

Systems Transformation Collaborative

Final Evaluation Report

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Executive Summary

Executive Summary

The System Transformation Collaborative (STC) was a three-year project initially funded by the Stuart Foundation through the Center for Applied Policy in Education (CAP-Ed) at the University of California, Davis. CAP-Ed contracted with Dr. Michael Fullan and his associates to implement the project in four Northern California school districts. The regional STC initiative was designed to facilitate inter- and intra-district collaboration and to develop collective leadership and instructional capacity. The theory of action supporting the project is that a more coherent, systemic focus on teaching and learning would lead to strategic improvements in instruction and, in turn, provide all students in the participating districts with greater opportunities for academic progress.

CAP-Ed, with additional financial support from the Dirk and Charlene Kabcenell Foundation, conducted an evaluation of the project's impact on participating schools and school districts. As part of the evaluation, CAP-Ed documented and synthesized participants' experiences of the STC process, particularly what practitioners and policy makers could learn from STC about generating whole-systems change.

Specifically, CAP-Ed evaluated progress towards the following project goals:

- ✓ A district-wide approach to focus on learning and teaching for improved student achievement;
- ✓ Building the capacity – knowledge, skills and attitudes – of district and school leaders to facilitate and sustain the focus; and
- ✓ Strengthening the culture of professionalism and learning within and across districts.

Methods

Although four districts were initially involved with the STC, the report focuses primarily on the two districts—Napa Valley Unified School District and Pittsburg Unified School District—that remained in the collaborative for the duration of the project. However, data collected from the San Lorenzo Unified School District and the Alameda Unified School District are used to inform our findings about the conditions that supported or hindered district implementation of the STC.

The report draws on data collected between January 2013 and April 2016. Interviews, focus groups and surveys serve as the primary sources of data for analysis, although we also draw upon field notes taken during STC meetings to triangulate data.

Key Findings & Recommendations

The following key findings and recommendations are based on our individual and focus groups interviews with teachers, school and district leaders, and data collected through an annual survey.

Whole System Change is a promising approach to building strong and effective organizations by creating conditions that can foster deep change in schools and districts. Effective school districts are organizations whose members are tied together by common norms, common purposes, common methods, and common language. The STC offers an alternative to the top-down model of school improvement that has prevailed over the past 40 years. At its core, the STC model is structured to support growth in organizational capacity for creating high quality instructional regimes through professionalization, transparency, collaboration, and intense focus on and commitment to few, critical education goals. In contrast to the top-down intervention approach, the two fundamental precepts of STC are that 1) continuous professional learning, coaching and mentoring of key administrators and teacher leaders over multiple years is essential to the achievement of whole systems change; and that 2) building relationships and a collaborative culture is fundamental to supporting the capacity and sustainability of whole systems change.

Baseline district capacity was an important factor in the implementation of systems change. Data collected for this report suggest that district capacity and the conditions within the district at the outset of the project were key determinants of districts' ability to implement systems change. As exemplified by the progress made in Napa, these district conditions and capacity include stable leadership, good labor-management relationships, cohesive leadership teams, and effective communication between district departments and between the district and school sites.

Nevertheless, it is also important to note that while Napa may have succeeded in coming much closer to achieving the STC intervention objectives, all districts benefited from their involvement with the collaborative. They all took the first steps toward system transformation—an increased awareness of the process of capacity building for deeper learning. STC, therefore, has the potential to serve as a catalyst for transformation rather than “the reform” that makes for better teaching and learning.

Cross-district collaboration is a valuable tool for building professional communities on a larger scale than just the school or district. However, collaboration can take many forms—from the superficial and ritual to shared learning and to the development of strong professional cultures. Data collected for this report suggest that the benefits of cross-district collaboration were not fully realized through the STC project. Both in individual and in focus group interviews, respondents were mixed about the benefits of such collaboration. At times, opportunities for collaboration seemed too vague and without a clear purpose—sharing ideas, mixing groups to engage in various exercises designed to foster collaboration

for its own sake. Strategies for making the cross-district collaborations more meaningful include the provision of opportunities to address common problems of teaching practice, opportunities to engage in instructional rounds and classroom observations, and including an annual culminating event such as the “Learning Fair” that took place in year two, into each year of the project.

The STC model must meet the unique needs of all participating districts. Although the Fullan team encouraged districts to develop their own goals and strategies based on their local needs, our findings suggest that participants perceived a need for greater differentiation in the content of the quarterly DLT and SLT sessions. Feedback from members of the SLTs and DLTs suggest the intervention and support strategies used by the Fullan team could have been more valuable to their growth if they were specifically tailored to the particular needs of each district. The importance of differentiated support was repeatedly emphasized in the interviews.

The interview responses are somewhat at odds with the evidence. The Fullan team did visit each district for an initial consultation prior to the launch of the STC project. According to the Fullan team, meetings were formal with a clear agenda and purpose. Several meetings were held between November, 2012 and June, 2013. The purpose of the meetings was to

- clarify expectations of the Fullan team and district leaders;
- build a consultation relationship as a basis for co-designing with the districts;
- co-plan to increase alignment with unique district needs.

Again, according to the Fullan team, although the interactions were in depth, district had no prior experience in bringing together all school leadership teams. Consequently, this approach represented a learning curve for the districts and schools in year one of the project.

The Fullan team also noted that it was necessary to differentiate the sessions for both San Lorenzo and Alameda beginning year one, as they were a different starting point with district leadership priorities. The team used feedback from the school teams and district leadership, which it had gotten the prior year in order to set the agenda for the differentiated sessions.

Both the Fullan team and participants noted that it would have been preferable to have included a more extensive “intake” process and needs analysis to help with improving the relevance of the STC program content. The criteria for selection of districts were made by UC Davis and there were no discussions with the Fullan team regarding criteria for district selection. Criteria used by UC Davis was based on geographic proximity of districts in order to facilitate cross-district collaboration. District were also selected on the basis of the superintendents having participated in the UC Davis Superintendents’ Executive Leadership Program.

At the beginning of the project, districts provided the Fullan team with significant student demographics, student achievement data, and assessment of successes, challenges, and priorities.

Three years is not enough time for STC to become institutionalized. What has become quite obvious at the termination of this particular project is that three years is simply not enough time to internalize the kinds of cultural, professional and structural changes, and practices required to bring about meaningful change. Building the social, cultural, and professional capital that anchor a set of norms, values, competencies, and behaviors takes more than three years. Transforming organizational cultures, especially of schools that are so deeply embedded in a set of practices and understandings that have changed little since World War II, is a long-term process that needs constant nurturing and attention.

Continuity between sessions is an important element to sustain school and district engagement in systems transformation. Unfortunately, STC suffered from some of the same challenges that afflict many professional development efforts—too many competing distractors and the lack of application with follow-up at their sites. Teachers and administrators go back to their schools or district offices and that reality trumps all others. Therefore, the most significant challenge in systems transformation work is creating an impact in the classroom. It does not matter how informative and beneficial each session may be if the impact of that session on participants does not reach the classroom. SLT and DLT leaders suggested that STC would benefit considerably in terms of teacher and administrator engagement, program coherence, and impact if there were greater supports in place to ensure that the STC work continued between sessions. Therefore, we recommend a stronger emphasis on continuity in between sessions. This continuity could come through email reminders for the STC point person at the district office to disseminate to sites, or through the provision of specific strategies for integrating this work year-round. In addition, it is important to have a strong system of communication among district and school leaders in order to engage teachers and administrators at the school site.

High leadership turnover in districts can cause instability. Three of the participating districts changed superintendents during the three years of the project. Additional turnover in district administration led to further changes in the composition of district leadership teams. This turnover in district leadership created substantial challenges in participating districts. Given the instability of school districts generally—the large turnover of principals and superintendents, the problem of turnover and instability is the norm rather than the exception. For that reason, there needs to be a strategy for turnover among district leaders, in particular, but also strategies for changes in the composition of the school leadership team. One solution to the problem of turnover in the superintendency might be to engage the school boards from the beginning of the project. It is intuitively apparent that school board members have to take ownership for STC just as teachers, administrators, and support staff must. The project could also provide additional strategies to districts for on-boarding new members of the SLTs and DLTs.

Section I: Introduction

Introduction

The System Transformation Collaborative (STC) was a three-year project initially funded by the Stuart Foundation through the Center for Applied Policy in Education (CAP-Ed) at the University of California, Davis. CAP-Ed contracted with Dr. Michael Fullan and his associates to implement the project, while the research team from UC Davis conducted the following evaluation.

The regional STC initiative was designed to facilitate inter- and intra-district collaboration and develop collective leadership and instructional capacity. The theory of action supporting the project is that a more coherent, systemic focus on teaching and learning would lead to strategic improvements in instruction and, in turn, provide all students in the participating districts with greater opportunities for academic progress.

CAP-Ed, with additional financial support from the Dirk and Charlene Kabcenell Foundation, conducted the evaluation of the project's impact on participating schools and school districts. As part of the evaluation, CAP-Ed documented and synthesized participants' experiences of the STC process, particularly what practitioners and policy makers could learn from STC about generating whole-systems change. It was our intention to find out if the STC strategy of system transformation, developed by the Fullan Team, could offer a viable alternative to the prevailing, top-down school improvement strategies of the past 40 years. This report summarizes our findings based on three years of data collected from the project.

Project Overview

The STC Project team was led by Dr. Michael Fullan, an internationally recognized leader in whole district reform in support of teaching and learning. The project began in January 2013 and ended in

spring 2016. Initially, four districts volunteered to participate: Alameda Unified School District, San Lorenzo Unified School District, Pittsburg Unified School District and Napa Valley Unified School District. District leaders in the Alameda Unified School District opted to leave the project after the completion of the first full year (2013-2014). The original grant provided for a two primary phases: planning (2012-2013), implementation (the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015). The third phase, focused on sustainability, was expected to begin in 2015-2016, but the Fullan organization, CAP-Ed, Napa, and Pittsburg decided to extend the implementation phase through March 2016. San Lorenzo Unified School District decided not to continue the project after the second full year of implementation.

Rationale for STC

The Fullan model is based on a theory of “Whole-System Change.” The conceptual underpinnings of Whole-System Change are that meaningful, sustainable instructional improvement cannot occur without a coherent interaction of all the elements of high quality instruction.

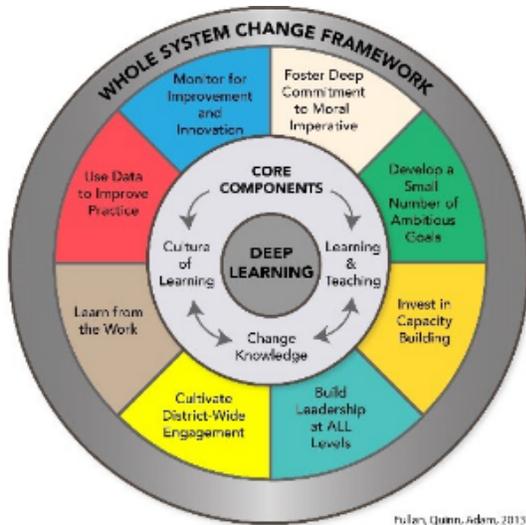
The history of school improvement efforts often resembles a revolving door of reforms, many of which are top-down and incompatible with other initiatives (Bryk, Sebring, Kerbow, Rollow, & Easton, 1998; Fullan, 1999). Moreover, because districts, schools, and classrooms have tended to operate in isolation, it is difficult for educators to share expertise and build instructional capacity throughout the system. While most district and school leaders can point to individual “islands of excellence,” our education system has yet to ensure that all students have access to high-quality instruction, regardless of the school or classroom in which they are enrolled. To address issues of inconsistent instructional quality, many education leaders have recommended that teaching and learning should emphasize “systemness” or coherence.

The System Transformation Collaborative developed as an alternative approach to the top-down, punitive reform efforts exemplified by No Child Left Behind and a bevy of “categorical” programs that focus on fragments of the system in isolation. To do so, the Fullan team designed the collaborative using the Whole System Change Framework (Figure 1). The essential elements of the framework include:

- Professional capacity building
- Collective responsibility, teamwork, and collaboration
- Moral commitment and inspiration
- More rather than less professional discretion
- Personally engaging curriculum and pedagogy with technology as the accelerator
- Better and broader performance metrics
- School-to-school assistance rather than punitive intervention from on high
- Systemic policies that are coherent and cohesive

Figure 1: Whole System Change Framework (Fullan, Quinn, & Adam, 2013)¹

¹ For the purpose of this report, we present the original Whole Systems Change Framework shared by the Fullan team during the first year of implementation. It is possible that the Fullan, Adams, and Quinn have updated their framework over the course of the project, but this was the framework upon which the project was designed.



Accordingly, two of the fundamental underlying precepts of Whole-System Change are: that continuous professional learning, coaching, and mentoring of key administrators and teacher leaders over multiple years, fosters and is necessary to achieve whole system change; and that building relationships and a collaborative culture is fundamental to supporting this capacity and sustainability.

Program Participants

- *The STC Project Team* – Also known as the Fullan team, these three international consultants specialize in educational leadership and school improvement, and were responsible for designing and facilitating the implementation of the project (though, as we report later, they collaborated with Napa in creating and presenting content during the final year).
- *District Leadership Teams (DLTs)* – Each district formed a DLT for the project with 8-12 key administrators, typically including many “cabinet” members and other academic leaders. All superintendents served on the DLTs. In two cases, certificated union representatives also served on the DLT, and in one district, site administrators were also included to represent elementary, middle, and senior high schools.
- *School Leadership Teams (SLTs)* – Principals from each school within the districts formed teams with 3-6 members, typically classroom teachers, but also including vice-principals or specialized personnel such as intervention teachers.
- *Teachers and classified staff* – SLTs were expected to bring ideas or assignments back to colleagues at their school sites who were not participating in the quarterly meetings (indirect involvement).

STC Project Activities

Formal STC project activities included four professional learning days each year for both district leaders and school leadership teams, as well as some professional coaching for individual districts between sessions. The consultants and District Leadership Teams (DLTs) met for a full day each quarter. These sessions were designed to provide sustained professional learning, coaching and mentoring to key district administrators. The DLT meeting content focused on the role of senior leaders in designing and supporting change across the district. District leaders from all the participating districts met together at these meetings.

The consultants also led quarterly, full-day sessions with each district’s SLTs. School Leadership Team meetings focused primarily on developing shared capacity for leadership and increasing instructional capacity at the school sites.

District and school leadership teams were also given tasks to complete between sessions (e.g., 60-day plans). All the project activities were intended to be strategically targeted to meet the specific needs of the participating districts as they moved through the stages of their development in the process of system transformation. As stated previously, the overall goal of this work was to create a sustainable culture that places teaching and learning at the center of all district work.

Methods

The purpose of this evaluation is to document and assess what happened in schools and school districts over the course of the three years of the STC project. The study focuses on STC as a model for whole-system change. While we collected and analyzed data from all four participating district, this report focuses primarily on the two districts—Napa Valley Unified School District and Pittsburg Unified School District—that remained in the collaborative for the duration of the project. However, data collected in San Lorenzo and Alameda is used to inform our findings about the conditions that supported or hindered district implementation of the STC.

Given the emphasis on whole-system change, CAP-Ed evaluated progress towards the following project goals:

- The development of a district-wide approach to focus on learning and teaching for improved student achievement;
- Building the capacity – knowledge, skills and attitudes – of district and school leaders to facilitate and sustain the focus; and
- Strengthening the culture of professionalism and learning within and across districts.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the research:

1. What are teachers, administrators, and students doing at project completion that is different from what they did before?
2. What difference did STC make in terms of student attainment and achievement?
3. Are there benchmarks that would indicate movement toward system transformation?

Data

This report draws on data collected between January 2013 and April 2016. Interviews, focus groups and surveys serve as the primary sources of data for analysis, although we also draw upon field notes taken during STC meetings to triangulate data. A breakdown of data collection activities is included in Appendix A.

Interviews. The researchers interviewed members of the four District Leadership Teams in the spring of each school year, 2014-2016. Each 45-minute, semi-structured interview addressed district context and project implementation (n=27 in 2014; n=21 in 2015; n= 14 2016).

District focus groups. In Spring 2014- 2016, researchers held focus groups with randomly selected members of each district's School Leadership Teams (SLT), including teachers, principals, and other staff (n=26 in 2014; n=13 in 2015; n=10 in 2016). The 45-60 minute focus groups included questions about district context, goals, and participants' experiences with project implementation.

Case study school focus groups and principal interviews. During spring 2015, researchers visited eight elementary, middle, and high schools in the three participating districts. During each visit, the researchers conducted a focus group composed of three teachers serving on their SLT and three teachers not serving on their school's SLT. The researchers also interviewed each principal. Questions in the focus groups and interviews covered district and school contexts, goals, and participants' perceptions about project implementation.

Surveys. An electronic survey was distributed to teachers, the DLT, and members of the SLTs in spring 2014 (n=669), 2015 (n=373) and 2015 (n=365). Questions were customized for each respondent type, and items addressed district goals, collaboration, leadership, culture and instruction. The teacher survey included additional questions about their instructional practices. District leaders from Alameda opted not to distribute the teacher version of the survey in 2014 due to contentious labor negotiations. Accordingly, only district and site administrators completed the survey in this district. The survey was designed by a consultant for the STC Project Team in consultation with the UC Davis research team.

Observations and artifacts. Members of the research team attended the quarterly DLT and SLT meetings to track project implementation and content delivery. The researchers collected handouts and also took photographs and notes at the meetings to capture key points.

Instrumentation

CAP-Ed developed several instruments to guide the collection of data. These instruments included a:

- 1) SLT Focus Group Discussion Protocol;
- 2) District Leader Interview Protocol;
- 3) STC Survey Protocols for DLT members, participants at the SLT sessions, and classroom teachers not attending the STC meetings;²
- 4) Case Study School Site Observation Protocol
- 5) Case Study School Site Principal Interview Protocol; and
- 6) STC Leaders Interview Protocol.

The protocols were designed to offer participants opportunities to reflect on the STC project, including the impact of the project on their work, their reflections on the STC model, highlights and challenges of

² As mentioned above, the survey was designed by a consultant for the Fullan Team in consultation with the UC Davis research team.

the work, and their recommendations for how to strengthen the work. The interview and focus group protocols were modified over time as the work progressed. Examples of each protocol are provided in Appendix B.

STC Evaluation Overview

The findings presented in this report are composed of two parts. The first section of the findings focuses on the impact of the STC project. In this section we describe the impact of the STC project both at the school- and district-level, including areas where change is evident or emerging.

The second section of the findings focuses on conditions that participants cited as supports or barriers to change during the course of the project. The final section of the report focuses on recommendations by participants about how to strengthen the Collaborative and final reflections on STC as a model for change.

Section II: Signs of Change

District Goals and Coherence to Support Teaching and Learning

The STC grant stipulated that by the end of the project participating districts would have developed and implemented “a strategic plan that outlines coherent and aligned goals; instructional, curricular and assessment practices; and procedures for assessing progress towards goals and practices.” Within this section, we address evidence of Napa and Pittsburg’s progress towards meeting these objectives, including participants’ perceptions about their efforts to achieve district goals.

Developing District Goals: A Necessary Pre-Condition of Coherence

According to the Fullan team, systems transformation is only possible once district leaders develop a clear focus and identify specific strategies to support continuous improvement in teaching and learning throughout the system. In an interview, one facilitator from the Fullan team described the theory of action for the Systems Transformation Collaborative:

Really, our theory of action is that [districts] have to focus their direction. They have to be really clear on goals and come up with just two or three goal areas, and then really be clear about the strategy that they're going to use to achieve them so that people in the districts develop a shared understanding of where the district is going, how they fit into that, what the plan is for getting there, how they build their capacity to do so (interview, May 2016).

Prior research supports the Fullan team’s claim that a shared vision focuses the energy and attention of individuals at all levels (Johnson, Marietta, Higgins, Mapp, & Grossman, 2015; Senge, 1990) and allows “leaders to convey where they are heading and sharpen focus on the primary purpose of the organization” (Supovitz, 2006). Thus, an important goal of the STC was to develop organizational coherence in support of effective teaching and learning. To do so, district leaders first needed to sort through the many competing priorities within their systems to identify a “small number of ambitious goals” specific to their local context and needs.

Identifying Goals in Year 1: Linking Goals to Existing Initiatives

At the outset of the project, the Fullan leaders tasked members of each district leadership team with developing three to five districtwide goals to guide each district’s efforts for the remainder of the project. DLT members were given time at the quarterly meetings during Year 1 to develop and refine their goals and to obtain feedback from administrators from the other participating districts. The DLTs also developed implementation memos. Interview data from three of the four districts involved in the project during the first year of the project suggests that these conversations continued in some form back at their central offices, often in conjunction with discussions about their LCAP priorities. Perhaps not surprisingly, we found that districts entering with some pre-existing agreement about their overarching goals reported a more cohesive vision by the end of the first year.

Napa and Pittsburg were the only two districts of the initial four that reported selecting goals that were a continuation of work already underway within their districts. As a Pittsburg DLT member commented, "I think one of the reasons that we appealed to the Fullan folks in the early stages was that we *already* had really tried to narrow our focus. So even though we were only starting to increase student outcomes and student learning, we had specific ways we were doing it" (interview, May 2014). Likewise, a DLT member from Napa commented that, "These have been our goals for the last three years, but we're trying to get tighter on [them]." In fact, at the conclusion of the project, the same DLT member attributed part of their perceived success to capitalizing on prior efforts when they selected their goals: "That was probably the most important thing we did, when we went to three academic goals...We've stayed consistent for five years with those same goals. Principals appreciate that." Another central office administrator agreed, adding that he believed the Fullan team accelerated the district's ability to meet those goals.

Understanding of District Goals at Different Levels of the System

The Fullan team repeatedly stressed the importance of having goals that are shared district-wide, and by the end of Year 1, a Pittsburg SLT member asserted that, "I definitely think we're on the same page with goals." A DLT member credited the STC project with helping refine their priorities:

It really assisted with us getting very clear, very quickly on our 3 major goals, which were actually ones that we actually built our Local Control Accountability plan around. So it was just kind of a natural piece of it that we took what we'd been wrestling with, and we started to refine them and polish them a little bit. Then, naturally, from there came a bunch of subgoals as well as actions and strategies...what we're doing as a district and where we see ourselves in the near future. It's a very tight, tight package, and it gives a very crystal clear view of Pittsburg's current reality as well as where it might be 3 years down the line.

As it happened, the first year of the collaborative coincided with implementation of the Common Core State Standards and California's new accountability system, which requires that each district develop a "Local Control Accountability Plan" (LCAP) with goals in eight different state-identified "priority areas." Throughout our conversations, educators described feeling deluged with information about new goals, instructional materials, and expectations. Data suggest Napa and Pittsburg were successful at communicating the goals among STC participants in Year One of the project, while classroom teachers and others who did not participate in the meetings were less clear on district goals. By the final year, however, Pittsburg Unified no longer reported clarity about their district goals.

For the most part, interview and focus group participants from Napa could identify the district's goals by the end of Year 1, referring frequently to their "Plan on a Page," a single-page document that outlined Napa's three primary goals and associated sub-goals. A Napa principal commented, "It's the first time with elementary principals that they would all, *all of them*, from their different perspectives of International Baccalaureate and magnet schools could say, 'Yeah, that's what our goals are.' I don't think we'd be there without having gone through these sessions" (SLT focus group, May 2014). Yet survey responses in Table 1 offer a more conservative perspective than we heard during interviews and focus

groups, with all three types of participants (district leadership team members, school leadership team members and teachers who were not involved with the project) providing neutral responses or slight agreement that the district had a small number of clearly defined goals. In fact, by the end of Year 1, both SLT members and classroom teachers still slightly disagreed with the statement that members throughout the system were able to articulate district goals (2.88 and 2.76, respectively). While it is unclear what accounts for discrepancies in participants' responses, respondents who attended the quarterly DLT or SLT sessions likely had more sustained, formal conversations about district goals than those unable to attend.³

Data from the first year in Pittsburg also suggest that although those who attended district and school leadership team meetings shared some knowledge about district goals, goals were not consistently understood at the site level. Survey data during Year 1, for instance, indicated that DLT members agreed that the district had well-defined goals (4.0), clarity about the district's strategy (4.0), and the degree to which people throughout the system could articulate the goals and strategies (4.33). Like Napa, however, responses from classroom teachers not attending the meetings indicated that goal clarity had yet to consistently penetrate at the school level. While DLT members agreed with the statement that the district's goals and strategies were clearly understood throughout the system (4.33), SLT members and classroom teachers disagreed slightly (2.7 and 2.6, respectively). In a May 2014 interview, a PUSD principal stated, "You've got to have a clear vision, and that's a piece that we've struggled with. It's like where are we going? It hasn't been clear here."

³ We also found that, in general, classroom teachers tended to gravitate towards neutral responses throughout the bulk of survey and displayed less variation than DLT and SLT members.

Table 1: Survey responses about district goals, Years 1-3, NVUSD

Napa	District Leaders					School Leaders					Teachers				
	2014 Rating Average (n=8)	2015 Rating Average (n=7)	2016 Rating Average (n=5)	Y1 to Y3 Change	2014 Rating Average (n=95)	2015 Rating Average (n=110)	2016 Rating Average (n=61)	Y1 to Y3 Change	2014 Rating Average (n=126)	2015 Rating Average (n=30)	2016 Rating Average (n=103)	Y1 to Y3 Change			
The district has a small number of clearly defined goals.	3.38	3.58	4.20	0.82	4.04	4.04	3.98	-0.06	3.56	3.96	3.28	-0.28			
The district has a well-defined strategy for achieving the goals.	3.75	2.92	3.60	-0.15	3.35	3.59	3.91	0.56	3.29	3.88	3.05	-0.24			
My school has a small number of clearly defined goals.	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4.16	4.22	4.04	-0.12	3.55	4.33	3.60	0.05			
My school has a well-defined strategy for achieving the goals.	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.89	3.98	3.96	0.07	3.53	3.88	3.66	0.13			
The district aligns its allocation of resources with the goals	4.33	4.00	4.00	-0.33	3.37	2.93	3.00	-0.37	3.05	2.85	2.76	-0.29			
Everyone in the system can articulate the goals and strategy for achieving them	3.14	2.67	2.80	-0.34	2.88	3.10	3.11	0.23	2.76	3.43	2.80	0.04			

Note: Survey responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree.

Table 2: Survey responses about district goals, Years 1-3, PUSD

Pittsburg	District Leaders					School Leaders					Teachers				
	2014 Rating Average (n=3)	2015 Rating Average (n=7)	2016 Rating Average (n=4)	Y1 to Y3 Change	2014 Rating Average (n=59)	2015 Rating Average (n=42)	2016 Rating Average (n=50)	Y1 to Y3 Change	2014 Rating Average (n=189)	2015 Rating Average (n=81)	2016 Rating Average (n=137)	Y1 to Y3 Change			
The district has a small number of clearly defined goals.	4	3.86	2.33	-1.67	3.55	3.00	2.98	-0.57	3.36	3.11	3.02	-0.34			
The district has a well-defined strategy for achieving the goals.	4	3.71	2.33	-1.67	3.31	2.76	2.79	-0.52	3.24	2.91	2.85	-0.39			
My school has a small number of clearly defined goals.	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.84	4.02	3.53	-0.31	3.40	3.37	3.23	-0.17			
My school has a well-defined strategy for achieving the goals.	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.71	3.69	3.02	-0.69	3.41	3.27	3.16	-0.25			
The district aligns its allocation of resources with the goals	3.88	3.00	4.00	0.12	3.53	3.52	3.49	-0.04	3.29	3.58	3.14	-0.15			
Everyone in the system can articulate the goals and strategy for achieving them	4.33	2.71	2.80	-1.53	2.70	2.05	2.40	-0.30	2.60	2.52	2.35	-0.25			

Note: Survey responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree

Evolution of Goals in Years 2 (2014-15) and 3 (2015-16)

In Year 2, the Fullan team consulted with district leaders to further refine and implement the districts' goals and strategic plans. At this time, data collected for this report indicate the degree to which goals were communicated to all levels of the organization and the specificity of strategic plans varied by districts, in part due to contextual factors described in Section III of this report. By the end of the third year, interviews and focus group responses indicate that Napa made noticeable progress towards the systemwide understanding of the district's "Plan on a Page." Administrators such as one SLT focus group participant observed there was comfort in knowing that "the target wasn't going to change" (March 2015). District leaders turned their attention from communicating goals, which remained largely stable, to developing coherence between the wide array of approaches that Napa schools were using to meet those goals. Interestingly, however, survey responses to questions about goal clarity and district strategies remained relatively stable, increasing or decreasing by only small amounts (Table 2). In interviews and focus groups, participants at all levels commented that Napa still struggled to stave off "initiative creep," but the Fullan consultants noted in a May 2016 interview that Napa's leaders "had stepped up in that they *really* focused their direction away from clutter to really clear, focused direction."

Although Pittsburg also selected goals that extended or deepened existing district priorities during year one, Pittsburg's superintendent retired during the summer of 2014, just after the completion of the first year of the project. The new superintendent revisited the district goals through the LCAP process and a task force ("Vision 2027") that she created in her first year. Over the next two years, Pittsburg experienced several additional leadership transitions within the central office and, thus, the Pittsburg DLT. While interview and focus group responses indicate that SLT members, central office staff, and classroom teachers in Pittsburg shared an understanding of district goals in Year One, our data suggests that respondents perceived a decline in goal clarity and the degree to which district goals were shared (Table 2). In the survey, the steepest decrease was evident within the district leadership team (2014=4.33, 2015=2.76, and 2016=2.80).⁴ The rating trends are consistent with interview and focus group responses that suggest less clarity about Pittsburg's main priorities after the extensive changes in DLT leadership composition.

Greater goal clarity as an indicator of developing coherence

As stated earlier, a central objective for districts involved in the collaborative was to develop coherence in district goals and objectives. In their book, *Coherence: The Right Drivers for Schools, Districts, and Systems*, Fullan and Quinn argued that coherence "is not structure. It is not alignment (although that can help)...It is not strategy" (2016, p. 1). Likewise, Honig and Hatch (2004) described coherence as schools and central offices constantly working together to negotiate between external pressures and local priorities. Essentially, coherence can be described as how people and processes within the district interact to support a common vision. Thus, schools in a district do not need to operate in "lock-step" or

⁴ These findings should be interpreted with caution, however, because there are other possible explanations for the decline in agreement, including the possibility that they reflect the opinions of different people over the years or that through participation in the collaborative, participants developed a greater awareness of the importance of specific, measurable goals.

use scripted programs to attain coherence.

A district-wide focus on a small number of clearly defined goals might serve as an early indicator of developing coherence. Participants throughout the system must be able to articulate district priorities in order to maintain focus and ensure decisions and resources support them.

Reducing Distractors

Given the constant barrage of reforms, new initiatives, regulations, and other information directed at schools and districts, participants in both districts argued that clear goals should serve as a filter for decision making. Otherwise, resources and attention become fragmented, and coherence remains elusive. In Pittsburg, administrators explicitly described the importance of using goals *as a tool* to weed out distractions. Educators are often criticized for moving from one fad initiative to the next, and the members of the PUSD central office staff repeatedly mentioned how goals can help leaders prioritize new and ongoing activities. In Year 1, a senior administrator from Pittsburg claimed that participation in the STC helped tighten their focus and expressed pride in their ability to reduce distractors:

We're very discernible (sic) consumers of what's bright and shiny...We're very tight with, 'Okay, but how is that going to fit into...one of these three buckets?' If it's going to deepen our understanding, if it's going to help us, you know, really move forward, that's one conversation. But if it's going to be seen as an add-on, or if there is any chance it's going to end up being an add-on, we say, "No thank you." (May 2014).

A colleague in the district office agreed, but was less certain if that strategy was evident at the site level, commenting that, "With every goal, we try to filter it through the [Pittsburg] Learning Model, but I'm not sure that people always see it that way...So I think it gets filtered through, but I'm not sure everyone could break it down and...articulate it the way I just did." Overall, however, participants in both districts generally described the use of goals to guide district decisions as a work in progress rather than a current strength.

Yet while a small number of shared, clearly defined goals are necessary for district coherence, they do not guarantee that leaders will be able to translate goals into coherent systems. In the next section, we examine possible indicators of increased district coherence and how participants perceived efforts to improve district coherence throughout the project.

Balancing local flexibility with the need for common ground

Schools in Napa range from traditional neighborhood programs to magnet schools that offer special programs such as project-based learning, the International Baccalaureate (IB) program, dual immersion, STEM or arts integration. While having several school "types" made developing coherence challenging at times, their decision to encourage this kind of local variation also highlights the distinction between *coherent* systems and *standardization*. This balance is difficult to articulate, much less develop and sustain, but the STC attempted to facilitate it over the course of the project rather than encouraging districts to impose a uniform approach upon all sites. Ultimately "systemness" is more about members of the system understanding how the

different moving pieces interact to help schools attain their goals than everyone following a scripted instructional focus or organizational approach.

Yet in Year 1, Napa administrators and teachers were unsure how schools with such different approaches could be part of a coherent system. While the school leadership teams were trying to develop common ground, one DLT member observed that “because we have magnet schools, we have the dual immersion schools, we have IB schools, we have New Tech Network schools, and we have community partnerships...they kind of want to filter anything through that.” This required the district to become much more explicit about how their efforts were connected. At the end of the STC project, a central office leader said:

Our challenge internally is getting our folks to speak with one voice and to have a single vision that where we have some flexibility within the framework of our vision for sites to have their own personality twist they want to have...yet you are still moving all the horses in the right direction...All students to be participating in deeper learning experiences. Are they? We hope so by now.

Over the course of the project, Napa grappled with how to provide coherence in a large district system while honoring its commitment to local innovation. A DLT member who had worked in Napa for more than a decade described the district’s transition from a district of “fiefdoms” to coherence: “Even though we’re 32 schools, we all have these common goals and strategies. For a superintendent to see you’re 32 schools working – or at least speaking and looking at – common strategies or common work, that’s pretty good.” She attributed this transition, in part, to conversations fostered by the STC project.

By Year 3, there were indications that the district was beginning to identify tangible ways to balance local flexibility and a coherent district vision. Notably, the district worked in conjunction with the Fullan team to develop and refine a rubric and protocols that all schools could use as a framework for discussing deeper learning using student work. After instructional coaches practiced using the protocol, school leadership teams spent a significant portion of the March 2016 meeting using the rubric and protocol to discuss student work with other sites, with the expectation that leaders would attempt the approach back at their sites.

As a district administrator said, “We had to make sure that working with our partners [e.g., New Tech, IB], the message was agnostic and yet personal...That was the challenge. The challenge is *not* having it appear that we are a ‘one size fits all’ message” (interview, April 2016). In his April 2016 interview, another DLT member attributed this progress to the STC project, saying, “Without it I think we’d still have all this uneven implementation. I think we’re more system wide. We all agree that some type of inquiry based pedagogy is going to be the main way that we instruct our students. That’s much better than it used to be.” His comments were echoed by yet another DLT member, who said:

It doesn't matter if you are a New Tech Network or you are IB...or whatever your slice of the pie might happen to be. If you are really talking about deeper learning for kids, these

are the resources we are providing ... We are really talking about these pedagogies. Everybody finally came to agreement on that, which was huge breakthrough for our system. This year I think finally kind of pushed us over that tension point.

Given that these developments occurred towards the end of the project (and data collection), we do not have data from SLT members or classroom members about their experiences with the new rubrics and protocols. Yet their creation indicates that both district and Fullan leaders were intentional about addressing coherence without eliminating or discouraging site's individual approaches to the curriculum and instruction.

Although Pittsburg did not have the same history of schools with special programs, district respondents also reported working towards coherence while providing for local flexibility. In a Year One focus group, an instructional coach said, "Since I supervise all 8 elementary schools...and looking at the 'systemness,' it's been a focus for us to keep coming back to [the fact that] not everyone does the exact same thing all day, but that there's a common approach. That there's common resources available for the teachers." Another participant referred to the different instructional models that each PUSD school developed in Year 1, observing that they were simply different approaches to attaining their shared goals.

Table 3: Survey responses about district goal alignment with decisions and resource allocation, Years 1-3, NVUSD

Napa Valley	District Leaders				School Leaders				Teachers			
	2014 Rating Average (n=8)	2015 Rating Average (n=7)	2016 Rating Average (n=5)	Y1 to Y3 Change	2014 Rating Average (n=95)	2015 Rating Average (n=110)	2016 Rating Average (n=61)	Y1 to Y3 Change	2014 Rating Average (n=126)	2015 Rating Average (n=30)	2016 Rating Average (n=103)	Y1 to Y3 Change
The district's decisions are aligned with the goals.	4.00	3.18	3.40	-0.60	3.67	3.75	3.65	-0.02	3.48	3.88	3.19	-0.29
The district aligns its allocation of resources with the goals	3.88	3.00	4.00	0.12	3.53	3.52	3.49	-0.04	3.29	3.58	3.14	-0.15

Note: Survey responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree.

Perspectives about coherence varied widely

At the outset of the STC project, district leaders described a fairly coherent system built around its pre-existing “Pittsburg Learning Model” (PLM) and use of instructional coaches. Their first goal was system-wide implementation of the PLM. In May 2014, one DLT member described how the PLM facilitated decision making that supports coherence, “We've stayed very focused on the Pittsburg Learning Model now for three or four years, I think...and it is such a strong focus that other things are easily fitting into it. It's easy to recognize what does fit in, and what is not really on our target.” Another central office administrator noted that the STC was helping them refine the PLM even further at a time when policy changes added uncertainty and could have derailed their existing focus:

We spent three years trying to deepen the different levels [of the PLM], but I think with the shift of the Common Core, because everybody's mind was going about 10,000 different directions, and how are we going to take all these standards and put them into this PLM...I think what we've learned over the course of the year is that we just have to narrow our focus. Like with the coaching model, we're still are focused on direct instruction. It's not that we're going to make a thousand different changes based on what didn't work, but we're going to look at things that *did* work and know where we have to go and make a fine tweak.

In Year 1, Pittsburg site and district administrators noted that developing coherence was more difficult at the secondary level, a concern also mentioned in subsequent years. One principal described a “disconnect” between the elementary sites and secondary schools that others reported pre-dated the STC project. A DLT member commented, “I don't think we're there yet, because while at the elementary level, our curriculum is pretty standard, everybody seems to be going in the same direction, in the secondary level, we're not” (interview, May 2014). A central office employee who worked extensively with the secondary schools noted, however, that while it was taking longer to impact the culture of secondary sites, their sites were showing some greater buy-in by the end of the first year due to their involvement with the STC.

So we, the junior high and the secondary, we set up a leadership boot camp. We actually took them through those articles and we had them do the same posters that your team had us do [during a Spring 2013 session that launched the project]. It was really validating...It's been a lot of work, working with secondary to try to get them to gel together and trying to have professional development opportunities for them to come together...because what I found with secondary they just want to go quick to go *faster*, they don't want to take the time to learn the process and to develop that culture it takes to do the work that we need them to do. But I can see with the junior highs, they're just like, “Oh, this is not being made up, this is actually research based.” So it's just a slower process but I think we've come quite a way with the secondary...And it helps that we have one of the principals on our executive team so he hears it twice.

In fact, over the course of the project, Pittsburg included two secondary principals, an assistant principal, and an elementary principal on their district leadership teams, something not required by the STC but that administrators believed would foster tighter coherence between the central office and school sites.

There are also indications of movement towards improved coherence in assessments and curriculum that coincided with the implementation of the Common Core and new accountability system. At the end of 2013-14, a DLT member commented that “A few years ago – and I think the System Transformation has helped us with this – we had different schools doing different assessment systems, particularly at the secondary level.” Additionally, in 2015-16, the district hired half-time instructional coaches at all the district elementary sites to expand an early literacy assessment and intervention approach that one elementary had implemented successfully in prior years. Sites shared the same assessments, data management system, pacing guides, and trimester benchmarks. Yet, according to participants, coherence in the district was compromised by high turnover in the district office and the arrival of a new superintendent in 2014. The STC used explicit strategies for maintaining coherence during the leadership transitions that Pittsburg experienced during the second and third year. These included interviews with the new superintendent and co-planning with her new leadership team. Subsequent efforts to co-plan with the district leadership team and to obtain a copy of the Vision 2017 were not successful.

Table 4: Survey responses about district goal alignment with decisions and resource allocation, Years 1-3, PUSD

Pittsburg	District Leaders				School Leaders				Teachers			
	2014 Rating Average (n=3)	2015 Rating Average (n=7)	2016 Rating Average (n=4)	Y1 to Y3 Change	2014 Rating Average (n=59)	2015 Rating Average (n=42)	2016 Rating Average (n=50)	Y1 to Y3 Change	2014 Rating Average (n=189)	2015 Rating Average (n=81)	2016 Rating Average (n=137)	Y1 to Y3 Change
The district aligns its allocation of resources with the goals	4.33	4.00	4.00	-0.33	3.37	2.93	3.00	-0.37	3.05	2.85	2.76	-0.29
The district's decisions are aligned with the goals.	4.00	4.00	2.67	-1.33	3.49	2.93	2.86	-0.63	3.26	2.96	2.84	-0.42

Note: Survey responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree.

Two survey questions offer additional perspective about the perceived coherence in Pittsburg over time: whether participants report that the district's *decisions* are aligned with its goals and whether district *resources* are allocated in keeping with its goals (Table 4). At the end of the first year, Pittsburg DLT respondents agreed that Pittsburg's resources (4.33) and decisions (4.00) were in aligned with its goals. School leaders reported slight agreement about resource allocation (3.37) and decisions (3.49), while classroom teachers were more neutral in their answers (3.05 for resource alignment; 3.26 for decisions aligned with goals). There is a noticeable discrepancy between DLT members and classroom teachers, though one might assume that central office administrators, in general, have greater familiarity with specifics about resource allocation. By the end of the project, however, all three groups of respondents reported about one third of a point decline, on average, in the perceived alignment of resources with goals. Notably, while district leaders agreed that the district's decisions were aligned with its goals (4.0) at the end of the first year, by 2016 the average dropped 1.33 points, indicating slight disagreement.

By 2015, some interview and focus group participants reported a relationship between a perceived reduction in goal clarity and a loss of momentum towards building district coherence. One respondent who served on the DLT during the first and second year claimed:

I feel that there has not been the same cohesive vision and work that had been done in the past. We're very much in transition right now. In a way, it's almost as if it's kind of reversed itself. Before, we kind of felt as if the district had a vision and the school sites were looking to us to inform their work. Now it's a little bit of the opposite. That *we're* having to look to the school sites because we're lacking a bit of cohesiveness.

It is difficult to make causal claims about why many interview and focus group respondents described decreased coherence in Years 2 and 3. How much can be attributed to leadership transitions, new standards, new assessments, or other factors, is unclear. It is possible that the attention to systems transformation during a period of leadership transition might facilitate greater coherence once the new district leaders settle in and educators gain experience with the new standards and assessments. At the end of the third year, a Pittsburg DLT member offered a pragmatic assessment of their current level of coherence, describing it simply as a "work in progress," adding, "I don't know if I can directly relate it to Fullan or not. I think that we as a district have some work to do in that area. The transition to the Common Core and things like that. But definitely I think the [collaborative]...helps the conversation."

The "Plan on a Page" as a tool to foster coherence

Meanwhile, findings from Napa offer a concrete example of how a district involved in the project used tools such as their "Plan on a Page" to transition to greater coherence. This increased coherence represents significant growth for Napa, which some participants noted has historically struggled to integrate wide-ranging programs and initiatives. One district administrator described Napa's history as one of reform overload: "Napa has, for a long time, struggled...with limiting the number of initiatives on

the table” (interview, June 2015). At the time the project started, for instance, Napa had additional consulting relationships with the New Tech Network because many schools were using or transitioning to project-based learning. Another leadership consultant also led ongoing professional development workshops and coached administrators throughout the district. Combined with the STC efforts, the roll out of Common Core, and the LCAP, many administrators and teachers in Year 1 interviews and focus groups described struggling to understand how the different initiatives were related. As a result, members of the DLT (as well as the Fullan facilitators) described a tipping point in the first year when principals pushed back, advocating for a clearer articulation of the goals and how it connected to their sites’ work. A DLT member in 2015 reflected back on the development of the “Plan on a Page” as a direct response to a request from school administrators:

The principals asked for it. “Give us a one pager on what you want,” so they can help filter things out. And they said to us, “Okay, so now when a new idea comes in, can you use this to filter something out, to inform us, protect us?”

Within the first year, we observed examples of Napa’s district leadership team members attempting to develop greater coherence among the different moving pieces. In a May 2014 interview, for example, a central office leader commented that she had met earlier that morning with a New Tech representative about ensuring that the summer leadership development program would complement district goals: “I want to be explicit about this is how this [New Tech] project not only connects but *supports* the work with Fullan, the work that we’re doing with leadership development with Lyle Kirtman. You know, all of these things fit.” As part of this effort, the district office mandated that school site plans incorporate the district goals. As one 2015 focus group participant said, “Our plan is linked to the three goals, is aligned to those three goals. All the work we do filters through those three goals...” Administrators and teachers are now evaluated, in part, using the goals pulled directly from the “Plan on a Page.” In addition, by the end of the first year, the central office staff used the goals as the starting point for planning the 2014-2015 professional development calendar, a practice that continued in subsequent years.

In a focus group during the spring of 2014, one Napa SLT member commented that her understanding of the value of STC to their district evolved once the connections between the different programs and initiatives became more evident:

[At first,] it was kind of like, ‘This is just another thing that we have to get done.’ And it was kind of taking it apart and looking at ‘Okay, how does it all fit together?’ I think that was imperative for us to figure that out to kind of embrace it and move forward. It was to figure out how it worked with the PBL [“project-based learning”], how it worked with Common Core, or how it worked with all the other things that were coming down and channeling into what we need to do...it’s...kind of helpful to get a global sense that this all fits in together, and that it’s not just another thing that you got to do, but a tool to do the same job.

The variation in participants’ responses in the first two years suggests it took time to make the connection between STC and the varied initiatives in the district and to communicate the connection

throughout the system. One DLT member said at the end of the first year, "I see us striving to make those connections and looking for opportunities, especially site-level opportunities to make those connections, but I'm not sure I've seen the results of that striving yet" (interview, May 2014). In Year 2, several administrators at all levels suggested that NVUSD remained in the early stages of developing coherence: a principal, three site focus group participants, and three DLT members described significant challenges around coherence, particularly with the selection of new materials, use of assessments, and pacing guides associated with the Common Core and LCAP. As one teacher commented in a focus group, "Instead of sticking with a problem that needs to be dealt with and coming up with a solution, it's 'Here's more stuff, and here's more stuff, and here's more stuff.'"

In addition, while several respondents saw the "Plan on a Page," as evidence that the district was becoming more focused in its improvement strategies, several other participants in Napa were more skeptical. A few respondents in Year 2 described the "Plan on a Page" as so broad that they believed administrators could continue to add on initiatives by identifying which goals that best matched new pet programs. One DLT member commented, "I sat there and watched [them] sort everything under the 4 Cs [part of a district goal]!" Another DLT member agreed, saying, "Maybe now at the *school level* it helps to filter things out...I think at this level [central office], we tend to take on a new initiative and say, 'That fits in Goal Two...' So, I don't think we've been good at resisting new initiatives." In 2015, one principal claimed that "What's happening in the middle of our transformation is there's *more* initiatives now being put on the table. And it's like, 'But did we take them through the filter?' And the answer to that is unusually *no*." A fellow administrator added, "...We may have the three goals, and we may have things coordinated, but we still can't say no."

Others reported that people within the district were becoming *more* thoughtful about using the goals to develop coherence. In May 2014, for instance, a member of Napa's DLT commented that by the end of the first year, leaders began to resist the temptation to sort any new initiative into one of the three goals and began a deeper examination of existing and new initiatives:

I think, it took us about three-quarters of the way through [Year 1] before I started seeing some switching happening with our thinking. It seemed to me like now we're beginning to look at things a little bit different. Instead of saying, "How does it fit? How does everything we're doing fit into a category?" it's more of "*What does that category mean?*"

It is difficult to attribute this change directly to the STC, but the project built in multiple opportunities for reflection on how to approach coherence-building. At the very least, their participation contributed to their shift in thinking. In addition, all of these comments suggest that efforts to build district coherence can take time and a continued commitment from district and site leaders.

Improved teaching and learning

In a 2016 interview, Fullan's team emphasized that a clear, shared vision will not "make any difference unless you tie them to getting deeper on good pedagogy and learning." Substantive shifts to instruction

and student achievement require time to take root, however, and this evaluation was not designed to directly measure changes to teaching and learning or student outcomes. Even if it had been, the change in annual state assessments would have inhibited year-to-year comparisons in student achievement. Instead, the first objective outlined within the STC grant is the expectation that districts would work with the Fullan team to develop “instructional, curricular and assessment practices; and procedures for assessing progress towards goals and practices.” In this section, we address some early indicators that districts were making progress towards fulfilling that objective.

Beginning in Year 1, facilitators shared videos at every meeting with examples of instruction from the transformation of other districts such as Sanger or schools within the Ontario school system. Instructional videos were used throughout the project to reinforce instructional practices for deeper learning and to provide common frames of reference for discussions about teaching and learning. The Fullan team also shared instructional strategies from researchers such as John Hattie and Robert Marzano, modeling them during the sessions so that teachers could experience and practice them together. Sessions in the second year focused heavily on Common Core implementation to support deeper learning. In Year 3, the sessions emphasized using student work as way to improve teaching and learning within districts’ and schools’ local contexts.

The Fullan team introduced the 60-day plan as a key practice for districts to inform instruction and assess progress in schools throughout both districts. During the 2013-14 year, the STC facilitators taught school leadership teams to develop plans for their sites’ next 60 days of instruction. By Years 2 and 3, SLTs planned and shared their 60-day plans during each quarterly meeting, a point we discuss further in the sections on building capacity and creating a culture of professionalism. The Fullan leaders provided time at each session for each team to reflect on their successes and challenges from the prior plan’s implementation and draft the next 60-day plan in consultation with their peers.

STC and Common Core Implementation

As a Napa DLT member observed in a 2016 interview, involvement with the STC complemented the concurrent implementation of the Common Core by focusing the district’s attention on teaching and learning for deeper learning beyond increased test scores. For many teachers, however, this type of instruction required teachers to approach teaching in new ways.

Remember what was going on at the same time with this project was the Common Core standards shift. I think that was huge leverage for the timing of this [the STC] with Common Core standards, which required a new way of thinking about, not so much the content but *how the content is delivered*, and it's how...it's about college and career readiness...As [colleague name] liked to say, change is hard, and *real* change is *real* hard. We'd like just some real change, and it's really hard... [Teaching] practice is in there, and if we don't change practices, we are not going to get to deeper learning.

Yet implementation of the Common Core and assessments also confounded which changes to instruction that participants could attribute to the STC. Many Napa and Pittsburg participants echoed the sentiments of Pittsburg principal who said, “I think that there there’s been connection for us at our

site. There's been opportunities for reflection, but direct connection to instructional capacity... it's hard to draw a direct correlation because there's so many different variables involved in that" (interview, April 2016). At the same time, some administrators and teachers felt they would have used similar instructional practices whether they had participated in the STC project or not. Others described it as a catalyst for common understandings of effective instructional practices.

New Structures for Improving Instruction

We did find evidence that, as proposed in the initial grant, each district developed and refined structures for assessing student achievement using interim assessments. In Napa, administrators and teachers described "Learning Walks" as a way for administrators and teachers to focus on concrete instructional issues and evidence of learning. Modeled in part on Elmore's "Instructional Rounds," the local protocols were designed to directly support a focus on instructional problems of practice. And in Year 3, teachers brought samples of student work to the quarterly STC sessions to review using protocols that could be implemented back at their sites. As one Napa DLT member commented at the end of the project, "I would say one thing that we've shifted through this process is really looking at student work with a more critical lens...Instead of saying the kids were engaged and they did their work, now taking that and seeing what does the work actually look like? I guess using that as a data point." His colleague agreed, adding, "We've also been able to look at more of student work and looking at the projects and seeing really *how* do we know that the kids are making progress based on the products that they're developing, but also within the planning of the teachers and meetings they're having in their PLCs" (interview, April 2016).

One example of Napa's increased focus on student work was the development and implementation of common protocols for using student work as the source of data in Year 3. A DLT member commented on the importance of this shift to looking at student work in the final year:

In looking at student work, teachers...We never did that [during STC sessions] in the first two years, but in looking at actual projects and the results of that project...and looking at student work and agreeing on, "Is that good or bad?" Using a rubric to evaluate that, that was a huge shift in that it allowed principals to say they're going to help you get better as a teacher with your unit development and your ability to assess kids on the 6 Cs [a district sub-goal].

It is difficult to gauge the changes to instructional focus using a survey, but the results from Napa remained fairly stable. In general, respondents across all groups reported moderate agreement with items related to instructional focus, the use of evidence-based strategies, and use of data to improve student learning (Table 5).

Table 5: Survey responses about district focus on instructional improvement and practices, Years 1-3, NVUSD

Napa	District Leaders					School Leaders					Teachers		
	2014 Rating Average (n=8)	2015 Rating Average (n=7)	2016 Rating Average (n=5)	Y1 to Y3 Change	2014 Rating Average (n=95)	2015 Rating Average (n=110)	2016 Rating Average (n=61)	Y1 to Y3 Change	2014 Rating Average (n=126)	2015 Rating Average (n=30)	2016 Rating Average (n=103)	Y1 to Y3 Change	
The district has a clear focus on instructional improvement.	3.86	3.64	3.80	-0.06	3.79	3.97	3.79	0.00	3.49	4.00	3.28	-0.21	
The district has a relentless focus on improved learning for ALL through instructional improvement.	3.71	3.18	3.80	0.09	3.70	3.85	3.81	0.11	3.37	3.87	3.20	-0.17	
The district consistently recommends the use of a wide range of evidence-based instructional strategies.	3.57	3.64	3.40	-0.17	3.72	3.75	3.96	0.24	3.43	3.96	3.37	-0.06	
The district's primary use of data is to improve student learning	3.71	3.45	4.00	0.29	3.82	3.74	3.94	0.12	3.55	3.65	3.48	-0.07	

Note: Survey responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree.

In contrast, Pittsburg responses varied more between respondent groups and over time (Table 6). The average ratings should be interpreted cautiously, particularly with the small sample size of the District Level Team. Moreover, a year-to-year comparison was likely impacted by the substantial changes to the DLT cohort composition. One takeaway from the survey responses, however, is that participants Pittsburg and, to a lesser degree, Napa, perceive that their districts could improve their focus on instructional improvement, pedagogy, and data use.

Table 6: Survey responses about district focus on instructional improvement and practices, Years 1-3, PUSD

Pittsburg	District Leaders				School Leaders				Teachers			
	2014 Rating Average (n=3)	2015 Rating Average (n=7)	2016 Rating Average (n=4)	Y1 to Y3 Change	2014 Rating Average (n=59)	2015 Rating Average (n=42)	2016 Rating Average (n=50)	Y1 to Y3 Change	2014 Rating Average (n=189)	2015 Rating Average (n=81)	2016 Rating Average (n=137)	Y1 to Y3 Change
The district has a clear focus on instructional improvement.	4.67	4.14	2.67	-2.00	3.94	3.71	3.09	-0.85	3.40	3.18	2.98	-0.42
The district has a relentless focus on improved learning for ALL through instructional improvement.	4.67	4.14	2.67	-2.00	3.82	3.33	2.93	-0.89	3.24	3.09	2.87	-0.37
The district consistently recommends the use of a wide range of evidence-based instructional strategies.	4.33	4.14	2.67	-1.66	3.74	3.33	3.21	-0.53	3.31	3.01	2.95	-0.36
The district's primary use of data is to improve student learning	4.33	4.14	4.67	0.34	3.92	3.10	3.16	-0.76	3.44	2.91	3.14	-0.30

Note: Survey responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree.

One Pittsburg principal saw the STC as impacting instruction, indirectly, by deprivatizing practice.

What I see is that as a result of being involved in this, their comfort level with leading other teachers and their comfort level in influencing the practice of other teachers has increased, which over time will help as we're working on affecting instructional practice across the school...That's where I see the project having a direct effect on instruction in our school.

Again, it is difficult to determine how much the STC impacted districts' focus on teaching and learning, given the shift toward full implementation of the Common Core State Standards and a new accountability system. For example, changes in the focus on teaching and learning might have occurred, in part, as a result of California's new requirement for districts to create a Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP), regardless of participation in the STC project. However, interview responses from district leaders suggest that the process has been shaped by core concepts from the collaborative. One Napa administrator commented that whether or not the STC was directly responsible for the changes, it certainly supported their efforts: "I think it helped break down some of those barriers for teachers. Just again hard to parse out where is the thing that really helped teachers make that shift and their thinking to where the world has changed...I don't know where all that shift came, but I definitely think the collaborative and their message...and their content in those meetings helped do that."

Participants from both districts noted that the ultimate indicator of improved teaching and learning would be better student outcomes. Whether or not this will occur remains to be seen, but we can examine how the STC support sustained attention to instructional capacity and student achievement. In the next section, we focus specifically on the ways in which the STC addressed districts' capacity to influence improvement.

Building the Capacity of District and School Leaders

Facilitated Meetings Build District Capacity

According to the Fullan team, the theory of action behind this model of systems transformation begins with a clear focus and a well-defined strategy for aligning the district towards continuous improvement in teaching and learning. In addition, district goals must be shared system-wide, and everyone in the district must have a clear understanding of their role in helping to move the district towards achieving these goals. These foundational components of the model require that districts build or maintain a certain level of internal capacity to set goals and to facilitate and sustain change. It also requires a baseline of knowledge about effective instruction and a commitment to improving educational outcomes for all students.

Important to the success of this model, therefore, is growth in the capacity of district and school leaders to facilitate and sustain a system-wide focus on teaching and learning that continues after completion of the formal project. Consequently, the Fullan team designed the school leadership and district leadership team meetings to foster this growth in knowledge and skills across the system.

Collaborative Planning Time: Building a Shared Plan

One of the first aspects of capacity building that the STC addressed was district and site leaders' ability to develop shared goals and strategies for affecting change, a critical component of systems transformation. According to district and site leaders, one of the most valuable aspects of the facilitated sessions was the opportunity to develop a unified focus on change and a structure and strategy to implement and sustain this focus. This foundational capacity building exercise was noted as an important component of both the site leadership team meetings and the district leadership team meetings. For example, one district leader from Napa said at the end of year three,

I think the Fullan project has been a catalyst in terms of making sure that people stay focused on what they need to do. I think it has helped. I also, and I have not participated, but I witness the site days when they meet at [name of] High School and every site brings a team, and they work. Again, I think that bringing the whole district together like that, under the instructional mission, I think is very healthy because everybody understands what the goals and the mission is, or are. Then giving each site the opportunity to work individually with their leadership teams, I think that is very productive.

A PUSD district leader similarly noted in year two, "The capacity building and the framing that STC has afforded my division in particular has been significant. All of the directors, all of the coordinators have really seemed to value the work." At the same time, this district leader noted her uncertainty about how the work would continue due to high turnover in her division. "At the end of this year, four or maybe five of the major players in this division will not be here, and so there's going to be a translation or a

transition to whether or not that same kind of impact continues on with the new team...It has made at the district level in my division the work more coherent.” This district leader’s comments suggest the importance of ongoing work to build capacity, particularly when there is high turnover among district staff. New staff might not have been exposed to the same learning experiences afforded by the leadership team meetings. Therefore, districts might have benefited from an explicit process or structure to support continuity in the face of personnel changes, an all-to-common condition in school districts.

The Fullan team remarked on the usefulness of the structured planning time to district and site leaders in Napa and in Pittsburg. At the end of year three the Fullan team noted, “The fact that they had to talk about their school plans and their goals and how they were getting there and examples was good for building knowledge and capacity, I think. It proved to be a really worthwhile thing.” A member of the team also claimed that despite the consequences of high leadership turnover in Pittsburg, the site-level teams continued attending to teaching and learning: “I would say all the school teams were really focusing on student learning, for sure. They may not have been quite clear on what the focus is as a district, but as a school they were certainly doing that. I think they were also building their capacity along the way to achieve that back at school.” As the Fullan team notes, school leaders in Pittsburg were able to use the SLT meetings to create a plan for their sites, despite limited coherence at the district-level (to be discussed further in the “Barriers” section of this report).

Adapting the Work to the Specific Needs of the District

Learning how to adapt this work to the specific needs of their district was another goal of the facilitated sessions and an important element to building internal capacity. Therefore, in addition to providing collaborative planning time, the Fullan team provided a range of tools to encourage districts to connect the theory behind systems transformation to the strategies needed to operationalize the work. Several participants reported that the 60-day plan was one of the most helpful learning tools provided by the Fullan team. For example, in a Year Two focus group with members of the NVUSD site leadership teams, one administrator noted, “And I think for me, my biggest takeaway from Fullan was the 60-day plan, and being able to put that into my head, what does that look like at my school? And that was with the Fullan people last year. Our teacher team helped us with that. And then other groups of teachers that we had in leadership roles and leadership capacity building.” A participant in the year one focus group in Napa similarly noted the value of the 60-day plan to their site. “The 60 Day Plan is a really good tool for us as a leadership team to make sure that what we’re doing with our staff is meaningful and important. So it helped guide our own work that impacted the staff.” Both participants noted the value of collective planning and adapting that plan for their school as a helpful exercise in capacity building. Similarly, another member of the NVUSD focus group during the second year of the project noted, “Fullan’s been good for us, internally, in a lot of ways...” and then went on to say that the SLT meetings provided, “powerful learning for us because we always bring things back that help us move forward as a site.”

Pittsburg participants echoed their counterparts from Napa in highlighting the importance of protocols or tools as strategies for capacity building. In the Year Two focus group, one PUSD administrator noted the value of exercises such as the “Instructional Framework” each site developed to focus the school site teams on building instructional capacity for deeper learning. “I definitely think it was very powerful last

year to make the chart of our, I forget what they call it, deeper learning chart, where we identified the most important aspects of our school and what we're focused on, because that really gave us purpose and hit okay these are the things that we do and we do well, we need to continue to do these things, and then how can we implement those things with our own teaching and having our kids also use it. For example, the communication and the collaboration parts were definitely very helpful." As this participant's comment exemplifies, some sites were able to successfully use the activities during the facilitated sessions to connect the theory behind systems transformation to the work of their school sites.

Employing the protocols and activities from the school leadership and district leadership team meetings back at their school sites was another important way that site leaders adapted the learning from the facilitated sessions to meet the specific needs of their district. Yet, some participants noted the difficulty of bringing the learning from the leadership team meetings back to their school sites. For example, a focus group participant in Pittsburg commented on the challenges teachers were facing to integrate new teaching for common core, with the pedagogical skills suggested by the Fullan team.

Because we're trying to navigate and figure things out and try to implement those critical thinking skills which is part of the deeper learning model of Fullan, it's trying to get the teachers to buy in when right now they're barely staying above-- you know-- drowning level with the stuff that they're being asked to do, and then trying to bring in more information and trying to get them to buy in is difficult.

This participant's comment indicates the difficulty of this work if it is not integrated into other initiatives at the sites (see the "Barriers" section for an extended discussion of this issue).

As mentioned previously, by Year Three, NVUSD was particularly successful at adapting their work with the Fullan team to meet the needs of their district. Specifically, NVUSD leaders adapted their learning through the STC to integrate multiple strains of work into a single district focus. One NVUSD leader noted,

We definitely see the need to use this work as the glue to bring everything together. I mean we're never going to be all IB schools, and we're never going to be all dual immersion schools, so we have to have some common language, and I think that there is a value in that...we've kind of learned as a system we have to align this work.

Importantly, district leaders in the NVUSD were able to connect the learning that occurred at the site leadership team and district leadership team meetings to the ongoing work in their district. To achieve this, district leaders created a communication and integration structure within the district. In addition, in the third year of the project, NVUSD district leaders worked with the Fullan team to co-create and co-present content at the school leadership and district leadership team meetings (discussed in more detail on page 37).

Building Instructional Capacity

Another key component to increasing district capacity is growth in knowledge of pedagogical concepts across the organization. This was another area in which members of the site teams from NVUSD and PUSD reported that the facilitated sessions had a positive impact on their practice. For example, a participant in the year two focus group in Pittsburg noted that the sessions provide, “Lots of great ideas. I mean they’re great ideas...every 3 months, I get reminded, okay, I need to make sure I’m teaching the 6 C’s and make sure that it is deeper learning and I get ideas from watching the videos and from doing the articles and then do that back and either implement it in my own classroom or at least share it with my grade level and with the staff.”

Another year two focus group participant from Pittsburg noted, “The content is meaningful...as [name of site leader] eloquently said, you can tie it in to everything. It’s really applicable and it really supports Common Core, and it supports critical thinking ...” At the same time, this participant noted that some of the potential gains of the project were not realized because of the way the district had structured the dissemination of information to others in the district and because of a lack of continuity between the facilitated sessions. The participant notes, “The structure of the process is what hindered the greater thinking from the professionals. And I think if the structure could be altered, then we may see more benefit.”⁵

When asked during a focus group in the first year of the project in Napa if their involvement with the project had impacted instruction in the district, one participant remarked that, “I don’t know that it’s necessarily quote/unquote ‘impacted,’ but it gave us new tools and refreshed people on Marzano’s strategies.” Another participant during the same focus group similarly noted that, “I think that it has impacted instruction at our site with the people participating, our administrators and our three instructional coaches...I can’t think of specific examples right now, but I know that there have been strategies that we’ve taken back and used with our teachers.” In an interview in the third year of the project, a district leader noted that involvement with the STC has led to a greater focus on student work. “We’ve also been able to look at...more of student work and...at the projects, and seeing really how do we *know* that the kids are making progress based on the products that they’re developing...” As this speaker notes, regular reviews of student work are an important component of districts’ efforts to build instructional capacity.

Learning the Language of Change

Another important area of growth was building a common vocabulary around the change process for greater focus on teaching and learning. One NVUSD district leader noted at the end of Year Two, “I think what we have become good at is some of the Fullan vocabulary, and so we talk about capacity building, we talk, we use some of the Fullan words, so our common vocabulary has gotten better, so that’s why when we say deeper learning we all want deeper learning but what does it look like, how do we describe it? What does quality look like? And so, just having that conversation, we weren’t having that conversation three years ago.”

⁵ This is discussed in greater detail in the section on communication.

The same district leader also noted use of a shared vocabulary as an indication of success in capacity building at the site level. “Two elementary and one junior high school leader really saw and practiced and built the capacity of their teams to see the dynamics that the STC were teaching us and giving us as frameworks to actually frame the work, to actually use the lexicon and the vocabulary and even the techniques that we often use when we get together as district or site teams...the various ways of interacting with one another to get the collaboration and the conversation going around certain concepts. These three leaders actually do that on a regular basis. So, those are real clear examples of folks that really use STC on a regular basis.”

Similarly, another district leader in Napa commented at the end of year three on the value of a shared language to discuss learning and change. “I think we are, amongst the principals we're using some of the language, having coherency, building capacity. Those are the kinds of things that we all now say to each other.”

Yet, building a shared vocabulary around the change process is only a *first step* in the work of systems transformation. As one site leader in Pittsburg noted at the end of Year Three, how the language translates into actual change is even more important:

I can speak for the elementary sites that we all understand that we have to set some goals long term, and we have to stick with those until they are solid. That's one thing that's come out of it. We all understand that we have to build the capacity of our staff and that that's huge. We do get those pieces. We understand...and I think what many of us would advocate for, is how the district offices could support us in those tasks because they're daunting...Sometimes you're on the run all day long and then when we sit down it's about, it's easier to say that all those catch phrases are really smart ones, they are so good and worthwhile. I see the usefulness in all of them. Sometimes we struggle with how to make it happen.

This comment indicates at least one participant's perception about the need for greater support from the district-level as sites engage in the work of systems transformation. Moreover, this participant reports that developing the language of change, an understanding of the need for change, and the steps that must take place in order for change to occur, still do not translate into actual change.

A Year Three Napa focus group participant described a similar need for scaffolding between theory and site implementation.

I think it would be advantageous for them to come up with a protocol, "Okay, this is what it can look like." How can you take this back to your school site and make this happen? That will be really helpfully because this is just one little aspect of our job and they're multi-faceted and there's not a lot of time. Is some kind of scaffolding to help us bring it back to our teams, would be really beneficial.

Given that these types of comments were evident throughout the project's implementation, it suggests that districts and the Fullan team might have focused more on providing sufficient

support for the translation between theory and practice. Importantly, multiple members of the San Lorenzo Unified DLT identified the difficulty of moving from theory to action and application in the STC work a barrier to their success

Building Leadership Capacity

Participants also reported that the facilitated sessions helped to build their own capacity as leaders. For example, a PUSD district leader noted in year three, “From the beginning we talked about initiatives and having a few number and leading from the middle and the push/pull. All of those ideas have really supported my leadership in being a stronger leader. Those kinds of things specifically have really grown my capacity.” Interestingly, this leader uses the language of change from the STC project (“push/pull” and “leading from the middle”) to describe growth as a leader.

Building the capacity of principals to lead at their school sites is an important element of this work. To this end, at the end of Year Two a district leader in PUSD reported:

I think it’s been great for the principals to have that opportunity to work in a facilitative way with their teams and have that experience of building those relationships and their teacher leader capacity and you see it in different schools have different, you know, were influenced differently.... doing the final project and sort of reflecting on their work and what they wanted to share, in a, you know, small designated amount of time. I think working together for them to do that was helpful, and you know but going through those sort of guided exercises with their teams I think was a great experience. And I think that experience would be great for a central team as well, too. It just wasn’t for ours for a variety of other reasons.

This participant’s comments again speak to the way in which some site teams were able to adapt the activities and protocols provided by the Fullan team to build capacity at their sites. Yet, the participant notes that the project influenced the work at school sites to different degrees. In addition, this district leader sees the success of these activities to school site teams, but they also note the lack of penetration among district staff.

A district leader in Napa similarly commented on the growth in leadership capacity among principals during an interview at the end of the second year of the project. “I see these principals who were in schools that didn’t have the extra funding [for leadership development training] now kind of coming up to this level because they’re getting the access of the Fullan work, the access of the learning walks that they used to not do with each other’s sites, the principal meetings where they work on things together.” In a Year Three interview, a district leader remarked on the way that the district can now use student data in order to identify potential teacher leaders in the district.

I think there is a great opportunity to have those particular educators, they are willing to do some professional training for others to perhaps have a greater influence in their PLC teams or with grade level PLC teams, where people come to observe them or we videotape them... how is it that they are moving these English learners, these low achieving results into some pretty significant growth by the end of the year? We know

part of what's going on and is contributing to that result but we need them, their voice would be helpful to 'use the group, to change the group,' that's what Fullan says. We need to know who those real leaders are. With technology now we can drill down to that granular level and identify who are those people.

This district leader's comment indicates a more systematic way of identifying teacher leaders in order to use them to improve instruction in the district.

The Fullan team also noted Pittsburg and Napa's growth in leadership capacity at the end of Year Three. "It was pretty powerful what went on the last day with all the district leaders in terms of how much they had grown and their ability to articulate now what their direction was and how they were building the collaboration and what they were going to do around learning." As we discuss in Section III, the capacity to communicate the goals and strategies was a key support for improved coherence.

District Leaders Co-Plan and Co-Present Meeting Content

According to the Fullan team and data collected for this report, Napa clearly demonstrated the growth in capacity necessary to carry out and sustain the work of systems transformation. In the third year of the program, the Fullan team invited district leaders from NVUSD and Pittsburg to co-plan and co-present the content of the meetings. According to the Fullan team, "Last June, we made a special trip to work with the district teams of both Napa and Pittsburg because we wanted to co-plan with them what was going to happen over the course of the third year to ensure greater sustainability. And when we arrived, we found that Napa had already had a pre-meeting to make sure that they had all of their thoughts in order. So they really had a whole strategy that they wanted to work with us on so that they would really be building that coherence across their whole system, and so they redesigned how they were doing their principals meetings so that they were all connected."

Napa actively worked within their leadership teams to address perceived gaps in coherence and STC implementation, a proactive approach not evident in the other districts. Central office administrators from Napa commented that this change to the structure of the facilitated sessions augmented their learning. According to one district leader, "I think the co-planning was the key, and even co-presenting. In the past [the Fullan consultants] would come up and present and talk *at* them. This time we mixed it up, where we not only had some of our administrators presenting, but then we had even teachers present their projects. Then teachers in the room got to see teachers up there saying, 'This is our unit. This is how we did the four Cs.⁶ This is how we got student engagement.' There's just more buy in."

According to the Fullan team, Pittsburg was also invited to co-plan and co-present, a suggestion that the DLT agreed would be helpful, but plans to collaborate fell through. "Pittsburg was not prepared for us

⁶ Napa Valley participants sometimes referred to the "Four Cs" (critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity) within the district's "21st Century Learning Plan." Others referred to the "Six Cs," which later added character and global citizenship; the data reflects this variation within our report.

when we arrived and indicated that they really didn't know what their focus was going to be for the next year because [the superintendent] was still new. But she'd been there for a year, and they had some new people on the team. So the joint planning consisted of our working with the new assistant superintendent, while we were at the session, to plan the next stages." This indicates that Pittsburg did not experience the same type of growth in leadership capacity for system-wide coherence from the STC project that is evident in Napa.

Increasing Opportunities for Capacity Building

During interviews with district and site leaders, participants were invited to share their recommendations on how to make the facilitated sessions even more valuable to their learning. Many of their suggestions focused on greater support for building district capacity to apply the concepts of change. In other words, some district and site leaders reported that the focus of the site and district leadership team meetings could have been shifted more from the conceptual—more abstract notions of change—to the operational, or how to apply the knowledge and sustain their focus. For example, a district leader from Pittsburg noted at the end of Year Three that although the district leadership team meetings provided new strategies to, “inform what we are doing,” the district needed additional support around how to sustain this focus on instructional improvement. The district leader said,

We needed more around how to sustain systems to build capacity and that change process and what is the role of the teacher, the principal, the district office? What do they go through and experience as they are grappling with that change? That's more what we needed and then how do you help develop sustainability by creating systems that will help internalize this work, because from my perspective that's really what's going to make it more sustainable...If they don't internalize it ...

In addition, some district leaders reported that the content of the facilitated sessions in Year One was too generic, and was not crafted to meet the specific strengths and challenges in their district. For example, one district leader from Napa commented,

People don't own what they don't build. It's always bad when you put your people in front of consultants that don't really know who you are. “Sit and get”, “drive-by” workshops aren't working anymore. There's just too much information for people to try and absorb. So you have to ensure when you're going to spend facetime with your people that what they're going to get is not a surprise, and what they're going to get is aligned to where they're headed...Nobody pushed us in the direction of saying, ‘Hey, why don't you come to some agreements around what are the overall goals of the work so that you can start to do that?’

The same district leader, along with others in Napa, noted an important shift in the value of the work to their district in the final year. Notably, district leaders in Napa discussed the way in which the Fullan teams adapted the work to make it more relevant and meaningful to districts in the second and third years. The participant noted, “I'm pretty optimistic about the work. I think getting the whole family in a gym and talking about district goals and having a sustained approach to that has been beneficial to the

overall direction of the district. I think it was a lot of things. It changed over the three years. I think that the Fullan collaborative adapted to the needs of the district this year much more than in the first two years and really customized their message to what our district goals are.” This adaptability was a central component of the STC. Rather than a fixed approach, the Fullan team made it clear from the outset that the collaborative would evolve throughout implementation.

As discussed previously, district leaders in Napa and in Pittsburg were invited to co-plan and co-present at the workshops in the final year. Even though participants offered recommendations for strengthening the facilitated sessions, most district and site leaders felt the facilitated meetings throughout the project were helpful to their growth, especially the dedicated time to work in their site and district teams towards systems improvement.

The Need for Baseline Capacity

According to the Fullan team, internal district capacity is critical to the work of systems transformation. Therefore, districts that entered the project without a baseline of internal capacity (as discussed later in the section on “barriers to success”) faced an enormous challenge when engaging in this work. In other words, too many distractions, a lack of focus, and high leadership turnover in a district, can hamper the work of systems transformation. Reflecting on districts that struggled with STC implementation, the Fullan Team noted that when you're selecting districts for this kind of work, if they don't have some level of internal stability and capacity, they need a different kind of intervention. They need to build internal coherence and capacity for this type of cross-school learning before focusing on cross-district collaboration.

In a separate communication at the end of Year Three, the Fullan team reiterated the idea that some districts needed to build their internal capacity before engaging in systems transformation. In this comment, the Fullan team discusses the districts that struggled the most to achieve the goals of the STC project.

One of the things we learned is that we needed to focus with these particular districts on the lateral capacity building being inside the district because they did not have experience with cross-school collaboration. The first two years built capacity for this type of collaboration because they didn't have school leadership teams that were used to meeting and then going back to the schools and doing something with it in the school. While they valued it, it just takes time to build that capacity. With their partnership, we were not involved with writing the proposal or selecting the districts, and so we didn't know what their initial capacity was. This meant that we needed to start at a different place and emphasize the internal before we could get to the cross-district.

sense of [It], it took the whole two years just to get that really moved to a certain level of capacity because they didn't have school leadership teams that were used to meeting and then going back to the school and doing something with it in the school. They weren't used to meeting with one another. While they valued it, it just takes you time to build that capacity. With this partnership we didn't know what their...We didn't pick the districts, and we didn't have anything to do with picking them, so we didn't know what their capacity was coming in. The proposal was written first, is what I'm saying, and then you end up with certain districts and we just needed to start at a different place and emphasize the internal before we could get to the cross-district.

These comments indicate that in their future systems transformation work, the Fullan team may alter their process for selecting districts based on their internal capacity to engage in this work. This does not necessarily mean that districts with limited capacity cannot undertake a project like the STC, but it does suggest that the benefits of networks and cross-district collaboration may be more appropriate once capacity has been developed. We address this in greater detail in our conclusion.

Sustainability

Finally, it is important to note that building internal capacity must be part of each district's continued work and must be built into the structure of the organization in order to sustain the focus on continuous improvement. The Fullan team recognized this growth in Napa.

Napa has made outstanding progress in moving toward coherence. It has intentionally developed mechanisms to build the vertical and horizontal. From the beginning, the Superintendent and district leaders committed to deep reflection and were open to changing their own processes and assumptions. Over the three years they were able to reduce overload and articulate and support a clear direction at all levels. They built conditions that fostered collaborative work within and across schools. They intentionally created mechanisms to build vertical integration of both direction and support. By year three they were proactive as lead learners in ensuring sustainability by co-designing with the consultants. They have already committed to a strategy to deepen the work now that this project has ended.

District leaders in Pittsburg noted that despite evidence of growth in internal capacity, particularly at the school sites, this growth was jeopardized by high leadership turnover at the district level. Therefore, another area of potential growth in the content of the facilitated sessions is a stronger focus on how to sustain organizational growth in the midst of leadership turnover. According to one district leader, "I found the days that we met really valuable. This year...when we went away to Napa, I found that I learned a lot from other school sites within the districts and then the other district that we've worked with...One of the challenges, having pretty much a new Ed Services department, if you will, is that a lot of the things that we began under the former leadership, just did not continue in our new leadership.

Nobody's fault, it's just how it is. Everybody comes with a different picture of how they want things to go.” This participant’s comment indicates the difficulty of sustaining this work during times of significant turnover in district leadership. Given the high incidence of leadership turnover in many districts, finding ways to build internal capacity to accommodate leadership change seems to be an important element to the success of this model.

Creating a culture of professionalism, learning and shared leadership

In addition to building district capacity, the STC model calls for districts to create a system-wide culture of professionalism, continuous learning and shared leadership. This shift in culture can help to sustain efforts to improve teaching and learning by institutionalizing certain professional norms. Yet, district-wide shifts in culture may be even more difficult to achieve than increasing district capacity—especially in a short period—and can be difficult to measure. In this section we look at the growth that occurred in Pittsburg and Napa with regard to district culture. Specifically, we look at shifts in the internal focus on professional learning, shifts in the culture of collaboration and shared leadership, and the way in which participation in the STC project helped to facilitate these changes.

An Internal Focus on Professional Learning and Growth

One of the goals for districts involved in the STC project was to become learning organizations. In other words, districts should show movement towards creating a culture of professionalism that includes ongoing opportunities to increase the capacity—knowledge and skills—of teachers, site leaders and district administrators. A starting point to facilitate this shift in district culture is to allow districts to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of their instructional model and the opportunities available for professional growth at all levels of the organization.

To some degree, all educators and educational leaders operate with a mental model about what constitutes effective instruction and how to attain it. Yet often, these models are implicit rather than discussed openly. When this is the case, teaching becomes anchored in the personal beliefs and preferences of individual teachers rather than in shared professional norms, and coherence around a shared vision remains impossible.

The Fullan team provided opportunities for teachers and site leaders to reflect on the instructional model in their district at the facilitated sessions during the first year of the project, effectively pushing administrators and teachers to make their instructional models explicit. According to our interviews, this was a critical learning opportunity for teachers and site leaders to think about the work that they do and how they can do it better.

For example, participants in Pittsburg noted increased attention to supporting quality instruction in their district during the first year of the project. One district leader remarked, “What this experience has allowed me to do is to reflect on how the district office, specifically [my division], is providing support...After hearing from each of the school sites, just the activity today with the instructional vision, it’s really allowed us to see similarities across our system as well as across our district.” A participant in the Pittsburg focus group in the second year of the project similarly commented on the way information from the project is being used to inform professional learning in the district. “The way that I apply this knowledge is quite different. In that, we’re using it towards developing professional development for teachers and in just creating our, whatever we’re creating...We’re using what we’re learning here and applying that for teachers versus for students.”

Another member of one of the site leadership teams in Pittsburg similarly noted the value of the STC project to their efforts to develop an instructional core during the first year of the project. “I supervise

all eight elementary schools with a systematic program and looking at the 'systemness.' It's been a focus for us to keep coming back to. Not everyone does the exact same [thing] all day, but that there's a common approach and that there's common resources available for the teachers, which again reinforces that we're on the right track." As this participant notes, the opportunity to reflect on the alignment in instructional practices across the district and to ensure that supports are available to continue to guide instructional improvement is a key feature of a learning organization. Through the activities at the facilitated sessions, teachers asked questions such as 'How do we use technology in the classroom for the best student outcomes? Or why should we use problem based learning?' Asking these types of questions and collectively determining the instructional model for the district can help to institutionalize a theory of learning and a new and different culture, or a commonly understood way for improving instruction in the district.

In Napa, a shift towards a stronger organizational culture of learning and professionalism manifested in their district-wide focus on pedagogy for deeper learning. Napa's focus on deeper learning was not just for students but also for the adults. One district leader in Napa noted the importance of building this shared focus on deeper learning in the third year of the project.

It went much smoother this year, I think, and we also were able to really sharpen the focus on our next steps with collaborating between the Fullan transformative [workshops] and our work with, our partners, with New Tech Network. Because it's kind of a tension point for some folks in the district who can't seem to connect dots between deeper learning from one person and deeper learning from another person. What the Fullan project this year was able to do through the resources they provided was to give us agnostic resources. It doesn't matter if you are a New Tech Network or you are IB...If you are really talking about deeper learning for kids, these are the resources... We are really talking about these pedagogies. Everybody finally came to agreement on that which was huge breakthrough for our system. This year I think finally kind of pushed us over that tension point.

Napa's focus on a shared pedagogy of deeper learning, which united several unique educational models in the district, is evidence of a cultural shift within the district that occurred over the course of their three years with the project. At the final school leadership team meeting in March, all of the school site teams worked with a rubric designed to measure deep learning in student work regardless of the instructional model. One district leader in Napa noted, "In the March day, teachers themselves presented amongst common groups and it was around the pedagogies of inquiry. It just reinforced that, 'Oh, this is not just my school. This is not just my principal telling me I got to do this. This is all of us.' Then they can learn from each other and say, 'Oh, that's a good idea.' When that teacher-to-teacher learning is happening, then we [administrators] can just be on the sidelines." This district leader indicated the importance of building a culture of learning where teachers play an important role in driving the learning around the instructional model. This shift in the culture of an organization, that it is about shared leadership built around a strong instructional core, is important to the sustainability of the model. The rubric was used to measure good teaching and learning independent of the specific educational approach. In both developing and instituting the use of this protocol, Napa further

developed their culture of professionalism. This corresponds with the model put forth by the Fullan team, an attempt to build an institutional culture from the ground up, rather than impose it on districts.

Napa also used “learning walks” or the opportunity for teachers to visit the classrooms of other teachers as a way to cultivate a culture of learning. According to a district leader at the end of year three, these learning walks were strategically timed to coincide with the facilitated sessions put on by the Fullan team. “We intentionally had learning walks before we had the Fullan meetings so that people could be out in the classrooms, looking at what was going on, [and] bring that information before we met as the big group. Those are system pieces that we changed as a result of this work we did.” The same district leader went on to say, “We need to learn, dig deeper on our own DIBELS data⁷ and say, ‘Which teachers are moving kids out of ‘intensive’ [support] and into ‘core’ at a significant rate? Who are those teachers?’ Because sometimes it's a single teacher at a school or a team of teachers at a grade level. Regardless, we only had, we identify initially right now I think a dozen. That work going that deep, tells us, we want to make sure when we are doing learning walks, those walks, those are the teachers that people are seeing, because something is going on in their classroom. They are totally having a profound impact on results.”

Survey data corroborate interview data on professional learning in Pittsburg and in Napa. When asked to agree or disagree with the statement “The district provides opportunities for professional learning aligned with its goals,” in Pittsburg school leaders (3.14) and teachers (3.30) were “neutral” on average, while district leaders (4.00) “agree” on average. Notably, average scores in Pittsburg decreased between Year One and Year Three for both school leaders and teachers (Table 7). In contrast, when asked to respond to the same question in Napa, in 2016 district leaders (4.00), school leaders (3.83) and teachers (3.76) all “agree” on average that “the district provides opportunities for professional learning aligned with its goals.” (Table 8).

A second survey item asked respondents to agree or disagree with the statement “The district has a clear strategy for developing effective teachers.” In Pittsburg, average responses for district leaders went down considerably between Year One (4.33) and Year Three (3.00), from “agree” to “neutral.” Average responses from school leaders also decreased (from 3.58 to 2.98), as did the average responses from teachers (from 3.28 to 2.95; Table 7). In Napa, average responses improved slightly or remained the same on this survey item. District leaders showed a slight decrease (from 3.71 to 3.60); site leaders showed an increase (from 3.22 to 3.63); and teachers showed a slight increase (from 3.21 to 3.29; Table 8).

These findings echo interview data which indicate that Napa has strengthened its culture of professionalism while Pittsburg increasingly struggled in this area. Yet average responses on the survey items overall indicate that creating a culture of professional learning remained an area of growth for both districts.

⁷ Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy (DIBELS) is a commercial reading assessment.

Table 7: Measures of Building a Culture of Professionalism, PUSD, Years 1-3

Pittsburg	District Leaders				School Leaders				Teachers			
	2014 Rating Average	2015 Rating Average	2016 Rating Average	Y1 to Y3 Change	2014 Rating Average	2015 Rating Average	2016 Rating Average	Y1 to Y3 Change	2014 Rating Average	2015 Rating Average	2016 Rating Average	Y1 to Y3 Change
The district provides opportunities for professional learning aligned with its goals	3.29 (n=3)	4.14 (n=7)	4.00 (n=4)	0.71	3.74 (n=59)	3.71 (n=42)	3.14 (n=50)	-0.60	3.38 (n=189)	3.38 (n=81)	3.30 (n=137)	-0.08
The district has a clear strategy for developing effective teachers.	4.33	4.00	3.00	-1.33	3.58	3.26	2.98	-0.60	3.28	3.04	2.95	-0.33

Note: Survey responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree.

Table 8: Measures of Building a Culture of Professionalism, NVUSD, Years 1-3

Napa Valley	District Leaders				School Leaders				Teachers			
	2014 Rating Average	2015 Rating Average	2016 Rating Average	Y1 to Y3 Change	2014 Rating Average	2015 Rating Average	2016 Rating Average	Y1 to Y3 Change	2014 Rating Average	2015 Rating Average	2016 Rating Average	Y1 to Y3 Change
The district provides opportunities for professional learning aligned with its goals	3.86 (n=8)	3.42 (n=7)	4.00 (n=5)	0.14	3.83 (n=95)	3.79 (n=110)	3.83 (n=61)	0.00	3.66 (n=126)	4.09 (n=30)	3.76 (n=103)	0.10
The district has a clear strategy for developing effective teachers.	3.71	3.42	3.60	-0.11	3.22	3.47	3.63	0.41	3.21	4.00	3.29	0.08

Note: Survey responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree.

Shared Leadership

Another important component of the STC model is strengthening district capacity by building shared leadership. Interviews with the Fullan team and with district and site leaders in Napa and Pittsburg suggest that this was a vital area of successful growth, particularly among site teams. Accordingly, at the end of year three the Fullan team noted the progress at the site level in Pittsburg.

Pittsburg school teams demonstrated strong growth in leadership and an emerging focus on Deep Learning. It is an example of what we call “Leadership from the Middle” - principals and teams taking action both within and across schools to secure growth.

At the end of the second year of the project, a district leader in Pittsburg also noted the growth in leadership at the school sites, despite shifts in the district’s leadership team. “I think the highlights would really revolve around supporting the school sites. Seeing kind of their development with regards to them building their leadership teams and the capacity of their staffs from leading from the middle, being able to kind of be part of their team as they kind of move the work forward.”

One member of the district leadership team from Pittsburg noted at the end of Year Three the way in which the facilitated sessions helped the district to support growth in leadership at the site level.

There were definitely pieces in previous years that were absolutely used to inform professional development...There were bits and pieces that were brought to different groups, different leadership teams that could then take that learning to another group. I can think specifically about the concerns based approach that was discussed a couple of years ago and that was something at the site day, the site leadership team talked about, “Well, what does that mean for how we support different people within our department?” So that was learning that they took away, to then be able to facilitate within their departments, and then that was also something that I took to our entire department chair team which was a different team and had them self-evaluate. Where did they fall on this scale and are they really leaders in some of the things that we’re trying to do? That was actually very useful. Some of those things we took away and directly informed what we did on campus. Some other things were just more of a personal learning. This year it felt more like it was more of a personal learning or personal take away. We didn’t have a systemic approach to how we were going to take this information back and potentially use it in the work that we were doing on campus. That had to do with some of the transitions that were happening at the high school as well as some of the transitions that were happening within its services as well. You can’t necessarily plan for that.

As this participant notes, one of the keys to the success of this model is the dissemination of information from the meetings to others in the district. While this administrator believed school leadership did a good job of disseminating information back to their sites in Year One, this system of dissemination was compromised by the third year. This comment suggests the importance of districts leaders maintaining strategies to disseminate the learning and protocols from the leadership meetings to others in the district.

Despite the growth the Fullan team notes at the site level in Pittsburg, they also commented on the persistent challenges at the district level due new leadership. Yet, comments from the Fullan team suggest that growth was evident at the district level before the change in leadership in the second year of the project. “Pittsburg was on the same trajectory as Napa in Year One. While the school teams and middle district leadership continued to grow throughout the life of the project, the superintendent change after year one shifted from full commitment to this work to a focus on other things. Schools and district leaders continued to see the value and work diligently but sustainability of the gains is fragile without deep superintendent commitment.” We further explore the challenge of sustainability in the face of superintendent turnover within the conclusion of the report, as it has implications for future systems transformation efforts.

The Fullan team was much more positive about the growth in leadership in Napa at all levels of the organization. The team noted at the end of Year Three that, “Napa is clearly on the move with much stronger leadership from the middle, a very strong district team and a fully committed superintendent. “

Collaboration

According to the Fullan team another important component of the STC model is building a collaborative culture within the district. In addition, the STC was designed to foster cross-district collaboration. Consequently, a focus on collaboration was central to the content of the facilitated sessions. The Fullan team noted at the end of year three, “We *modeled* for them how you build that collaborative culture. It has to be around real work, it has to be focused with protocols and processes that facilitate the work, and it has to be ongoing and sustained.”

Similar to their comments about the growth in shared leadership in Pittsburg, the Fullan team reported that Pittsburg made gains in the first year of the project to build a culture of collaboration. However, they also noted that these gains were compromised by high turnover in district leadership in the second and third year of the project. “As far as Pittsburg goes, that would be the other district that...It's trying to rebuild that collaborative approach to leadership and working together as a team, and it's going to be difficult for them to do that at this point in time, especially as they continue to lose people that are on their district team.”

During a focus group in year one of the project, a member of one of Pittsburg’s school leadership teams described the opportunities for collaboration as one of the highlights of their involvement with STC. “I think the main highlight that I can take from this experience is being able to--you know--collaborate with our school site team as well as other schools—secondary and elementary and high schools when we all get together and kind of talk about this. I think one of the challenges for us initially was understanding what exactly, what we were going to be doing. We weren’t sure how or what our role was – what we were actually going to be creating. As we’ve gone through it, it’s been taking shape and it’s been comfortable because we’ve figured that out together.” This participant’s comment corroborates comments from the Fullan team that the quarterly sessions were designed to facilitate a collaborative culture. However, the participant also notes their initial struggle to understand the purpose behind their work with the STC.

A representative from the teacher's union in Pittsburg also noted the way in which the facilitated sessions helped to build collaboration between district administrators and site administrators and site administrators and teachers. "I can definitely see the benefit of them participating alongside the school teams, hearing what's happening, hearing about challenges. It definitely keeps them more connected to the school sites. A big perception here for a long time was that the central office is so out of touch with what's happening in classrooms, and I think that this showed that they are very interested in supporting teachers in the classroom and this gave them an opportunity to really stay in touch." According to this participant, the structure of the facilitated sessions not only brought school site teams together but also created a stronger connection between the central office and the work at school sites.

By year three, however, focus group participants talked about the loss of this collaboration in Pittsburg. "We had teachers on special assignment, and we had collaboration times. Specific grade levels would go to collaboration with...To find special assignments, instructional coaches, and they'd work together on collaborating a specific standard or skill or whatever the topic was. That's not in place anymore, it was just taken this year, completely taken. New teachers and old teachers didn't get a chance to collaborate." Another focus group participant similarly noted, "we had a very systematized routine, especially for K-5, where teachers were going 4 times a year, they're going into classrooms, so it was very...Structured and systematic, the level of support and the level of expectation was very clearly identified, and the expectation was laid out, this is what's going to happen, this is what will happen, and teachers felt very confident leaving. That structure has kind of caved in on itself and without that system in place it's left people more to be islands than feeling like you're part of a structured system, if I can use that analogy." Yet another participant noted, "prior to this superintendent we had a different superintendent who was very focused on professional learning communities prior to us getting into Fullan, and we talked about it at every leadership meeting that we had as elementary principals...We haven't had that as of late." Once again, even participants on the school site teams note the differences in the district with regard to collaboration after the changes in district leadership. These comments suggest the possible benefit of increased support for districts during times of significant leadership turnover. At the same time, a district leader in Pittsburg remarked at the end of the third year on a willingness of teacher to collaborate with other teachers. "I think there's a lot of openness to collaboration in this district, between the teachers. I really do."

The Fullan team reported growth in Napa in the area of building a collaborative culture. "Napa would definitely be the ones that made the most growth, the strongest changes. They had stepped up in that they *really* focused their direction away from clutter to really clear, focused direction. They're building that collaborative culture by linking different ways that they're intervening with their schools."

A focus group participant in Napa similarly commented on the culture of collaboration in the district. "Some highlights: we've been able to collaborate here with our leadership teams and really come to a consensus around what we want our work to look like back on our own sites so we're able to come here, gain ideas from other school sites when we do pair up with them and get feedback. Then take it back to our own team. At school we first discuss it with our leadership team there and then anything that we feel is really important or useful, we then share that with our entire staff. That's been a highlight that's

been able to help focus our work on our own school site and give us areas to work on and then come back and really collaborate with other schools within the district.”

Survey data similarly suggests a growth in the perception of a culture of collaboration in Napa and a decrease in Pittsburg. Average responses from district leaders in Napa increased on all of the survey items related to collaboration, indicating that district leaders believe that there was a stronger culture of collaboration in the district in the third year of the project than there had been in the first year (Table 9). The only exception was on a question that asked whether “School leaders collaborate with leaders from other schools in the district.” The average response on this question decreased by .26. In contrast, district leaders’ responses to the survey questions about collaboration in Pittsburg decreased on every item, with decreases as high as 2 points on three of the questions. This indicates a dramatic decrease in district leaders’ beliefs in the presence of a collaborative culture in Pittsburg between the first year and the third year. The average responses from school leaders and teachers in Napa and Pittsburg closely mirrored the responses from the district leadership team, with slight increases on most survey items between year one and year three from Napa, and decreases on almost all of the questions about collaboration from Pittsburg (Tables 10 and 11). These survey responses corroborate the findings from interviews on the growth in a collaborative culture in Napa and reductions in the collaborative culture in Pittsburg, seemingly due, at least in part, to a high turnover in district leadership.

Table 9: Measures of Building a Culture of Professionalism, District Leaders, NVUSD & PUSD, Years 1-3

District Leaders Difference between Year One and Year Three	NVUSD				PUSD			
	2014 Rating Average (n=8)	2015 Rating Average (n=7)	2016 Rating Average (n=5)	Y1 to Y3 Change	2014 Rating Average (n=3)	2015 Rating Average (n=7)	2016 Rating Average (n=4)	Y1 to Y3 Change
The district and schools work collaboratively to achieve goals	3.5	3.33	3.80	0.30	4	3.86	3.00	-1.00
District leaders collaborate with leaders from other districts	3.29	3	3.40	0.11	4.33	4	2.33	-2.00
School leaders collaborate with leaders from other schools in the district	3.86	3.5	3.60	-0.26	4.33	3.86	2.33	-2.00
The district allocates time for collaborative work	3.71	3.67	4.20	0.49	3.43	4.14	3.00	-0.43
The school organizes time for collaborative work	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
The district has well-established mechanisms for two-way communication with schools.	3.14	3.08	3.40	0.26	4	4	2.00	-2.00

Note: Survey responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree.

Table 10: Measures of Building a Culture of Professionalism, School Leaders, NVUSD & PUSD, Years 1-3

School Leaders Difference between Year One and Year Three	NVUSD				PUSD			
	2014 Rating Average	2015 Rating Average	2016 Rating Average	Y1 to Y3 Change	2014 Rating Average	2015 Rating Average	2016 Rating Average	Y1 to Y3 Change
	(n=95)	(n=110)	(n=61)		(n=59)	(n=42)	(n=50)	
The district and schools work collaboratively to achieve goals	3.58	4.34	3.74	0.16	3.25	3.38	2.89	-0.36
District leaders collaborate with leaders from other districts	3.37	3.47	3.43	0.06	3.1	2.81	2.74	-0.36
School leaders collaborate with leaders from other schools in the district	3.63	3.88	3.43	-0.20	3.44	3.36	3.26	-0.18
The district allocates time for collaborative work	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
The school organizes time for collaborative work	4.3	4.41	4.24	-0.06	3.82	4.29	3.67	-0.15
The district has well-established mechanisms for two-way communication with schools.	3.21	3.48	3.43	0.22	2.98	2.55	2.42	-0.56

Note: Survey responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree.

In many of the NVUSD items, we observed a perceived improvement from Y1 to Y2, followed by a drop in the final year. This is worth noting, but the implications are unclear. This may represent statistical “noise”; the fact that as the project progressed, participants had higher expectations; or a genuine decline. Only longer term survey data could help distinguish between measurement “blips” or trends within the data.

Table 11: Measures of Building a Culture of Professionalism, Teachers (Non-SLT), NVUSD & PUSD, Years 1-3

Teachers Difference between Year One and Year Three	NVUSD				PUSD			
	2014 Rating Average (n=126)	2015 Rating Average (n=30)	2016 Rating Average (n=103)	Y1 to Y3 Change	2014 Rating Average (n=189)	2015 Rating Average (n=81)	2016 Rating Average (n=137)	Y1 to Y3 Change
The district and schools work collaboratively to achieve goals	3.39	4.17	3.26	-0.13	3.22	2.99	2.80	-0.42
District leaders collaborate with leaders from other districts	3.21	3.48	3.16	-0.05	3.02	2.89	2.91	-0.11
School leaders collaborate with leaders from other schools in the district	3.45	4	3.45	0.00	3.27	3.08	3.10	-0.17
The district allocates time for collaborative work	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
The school organizes time for collaborative work	4.09	4.22	4.07	-0.02	3.36	3.68	3.56	0.20
The district has well-established mechanisms for two-way communication with schools.	2.99	3.70	3.01	0.02	2.8	2.76	2.47	-0.33

Note: Survey responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree.

Several district leaders also commented on the benefit of their collaboration with other districts through the STC. For example, one district leader from Napa said at the end of year three, “I learned a lot in talking with other districts and asking them questions.” Another district leader in Napa simply stated at the end of year three, “It was good to talk to other members of other districts, just to find out where they were on the same topic.”

However, some felt that the opportunities for collaboration could have been strengthened to yield greater benefits for the districts involved. For example, a district leader from Napa commented at the end of the third year on the difficulty of a collaborative with four districts with such different needs and priorities. “It appeared to me about a year and a half into it, they said, this district is all about deeper learning and 21st century skills...but we were working with these other districts that weren’t doing that, and that’s probably why they dropped off. Because it’s like the whole agenda shifted to something that made sense for us, but I don’t know that it did for [name of district] and the other places.” The same district leader elaborated further on this point.

I see how it could have had a benefit. I don’t think it did. I don’t think any of the districts ... Other than maybe ‘we’re going to be able to recruit their Assistant Sup to be our Assistant Sup.’... It’s not unlike any other of our classrooms at [name of school] High. A

whole bunch of kids on day one show up in the room for the teacher and they're 30 different learning profiles. They're all over the map and we don't track anymore. The teacher is challenged with how do I meet the needs of these 30 kids? I think their consultants were challenged with how do I meet the needs of these four districts?...They didn't do enough to see, well, this district ... They tried. This district is really into this and this district is really into that. It never really synced up..."

According to this district leader, the potential of the collaborative to foster learning across districts was hampered by the fact that the districts were so different.

Another district leader in Napa noted the value of the Learning Fair for the cultivation of ideas across districts, but also noted the difficulty of working with districts that have such different needs. "I think it's good to learn from other places and I think when they did the Fair last year in May that was nice to see what other school districts are doing. I think in the collaborative, the only thing I saw is it might be good to choose districts that are working on a similar problem or similar focus because we were more inquiry based, which I think the other districts were more just the standards common core based. There was not always a lot of things in common." Nevertheless, this district leader mentioned that she has stayed in contact with some of the district leaders from the other districts.

District leaders in Pittsburg were similarly mixed about their work with other districts through the collaborative. One district leader noted that, "It was a good thing to see how other districts function and their goals and their visions...learning from other districts. It validates maybe some of what you're doing or it doesn't, what areas that we can change and improve." Another DLT member similarly noted the value of the opportunity to meet with people from other districts in the same position at the DLT meetings. The same DLT member mentioned that one of the most valuable learning opportunities with the other districts, however, took place outside of the STC project, when the district arranged to visit classrooms in Napa. According to the DLT member, "[on this visit] we learned a lot from how a district like Napa has been really putting pieces into play a long time ago. We learned that we need to re-evaluate some of our systems yet again."

Similar to the comments from districts leaders in Napa, another DLT member noted that STC might have been a more valuable experience for Pittsburg if they had been able to focus on the problem most relevant to their district by working individually with the consultants. "I also think that it might have made it more sticky for Pittsburg, if we had focused on our problem. Although, it's not that we weren't allowed to focus on our own problem. I think that's the part where, without that understanding, without that clarity or vision of, 'Why are we at Fullan?' If we can't answer, why we're at Fullan, then regardless of the way that you structure it, we might have had the same outcome. If you had come in and said, 'Okay, what is going to work with just Pittsburg? What is your problem that you really want to address and be able to change?' 3 years from now we can say, 'That outcome changed because we were able to put a system in place and have this level of coherence.'" Comments from this DLT member suggest that the value of the project may have been raised for some districts if they had received more individualized support.

The STC consultants also discussed the benefits of doing this work as a multi-district collaborative. For example, they attributed the visit that the Pittsburg team made to Napa to their work with the Collaborative. “We think that that [the visit] came through probably from the district leaders because they were doing role-alike and they were working so intensively over the three years...So that they had time to get to know each other and to know how they were, because of the sharing that they were doing, how they were structuring different things...We didn't structure some of that, it came from internally from them...What we did try to do was put them in a situation where they would know each other's strengths and what they had to bring in and think about what could be shared.”

Section III: Supports and Barriers to STC Implementation

Countless factors shaped district activities over the course of project, including concurrent implementation of the Common Core and new accountability measures. Participants struggled to disentangle what changes could be attributed to their district's participation in the STC from other variables. In part, this was to be expected. The project was intended to be integrated with other district efforts instead of functioning as a stand-alone intervention, but it did present challenges for our evaluation.

Our longitudinal data, however, allowed us to identify several patterns or themes from the districts' experiences. In this section, we explore how the structure and implementation of the STC supported or constrained progress towards developing the capacity for improvements to teaching in learning. We found five primary conditions that contributed to each district's ability to experience a shift in district culture. These include leadership stability, how well districts and the Fullan team integrated the STC with other district efforts, the degree of ownership of the work that districts assumed, districts' existing organizational culture, and communication about both the district's goals and the project itself. In the conclusion of this report, we consider the implications of these conditions for district efforts to develop system-wide improvement of teaching and learning.

Leadership Stability

The most evident theme that we identified in the data was the impact of leadership continuity or transitions on the districts involved in the collaborative. We have already mentioned leadership turnover throughout our evaluation, so we will not expand on it much here beyond noting that turnover is a fact of life in school districts. In the case of the STC, three of the four initial districts experienced significant turnover in the course of the project's implementation. San Lorenzo's superintendent – the one who had committed the district to the project and worked with the district and Fullan team during the planning phase – retired and a new superintendent was hired in September 2013, shortly before the second DLT meeting of the implementation phase. Alameda's DLT composition altered substantially between the planning phase and Year One, with only three original team members continuing. The superintendent moved to another district during the summer of 2014, and the district withdrew from the project prior to the start of the second year after a new superintendent was hired. While Pittsburg's leadership team had been fairly stable at the start of our project, the superintendent retired at the end of the 2013-14 school year. In Years Two and Three, there were several additional central office leadership changes in Pittsburg.

As noted throughout our report, it appears that these transitions presented a barrier to implementation, while Napa benefited from leadership stability. Yet transitions are something to anticipate, a point we address in our recommendation that future efforts like the STC incorporate support for leadership

turnover into their design.

Integrating the STC with Existing District Goals and Initiatives: Different Approaches, Different trajectories

The STC theory of action assumes that members at all levels of the district system must develop a common vision before they can ensure all students consistently have access to high quality instruction to improve learning outcomes. Rather than impose external structures or a set of step-by-step directions, however, the Fullan team intentionally designed the collaborative to encourage districts to develop their own goals and strategies for meeting them. Our findings indicate that districts' first year trajectories varied depending on whether they entered the project seeking to *develop* goals for system transformation – or whether they viewed the collaborative as an opportunity to build off existing priorities to *accelerate* the rate of change.

In their April 2014 interviews, respondents from Pittsburg and Napa spoke about selecting goals that capitalized on existing district efforts. Accordingly, district leadership teams were able to direct more attention in the planning stages and first year of implementation towards refining goals, communicating them with the sites, and examining how district work could further help them attain their goals. In the case of Napa, this was evident in their decision to focus on their “Plan on a Page,” including how it connected with pieces such as professional development, site goals, and personnel evaluations.

In Pittsburg, responses from many participants suggest that the educators and administrators initially used their STC time to focus on the existing Pittsburg Learning Model and emphasizing collaboration as a key component of the model. As we discuss, however, PUSD hired a new superintendent in the summer of 2014, who then worked with her cabinet and other stakeholders to revisit their vision during the development of their strategic plan, “Vision 2027.” We observed little evidence that the Pittsburg leadership team and Fullan consultants discussed how the new vision and strategic plan might have been integrated into their existing work with the collaborative. Again, this suggests that the design of future initiatives such as the STC might benefit from explicit plans about how to incorporate new initiatives and approaches into the STC work when leadership changes occur. For Pittsburg participants, the transition appeared to have hampered their momentum.

Leadership transitions were not the only reason that DLTs might opt to focus on establishing new district goals. The STC attempted to support the implementation of the Common Core State Standards in a way that was pragmatic (reducing so-called “initiative fatigue”) and strategic for fostering coherence, and at the district leadership level, the STC sessions provided several opportunities for district teams to develop their LCAP around a coherent set of goals. In the case of Pittsburg, one administrator said:

[The STC] helped nail down some things and helped...definitely with regards to getting an LCAP put together. Huge strategic plan. A lot of districts kind of fell apart with it, but because we had those two years of kind of working together on getting clear, naming some common goals and all of that, I think it accelerated it, or it really helped us being able to get something down on paper (interview, June 2015).

While some districts approached the STC as a way to tighten current goals and facilitate LCAP development, others used the state-mandated LCAP feedback process to determine what goals would guide district work during remainder of the collaborative and ideally, beyond. When San Lorenzo hired a new superintendent in September 2013, for example, the district opted to use the stakeholder feedback as a way to select new goals and write a new strategic plan. As one central office administrator said, “We decided that all of our goals will relate to our LCAP goals...When the LCAP became imposed...[our new superintendent] took that opportunity to make the LCAP our vehicle for determining our district goals” (interview, April 2014).

Both approaches – using the project to develop a focus or accelerate efforts to implement existing goals – are consistent with the STC’s purpose of fostering a sustained, system-wide focus on instruction for deep learning and improved achievement. Ultimately, our findings suggest that districts leveraged their work in different ways. Accordingly, districts and the Fullan team should anticipate how the different approaches will likely alter the rate of change, particularly in the first year.

District ownership of the work was essential

Ultimately, a risk of working with external consultants is the tendency to assume they are the ones responsible for the success or failure of a project. In Year 1, participants from all four district teams described a minimal degree of “ownership” of the STC work in the central office. The Fullan consultants designed the sessions, and while each district had a “point person” for communicating with the Fullan team, the project did not explicitly task a leader or group of leaders with clear responsibility for continuing the work between sessions. While the administrators described valuing the DLT and SLT sessions, without a few individuals who were expressly given the responsibility of weaving STC work into other district decisions and activities, the work of integrating their efforts generally depended on the individual commitment or capacity of site and district leaders. This resulted in uneven implementation.

At the site level, some SLT members such as teacher leaders and principals reported that they were unsure who to contact when they needed clarification about “assignments” or other STC items. In a spring 2015 site-level focus group, one Pittsburg teacher said, “There was no one I could contact to get clarification.” His colleague added “If there’s a go-to person that understands everything and is aware of everything that you can contact, I think there would not be nearly as much confusion and misunderstandings as there has been” (focus group, April 2015). One participant who served on both the district and site leadership teams commented that the lack of ownership often meant that they did not follow up on STC assignments or activities until the week before the next meeting.

Nobody ever said, "I don't want to do this work," or "I don't believe in this work," or "This isn't the right work," nobody ever said that. It was just like, "We had a great meeting in Napa, what do we do to bring that back?"... "Oh shoot, we haven't really debriefed when we talked about that in Napa." Now we're set to go again and there was one where [name of fellow DLT member] missed, and I was like, "I'm jealous because I'm embarrassed to go back this time because we haven't followed up on the work from last time and that's not how any of us got to where we are today," so that was hard.

Comments from district and site leaders indicate the importance of building structures to ensure continuity of the work in between sessions.

By the end of the second year, Napa administrators recognized that merely attending the quarterly sessions and completing their assignments the week before the meeting was limiting the impact of the STC work. If they were to make the most of the program, they would have to take ownership and integrate the collaborative's work with their ongoing efforts. For example, Napa was also working with several other consultants on various district improvement efforts. The district leadership team recognized that it was not just the Fullan team's responsibility to create a coherent system. One participant noted, "We weren't owning the work. In other words, we want *you* [Fullan's team] to change and modify it for us, but we're not really going to own the product of the result or anything, which you really can't do..." (interview, June 2015). Assuming greater ownership demanded more of their attention, but also had its advantages. At the end of the project, one DLT member noted that it took more work to integrate the pieces, but it was up to them to get the most out of the project:

It's more of a challenge, but it's sort of like you get your voice and then you realize, "Wait a minute guys, let's step up to this...It's the leading from the middle and that you can't wait for the superintendent to do everything, you can't wait for [Fullan team leader] to do everything (interview, April 2016).

As a result, Napa initiated a meeting with the STC consultants, another leadership consulting partner, and representatives from the New Tech Network in May 2015. As one DLT member remembered it, they had "more people in the room saying 'Wait a minute, we need to OWN this; we need to own the work. We need to align it. This is *our* responsibility. If we don't do this, then it's being done *unto* us, and when [the Fullan team] leaves, we'll have nothing" (interview, June 2016).

As discussed earlier, the team from Napa began to co-plan and co-present the meeting content in the third year of the project. According to one member of the DLT, this change was initiated by Napa. , "I think we said, 'We'd like to co-create those agendas so that we're using our language and people know that we're all in this together. It wasn't just people on the outside coming in and telling our people what to do...This is what we need, and this is what got delivered."

In addition, between the spring of Year 2 and fall of Year 3, district leaders proposed linking all three projects so that they could build greater coherence. For example, several administrators wrote a professional development plan for the year called "Transformational Learning Workshops" (TLWs), to integrate the various strand of work in the district.

It became more personal for us. [The Fullan team] were always very flexible about checking back with us, the feedback from our folks and when we began to say that we are making progress, but if you *really* want to make the next steps... We had several, three-way phone conferences with New Tech network and the Napa Alliance and the Fullan folks.

They also began holding additional sessions between the official meetings with the Fullan team. A Fullan facilitator described how the supplementary sessions accelerated change and fostered coherence:

The meetings that they were having in between were with a principal and one person from the school. Whatever we were going to work on in the *large* group sessions [quarterly SLT sessions], they did a pre-cursor of it with that that group so that they were skilled in how to use the protocol. They had a dry run and experience at working through it...So we ended up having people who could serve as good facilitators for their own schools...Also, it very much tied into what the school was working on between the sessions.

Our respondents indicate that Napa's increased ownership and collaboration with program facilitators became a turning point for the district, as evidenced by reports of greater attendance in the third year of the SLT meetings. Participants in Napa also reported that more participants felt the content of the sessions directly related to the district's needs. A DLT member who had been frustrated by what he perceived as "canned" content during Years 1 and 2 was satisfied by the work in Year 3, especially because of the greater relevance to Napa's goals and issues:

In the last two TLWs, everybody said, "Oh my gosh, it's so much better. What makes the difference?" It's like the difference is we're now finally starting to own the learning ourselves up here, and co-leading it and co-planning it...

Another DLT member said she appreciated that co-planning allowed principals to get a sense of the bigger picture, which made it easier to develop action plans in between formal sessions.

We could fill in those in between meetings, those principal meetings. I mean we're now at a place, we're going to be co-planning more, so we know where the vision's going. [In prior years], I felt like we weren't exactly sure what was going to be on the agenda until we *got* the agenda, which was, like, three weeks before the thing. By that time, it was too late, and we couldn't front load it with the principals' meeting, which would have been good for us to do.

A long-serving Napa DLT member said that the last year of the project was probably their best year in the collaborative because the STC meetings were "personalized for our district. Again, our principals and sites [were] more involved in those best practices and strategies, inquiry-based learning, but I think it takes time for things to start clicking,"

The Fullan team also commented on the growth in Napa in the third year. In an interview with the Fullan team (April 2016), one facilitator commented that the team made an extra trip during the summer to work with the district teams from both Napa and Pittsburg:

...When we arrived, we found at Napa had already had a pre-meeting to make sure that they had all of their thoughts in order. So they really had a whole strategy that they wanted to work with us on so that they would really be building that coherence across

their whole system, and so they redesigned how they were doing their principals meetings so that they were all connected. They re-designed how they would meet between sessions that we were running. They would offer one in between each so that there was continuity, so they had a number of strategies, and we worked with them across the year to make sure that it was much more.

Ultimately, Napa’s increased ownership of the STC work – their sense of responsibility for ensuring the project fully, coherently implemented – was a key contributor to the progress they reported.

Existing organizational culture

No reform operates in a vacuum, and a district’s organizational culture impacts the ability of leaders to develop shared goals. Our research team identified three specific aspects of district culture that impacted the work: the degree to which people reported that their districts operated in separate “silos” prior to the start of the project, the value districts placed on innovation and autonomy at school sites, and the level of trust between the administration and teachers. In this section, we elaborate on these factors.

Silos

The Fullan consultants emphasized “systems thinking” as a core component of work within the project, yet many participants described existing “silos” or “fragmentation” within their districts as a barrier to developing shared goals. The STC was designed to reduce or eliminate fragmentation and isolation between schools and district departments by developing system-wide goals and emphasizing vertical and horizontal collaboration. Yet districts’ initial degree of fragmentation influenced the rate at which participants reported the development of greater coherence.

In Napa, for instance, the district leaders generally reported that the STC helped foster greater coherence, despite having a history of fragmentation at the project outset. For example, some participants reported that leaders in the NVUSD still found it challenging to connect the work of the Human Resources department with the development of system-wide instructional capacity. Yet hiring, placing, and evaluating a system’s personnel is directly related to capacity. As one DLT member said in a 2015 interview, however, the disconnect between the district’s departments persisted through year two of the project.

...To a large extent, this initiative has been carried by the instructional division and in a very formal way. Napa Unified like many organizations, divides their world between instruction and operational systems, and in Napa, Human Resources falls on the operational side more often than it falls on the instructional side, so there’s a little bit of a disconnect there. I know there is some synergistic work done in instruction, and I’m not a part of that...So, the linkage with HR is weakening.

At the same time, many participants described increased coherence in Napa, and there is substantial evidence throughout this report that suggests NVUSD was able to use their goals from the “Plan on the Page,” along with more collaboration to break down silos. Yet, traces of Napa’s history of what one DLT member described as “fiefdoms” still hindered coherence at the

central office. Another Napa administrator agreed with the comment above, providing examples of the challenges created by the silos within the district.

So one thing is that I have not seen enough from Michael Fullan's work is developing a system among the district office. The reason I say that is Human Resources operates on their own; business operates on their own; technology is doing...I'm not sure what they're doing, so you have these silos within a district system that often put a lot of roadblocks for instruction to get results...For example, right now we're at a standstill in hiring teachers just because we're in a transition of new HR people, but we're also at a standstill because our next board meeting's not until July 23 where we can't post any jobs or we can't open up any jobs until the board gives their approval, even though we know we have 15 people to hire...But between now and July 23, we can't do anything until the board says yes, and then once we say yes, then we can post them on Ed Join. In the meantime, we're losing people out there getting jobs, so what's going to happen is July 23, you know we're going to start, they're going to be posted and then we're going to be hiring in August. So that's one example...The other one is technology, um, our kids should have computers ready that first day of school in August. That won't happen. I don't know why. But it won't happen.

Pittsburg (along with San Lorenzo) also described cultures where the central office was fragmented along departmental and school lines. In a Year 1 interview, one Pittsburg DLT member said he initially hoped that participation in the STC project would increase central office cohesion.

That's part of our struggle as a system right now, because we've been very siloed, like *extremely*. So as a principal we would come in, and I remember last year, it was almost like a cartoon: What can you catch that's falling from the air, because Special Ed is going to do this for us, and ELD is going to do this for us. Science is going to do this for us. It was like, "Whoa, overload!"...That silo continued. I *do* think that the [STC] work inspired that and encouraged that and supported that, I do think that. I think that that was happening at some of our *sites*, like I said. For me it was already happening, so when I read [about the STC], I was relieved...because when I saw that, I was like, "All right, this is going to be right in line with what we're doing."

By the final year, however, Pittsburg was still grappling with the tendency to rely on departmental "experts" and a sense of territorialism. Yet the STC fostered an awareness that administrators should work to reduce that kind of mindset. As one DLT member described cabinet meetings:

Everybody's going, "Well, the superintendent needs to understand that we're all experts in what we do."...Well, yes, but how do we integrate all of that? How do we bring this so it's a cohesive product? We haven't, it's been very siloed, so that's the work we're doing right now: To take it *out* of silos, and [consider] how do we integrate those things?

Despite the fact that a history of departmentalization made systems coherence more difficult, the collaborative fostered conversations about the importance of addressing it. By bringing district

leadership teams beyond the superintendent's "cabinet" to the STC sessions, for instance, the project built in opportunities for administrators (and in some cases, teachers and union reps) to consider how the pieces could be coordinated. Napa, for instance, reorganized some of their central office roles and reporting structures so that greater communication could happen between departments. Leaders like Michael Fullan and Meredith Honig have cautioned that changing "Org Charts," does not necessarily translate to greater coherence. In the case of Napa, however, DLT members noted that shifts in the structure of the district office were developed specifically to address the silos observed during STC conversations.

Cultures that emphasize local innovation

As mentioned previously, throughout the project, the STC facilitators emphasized a systems perspective. Yet administrators and teachers from two of the four districts described a tension between an existing culture that sought to balance *site-based* autonomy and innovation with coherent, system-wide goals. The concepts are not mutually exclusive. Many participants described the possibility of having the same goals district-wide while allowing schools or teachers to use different strategies to attain the goals. As a Pittsburg administrator commented, it is possible for district goals to "feed into each school, having the same umbrella of an instructional framework, but also make it their own and recognize, 'We're part of a system, but we are an individual site. [Therefore], this is what we have going on, and this is how it fits into the district goals.'" A site administrator also agreed, adding:

I think that making that transformation at each site has been a work in progress. You can see it in the graphics that it's happening at each site. It might look a little different in the *process* that it's being used, like I'm sure at [school name], when you analyze data, it's different from how we analyze it at [school name], but we're getting some of the same results from it and using it in a similar fashion (SLT focus group, April 2014).

As discussed earlier, Napa Valley is a large district with numerous magnet and dependent charter schools. During the first year, one focus group participant said that shared goals were a work in progress that he hoped the collaborative would foster through the on-going conversations about the district's four goals. Yet when describing the current degree of shared vision, he said:

...I feel like we still don't have one; everyone is doing their own thing. And everyone's celebrated, and that's great, but...where do we come together? Where's our research base, you know, the connection? How can we truly collaborate across the district – elementary, middle, and high school? Where's our common link? And I think that by bringing everyone together and having all these days where we have every school in the district together...[trails off]...We haven't got there yet.

By the end of the project, however, Napa appears to have addressed this challenge directly through the implementation of protocols and practices like the "agnostic" rubric described earlier.

The STC fostered conversations about the balance at a time when California was highlighting local flexibility in their accountability and fiscal plans. Again highlighting the fine line between "coherence" and "standardization," another Napa focus participant questioned whether coherence is preferable:

...but as a counter position, is the fact that we have so many different kinds of schools to serve all the different kinds of children we have with all their different needs...Is that, in and of itself, a strength in our district – the fact that parents can say ‘I love the fact that your school does that, I want my kid to go there’ or ‘I love the fact that your school does that.’? In other words, I don’t want those two schools to look the same, because then I don’t have choice (focus group, April 2014).

The tension between local flexibility and systemness was noted by first-year participants from Alameda, as well. Although their withdrawal from the project precludes us from drawing conclusions about how much this impacted their attempts to decrease fragmentation, it further suggests that district contexts that encourage or have historical cultures of local autonomy must carefully work to address how the central office and sites negotiate the balance between flexibility and “systemness.”

Trust

Each district entered the collaborative with varying levels of perceived trust between the central office and sites, especially among teachers. This emerged as a factor that influenced participating districts’ ability to develop and implement shared goals. Our findings echo what Johnson et al. (2015) found in their study of five large, urban school districts attempting to develop coherence. As the authors note, although establishing reciprocal relationships and trust between the central office and the schools were key supports for district coherence, district leaders tended to overlook the importance of fostering relationships.

As we described earlier, Napa Valley Unified, included the union leadership on their district leadership team from the outset of the project. As one administrator commented in discussing the district leadership team’s work in the planning stages for Year 1, “Whenever we have an opportunity...to turn our attention away from a grievance or an injury or a dismissal and have a formal opportunity to turn our attention to something instructional, *that’s* a highlight. So that’s very much been a highlight of our work.” A union leader added that they believed having a “seat at the table” benefitted the administration, too, saying, “It was a growth for us, sitting there with the district people, because we were changing ideas, *doing* things.” Consistent with DLT reports, focus group participants from Napa did not describe challenges related to trust.

Starting in the first year of the project, Pittsburg included some site administrators from three school sites on their DLT – one elementary, one middle school, and one (eventually two) representative from the comprehensive high school. After observing Napa’s inclusion of two certificated union leaders during the first year, Pittsburg also decided to bring in its union representative in Year 2. Yet trust, especially during the leadership transition, was described as a challenge by six different principals and teachers in our focus group and individual interviews in Pittsburg. In some cases, participants described concerns about the degree of respect or input teachers were given. While horizontal collaboration between schools appeared to have improved, vertical communication may have suffered.

Notably, mistrust, especially between teachers and the central office were significant barriers for San Lorenzo and Alameda, issues that participants described as pre-dating the Fullan project. Given that

three of the four districts experienced this as a barrier, trust appears to be an important contextual feature for projects like the STC to consider in their design.

Communication played a critical role on many levels

The STC's concurrent implementation of the Common Core complemented an ongoing focus on instructional practices for deeper learning, a goal of the STC project. At each session, the Fullan leaders reminded participants the STC was not a separate reform; it was intended to build collective capacity throughout the system. Yet some respondents described the STC as an "add-on" or distraction. Our findings suggest that communication about the purpose of participation within the collaborative and how different initiatives and district efforts related to the overarching goals warranted greater attention. Furthermore, participants reported that their districts would have benefited from additional, strategic communication between sessions.

Communicating to create a shared understanding of the STC

Leaders from Pittsburg and Napa reported that they intentionally integrated the STC with existing practices and reforms, but the connection was less evident to those at the site level. Teachers described feeling overwhelmed by initiatives or frustrated by the perception that the STC sessions and assignments were "extra" work. A Napa teacher lamented that her inbox was overflowing with emails that outlined new expectations and responsibilities, adding that she was "treading water" to keep up with all of the changes (focus group, April 2014). A Pittsburg principal described the new standards, assessments, and the STC as disjointed: "It's just the subdividing of so many things, like they're trying to do so many things that they're not doing much well...I feel like I'm being pulled in a million different directions, where it would be nice to just focus on Fullan and let stuff go from there" (interview, March 2015).

In Year 1 in particular, many participants, especially teachers and principals, reported that they were unclear about the goals and desired outcomes for the project. The Fullan consultants had designed the project to be open to local needs and interests, hoping that districts would co-construct the work over time. Yet a Pittsburg principal noted, "But even then, we weren't completely clear. Even though [name] had envisioned maybe how to use it, and maybe she didn't, she seemed like she did, we as principals were like ... after the first couple sessions, we still were like, 'Where is this going?'" Two years later, a DLT member who had also served on a School Leadership team said, "That's where we may have missed it, missed the mark, is that not everyone, even maybe at this point...not everybody could articulate [the purpose of the project] to you throughout our system. That's just work that has to be done" (interview, PUSD, April 2016).

At the end of the project, one Pittsburg site administrator claimed that principals essentially had to communicate connections from their personal interpretations of the work:

...but even until now as an elementary principal – there's eight of us – if you asked all eight individually the last two years how did we approach it, not one of us would give you the same answer. Not one of us, because you're right [speaking to another principal], the intent for all this, or *the why* was not clear. We had to create like, "Well,

why are we doing this? How can we make it more meaningful?" so we each came in with a different perspective (interview, April 2016).

Pittsburg was not alone in their struggle to make the connections evident to their teachers. As a Napa DLT member observed during a June 2015 interview:

In the district office, we get it, because we are always around it. I think the principals have a pretty good understanding of the key things. But I think there are still gaps with the teachers. I don't know that the teachers see the connections. Unless we help them through communicating focus and just being really clear on what's "have to do" and "maybe you could do if you have time." That's an area we need to work on.

This is, perhaps, a simple way to increase the likelihood that coherence develops in an approach like the STC. One DLT member from Napa said that being intentional about communication does not have to be burdensome:

I think what it could be if we were to capitalize on the project well is to be more clear about the goals and expectations of what we're doing, to communicate better every time we do something, about, "*This* is why we're doing it; *this* is how it fits in the system...Having a common understanding of it.

The same respondent noted that those who attended the Fullan meetings developed clarity over time, even if it had been a barrier in the past. "I think that people who went to the Fullan training get that, at the elementary schools. They absolutely get that (interview, April 2016)." Yet not all district teachers and other personnel attend the quarterly sessions, and they depend on DLT and SLT members to communicate the purpose and key principles.

Several district administrators suggest that more direct communication at the project outset would have increased buy-in at the site level. In Year 2, a Pittsburg principal said, "...Because we have participated [in the quarterly meetings], we thought we were being transparent...but we found out towards the end that our teachers weren't clear on that piece of the work....it hasn't been as clear as we would all like it to be" (Interview, June 2015). A year later, another PUSD site administrator came to the same general conclusion about their communication:

...That gets at the heart of one of the tensions with reform efforts, which is teachers who are leaving the classroom for a day when they are facing so many different changes... They are looking for things that directly relate to their classroom practice, whereas the Fullan work as it was described in the first year really is more of the systems piece, but with this lack of clarity about where the program would go over three years, that seemed to affect teacher buy-in from what we heard (interview, May 2016).

The Fullan consultants acknowledged the need for more communication about the project's purpose and the interactions between the STC and district activities. One of the Fullan coordinators said that

during the project, they learned the importance of “explicitness” in their implementation. Similarly, one Napa DLT told us that it was the district’s job to “connect the dots” for teachers.

In fact, frustration about the sporadic communication with the Fullan team about the trajectory for the project’s work, and the district’s subsequent inability to communicate the “big picture” clearly with their sites served as a catalyst for changes in the final year. Napa was proactive in addressing this design issue, something we did not observe in the other participating districts.

Even when the district leadership team is clear about the purpose of the project and how district work is connected, site-level staff might not be. Some Pittsburg and Napa DLT members expressed confusion about the STC, well into the project. In June 2015, for example, a Napa DLT member said, “I felt like I didn’t know what the long range outcomes were or deliverables would be, so I wasn’t, I think we could have planned better together.” Likewise, in Pittsburg, a district leader said:

To this day, and [name] and I go back and forth, but I’m still like...“Is it just me?” To be honest, if you talk here with a lot of my colleagues, we are all very unclear still to this day. It’s not that the individual trainings or the workshops weren’t helpful...Going back to what the purpose was of the Fullan project, so to speak, I still think to this day it’s very unclear in terms of what we were expecting to accomplish. I know that’s rather general, but...that’s what the first thing that just came to mind (interview, April 2016).

Accordingly, a Pittsburg cabinet member claimed that the launch of the project could include more direct communication about why districts were investing in a multi-year project that brought so many personnel together. Asked if there were there was something other districts might learn from their experiences, she said:

I think being really clear on what it is that a district wanted to get out of it. If it was, we would have a common set of protocols that we use in all of our meetings or we’re going to have a common way of talking about the transition to Common Core, or how we are narrowing it down...Then whoever was sort of leading that work in curriculum department or whatever would continually use those tools in their meetings or things as well, too. I think that we would have taken hold a little bit deeper around it.

Likewise, a Pittsburg DLT member suggested that from the outset of this kind of collaborative, districts would benefit from communicating the big picture and a general trajectory for the project, something like a “Three year plan. Even if you don’t want to give us the details, what are you expecting after the first year? And then how does it tie into the second year? What are you expecting of the second year? And tying to the third year...”

Clear communication about how the project and district efforts are related would help districts to build greater coherence because members of the system could then focus on integrating their work. One Pittsburg principal summarized the critical role of communication in crafting a clear vision, “We need a clear vision of how all those pieces connect, and what our place is in relation to that vision, and what our separate piece is within the system, so that we can take care of that piece and then come back together and talk about where everybody else stands.”

Communication between sessions

In addition to communicating an understanding about the project, the Fullan consultants and district leadership teams both grappled with how to structure communication between meetings. First, it is important to note that because the project was primarily organized by external consultants, districts were responsible for communicating with sites between sessions. Nevertheless, DLT members noted that the project would have been more effective if additional communication with the Fullan consultants between sessions had been included within the STC design. As one Fullan consultant noted:

It's what they are doing between the sessions that's important. Yes, we touch in with them, but it's that they're always applying the learning in a meaningful way, whether they're a district person or a school person. So it's those cycles – or “learning loops” as we call them – that are really critical. Otherwise, if you just show up every few months, nothing will ever happen or change...(interview, April 2016).

In the case of Napa Valley Unified, several central office administrators sought to reinforce the four goals throughout the year. By the time our research team visited the district office in May 2014, the directors of elementary and secondary education had developed a calendar for their professional development (PD) and principal meetings that provided regular opportunities to revisit specific aspects of the goals, each listed at the top of the calendar overview. Furthermore, each goal was included in the principal evaluations to ensure the goals remained an ongoing focus. As the superintendent said, “The PD calendar is an example of the directors trying to foster the communication between meetings. So is the fact that the goals are part of the principal evaluations...keeps it on their radar.” As a Fullan consultant observed:

It takes time for people to connect the dots and see the relevance for themselves and the school and their kids in the classroom. I think we always hope it's going to happen sooner than later, and it just takes time for that to happen, but certainly as we saw that taking place over time. And it happens faster in a district like Napa...[where] they're facilitating it in between the sessions. It really starts to take off (interview, April 2016).

Yet reports of how clear Napa communicated with sites varied between respondents. Some DLT members offered concrete examples of strategic communication efforts. Others felt that in between sessions the district was less effective at communicating the vision and approach to the work. As one administrator noted, “[Principals] have to commit to engaging an ongoing sense-making of the connections between the work and facilitating the sense-making with the schools...NVUSD's job is to create...the opportunity for human beings to make sense of what's going on. And they didn't do that. They didn't do that” (interview, June 2015).

Participants in Pittsburg, along with Alameda and San Lorenzo, reported that implementation was impeded by the lack of structures to ensure more communication between the sessions. As one focus group participant said, “Having 3 months of no communication [about the STC] whatsoever and then coming back, that knowledge and that drive is lost” (PUSD, March 2015). Agreeing, another SLT member added, “There's no follow through for any of it. It's like, ‘Okay, you got this information, see you in 3

months, remember the homework'...So it's kind of like, 'Well, then I'm just going to show up;' so it loses its value" (focus group, March 2015). Asked if they would recommend the STC approach to other districts, one principal said it "might be worth it if they met once per month...because the drawback is the time in between the meeting...You lose that fire, that momentum. Then it's lost, and then you have to come back again to do the same process" (PUSD Focus Group 2015).

Between the loss of momentum from the central office leadership transitions and limited infrastructure for communication about the STC between sessions, DLT members in Pittsburg recognized missed opportunities for deeper implementation.

Because I think where we lost motivation on our end, is the *in between*. If you don't have people really doing that...There is no communication in between the sessions...It can feel like a "drop in" moment of time if you don't have someone at the school site levels and at the central office embedding those elements in things. "Oh, wait, we've got some homework because this coming next week" versus being embedded in. I think that's really on the districts to do that up front and make sure that they're clear on that...I don't think we did a good job of that in Pittsburg at all (interview, DLT member, April 2016).

Communication with teachers not participating in SLTs

One potential gap in implementation is between the SLTs and teachers who did not attend the quarterly Fullan meeting. Non-SLT members depended on their site's teams to bring back information and work with them on implementation. The STC attempted to facilitate ongoing communication between meetings in a variety of ways. First, the consultants assigned "homework" assignments for participants in between sessions. Often, this homework included activities that encouraged site-wide engagement. Second, principals were asked to incorporate content in faculty or grade-level/departmental meetings after the SLT sessions.

Although the consultants told teams to bring back what they had learned or worked on with their sites, they did not impose guidelines about what method leaders should use. Furthermore, given the day-to-day demands on teachers and administrators, districts and sites varied in their approach to communicating the goals between meetings. Unsurprisingly, this influenced how well participants understood the goals and how district activities connected.

As a result, districts – and schools within districts – varied in their approaches to.... In some cases, the principal took responsibility for communication. In others, the site administrators asked the teachers from the leadership teams to present the information to their colleagues. Although we asked participants in our focus groups to share *how* they communicated the goals and content from the sessions to the rest of their staff, it is difficult to draw conclusions about the representativeness of their approaches. What follows are examples of communication strategies described by district or school leadership team members.

In our focus groups and principal interviews, many SLT members expressed a desire to serve as a buffer between the onslaught of reforms and changes and their teachers. Therefore, administrators frequently

mentioned that they did not refer to the work of the STC or “Fullan Project” (as some participants referred to it) by name. This made it difficult to ask teachers who were not directly involved in the project about the perceived impact of the STC – or even what activities were related to the project – but it does not mean that change was not happening. In fact, the decision to *not* attribute activities or goals to the STC was often associated with a sense that it was effective leadership aligned with the project’s theory of action. As one principal said, “Administratively, we have not felt any temptation or need to familiarize our staff with Fullan...We believe that the simpler you keep it for teachers, the more focused on just a few goals, the better results that you get.” Her colleague agreed, adding:

Some schools intentionally don’t refer to it as the Fullan project, because then it has the potential to become just like another initiative...their hope is that these sort of strategies and ideas around coherence in the district will persist....some leaders have just not referred to it as a separate thing but as part of what they're already doing or a way of approaching Common Core implementation, something along those lines (SLT focus group, NVUSD, March 2015).

Bringing more stakeholders (like bargaining units) into the conversation

Multiple participants acknowledged the need to communicate about goals with a broad group of stakeholders. In this section, we highlight a few themes identified by respondents, from inclusion of the union leadership to school boards.

At the outset of the project, districts identified a small team of administrators to include in the “district leadership team” for the collaborative. The researchers – and soon, other districts – noted that NVUSD was the only participating district that included two representatives of the certificated employee union on their DLT. One DLT member recalled that the decision was made early in the process, and both he and the union representatives indicated that they found it particularly effective to carpool to the quarterly district and school leadership meetings, as the ride allowed them to discuss key issues in a constructive manner. The DLT member noted, “[W]henever we have an opportunity to turn our attention away from a grievance or an injury or a dismissal and have a formal opportunity to turn our attention to something instructional, that's a highlight.”

In Napa Valley, there was also evidence that the district leaders were responsive to feedback from principals and teachers. In one particularly significant development, the principals requested greater clarification about the district goals, and the district responded by generating a one-page summary of the goals. The superintendent brought that sheet into our interview, and other district leaders and focus group participants referenced it in their responses. One DLT member was quick to credit the principals for this communication strategy: “After the principals said, ‘You have [given us too] much to do. You’re not being clear with us,’ then we said, ‘Okay, these are what we're committed to. This is what we're focused on. And so it just helped us message...’ (interview, May 2014).

Yet while Napa Valley included the certificated union on their DLT, no participants in the district spoke of intentional communication with the classified staff in the development or dissemination of their goals. One Pittsburg cabinet member reflected:

I think an area of growth for us is when you say “staff,” that makes me think beyond

teachers...[W]e've not branched out or reached out nearly as clearly to classified staff, to school board members, and to parents. So those would be three constituent groups that need better understanding.

If a system is to develop coherence, it is critical that all members must be able to articulate the shared vision and their role in advancing their goals, but our findings suggest that the design and implementation of the STC could have further extended the work to include other stakeholders like classified employees, or as several participants also noted, board members. One principal from Pittsburg felt as if the coherence building would have been easier if the central office had included their board in more conversations about the STC, but instead described a "disconnect" with the board (interview, February 2015). A DLT member, reflecting back on the project at the end of Year Three similarly noted the importance of greater communication about the project with their school board.

Now that I'm reflecting on it, it would have been good to maybe have had them attend some of the sessions or even understand the background. That, when the marching orders are given to the Superintendent, there would have been an understanding about, what we were working on.

The same DLT member added that this type of board inclusion might have reduced the disruption when the superintendent and several central office leaders changed. Because the board selects new superintendents, this participant noted, they could emphasize the importance of continuing the work. But without including them in the STC, we heard only two participants suggest that their boards knew anything about the STC beyond its costs. As one Napa administrator noted, that meant that sometimes the board could be working on its own goals, decreasing the likelihood of coherence.

Section IV: Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

As we noted at the beginning of this study, the STC offers an alternative to the model of school improvement that has prevailed over the past 40 years. At its core, the STC model is structured to support growth in organizational capacity for creating high quality instructional regimes through professionalization, transparency, collaboration, and intense focus on and commitment to few, critical education goals. What this approach to school improvement attempts to replace is a reform strategy driven by top-down intervention programs—primarily through a combination of targeted funding streams and regulations.

In contrast to the top-down intervention approach, the two fundamental precepts and approaches to whole system change are that 1) continuous professional learning, coaching and mentoring of key administrators and teacher leaders over multiple years is essential to the achievement of whole systems change; and that 2) building relationships and a collaborative culture is fundamental to supporting the capacity and sustainability of whole systems change.

Our overall conclusion about the STC model is that it is a promising approach to school improvement, particularly large-scale improvement, and is supported by a growing body of research literature as well as evidence from the STC project. The most important contribution of this study is that it will provide policymakers and practitioners with a much deeper and more complete understanding of the necessary conditions for whole system change to occur, both in terms of the reform’s design and in the district context. In contrast to past, one-dimensional policy strategies promulgated by state and federal lawmakers, whole system change relies on multi-dimensional, aligned, and coherent strategies for system transformation.

In previous sections of this report, we discuss how STC was operationalized—building the capacity for whole system change and its sustainability. It entails changing habits of the heart and mind, developing professional norms and new ways of thinking about teaching and learning. Earlier in the report we also discuss both the opportunities and barriers to whole system change as we observed them play out in the STC project over three years. The following key findings and recommendations are based on our individual and focus groups interviews with teachers, school and district leaders, and data collected

through an annual survey (discussed in detail in the Methodology section).

Key Findings

- STC is a promising approach to building strong and effective organizations by creating conditions that can foster deep change in schools and districts. Effective school districts are organizations whose members are tied together by common norms, common purposes, common methods, and common language.
- Cross-district collaboration is a valuable tool for building professional communities on a larger scale than just the school or district. However, collaboration can take many forms—from the superficial and ritual to shared learning and to the development of strong professional cultures.
- Whole systems change is unlikely to occur in two or three years. Transforming organizational cultures, especially of schools that are so deeply embedded in a set of practices and understandings that have changed little since World War II, is a long-term process that needs constant nurturing and attention.
- In light of the above, continuity and stability are critical conditions for whole system change.
- Continuity between sessions is an important element to sustain school and district engagement in systems transformation.
- In addition, a wide range of stakeholders must be involved in this work. Importantly, school boards need to be informed about STC and regularly briefed on the process.
- Finally, it is important to have a strong system of communication among district and school leaders in order to engage teachers and administrators at the school site.

Issues for further Study

We do not intend this study to be a summative evaluation of an embedded systems change intervention, but rather an exploratory study of systems change with the goal of building high-quality instructional systems. This study is intended to open the organizational black box of schooling to illuminate the conditions and processes that shape school organizational cultures. Our findings, as noted above, are not surprising, they reify what we know from other, similar research on school change. The study also raises some important questions that we cannot fully answer at this time. The reasons for that have to do with the project's time-frame and the depth of change sought by this intervention. As we noted earlier in the study, three years is not enough time to effect changes of the magnitude that systems transformation requires. There are no "on/off" switches to change deeply held beliefs about teaching and learning or to alter the culture of schooling—a deeply entrenched culture that has not changed in 100 years. But, policy makers, practitioners, and the public want change, and they usually want it immediately.

In addition to the findings and recommendations that we discuss, we have also identified some issues and tensions that emerged from the project that we are unable to fully address in this paper. We simply do not have sufficient data to draw clear conclusions. These are 1) coherence and "systemness," 2) leadership capacity vs. instructional capacity, 3) could school districts achieve on their own what one district achieved without the Fullan intervention, 4) might CA's changes in accountability, standards, assessment, and finance be convergent issues around which to build system coherence?

Coherence and “Systemness.” As discussed earlier in this paper, coherence and systemness are the core principles of high quality instruction. Coherence simply means that districts need to have consistent goals and a strong professional core to implement those goals. It also requires a strong system of instructional support to provide teachers and administrators with the necessary tools to shape effective instructional strategies. Among the two districts—Napa and Pittsburg-- that remained in the program for three years, we found some important differences between them on the measure of coherence and systemness.

Napa’s movement towards coherence and systemness is manifested in three ways: collective attention to deep learning; a movement toward building strong connections between district departments (e.g. HR and programs); and their “plan on a page,” evidence of shared understanding of district goals system-wide.

Pittsburg indicated increased awareness of the importance of systemness and coherence at multiple levels of the districts. However, this coherence and systemness was not realized (in some areas like PD it has actually broken down). This seemed to be largely a result of the turnover among top-level administrators.

The differences between Napa and Pittsburg on measures of coherence and systemness raises the question whether high levels of coherence and systemness are possible in the absence of stable leadership. Turnover in leadership may undermine coherence when turnover results in a lack of continuity. School boards often hire superintendents to “shake up” the system. They often seek individuals who will bring change rather than stability and continuity to the district. Given the demands of CCSS, LCFF, and LCAP, districts are under considerable strain and disruption. Further disruption is more likely to overwhelm teachers and administrators, rather than lead to stronger instructional systems.

It is difficult to differentiate with the information that we have between the relative importance of leadership change as opposed to program continuity. It is conceivable that there are school boards that might stress program continuity and moving forward with existing capacity-building strategies. There is, however, as noted earlier, a tendency for school boards and school leaders to seek the “silver bullet” that will transform schools. The Fullan approach to school change is a promising way to improve education systems. But it takes thoughtful, knowledgeable leadership; time; and resources.

Finally, we argue that given enough time with a stable leadership core that allows the efforts to take root, one can imagine creating a sustainable system that thrives in spite of leadership changes.

Leadership Capacity vs. Instructional Capacity. The linkages between leadership and classrooms were most obvious in Napa. In San Lorenzo, the new superintendent, who was hired after the first year of the STC project, had a difficult time convincing faculty that STC had relevance to their own district’s problems of practice and was not convinced that in their circumstances cross-district collaboration was useful to them. In Pittsburg, the connections between leadership and instructional improvement were fragmented by changes in leadership, as noted earlier. This meant that relationships among administrators—both central office and school—had to be re-established. We know from research that

such relationships are fragile and may take years to develop, depending on the social context of the school district.

The driving theory behind the Fullan project was that instructional capacity was dependent on competent and committed leadership that was distributed across the entire system. The superintendent is critical in setting the tone for instructional development, but the vision of teaching and learning that is the engine of instructional quality has to be shared by the leadership at all levels of the system—the school sites as well as the central office.

STC could be seen as a way of nurturing those changes, creating opportunities to collaborate and to facilitate big-picture discussions outside of the everyday demands of the workplace. It could contribute to the “shared vocabulary” and a culture of pushing towards deeper learning. Yet it is difficult to know whether an open-ended professional learning opportunity such as STC could have a powerful impact. After all, STC was not designed to be concrete in its development of pedagogy. STC was never meant to be about powerful content-area professional learning, for example. Such professional development is much more intentional, much more intense. The demands placed on teachers go much further.

Support and Time. Could districts system transformation have occurred without the intervention of the Fullan team? Napa would certainly be the front-runner without the Fullan intervention. However, it is quite likely that it might have taken the district longer to accomplish what they achieved in three years without their involvement with the STC. Napa had the necessary ingredients for success: continuity—the Fullan intervention built on existing goals; stable leadership; good labor-management relationships; and cohesive leadership teams. It is important to note also that while Napa may have succeeded in coming much closer to achieving the Fullan intervention objectives, all districts benefited from the intervention. They all took the first steps toward system transformation—an increased awareness of the process of capacity building for deeper learning.

With regard to the issue of whether districts could get to the level that Napa attained without an outside intervention, we need to emphasize the distinction between the idea of the STC as a catalyst for transformation and the STC as “the reform” that makes for better teaching and learning. Thus, it may be less about “good candidates” for this model and more about best fit for design. For example, perhaps one district needs a high level of support in the central office before rolling out the SLTs. After all, the SLTs require significant organizational resources. Getting substitutes for every site in the context of teacher shortage must be worth the time cost. If the central office cannot agree on goals and sharpen their focus, it is difficult to imagine that they could make much headway toward coherent goals that are widely shared throughout the district.

Certainly, more research needs to be done to gain a better understanding of the kind of support system that could be created that would be available to large numbers of districts and schools throughout the state. At the present time, there does not appear to be the capacity to provide on a large scale the kind of intervention that the Fullan team provides.

System transformation requires a significant commitment of time and effort by participating school districts. Napa, for instance, estimated that the cost of teacher participation in the workshops cost over \$100,000 per day. In order for districts to engage in this type of professional development necessitates new approaches to how professional development of this kind can take place. This raises the critical

question of what types of state and federal resources are available for building strong systems of support for schools.

Obviously, the State Department of Education has neither the resources nor the organizational capacity to provide over 1000 school districts and over 10,000 schools in the state with the kind of support that most schools and districts need. Policy makers should consider what kind of support infrastructure could be created statewide but on a regional basis to provide the kind of support to schools and districts that will move them along toward building high quality education systems. Policy makers should consider what is the best use of state resources to build local professional and organizational capacity.

The overlap with the implementation of the Common Core and LCAP. The convergence of CCSS, LCFF, and LCAP are a ready-made opportunity to anchor school improvement strategies. All three give LEAs considerable discretion in how to allocate resources, design their instructional programs, and determine how to meet the educational needs of all students. While all three are inter-related, there is the danger that districts regard them as distinct areas of education policy to be addressed. The STC sought to address this issue by bringing all of them under the umbrella of systems change and efforts to focus district efforts on improvements in teaching and learning.

Recommendations

Cross-district collaboration. In our proposal to the Stuart Foundation, we suggested that the putative benefits of cross-district collaboration were the development of shared language, norms, protocols, and knowledge. The benefits of collaboration were also based on concepts of improvement science: the power of networks and the wisdom of crowds. Perhaps most importantly, it is based on the recognition that significant and deep change has to engage those who are responsible for making and sustaining change. Those who are most closely responsible—school-level practitioners—must be engaged in the process of improvement. It is an organic process that has to come from within.

Data collected for this report suggest that the benefits of cross-district collaboration were not fully realized through the STC project. Both in individual and in focus group interviews, respondents were mixed about the benefits of such collaboration. At times, opportunities for collaboration seemed too vague and without a clear purpose—sharing ideas, mixing groups to engage in various exercises designed to foster collaboration for its own sake. One possible strategy for making the cross-district collaborations more meaningful might be to address common problems of teaching practice. For instance, SLTs might have been given case studies with discussion protocols, which SLTs would first discuss in their respective schools and then discuss with members of other district SLTs in small groups. Another strategy for creating a more intentional structure for collaboration between districts might be to engage in instructional rounds and classroom observations. There could also have been more explicit discussion of the advantages of collaboration among districts with SLTs and strategies to take those back to the schools for discussion.

The Learning Fair was designed to be a central mechanism for cross-district collaboration. The purpose of the Learning Fair was to give SLTs and DLTs opportunities to discuss their responses to the STC—

developing a few, focused goals and developing strategies for meeting those goals. In addition, the intent of such collaboration is for school leaders (teachers, principals, district leaders) to learn from one another, and perhaps, catalyze development of a professional core.

District and school leaders reported that the Learning Fair was an important event that helped to cultivate vertical and lateral collaboration, helped build and disseminate new knowledge and was a mechanism for recognizing the growth across districts. However, the Learning Fair occurred only in the second year of the project. To maximize collaboration between districts, especially at the school level, leaders might consider building in more opportunities for this type of learning and collaboration. We recommend including an annual culminating event of some sort into each year of the project. The fairs might also be modified to be shorter but more frequent in an effort to make the relationships between districts more meaningful. Similarly, classroom visits from district and school leaders of one district in another are opportunities to discuss problems of practice and find common approaches to their solution.

Greater differentiation and individual coaching and support for the unique needs of districts. Although the Fullan team encouraged districts to develop their own goals and strategies based on their local needs, our findings suggest that participants perceived a need for greater differentiation in the content of the quarterly DLT and SLT sessions. Feedback from members of the SLTs and DLTs suggest the intervention and support strategies used by the Fullan team could have been more valuable to their growth if they were specifically tailored to the particular needs of each district. The importance of differentiated support was repeatedly emphasized in the interviews. However, it is somewhat difficult to interpret this view since the sessions were designed with the purpose of differentiating district needs.

Some survey respondents noted that, for them, the initial, year-one meetings were not as specifically targeted to their problems of practice as they might have wished and covered material that teachers and administrators had been implementing prior to the project. In response, Napa approached the STC leaders to modify the implementation to allow for co-planning and co-facilitation of the session content. Their participants believed that the project's final year was the most valuable for them as the Fullan team worked closely with the district to develop their own strategies for building a coherent system of teaching and learning. Findings from this study suggest that this is an important strategy for building buy-in and for creating more meaningful content and opportunities for growth for the districts involved in the STC. We recommend that opportunities to co-plan and co-present meeting content be incorporated into the project as early as the first year.

Furthermore, both the Fullan team and participants noted that it would have been preferable to have included a more extensive "intake" process and needs analysis to help with improving the relevance of the STC program content. The Fullan team did visit each district for an initial consultation prior to the launch of the project, but it was not a formal process included within the design. Possible strategies might include a few focus groups and site visits, a brief staff survey (or the use of recent district climate surveys, if available). In the case of California, now that schools develop an LCAP plan, the consultants could use the documents and student accountability data to prepare for a more in-depth conversation

during the intake process. Moreover, if the district intake suggests that there are substantive challenges in terms of organizational or leadership capacity, the consultants might suggest setting aside time to address those issues prior to system-wide implementation.

Greater emphasis on continuity between sessions. Unfortunately, STC suffered from some of the same shortcomings that afflict most professional development efforts—the effect tends to stay with participants as long as they see the professional development location in their rear view mirrors. Teachers and administrators go back to their schools or district offices and that reality trumps all others. Therefore, the most significant challenge in systems transformation work is creating an impact in the classroom. It does not matter how informative and beneficial each session may be if the impact of that session on participants does not reach the classroom. SLT and DLT leaders suggested that STC would benefit considerably in terms of teacher and administrator engagement, program coherence, and impact if there were greater supports in place to ensure that the STC work continued between sessions. For example, some participants reported that they would often wait until right before the SLT session to complete the assignment from the previous session. By that time, they could not remember the specific details of the assignment. However, in this particular district, there were no supports in place to remind SLTs of the assignment and its purpose. Therefore, we recommend a stronger emphasis on continuity in between sessions. This continuity could come through email reminders for the STC point person at the district office to disseminate to sites, or through the provision of specific strategies for integrating this work year-round.

Strategies to address leadership turnover in districts. As noted in this study, three of the participating districts changed superintendents during the three years of the project. The issue of turnover in the superintendency might be addressed by engaging the schools boards more directly from the beginning of the project as occurred in one of the districts. It is intuitively apparent that school board members have to take ownership for STC just as teachers, administrators, and support staff must.

As noted earlier in the report, the Fullan team suggested that districts have to have a “baseline capacity” to fully benefit from their involvement in the Collaborative. There are several problems with that. First, it is difficult to predict which district will experience superintendent turnover. Among the districts (about 120) that have participated in UC Davis’ Superintendents’ Executive Leadership Forum program, roughly half of the superintendents have either changed positions or retired. In most instances, turnover in central office and school-level administrators tends to be quite high as well. This was certainly true for Pittsburg. In addition, districts naturally experience changes in site leadership and high teacher turnover. All of these changes impact not only the composition of the school leadership teams and the district leadership teams, but also their ability to sustain momentum for systems change. For example, many new teachers joined the site leadership teams in the project’s third year who were not involved in the first two years. If a strong professional core existed among school personnel, turnover might not be a serious problem. The fact that the lack of a professional core is one of the chief problems that STC addresses makes the matter of turnover all the more problematic.

Given the instability of school districts generally—the large turnover of principals and superintendents—

the problem of turnover and instability is the norm rather than the exception. For that reason, there needs to be a strategy for turnover among district leaders, in particular, but also strategies for changes in the composition of the school leadership team.

As noted in this study, three of the four districts participating in this study changed superintendents. One solution to the problem of turnover in the superintendency might be to engage the school boards from the beginning of the project. It is intuitively apparent that school board members have to take ownership for STC just as teachers, administrators, and support staff must. The project could also provide additional strategies to districts for on-boarding new members of the SLTs.

Three years is not enough time for STC to become institutionalized. Finally, this study suggests that the STC approach to school improvement has considerable potential. What has become quite obvious at the termination of this particular project is that three years is simply not enough time to internalize the kinds of cultural, professional, structural changes, and practices required to bring about meaningful change. Building the social, cultural, and professional capital that anchor a set of norms, values, competencies, and behaviors takes more than three years. For that reason, Napa is continuing beyond its original three-year commitment with the work of the collaborative.

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