools’ capacity for implementation. For example, Oakland’s 2000 new small autonomous schools policy required prospective school teams first to participate in the “Incubator”—a process designed to help them plan their school and identify the resources necessary for implementation (OUSD, 2000). Furthermore, selection criteria for school teams to participate in this initiative included teams’ capacity to launch their school.

Third, school district central offices tended not to participate in supporting the implementation of decentralization, school site-based management, and similar prior initiatives (Arterbury & Hord, 1991; Ogawa & White, 1994). School district central offices often adhered closely to long-standing district norms supporting centralized or top-down authority and did not transfer the promised authority to schools (Malen et al., 1990a; Wohlstetter & Odden, 1992). District central offices also generally failed to provide time, funding, and other resource essential for implementation (Clune & White, 1988; Cotton, 1992; Malen et al., 1990a). Some district central offices bucked these trends and aimed to enable implementation mainly by allowing schools to apply for waivers or exemptions from some district policies as their main strategy for strengthening implementation (Wohlstetter, Smyer, & Mohrman, 1994). However, waivers generally removed barriers to implementation but did not necessarily result in the proactive provision of implementation supports (United States Department of Education, 1998).

By contrast, school district central offices appear in many contemporary autonomy policy designs as key participants in and enablers of implementation. For example, in Chicago Public Schools (CPS), the authorizing school board policy calls on the CPS district central office to actively support the implementation of the provisions of the policy including autonomy over budgets, curriculum and instruction, facilities, human resources, and schedule. Whereas many school site-based management initiatives of the 1990s stemmed from state policy, district central offices are the main designers of most of the new autonomy initiatives and cast themselves as key leaders in helping schools make productive use of their new autonomy (Honig, 2009b). In this way, the autonomy

initiatives depart from such previous reforms by not treating authority as a zero-sum game—a fixed resource held by either the central office or schools and as a resource that may increase for one only at the expense of the other’s authority. Instead, both central offices and schools have key roles to play in enabling implementation (Honig, Lorton, & Copland, 2009).

Chapter 3

Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

Looking at this new model of autonomy initiative, the Philadelphia School Redesign Initiative fits closely with this model. As discussed in their request for proposals, the Philadelphia School District is placing an emphasis on instructional design as a key aspect for each redesign proposal. In addition, rather than the selected schools having to rely on their own resources to implement the redesigns, each selected school is given a grant to help alleviate the start-up costs of implementing their redesign. Finally, the schools are encouraged to partner with outside organizations for continued support throughout the redesign process. However, with this autonomy what are specific schools doing? Because each school participating in the School Redesign Initiative is implementing different programs and strategies, it provided an opportunity to begin to explore what the different schools were doing.

I became aware of the Philadelphia School Redesign Initiative through my thesis advisor, Mindy Kornhaber in early 2015. As a new program, that would not be implemented until the 2015-2016 school year, it provided an opportunity to provide some of the initial research on the program. Considering the time frame I had to complete my thesis, a descriptive analysis of the schools' different programs rather than an evaluation of their progress or effectiveness was most appropriate.

Going into this study, I knew little about the School redesign program. Starting in Spring 2015, I read the information online provided by the initiative, including the

request for proposals, as well as tracked news articles about the program to begin better understanding the program. Leading into the fall of 2015, I determined the best approach to gather more detailed information about the programs was to speak directly with members of the schools' redesign teams. This would allow me to have direct insight into their programs. At this point, I began to form my research questions.

Research Questions

There were two main questions that guided this research:

Q1. What are the goals of each schools' redesign plan?

Q2. What strategies are the school redesign teams using to achieve the goals of the initiative?

The first question attempts to seek the driving factors behind each schools' redesign plan. I anticipated that each school would have similar answers for this question centered on improving student achievement. I expected variation in the second question, which looks at the specific program designs and instructional strategies that the schools are implementing.

Participants

As there were only four schools participating in the first round of the Philadelphia School Redesign Initiative, my participant pool was small. I started by reaching out to the principal at each of the four schools, via email, to ask if they were willing to participate. I received three confirmations: Tilden Middle School (Tilden), John Story Jenks Academy for the Arts and Sciences (Jenks), and Laura H. Carnell Elementary

School (Carnell). Through email correspondence with the principals at these three schools, I was able to secure interviews with two members of the redesign teams at each school. As outlined in the Protocol for Human Subject Research submitted to Penn State's institutional review board, the actual names of each school would be used throughout this study. No principal at any of the participating school requested otherwise.

The team members came from a variety of backgrounds such as the principals themselves, teachers, curriculum instructors/specialists, and parents. All participants approved their participation in the study through the signing of the Office of Research Protection (ORP) Consent Form. This form outlined the purpose of the research, how the research would be conducted, and their rights within the research such as choosing not to participate.

Data Collection and Analysis

This research was conducted as a generic qualitative study. I conducted semi-structured interviews, in-person, with each of the participants. For Tilden, I interviewed the two participants together in a public space. For Jenks and Carnell, I interviewed the participants individually on-site at the school. The interviews lasted from approximately twenty minutes to an hour. Each interview started with an introduction of myself and an overview of the study and the ORP Consent Form. I created a list of interview questions (Appendix A) to use as an outline and asked clarifying questions throughout the process. The participants were encouraged to elaborate on their answers and provide as much detail as possible.

I recorded each interview on a digital audio recorder, as well as my cell phone to ensure complete files for each interview. Following the interviews, I uploaded the files from the digital audio recorder to my computer and typed out word-for-word transcriptions using the playback software provided with the audio recorder.

For the data analysis, I used a loose grounded theory approach. Within each word document, I went through and coded inductively, by hand, highlighting significant phrases from the participants' responses using open coding. I used one color for phrases related to goals, a different color for phrases related to strategies, programs, and implementation of the redesign plan, and a third color for anticipated outcomes and how they would measure them. Then, in Excel, using a table format, I grouped the goal, implementation, and outcomes phrases that aligned with each other using axial coding. I did this by starting with a goal of the program. I then went through the highlights of phrases related to strategies, programs, and implementation that worked towards meeting the specified goal. Finally, I went through the highlights of measures and outcomes and selected the ones that met the specified goal. I repeated this process for each goal given by each school.

Chapter 4

Results

Tilden Middle School

Tilden is a public middle school in the Philadelphia School District. It is located in the southwest area of the city. The school serves approximately 500 students in grades 5-8. Eighty-nine percent of the students are African American, 8 percent are Asian, and about 1 percent are each Hispanic, White, and Multi-Racial. One hundred percent of the students at Tilden qualify for free and reduced lunch. Even prior to the PSSA realignment to the more rigorous PA Common Core standards, Tilden had historically very low test scores (Philadelphia School District, 2015a).

Prior to the request for proposals for the School Redesign Initiative, a group of teachers and staff at Tilden were grappling with the need to change what was happening in the school. They saw students continuing to fall behind and realized that they needed to rethink what schooling looks like for students and how learning happens. Seeing this need, the principal, Brian Johnson, had already applied for a state school improvement grant, but had not received it. Upon receiving the request for proposals from the Philadelphia School District superintendent in July 2014, Mr. Johnson and Margie Salvante, special education liaison and member of the redesign team, discussed applying for the grant. They quickly realized that the objectives put forward by the school district for the initiative were already in line with what the school was looking to change. Because Mr. Johnson had previously been working on the proposal for the state grant,

they were able to just modify and expand it for the School Redesign Initiative. It was Mr. Johnson and Ms. Salvante that I interviewed for this study.

The redesign team's goals for the redesign fall into two broad categories. Their first goal is to improve the learning outcomes for students by changing how instruction happens in the classroom. The second is to see students grow as a whole by rethinking what the school culture is like. These two goals align closely with their vision:

Tilden Middle School will provide a rigorous and engaging learning environment in every classroom that nurtures leadership, perseverance, integrity, curiosity, and kindness in order for our students to discover, develop, and communicate the skills and content necessary for college and career success in the 21st Century. (Philadelphia School District, 2015b)

The main component of their redesign involves implementing a blended learning model within classroom through a station rotation approach. This creates a cyclical system of direct instruction, guided practice, and individual practice, in which a student can enter in at any point in the process. The blended learning aspect comes into play with the guided practice portion of the cycle. This is facilitated through a computer program. One of the computer programs they are using is Achieve 3000, an English language arts instructional program. Achieve 3000 works through four steps to provide differentiated instruction and practice to students. The first step is an initial assessment to set a base line of student knowledge. In the second step, the student receives a grade-appropriate, nonfiction passage, which matches their skill level set by the initial assessment. Then, in step three, the student completes a series of activities, aligned to

grade level standards, which measures their ability to comprehend the passage assigned in step 2. Finally, in the fourth step, as the student progresses toward 40 activities for the semester (80 for the year), their reading abilities are evaluated, and text rigor is increased when progress is detected. Students cycle through these last three steps throughout the school year. In addition to following the learning cycle provided through the computer program, Achieve 3000 also provides students' achievement data from throughout the cycle in easy to read charts and graphs that both students and teachers are able to access.

There are two main advantages of this for student learning outcomes. This first is that the computer can continuously adjust what it is providing the students in terms of skills and scaffolding ensuring that student do not miss key skills which may have otherwise caused them to fall further behind down the road. The second benefit to using the computer program is that it allows the teacher to see daily data on the students and adjust instructional group based on where the students are at in their learning objectives. This allows for a more individualized learning model for the students.

However, in order for this shift in the instructional model to be successful, the redesign team needed to consider what support the teachers would need in the transition process. The team created a yearlong professional learning program for the teachers and are slowly transitioning the classroom instruction to the blended learning model to allow teachers time to adjust lessons and materials throughout the process. The professional learning program has several components. One of the components is a weekly forty-five minute meeting in which each grade gets together to receive guidance on various lesson planning topics such as data driven decision making as well as getting technical

assistance on the computer programs being used in the classroom. Another component of the professional learning program is a weekly full staff meeting on Wednesdays after the students go home. These meetings are led by Mr. Johnson and cover a wide range of instructional issues. Looking at the idea of a growth mindset, the team believes that by providing new learning opportunities for teachers, it will in turn impact the work they are doing with students and the students will grow. They also hope that through the professional learning program, the teachers will be able to provide guidance to new teachers who are coming to the school and eventually to teachers at other schools who are looking to incorporate blended learning models within their own classrooms.

Beyond just seeing students grow academically, the team also wanted to see the students grow as individuals and create a positive school culture. Looking to their vision, the team focused on leadership, perseverance, integrity, curiosity, and kindness in the students. One way they are looking to achieve this is by implementing a positive behavior, incentive, and support program, or PBIS. PBIS programs focus on not only having the rules for the school, but allow for growth and learning opportunities when there are incidents. For example, when there is an incident with a student, rather than only administering a punishment, there is a conversation about alternative way the student could have handled the situation. PBIS also focuses on linking positive behavior to academic success. The second part they are looking at is creating a positive school culture is by engaging parents with the school. The school started hosting monthly power hour meetings that parents are able to attend to find out what their students are working on in school. They want to create an environment and opportunities that welcome

parents in and make them feel like a part of the school community. The team's reasoning behind this is that if parents are involved in supporting the learning process and school culture, the students are more likely to be engaged.

Looking to the success of the redesign, the team has several goals they are looking to achieve which they are tracking through data. In terms of academics, the team is looking for a 5 percent increase each year for three years on overall PSSA scores. In addition, they want to see a greater percentage of students reading on grade level. As for school culture, they are looking to increase attendance and the number of parents coming in for event such as report card conferences as well as decrease the number of tardiness, suspensions, and serious incident reports.

John Story Jenks Academy of the Arts and Sciences

Located in Northwest Philadelphia, Jenks is a public school in the Philadelphia School District serving about 450 students in grades K-8. The student population is about 76 percent African American, 11 percent White, 10 percent Multi-Race, 2 percent Hispanic, and 1 percent Asian. In contrast to Tilden and Carnell, only about 50 percent of the students they serve qualify for free and reduced lunch. Traditionally, Jenks has had PSSA scores significantly higher than the district (Philadelphia School District, 2015c).

In the couple of years leading up to the request for proposals being put out by the district for the School Redesign Initiative, Jenks had already started making some instructional design changes. They had introduced a STEM lab in the 4th and 5th grade with a shared classroom model and created a STEM elective program for the middle

school grades. In addition, they started using the shared classroom model in K-2 and in middle school English language arts. Then, in July 2014 when the request for proposals came out, members of the school leadership team felt that it was a great opportunity to reinforce what they were already doing instructionally as well as provide an avenue to create innovative extra-curricular opportunities outside of the traditional school day.

The redesign team's reasoning for applying to the School Redesign Initiative relates closely to their vision which states:

Jenks will engage students where their strengths and talents lie so that they may experience success and build confidence to take on new challenges. Jenks will remove the walls and bells from learning by offering experiences outside of the classroom and school day to develop the habit of seeking learning opportunity everywhere. Jenks will encourage students to seek to learn out of passion, not requirement. Students will be self-driven to discover, hungry to explore, and confident to take risks. (Philadelphia School District, 2015d)

For the study, I spoke with Christina Moore, STEM teacher at the time of application and now a school based teacher leader, and Brandy Arnold, a learning support teacher.

During the interviews all of the pieces of their program pointed to the goals of "creating learning experiences that are vibrant and vital for their experience," and developing students that have an independence in their learning.

The main part of Jenks' redesign plan centers around their Ignite summer learning program. The goal of the program is to prevent student academic regression over the summer. Teachers and staff from the school created this program from scratch and they

piloted it this past summer. For each grade, the school created three science themed units built around key skills in math and English language arts the students learned that previous school year. The students report out on these units using a google classroom that a teacher monitors. Google classroom is a free web-based platform that allows educational institutions to integrate all of their google services such as Google Docs, Gmail, and Google calendar. Teachers are able to setup a classroom, create assignments with due dates and attach drop boxes to them to collect assignments. They are also able to set up discussion boards to facilitate class discussion. In addition, teachers are able to provide feedback and grades within the classroom they set up. By practicing these skills throughout the summer, the redesign team hopes that when the new school year starts, the teachers will not have to go back and reteach these skills. This will prevent students from falling behind grade level.

In addition, the school has partnered with several community organizations to work with through the Ignite program. First, they have partnered with the community library to provide any research materials the students may need as well as technology if the student does not have any at home. They also set up programs with different museums and organizations to provide excursion days that the whole family can take part in throughout the summer. Their goal is to create a more participatory experience for the students' education in which they have choice in what they are learning, while also held accountable for reaching work goals.

The second part of Jenks' redesign program is expanding the afterschool club offerings. Teachers volunteered to lead clubs such as Odyssey of the Mind, Friendship

Club, chess club, and sports club. This provides an alternative outlet for their energy after the school day while promoting community, collaboration, problem solving, and leadership development among students.

All of Jenk's redesign plans center around creating additional learning experiences for their students. As mentioned in the interviews, a big push for the redesign team was the parents wanting a rigorous academic environment for their students. The redesign team wanted to see how they could blend this with helping develop as a whole rather than just throwing more academics at them. Both of their programs, Ignite and the afterschool programs, are focused on letting students' curiosity take hold, develop themselves as learners, and become goal driven.

The redesign team is looking at several measures to determine the success of the program. The first measure is where the students are testing at the start of each school year. Their goal is to eventually have everyone testing at the midyear level of that school year when they come in during the fall. This way, students can eventually move a year ahead in their studies and stay competitive for high school placements. As for families, they are tracking how many people take advantage of the summer opportunities and conducting surveys to see what parents are liking and what they want to see more of.

Laura H. Carnell Elementary School

Carnell is a public elementary located in the lower northeast section of the Philadelphia School District. They serve approximately 1,000 students in grades K-5. Carnell has a diverse student population where approximately 56 percent of students are African American, 26 percent are Hispanic, 9 percent are Multi-Racial, 5 percent are

white, and 4 percent are Asian. All of the students qualify for free and reduced lunch.

Historically, Carnell's PSSA scores were just under the school district averages

(Philadelphia School District, 2015e).

The process for applying to the School Redesign Initiative program was started by the principal of Carnell, Hilderbrand Pelzer. He emailed a number of individuals who he thought might be interested in working on the redesign team. Two of the individuals who joined the team were Erin Richardson, an honors teacher for grade 3-5, and Jennifer Leaman, a parent and then president of the school advisory committee: it was these two individuals I interviewed for the study. The members of the team noticed that the school test scores were low and that the best way to improve them was to make a significant change in what the school was doing.

According to the School Redesign Initiative website, the vision of Carnell's redesign plan is:

The Laura H. Carnell School will be the leading project-based learning elementary school of choice for Philadelphia students. It is our goal for every student to achieve academic growth and engage in an inspiring, challenging, and personalized project-based learning environment that prepares students for success, including in Philadelphia's new middle and high school models.

((Philadelphia School District, 2015f)

In the interviews with two of the redesign team members, they continued to come back to two overarching goals. The first was to improve the school culture for students, parents, and staff. The second was to provide an engaging and challenging curriculum to improve

student academic performance. As they discussed both of these goals in the context of the redesign plans, it became evident that they were closely linked. They look to achieve these goals through two programs: project-based learning curriculum and a family resource center.

The first part of the Carnell's redesign plan centers around an instructional redesign. Carnell has partnered with Expeditionary Learning (EL) to introduce a project-based learning program curriculum into the classrooms. Rather than learning a set of skills and being tested on them, EL's project based learning curriculum works through a unit, which culminates in a project. There is a focus subject for each unit that can be science or social studies related. In addition, each unit lays out a clear set of expectations the students should be able to meet by the end of it. In addition, they are given the tools needed to find the information they need, collaboration skills, and the ability to start a project on their own rather than waiting for the teacher to tell them what to do. This challenges students to take more ownership of their learning. The redesign team's hope is that this will ultimately lead to better academic performance by the students.

EL also has a set of norms and protocols they follow which are school wide. By having that consistency across the school building, there is hope that it will create a uniform culture throughout the school. Their norms include be polite, be prompt, be prepared, be patient, and be a problem-solver. In addition, the team believes that this will be a more engaging curriculum for the teachers. Ms. Richardson discussed how the first year will be challenging because everyone is at square one when it comes to planning and preparation, but once they get through that, they should start seeing results.

Mrs. Leaman also discussed how she hoped the EL program would create a more supportive and collaborative culture among the teachers as they lesson plan together and share what is and is not working for them. She discussed how it is “not easy to implement a brand new model, so I want to see the teachers be emotional supports for each other.”

The second part of the redesign is to create a family resource center. In the early stages of meeting as a redesign team, they realized that there were many problems that the students were facing that teachers and staff are not trained to handle. At the point of the interviews, November 2015, the team had met with a number of community organizations with which to potentially partner. Their vision is to have a main partnership that provides a couple of case managers on site to meet with parents if they are experiencing problems at home or students if they are having problems in the classroom. The school would then have additional partner organizations that focus on certain issues such as immigration. The redesign team wants to see families interacting with the school before there is a crisis. They hope this will create a more positive interpretation of the school from the perspective of parents and encourage them to volunteer and ask how they too can be a part of the solution. The second goal is to reduce stress levels for families. By doing this, the team hopes to ease the minds of the students and allow them to better focus in class and be able to work to their full academic potential.

Carnell’s redesign team is measuring outcomes of the two programs, EL project-based learning and the family center, from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives.

Quantitatively, they have yearlong benchmarks they want to reach in terms of the number of students reading on grade level and a certain percentage for their average test scores .

They also have quantitative climate goals such as attendance, number of suspensions, and the number of parents taking advantage of the family resource room. Qualitatively, they have a survey that they hope each parent will fill out after visiting the family resource center. This will give them a framework moving forward in the redesign as to what parents find works and what services or opportunities they want to see offered.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusion

While all of the schools implemented a different design plan, each of their plans were rooted strongly in looking at instructional design, whether during the typical school day or beyond. This goes hand-in-hand with what the research is showing about the school autonomy initiatives of the 21st century. In addition to each school having a main goal of improving student learning outcomes, they also all had a goal concerning school culture; understanding that if the culture of the school is not conducive to learning, to some extent, it does not matter what is happening in the classroom. Both the goal of improving student learning outcomes through changes in instructional design as well as improving school culture come directly from the design principals laid out by the School Redesign Initiative.

Although all three schools worked from the same design principals, they developed these two aspects of the design differently. An interesting finding to note is that the amount the redesign focused on instructional design appears to be directly related to the schools' average PSSA scores. Tilden, which had the lowest PSSA scores focused almost solely on changing classroom instruction as that was one of their most pressing issues. Almost their entire redesign was centered around implementing the blended learning model in their classroom through station rotation and computer based programs. Even the part of the redesign for teachers was focused on helping the teachers reach their full potential in implementing the blended learning in their classrooms.

Carnell, which test scores, while traditionally still below the district average, were slightly higher than Tilden, split the focus of the redesign between an instructional redesign and their family resource center, both with a big focus on improving the school culture. Carnell chose to partner with a curriculum/school design company, Expeditionary Learning, which uses a project-based curriculum design in partner with a school culture component centered around schoolwide norms and protocols.

Finally, Jenks, which typically performed above the district average, did not look at classroom instruction beyond continuing on with changes it has made in the last few years, rather their redesign plan looked beyond the 8:00am to 3:00 pm school day. While they continued with their STEM programs and open classrooms during the traditional school day, Jenks wanted to provide enrichment opportunities for their students. Their summer Ignite program allows students to practice the skills they learned in the past school year in an engaging manner in order to keep them at least on grade level if not ahead for the upcoming school year.

The three schools also differed in the extent they looked at school culture programs beyond the classroom. Tilden's main school culture component was the continuation of their PBIS program which looks to developing the child as a whole through an intervention program. Carnell looked to create a family resource center to help alleviate stresses their students' families may be facing as well as providing an open environment in which parents are able to visit and come into the school. Last, Jenks' expanded their afterschool programs to help develop interests in students and provide an alternative outlet for energy at the end of the school day.

All members of the redesign teams interviewed for the research acknowledged how hard this redesign process was, but also how rewarding it has been at the same time. Ms. Salvante shared how “redesigning a school is like trying to change a tire while the car is moving. Each lug nut of the tire is a specific pillar of the redesign process that needs to be fixed.” But, all team members believed that the hard work could lead to amazing positive changes within their schools. Both Ms. Richardson and Mrs. Leaman of Carnell talked of how encouraging the grassroots nature of the School Redesign Initiative was. Ms. Richardson discussed how “in a system where there are state take-overs happening and where the city is having to shut down schools, it allows schools who a struggling to take ownership and make changes with the support of the school district.” They were provided with an opportunity that not many struggling schools are given.

Considering that teachers and principals, particularly in Philadelphia, are often perceived to be unhappy with reform efforts, what makes the Philadelphia School Redesign Initiative different? The School Redesign Initiative stands in stark contrast to the Children Achieve plan of the late 1990’s and when the School Reform Commission replaced the school board in the early 2000’s. The two previous reforms were controlled externally of the schools with little consideration for the unique situation of the individual school. In contrast, the School Redesign Initiative places the reform decisions in the hands of the school: including principals, curriculum specialists, teachers, and parents. The redesign initiative allows the redesign teams to align their plans with what they believe, giving them and their schools a greater level of buy-in to the program. Since schools have the will to participate in the redesign initiative because they are able to align

their plans with their beliefs, and the capacity because the decisions are being made at the bottom level, the longevity of the School Redesign Initiative depends on sustainability.

Will the schools have the resources they need for long-term implementation of their plans? When their design year grants are up, can the schools sustain the programs they have put in place?

This study was an important first step in examining the School Redesign Initiative as it was able to expand the discussion on each of the schools' redesign plans. However, because the 2015-2016 school year was the first year of implementation for this first cohort of School Redesign Initiative schools, there is still a lot of research to be done. One of the next steps will be to track the outcomes of each school's redesign plans. The scores from this school year can begin to provide a picture of the designs effectiveness that will become more clear three and five years down the road.

The other important step for research on the School Redesign Initiative will be to continue to examine the redesign plans for each new cohort of schools. One important question to look at will be, do they learn from what Cohort One schools are doing? If so, how, and how does that influence the later cohorts' work.

Appendix A

Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. What is your name?
2. How are you associated with your school?
3. How did you become a member of the redesign team?
4. What led the team to apply for the redesign initiative grant?
5. What are the goals of the redesign team?
6. What is your team hoping to achieve through the redesign initiative?
7. Which of the initiatives design principles did your team focus on?
8. Why did your team choose to focus on these?
9. What does your school's redesign program entail?
10. What instructional strategies did you implement?
11. What tools/resources are you using to support this instructional strategy?
12. What outcomes do you anticipate by implementing this redesign program?
 - a. For students?
 - b. For teachers?
 - c. For families?
13. For the school culture?
14. How are you measuring the outcomes of the program?
15. What models or examples did you design your plan off of?
16. Are there any questions you think I should have asked you that I did not?

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