

# **A Study of Leadership and Continuous Improvement at Leadership Preparatory Academy**

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THESIS

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This thesis is dedicated to my children, husband, parents, brother and sister, family, and friends without whom it would never have been accomplished.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACCESS	Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State
ASC	Advisory School Council
CSR	Consortium on School Research
DIBELS	Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills
ELLs	English Language Learners
IDEL	<i>Indicadores Dinámicos del Éxito en la Lectura</i>
IMPS	Independent Management and Performance School
LPA	Leadership Prep Academy
MAP	Measures of Academic Progress
NWEA	Northwest Evaluation Association
PreK	Prekindergarten
RTI	Response to Intervention
SAP	School Action Plan
SAT	Student Achievement Test
SIP	School Improvement Plan

## SUMMARY

This capstone project examines how an elementary school principal and her leadership team transformed Leadership Prep Academy in Capital City into a collaborative, high performing community school. This five-year process of continuous improvement involved engaging students, staff, parents, and members of the community in developing a culture of shared accountability which included analyzing existing practices and procedures, reviewing student performance and other relevant data, and developing strategic plans to move the school forward.

Mrs. Garcia developed a culture of continuous improvement at LPA through the use of two major elements of leadership that served as two central themes throughout this story of school development. The first theme focuses on how she used power, authority, and influence to introduce changes and new initiatives. The second theme describes how she developed relational trust to help her decrease the risks and liabilities that occurred as a result of the changes. Mrs. Garcia used relational trust to lessen the friction caused by her direct communication and focused vision. Selected educational research will be used to support the central themes in this capstone dissertation.

As Mrs. Garcia reflected on her experiences as principal over five years, there were two types of lessons learned: (1) lessons she and her team learned after reflecting on the past five years and (2) lessons that others should take away from the LPA story and analysis. Mrs. Garcia believed that each of these lessons may contribute to educational research on the use of relational trust with power and authority to implement change processes in school development, and may be useful to practitioners in understanding that risks and uncertainties need to be addressed in order for improvement to occur.

## I. INTRODUCTION

This capstone project examines how an elementary school principal and her leadership team transformed Leadership Prep Academy (LPA)<sup>1</sup> in Capital City into a Level 1 school<sup>2</sup>. This five-year process of continuous improvement involved engaging students, staff, parents, and members of the community in analyzing existing practices and procedures, reviewing student performance and other relevant data, and developing strategic plans to move the school forward. This story describes how Principal Garcia and her leadership team managed liabilities of newness through the development of relational trust among members of the school community. In this capstone, “liabilities of newness” refers to risks or uncertainties that surfaced as a result of changes or new initiatives in the school organization (Smylie, 2010). Relational trust, as defined by Bryk and Schneider (2003), refers to

parties in a relationship maintaining an understanding and commitment of their roles and obligations and holding some expectations about the obligations of the other parties within an organization.

During this five-year period, from 2006 to 2011, this intentionally reflective process involved engaging the school community in identifying what was working and what needed work, setting goals and priorities, and establishing next steps and progress-monitoring systems. Initially, Mrs. Garcia used her authority, power, and influence as the principal to get the staff, students, parents, and community to along with her vision. Eventually she strategically used relational trust in addition to power and authority to get the school community to understand and accept change. Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team fostered relational trust by engaging

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudonyms are used throughout this capstone. Quotes included in this capstone are based on the principal’s (Mrs. Garcia) recollections of events during her time at LPA.

<sup>2</sup> Level 1 is a designation assigned by the District Public Schools Office to identify schools that have consistently made gains in student performance on state tests and have had increases in attendance over the previous three years. Eleven out of forty-one schools in LPA’s area have obtained Level 1 status.

members of the school community in understanding and supporting changes aimed at moving the school forward. This was an integral part of developing a strong, community school culture. The school culture evolved from one that prepared students to meet state standards on the Student Achievement Test (SAT) to one that prepared them to exceed those standards. After years of collaborative work, students, staff, parents and members of the community worked together to develop “The LPA Way,” a framework that defined expectations and became the norm at LPA. This collaborative culture centered on consistent communication, high expectations, and the exchange of ideas to increase student performance.

The leadership team learned to manage risks and liabilities effectively by focusing on developing relational trust among members of the school community. To increase relational trust, the leadership team worked closely with staff, and also met regularly with parents and community partners to gain support for changes, or to follow up on conversations or new initiatives. As relational trust increased, Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team found it was easier to gain buy-in and implement changes at LPA.

This capstone will examine how Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team developed relational trust and responded to obstacles. It includes a description of the four years prior to Mrs. Garcia’s arrival at LPA, and how the school cultivated a culture of continuous improvement under her leadership after she became principal. It examines the areas that Mrs. Garcia and her team initially worked to improve or enhance, which became the focus of school-improvement initiatives. These areas included collaboration and communication, instruction and curricular materials, and community and professional partnerships. The leadership team created a culture that thrived on change, reducing the liabilities of newness by increasing relational trust among members of the school community (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). This

capstone examines the decisions and actions of Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team, and describes how their thinking evolved over time.

The work of Schein (2010), Smylie (2010), and Fullan (2007) is used in examining the adoption of significant changes at LPA, including new literacy and math series, a transitional bilingual program, and many other initiatives. This literature, as well as other research, is used to explain how buy-in was established and how continuous improvement was promoted.

## II. LEADERSHIP PREP ACADEMY

Leadership Prep Academy opened its doors in 2002 to relieve overcrowding in four nearby attendance-area schools. The school began with one classroom per grade level from pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. Mr. Lopez served as the interim principal, and Ms. Tapia was the interim assistant principal. They served as interim principal and assistant principal until the Advisory School Council (ASC)<sup>3</sup> was established and a principal was selected and given a four year contract. Mr. Lopez and Ms. Tapia selected the initial staff, ordered curricular materials, and established the school policies and procedures. During the summer of 2003, Mr. Lopez was selected as principal by the ASC a year after the school was opened.

In December 2006, Mr. Lopez accepted a position at the District Central Office, and Ms. Tapia retired. In April 2007, Mrs. Garcia, the assistant principal, who replaced Ms. Tapia, accepted the principalship at LPA. Mr. George, a principal intern, followed Mrs. Garcia as the assistant principal.

In 2006, 91.1 percent of LPA students were Latino, 92.7 percent received free or reduced lunch, and 37.7 percent were Limited English Proficient (see Table I, Appendix).<sup>4</sup> That year there were thirteen classroom teachers, a special-education teacher, a bilingual program coordinator, and a counselor. At the time all of the staff except for two teachers and the counselor had less than ten years' experience working in a public school. In 2011, 97.9 percent of LPA students were Latino, 96.5 percent received free or reduced lunch, and 50.1 percent were

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<sup>3</sup> The Advisory School Council consisted of six parents, two community members, two teachers, and the principal. In 2010, a paraprofessional was added to the ASC. The ASC was responsible for selecting and evaluating the school principal, renewing the principal's contract, approving the School Improvement Plan (SIP), and allocating discretionary state and federal school funds. Only Advisory School Councils have the authority to give principals four year contracts.

<sup>4</sup> District Public Schools. (2006). *State school profile: Leadership Prep Academy*. Capital City: State Board of Education.

Limited English Proficient.<sup>5</sup> That year, the faculty had grown to include seventeen teachers, four special-education teachers, a bilingual program coordinator, and a counselor. LPA had two Pre-K classrooms, and provided programs for students with autism in two classrooms, one for students in Grades K-4 and the other for grades 5-8. The student population grew from 25 in 2006 to 373 in 2011. The mobility rate, which tracks students transferring to other schools, was 5.1 percent of students in 2011 in comparison to district mobility rate which was 17.6 percent (see Table I, Appendix).

Leadership Prep Academy was located in a leased facility in southwestern Capital City that was built in 1909. It had fifteen classrooms, a library, a computer lab, a gymnasium, office spaces, and a cafeteria. The school had many facility problems, including a roof that often leaked, chipping paint, no air conditioning, and squeaky floors. Also, LPA was spread across two separate buildings that students and staff had to walk between, including during inclement weather. Initially, the buildings provided limited classroom space. The leadership team worked to maximize space utilization in both buildings between 2006 and 2011.<sup>6</sup> For example, the cafeteria doubled as an art room, the library doubled as a computer lab, and small closets were converted into administrative offices shared by multiple people. The leadership team secured resources from state capital-improvement funds and district discretionary building-operations funds, to make necessary renovations like replacing windows in both buildings.<sup>7</sup> The leadership team also attempted to seek out additional space and a new building through the LPA Expansion

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<sup>5</sup> District Public Schools. (2011). *State report card: Leadership Prep Academy*. Capital City: State Board of Education.

<sup>6</sup> District Buildings Operations Office. (2006). *Space Utilization Report*. Capital City: Author.

<sup>7</sup> LPA. (2008, February). *LPA minutes of ASC meeting*. Capital City: Author

Proposal,<sup>8</sup> the LPA New School Proposal,<sup>9</sup> and the LPA K-12 Proposal,<sup>10</sup> in order relieve overcrowding and provide additional students with quality educational opportunities.

Even with a deteriorating facility and limited space, LPA student performance increased over time (see Tables II and III, Appendix), and positive changes occurred in the school culture. As will be story that follows, student performance reflected the school community's hard work and commitment to providing students with high-quality educational opportunities. Student performance on the SAT improved, with the number of students meeting or exceeding state standards increasing from 64.8 in 2006 to 86.1 percent in 2011 (see Tables II and III, Appendix). In reading, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding increased from 57.1 to 83.9 percent, from 69.8 to 89.1 percent in math, and from 73.7 to 83.7 percent in science. As a result of gains in student performance, LPA achieved Level 1 status in 2011, according to the District Public Schools Performance Policy. Mrs. Garcia believed that increased relational trust among members of the LPA school community played a significant role in helping to increase student performance and in developing a collaborative school culture that thrived on continuous improvement.

Although they had experience working with low-income, Limited English Proficient students, and had a strong understanding of effective school and change research,<sup>11</sup> Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team developed evolving "theories of action" for school improvement evolved based on new experiences. Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George's initial theories of action focused on

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<sup>8</sup> LPA. (2008, March). *LPA Expansion Proposal*. Capital City: Author.

<sup>9</sup> LPA. (2009, June). *LPA New School Proposal*. Capital City: Author.

<sup>10</sup> LPA. (2010, June). *LPA K-12 Proposal*. Capital City: Author.

<sup>11</sup> Effective school and change research includes Marzano (2003), DuFour (2004a; 2004b), Evans (1996), and Fullan (2007).

developing systems to support continuous improvement. This involved engaging the school community in developing strategic plans to give students a strong educational foundation, which would provide them with more options for selective-enrollment and magnet high schools, in addition to competitive colleges and universities. In order to take advantage of these opportunities, students needed to do well on the EXPLORE and other selective enrollment tests. If they were to perform better on both tests, Mrs. Garcia and the leadership team thought that students needed a strong early literacy foundation in the primary grades, and college-readiness skills developed in middle school. This motivated Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team to make many changes described in this capstone.

Even though there were substantial gains in student performance, and the culture transformed into one with high expectations for all, there was still much room to learn and grow. Leadership Prep Academy was by no means perfect, but it made great strides in transforming the school culture and providing students with high-quality educational opportunities. The following narrative describes how Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team developed a high-performing school by increasing relational trust among members of the school community and reducing risks or uncertainties.

**A. The Story Unfolds: July 2002 – June 2006**

In 2002, LPA opened its doors to 275 students. The first principal of LPA, Mr. Lopez, and the assistant principal, Ms. Tapia, served as the school's leadership team. Mr. Lopez was a first-year principal with three years of experience as an assistant principal and five years of teaching experience. Ms. Tapia was a teacher with twenty years of classroom teaching experience, but no experience as an assistant principal. Mr. Lopez and Ms. Tapia prepared the school for its opening.

According to Mrs. Castro, the school clerk who was part of the LPA school opening, the first leadership team selected the instructional materials, ordered supplies and furniture, and hired the school staff. According to Mrs. Terry, a teacher who worked at the school when it opened, Mr. Lopez and Ms. Tapia were initially focused on developing systems to support day-to-day operations and management, such as developing the staff and student handbooks, rather than on instruction.

The initial school-wide vision was to create a high-performing, dual-language program, but this vision lacked the structure to support it. Because the school was new, it took a few years to develop the instructional programs. Also, according to the bilingual coordinator, the staff had not been properly trained, nor did the school have enough English books and Spanish books available for students in a dual-language program. The original staff received some professional development and support, with curriculum mapping and developing lessons from university partner St. John University. However, according to Mrs. Terry, the school's instructional program lacked overall coherence. There were inconsistencies in the ways lessons were introduced, students were assessed, and grades were distributed. There were few systems in place to support the instructional programs, and the leadership team asked staff to integrate additional resources from a variety of publishers in order to differentiate instruction, instead of purchasing a reading and math series in which differentiation was embedded in the program.

The school developed a partnership with Community Project, a non-profit organization that represented twenty-eight public and private institutions on the city's southwest side. Community Project provided workshops for all LPA parents, and trained parent tutors on how to work with students in small groups and one-on-one with reading and math activities. In the first four years, Community Project was the only institution that assisted with increasing parental

involvement by bringing in parents to volunteer as mentors in classrooms. However, parent participation and community involvement at LPA was low. In 2006, for example, attendance at parent workshops ranged from fifteen to twenty parents.<sup>12</sup>

In June of 2006, Ms. Tapia retired. At that time, Mrs. Garcia was serving as a district reading coach. In that role, she facilitated professional development workshops for administrators and teachers, modeled lessons for teachers in nineteen schools, facilitated grade-cycle meetings on reading, writing, and math research-based best practices.<sup>13</sup> Mrs. Garcia visited two or three schools each day, providing additional support via email and phone, working ten to twelve hours each weekday and often on weekends. She had the opportunity to work with many instructional leaders, while developing her own leadership style. These experiences helped Mrs. Garcia to deepen her understanding of what effective leaders do and say. As she traveled from school to school introducing new district initiatives, she learned that her work was much more effective when she developed relational trust with the staff. When working with leadership teams and grade-cycle teams, Mrs. Garcia refrained from making judgmental statements about current practices, instead encouraging staff members to reflect on their own practices. Although Mrs. Garcia had learned from her experiences as a reading coach, she wanted to focus her work in one school and wished to apply what she had learned as a reading coach about good instruction as a school administrator.

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<sup>12</sup> LPA. (2006, May). *Agendas, minutes, and sign-in sheets of Parent Bilingual Advisory Committee meetings*. Capital City: Author.

<sup>13</sup> During grade-cycle meetings, teachers met once a week for thirty minutes to discuss instructional topics, which included lesson planning, assessments, grading, and others. The day and time of these meetings varied from year to year.

**B. A New Leadership Team: July 2006-August 2006**

In July 2006, Mrs. Garcia was hired as the new assistant principal at LPA, and Mr. George was assigned to the school as a principal intern. As a principal intern working under Mr. Lopez, Mr. George was expected to learn how to manage the roles and responsibilities of a principal throughout the year. Although Mr. George had eight years of experience as a special-education high school department chairperson, neither Mrs. Garcia nor Mr. George had experience as school administrators.

During her first week as assistant principal, Mrs. Garcia was on her own at LPA. The former assistant principal had retired, and Mr. Lopez was on vacation. Mrs. Garcia started learning as much as she could about the school by reviewing student-performance data and other relevant documents, such as the School Improvement Plan (SIP) and School Action Plan (SAP), as well as other relevant information about the school from the District website. The SIP and SAP were developed by the staff and the ASC, and included school-wide goals and priorities, school-improvement strategies or initiatives, and school budget allocations. Both documents, however, lacked detail and specific action steps on how instruction would be improved and monitored. The SIP mentioned many areas that individual students, teachers, and the school as a whole needed to improve, but failed to address how these improvements would be implemented or monitored. Together, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George also analyzed LPA's Value Added Report, State Standards Achievement Test (SAT) results, Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) scores, EXPLORE scores, attendance and mobility data, and Consortium on

School Research Survey<sup>14</sup> results (see Tables I through VII, Appendix). The Consortium on School Research Survey examines five key components of school success. These components include ambitious instruction, effective leaders, collaborative teachers, involved families, and supportive environment. LPA used the Consortium School Research Survey data in understanding the state of the school and in establishing priorities.

From these data, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George learned that in 2006, 57.1 percent of students without ELLs were meeting state standards in reading, as were 69.8 percent of students in math, but less than 10 percent of students were exceeding state standards on the SAT (see Table II, Appendix). The data were alarming to them because of the small number of students exceeding state standards. Mrs. Garcia knew from their doctoral coursework that students needed to exceed state standards in order to meet standards on national assessments and be ready for college. Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George came to believe that there was a need for differentiated instruction in order to address the needs of the students who were not meeting state standards, while pushing other students from meeting state standards to exceeding them.

Mr. Lopez asked Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George to develop a professional development plan and facilitate sessions for the 2006-2007 year. At the time, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George were not sure why Mr. Lopez was allowing them to lead professional development during the year but appreciated the opportunity. They recognized early on that in order to get the school community to understand the need for change, they needed student, staff, and parent input and

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<sup>14</sup> The Consortium on School Research uses 20 years of research findings to define these five components of organization and climate related to improving schools. Schools are classified as very strong (at least 1.5 standard deviations above the district average), strong (between 0.5 and 1.5 standard deviations above the district average), neutral (above -0.5 standard deviations and below 0.5 standard deviations above the district average), weak (0.5 to 1.5 standard deviations below the district average), and very weak (at least 1.5 standard deviations below the district average) in each of these five components of schools success. The Consortium on School Research has found that schools that do not demonstrate strengths in multiple areas often struggle to improve.

buy-in for developing school goals and priorities. They therefore knew that they needed to win the trust of the school community. Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George believed that they needed to develop a strategic plan for LPA before opening the school year, but were not sure they what they should do first. When beginning to develop a plan of action for school improvement efforts, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George spent a lot of time thinking about and talking about Bolman and Deal's (2008) organizational frames and how they connected to the work they were proposing for LPA. She was most interested in talking about the structural and political frames that deal with how organizations are organized and the political systems that exist within them. Mrs. Garcia had been introduced to Bolman and Deal's (2008) work in her doctoral classes, and Mr. George was being exposed to their work as part of his principal-preparation program.

Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George spent hours talking with each other about the school as an organization, and discussing necessary changes to the instructional programs that could get additional students to exceed state standards. Drawing on her experiences as a district reading coach, Mrs. Garcia believed that changes to instructional programs and practices would affect the culture at LPA. From the end of July through August 2006, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George spent many days, evenings, and weekends fleshing out the changes they felt would be necessary, and brainstorming how to get the buy-in necessary to support them. They also spent a lot of time talking to other school administrators and reading research such as Marzano (2003), Collins (2001), and other research that discussed effective practices in schools, such as establishing a common vision and increasing parent and community involvement.

Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George found that the school performance data and other related documents they reviewed were very useful in understanding the needs of the school. These documents provided useful data necessary to understand school-wide performance, attendance,

and mobility trends, and they helped Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George understand the school's strengths and weaknesses. Although 57.1 percent of students in reading and 69.8 percent of students in math were meeting state standards on the SAT, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George were troubled that only 7.9 percent and 9.5 percent, respectively, were exceeding state standards. They believed that students needed to perform at the exceeding level in order to demonstrate that they were college ready.

Formal and informal conversations with students, staff, and ASC members during August 2006 were just as important as analyzing data. These conversations were important in helping Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George build a foundation of relational trust with members of the school community, and helped them to understand the need for systems to support day-to-day operations. Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George thought that the school culture could be improved by establishing clear, high expectations and engaging various members of the school community in making decisions about school-improvement efforts. Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George had informal conversations with five middle-school students who stopped by at different times over the summer. One student informed Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George that there was a lack of rigor in all of his classes. Another student mentioned that the current school discipline plan, which involved morning detention, was "rather useless" because it did not deter inappropriate behavior. A third described students requesting to use the bathroom solely to get out of classes, while a fourth student was appalled by the graffiti on school property. A fifth student talked about how he was frightened to go to the bathroom because of the bullying that occurred there. Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George learned about the school culture from talking to these students, and made it a point to also speak with the teachers who were in the building during the summer.

In August 2006, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George met informally with six teachers, who had dropped by to pick up things or came to work in their classrooms. Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George took advantage of these opportunities to begin to develop relational trust by asking for suggestions on how the school could be improved. One teacher mentioned that the staff obtained information through weekly bulletins, but that there were no consistent, weekly staff meetings. Another teacher explained that there were not enough opportunities to exchange ideas with other teachers. One consistent complaint during these conversations was that teachers felt they were not appreciated by the administration. The teachers mentioned that Park University provided most of the professional development and curriculum support, and Mrs. Garcia also learned from staff members about the school's partnership with Community Project. All of this information was useful in understanding some school needs, and in understanding who was involved in helping the principal make decisions at LPA.

A few of the teachers also recommended that Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George speak to ASC members to learn more about parental and community involvement. The ASC was involved in making significant decisions related to principal selection, principal contract renewal, and decisions about how to spend discretionary state and federal funds. Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George took the teachers' advice and spoke to six ASC members who visited the school during the summer. Through these informal conversations, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George learned that the same group of six to ten parents was involved in many school activities. The ASC members recognized that they wanted to focus on increasing parent involvement at the Bilingual Advisory Committee meetings, at which attendance ranged from fifteen to twenty parents. During informal conversations, several ASC parents indicated that they wanted to increase parental involvement but did not know how, so Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George made finding ways to do so one of their

priorities. Mrs. Garcia believed that the ASC members appeared surprised that she had taken time to speak with them and ask them for their opinions. Mrs. Garcia made it a point to be present at the first ASC meeting of the year, as an initial step in developing the ASC's trust.

The first ASC meeting of the year was held in August 2006. Mrs. Garcia wanted to make the ASC members feel welcomed, in order to get off on the right foot as the assistant principal and to establish a new norm in which the staff showed appreciation for parent and community involvement. Mrs. Garcia bought and served tamales and coffee at the meeting, and explained that she believed that parents and members of the community needed to work together to identify what was working and what needed work. Mr. Rodriguez, an ASC parent representative, responded by stating, "All of your ideas sound good, but how do we know you are not going to change?" He clarified that, when he mentioned change, he was referring to becoming mean or authoritative. It was clear that Mr. Rodriguez had trust issues with the new assistant principal, though Mrs. Garcia was not sure if this was because she was new to the school, or if he did not trust administrators in general.

Mrs. Garcia responded, "There is not anything I could say now to ease your minds. Only time will tell with my words and actions." Mr. Rodriguez responded by asking, "How old are you?" This was the first of multiple times Mrs. Garcia's age would be questioned. Before Mrs. Garcia was able to answer, he added, "I know I'm not supposed to ask that, but you're not supposed to serve food either." Mrs. Garcia responded, "Well, we're a team and I don't mind serving food." Mrs. Garcia did not take offense at the comment, and kept a smile on her face. She was determined to win the ASC's trust.

After reviewing student-performance data and other relevant school documents, and meeting with a few school community members, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George developed a

professional development plan for teachers that included reviewing what was working and what needed work, analyzing student-performance data, reflecting on current practices, sharing best practices, and using data to inform instruction and school decision making. Professional development workshops and grade-cycle<sup>15</sup> meetings during 2006-2007 focused on the previously mentioned areas and played a fundamental role in school-improvement efforts.

**C. Raising Expectations and Creating a Sense of Urgency: August 2006 – November 2006**

During the first day of the August 2006 professional development session, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George introduced themselves to the staff as the new assistant principal and principal intern. Mrs. Garcia believed that they had to make a good first impression to gain the staff's trust. The staff appeared to be listening attentively as they described their previous experiences and educational backgrounds, though Mrs. Garcia believed from the expressions on their faces that the staff questioned her age and experience. Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George strategically linked their experiences in literacy, bilingual, and special education to how they felt they could support LPA. The staff members then had the opportunity to introduce themselves to the new assistant principal and principal intern.

After introductions, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George engaged teachers and classroom assistants in reviewing the school's yearly formative assessment data, including SAT and EXPLORE assessments, and in identifying trends over time by cohorts of students in reading, math, and science. Mrs. Garcia believed that if they wanted to gain the staff's trust, they needed to create a safe place for staff members to share their opinions and ideas. Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George held off on sharing their own ideas on how to move the school forward, and instead

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<sup>15</sup> Grade cycles included grades Pre-K-2, grades 3-5, and grades 6-8. In 2011, grade cycles were changed to Pre-K-1, grades 2-4, and grades 5-8.

focused on the staff's ideas on how to improve current practices. They asked the staff to identify areas of instruction that could be improved, and were careful to acknowledge everyone's ideas. Initially, several teachers indicated that they had no idea what would be involved in increasing the level of academic rigor. One teacher said, "We already work eight to ten hours a day. How many more hours do we need to work to increase the level of rigor in our classrooms?" Another teacher said, "We are already doing what we need to be doing, because 70 percent of our students are meeting or exceeding." Mrs. Garcia was not naïve, and recognized that some of the staff members were likely skeptical about her leadership, even though none of them questioned or objected to the ideas she introduced in the professional development workshops. In an effort to win the staff's trust, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George stressed that they wanted the staff to feel comfortable in talking about what was working and what needed to be improved, though they knew that it would take time for the staff to feel comfortable openly talking about their weaknesses or areas that required improvement.

After looking at the data, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George asked the staff specific questions related to student performance, such as, "If 70 percent of students are meeting state standards in your classrooms, is that good enough? What about the other 30 percent of students?" Two teachers expressed the need to raise expectations in order to have additional students meet or exceed state standards. Mrs. Terry, the ASC teacher representative, responded with a list of things that teachers were already doing. Mrs. Terry stated, "We already stay late and grade papers at home. Are you trying to tell us that we need to improve our instruction?" Mrs. Garcia responded, "I'm not saying you need to improve your instruction. I'm saying that you need to enhance it. Improving would imply that there is something wrong with your teaching, and enhancing means you simply add on to what you are already doing." While this dialogue was

progressing, other teachers watched to see how Mrs. Garcia responded to being questioned. Mrs. Garcia believed that the staff members were surprised she did not take offense at the ASC teacher's question. Mrs. Garcia responded respectfully and believed that this collaborative, respectful interaction with the staff helped open the door to gaining the staff's trust over time.

During the three days of intensive professional development, the staff was involved in discussions on developing school-wide and grade-cycle goals and priorities. This process involved dividing into three groups by grade cycle- Pre-K to grade 2, grades 3-5, and grades 6-8. These groups identified what was working and what needed work in terms of instruction, assessments, student discipline, parent involvement, and other topics, and then shared findings with the whole staff. Sometimes groups went back and forth on what they thought was working, but the grade-cycle groups ultimately reached consensus on how they could improve their practices. Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George then led the staff in discussion about effective instructional practices. The staff debated some of the practices, but for the most part, they agreed it was important to incorporate a few key ones as part of each lesson. These areas included having an opening "bell ringer" activity at the start of class, setting a clear objective and focus for the lesson, introducing the lesson by building on students' prior knowledge, and having students engage in an activity or produce a product based on what they learned. Mrs. Terry told Mrs. Garcia that the staff members appreciated being included in identifying school-wide and grade-cycle goals, and welcomed the opportunity to have their voices heard. Even though they did not yet have a reason to trust Mrs. Garcia, the staff went along with incorporating some of the practices they agreed on as essential components of instruction.

Initially, the staff went along with Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George's ideas because they held power and authority as the assistant principal and principal intern. Since many staff had less than

five years teaching experience and they were afraid to go against members of the administrative team, the staff engaged in the professional development activities. Mrs. Garcia also believed that because most of the staff members were in their early or late thirties, they may not have been set in their ways.

Since the start of this story, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George focused on building relational trust in a variety of ways which included engaging teachers in reflecting on their own practices without making judgmental statements. Over the next several months, Mrs. Garcia continued to facilitate professional development workshops that involved analyzing SAT data and brainstorming with teachers about how to enhance their instructional practices. Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George visited classrooms, and provided oral and written suggestions. Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George also made themselves available to staff in the morning, during preparation periods, and after school to answer questions or help out. Mrs. Garcia recalled that teachers started spending more time in the building before and after school, and came to her office to ask questions and seek advice. After a few months, several teachers invited Mrs. Garcia into their classrooms for observations and requested her feedback. Mrs. Garcia believed that practices began to change over time based on her observations and conversations with staff. She saw an increase of rigorous class work and homework. She also saw a change in the types of questions that were asked in classrooms. Teachers began to shift from asking literal questions to asking higher-level, thinking questions. As changes in instructional practices became evident in classroom observations, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George continued working on gaining the LPA staff's trust through their words and actions. They continued to visit classrooms and be available to teachers before and after school. By focusing on increasing relational trust, Mrs. Garcia found that this helped to decrease uncertainties and risks among the staff.

Between September and November 2006, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George began to develop ways to address instruction and day-to-day procedures, since they believed that existing procedures and instructional programs lacked coherence. One system they developed to support instruction was to have weekly reviews of lesson plans and classroom observations by the leadership team, in which written feedback and reflective questions were given to teachers. Systems to support day-to-day operations included updated entrance and dismissal procedures, and lists of school responsibilities. The leadership team also began to review closely the role of community and professional partners in the school. These systems were put in place to create more structure, support, and organizational effectiveness within the school.

Weekly grade-cycle meetings were intended to provide teachers with an opportunity to discuss instructional practices and serve as a strategy for increasing collaboration and communication. Staff-meeting agendas were developed each week by Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George, and the grade-cycle-meeting agendas were often developed with teacher input. Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George initially facilitated the grade-cycle meetings, which included reviewing student work, scoring extended-response student products, and discussing a variety of topics including special education and bilingual education. Mrs. Garcia attempted to increase relational trust and provide a safe environment for staff to share ideas by asking guiding questions like, “What do you think?” This appeared to decrease risks and uncertainties among the staff. Mrs. Garcia knew that she had to be careful to avoid using what was shared during staff and grade-cycle meetings in an evaluative manner.

Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George continued to work with teachers before, during, and after school. They worked with groups of teachers by grade cycle on developing weekly lessons plans or posting student work on bulletin boards. Mrs. Garcia recalled that at times there was push-

back, because several staff members were already feeling overwhelmed by looking for ways to improve their instructional practices. One teacher said, “We are already doing so many things. How can we take one more thing on?” Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George believed that the staff often felt overwhelmed, so they tried to decrease the staff’s anxiety by making jokes, while working to create a need for change.

During this time, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George also began to create a data-driven environment in which student performance, attendance, and other data sources were used to make decisions about the direction of the school. They sought to learn more about the school’s culture by talking with students, parents, and staff about existing norms and practices. These conversations were helpful to Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George in gaining the trust of the school community. One parent, Mrs. Trujillo, told Mrs. Garcia, “The parents appreciate you taking the time to ask us for our opinions.” These conversations focused on, “What do the data tell us, and what can we do to improve student performance and the school culture?”

Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George had these opportunities to serve as instructional leaders because the principal, Mr. Lopez, was frequently out of the building due to his pursuit of a position at the District Central Office. As time passed, Mr. Lopez was less visible in the school. Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George invited Mr. Flores, the bilingual lead teacher, to be part of the leadership team. They also invited Ms. Leon, the counselor and case manager, to be a part of the team. However, she maintained her distance and kept to herself in her office, except when she was specifically invited to meetings.

In November 2006, Mrs. Garcia informed the staff, parents, ASC, and students that she was pregnant. She tried to reassure them that she would only be gone for four weeks. Mrs. Terry told Mrs. Garcia that the staff hoped that she kept her promise to come back in four weeks. Mrs.

Garcia wanted the staff to stay focused on the work they had begun in looking for ways to improve their instructional practices.

**D. A Bump in the Road: December 2006 – March 2007**

In December 2006, just as things appeared to be going smoothly, Mr. Lopez announced that he had accepted a position at the District Central Office. Questions and feelings of uncertainty spread quickly among the staff and the parents who were involved in the school. Mrs. Terry told the ASC that the staff did not want the principal-selection process to divide the faculty, and did not want the process to go on for a long time. Several staff members indicated that they were also worried about the transition, and how it would affect student performance on state assessments that were two months away.

After discussing with her husband and parents the responsibilities involved in assuming the principalship and the impact it would have on her family, Mrs. Garcia decided to apply for the position. She then informed the staff of her intentions to apply for the principalship. Even though she had told the staff she would return from her leave of absence in four weeks, the staff and ASC were skeptical that she would return quickly. However, she received positive oral support from most staff members and a few parents. Mrs. Garcia recalled that there were two teachers, Mrs. Sandoval and Mrs. Jones, and two parents, Mrs. Soto and Mrs. Montez, who openly did not support her as the new principal. Mrs. Terry and the ASC chairperson, Mrs. Aguilera, shared with Mrs. Garcia that they were nervous about the principal transition and the direction of the school. Mrs. Garcia believed that the staff and ASC were unsure if Mrs. Garcia would come back in four weeks as she had promised, because no one could predict if there were would be any complications with the baby's delivery.

In late December 2006, the District office assigned an interim principal, Mrs. Alvarez, to the school. The District was split by geographic areas; each supervised by a district team, and LPA was supervised and supported by the Southwest District team.<sup>16</sup> Because the principal was no longer at the school, Mr. George, the principal intern, was moved to a high school.

In January 2007, Mrs. Garcia went through the District Principal Eligibility Process and became eligible for a principalship. At the end of January, Mrs. Garcia went out on maternity leave, and would remain on leave until the middle of March. During her absence, she stayed connected to the staff by phone, while caring for her newborn baby. Mrs. Alvarez had told the staff that all questions about instruction or day-to-day operations should be directed toward her while Mrs. Garcia was on leave, but the teachers continued to call anyway. Mrs. Garcia answered their calls, but referred the teachers back to the interim principal for anything that was school related. Still, because the staff was turning to her for direction even in her absence, Mrs. Garcia knew she had made strides in developing the staff members' trust.

Two members of the District office had been at LPA every week during the initial transition from Mr. Lopez to the interim principal, Mrs. Alvarez, from December through the end of January. While Mrs. Alvarez had originally told Mrs. Garcia she had no intention of applying for the permanent principalship, she later submitted her resume on the last day applications were being accepted. Mrs. Alvarez told Mrs. Terry that two members of the District team had encouraged her to apply for the principalship, and Mrs. Terry relayed this information to Mrs. Garcia. Mrs. Garcia began to distrust the District office and the interim principal. She also learned from Mrs. Terry that two members of the school staff also supported Mrs. Alvarez for principal. The ASC wanted to facilitate the principal-selection process and did not want the

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<sup>16</sup>The Southwest District team included an area instructional leader, four instructional coaches, and an operational leader who was responsible for overseeing twenty schools.

District office involved in the process. When the ASC informed the two members of the District office that they could not be involved in developing the interview process, the two of them stopped coming to the school as often as they had in previous weeks.

Mrs. Garcia came back from maternity leave in mid-March after four weeks, and the ASC immediately began conducting interviews. She was interviewed the day after returning to work. Mrs. Garcia observed how the ASC expedited the principal-selection process, which was completed in four weeks. The ASC had posted the vacancy for two weeks in the district bulletin. According to Mrs. Terry, the ASC accepted resumes for the LPA vacancy for two weeks, then went through all of the resumes in one week, and scheduled interviews for the following week. Though Mrs. Garcia had learned from Mrs. Terry that members of the District office had supported the interim principal and encouraged her to apply, those same members of the District office remained neutral in meetings at which Mrs. Garcia was present.

It was during this time that Mrs. Garcia learned the role and value of relational trust in navigating the politics of the school. During Mr. Lopez's transition to Central Office, the arrival of the interim principal, and throughout the principal-selection process, Mrs. Garcia watched how the District office, parents, and staff responded and how they were involved. She had learned from her doctoral classes and previous experiences as a reading coach that strong, effective leaders know how to be strategic in responding to the structural, political, human resource, and symbolic needs of a school (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

#### **E. A New Principal: April 2007**

The ASC selected Mrs. Garcia, and she became the new principal of LPA as of April 1, 2007. She selected Mr. George as the assistant principal. This was contrary to suggestions made by the District office, which had recommended that Mrs. Garcia hire a bilingual assistant

principal, as Mr. George was African American and did not speak Spanish. Mrs. Garcia believed that the District office wanted Mrs. Alvarez to be selected as the assistant principal. Mr. George had won Mrs. Garcia's trust in a matter of months, and she was not going to jeopardize his trust or go back on her word about selecting him as assistant principal if she became principal.

In May 2007, Mrs. Garcia assembled the rest of her leadership team and outlined responsibilities for gathering the data necessary to complete a needs assessment and develop a strategic plan for the next school year. Along with Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George, the new leadership team included the school counselor and case manager, Ms. Leon, and the bilingual lead teacher, Mr. Flores.

The challenge for Mrs. Garcia and the new leadership team was getting the school community to recommit to the work they had begun before she left for her maternity leave, and building the momentum again as quickly as possible. The vision that Mrs. Garcia had begun to lead the staff, parents, and students in developing while assistant principal included developing a collaborative, data-driven school community that worked together in implementing shared accountability, high expectations, respect, and discipline. Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George continued their focus on enhancing the instructional programs while, at the same time, creating systems to support the social and emotional needs of students.

Initially, there were four teachers and two parents who were openly resistant to the changes. By May 2007, however, Mrs. Garcia recalled that two of the teachers and one parent became much more open to change. Two of the initial four resistant teachers began to implement changes or new strategies in their classrooms, while one of the resistant parents became more active in the school and participated in school events.<sup>17</sup> The two still-resistant teachers, Mrs.

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<sup>17</sup> The other resistant parent ended up transferring her children out of the school at the end of the 2007-2008 year after unsuccessful attempts to get parents to rally against Mrs. Garcia and the leadership team.

Sandoval and Mrs. Jones, made negative comments to other teachers and tried to get other staff members to disagree with the administration. Although the comments went against the new leadership team's vision, when things appeared to be escalating and taking a toll on the staff, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George addressed the negative comments directly with what they called "courageous conversations." For example, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George met with one of the openly resistant teachers, and asked her to share her concerns after comments she had made about the new administration's sense of urgency in making changes to current instructional practices. During the conversation, the teacher became defensive and said that she thought change was needed, but was critical about the urgency with which the changes were being implemented. The conversations went in circles, and it became clear that nothing would change the teacher's mind. Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George agreed that she would need time to accept the changes that had been introduced, or would need to make a decision about her future at LPA. After three years, the teacher never truly accepted the changes, and chose to accept a position outside the field of education.

Mrs. Sandoval, a bilingual teacher, often questioned Mrs. Garcia's decisions and appeared not to trust the new leadership team. She would ask other staff members if they agreed with Mrs. Garcia's decisions, and tried to establish a resistant group of staff members who disagreed with Mrs. Garcia's vision for the school. Mrs. Garcia believed that some tension surfaced because several staff members who were approached were uncomfortable about "choosing sides."

What the openly resistant teachers did not know at the time was that staff members were communicating what was being said behind closed doors to Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George. Two staff members told Mrs. Garcia that they trusted her, and knew that she would know how to

address the openly resistant teachers without creating animosity among the staff. This allowed the administration to be well informed of the resistant teachers' positions and feelings about new initiatives and changes in the school. Three staff members sought out Mrs. Garcia and informed her about the feelings of the unhappy teacher, and asked for suggestions on how to get her to stop "harassing" them. Mrs. Garcia responded, "Let her know that if she has a concern or a problem, she should come talk to me."

Mrs. Garcia and the leadership team did not allow Mrs. Sandoval or the resistant teacher to take control of meetings or professional development workshops. Instead, Mrs. Garcia chose to address the situation with Mrs. Sandoval directly. Mrs. Garcia believed that the teacher did not trust her and did not agree with her decisions. She also believed that Mrs. Sandoval was opposed to change because she respected the former principal and did not feel the need for change. Mrs. Garcia requested a meeting with the teacher and asked her to voice her concerns. Mrs. Sandoval became very defensive, and was surprised to hear Mrs. Garcia say that her colleagues felt uncomfortable being put in the middle of this situation. The teacher said, "I agree with your vision of increased expectations," and denied talking behind Mrs. Garcia's back. She also mentioned that she was feeling stressed due to problems at home. Mrs. Garcia made her expectations clear during that meeting, and told Mrs. Sandoval that she expected her to voice her questions and concerns directly to the administration. Mrs. Garcia recognized that the situation could have gotten out of hand if Mrs. Sandoval had more support among staff members, but she encouraged the teacher to keep an open mind to change and said, "Time will tell if these changes are effective in increasing student achievement." Even though other staff members were aware of the tension between Mrs. Sandoval and Mrs. Garcia, one teacher said she was surprised that Mrs. Garcia did not take further disciplinary action. Mrs. Garcia responded, "It is everyone's right to

have his or her own opinions, and it is my responsibility to keep everyone focused on instruction.” Although Mrs. Garcia believed that Mrs. Sandoval was not very happy, the teacher remained committed to her instruction and her students, but eventually transferred to another school. Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George were not surprised by her decision to leave. This decision enabled Mrs. Garcia to hire a new teacher that was open to learning new practices.

Mrs. Garcia’s leadership style included being very straightforward, and she believed that transparency in her communication would help her win the staff’s trust. Mrs. Garcia also believed her directness was sometimes too much for some staff members. For example, she once asked, “Would you want this for your child?” Through her words and actions, Mrs. Garcia wanted the staff to understand that she was not only there to give direction and guidance, but she was willing to do whatever was necessary to improve the instructional programs for all students and this included having difficult conversations when necessary.

Mrs. Garcia did not gain the school community's trust very easily, but understood its need for clarification and desire to ask questions. For example, staff members asked, “How do we do this?” and “Where do we go from here?” Mrs. Garcia believed that the teachers’ questions were their way of testing her, to find out if she could articulate her vision and plan. The students often asked, “Why do we have to do so much homework?” Mrs. Garcia responded, “The only way to get better is to practice. Homework gives students an opportunity to practice what they have learned during the day.” Even though students probably did not agree with the increased homework, most students submitted homework every day.

When the staff asked about how to improve test scores, Mrs. Garcia immediately responded, “By enhancing instruction through differentiated instruction and assessments and creating support systems.” Mrs. Terry would immediately fire back, “What do you mean by

enhancing instruction?” “Enhancing instruction means that we need to take instruction to another level,” Mrs. Garcia replied. “We need to strategically think out and plan what we are going to teach, what we expect students to learn, and how we are going to know that they learned it. We must differentiate instruction for students below, at, and above grade level.” It was obvious to Mrs. Garcia from the looks of surprise on their faces that the staff members were taken aback by her response. When Mrs. Garcia suggested that teachers implement a new lesson-plan template, one teacher asked, “Is this mandatory?” Mrs. Garcia’s response was, “It is not mandatory. It is a suggestion to help you increase the level of rigor in your classroom. Remember, if you do the same thing you always do, you will get the same results.” Even though she said the new templates was not mandatory, Mrs. Garcia made it clear to the staff that she would only accept a lesson plan template in which differentiated instruction was integrated.

Mrs. Garcia believed the staff would eventually begin to trust the new leadership team and would accept the changes she proposed. She wanted people to know her reasoning for making decisions, and often addressed the staff or parents with detailed explanations for why decisions were made. She provided multiple opportunities for students, staff, parents, and members of the community to ask her questions, and encouraged them to make suggestions in formal meetings and informal settings, such as while she was monitoring hallways in the morning or during after-school dismissal. For example, she would start meetings with phrases like, “The reason why this is important is...,” “We have decided to make this change because...,” or “After reviewing the data, we believe...” Mrs. Garcia worked to make staff and community members feel comfortable about asking questions or giving suggestions. She would ask them questions like, “What do you think?” “Do you have any recommendations?” “How do you feel about...?” When they offered suggestions, Mrs. Garcia assessed whether or not they

made sense for the school, and implemented the suggestions when possible. For example, when brainstorming morning drop-off procedures, a parent suggested that the parent tutors be part of a “Parent Patrol” that assisted with morning drop-off procedures. Mrs. Garcia agreed and began having parent tutors assist the next day. If a suggestion did not make sense, she gave the parent or staff member an explanation for why it could not be implemented. Over time, when parents saw that they could share something or provide a suggestion that was genuinely heard and considered by Mrs. Garcia, many began offering more input. Sometimes, this became a little overwhelming because she did not want the staff to think that she did not value their suggestions, but Mrs. Garcia tried to remember that the parents only wanted what was best for their children.

Mrs. Garcia believed that her efforts to minimize uncertainties and risks were usually successful because she addressed problems and questions immediately, before they escalated. She also recognized that not everyone trusted her or agreed with her decisions, but they still sometimes simply went along with her.

Throughout their first year, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George spent at least one hour at the end of each day reflecting on the day’s events and making changes based on what they thought would improve the school. They often made evening phone calls or sent emails to members of the community to gain support or clarify misunderstandings. Sometimes the calls were positive in nature, and other times they were meant to clean up messes created during the day. For example, Mrs. Garcia often called Mrs. Terry or other teachers to explain why she did what she did, or to apologize when she came on too strong.

The days were long and the work was hard, but Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George were confident that they were doing what was best for their students and for the school. The leadership team led the school community in analyzing what appeared to be working and what still needed

work, and used the responses to inform changes. For example, Mrs. Garcia believed that the staff had different ideas on integrating the writing process in the school, so she worked with teachers in developing a school-wide writing plan. This included developing a list of genres, or types of writing, that would be introduced each month, and included a format for teaching writing. This format included using a workshop model in which students worked at their own pace through brainstorming, editing, revising, and publishing. After professional development workshops, the leadership team requested feedback on the work that was accomplished, and on topics for future meetings.

Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George worked to increase relational trust and establish buy-in by providing opportunities for students, staff, and parents to voice their thoughts and be involved in planning meetings, such as monthly Bilingual Advisory Meetings and Quarterly School Improvement Planning Meetings. Mrs. Garcia shared with her leadership team the importance of modeling high expectations, clear communication, and fostering strong collaboration. Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George believed they would gain the respect of the school community by working alongside staff and parents in the classroom. They worked with students in small groups or one-on-one in a variety of areas, such as reading fluency or basic math and problem solving. They assisted teachers with developing lesson plans and sharing best practices, or even swept the main entrance if needed. The leadership team modeled high expectations by focusing its decisions and actions on what it believed were in the best interests of the students and families of LPA. The leadership team facilitated conversations to discuss controversial or difficult topics, such as conversations with staff members about poor teaching practices. At times, conversations about changes in instructional practices appeared to be productive and other times it took several meetings before the teacher and Mrs. Garcia agreed on the implementation.

#### **F. Building the Right Faculty: May 2007 – August 2007**

In April 2007, after months of modeling lessons for teachers in classrooms and coaching teachers on a weekly basis in grade-cycle meetings,<sup>18</sup> Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George made their first significant decision as principal and assistant principal, deciding to replace the kindergarten and first-grade teachers. Prior to assuming the principalship, Mrs. Garcia was not responsible for making staff hiring decisions. Mrs. Garcia believed the decision had to be made, because the primary teachers had not adequately prepared their students with a strong early literacy foundation.<sup>19</sup> Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team knew that the opportunity to hire new teachers would be instrumental in building the right staff that was committed to working hard and open to implementing new practices.

Mrs. Garcia believed that she had to handle the situation carefully. She knew that she needed to be very respectful in the way she handled the decision, because she did not want to jeopardize the trust she was working so hard to establish with the whole school community. She met with both teachers individually, and reviewed their students' lack of progress on classroom assessments. She told the teachers that the decision was not personal, but was based on this lack of student progress. Other teachers who were openly resistant toward the leadership team tried to take advantage of this by trying to get the staff to lose trust and question the new leadership team's decision, but were unsuccessful. The leadership team expected resistance to replacing the two teachers, but met very little. Mrs. Garcia believed that the staff did not protest the decision because staff members knew that the fired teachers had received consistent support throughout

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<sup>18</sup> LPA. (2007, April). *Agendas, minutes, and sign-in sheets of LPA grade-cycle meetings*. Capital City: Author.

<sup>19</sup> For example, only 10 percent of third-grade students at LPA were meeting or exceeding state standards on the SAT. The decision to replace the kindergarten and first-grade teachers was intended to send a strong message that the new administration was willing to make difficult decisions in order to provide students with the highest-qualified staff.

the year, but had not improved sufficiently to ensure that students were adequately on track. At the same time, just as the staff did not side or advocate on behalf of the teachers that were replaced, the staff also did not support the two openly resistant teachers because they had begun to trust Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George.

Students at other grade levels were showing improvement. After a year of intensive work on improving instructional practices through the use of student-performance data and developing high expectations, student performance on the SAT improved. The number of students meeting or exceeding state standards rose from 64.8 percent to 71.0 percent (see Tables II and III, Appendix). The number of students meeting or exceeding state standards increased from 57.1 to 63.2 percent in reading, and from 69.8 to 80.0 percent in math. Based on classroom observations, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George felt that instruction had improved over the first year, because they consistently saw key elements in each classroom: having a bell-ringer activity, setting a clear objective and focus for the lesson, introducing the lesson by building on students' prior knowledge, and having students engage in an activity or produce a product based on what they learned.

During May and June 2007, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George worked hard at maintaining the sense of urgency they had created at the beginning of the year by engaging all members of the school community in reviewing SAT student-performance data again, and setting goals and next steps for the 2007-2008 school year. The ASC and its chairperson voiced support of the new leadership team's vision and ideas at ASC and parent meetings. Mrs. Garcia believed that this was helpful in the new leadership team gaining the trust of members of the community, because it appeared to Mrs. Garcia that the ASC was respected by other parents and community members

in the school. After several meetings to set priorities for the next school year, the goals identified by parents, members of the school community, and staff included the following:

Goal 1: Develop a school community that addressed the social, emotional, and academic needs of each student.

Goal 2: Foster a culture that included high expectations, transparent communication, and consistent collaboration among students, staff, parents, members of the community, and partners.

Goal 3: Enhance the safe, nurturing school environment through strong community and professional partners and resources to support the school community.

Some parents expressed at parent meetings that they felt that the social and emotional needs of students were not being addressed by the school. In order to address this, the LPA leadership implemented changes to identify those needs and implemented a school-based, problem-solving process. Before this, parents and community members had expressed in the Consortium on School Research survey that they did not feel like they were an integral part of the school.

After identifying the school's goals in May and June 2007, the school improvement team which included staff, parents, and ASC members began to look for ways to address the differentiated needs of students (Goal 1), and the need for open communication and collaboration (Goal 2) became essential. If the school was going to be effective in identifying and supporting the needs of students and families, the leadership team recognized that it would not be able to do so alone. So it worked hard at seeking out additional resources, such as free eye glasses and dental exams, and enhancing partnerships like the one with Community Project (Goal 3).

Mrs. Garcia knew that LPA needed a strong counselor to lead the work in developing social and emotional support systems. It was clear to Mrs. Garcia that Ms. Leon was not

committed to working as hard as was needed to move LPA forward, and she transferred to another school over the summer. During June and July 2007, the leadership team interviewed many candidates for the position of counselor and case manager. The new priority on social and emotional support would require a person in that position who was committed to working hard. The leadership team hired Ms. Mitchell, a young, energetic counselor who had just received her master's degree. Mrs. Garcia recalled that she was eager to take on multiple tasks, and was anxious to learn. Ms. Mitchell was invited to be a part of the leadership team and would later be instrumental in transitioning the special-education program at LPA from a self-contained model to an inclusionary one.

Even though LPA had experienced a significant amount of staff turnover in a short time, which included replacing the principal, assistant principal, two primary teachers, and the counselor, Mrs. Garcia reminded the staff that “change is sometimes needed in order to move forward.” Mrs. Garcia believed that the school community understood why some of the staff needed to be replaced, and they did not give her any push-back about replacing the primary teachers or losing the counselor. The primary teachers who were replaced accepted teaching positions in other schools in the District. Mrs. Garcia hired two new teachers. One of the teachers was a first year teacher and the other had two years experience. Even though they had limited experience, they had strong educational backgrounds in literacy and math. Mrs. Garcia believed that she could mold the new teachers into strong instructional classroom teachers. The newly hired primary teachers were expected to help build a strong primary literacy program by providing students with challenging class work and homework.

Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George were excited to start planning for the new school year with a new member of the leadership team. The leadership team spent the entire summer, from June

through August 2007, reflecting on and discussing the progress of the work that had transpired. Although Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George felt that they had made great strides with the staff in beginning to create a culture that accepted change, they knew that the hard work and difficult decisions had just begun. This reflective process which included identifying what appeared to work and what needed work was helpful in evaluating the progress that was made, and in setting priorities for what needed to be addressed in the next school year.

After the end of the school year, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George analyzed and reflected on the 2007 Consortium on School Research (CSR) Staff Survey Results.<sup>20</sup> The CSR Survey Results showed LPA as being average in Professional Capacity and Family and Community Involvement, and above average in Instructional Leadership, Learning Climate, and Instruction (see Table VI, Appendix). The highest rated category under Instructional Leadership was that of Shared Leadership, in which the staff rated the instructional leadership at LPA as far above average. Mrs. Terry told Mrs. Garcia that the staff had rated Instructional Leadership as far above average due to the changes in instructional leadership since she and Mr. George joined the administrative team. Since the CSR indicated that the staff recognized LPA as average in Professional Capacity and Family and Community involvement. These two areas became a priority for the following school year.

#### **G. Creating a Sense of Urgency: September 2007 – April 2008**

Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George were pleased to learn that a retired school principal would be serving as a source of support for the leadership team at LPA, as the university where Mrs. Garcia was pursuing her doctoral degree was providing her with a leadership coach. Dr. Rachel

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<sup>20</sup> The Consortium on School Research classifies schools according to effective leaders, collaborative teachers, supportive environment, involved families, and ambitious instruction as very strong, strong, neutral, weak, and very weak.

was an experienced principal, with a proven track record of leadership that included consistent increases in student performance and in strong parent and community involvement. Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George welcomed Dr. Rachel's instructional leadership and parent and community involvement expertise.

Throughout the month of September, Dr. Rachel met with Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George. The three of them reviewed SAT trends over time, attendance data, and other data necessary for setting priorities for the year, like the district-mandated School Improvement Plan (SIP) and School Action Plan (SAP). Dr. Rachel met with Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George once a week, and at least once a month with the whole leadership team. Dr. Rachel held high expectations for both Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George, and each week made sure not to leave without giving the leadership team a list of follow-up items that they established as priorities for the next week. Mrs. Garcia recalled that the weekly support and the extra push they received from Dr. Rachel kept the leadership team motivated and focused. In just a few months, Dr. Rachel won Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George's trust and respect, and became an integral resource for the LPA team.

At the start of the first full year of her principalship, in September 2007, Mrs. Garcia decided to change the school's dual-language program to a transitional bilingual program following the District office's recommendation. The existing dual-language program included building language proficiency in English and in a second language, while the transitional bilingual program would involve developing a strong foundation in the student's native language while, at the same time, building English-language proficiency in three years. Mrs. Garcia could have waited until the following year to transition to the bilingual program, but after several conversations with Dr. Rachel she chose not to because she did not want to waste any more time in implementing a program that she considered was not fully effective. She knew changing the

bilingual program could result in angry parents and staff, as the change could have easily been perceived as her not believing in native-language development. Mrs. Garcia recognized that if the decision to change was not accepted by the school community, it could have severe consequences on her role as principal and the relationships she was developing with parents, the ASC, members of the community, and the staff.

This decision was based on the limited number of teachers trained in the dual-language model, a lack of resources and materials, and an insufficient number of English-dominant students. According to the bilingual coordinator, these challenges prevented the dual-language program from being properly implemented.

Mrs. Garcia was very careful in the way she handled the decision to transition from a dual-language to a transitional bilingual program. She did not want parents or staff to think that she did not value students' ability to learn more than one language. She also knew that it was an opportunity to win or lose the trust of parents, so she proceeded with caution, and engaged parents and staff in supporting the transition. The leadership team held parent and staff meetings, which helped to develop support for moving from a dual-language program to a transitional program.<sup>21</sup> Mrs. Garcia also shared research articles with the staff and parents on the effectiveness of each of the instructional models and requested the staff's input on their opinions of the effectiveness of the dual language program. After several meetings, Mrs. Garcia recalled that the staff and the parents who participated in the Bilingual Advisory Meetings agreed to support the decision. Even though Mrs. Garcia was the one who made the decision to move from a dual-language model to a transitional bilingual model, an ASC member informed Mrs. Garcia

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<sup>21</sup> LPA. (2007, September). *Agendas, minutes, and sign-in sheets of LPA Bilingual Advisory Committee meeting*. Capital City: Author.

that the staff and parents felt like they were included in the decision, because they were invited to participate in discussing the advantages and challenges of the current model.

Although 2007-2008 was a challenging year, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. Flores provided professional development and support on the transitional bilingual model. They provided opportunities throughout the year for teachers to share strategies and ideas about how to implement the new model, with staff and grade-cycle meetings.<sup>22</sup> The state lacked specific requirements for the language of instruction for English Language Learners (ELLs), so LPA developed its own Transitional Bilingual Implementation Plan.<sup>23</sup> This plan was coordinated by the bilingual coordinator, and developed by LPA's bilingual teachers. The plan identified the minutes of instruction per grade provided in English and in the native language for ELLs. It also provided a list of the curricular materials and resources that would be used at each grade level.

Although many changes had taken place by April 2008, Mrs. Garcia believed that things were definitely headed in the right direction. Mrs. Garcia recalled that two of the four resistant teachers and one of two resistant ASC parents had become more supportive of the new leadership team. Mrs. Montez, one of the resistant parents, told Mrs. Garcia that she had been closely observing the changes and understood why they were necessary in order to continue moving the school forward. Two of the resistant teachers began to implement the new strategies, which they were learning in weekly grade-cycle meetings, in monthly professional development workshops, and in their classrooms. One of the openly resistant parents became more active in the school and participated in school events. Mrs. Garcia also remembered that, although the

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<sup>22</sup> LPA. (2008, September). *Agendas, minutes, and sign-in sheets of LPA grade-cycle meetings*. Capital City: Author.

<sup>23</sup> LPA. (2008, December). *LPA Transitional Bilingual Implementation Plan*. Capital City: Author.

negative comments were distracting, the positive energy and changes were becoming more visible in the school.

By the middle of the year, the parent tutor program which was sponsored by Community Project had increased from eight to twelve volunteers in classrooms. The parent tutors who were volunteering in the school helped to spread the word about the new leadership team, handing out flyers and personally inviting parents to the monthly parent meetings. As the months passed, there were a few additional parents at each of the meetings.

Overall, 2007-2008 resulted in positive changes for the school. The new leadership team had begun to create a data-driven, responsive culture of continuous improvement, in which students, parents, and staff engaged in school decisions. The bilingual program had been evaluated and changed with the school community's support. Parent involvement had increased from fifteen to thirty parents participating in parent meetings and workshops.<sup>24</sup> Mrs. Garcia recognized that she and her team were gradually winning the school community's trust. This was evident in teachers implementing newly learned instructional strategies, increased parent participation in meetings, and additional parent tutors volunteering in the school. Even though there were positive changes visible throughout the school by the end of the school year in 2008, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George recognized that there was much more work to be done.

#### **H. Now or Never: May 2008 – June 2008**

From 2006 to 2007, the percentages of students meeting or exceeding state standards on the SAT in reading increased from 57.1 percent to 63.2 percent and from 69.8 percent to 80 percent in math (see Tables II and III, Appendix). Although LPA had experienced increases in student performance on the SAT, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George believed that the existing reading

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<sup>24</sup> LPA. (2008, April). *Agendas, minutes, and sign-in sheets of LPA Bilingual Advisory Committee Meetings*. Capital City: Author.

and math programs still did not have the appropriate materials needed for differentiated instruction based on students' needs, so they led the staff in identifying the need for implementing a new literacy and math series. They felt that new programs would result in even more significant increases in student performance. After reviewing SAT data in May and June 2008, the leadership team led the staff in selecting new literacy and math curricula for the 2008-2009 school year. This was another significant change at LPA. Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George made the decision to change reading and math curricular programs, but they had the teachers select from several district-endorsed curricular programs, asking that they select the programs they thought would be most useful in differentiating instruction and assessment. The reading programs included Open Book, Publishing Tree, and Beacon Hill. The math programs that were reviewed included All Day Math and Mountain Climbers Math.

In making its selection, the staff reviewed SAT trends over time, focusing on student-performance data in reading and math, completing needs assessments of current programs, reviewing a variety of materials, and then selecting a new literacy and math series that provided the resources needed to differentiate instruction. The needs assessment, Instructional Texts and Materials Survey, included having teachers identify all the core and supplemental curricular materials they had as part of the current basal series.<sup>25</sup> The second part of the survey included a list of materials they were supplementing the core programs with in order to differentiate instruction.

The process of selecting new reading and math programs also involved reviewing the current literacy and math programs during grade-cycle<sup>26</sup> and professional development meetings,

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<sup>25</sup> LPA. (2008, June). *Instructional texts and materials survey*. Capital City: Author.

<sup>26</sup> LPA. (2008, April). *Agendas, minutes, and sign-in sheets of LPA grade-cycle meetings*. Capital City: Author.

and engaging teachers in discussions about the need for new literacy and math programs. A teacher expressed that there were many skills not being covered in the reading and math textbooks until after state tests, and several other teachers agreed. Another teacher expressed that there was a lack of differentiated materials and resources within the literacy and math textbook series that were being implemented. Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George recognized that the transition to new reading and math series would be much more successful if staff was involved in making the decision in selecting the new literacy and math series. Mrs. Garcia recognized that the tide began to turn when the LPA staff reached a point where it felt safe sharing concerns and opinions without feeling afraid of how their opinions would be taken by other staff members or the leadership team. The staff selected Publishing Tree as the reading program and Mountain Climbers as the math program, because both had the resources necessary to differentiate instruction and assessments.

The District team told Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George that it thought that the decision to implement new reading and math programs simultaneously was irrational, and worried that it could have a negative effect on student performance. The District team also said it did not believe that the LPA staff would be able to plan for and successfully implement new reading and math programs at the same time. One of the District office members told Mrs. Garcia at a meeting, “I hold both of you fully responsible for decreases in student performance.” This caused Mrs. Garcia to worry, but she decided to transition to the programs anyway.

Mrs. Garcia recalled that the LPA staff members decided that they did not want to continue supplementing existing curricular programs, because the programs did not provide the resources needed to differentiate instruction. Although they recognized the significant pressure that would be placed on them to participate in intensive professional development over the

summer and throughout the year, Mrs. Garcia believed that, overall, the staff agreed with implementing new reading and math programs. Mrs. Garcia believed that having the necessary resources to differentiate instruction contributed to increased student performance.

In June 2008, Dr. Rachel suggested that Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George pursue Independent Management Performance School (IMPS) status. If granted IMPS status, LPA would have local governance and manage their own budget. Mrs. Aguilera supported Mrs. Garcia's decision to pursue IMPS status and encouraged other members on the council to do the same. Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George surveyed the staff to find out how many of them supported the possibility of submitting an IMPS application for LPA. By a show of hands, all teachers except for two classroom assistants agreed that LPA should apply for IMPS status. The two who did not vote in favor said they felt they did not know enough about IMPS to support the change. Mrs. Garcia felt that most of the staff went along with applying to be IMPS because they knew that she supported the idea. Mrs. Terry told Mrs. Garcia she welcomed the idea of being autonomous because she thought that there would be less pressure from the District office and no more walk-throughs by the District Staff. During meetings, three other staff members articulated their excitement about being able to develop their own accountability systems and identify what was working and what needed work. The staff members did not trust District office because they did not appreciate the feedback given after quick, informal observations during school visits. They did not feel that they needed someone from the outside to come in and make judgments about their practices during classroom visits that ranged from three to five minutes.

#### **I. Shared Accountability and Local Autonomy: July 2008 – August 2008**

In July 2008, the LPA leadership team applied and interviewed for IMPS status. The process involved a written application that Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George completed with the help

of three teachers, and an extensive interview in which the principal and assistant principal were asked to explain their instructional leadership practices and their vision for the direction of the school. They communicated that the school's vision as an IMPS was to develop systems and structures to support college readiness and rigorous academic instruction through differentiated instruction and assessments from Pre-K through eighth grade. Before making a decision, the IMPS office told Mrs. Garcia that it spoke with the District office about granting the school IMPS status. The District office shared its concerns about Mrs. Garcia's limited experience as a principal and about her ambitious decision to change to new literacy and math series in the same year. Mrs. Garcia was taken aback by the District office's lack of support but LPA was still granted IMPS status in July 2008. The IMPS team told Mrs. Garcia that LPA had been selected due to increases in student performance and the school's strong instructional and operational organization.

The school gaining IMPS status was a turning point in this story. Until then, the leadership team had to be very strategic in implementing or recommending significant changes in the school, such as selecting the new math and literacy series, because each had to be approved by the District office. Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George also had to follow district mandates, which sometimes conflicted with what they believed to be best practices and priorities for their school. For example, the District office had specific expectations for each classroom, which included having "word walls" and visual library check-out systems posted. Mrs. Garcia supported her teachers in creating their own systems for teaching, such as having students access new vocabulary as opposed to placing words on a wall. She did not object to alternative classroom library check-out systems that did not have to be posted, as long as books were going home with students.

Gaining IMPS status enabled the LPA leadership team to implement its own initiatives that it believed would help in improving student achievement. Local autonomy helped the staff and administration focus on teaching and learning, and relieved the stress created by the District office and its mandates. Teachers told Mrs. Garcia that they were excited not to worry about preparing for District office team walkthroughs, attending mandated professional development workshops, or following other District office mandates.

**J. Expanding the Three-Ring Circus: September 2008 – July 2009**

Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George were more determined than ever to increase student performance and create a supportive school culture at LPA. Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George described the school as organized chaos or “a high-functioning, three-ring circus.” This circus required a lot of time and commitment in order to run effectively. The work became even more demanding, and the internal accountability and pressure seemed to grow more each day. Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George remembered that, even though they had achieved IMPS status, the District office was still going to hold them responsible for any decreases in scores.

After reviewing SAT data, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George recognized the extensive professional development and support that would be needed to implement the new literacy and math programs. In August 2008, they hired a literacy coach, Ms. Viejo, to support teachers with the literacy program implementation, in addition to helping the staff continue to work on the transitional bilingual model that had been put in place the previous year. Ms. Viejo joined Mrs. Garcia, Mr. George, and Ms. Mitchell as part of the leadership team. Mrs. Garcia recognized that it would take time for the staff to trust Ms. Viejo, due to her being new to the school, but believed that Ms. Viejo’s strong instructional leadership experiences and friendly personality helped her to gain the necessary staff buy-in to make critical changes in their teaching practices.

Ms. Viejo became an integral part of the leadership team which met for at least an hour every week.<sup>27</sup> The topics discussed at the leadership team's meetings included evaluating the school's progress implementing the new literacy and math series, discussing the progress of English Language Learners and special education students, and a variety of other topics. These weekly meetings provided Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George the opportunity to assess the new initiatives in the school, and to delegate responsibility to members of the team. For example, Mrs. Garcia delegated to Ms. Viejo the responsibility of creating the schedule for the DIBELS assessment and monitoring teachers' progress, and gave the same responsibilities for the ACCESS English Language Proficiency Test to Mr. Flores, the bilingual lead teacher. The leadership team also took advantage of the increase in staff morale from gaining IMPS status to raise expectations for academic rigor. Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George believed that, in the previous two years, the staff had established classroom routines and instructional practices, and were now ready to improve existing instructional practices. Previously, the staff had focused on addressing the needs of low-performing students. Now, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George asked the staff to focus on developing lessons that challenged high-performing students as well, which would result in additional work and stress for the teachers. In order to enhance the instructional programs, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George recognized they needed stronger community and university partnerships, and the help of parents. As a result of the parent tutors and student teachers assisting in classrooms, there were more eyes to monitor students in the hallways, and additional people to work with students in small groups. From 2006 to 2008, Mrs. Garcia recognized the positive impact that the parents had on the school climate and student performance. She believed that the teachers might have been overwhelmed, but every day they kept asking questions and wanting to

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<sup>27</sup> LPA. (2008, September). *Agendas, minutes, and sign-in sheets of LPA leadership team meetings*. Capital City: Author.

learn more. Teachers not only worked long hours on weekdays, but they often worked on lesson plans and participated in professional development workshops on weekends. Even though teachers were working harder and longer hours than before, they did not complain to Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George.

Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George continued to focus on continuously improving the instructional programs at LPA. They both worked on developing and strengthening existing partnerships to support the instructional programs and school culture. Recall that two of these partnerships were with University College and Community Project. Mrs. Garcia believed that these partnerships not only helped to enhance the instructional programs, but at the same time helped to create a community school culture in which all felt welcome and were involved in school decisions.

Faculty members from University College assisted LPA staff with curriculum mapping, and provided student teachers and observers. These additional adults helped to decrease the student-adult ratio in classrooms, and assisted by working with students one-on-one and in small groups. They also helped to monitor students and ensure they remained focused on what they were learning.

Mrs. Garcia recognized that the partnership with Community Project resulted in increases in the number of volunteer parent tutors in the building. The parent tutors assisted in classrooms, organized the school picnic and other school-related events, and organized activities to promote positive behavior. LPA recruited more extensively and accepted additional parents into the program. Based on Mrs. Garcia's observations in classrooms, the additional parent tutors helped to increase one-on-one and small-group support in all classrooms from Pre-K to eighth grade. Over time, they became part of the LPA team.

The increased numbers of parent tutors, student teachers, and student observers meant more people for both Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George to manage. They spent most of the day working with students and staff or meeting with parents, so many of their administrative responsibilities were completed long after the staff left the building at the end of the day. Mr. George once told a group of beginning principals what life was like working at LPA, “As I drove to school in the morning, the parking lots for the schools I passed were empty. And as I drove home in the evenings, the parking lots remained the same- empty.”

Not only were students, staff, and the administration working hard, but the expectations for parents also increased significantly. Mrs. Garcia believed that it took time and hard work to get parents to understand the benefits of increased involvement, but parent involvement became an expectation at LPA. Teachers also thought it would be useful to meet with their students’ parents twice a year in order to communicate their expectations. Therefore, the teachers and leadership team implemented teacher-led parent meetings for each grade level, aimed at increasing parents’ involvement in their children’s education and on sharing information about classroom academic and behavior expectations.<sup>28</sup> Parents were expected to attend, though it was not easy to get parents to understand that some meetings were mandatory while others were optional. Often, multiple meetings were offered. This way, parents understood that they were excused when missing a meeting, but second-meeting notices were sent home until parents began to understand that they would have to make time to attend certain mandatory meetings. Mr. Flores also worked on getting more parents and community members to attend monthly Bilingual Advisory Council meetings. He invited guest speakers, provided raffle prizes and other incentives, and held meetings regarding a variety of general-interest topics, such as home

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<sup>28</sup> LPA. (2008, October). *Agendas, minutes, and sign-in sheets of LPA parent grade level meetings*. Capital City: Author.

foreclosure and civil rights. The parent tutors also helped to get more parents involved in meetings and workshops by giving out flyers, and by personally inviting parents when they dropped students off in the morning or picked them up after school. At the same time, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George worked on increasing community partnerships. Mrs. Garcia reached out to institutions including Healthy Family Services and Mujeres Hispanas, and initiated partnerships with them. These organizations focused their support on allowing teachers to refer students for individual or family counseling services. Some students were seen by the school's counselor or social worker, while those who required more intensive, consistent support were referred to these community partners.

It was not easy for Mrs. Garcia to juggle multiple partnerships and keep them focused on the school's vision. Since there were many school initiatives occurring at the same time, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George divided the responsibilities among members of the leadership team, so that they could continue to effectively support the entire school community. In order to effectively manage the partnerships, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George asked Ms. Viejo and Mr. Flores to lead the work with different community partners.

In September 2008, to Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George's surprise, there were more than four dozen students on the waiting list to be enrolled at LPA. However, these students could not be admitted due to space constraints, as every classroom and closet was already being used in order to have space to meet with students one-on-one or in small groups. Mrs. Garcia recalled that as the instructional programs improved, the number of students at LPA also continued to increase incrementally from 280 to 320. Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George knew they needed more space to address continuing space problems and accept additional students at LPA.

After several meetings during September and October 2008, the leadership team decided to share with the school community the idea of an expansion proposal. Expansion would include either adding on another classroom at each grade level to address overcrowding, or adding on a four-year high school. The leadership team made the decision to submit an expansion proposal, but engaged students, staff, parents, and members of the community in developing and supporting the expansion proposal. This expansion plan would allow the school to enroll between 100 and 200 additional students for the 2008-2009 school year. The plan also involved converting the nearby convent into part of the school, with three options. These options included adding one additional classroom per grade, converting the space into an early childhood and special-education center, or adding on a high school one year at a time so that the current eighth-grade students could remain at LPA for high school.

During an expansion planning meeting in October 2008, Mrs. Trujillo, a parent asked, “What will happen with the LPA family?” Mrs. Garcia reassured the parents and staff that the expansion plan was a great opportunity to share “The LPA Way” with other students in the community. Some staff and parents were skeptical about the how the plan would be implemented, with parents expressing their fears that, with new students coming in, their children would not continue to get the education and attention they had been receiving. Mrs. Garcia responded that all students should have access to high-quality programs.

In October 2008, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George hosted planning meetings for parents and the community to discuss expansion options.<sup>29</sup> These meetings involved analyzing data from formative assessments, student membership, attendance, and EXPLORE tests. It also involved examining the pros and cons of expanding LPA, and the impact of increasing the enrollment.

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<sup>29</sup> LPA. (2008, October). *Agendas, minutes, and sign-in sheets of LPA parent and community planning meetings*. Capital City: Author.

The staff, the LPA student government,<sup>30</sup> parent tutors, and community members all helped to develop the LPA Expansion Proposal.<sup>31</sup> They were instrumental in developing a list of core practices that would be implemented as a part of the expansion, based on the leadership team's assessment of what worked or needed work at LPA. The leadership team did not want to develop the plan alone, and trusted the input of students, staff, the ASC, and community partners in developing the expansion plan.

Mrs. Garcia believed that the ASC was excited about the possibility of providing additional students in the district with their hard work and best practice. Mrs. Soto, an ASC parent, told Mrs. Garcia, "I do not know how it will work, but I'm sure you will find a way for us to do it." During these meetings, staff members and parents expressed their concerns about how the expansion would take place without jeopardizing the work that had been accomplished. Though they voiced their concerns about day-to-day operations or ways to improve the school, Mrs. Garcia believed that the students, parents, and staff trusted the leadership team.

Mrs. Garcia and the leadership team asked the parent tutors and active community members to review the LPA Expansion Plan and provide feedback. One of the parents said, "We appreciate that you are willing to take risks and take on more work in order to provide additional students with opportunities to attend LPA." On behalf of the leadership team and the entire school community, Mrs. Garcia contacted the district's chief education officer and presented her with the expansion proposal.

Although it was not easy, the leadership team kept the school focused on continuous improvement while developing the expansion proposal. The leadership team created a literacy

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<sup>30</sup> The LPA student government included fifteen students, from fifth grade to eighth grade, who helped with organizing activities and provided input on key decisions.

<sup>31</sup> LPA. (2008, March). *LPA Expansion Proposal*. Capital City: Author.

support model, which involved having an additional staff member in each classroom to assist with providing small-group, differentiated instruction. To Mrs. Garcia's surprise, all teachers were willing to give the literacy support model a chance. At times, the teachers disagreed about how to teach different skills or lessons, but within a year, Mrs. Garcia believed that the teachers had begun to trust and learn from each other.

The teachers were also involved in developing a school-wide lesson plan template and a writing plan. Three of the teachers told Mrs. Garcia that they were not on board with changing the lesson plan, because they had been using the same one for a few years. The new template required teachers to reflect on how they would model skills, as well as the content that was going to be presented to students. The writing plan, developed in September 2008, mapped out genres of writing that would need to be introduced prior to the state-wide writing assessment. One of the teachers told Mrs. Garcia that she appreciated being included in developing the writing plan, but was not excited about all of the work that was involved in providing feedback on writing papers. Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George recommended that teachers teach students how to peer conference and edit. That way they could learn how to help each other correct simple mistakes, and that would help make grading papers a little more manageable. Along with these initiatives, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George continued to provide the staff with professional development workshops that focused on analyzing formative assessment data and differentiating instruction for all students.<sup>32</sup> Teachers were challenged not only to differentiate instruction for low-performing students, but to challenge high-performing students. Mrs. Garcia believed that the increased differentiation would be a challenge for teachers, as it required much more planning and classroom organization. As the expectations grew, so did the need for increased relational trust.

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<sup>32</sup> LPA. (2008, November). *Agendas, minutes, and sign-in sheets of LPA professional development sessions*. Capital City: Author.

Throughout the 2008 school year, Mr. Flores, Ms. Viejo, and a team of teachers were responsible for leading workshops on reading, math, and writing. The leadership team involved various staff members in leading different workshops in order to build a professional learning community, one where everyone was involved in developing core instructional practices. This process involved establishing a community based on relational trust, where teachers were encouraged to raise questions and identify areas of opportunity. Mrs. Garcia believed that the transparency and communication between the leadership team and the staff helped to foster that relational trust, and worked with teachers on implementing the new strategies.

As the staff continued working on enhancing the instructional programs throughout 2008, the leadership team continued to focus on increasing parent and community involvement and fostering partnerships. Six ASC members began to volunteer in the school regularly, helping to distribute parent letters to classrooms, coordinating activities, planning school-wide student incentives, and seeking out donations for school activities, such as the school picnic. Two of the six ASC parent members expressed to Mrs. Garcia and the leadership team that they felt welcomed and appreciated in the school. They also shared that they recognized how hard the leadership team, staff, and teachers were working, and said they wanted to help out.

Although the leadership had obtained the ASC's support most of the time, Mrs. Garcia recalled that during this time the ASC became even more visible throughout the school and more actively engaged in school-wide activities. One of the ASC parents expressed at a meeting that, "Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George have the students' interests at heart." The ASC members started spending more time in the teachers' lounge, talking with teachers or helping by running copies and stapling papers for teachers. The teacher's lounge became a communal gathering place.

In May 2009, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George were informed by the district's chief education officer that the LPA Expansion Proposal was rejected due to excessive building-renovation costs. Mrs. Garcia believed that the school community had worked very hard to move the school forward, and deserved the additional space. The rejection of the expansion proposal was frustrating for the leadership team and staff, but the team refocused its vision on the progress that the school had already made, and used the improvement in student performance as a way of continuing to build momentum and energy among students, staff, and parents.

**K. A New School: July 2009 – August 2009**

During July 2009, with the expansion rejected, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George learned about the district's new-schools process and considered submitting a proposal for a second school. A new school would enable LPA to expose other students in the district to the high-quality instructional and support programs developed at LPA. They knew that if the school was granted another school in another part of the city, they would need to make a decision about which members of the leadership team would open the new school and which would remain at LPA. The District Public Schools Office of New Schools would decide which schools were granted, and would decide on the location of the new school.

Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George believed that they were prepared for the challenge. Even though the leadership team was still recuperating from the rejection of the expansion proposal, it met eight times during the summer of 2009 and ultimately decided to draft a new school proposal. The development of the new school proposal turned out to be a year-long process that would involve developing the new school's vision and mission, creating an instructional and professional development plan, identifying the curriculum and support structures, listing roles and responsibilities for each position in the school, creating the school budget, and identifying

resources and partnerships. The process involved meeting with District recommended individuals on instruction, budget, and grant writing. Mrs. Garcia recalled that the application process for the new school was much more extensive and detailed than for the expansion proposal. The long days and weekends continued, but Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George were seeing the results of their hard work in improvements in student performance and positive changes in the school culture. They were committed to the idea of opening a new school.

In August 2009, the leadership team also decided to implement a new student learning assessment, MAP, an adaptive computerized assessment created by the New West Evaluation Association (NWEA). The leadership team was excited to learn about this assessment because it would better enable teachers to differentiate instruction for students at, below, or above grade level. At the same time, they recognized that using the NWEA data to inform instruction would involve additional professional development workshops and hard work. After receiving professional development on the MAP and learning more about how to use the data to inform instruction, the leadership team decided to implement the assessment.

In late August, Mrs. Garcia was recognized as a competent principal with a proven track record of success and increases in student performance by the district; therefore, she was selected to mentor an intern that was preparing to be a principal. Mr. Smith would be responsible for training the teachers on the new assessment, and for providing monthly professional development workshops on using the MAP data to develop lessons. He was instrumental in the implementation of the new assessment and played a significant role in developing the New School proposal. Mrs. Garcia taught Mr. Smith about the importance of trust and building relationships in order to gain buy-in for new initiatives, such as utilizing data to drive decisions. Mr. Smith initially believed that parents, staff, and community members would simply go along

with any decisions put forth by the administration because the administration suggested them. He learned that Mrs. Garcia's actions, including making late night phone calls to staff and parents were instrumental in helping the school community to accept changes.

**L. September 2009 – May 2010: Replicating What Works**

At the beginning of the 2009-2010 school year, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George introduced the possibility of opening a new school and discussed the proposal process in meetings with students, parents,<sup>33</sup> staff, and the ASC. Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George argued that a new school would enable the LPA school community to provide other students in the district with the same rigorous academics and supportive school community found at LPA while relieving overcrowding. Mrs. Garcia believed that a few teachers were skeptical because they knew how much time and effort was involved in developing the expansion plan, but this did not stop the leadership team from building support for the new school proposal. Mrs. Garcia explained to the skeptical teachers that she needed their support, because many students would benefit from a new school. Once again the leadership team, sought input from students, staff, parents, and community members in developing the new school proposal.

During a planning meeting, a teacher raised the question, "What do we need to do to get a new school?" Mrs. Garcia replied, "First, we need to continue to do what we have been doing in increasing student performance. Second, we need to develop a plan, which involves which LPA practices are worth replicating in a new school." Mrs. Garcia could tell that not all staff members were excited about a new school. However, just like during the expansion-proposal process, the

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<sup>33</sup> According to the 2009-10 CSR survey, 83% of parent respondents identified that they are given the chance to be a part of decisions about the school through parent organizations.

leadership team worked on gaining support by engaging the school community in developing the LPA New School Proposal, which was finalized and submitted in June 2010.<sup>34</sup>

While the leadership team was busy with the new school proposal, it simultaneously introduced the new computer-adaptive MAP assessment, which provided students with questions in reading, math, and science at their independent levels. Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George explained how the MAP results could be used to differentiate instruction based on students' individual needs, and could result in increased student performance. Mrs. Garcia believed that the leadership team's previous, successful integration of data analysis was helpful in getting the teachers to buy into the new assessment. Mrs. Garcia recognized that some teachers did not support the idea of a new assessment, but the others quickly tried to understand the MAP and used the results to make instructional decisions. Teachers also had friendly competitions over getting students to achieve their growth targets in reading and math.

The implementation of the assessment was not as smooth as it could have been given the outdated technology in the building, but the LPA staff did not let this stand in its way, and it was able to successfully administer the assessment three times throughout the school year. After the first assessment, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George reviewed the data with the staff and at parent meetings.<sup>35</sup> Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George often included parents and community members in planning meetings in order to get their input. Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George wanted to be transparent about the results, and wanted the students to become familiar with the format of the MAP and what it assessed. Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George met with students from second through eighth grade to go over their MAP scores and complete MAP goal-setting sheets for the winter

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<sup>34</sup> LPA. (2010, June). *LPA New School Proposal*. Capital City: Author.

<sup>35</sup> According to the 2009-10 CSR survey, 89% of parent respondents identified that the school thinks it is important to work with them in making decisions about their children's education.

test administration.<sup>36</sup> Mrs. Garcia believed that students and staff needed to see the leadership team involved in analyzing the data and setting goals with students in order to get them to understand the importance of the assessment. The leadership team worked with students to identify their strengths and weaknesses and to develop action plans to increase their performance on the next assessment. These goal-setting meetings became a norm after each testing window at LPA. Two teachers told Mrs. Garcia that they did not oppose these meetings as long as they did not increase their workload. In previous years, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George had met with students to go over SAT results, but only at the end of the year. Mrs. Garcia had always believed that if the teachers could see the leadership team involved in the process of analyzing data, they would not feel isolated in their attempts to increase student achievement; it would be seen as a team effort. Now the leadership team would also meet with students one-on-one to go over assessment data in the fall, and again in the winter.

The LPA staff established differentiated small-group instruction and assessments as school-wide priority. Professional development workshops<sup>37</sup> and weekly grade-cycle meetings focused on using assessment data to inform small-group instruction. After identifying strengths and weaknesses, the leadership team engaged the staff in sharing and identifying instructional practices or methods that could help students improve on specific skills. The leadership also used meetings to engage parents in reviewing student-performance data, having them also identify strengths and weaknesses, and asking parents to identify ways they could help their students improve in specific areas.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> LPA. (2009, November). *LPA MAP goal-setting sheets*. Capital City: Author.

<sup>37</sup> LPA. (2009, September). *Agendas, minutes, and sign-in sheets of LPA professional development sessions*. Capital City: Author.

<sup>38</sup> LPA. (2009, January). *Agendas, minutes, and sign-in sheets of LPA Bilingual Advisory Committee meetings*. Capital City: Author.

Mrs. Garcia recalled that all staff, student teachers and observers from district universities, and volunteers were involved in providing small-group instruction in literacy during the first two hours of the school day. The leadership team's vision of high expectations, clear collaboration, and strong communication was more visible than ever. Even the security guard and custodial staff were helping organize books and doing whatever Mrs. Garcia asked, in order to improve the instructional programs and school environment. Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George knew that it would take the entire village to truly address all students' academic, social, and emotional needs.<sup>39</sup> She asked the staff to do things that went beyond their own responsibilities, and she recognized that they did so with minimal complaints. She believed that the staff members worked hard and were committed because they wanted what was best for students and families at LPA. Until now, she had shared her vision of increased expectations and increased collaboration with the entire school and believed that it was needed in order to move the school forward. Mrs. Garcia pushed the staff to work hard, and believed that she was able to do so because of the relational trust that had been established. Teachers like Mrs. Terry let her know when teachers were feeling overwhelmed. When Mrs. Garcia was tired or sick, she tried not to let the staff know, worried that her stress would spread throughout the school. Instead, she tried to address her stress with Mr. George and Dr. Rachel.

Mrs. Garcia often recognized when she made mistakes, and was not afraid to say that she was sorry. For example, she often apologized to the staff when she knew that she had been pushing them hard without recognizing their hard work. The staff often nodded when she apologized for pushing, and then laughed because they knew it would only be a matter of time before she was pushing again. Mrs. Garcia also knew that staff members could have filed

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<sup>39</sup> According to the 2009-10 CSR survey, 96% of parent respondents identified that their children feel that he or she has at least one adult at school that he or she can to.

grievances against her, because of the many extra hours of work involved in detailed lesson planning, but instead they went along with her. The year had involved extensive analysis of NWEA and SAT student-performance data and reflections on current practices, and the leadership team believed that it had developed a culture that thrived on change and new initiatives. After reviewing SAT data, one parent asked, “What do we need to do to get every student reading at level?”<sup>40</sup> Mrs. Garcia believed that the question was just one example of the shift toward collective responsibility in for supporting all students’ literacy development. The leadership team believed that the staff, parents, and ASC was learning how to make sense of student-performance data and setting goals and that data was the driving force in decision making at the school.<sup>41</sup> This was not an easy task, but Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George knew that sharing the data would be instrumental in establishing a culture of shared accountability and ownership. Even though Mrs. Garcia recognized the role that she played as the instructional leader, she wanted everyone to feel responsibility in improving the instructional programs and the school culture and she communicated her vision of increased expectations and collaboration to the entire school community.<sup>42</sup>

After a year of intensive work on the use of assessment data to inform instruction, student performance on the SAT improved. The percentage of students meeting or exceeding state standards rose from 74.3 percent to 78.7 percent (see Table II, Appendix). In reading, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding state SAT standards increased from 72.5 percent to

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<sup>40</sup> According to the 2009-10 CSR survey, 90% of parent respondents identified that they are encouraged to share their concerns with the school principal and assistant principal.

<sup>41</sup> According to the 2009-10 CSR survey, 83% of parent respondents felt that they are given a chance to a part of decisions about the school through parent organizations.

<sup>42</sup> According to the 2009-10 CSR survey, 88% of parent respondents felt that the school considers communication with parents to be an essential part of students’ education.

73.8 percent, in math from 78.3 percent to 84.4 percent, and in science from 67.5 percent to 76.7 percent. At the end of the year, Mr. Smith, the principal intern obtained a position as an Assessment Coach at the District Office. He was responsible for working with 20 principals on using data to inform practices at the district Mr. Smith wanted additional leadership experience before pursuing an administrator position in a school.

### **M. June 2010 – July 2010: Changes in the Leadership Team**

In June 2010, the LPA leadership team was informed that its new school proposal was rejected by the Office of New Schools. This was the second time an LPA proposal was rejected. The leadership team was not informed why the proposal was turned down, but did learn that only proposals for new charter schools were accepted. Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George still felt that they had learned extensively from their leadership experiences about what was important in developing an effective school, and continued to search for other ways to expand LPA or create a new school based on its practices. The leadership team wanted to be involved in opening a bigger school that would serve more than one thousand students.

When LPA's budget<sup>43</sup> was released in June 2010, at the end of the school year, the District Budget Office had reduced LPA's funding by \$100,000 due to district funding cuts. Mrs. Garcia informed the staff about the cuts and that there would not be enough money to maintain all positions. A decrease in funding by \$100,000 was significant in a small school like LPA. She believed that the staff became very stressed about the possibility of losing a teacher. In order to avoid having to eliminate a teacher, Mr. George willingly gave up his position at LPA. This announcement shocked the staff members who could not imagine LPA without Mr. George after five years. Even though the staff knew Mr. George would have to leave one day to become

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<sup>43</sup> LPA. (2010, April). *LPA School Budget 2010-11*. Capital City: Author.

principal at another school, and was now ready to seek out such a position, the staff was worried about what life at LPA would be like without him. One teacher asked, “Who will be there to calm Mrs. Garcia in the morning when she gets those crazy ideas in the middle of the night?” The staff and Mrs. Garcia laughed, as there was much truth to the teacher’s question, Mr. George had been Mrs. Garcia’s right-hand man since she took the principalship and he reassured the teachers those things would be fine. He said he would always be there to support Mrs. Garcia and the staff, even as the principal of another school.

In late June, Mr. George accepted a principalship at another school. Mrs. Garcia felt fortunate that there had been “two principals” at LPA for the past few years, but knew that it was time for Mr. George to move on. Also, his decision enabled all teachers to be funded for the following year. Even after Mr. George became the principal at another school, Mrs. Garcia continued to turn to him for advice and suggestions.

#### **N. August 2010 – May 2011: New Members on the Leadership Team**

At the end of August 2010, as a result of \$120,000 in additional federal stimulus money, the District Office restored an additional position and a half for the new school year. Mrs. Garcia recommended to the ASC that the school fund an assistant principal position, and recommended Ms. Viejo due to her instructional and leadership experience. Once again Mrs. Aguilera, ASC Chairperson, supported Mrs. Garcia’s decision to hire Ms. Viejo as the assistant principal and the ASC unanimously agreed. Mrs. Garcia knew that had the ASC not liked Ms. Viejo, she could have had a difficult time convincing the ASC to hire another assistant principal. Mrs. Garcia reflected on the best use of the remaining funds, and concluded that it would be best to hire two instructional coaches who could lead professional development, facilitate data dialogues, and work side-by-side with teachers to model lessons and work with students. The ASC also

supported this decision. Mrs. Garcia then began looking for a literacy coach who could support the new State Response to Intervention (RTI) Initiative,<sup>44</sup> and a half-time math coach who could focus on increasing student performance (see Tables II and III, Appendix).

The RTI Initiative was a state-wide effort aimed at identifying low-performing students and providing them with differentiated instruction, support, and resources. The goal of the initiative was to provide interventions, support, and progress monitoring of these students, instead of making an immediate referral for special-education services. Although RTI was a district-wide initiative, the district provided very little guidance on how to implement it, meaning the LPA staff had to figure out implementation on its own.

In August 2010, Mrs. Garcia included two middle-school teachers and one ASC member in interviewing the candidates for the new coaching positions. Mrs. Garcia knew that she needed to be very strategic in hiring the two instructional coaches, because the teachers' capacity in the building was high, and they would not welcome teachers from the outside telling them what to do. The new coaches would need to be very innovative and would need to win the teachers over before getting them to reflect on their practices. Mrs. Garcia received more than two dozen resumes. She interviewed ten candidates who had literacy and math teaching experience, and who had records of increasing in student performance on their resumes.

During the interviews, Mrs. Garcia and the LPA teachers shared with the candidates that whoever was hired would need to be committed to doing a variety of instructional and non-instructional activities, from working with small groups of students to coaching teachers. As instructional coaches, they would be responsible for modeling best practices, grading papers, putting up bulletin boards, and doing whatever was needed to support students and teachers.

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<sup>44</sup> The State Response to Intervention Initiative required schools to implement interventions and strategies to support students who were performing below grade level.

Since the school had demonstrated consistent growth on the SAT in reading, math, and science from 2006 to 2010, it was important that the two new instructional coaches also believe in “The LPA Way” and be driven by desire to assist with continuing to increase student performance. The candidates that were hired were chosen because of their ability to show others how to use quality teaching methods as partners in the education of all students. The newly hired staff members worked to demonstrate that they respected the teachers’ professionalism and focused their conversations and collaborations on the creative, practical application of research-based best practices. Initially, staff members were not sure if they could trust the new hires, but over time they won the trust of the staff by working with students and coaching teachers in classrooms, instead of making judgments about classroom practices.

Mrs. Garcia started the 2010-2011 school year by having the staff members review trends-over-time data for students meeting and exceeding state standards in reading and math. The school had made major strides in the number of students moving from below to meeting state standards, but movement from meeting to exceeding state standards improved at a slower pace (see Tables II and III, Appendix).

During the professional development workshops at the beginning of the year, the staff reflected on its teaching practices and established priorities for the year.<sup>45</sup> Ms. Viejo, the new assistant principal, and Mrs. Trinko, the newly hired lead literacy teacher and RTI coordinator, led the staff in reviewing individual SAT and MAP results and grouping students according to their performance in reading and math. Mrs. Garcia wanted the staff to see the new assistant principal and new literacy coach in leadership roles. By identifying students performing below grade level on the DIBELS, IDEL, MAP, and SAT assessments, this process was helpful in

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<sup>45</sup> LPA. (2010, September). *Agendas, minutes, and sign-in sheets of LPA professional development sessions*. Capital City: Author.

determining which students would benefit from the new RTI model, and in selecting students performing above grade level for a new, school-wide Walking Reading program. Mrs. Garcia and the new leadership team led the school community in implementing these two new initiatives, RTI and Walking Reading, both of which were aimed at increasing student performance and supporting students in classrooms. Mrs. Garcia was providing additional resources to support differentiated instruction for both low-performing and high-performing students.

The instructional coaches helped to implement a school-wide RTI plan to support low-performing students. This plan involved identifying the students who were performing below level on SAT and on the MAP assessment, and referring them for support four times a week for twenty minutes a day. Mrs. Garcia believed that the ASC trusted her and provided her with the support needed to strategically use discretionary funds to hire eight college tutors who would be trained by Ms. Trinko to provide interventions. The students identified for RTI were assessed weekly, with teachers and the college tutors providing small-group literacy and math interventions based on individual students' needs. Mr. Alvarez, the new math coach, worked with teachers in identifying students who required small-group math support and provided instruction for them.

The RtI program helped the school in providing a system of support for struggling students. It included a plan in which resources and next steps were identified. The RtI program established a three-tiered process in which Tier I students received core instruction with their peers, Tier II students received intervention support in small group tutoring sessions three days a week for twenty minutes, and Tier III students received intervention support in small group tutoring sessions five days a week for twenty minutes and additional resources were utilized to

help students achieve more. Although this program was implemented and successful in helping LPA students performing below grade level and included a plan to provide additional students with support, it continued to grow and develop over the next several years. Over time, Ms. Trinko won Mrs. Garcia's trust and became an integral part of the leadership team and took on many roles and responsibilities.

At the same time, LPA implemented a new school-wide Walking Reading program, which involved having students participate in literacy classes above their grade level. For example, students who were reading above level in fourth grade would "walk" to fifth grade for reading. The purpose of the initiative was to challenge students to continue reading above their level. This initiative was aimed at motivating and increasing the level of rigor for students who were performing above grade level on the MAP, DIBELS, IDEL, and SAT assessments, and increasing the number of students exceeding state standards. Students that participated in the Walking Readers Program identified that they felt encouraged by receiving instruction at the grade level above their own. These students felt that the resources that were being used challenged their thinking.

In late August 2010, Mrs. Garcia was asked by the education department of a state university to mentor a principal intern, Mrs. Addams, who was learning the roles and responsibilities of a principal. Mrs. Addams would be responsible for leading the school-wide math initiatives, which involved leading the staff in analyzing math data, coaching teachers, and improving the math program during the upcoming school year. She would also be responsible for helping to enhance safety and security procedures in the school. After a few weeks, she fit right in at LPA, working side-by-side with teachers and providing them with workshops and support.

In September 2010, LPA implemented the Classroom Literacy Support Model, which included support and administrative staff co-teaching three days a week during the literacy block. Mrs. Garcia recognized that classroom teachers alone would not be able to consistently differentiate their instruction effectively. She realized that she needed to integrate additional staff so that the student: adult ratios decreased and students received instruction and support at their own independent level. The Classroom Literacy Support Model, the RTI plan and the Walking Reading program were all aimed at increasing student performance on the SAT by providing opportunities for additional support that focused on students' differentiated needs. Each of these initiatives was perceived by the leadership team as instrumental in helping the school achieve significant growth in the number of students moving from below to meeting state standards on the MAP and SAT.

With these new initiatives and new staff members, the beginning of the school year was busier than ever. Mrs. Terry shared her frustration with Mrs. Garcia by stating, "I do not need another person telling me what to do." Mrs. Garcia respected her honesty, and introduced the new coaches as key individuals who were there to support the teachers in the classrooms, not to evaluate them. Mrs. Garcia believed the staff was nervous about what to expect from the new coaches and about the transition to a new assistant principal, but was glad that Ms. Viejo had taken that role.

Mrs. Garcia had Ms. Viejo and the coaches take on some of the responsibilities of leading grade-cycle<sup>46</sup> and professional development workshops. Mrs. Garcia coached the new team members in leading the school community in increasing the already high expectations, continuing to improve student performance, and enhancing the supportive school culture. As a

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<sup>46</sup> LPA. (2010, September). *Agendas, minutes, and sign-in sheets of LPA grade-cycle meetings*. Capital City: Author.

result of the strong partnership and trust that had developed between LPA and Community Project, the non-profit organization agreed to increase the number of parent tutors from twelve to eighteen, in order to support the instructional programs and strong community culture that had developed over the past four years.

Also, LPA's university partner, Southtown University, increased the number of student teachers from three to eight, and the number of classroom observers from eight to twelve. Even though the school and university already had an existing partnership, the increase in student teachers and observers helped to formalize it. The partnership was also extended that year to include visits, as well as reading workshops and special-needs workshops for parents provided by Southtown University professors.

Community Project also helped to establish and fund other programs in the school, including a Mariachi music group. Community Project provided stipends to the three parents teaching the Mariachi classes, which taught a group of thirty students the violin, trumpet, or guitar. Community Project also helped to establish a partnership between LPA and Computer Network, which provided computer classes for middle-school students for one hour daily, Monday through Thursday. These partner initiatives helped to fill important gaps in music and technology.

Mrs. Garcia also developed a partnership with the school where Mr. George was now principal, in order to support both schools. This partnership involved splitting staff positions and providing joint professional development workshops for both schools throughout the school year. Partnering with Mr. George's new school enabled the LPA staff to share with other teachers what they had learned about good instruction and transforming a school culture. In a sense,

through Mr. George's new school, LPA was able to share its practices with others, even without being granted an expansion or a new school building.

Even though LPA took on many school-wide priorities and initiatives, the drive for increased performance continued and resulted in significant gains in student performance on the SAT (see Tables II and III, Appendix). Increased expectations and collaboration had become the norm at LPA. There was also an increase in the number of students accepted into selective enrollment high schools from only one or two in 2006 to thirty percent of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade class. The school had made great strides in improving the instructional programs and fostering a collaborative school culture.

After a year of intensive work on the implementation of differentiated instruction through RTI, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding state standards on the SAT rose from 78.7 percent to 86.1 percent (see Table II, Appendix) in grades three through eight. That percentage improved from 73.8 percent to 83.9 percent in reading, from 84.4 percent to 89.1 percent in math, and from 76.7 percent to 83.7 percent in science. The RtI Program helped LPA to identify struggling students and provided a framework for addressing the needs of those students.

At the end of the 2010-2011 school year, the LPA staff celebrated its hard work with a sports field day and other school-wide incentives. The leadership team prepared students and staff for the next year by having all students visit the teacher for their next grade level to talk about academic and behavior expectations. The team also had the teachers map out the first ten weeks of the following school year, and evaluated the interim five-week assessment and end-of-first-quarter assessment for academic rigor and differentiation. Mrs. Addams accepted a position as an assistant principal.

Mrs. Garcia had not given up on her vision of a new school. She learned about a building that was being built six blocks away from LPA. Even though LPA had been turned down before, Mrs. Garcia was committed to giving a new school building another try. Parents and community members took ownership in advocating for the new building. More than a hundred parents and community members attended Central Office board meetings, wrote letters, and placed calls to request that LPA be granted the new school. Mrs. Garcia and the parent tutors also met with the local alderman and with Central Office staff to share the LPA proposal for the new school. Mrs. Garcia acknowledged that even if LPA was not granted the new school, it would continue to look for ways to further enhance its instructional programs and keep developing “The LPA Way.”

After the fifth year of her principalship had ended, Mrs. Garcia reflected on the 2011 Survey Results which showed LPA as being strong in Ambitious Instruction, and very strong in Effective Leaders, Collaborative Teachers, Involved Families, and Supportive Environment. The highest rated categories were those of Teacher Influence, setting high standards for student learning, and feeling ok to discuss feelings, worries, and frustrations with the principal. In previous years, parents had identified not feeling included in making decisions about their children’s education. 90% of teachers recognized having influence in a broad range of decisions regarding school policies and practices, and 94% of them strongly agreed that teachers and administrators set high standards for student learning. According to 2011 CSR (See Table VII, Appendix) survey results, 94% of teacher respondents reported that they could discuss feelings, worries, and frustrations with the principal. Mrs. Garcia had worked hard at developing trust and agreed with the CSR that indicated that most teachers felt comfortable with approaching her and they trust her as principal and they feel that they are involved in making decisions about the school.

Mrs. Garcia believed that the school culture would continue to thrive on change. Even though student performance had increased, the work at LPA was far from done. Mrs. Garcia continued to believe that each person must play a part in continuing the work that had been accomplished thus far. Mrs. Garcia had assembled a strong team that she could trust and would continue to work on developing trust and implementing continuous improvement efforts as new students, staff, parents, and community partners joined the LPA family. The school community would continue to look for ways to continuously foster relational trust, improve the instructional programs, and seek out additional resources and partners to support and expand those programs.

### **III. HOW IT ALL COMES TOGETHER: CENTRAL THEMES AND ANALYSIS**

Mrs. Garcia developed a culture of continuous improvement at LPA through the use of two major elements of leadership that served as two central themes throughout this story of school development. Initially, she used power, authority, and influence to introduce changes and new initiatives. Gradually, she developed relational trust to help her decrease the risks and liabilities that occurred as a result of the changes. Mrs. Garcia used relational trust to lessen the tension caused by her power, authority, and influence as principal. Relational trust helped the school community understand her drive for outcomes, which included direct communication and a focused vision.

Organizational and educational research was used in defining and examining the role of power, authority, and relational trust in implementing changes at LPA. Yukl's (2013) work describes power as "the capacity of one party to influence another party" (p. 186). This power may be granted through many sources, such as the power associated with material wealth, charisma, persuasion, or knowledge. One of the primary sources of power is authority. Yukl defines authority as, "the rights, prerogatives, obligations, and duties associated with particular positions in an organization" (p. 186). An individual's authority is based on their position within an organization and by the way their role is perceived by those over which they would exert power. Power and the ability to influence can stem from an individual's personal characteristics, expertise, coercion, or control of scarce material resources (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006).

Regardless of its source, utilizing power involves influencing another person's ideas, attitudes, or behaviors. This influence may take the form of collaboration, criticism, inspiration, or negotiation, but the overall acceptance of this power depends on the consent of those being managed (French & Raven, 1959). Legitimate power provided by an individual's position within

an organization is often referenced when establishing the organizational culture. Members of the organization follow the rules and norms established by those with power in return for membership in the organization.

“The base on which leaders can operate to exert influence in the direction of helping the group deal with the need for change” (Hollander, 1980, p. 113) is identified as the leader’s legitimacy. The leader’s legitimacy is essential in helping the organization accept and implement changes. This legitimacy “produces the belief that the leader has the authority to exert influence” (Hollander, 1980, p. 114). Without legitimacy, members within the organization would not necessarily believe or accept the leader’s vision. A leader gains legitimacy as a result of his or her ability to effectively communicate and influence others, while at the same time producing results (Hollander, 1980). Leaders communicate with other members of the organization to convey necessary information. If the information that is conveyed leaves gaps in knowledge for members within the organization, they may experience uncertainty stemming from risks and liabilities of newness (Smylie, 2010), which are the perceived result of changes to organizations or of new initiatives (Evans, 1996; Fullan, 2007; Schein, 2010).

When changes and new initiatives are introduced in an organization, members are often asked to perform new roles. These new roles must be learned while members develop trust towards the new initiative. Often, these new expectations are accompanied by doubt and distrust which must be mitigated in order to successfully implement changes within organizations (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

As time passes, and an individual with power establishes positive results, the risks and liabilities of newness associated with changes may be reduced. “With a fund of credits, an individual’s assertions of influence become more acceptable” (Hollander, 1980). In this way, as

relational trust is increased within an organization, these “credits have operational significance in allowing later deviations which would otherwise be viewed negatively if a person did not have a sufficient balance upon which to draw” (Hollander, 1980).

When analyzing the effects of power, authority, and influence in this story of school development, it is also important to examine the impact of social status and role sets within organizations. Merton (1949) defines social status as “a position in a social system with distinctive array of designated rights and obligations” and social role as “the behavior of status occupants that is oriented toward the patterned expectations of others (who accord the rights and accord the obligations).” Merton (1949) criticized sociologists who believed that “each person occupies multiple statuses and that each has an associated role,” instead claiming that “each social status involves not an associated role but an array of roles.”

The social structures and role sets must be closely analyzed when examining and interpreting the balance between power, authority, influence, and relational trust at LPA. Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team assumed a variety of roles associated with their statuses as organizational leaders in order to implement and effectively manage change and new initiatives. Therefore, the role sets associated with the principal and the leadership team were examined and used in explaining their contributions in this story of school development.

The principal and members of the leadership team at LPA held multiple statuses and assumed multiple roles for each of the statuses. The principal’s statuses included that of building supervisor, fiscal manager, and community partner. Her own personal sources of power included her expertise as a reading coach, her teaching experience which helped her serve as an instructional leader, her driven personality, and her direct leadership style. Each of these sources of power played a significant role in helping Mrs. Garcia get the school community to accept

change. Other sources of power include control of resources, information, and rewards and consequences. Mrs. Garcia used her power to control resources by making changes in staff personnel. She recognized that her control over hiring and firing staff contributed to staff buy in and compliance. Eventually trust helped her to get the staff to understand her vision and drive for continuous improvement.

Throughout her principalship, Mrs. Garcia carried out power, authority, and influence through a variety of roles which included facilitator, collaborator, and instructional coach, among many other roles. When necessary, she acted as a supervisor or manager in making important decisions, such as deciding to replace two primary teachers. At other times, Mrs. Garcia served as a community partner and in that role, she collaborated with community and university partners to in order to get students and families the resources they needed to be successful.

The leadership team members served as supervisors, coordinators, and lead teachers. Their power came as a result of their membership on the leadership team and their expertise in a variety of areas which include literacy, math, and bilingual education. As a result of this, the roles they fulfilled included mentoring, coaching, and collaborating with students, staff members, and parents. For example, as the Bilingual Coordinator, a member of the leadership team, was responsible serving in a supervisory role where he was responsible for overseeing testing of students' English literacy abilities and completing compliance requirements, which required him to make decisions in order to fulfill state and district policies. On the other hand, the Bilingual Coordinator also served as a coach, supporting teachers and the leadership team in transition from the dual language to the transitional bilingual program. As a coach, he fulfilled a more collaborative role with other staff members instead of exerting authority top-down. Serving

in multiple statuses allowed Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team to balance power, authority, influence, and relational trust while implementing changes at LPA.

The following figure describes how the role and the authority of the principal and leadership team impacted the relationship between changes and liabilities of newness, and the effective management of liabilities throughout the development at LPA.

Figure 1: The relationship between power, authority, influence, and relational trust in developing a culture of continuous improvement

Formal authority and other sources of power (history of instructional leadership, charismatic personality, etc.) → Changes and liabilities of newness (risks, uncertainties, etc.) → Effective management of those liabilities through increased relational trust → school development/changed school culture

Burke (2007) examines major changes in organizations as decisions that significantly change the direction of an organization and the way things are done. In *Organizational Change: Theory and Practice*, he reviews different types of change and various models that can be used to examine how change impacts organizations. He examines how organizations plan for change, as well as the differences between revolutionary change and the gradual, evolutionary change that is more typical in organizations.

According to Burke (2007), there are three reasons why changes in organizations might be unsuccessful. First, organizational change is difficult. Some individuals may not be open to change or see the need for it. As stated previously, Mrs. Garcia used her power and authority to get the staff to reflect on their practices and understand the need for change. Second, it is difficult to build support for change. Even when Mrs. Garcia encountered resistance, she continued to stay focused on her vision and continued to collaborate with staff and community members who were open to change. Third, there is limited knowledge about how to plan and implement change in organizations. Initially Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George did not have a specific

plan for implementing changes but used a variety of data to make changes. Each of these three reasons is connected to how changes are perceived within organizations which often results in increased liabilities and risks. Burke's (2007) work is useful in examining why Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team may have been successful in implementing changes or new initiatives, as a result of the way they effectively managed liabilities of newness by increasing relational trust among members of the school community. This section will also examine how Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team planned for and implemented changes at LPA.

In *Built to Change*, Lawler, Worley, and Porras (2006) describe the role of leaders within organizations and what organizations need to do in order to respond more effectively to change. They suggest two ideas. First, leaders must understand the organization's values and use those values to guide changes. Second, leaders must embrace, rather than resist, change. This means leaders must first be open to change themselves before they are able to successfully change their organizations. Lawler et al.'s work is important in understanding the role Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team played in implementing and effectively managing changes at LPA. Their work is helpful in examining how increased relational trust can be instrumental in decreasing liabilities and risks within organizations. Instead of tearing down what had been accomplished before her arrival at LPA, Mrs. Garcia introduced changes as ways of enhancing the existing instructional programs and established school culture.

#### **A. Liabilities of Newness**

According to Smylie (2010) and Burke (2007), "liabilities of newness" are increased risks or uncertainties that surface as a result of changes that are anticipated and adopted throughout an organization. Evans (1996) also speaks to risks or challenges that make changes difficult to accept and implement in schools. According to Smylie (2010), significant changes

within and outside of organizations often result in increased stress.<sup>47</sup> This stress can come from internal or external factors, and at the same time can decrease relational trust among organization members. This, in turn, makes organizations fragile, to the point where even their continued existence might be threatened. To manage the increased stress and systemic instability, it is important that organizations designate time and resources to increasing or establishing trust and decreasing liabilities of newness (Smylie, 2010).

Evans (1996) and Fullan (2007) suggest that increased risks and liabilities can be functions of the organization's external environment relations, or come from members and events inside the organization itself. One example in the LPA story was the increased risks and liabilities that surfaced as a result of differences between the leadership team's vision and the District office's priorities. The LPA staff felt external pressure from the District office. Within LPA, there were feelings of uncertainty or anxiety that resulted from the transition to a new leadership team or from the changes it introduced and the introduction of multiple new initiatives to a small faculty. In order to effectively manage change and successfully implement a variety of new initiatives over five years, Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team focused on increasing relational trust and engaged various members of the school community in making decisions to move the school forward. These decisions included transitioning to a new bilingual program, implementing local autonomy, and many other school initiatives described in detail in the LPA story.

### **B. Relational Trust**

According to Bryk and Schneider (2003), "relational trust" is defined as parties in a relationship maintaining an understanding of and commitment to their roles and obligations,

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<sup>47</sup> Stress within an organization can refer to problems, conflicts, or challenges that can result for many different reasons, for example, changes in leadership or financial problems.

while holding some expectations about the obligations of the other parties within an organization. At LPA, relational trust included a mutual understanding and respect among members of the school community for each other's roles and responsibilities. As described in educational research, schools with strong relational trust are able to establish buy-in for the need for change, and can foster a culture that includes shared decision making and ownership of the school's progress (Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

Strong relational trust was important at LPA due to the constant changes taking place. Without relational trust, school organizations can be fragile, which can result in stressful environments (Smylie, 2010). In order to strengthen and foster a collaborative school culture, Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team not only worked at gaining the school community's trust but at the same time provided opportunities in grade cycle meetings and staff professional development sessions for teachers to engage in collaborative discussions to share ideas. Cosner's (2009; 2010) work discusses the important role of principals in helping to reinforce norms of interaction among staff members in changing organizations. At LPA, the leadership team prioritized opportunities for trust development among staff members and in developing trust among new and existing community and university partnerships.

Educational research suggests that strong relational trust makes it easier to implement changes or new initiatives, because trust reduces the sense of risk associated with change (Bryk & Schneider, 2003, Tschannen-Moran, 2004). When school professionals trust one another and sense support from parents, they feel safer to experiment with new practices. In school cultures in which trust has been established, staff members are much more likely to discuss their current practices in terms of what is working and what needs work. Without trust, school staff members may not feel safe speaking openly with each other about their practices (Bryk & Schneider,

2003). In schools in which relational trust is improving over time, teachers are more likely to be open to implementing new practices to improve the instructional programs. Bryk and Schneider (2003) found that elementary schools with high relational trust are much more likely to demonstrate marked improvements in student learning, and that the overall measure of school trust resulted in a significant difference in student performance when comparing improving and non-improving schools.<sup>48</sup> A school with a low score on relational trust had a one-in-seven chance of demonstrating improved academic productivity. By contrast, half of the schools that scored high on relational trust were in the improved group. On average, these improving schools recorded increases in standardized test scores of 8 percent in reading and 20 percent in mathematics over five years. The schools in the non-improving group with low trust results scored lower on standardized tests in reading, and were stagnant in mathematics. Schools with indicators of low trust did not show improvement in either reading or mathematics.

One way to build relational trust is to show that the leader is willing to do anything that he or she asks of other members of the organization. “If a leader can do something, but seems unwilling to do so, there may be a crisis” (Hollander, 1980, p. 108). At LPA, Mrs. Garcia would not ask her staff to do anything that she had not done before or was not willing to do at the time. “The nature of the leader’s role is such that he or she is likely to have many and varied relationships with others in the group” (Hollander, 1980, p. 117). Hollander’s research is important in examining how Mrs. Garcia developed trust at LPA.

Tschannen-Moran (2004) found that trust is established through a commitment period during which each partner has the opportunity to signal each other a willingness to accept personal risk and not to exploit the vulnerability of the other person for personal gain. This

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<sup>48</sup> Bryk and Schneider measured school trust on the basis of approximately two dozen survey items addressing teachers' attitudes toward their colleagues, principals, and parents.

commitment period begins at the moment of initial contact and extends until the participants know each other well enough to predict one another's values and behavior's. The process of developing trust takes time and commitment by all individuals involved. Mrs. Garcia not only focused on developing trust of teachers, parents, and community members but she worked on developing the trust of her leadership team which included her assistant principal, counselor and bilingual lead teacher, lead literacy teacher, and math lead teacher.

Smylie and Brownlee-Conyers (1992) found that relationships develop and function within an organizational context and as a result of changing work relationships role ambiguity and role conflict may surface. As trust develops between teacher leaders and principals, Smylie and Brownlee-Conyers argue that interpersonal dimensions within the new relationships must develop. The interpersonal dimensions include establishing trust, confidence, and a way of communicating effectively. Initially Mrs. Garcia worked on establishing trust with Mr. George and later focused on developing the trust of her leadership team and the school community.

This story of school development focuses on how Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team used power, authority, and influence initially in creating and implementing changes to incorporating trust as a major lever in effectively managing risks and liabilities. Initially, the staff most likely went along with decisions or changes when asked to do so by Mrs. Garcia since she held power and authority as the school principal. Mrs. Garcia believed that the young staff with limited teaching experience and relatively new school culture at LPA made it easier for her to get the school community to buy into the need for change. Later, she still used her power and authority to introduce changes or initiatives but since she had developed the staff's trust changes were more readily accepted. Although much has been written on collegial, student-teacher, parent-teacher trust, this story focuses on the staff and school community's trust in the principal

as the school leader. Cosner (2010) found that trust in a leader can have a positive effect on task and team performance.

Fullan (2007), Schein (2010), and Tschannen-Moran (2004) contend that much of the effectiveness of change lies in having various stakeholders involved in creating, developing, and sustaining the changes as seen in the case with LPA Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team involved students, staff, parents, and members of the community in developing school goals and priorities, and in making decisions to support continuous improvement. Through the development of trust over time, the liabilities of newness became less of an obstacle to change initiatives.

Schein (2010) argues that schools with newly developing cultures have more of a chance to implement changes, because they do not already have a solidly formed culture that would resist those changes. This was the case with LPA, as it opened in 2002. Hatch and Cunliffe (2006) suggest that school cultures and the need for change must be aligned, and school organizations must understand the need for change. Because the school was relatively new and the staff members were not necessarily set in their ways, it may have been easier for Mrs. Garcia and her team to gain buy-in on the need for change.

### **C. Effective Management of Liabilities of Newness through Increasing Relational Trust**

As described in the narrative, LPA was faced with a new leadership team and with frequent, rapidly paced changes over the course of five years. All of the initiatives could have overwhelmed the school community and been detrimental to the development of a strong school culture at LPA. However, the changes and the liabilities of newness they created were effectively managed through increased relational trust.

Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team allocated the time and resources needed to build relational trust as outlined in Diagram 1. The leadership team took time to meet with students, staff, and parents in formal and informal settings throughout the building, and throughout the day. Before introducing changes, the team often made phone calls to members of the community to share information, clarify questions, or gain buy-in. Mrs. Garcia and the leadership team also brought in materials and coordinated workshops for students and families to address their academic, social, emotional, and physical needs. This included guest speakers who worked with students and families to build self-esteem and communication, and workshops to help families address questions related to home foreclosure, immigration, and how to get help to pay electric and gas bills. Over time, Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team gained the trust of students and parents through this allocation of time and resources, creating a safe, supportive school environment.

Under Mrs. Garcia's leadership, LPA experienced rapid changes in instructional programs, curricular materials, local governance, and many other areas. These introduced changes created internal and external stresses, but Mrs. Garcia's emphasis on the importance of fostering relational trust throughout the implementation process helped to decrease these liabilities of newness. For example, Mrs. Garcia shared her idea for a new school proposal with a few staff members and parents in order to get buy-in before introducing the proposal to the entire school community. After submitting the proposal, she followed up with staff members and parents to gain a sense of how the school community was responding and how it felt about the possibility of a new school. She used the information she obtained to increase relational trust and to guide her in figuring out what to do next.

Smylie (2010) found that changes or new initiatives within organizations often result in decreased relational trust among school community members, and a fragile school culture. Although the leadership team experienced some resistance from teachers and staff members in initiating and implementing changes in curricular materials, Mrs. Garcia believed that significant problems or challenges to the changes were avoided due to the consistent focus on fostering relational trust.

Relational trust as a theme is useful in understanding how Mrs. Garcia and the leadership team managed the liabilities of newness when introducing changes at LPA. Mrs. Garcia believed a stable school culture incorporated the school community in developing clearly defined goals and priorities that supported the school's vision and mission, which was data driven and grounded in research-based best practices. Mrs. Garcia believed that without strong relational trust, the staff's feelings of stress, anxiety, or uncertainty would have had a detrimental impact on developing a culture of continuous improvement.

In the case of LPA, when stakeholders did not understand why changes were needed, Mrs. Garcia took the time to share data that supported the need for change and provided rationales for the decisions of her leadership team. At the same time, she and her leadership team worked toward building relational trust by focusing on building a culture in which members of the school community felt responsibility for improving the school. She did so by engaging stakeholders in reviewing data and developing school-wide goals and priorities for which all LPA staff members pushed. Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team were able to shape the school culture by enhancing and building on existing practices, and by developing new norms of high

expectations for all<sup>49</sup> and increased collaboration and communication, rather than threatening existing norms and beliefs.

In order to understand this story of school development, it is important to recognize the relationships between newness, risk and liability, trust, and improvement, and the impact each of these areas had on the school culture. Throughout the transition to a new leadership team and the new initiatives that were introduced in the school, Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team were able to effectively manage liabilities of newness through increasing relational trust. This process of “changes and liabilities of newness (risks, uncertainties) □ effective management of those liabilities (culture building, trust, resources, time) □ school development” was followed in making improvements to instructional quality, curricular materials, student achievement, and many other areas. These initiatives and changes in different aspects of school organization were essential to the school's development.

During the course of five years, Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team used increasing relational trust to establish the buy-in necessary to implement changes in instructional programs and school culture. They helped students, staff, parents, and members of the community shift their thinking away from supporting existing structures and programs, and toward understanding the need for change, even if it meant temporarily managing uncertainty, non-rationality, and risks. The leadership team led the staff and school community in implementing necessary changes in instructional programs, curricular materials, and local governance, as well as developing proposals for expansion and for a new school. This process involved going from the “known” to the “unknown” in order to help move the school forward. During the course of five

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<sup>49</sup> According to the 2012 Consortium Survey, 94% of teacher respondents report that the principal of LPA sets high standards for student learning.

years, Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team believed that the initial feelings of risk and ambiguity converted to those of certainty and confidence.

During the transition to the new leadership team, and during changes to the instructional programs and curricula, there was an initial lack of trust and uncertainty among a few members of the school community and the new leadership team. Initially, staff and parents were reluctant to take risks and were not clear about the direction of the school. Staff members did not understand the need for change, and this created stress among the staff. Mrs. Garcia believed that the staff was satisfied with the status quo, in which approximately 70 percent of students met state standards on state standardized tests, and that they did not understand why they needed to change their practices.

The school leadership team knew that it had to designate time and resources in order to establish and maintain trust. When implementing significant changes, the team had many formal and informal meetings, and used phone calls, emails and text messages to decrease anxiety or uncertainty among staff, parents, and ASC members. The leadership team did whatever was necessary in order to help the school community understand why the changes were necessary, and how they could help the school move forward. With time and patience, relational trust increased, relationships were strengthened, and the school became a stronger institution within the community.

Because LPA was a relatively new school with a small faculty and student population, Mrs. Garcia was able to implement changes in the school organization relatively easily, since there were not well-established systems in place. The overall culture of the school was still developing, and for this reason, it might have been easier to implement changes at LPA. As new

initiatives were introduced, Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team recognized that they needed to continue building relational trust.

There were many areas in which relational trust played a significant role in helping Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team effectively managed the uncertainty and liability of changes within the school. Five examples are provided here to illustrate this relationship. In each of these examples, Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team focused on increasing relational trust in order to decrease liabilities of newness that surfaced when new school initiatives were introduced. The five examples represent different areas of school improvement, including developing strategic leadership, enhancing professional capacity, improving instruction, increasing parent and community involvement, and developing a culture of continuous improvement. Each of the following examples described how Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team decreased liabilities of newness by increasing relational trust.

#### **D. Developing Strategic School Leadership**

Not only were Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team new to the school, but they quickly introduced changes and initiatives that resulted in increased liabilities of newness, such as feelings of anxiety or uncertainty. As part of her vision for the school, Mrs. Garcia introduced strategic changes to the instructional programs and initiatives over the course of five years. Mrs. Garcia used the term “strategic changes” in retrospect to describe an action or idea that had a clear purpose and plan of implementation, in which data had been reviewed, and steps on how to address challenges had been identified.

The new leadership team itself was one example of the changes LPA experienced. The newness of the leadership team and the changes and initiatives it introduced led to uncertainties among faculty, parents, community members, and external partners like the district office. With

the new leadership transition, the new team implemented a series of changes that included new curricular materials, a bilingual instructional model, and autonomous local governance.

As described in the case narrative, some parents and community members expressed during an ASC meeting that they were concerned about whether or not the team could be trusted. Mr. Rodriguez, an ASC parent representative, stated, “All of your ideas sound good, but how do we know you are not going to change?” Mr. Rodriguez clarified that he was referring to whether Mrs. Garcia would become mean or authoritative, and he questioned her age during the same ASC meeting. Mrs. Garcia was not surprised that her age and limited experience were being questioned, and she knew she would need to win support for her leadership through her actions. Initially, some members of the school community were skeptical that Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team would be able to support the significant changes that were introduced, and wondered whether the school could continue to increase student performance and move forward with the same momentum. They often asked Mrs. Garcia questions about the progress of the school and initiatives.

Initially, the leadership team focused on establishing trust by working and learning alongside students, staff, parents, the ASC, and community members in meetings and workshops. They were also visible in hallways and outside, before and after school. They visited classrooms and took time to teach students in small groups, model lessons for teachers, and lead workshops for parents. As described in the case narrative, Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team gradually began to gain the trust of community members and professional partners. This was evident in the staff’s willingness to implement new practices and programs, in students’ rapport with the staff through one-on-one goal-setting sessions, and parents’ participation and involvement in the school through planning meetings and as volunteers in classrooms.

Although most staff members and parents went along with Mrs. Garcia's suggestions or ideas, initially there were a few staff and ASC members who did not agree with the leadership team. At the same time, Mrs. Garcia recognized that perhaps some of the staff members did not trust her as a result of her role as a school administrator. A few staff members and parents voiced their concerns and questioned Mrs. Garcia's changes in instructional programs and curricular materials, but did so in respectful ways because relational trust had already been established. When questioned, Mrs. Garcia responded respectfully and provided detailed responses. She often concluded by asking if anyone had any additional questions or needed additional information. Not everyone agreed with Mrs. Garcia's vision for the school. Several staff members who did not support her leadership team chose to move on to other schools. Mrs. Garcia recognized that the staff and ASC could have made it much more difficult for her leadership team to implement a variety of instructional and organizational changes in a short period of time, but she believed that they did not do so because of the trust established within the school community.

There were also liabilities of newness that surfaced between the new leadership team and external partners. One example was the differing views on school priorities between the LPA leadership team and the District office. The District office was concerned with Mrs. Garcia's lack of experience as a principal and questioned her decision to transition to new literacy and math programs in the same year. It took at least three years for Mrs. Garcia to gain the trust of the District office, but she believed that she was ultimately able to gain that trust because her leadership team led the school to improved student performance.

#### **E. Improving Instruction and Enhancing Professional Capacity**

Between 2006 and 2011, instruction at LPA improved as a result of Mrs. Garcia's leadership and vision in developing, and implementing new initiatives. Throughout this five-year

process, Mrs. Garcia implemented a coaching leadership style in which she worked with the staff in communicating and understanding the need for change. As a former reading coach, Mrs. Garcia learned from other school principals who felt they were more effective if staff and school community members were included in making important decisions.

As described in this case narrative, before Mrs. Garcia's arrival, the school had experienced a certain level of success, with 57.1 percent and 69.8 percent of students meeting or exceeding state standards on the SAT. Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team had to help the staff understand the need for changes in teaching and planning practices in order to prepare more students to meet and exceed state standards.

Mrs. Garcia, with the leadership team, introduced a variety of new initiatives or changes aimed at enhancing the staff's professional capacity, and implemented a coaching model to promote improved practices and increased expectations for all staff members. In Year 1 (2007-2008), Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George led most of the professional development regarding using data to set goals and to identify priorities, common expectations, and core practices. In Years 2 and 3 (2008-2009 and 2009-2010), external partners provided much of the professional development for the new transitional bilingual program, as well as literacy and math programs. In Years 4 and 5 (2010-2011 and 2011-2012), many of the professional development workshops were led by teachers and focused on engaging staff in analyzing NWEA data to identify differentiated instruction and assessment.

The five new initiatives aimed at enhancing instruction included: (a) Use of student-performance data to drive decisions and to develop high expectations and core instructional practices in 2006-07; (b) Transition from a dual-language program to a transitional bilingual program in 2007-08; (c) Implementation of new literacy and math programs in 2008-09; (d) Use

of assessment data to inform instruction in 2009-10; and (e) Implementation of differentiated instruction through RTI in 2010-11.

The five-year process of enhancing professional capacity involved increasing school-wide expectations for acceptable levels of performance for students and staff, and understanding state and national standards. This process involved reviewing student-performance data over time, sharing best practices, and reflecting on what was working and what needed work. Even though several approaches were attempted, a few strategies remained consistent, such as having teachers analyze data to identify what was working and to inform instruction.

The leadership team recognized that there were many risks and uncertainties involved in having the staff make so many changes to their practices. Some of the risks included possible decreases in student mastery in specific subject areas, or decreases in the number of students meeting standards on state standardized tests. Mrs. Garcia addressed these risks and uncertainties by helping the staff understand the need for change. The leadership team led the staff in reviewing and discussing student-performance data, and in setting school goals and priorities aimed at increasing the number of students exceeding state standards. Mrs. Garcia and the leadership team focused on decreasing risks and uncertainties by increasing relational trust through working with teachers on developing the curriculum and creating a supportive environment. Mrs. Garcia wanted the staff members to know that they were not on their own, but had the support of the leadership team in improving the instructional programs at LPA. Together, the staff and leadership team brainstormed ideas and looked for ways to improve existing practices.

Mrs. Garcia believed that this process of building staff capacity was significant in improving instructional practices and student performance on the SAT. Capacity was built by

having the staff members participate in extensive internal and external literacy and math professional development workshops, and by providing modeling and coaching support. Mrs. Garcia and Mr. George often modeled lessons or gave written and oral feedback to observations, lesson plans, and assessments. They modeled lessons, coached staff, provided feedback, and led the staff in reflecting on their practices in order to build capacity and improve instructional practices at LPA. As student performance increased and the staff members felt that they were developing stronger instructional practices, the leadership team gained more trust from the staff, which was important in decreasing the liabilities of newness that surfaced from asking the staff to make changes to their current practices.

When developing the staff's capacity, Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team implemented a coaching strategy that she had used in her previous role as a reading coach. She modeled reading and writing lessons, and facilitated discussions on how to use assessment data to develop lessons. The new leadership team gained the staff's trust by working directly with them in grade-cycle meetings, professional development workshops, and staff meetings. They worked together with staff in reviewing student performance on state tests, reflecting on current practices, and developing core practices at LPA. Reflecting on her first five years as principal, Mrs. Garcia believed that this collaborative process was much more effective in leading the staff to change some practices than if she had given the staff a list of non-negotiable mandates.

The transition to a new bilingual instructional model in 2007-2008 was one example of the new leadership team focusing on enhancing instruction. Prior to the change, students received Spanish-language instruction in all grades, according to a dual-language model. LPA transitioned to a new, bilingual program in which students would only receive native-language instruction and support for a maximum of four years. As kindergarteners, each student would be

assessed using a language screener that determined their English-language proficiency. Then, if their English proficiency was limited, they would be provided with instruction in their native language throughout their primary years, in addition to limited English-language instruction.

The increased liabilities of newness brought about by the new bilingual program included feelings of stress by the staff. These were the result of changes in current teaching and planning practices, the use of different curricular materials, and additional professional development. When weighing the pros and cons of transitioning to a bilingual instructional model, Mrs. Garcia believed that some of the risks and liabilities meant that members of the school community might view the decision as a decreased emphasis on the value of native language and culture. The possibility of decreased student performance was another potential risk.

Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team addressed the risks and uncertainties of this transition in a variety of ways. They met with parents, staff, and the ASC to review the significant differences between the existing, dual-language program and the transitional bilingual model. At staff and parent meetings, Mrs. Garcia explained the reasons why she believed the transition was necessary. She explained that the school did not have the funding to purchase enough separate Spanish textbooks and English textbooks in order to successfully continue to a dual-language program. She described the limited professional development that had been given to teachers, and their limited expertise in properly implementing the dual-language program. She also explained that there were not enough English-dominant students enrolled in the primary grades to model the English language for Spanish-dominant students. Upon reflection, Mrs. Garcia believed that this process of informing and having discussions with staff, parents, and the ASC was important in gaining the school community's support for transitioning to the bilingual model. Mrs. Garcia focused on increasing relational trust by being as transparent as possible

about sharing the reasons for the change with staff and parents, and by providing staff and parents with support during the transition. The support for staff included purchasing appropriate curricular materials, providing professional development workshops, and providing coaching. Support for parents included providing responses to their questions and concerns.

Over time, Mrs. Garcia believed that she gained the trust of the staff and parents in making the decision to transition. After providing the staff with professional development and support, purchasing the necessary curricular materials, and educating the community about the benefits, the transitional bilingual model was implemented. One indicator of good instructional practices, which included accommodations for English Language Learners (ELLs), was the increase in student performance on the SAT among ELLs and general-program students (see Tables II and III, Appendix). Other indicators of enhanced capacity included knowledge and successful implementation of effective instructional practices, a common language, and an understanding of core instructional practices.

#### **F. Increasing Parent and Community Involvement**

In order to build norms of shared accountability for the success of the school, Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team regularly engaged parents and community partners in a variety of ways. Expectations were raised for parents, just as they were for students and staff. Initially, parents and community members were encouraged to volunteer in classrooms, participate in parent workshops, and collaborate in planning meetings. In later years, parents were expected to be involved in their children's education.

Mrs. Garcia initiated many strategies in order to keep parents and community members informed and to get them involved in the school. These strategies included sending home

quarterly newsletters, weekly reminders, flyers, and letters, as well as making personal phone calls to get people involved.

The focus on increasing parent and community involvement included the following five initiatives: (a) Increased number of parent meetings in 2006-07; (b) Introduction of parent grade-level meetings in 2007-08; (c) More parent volunteers in classrooms in 2008-09; (d) More community and professional partnerships in 2009-10; and (e) Strategic parent and community involvement, including parent teacher organization, community meetings, and parent leadership teams in 2010-11.

Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team implemented various strategies and initiatives aimed at increasing parent and community involvement at LPA. For example, there was initially limited parent and community involvement. There were eight to ten parent volunteers, and only ten to fifteen parents participated in parent meetings. There was one strong community partner, and one university partner. After three years, parent and community involvement increased to fifteen to twenty parent volunteers, and approximately twenty-five to thirty parents participating in parent meetings. The school also opened its doors to twenty to thirty student teachers or observers. The school had also developed strong partners, including one community and three university partners.

As the number of active parents and community partners increased, there were increased risks and uncertainties involved. As there were more eyes watching, the school was more open to criticism and there were more opportunities for misunderstanding. Mrs. Garcia recognized the benefits of having additional volunteers or community partners, such as student teachers, in the school. She asked the staff to consider opening their classrooms to parent and community volunteers and left the door open for discussion if having additional adults in each classroom did

not work. Mrs. Garcia believed that she won the staff's trust by saying that, if having volunteers in the classrooms did not work, they could look for other ways to involve parents in the school in the future.

Mrs. Garcia believed that parent and community involvement increased over time as a result of increased relational trust. Mrs. Garcia believed that, as time passed, the parents and community members began to feel more comfortable in the school. Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team fostered trust by welcoming volunteers in the school, communicating changes to the entire school community, and engaging members of the school community. The process of engaging the school community in making decisions and changes in the school became a core practice at LPA.

Parents and community members became more involved in the school by volunteering in classrooms, participating in workshops, and participating in teams that were responsible for making decisions about how to move the school forward.

#### **G. Developing School Status**

After a few years of working to enhance instructional programs and develop the school culture, Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team also focused on developing the school's status as a Level 1 IMPS school that strived for continuous improvement. They developed their school's status by obtaining local autonomy, by achieving Level 1 school status according to the District Performance Policy, and by pursuing the possibilities of expanding the school or opening a new school. When the school was granted IMPS status, Mrs. Garcia used the opportunity as the impetus for engaging the school community in maintaining the school's Level 1 status by continuing to develop systems for continuous improvement. This involved developing school-improvement efforts related to instruction, instructional programs, curriculum development,

building operations, fiscal management, school organization, and other areas. Mrs. Garcia worked steadily to implement her vision of developing a collaborative and engaging school culture in order to enhance the instructional programs, and engaged the school community in developing systems to support and monitor school improvement.

During this five-year period, the leadership team learned the powerful role of trust in implementing changes in the school culture and climate. Although the leadership team recognized that strong relationships were essential in building a school community, it initially underestimated the role of trust in the change process. Through a trial-and-error process, the leadership team learned that consistent communication and collaboration among members of the school community were essential elements in developing trust and successfully implementing changes.

The school culture developed as a result of the following five significant school-wide initiatives and priorities: (a) Establishing expectations and initial trust; (b) Significant changes in curriculum and instruction and obtaining a local autonomy status in 2007-08; (c) Defining a data-driven culture and submitting new-school proposal in 2008-09; (d) Reestablishing trust with changes in leadership support team in 2009-10; and (e) Nurturing continuous improvement in time of high accountability in 2010-11.

The transition to local autonomy in 2008-2009 was one example in which Mrs. Garcia and her new leadership team focused on building a culture of shared accountability. Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team did this by increasing relational trust and decreasing risks and liabilities. The leadership explained to the staff and parents that the school community would be responsible for making its own instructional and budgetary decisions and creating its own systems to support and monitor progress. Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team used local

autonomy as a way of getting students, staff, parents, the ASC, and community and professional partners to buy into the need for shared ownership and accountability for the school's success. She explained that all members of the school community were responsible for moving the school forward.

The new team and the initiatives it introduced resulted in increased risks or liabilities, which Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team were able to effectively manage by continuing to focus on increasing relational trust. Some of the risks and uncertainties included feeling of uncertainty among some of the staff and parents about local decisions being responsible for moving the school forward. The leadership team effectively managed the liabilities by continuing to have members of the school community engage in implementing decisions such as local autonomy and developing the new school proposal, while focusing on the positive changes and the progress the school had made under the leadership of Mrs. Garcia and her team. The positive changes included increased collaboration and communication, which had been achieved without being able to rely on a proven track record of increases in student performance on standardized tests. She and her leadership team took risks in asking the school community to buy into local autonomy.

Mrs. Garcia recalled that the staff and some ASC parents were skeptical at first about gaining local autonomy, because they were not sure if they had the systems or structures in place to support making local decisions. They also were not sure if the transition to local autonomy would mean increased district accountability or additional expectations. Although most staff members did not know what local autonomy involved, a few teachers who were familiar with the District team knew that local autonomy could benefit the school in a number of ways, because the school community was responsible for making curricular and budgetary decisions. The risks

included being fully responsible for every decision taken as a school, and not having someone else to review school processes to make sure they followed district, state, and federal guidelines. This made the staff, ASC parents and even Mrs. Garcia nervous. The school community recognized the risks of jeopardizing Level 1 status and the possibility of decreased student performance if they were not successful in managing the school.

As described in the case narrative, the leadership team reassured the staff, parents, and ASC that they were ready to take on additional risks, which included local autonomy. Even though Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team were not sure about what was to come, they were ready to make their own instructional and financial decisions. Throughout the transition to local autonomy, Mrs. Garcia continued to develop the community members' trust by continuing to work side-by-side with members of the community in classrooms and in meetings, by being available before, during, and after school, by answering questions, and by continuing to include students, staff, parents, and members of the community in making and implementing decisions. Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team dedicated more time to meeting with and talking to additional parents and community members in order to get more members of the community involved in helping to move the school forward.

## **H. Cyclical Processes of Continuous Improvement**

The educational literature on power, authority, and influence, liabilities of newness, relational trust and change in organizational cultures is useful in examining how LPA developed a virtuous circle of continuous improvement. A virtuous circle has favorable results, while a vicious circle has detrimental results (Krueger, 1993; Webel & Galtung, 2007). According to Smylie (2010), organizations with virtuous circles often include a self-perpetuating spiral of growth and improvement that stemmed from small and large incremental changes. Virtuous circles can result in fundamental changes in organizational processes, but these changes might not be enough to overcome internal or external pressures or stresses on the organization (Smylie, 2010). On the other hand, once an organization is part of a vicious circle, it is likely that the organization will “continue on a path of action that leads further and further away from the desired state of affairs” (Masuch, 1985, p. 14). Over the years, the efforts and changes introduced by Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team evolved into a virtuous circle. Initially, Mrs. Garcia used her power and authority to introduce and implement changes and new school initiatives, which helped to initiate a spiral of growth and improvement in student performance and in the school culture. The successful implementation of changes perpetuated continued growth and augmented the effects of the virtuous circle.

Within the virtuous circle established at LPA, there were “tipping points,” or moments of critical mass that occurred suddenly and rapidly (Gladwell, 2000). According to Gladwell (2000), tipping points can be small, incremental changes within organizations that develop into significant changes over time, or can involve large, significant changes during short periods of time. The effects of these changes can be contagious (Gladwell, 2000). At LPA, the “tipping points” of shifting to a transitional bilingual program, gaining IMPS status, and transitioning to new literacy and math programs were large, significant changes that could have resulted in decreases in student performance and fragmented the staff and school culture. Instead, Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team engaged the school community in understanding the need for implementing these changes, and the virtuous circle at LPA continued.

Over time, Mrs. Garcia learned that, whether the changes at LPA were small or significant, she needed to be strategic in lessening the tension caused by her power and authority by increasing relational trust in order to decrease the risks or uncertainties that resulted from the new school initiatives. She learned that by sharing her ideas with key stakeholders and getting them involved in making decisions, she not only gained buy-in, but she won the trust of the school community.

For example, the staff and parents were involved in making the decision to transition from a dual-language program to a transitional bilingual program. Because she rallied support for the transition beforehand, the changes did not spiral out of control and were more easily accepted by members of the school community. This approach to changes seemed to contribute to a virtuous circle of continuous improvement.

In order to understand this story of school development, it is also important to understand how processes of school improvement at LPA developed into virtuous, rather than vicious, circles. At LPA, Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team believed that distributed leadership played

a significant role in the development of a culture that thrived on continuous improvement.<sup>50</sup> According to Mrs. Garcia, distributed leadership at LPA involved engaging the staff, parents, and community members in reviewing data, identifying areas of need, setting goals and action steps, developing a progress-monitoring system, and making changes as needed. By engaging members of the community in the process, Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team believed that the school community would become more invested in moving the school forward. In the work of Smylie, Mayrowetz, Murphy, and Louis (2007), trust can play a significant role in the development of distributed leadership in school-improvement initiatives. The role of trust can be examined in how it influences the design and performance of distributed leadership, and how it is perceived.

At LPA, Mrs. Garcia played a significant role in emphasizing trust to successfully implement change and develop a culture of continuous improvement. Mrs. Garcia began to develop social capital in informal ways until it was recognized as a fundamental element of “The LPA Way.”

The work of Smylie (2010) on stress in organizations is helpful in examining the anxiety and stress created by the changes that were implemented at LPA in developing a culture of continuous improvement. Mrs. Garcia recalls examples in which some staff members displayed stress during the transitions to a new leadership team, a new bilingual program, and new literacy and math series. The stress during these periods was initially high, but as Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team focused on increasing relational trust, uncertainties decreased. The initial stress eventually evolved into a community-wide sense of urgency to improve the school.

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<sup>50</sup> Mrs. Garcia described “distributive leadership” as opportunities for her staff to take on leadership roles in school. For example, even though she and her leadership team were involved in transitioning to new literacy and math series, the teachers were responsible for selecting the new curricular materials and developing implementation plans to support the transition.

Over time, the leadership team, parents, staff, and community members began to trust each other as they worked together to develop a culture of continuous improvement, set goals and make decisions about the direction of the school. This led to the second significant theme, relational trust. The leadership team was able to establish trust by having school community members involved in making important decisions about the school's vision and goals. The leadership team provided many opportunities for members of the school community to share each other's ideas about how to move the school forward. As the trust developed and the liability of newness decreased, the relationships were strengthened and the school community was able to accomplish its goals of increasing student performance and creating a supportive school environment. Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team believed that time and resources helped to reestablish relationships within the organization (Smylie, 2010).

Although liability of newness and relational trust are distinct themes, they are intertwined. As relational trust increases, the liabilities of newness or risks that come with change decrease. In order to understand the connection between liabilities of newness and relational trust, the relationship between organizations and their environments must be examined. Burke (2007) and Thompson (1967) suggest that organizations and environments function best when in alignment. When a middle ground was achieved between the new LPA leadership team and the external environment, the school as an organization functioned much more smoothly. According to Smylie (2010), when organizations and environments are aligned, things are predictable and resources flow better. External expectations seem met, and the organization is supported and prospers.

At the same time, the relationships between organizations and environments are constantly changing. The balance between the new administration and the environment was

constantly challenged by internal and external pressures. These changes created uncertainty and ambiguity in organizations, which can be described as “newness of circumstance.” Thompson (1967) and Schein (2010) argue that organizations do not like a lot of uncertainty and are not necessarily conducive to school improvement initiatives. Organizations need to constantly develop and foster relational trust within and outside of the organizations' relationships with their environments. The decisions of Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team were challenged by the District team several times. That external stress on the school organization changed after the school achieved autonomous status, as the school community was then responsible for the school's progress.

This capstone integrates Burke's (2007) and other's lenses of organizational theory in describing and analyzing the role of relational trust and the change process in this story of school development. According to Burke, organizations, like schools, change internally at a slower rate than their external environments; therefore, organizations need to continue to evolve in order to keep up with the environment. Further, these environments are in constant flux, and challenge the assumption of continuity on which organizations are created and developed.

The literature on virtuous and vicious circles and organizational theory was helpful in analyzing the relationship that evolved between change and culture. Changes significantly affected the school culture, while the culture evolved into one that thrived on continuous improvement. Leadership Prep Academy experienced consistent, significant changes over a five-year period, which promoted the development of a virtuous circle that included a new leadership team and school-wide initiatives. Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team repeatedly lessened the friction caused by her power and authority by increasing relational trust, which resulted in

decreasing the liabilities of newness. This virtuous circle involved mostly favorable results and resulted in the development of a culture of continuous improvement.

The educational research related to the central themes included in this capstone was instrumental in understanding how the themes connected and in analyzing the lessons learned from this case. These lessons will be outlined in the conclusion of this capstone and provide insights for those interested in learning from this example of school development and leadership. There is a clear need for greater understanding of how to lead, manage, and change organizations. This capstone is an example of the way one principal and her leadership team developed, implemented, and managed the change process at LPA.

#### **IV. LESSONS LEARNED AND PROPOSED**

As Mrs. Garcia reflected on her experiences as principal over five years, there were two types of lessons learned: (1) lessons she and her team learned after reflecting on the past five years and (2) lessons that others should take away from the LPA story and analysis. Mrs. Garcia believed that each of these lessons may contribute to educational research on relational trust and change processes in school development, and may be useful to practitioners in understanding that risks and uncertainties need to be addressed in order for improvement to occur.

There are several significant lessons that Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team learned after reflecting on her five years as principal. During these five years, she learned that as principal, she held power, but her legitimacy and ability to influence others and gain their trust was fundamental in creating a culture of continuous improvement. She also learned that establishing and developing relational trust helped her to effectively manage change at LPA. By engaging others in reviewing data, establishing goals and priorities, and developing action plans and next steps, she was able to successfully get others to buy into the need for change. Therefore, Mrs. Garcia learned how to lessen the friction caused by power and authority by increasing relational trust in order to decrease liabilities of newness.

The balance between power and relational trust were instrumental in helping Mrs. Araujo and her leadership team implement changes from 2006 to 2011. At the time, Mrs. Garcia did not recognize the power of trust and the relationships she had developed. She believed that her primary role as a school principal was that of an instructional leader. Upon reflection, Mrs. Garcia realized that she learned early on that relational trust was instrumental in establishing buy-in and building trust to implement new initiatives. Initially, the leadership team learned through doctoral coursework and by talking to other administrators that it was important to engage

various members of the school community when implementing new initiatives in order to gain buy-in. In 2006-07, Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team engaged various members of the school community in using student-performance data to drive decisions and to develop high expectations and core instructional practices. Mrs. Garcia was not sure how engaging members of the school community would help her to gain buy-in or establish trust. Over time, she learned that she had to continue to work on developing trust in order to move the school forward and create a culture which supported additional changes.

Next, Mrs. Garcia learned that communicating the reasons behind her decisions and providing the school community with information was instrumental in helping a school community accept changes. In 2007-08, Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team led the school community in changing the dual-language program to a transitional bilingual program. Mrs. Garcia provided parents with useful information about both bilingual programs. This was useful in helping the community to accept changing the dual-language program to a transitional bilingual program. At the time, Mrs. Garcia learned that parents did not know the difference between dual language and transitional bilingual programs. Prior to the changes to the bilingual program, she did not realize the value of sharing relevant information with parents and how it helped her to establish trust because parents felt respected and valued when given useful information.

In 2008-09 Mrs. Garcia learned another important lesson when LPA became an IMPS school. Since LPA would be accountable for its results, she recognized that part of local autonomy involved developing systems, progress monitoring, and making adjustments to changes and initiative. Therefore, Mrs. Garcia developed clear systems and structures to ensure accountability and fiscal management. Initially, she did not recognize the importance of having

progress monitoring systems in place to continue to improve the instructional programs and school culture until she and her leadership team began to look at continuing to improve and sustaining the positive changes that had been made at the school which included supporting the adoption of a new bilingual program and transitioning to a new literacy and math program.

Even though Mrs. Garcia may have learned small lessons along the way while she was going through the experiences she described in the narrative, she did not remember having significant breakthrough moments. Instead, she feels that her growth and learning as an instructional leader came after reflecting on her five years as principal of LPA. These lessons contribute to the three lessons she feels others should take away from her experience.

There are three lessons that Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team learned that others should take away. First, an effective leader should know how to lessen the friction caused by power, authority, and influence through increasing relational trust in order to decrease risks or liabilities that come with changes in an organization. Therefore, the school must have a strong leader and leadership team who are able to effectively manage change through increased relational trust. The team's strategy for effectively managing changes should include engaging members of the school community in developing, monitoring, and supporting changes. A school community must work together in implementing, monitoring, and making changes as needed.

Second, without strong relational trust, liabilities of newness can diminish the strength and effectiveness of change within an organization. The leadership team learned that it truly takes a village to move a school forward, and the members of the village must trust each other in order for the organization to be effective. The school community must believe in and foster trust, shared accountability, and ownership in order to implement the changes necessary to produce continuous improvement.

Third, there must be clear systems in place to support change and continuous improvement within an organization. A leadership team must provide support when making significant changes to the instructional and curricular programs, and when making changes in the school culture.

Mrs. Garcia used what she learned through her experiences and from educational research about effective practices and good instruction to guide her leadership. She relied heavily on her commitment to serving children to guide her in making decisions about the direction of LPA. Mrs. Garcia found it helpful to network with other principals to identify effective instructional and fiscal management practices. From 2006 on, Mrs. Garcia's theory of action was driven by a clear vision which included high expectations for all. It includes planning strategically, managing time well, continuously improving, and strategically using resources. This strategic planning included reviewing data, setting goals and priorities, monitoring progress, and allocating staff resources to carry out different initiatives. This process also involved identifying probable obstacles or challenges in implementing initiatives or changes and troubleshooting as problems arose. In developing a culture of continuous improvement, Mrs. Garcia and her leadership team developed defined time-management strategies, which included creating short-term and long-term goals and actions, multitasking, and delegating specific roles and responsibilities. Daily, weekly, monthly, and quarterly to-do lists became integral parts of increasing time-management capabilities. Her theory of action continued to evolve due to her vision of a culture continuously working toward improvement.

Equifinality is a term used to define how "different organizations, in different contexts, and starting from different places may need to use different strategies and take different routes" (Smylie, 2010, p. 26). The concept of equifinality is important in understanding how this

capstone can be useful in contributing to the educational research on schools with continuous-improvement models, and for practitioners looking for best practices. This capstone is not intended to be a one-size-fits-all plan for school improvement; rather, it is intended to be a case with insights and lessons that both practitioners and researchers can use to contribute to their own understandings of the effective implementation of change, and the role of relational trust within organizations.

In understanding the changes that were implemented at LPA and the central themes that surfaced throughout the story, it is important to note that Mrs. Garcia's theories of action were not well defined. Instead, they evolved throughout this story of school development. Mrs. Garcia's theories of action continued to evolve due to her vision of a culture continuously working toward improvement.

Implementing and supporting change was not an easy process at LPA. It required strategic thinking and extensive planning. Upon careful reflection on the past five years, Mrs. Garcia learned that the effectiveness of the changes introduced relied on her leadership team's ability to lessen the tension that can be caused by power, authority, and influence by increasing relational trust. She also recognized the significant dangers involved in failing to mitigate trust. This capstone is not intended to focus on Mrs. Garcia's effective leadership decisions or actions, but on the thinking or theorizing about change, how it was effectively implemented at LPA and the lessons related to trust that can be applied to other schools and organizations.

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## VII. APPENDIX

Table I

*State School Report Card, 2011*

	Percent Low-Income	Percent Limited-English-Proficient	Mobility Rate	Attendance Rate	Total Enrollment
School	96.5	50.1	5.1	93.1	373
State	48.1	8.8	12.8	94.0	2,074,806

Reference: District Public Schools. (2011). *State report card: Leadership Prep Academy*. Capital City: District Research and Accountability. Accessed September 1, 2011.

**APPENDIX (continued)**

Table II

*Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding on SAT by Year and Subject, with ELLs after 2008*

With ELLs		SAT % Meet or Exceed				SAT % Exceed				SAT % Meet			
Grade	Year	Read	Math	Sci	Comp	Read	Math	Sci	Comp	Read	Math	Sci	Comp
3-8	2003	29.3	31.0	51.2	35.8	1.7	0.0	4.7	1.9	27.6	31.0	46.5	34.0
3-8	2004	29.1	50.9	74.4	49.0	1.8	1.8	10.3	4.0	27.3	49.1	64.1	45.0
3-8	2005	60.3	41.4	43.9	49.0	6.9	8.6	0.0	5.7	53.4	32.8	43.9	43.3
3-8	2006	57.1	69.8	73.7	64.8	7.9	9.5	0.0	7.6	49.2	60.3	73.7	57.2
3-8	2007	63.2	80.0	67.5	71.0	8.0	12.0	10.0	10.0	55.2	68.0	57.5	61.0
3-8	2008	57.9	65.0	57.4	60.9	7.9	14.4	8.2	10.7	50.0	50.6	49.2	50.1
3-8	2009	60.8	75.4	60.3	67.0	6.0	13.8	5.2	9.2	54.8	61.7	55.2	57.8
3-8	2010	67.5	84.7	73.5	75.8	20.8	24.2	2.0	19.7	46.8	60.5	71.4	56.1
3-8	2011	76.7	90.3	84.2	83.6	16.5	27.3	24.6	22.2	60.2	63.1	59.6	61.4

Reference:

District Public Schools. (2011). *SAT trends over time report: Leadership Prep Academy*. Capital City: District Research and Accountability. Accessed September 1, 2011.

## APPENDIX (continued)

Table III

*Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding on SAT by Year and Subject, without ELLs*

Without ELLs		SAT % Meet or Exceed				SAT % Exceed				SAT % Meet			
Grade	Year	Read	Math	Sci	Comp	Read	Math	Sci	Comp	Read	Math	Sci	Comp
3-8	2003	29.3	31.0	51.2	35.8	1.7	0.0	4.7	1.9	27.6	31.0	46.5	34.0
3-8	2004	29.1	50.9	74.4	49.0	1.8	1.8	10.3	4.0	27.3	49.1	64.1	45.0
3-8	2005	60.3	41.4	43.9	49.0	6.9	8.6	0.0	5.7	53.4	32.8	43.9	43.3
3-8	2006	57.1	69.8	73.7	64.8	7.9	9.5	0.0	7.6	49.2	60.3	73.7	57.2
3-8	2007	63.2	80.0	67.5	71.0	8.0	12.0	10.0	10.0	55.2	68.0	57.5	61.0
3-8	2008	71.4	73.0	68.9	71.7	9.5	16.7	8.9	12.5	61.9	56.3	60.0	59.3
3-8	2009	72.5	78.3	67.5	74.3	8.3	16.7	7.5	11.8	64.2	61.7	60.0	62.5
3-8	2010	73.8	84.4	76.7	78.7	24.6	27.9	2.3	22.6	49.2	56.6	74.4	56.1
3-8	2011	83.9	89.1	83.7	86.1	20.4	28.5	32.6	25.6	63.5	60.6	51.2	60.6

## Reference:

District Public Schools. (2011). *SAT trends over time report: Leadership Prep Academy*. Capital City: District Research and Accountability. Accessed September 1, 2011.

## APPENDIX (continued)

Table IV

*Average EXPLORE Scores by Year and Size of Population*

	Year					
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
City	13.1	13.1	13	13.1	13.5	13.6
School	13.6	13	13.2	11.9	13.2	13.9

*Note.* N represents the number of students tested in that category.

## Reference:

District Public Schools. (2011). *EXPLORE trends over time report: Leadership Prep Academy*. Capital City: District Research and Accountability. Accessed September 1, 2011.

## APPENDIX (continued)

Table V

*2011 Value-Added Results to Student SAT by Grade Level and Subject*

	# of Students	Value-Added Score (Confidence Interval Range)	Percentile	Performance Category
School-Level Value-Added				
Reading	102.6	0.7	77 <sup>th</sup>	ABOVE AVG
Math	103.6	0.5	72 <sup>nd</sup>	ABOVE AVG
Reading Grade-Level Value-Added				
Grade 4	10.5	1.4	93 <sup>rd</sup>	HIGH
Grade 5	17.3	-1.0	9 <sup>th</sup>	LOW
Grade 6	26	0.6	71 <sup>st</sup>	ABOVE AVG
Grade 7	23.1	0.3	63 <sup>rd</sup>	ABOVE AVG
Grade 8	25.7	0.5	70 <sup>th</sup>	ABOVE AVG
Math Grade-Level Value-Added				
Grade 5	18.3	-0.8	21 <sup>st</sup>	BELOW AVG
Grade 6	26	0.4	68 <sup>th</sup>	ABOVE AVG
Grade 7	24.1	0.4	66 <sup>th</sup>	ABOVE AVG
Grade 8	25.7	0.4	68 <sup>th</sup>	ABOVE AVG

## Reference:

District Public Schools. (2011). *2011 valued-added school summary report: Leadership Prep Academy*. Capital City: District Research and Accountability. Accessed September 1, 2011.

**APPENDIX (continued)**

Table VI

*Performance on the Five Fundamentals for School Success, 2007*

<b>Fundamental for School Success</b>	<b>Performance Level</b>
Instructional Leadership	Above Average
Professional Capacity	Average
Learning Climate	Above Average
Family & Community Involvement	Average
Instruction	Above Average

## Reference:

District Public Schools. (2007). *Consortium on school research findings report: Leadership Prep Academy*. Capital City: District Research and Accountability. Accessed September 1, 2011.

**APPENDIX (continued)**

Table VII

*Consortium on School Research Findings Report of Parent Surveys*

<b>Fundamental for School Success</b>	<b>Performance Level</b>
Instructional Leadership	Strong
Professional Capacity	Strong
Learning Climate	Strong
Family & Community Ties	Strong
Ambitious Instruction	Strong

## Reference:

District Public Schools. (2011). *Consortium on school research findings report: Leadership Prep Academy*. Capital City: District Research and Accountability. Accessed September 1, 2011.

## APPENDIX (continued)

Table VIII

*Characters in the LPA Story*

Name	Position
Mr. Lopez	Principal of LPA from 2002-2007
Ms. Tapia	Assistant principal of LPA from 2002-2007
Mrs. Garcia	Principal of LPA from 2007-present
Mr. George	Principal intern, then assistant principal of LPA from 2007-2010. Now principal at another school
Mrs. Castro	Clerk of LPA from 2002-present
Mrs. Terry	ASC teacher representative, and teacher at LPA from 2002-present
Mr. Rodriguez	ASC parent representative
Mrs. Trujillo	Parent
Ms. Leon	Original counselor and case manager
Mrs. Sandoval	Bilingual teacher
Mrs. Jones	General program teacher
Mrs. Soto	Parent and ASC member
Mrs. Montez	Parent
Mrs. Alvarez	Interim principal
Mrs. Aguilera	ASC chairperson
Mr. Flores	Bilingual lead teacher
Ms. Mitchell	New counselor/case manager
Dr. Rachel	Experienced principal coach
Ms. Viejo	Literacy coach, then assistant principal from 2010-present

**APPENDIX (continued)**

Table VIII (continued)

*Characters in the LPA Story*

Mrs. Sierra	Primary teacher
Ms. Trinko	Literacy coach and RTI coordinator
Mr. Alvarez	Math coach
Mr. Smith	Developing principal intern
Mrs. Addams	Developing principal intern

## VIII. VITA

NAME: Jacqueline Medina Araujo

EDUCATION: B.A., Political Science, DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois, 1993  
M.A., Education, DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois, 1995  
Ph.D., Curriculum and Instruction, University of Illinois, Chicago, Illinois, 2013

TEACHING EXPERIENCE: Elementary School, Capital City, General Program, Bilingual, Dual Language Teacher, 2005

LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE: Elementary School Principal, District Public School, 2013  
Elementary Assistant Principal, District Public School, 2006  
District Reading Coach, District Office, 2005

HONORS: Stone Fellowship, University of Illinois, Chicago, Illinois, 2012

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS: Chicago Area Reading Association, Illinois Reading Council

PUBLICATIONS: Bush, L., Stirling, T., & Medina, J. (2012). *One Latino community: What's so special?* [PowerPoint]. Boston, MA: Learning Forward.