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Educational Restructuring and the Changing Role
of the School Principal in Alberta

by

David Rouse van Tamelen ©

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Abstract

The role of the school principal in Alberta was significantly affected by several aspects of an educational restructuring initiative that began in 1994-1995. This study, exploratory in nature, examined how the restructuring changed the principal's role. An interpretive perspective was used, reflecting the assumptions and procedures of naturalistic inquiry.

A purposive sampling technique established a group of 12 experienced school principals who were familiar with the role prior to restructuring. It was comprised of a pilot study of three respondents and a main study of nine participants. Data from the pilot and main studies were consolidated for analysis. The main study participants were nominated by school jurisdiction superintendent colleagues of the researcher. The participants were selected to represent a cross section of school types, sizes and community contexts, predominantly in large rural school jurisdictions in north central Alberta. The participants all participated in in-depth, semi-structured interviews that were audio-recorded and transcribed.

The study supported the view that restructuring significantly affected the role of the principal. It indicated that the paradox between educational leadership and school management was intensified for the participants. In particular, financial management was seen as taking time away from educational leadership. Workload and effectiveness issues appeared troublesome for the participants. There was agreement that changes to the role had increased workload, but there was uncertainty that this resulted in any beneficial effect for their schools. Accountability and collaboration appeared more contradictory as a result of different and new expectations shifted to principals,

straining collegial relationships with staff. The study suggested that respondents adjusted to the changed role in several different ways and with differing degrees of satisfaction, depending on their overall conceptualization of the role.

The study recommended that care about viability is necessary by persons and agencies in positions to further shape expectations of the principal's role. It further suggested that administrator development and training is increasingly important for school jurisdictions; that more attention is now needed to foster and maintain principals' connections with peers and their jurisdiction; and that principals' professional relationships with teachers requires review and attention.

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Chapter 1

Introduction to the Study

In the fall of 1993, the Government of Alberta commenced implementation of a comprehensive restructuring of the Alberta Department of Education and school systems throughout the province. This initiative occurred as part of a government-wide reorganization process in the context of providing more efficient and effective government services and eliminating annual provincial budget deficits.

Problem Statement

The government's initiative affected all aspects of the provincial education system, however it could be seen as having particularly significant implications for the role of the school principal. This change context established the problem statement for the study: how are the recent changes in provincial legislation and government policy regarding education in Alberta changing the role of the school principal?

Specific Research Questions

The problem statement for this research gave rise to the following specific research questions, which served to frame the study.

1. How is implementation of site-based management changing the role of the principal?

2. How is increased parental involvement with schooling, particularly in the form of school councils and choice of schools, changing the role of the principal?

3. What effects are the limits which have been placed on financial expenditures for central administration and instructional support services having on the role of the principal?

4. What effect is the reduction in the number of school jurisdictions having on the role of the principal?

5. Are there other significant effects of restructuring on the role of the principal

unanticipated by the previous questions, and if so what are they?

These questions were developed in alignment with major areas of the provincial restructuring as they relate to school level operations. Peters (1998) described restructuring impacts regarding the number and size of jurisdictions, funding structures, and increased parental roles. Holdaway, Thomas, and Ward (1998) noted that site-based management, school councils, changing expectations and emphasis on responsibility for staff had modified the role of the principal in Alberta.

Background

This reorganization involved several aspects, the implementation of which proceeded somewhat in parallel: the regionalization of school jurisdictions to reduce the number of local authorities to less than half of the previous number; the centralization of school requisition tax collection by the province and equitable redistribution of funds by a new funding framework; the reduction of the total funding available to school jurisdictions over a multi-year business plan; the development and implementation of accountability measures and reporting processes; and the enhancement of business involvement and technology initiatives. Significant changes have been enacted through amendment of the School Act and other provincial legislation, policy statements, and regulations.

Legislative Context

The initiatives identified above are reflected in the most recent amendments of the Alberta School Act, which provides in Section 15 that

> A principal of a school must
> (a) provide instructional leadership in the school;
> (b) ensure that the instruction provided by the teachers employed in school is consistent with the courses of study and education programs prescribed, approved or authorized pursuant to this Act;
> (c) evaluate or provide for the evaluation of programs offered in the school;
> (c.1) ensure that students in the school have the opportunity to meet the standards of education set by the Minister;

(d) direct the management of the school;

(e) maintain order and discipline in the school and on the school grounds during activities sponsored or approved by the board;

(f) promote co-operation between the school and the community that it serves;

(g) supervise the evaluation and advancement of students;

(h) evaluate the teachers employed in the school;

(i) subject to any applicable collective agreement and the principal's contract of employment, carry out those duties that are assigned to the principal by the board in accordance with the regulations and the requirements of the school council and the board. (SA 1988 cS-3.1 s15)

Section 17 of the School Act establishes school councils and creates the following

mandate. The full text of Section 17 is provided in Appendix 1.

(4) A school council may, at its discretion,

(a) advise the principal and the board respecting any matter relating to the school,

(b) perform any duty or function delegated to it by the board in accordance with the delegation,

(c) consult with the principal so that the principal may ensure that students in the school have the opportunity to meet the standards of education set by the Minister,

(d) consult with the principal so that the principal may ensure that the fiscal management of the school is in accordance with the requirements of the board and the superintendent, and

(e) do anything it is authorized under the regulations to do.

(5) Subject to the regulations, a school council may make and implement policies in the school that the council considers necessary to carry out its functions.

(6) A school council may make by-laws governing its meetings and the conduct of its affairs. (SA 1988 cS-3.1 s17)

In addition to the previously established responsibility of a board to serve its resident

students, the responsibilities set out in section 28 were broadened to include the

following provision:

(3) A board shall enroll a resident student of the board or of another board in the school operated by the board that is requested by the parent of the student if, in the opinion of the board asked to enroll the student, there are sufficient resources and facilities available to accommodate the student. (SA 1988 cS-3.1 s28)

This provision effectively creates a choice of school arrangement for parents, except in cases of school crowding, or special programs with unique resource or cost considerations.

Funding Framework

The new framework for funding school jurisdictions in Alberta has a significant effect on the administration of education. The framework removes local taxing authority and routes property tax funds for education through the provincial government to achieve funding equity to all jurisdictions regardless of local tax base wealth. This revenue stream is blended with the provincial revenue contribution for education so that school systems are virtually fully funded by the province. As part of this approach, the province has attached some constraints on how jurisdictions may use these funds, by blocking the grants into instructional, operations and maintenance, student transportation and system administration components, with restrictions on how funds may be transferred between blocks. This scheme includes two provisions which particularly relate to school administration. The funding block for system administration is limited to 5% of the total funding allocation and no transfer of additional funds into this function is allowed. This constrains central administrative line positions to a small number of people who have a broad span of supervisory responsibilities. Second, the funds a jurisdiction can allocate for centrally-provided instructional support services are capped at 1.4%, 1.2%, and 0.8% of the instruction and administration blocks over a three-year implementation period. This constrains the staff positions and resources available at the system level to support principals at the school level.

Study Parameters

Definitions

"Role" is used to mean the behavior expectations ascribed to an institutional position (Cherrington, 1994, p. 369; Jones & Holdaway, 1995, p. 191).

"School-based management" refers to the devolution of operational decision making to the school site level pursuant to jurisdictional and provincial policy parameters. Alberta Education (1994) provides the following explanation: "School-based management of schools results in decisions being made where education happens -- in the school. It gives parents and teachers greater involvement in decisions affecting the education of students. It also means schools are more accountable for the achievement of their students" (p. 11). An appropriate definition has been provided by Caldwell and Spinks (1988):

> We define a self-managing school as one for which there has been significant and consistent decentralization to the school level of authority to make decisions related to the allocation of resources. This decentralization is administrative rather than political, with decisions at the school level being made within a framework of local, state or national policies and guidelines. The school remains accountable to a central authority for the manner in which resources are allocated. (p. 5)

Delimitations

The study was delimited by the sample and time frame. There were 12 participants including the pilot study, selected from six school jurisdictions in central and northern Alberta. Data gathering was limited to a few months, governed in large part by the school calendar constraints on the work priorities and availability of principals as participants. Another delimitation was that the researcher did not make direct observations of the administrative processes by which the participants discharge their roles.

Limitations

The generalizability of the findings is limited by the purposive sampling technique used and by the nature and purpose of the analysis undertaken. The study described understandings of role changes as held by the participants but did not address the extent to which these understandings are representative of all school principals. This approach is addressed by the researcher providing substantial contextual description to assist readers decide the extent to which the findings relate to other specific contexts, and by appropriately qualifying the findings and recommendations to applicable contexts.

Assumptions

The study reflected assumptions that the participants provided trustworthy accounts of their perceptions and understandings regarding their roles and role changes. It is also assumed that the analysis of the data allowed for the construction of a credible description of the participants' understandings about their role changes. Other assumptions regarding trustworthiness, which were identified through the process of the research, are discussed in Chapter 3.

<div align="center">

Effects on Schools

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Centrality of the Principalship

While many of the province's restructuring measures were directed primarily at the system rather than the school level, several measures, such as site-based decision making, funding framework constraints, and enhancement of the role of school councils, affect schools directly. Other aspects, including administration and instructional support limitations in the funding framework, affect school operations more indirectly. The school principal, as site leader and manager, is unavoidably engaged in responding

to these changes, and it is frequently, through impacts on this central role, that changes influence the rest of the site.

Justification

The recency of restructuring in Alberta means that these circumstances are causing adjustments in the principals' role in the present time frame, making this study of changes to the role a timely undertaking. This report seeks to help inform future policy making and leadership decisions on the role widely recognized as one of the very important elements of school success.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

While the context of this research is the Alberta education restructuring initiative, its main concern or focus is the role of the principal. A review of current literature on the principalship, with respect to school restructuring initiatives, indicates that much of the material addresses changes in the role of the principal associated with school restructuring for "effective schools" in response to the concerns about public schooling identified in the last decade.

Role of the Principal

The concept of role is central to this discussion. Hellriegel, Slocum, and Woodman (1992) broadly defined "role" as an organized set of behaviors (p. 15). Cherrington (1994), in discussing group roles, suggests that "a role encompasses the expected behaviors attached to a position or job" (p. 369). This is consistent with Lonsdale's (1964) view that "the way people behave in these positions depends partly on how they think they are expected to behave and on how others actually expect them to behave. These expectations are called roles" (p. 149). Different dimensions of roles have been identified, such as interpersonal, informational, and decisional (Hellriegel, Slocum, & Woodman, 1992, pp. 16-17) and associated concepts such as role ambiguity and role conflict have been established (Cherrington, 1994, pp. 372-374). In this context Hellriegel, Slocum, and Woodman identified the roles of entrepreneur, disturbance handler, resource allocator, and negotiator (1992, pp. 17-18). These dimensions appear to align well with various aspects of the school principalship.

A comprehensive description of what Sergiovanni (1995) referred to as an idealized conception of the principalship has been developed by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (1986, cited in Sergiovanni, 1995) by grouping 74 identified proficiencies into the categories of leadership behavior,

communication skills, group processes, curriculum, instruction, performance, evaluation, organization, fiscal, and political elements (pp. 4-6). Mintzberg (1973) described administrative duties as being interpersonal, informational or decisional in nature, characterized by fragmentation, variety and brevity. Morris (1984) examined the application of Mintzberg's work to school principals and in part concluded

> that the job of building principal is open-ended; that is, the job becomes largely what each principal wishes to make of it. Despite a tightly structured paper hierarchy, principals have a great deal of autonomy that allows their own values and preferences to influence the job. (cited in Sergiovanni, 1995, p. 9)

Thus, while the general content of the principal's role is fairly standard, the specific role dimensions of a given situation may vary considerably.

Ubben and Hughes (1997) developed a comprehensive discussion about the effective principal under categories of substance and style, instructional leadership, decision making, school and community, legal rights considerations, restructuring through planning, learning climate, student and special services, curriculum, learning, personal and staffing, scheduling, computer applications for management, and budgeting (pp. v-xiv). This contemporary view appears consistent with that of the NAESP scope outlined above, with the addition of several emergent concepts such as restructuring and computer applications.

Common to most presentations on the principal's role is the issue of tension between instructional leadership functions and administrative management tasks. Sometimes this is seen as a dichotomy, with management demands increasingly winning out over instruction, while other writers tend to see it as a duality to be surmounted. Deal and Peterson (1994) described this as a paradoxical relationship between the logic and artistry required of principals. They promoted a balance of the two kinds of effort as necessary to the effective conduct of a school. Drake and Roe (1994) have summarized this with the observation that while a review of principals' job descriptions indicated "the principal's instructional leadership functions descriptively in

balance with general administrative duties" school system reward systems effectively give top priority to management activities (p. 27). In a more overarching view, Sergiovanni (1995) proposed that

> to overcome the limits of traditional management and leadership, a new theory for the principalship must be developed--a theory more responsive to nonlinear conditions and loose structuring and that can inspire extraordinary commitment and performance. This theory should not replace, *but subsume* the old [emphasis added]. (p. 45)

The recent restructuring initiatives in Alberta, such as school-based decision making and school councils, can be related to these theoretical perspectives with potentially important implications for principals. Holdaway, Thomas, and Ward et. al. (1998) have suggested that "while the view of the principal's role as instructional leader has been generally supported in the past (e.g. Johnson & Holdaway, 1991; and Pratt and Common, 1986) the current legal and cultural situation could challenge this focus" (p. 2).

Aitken and Townsend (1998) explored this situation using a survey method with a sample of Alberta principals in 1996 and found that restructuring was perceived by the respondents to have significantly changed their role, mostly in ways felt to be negative. Increased responsibility or downloading of duties, school councils, school-based budgets, and expectations for collaborative decision making were all identified as factors making the role of the principal more complex (pp. 1-5).

Leadership

The main notion regarding effective principals is that of leadership shaping the school culture and school climate to one of communities of learners with the principal as "head learner" (Barth, 1992; Robbins & Alvy, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1995). This focus emphasizes both (a) instructional leadership over management functions and (b) collaborative, facilitator-oriented, collegial approaches by principals. The view is of the

role shifting from directing and controlling to consulting and facilitating (Bohac-Clarke & Brownlee, 1995; Bredeson, 1989).

Current thinking about improving school effectiveness tends to emphasize transformational approaches. Sergiovanni (1992) cited several writers to establish the position "that transformational leadership is the key to creating successful schools" in contrast to transactional leadership reflecting management skills to maintain a basic service level (p. 306). Leithwood and Steinbach (1991) described theoretical constructs associated with transformational leadership in the school setting which include collaborative problem solving, leading to better solutions; long term individual development of the participants through collaboration; and greater commitment to the organization and decision implementation (pp. 224-226). Their research found that, particularly with respect to principals considered to be expert in their role, "practices associated with transformational leadership were particularly clear in the solution processes" (p. 241).

Using different language, but developing a similar position, Ackerman, Donaldson, and van der Bogert (1996) advocated

> principals as *sense makers* for their schools [whose] success at leading hinges, to a great degree, on their ability to see clearly the school's core functions, to evaluate events in light of those functions, and to help the members of the school community conduct their work and their relationships in ways that serve these core functions. (p. 1)

These authors recognized the tension facing principals between directive and participatory styles and developed the concept of consensus authority as the basis for principals' leadership to facilitate effectively building the school community (pp. 147-151).

General typologies of leadership have been synthesized into four patterns of principal leadership by Leithwood and Steinbach (1993), which are a focus on relations and climate; a focus on student achievement and well-being; a focus on programs; and a

focus on organization and routine operations (pp. 104-105). These authors cited substantial research in support of the focuses on student achievement and growth, and on programs, as the greatest contributors to school improvement (p. 105). McCall (1994) has noted that site-based management has increased the attention given to principal's leadership roles: "... principals can no longer hide. With site management, crises arise and are settled at the building level. The more site management, the more the principal must lead" (p. 16).

Management

A second theme, that tends to run counter to the "leadership for effectiveness" ideas, reflects the practical, operational demands that principals face and the associated time pressures. The writers focusing on this theme suggest that, desirable or not, management functions dominate the role. In the tension between instructional leadership and management, management prevails, and several authors have suggested that this trend will likely be magnified in the school-based decision making environment (e.g., Isherwood & Achoka, 1992; Moorthy, 1992; Nash, 1996). Murphy and Seashore Louis (1994) have observed that so far, transformational change has not much affected instructional leadership, but seems to have been caught up with managerial functions and demands (p. 273). While acknowledging desirability of the collaborative, instructional leader approach, pragmatic considerations may move the role in a different direction. That is, the principal's role is greater than an instructional leader who does management activities well.

Accountability

Underpinning these changes is a broad provincial initiative for increased accountability for the outcomes of government activity, which was documented by the Minister of Education in an "Accountability in Education Policy Framework" document setting out requirements for school system and school level planning and reporting (Alberta Education, 1995c, p.2). Fullan (1998) identified increased public

accountability as a significant change for principals: "In all cases, the new leadership requires principals to take their school's accountability to the public. Successful schools are not only collaborative internally, but they also have the confidence, capacity, and political wisdom to reach out, constantly forming new alliances" (p. 9).

One of the difficulties with this topic is that the many actors speaking about public education tend to use the term accountability broadly, and with meaning implied to suit their particular purpose. Burgess (1992) observed that

> "people understand many different things by accountability. This is not a problem merely of definition. If it were, we could simply use another word. It is rather that accountability can be of many kinds: personal, professional, political, financial, managerial, legal, contractual. All these kinds of accountability are present in education" (pp. 5-6).

Frymier (1996) noted that "accountability still means different things to different people, and there is little concensus about how to use the concept intelligently and creatively in schools (p. 7). He proceded to define accountability in the school context as responsibility for the care of another, capacity to be trusted, to be reliable, and to be answerable for one's behavior (p.8). In a political context in the Alberta environment, King (1995) described accountability as "essentially the recognition, either positive or negative, that follows the measurement of the correlation between responsibility and preferred outcomes" (p. 2).

Other writers have developed broader explanations of the concept. Krist (1990, cited in Newmann, King & Rigdon 1997) described accountability as "a relationship between a steward or provider of a good or service and a patron or agent with the power to reward, punish, or replace the provider" (p. 43). Rothman (1995) defined the term for schools as the "process by which school districts and states attempt to ensure that schools and school systems meet their goals" (p. 189). In summary, a workable

meaning of accountability with respect to the principal's role is complex and to a degree ambigious, but it describes a process which includes establishing goals and standards, gathering information on performance related to those standards, making judgments on that performance, and implementing consequences based on those judgments (Newmann, King and Rigdon, 1997, p. 43).

Devolution

Various terms are used by different writers to describe a shift in emphasis from school system central direction to school site determination of operational matters. Devolution expresses this shift in broad terms, although decentralization is frequently used also.

Decentralization and the Principalship

Brown (1991) asserted "the role most affected by decentralization is clearly that of the school principal. No other person will encounter more change, more need to adjust, and more potential to make a difference both to his or her school and to the way decentralization works at the school level" (p. 79). Caldwell and Spinks (1988) described two roles for the principal in implementation of site-based management; responsibility for implementation of programs, and responsibility for providing leadership to the planning committee for effective implementation (p. 133). Along the same lines, Wohlstetler and Briggs (1994, cited in Oswald, 1995) listed the principal's emerging roles under school-based management as:

- designer/champion of involvement structures (by developing and empowering decision-making teams)
- motivator/manager of change (by encouraging staff development)
- liaison to the outside world (by bringing to the school new ideas and research about teaching and learning, for example). (p. 17)

Alberta Education (1996) consistently reflected this view in its recent documentation, such as the following background statement from a request for proposals to develop an Alberta school-based decision making support document:

. . . the principal is a key educational leader who will foster successful school-based decision making. Principals will work with parents, teachers and members of the community to establish a school-based decision making system to develop school plans, policies and budgets, as well as establishing the scope of the school program and extra-curricular activities. (p. 1)

The Alberta School Councils Handbook indicates that a school council could provide

the principal advice and consultation in the following areas (Alberta Education, 1995a):

> Planning
> • school's overall mission, philosophy, policies, rules and objectives
> • school jurisdiction policies
> • guidelines and principles for the school budget
> • inservice and/or information needs of school council members and parents
> • policy development on use of facilities by the larger community
> • possible selection criteria for school staff
> Communications and community relations
> • methods of reporting student achievement results to parents and the public
> • methods of communicating with the public
> • promotion of the school in the community
> • annual reporting to the school board on results achieved by the school council
> School programming
> • programs offered in the school
> • extracurricular activities offered in the school
> • standards of student conduct
> • services for students to help improve learning, such as assistance from reading specialists and guidance counseling. (p. 4)

The Alberta School Council Resource Manual refers specifically to the principals' role

and, in addition to the general responsibilities identified in Section 15 of the School Act,

recommended the following responsibilities for principals with respect to school

councils (Alberta Education, 1995b):

> to promote a collaborative, collegial approach to decision making
> to establish a school council
> to be a member of the school council
> to promote the activities and mandate of the council
> to assist the council in its operation
> to promote the collaborative model of decision making.
> (p. c4)

The question of governance at the site level emerges from the emphasis on staff, parent and community involvement. Brown (1991) pointed out that "the most fundamental issue to resolve . . . is whether parents or teachers will be given a mandate over schools using parent councils, or if the district school board will retain control of schools through its administrators" (p. 49). While Alberta has, by provincial policy, determined that school councils are advisory, and has chosen to maintain the latter Board of Trustees -- administration control structure, the site based emphasis as evidenced in Alberta Education's commentary potentially places the principal in a difficult spot when school council and school board wishes conflict. Hallinger, Murphy and Hansman (1992) noted this problem when they reported that

> a key concern expressed by principals involved accountability for school performance. In organizations historically characterized by the individual principal's accountability for decision making and performance, it remains unclear how a school-based council responsible for significant school decisions will share accountability with the school's formal leaders. (p. 347)

Generally, there appears to be only limited reference to experience with parents and parental involvement in the site-based management literature. The emphasis in these readings seems to be very much restricted to principals and teachers, but one wonders if some of the concerns reflected in the management demands perspective are not an indirect recognition of parents' influence on the role. Weindling and Earley (1987), from the UK perspective, identified the increased political aspect of the head's role in conjunction with the local school governors model being implemented there. The implications for the principal's role with respect to school councils' participation in site-based management appear to warrant more attention.

Change Factors

The restructuring of education in Alberta, while initiated in the context of provincial fiscal restraint measures, can be seen as responding to a number of broader pressures for change. The then-Deputy Minister of Education, R. Bossetti, in a

presentation to school superintendents in February 1994 described the government's fiscal downsizing as establishing a nexus of opportunity for restructuring education. Holdaway and Ratsoy (1991) identified societal, professional, and organizational change factors affecting the role of the principal. In addition to broad demographic and political trends, they listed emphasis on school effectiveness, mainstreaming, competition for students, increased autonomy of individual schools, more testing of students, and more involvement in teacher personnel decisions as changes directly relevant to the role of principals (p. 1).

In a similar vein, Pounder and Young (1996) pointed out that educational initiatives including "emphasis on concepts and practices such as site-based management, school-family partnerships, and inter-agency cooperation" along with "changing conceptualizations of leadership, and changing student characteristics may reshape the role expectations and position demands of school administrators" (p. 3). They have interpreted these trends as suggesting the principal's role needs "administrators with strong problem-solving skills who can unite diverse constituents to address the complex learning and social problems of children. Administrators must be child advocates who can elicit support from others to address many of these complex student issues" (p.9) and further that the role calls for "creative problem-solving and innovative leadership techniques as opposed to bureaucratic management" (p. 9).

The combined measures of school district consolidation, fiscal centralization, and devolution of more operational functions to the school level are consistent with these trends. Caldwell and Spinks(1988) identified the head teacher, or principal, as the "catalyst for action" to implement collaborative school management (p. 165). They described a leadership function for principals to achieve this change based on articulating and implanting vision for the school, making collaborative decisions in the light of that vision so it becomes the foundation of the school's culture, and celebrating the vision (pp. 174-175). They also advocated the involvement of staff by sharing

leadership functions as part of the school's management (pp. 176-177). This view is consistent with the above discussion of transformational leadership and empowerment and supports the change emphasis which is becoming an integral part of the principal's role. Greenleaf's (1977) concept of servant leadership provided another view or perspective to consider how the principal's role may evolve in response to change. Murphy and Seashore Louis (1994) built on this and suggested that multiple roles for responding to complex challenges will increasingly characterize the principalship (pp. 9-15).

Framework

The framework for this study comprised concepts relating to the nature of the principal's role. One was that the principal's leadership activities expressed the role as it was perceived. Another key conceptualization was that of the principal's role being defined by a complex set of expectations from both outside and within the school. These frames are depicted in Figures 1 and 2. Aitken and Townsend (1998) described the emerging situation of the principal as reflecting a "pronounced emphasis on accountability" and produced this summary:

> In many ways the principal has been made a key player in the restructuring of education in Alberta. Teachers have depended on the principal for protection, inspiration, and guidance; parents have relished the opportunity to deal face-to-face with the principal, to advise, to challenge, and to demand; and school boards and superintendents have looked to the principal for leadership in implementing policies, administering budgets, reporting results, and, in general, seeing that the public education mission is carried out in each school. (p. 1)

Transformation

Many aspects of the foregoing discussion suggest that the principalship is a pivotal and transformational role between the traditional hierarchy of the conventional organization, and supporting empowered participants in an organization which reflects an emphasis on group effectiveness. This is illustrated in Figure 1, where the principal, to the extent necessary, provides traditional kinds of management to the school

hierarchy as represented by the bottom pyramid. At the same time, the principal as servant of the school, supports site-based endeavors in a facilitating, transformational way as represented by the inverted upper pyramid balancing on the key role.

Lashway (1996) distinguished between transformational and facilitative leadership strategies, in addition to the traditional hierarchical one, but for the purpose of establishing this frame of reference, the two concepts are represented by the inverted pyramid portion of the figure, implying the work of others in the organization being supported by the principal. The principal's effectiveness as an appropriate kind of leader for the school context was widly seen as an essential ingredient for school improvement and success (Wohlstetter, Van Kirk, Robertson, and Mohrman, 1997), and for this study leadership practice was the expression of the role; the outcome behaviors by which the participants answered the expectations they held to define their changing roles.

Expectations

In this position, the role of the principal can be seen as a complex set of interrelated expectations, some from within the school, some from within the school system, some from the provincial framework, and some from parents and the broader community. Figure 2, based on the concept of a role set as developed by Merton (1957), outlines the context within which restructuring is influencing the role of the Alberta school principal. Merton described the concept this way:

> I began with the premise that each social status [job position] involves not a single associated role, but an array of roles. This basic feature of social structure can be registered by the distinctive but not formidable term, role-set. To repeat, then, by role-set I mean that complement of role-relationships in which persons are involved by virtue of occupying a particular social status. (p. 110)

He also went on to make the observation that "disparate and contradictory evaluations by members of the role-set greatly complicate the task of coping with them all" (p. 112).

This comment may be very appropriate to the contemporary situation of the principalship.

External influences changing the principal's role can be seen as coming from Alberta Education, parents, community members, the Alberta Teachers' Association, support staff unions such as Canadian Union of Public Employees, and legislation and regulations. In many respects, the increased emphasis on accountability is tied to these external expectations. These influences are mediated by internal components of the school system as they reach the central role. The internal influencers on the principalship arise with the organization and include the school board and superintendent, school council, central services staff, teachers, students and support staff. The Alberta Teachers' Association (1998) Task Force on the Role of the School Administrator recognized a similar contextual determination of the role, and confirmed changed expectations with restructuring.

> "The factors that greatly affect the role of the administrator include the size of the school, nature of the school (K-12, K-4, 10-12), numbers of programs offered, socio-economic nature of the community, involvement of parents, expertise and experience of the staff, amount of support staff, geographical factors and the nature of the student population". (p. 5)

These elements are reflected in Figure 2, both explicitly with respect to the A.T.A. and implicitly within several of the other role senders identified in the diagram.

Another aspect of the role's determination as depicted in Figure 2 is the self-expectations of the principal. Not only do all the role senders contribute to the complexity of the role, but each incumbent brings his or her personal views, beliefs and conceptualizations about what is to be done, and this constitutes another level of definition contained within the center box labeled as "principal". McCall (1994) addressed this in terms of principals' thinking about the outputs of their role, and identified "judgements and opinions, directions, allocation of resources, mistakes detected, staff trained, programs planned, commitments negotiated, complaints handled,

communications with central office, programs assessed, staff motivated, pbulic informed, parents consulted, students counseled and disciplined" as their set of expectations (p. 124).

Both models place the role in a very central position, and it seems reasonable to expect stress and frustration on the part of incumbents related to coping with substantive changes when in such a pivotal location in the organization. Fullan (1998) emphasized that there is no one answer to the leadership model for the changing principalship, and proposed several proactive strategies for principals to cope with this reality. These included reaching out to form new alliances, being openly accountable, recognizing the place of emotion in leadership, and maintaining a sense of hopefulness (pp. 8-10).

Summary

Many of the ideas discussed in these references on the principalship are broader than just role-change considerations. Some of the functions to be performed differently may not be matters of role at all, but rather changed behaviors, tactics, priorities, and measures for implementing roles already established. Richardson, Short, and Prickett (1993) pointed out that the notion of restructuring relates to the person and position as well as the role. Sergiovanni (1995) has suggested using a values-based approach to defining an appropriate role (p. 7). He identified the principles of cooperation, empowerment, responsibility, accountability, meaningfulness, and ability-authority to define such an approach (pp. 57-58). An interesting and useful frame was suggested by Dubin (1991) in the summary of his anthology: the shift from "autocrat/CEO" to "facilitator . . . politician . . . entrepreneur . . . and consultant/CEO". This powerful conceptualization recognizes the other aspects of the role related to governance as well as the facilitation and collaboration dimensions associated with school effectiveness.

The descriptions developed in this discussion have many similarities, and reflect the paradoxical nature of the role described by Deal and Peterson (1994). These ideas, encompassed in the conceptual models, served as a frame for exploring the research

questions with the study participants, and for considering the data they generated in the study.

the new school

organization

the principal

the old

school organization
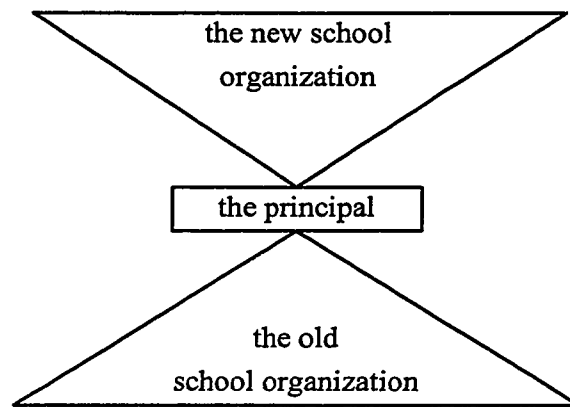
Figure 1: The Principal -- Transformational Role

external

Alberta
Education

parents

community
members

internal

school board

superintendent

school
council

PRINCIPAL

central
services

students

teachers

support staff

legislation
&
regulations

Alberta
Teachers'
Association

staff unions
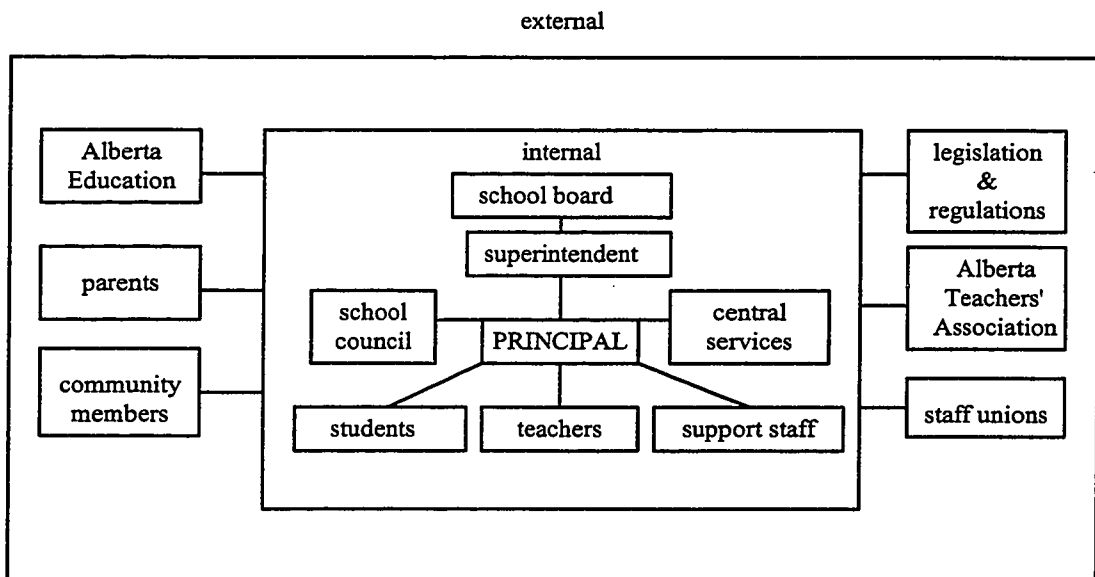
Figure 2: Role Set and Role Senders for the Principal

Chapter 3

Research Method and Design

This research was exploratory and descriptive. It sought to add to the initial understandings which have emerged about impacts of restructuring on Alberta school principals by seeking insights from practitioners. The methods that were employed are consistent with what Burrell and Morgan (1979) referred to as an interpretivist approach, also described by Denzin and Lincoln (1994) as a constructivist--interpretive paradigm. The nature of this design is that the study does not support broad generalizations, but rather serves to inform the understanding of readers.

Interpretive Perspective

A research design, as described by Denzin and Lincoln (1994) "situates researchers in the empirical world and connects them to specific sites, persons, groups, institutions, and bodies of relevant interpretative material, including documents and archives" (p. 14). They explained that in the interpretive paradigm

> The researcher first creates a field text consisting of field notes and documents from the field, . . . The writer-as-interpreter moves from this text to a research text: notes and interpretations based on the field text. This text is then re-created as a working interpretative document that contains the writer's initial attempts to make sense out of what he or she has learned. Finally, the writer produces the public text that comes to the reader. (p. 15)

Burrell and Morgan (1979) discussed this using the continuum between ideographic and nomothetic approaches to social science. The ideographic position is based on the researcher acquiring first hand knowledge, getting close to the subjects, getting inside situations by involvement with the circumstances under study. The nomothetic position, on the other hand, is based on the quantitative analysis of data to test hypotheses in an experimental or quasi-experimental design (pp. 6-7). The interpretivist paradigm is clearly based on an ideographic methodology.

Denzin (1989) developed and described an interactionist approach in which he included discussion of the concepts of emic (particularizing) and etic (generalizing) research focuses. In this he places interpretive interactionist study as ideographic and emic

> Ideographic research assumes that each individual case is unique. This means that every interactional text is unique and shaped by the individuals who created it. This requires that the voices and actions of individuals must be heard and seen in the texts that are reported. Emic studies are also ideographic. They seek to experience from within, through the use of thick description or accounts which attempt to capture the meanings and experiences of interacting individuals in problematic situations. They seek to uncover the conceptual categories persons use when they interact with one another and create meaningful experience. (pp. 20-21)

In an earlier discussion on methodology, Denzin (1970) proposed several principles, including the following

> The investigator must take the perspective or role of the acting other and view the world from his subjects' point of view . . .
> The investigator must link his subjects' symbols and definitions with the social relationships and groups that provide those conceptions . . .
> The behavioral settings of interaction and scientific observation must be recorded. . . .
> Research methods must be capable of reflecting process or change as well as static behavioral focus. (p. 19)

The notion of "thick description" as mentioned here is one that is used by several writers as a summary statement on interpretive methodology, along with that of meaning being jointly developed between the subject and the researcher.

Interpretivism holds that reality is relativist. There are multiple realities, which are particular to a situation, and which are uniquely constructed (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 13; Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 109). Neuman (1994) described reality in interpretive social science this way

> The social world is largely what people perceive it to be. Social life exists as people experience it and give meaning to it. . . . For interpretive researchers, social reality is based on people's definition of it. A person's definition of a

situation tells him or her how to assign meaning in constantly shifting conditions. (pp. 62-63)

In the constructivist or interpretive paradigm distinctions between the nature of reality and the nature of knowledge are seen as less significant than in the functionalist, positivist context since with multiple, constructed realities, knowledge is subjective and transactional with that reality. The researcher and subject(s) interact to create findings that give meaning to the situation (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111). Neuman (1994) describes this condition as that of facts being "fluid and embedded within a meaning system . . . not impartial, objective, and neutral . . . [but] context-specific actions that depend on the interpretations of particular people in a social setting" (p. 65).

Moving beyond meaning and knowledge at the individual level, Merriam (1988) cites Erickson as pointing out that

> The production of generalizable knowledge is an inappropriate goal for interpretive research. In attending to the particular, concrete universals will be discovered. 'The search is not for *abstract universals* arrived at by statistical generalization from a sample to a population . . . but for *concrete universals* arrived at by studying a specific case in great detail and then comparing it with other cased studied in equally great detail'. (p. 175)

The understandings developed in this paradigm are interactive, based on concepts such as the hermeneutic circle (Burrell & Morgan, 1979):

> the social whole cannot be understood independently of its parts, and vice versa. Words in a sentence have to be understood in terms of their total context. Whilst one can attribute a particular meaning to words on their own account, they may assume a different meaning in the context of other words. So, too, with social phenomena. (p. 237)

Another perspective is to see meaning as derived from an interchange of the frames of view of the researcher and subject, so that reality and knowledge arise from interaction. This gives rise to a debate between understanding from the interaction (e.g. Denzin's Interpretive Interactionism) and understanding from a primary concern with the perspective of the subject more typical of the ethnomethodologist approach (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, pp. 251-252).

In this context there is a question of the extent to which free will or determinism defines man's relationship within the social environment. Burrell and Morgan (1979) described this as a continuum between a determinist view where people and their activities are completely caused by their situation and a voluntarist view of people as completely autonomous in their actions (p. 6). They situate interpretivism on the free will side, linking again to roots in the thinking of Kant and the German idealist social philosophy (pp. 28-31). Neuman (1994) described this as ordinary people creating flexible meanings through social interaction. "Human behavior is patterned and regular, but this is not due to preexisting laws waiting to be discovered. The patterns are created out of evolving meaning systems or social conventions that people generate through social interactions" (p. 63). In summary, people exercise choices which define their reality rather than existing in a state where their reality is externally determined.

Values are integral to each individual in the choices associated with this process of voluntarist action to create meaning. The German idealist constructs underlying interpretivism reflect *a priori* or "inherent, in-born organizing principles within man's consciousness by which any and all sense data is structured, arranged and understood" (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 227). This effectively means that human values must always be present and therefore intrude on any process of inquiry (p. 228). Greenfield (1975) made the point that not only are values always present in data and analysis, but that the suggestion of universal ideas and values fails: "Our concepts of organizations must . . . rest upon the views of people in particular times and places, and any effort to understand them in terms of a single set of ideas, values and laws must be doomed to failure" (p. 120). In a more recent writing, he cited Hodgkinson to illustrate this point: "the intrusion of values into the decision making process is not merely inevitable, it is the very substance of decision" (Greenfield, 1991, p. 169).

It was within this framework of knowledge and meaning that this study was undertaken to provide a better understanding of the changes which are occurring to the role of the school principal in Alberta.

Study Design

Data Collection

Documentary data generated by Alberta Education on restructuring activities were compiled and reviewed to establish the context of the study.

The primary source of data was interviews with 12 school principals. The study was limited to this size by practical considerations of time and available resources. Selection of participants was made by consultation with peers in the superintendency and faculty in the Department of Educational Policy Studies to identify a selection which represents a variety of school types and situations, including elementary and secondary levels as well as urban, suburban, and rural settings in north-central Alberta. An effort was made to include both elementary and secondary schools of a range of sizes and community contexts. Respondents were sought who were considered to be established and competent in the principalship, but not necessarily proponents of the restructuring measures. Respondents were established in the principal role prior to the present restructuring initiatives. It was not considered essential that they were all in their current school for the duration of their administrative experience, so long as the previous experience was in an Alberta context reasonably similar to their present positions. No participants were from the researcher's school jurisdiction.

The primary source of data was interviews, all of which were audio recorded and transcribed. A multi-step process was used, consisting of an initial semi-structured interview, verification of the transcript and notes with the respondent, and a follow-up contact for additional clarification as was required. The attached interview schedule (Appendix 2) identified questions which were asked in the interview with each participant. The questions in the schedule were developed to initiate conversation on

the topics addressed by specific research questions. The questions were provided to participants in advance of the interview, in the hope of facilitating commentary that included in depth reflection by the respondents, rather than more superficial immediate, unconsidered reactions.

Documentary data such as job descriptions of the respondents and other role related policy documentation were gathered in conjunction with the interviews, or accessed in conjunction with other related research projects being undertaken concurrently by staff and graduate students in the Department of Educational Policy Studies.

Pilot Study

The proposed interview schedule was tested with three school principals who were available to the researcher as colleagues attending the Department of Educational Policy Studies. The proposed interview questions appeared suitable after this process and only minor revisions and refinements were made on the basis of experience from this testing. The pilot study respondents were included in the participant group for the study and their data are included as part of the 12 subjects reported on in the findings.

Data Analysis

Interview transcripts and other documentary texts were classified on the basis of responses to the research questions, and in recognition of other information which emerged from the interview conversations. Van Manen's (1990) discussion of theme was considered in analyzing the data:

(1) *Theme is the experience of focus, of meaning, of point.* As I read over an anecdote I ask, what is its meaning, its point?

(2) *Theme formulation is at best a simplification.* We come up with a theme formulation but immediately feel that it somehow falls short, that it is an inadequate summary of the notion.

(3) *Themes are not objects one encounters at certain points or moments in a text.* A theme is not a thing; themes are intransitive.

(4) *Theme is the form of capturing the phenomenon one tries to understand.*

Theme describes an aspect of the structure of lived experience (p. 87).

In reviewing the study data, approaches which van Manen described as "holistic reading" and "selective reading" tended to be used most, rather than the detailed sentence by sentence approach (p. 93).

The specific research questions were useful to organize findings respecting different aspects of the principals' roles and to develop an understanding of changes to these roles. As a starting point for classification the researcher looked at how each respondent answered the research questions. After this, stories and examples provided by the respondents which seemed particularly relevant to the themes were identified. In the process of considering the data, it also became evident that additional information had been provided which did not quite fit the structure implied by the first four research questions. In essence, research questions three and four combined into a category described as structural changes, and research question five, regarding other insights and information provided by the participants, focused on issues of responsibility and accountability. In the subsequent chapters reporting on the research questions, data presented directly from the interview transcripts are italicized.

Analysis of the data was assisted by the preparation of two presentations given by the researcher about the study, one to the College of Alberta School Superintendents' conference in August 1997, and one to the administrators and trustees of an Alberta school authority in October 1997. In both cases, discussion by participants at these workshops helped inform the researcher's analysis.

Trustworthiness

Several approaches were used in order to maintain credibility of the understandings developed by the study. Member checking was practiced with the participants, who were asked to check interview transcripts for accuracy. At the analysis stage preliminary/tentative findings were referred back to the respondents for review and comments, by way of correspondence and telephone contact.

The selection of participants from a variety of school environments provided for comparisons within the interview data, and the documentary data gathered provided additional comparisons on the consistency of the data. To augment these sources, a field log was maintained for recording observational data and insights formed by the researcher during the study. These measures in combination support the credibility of findings.

Assumptions

The researcher made the explicit assumption that the role of the principal has been changed by restructuring. He recognized that it could be argued that the role has not changed, that the major functions such as instructional leadership and operational management remain as they were before. Essentially that view would be that the context was changed by restructuring, but not the role. While there may be some validity to this line of thinking in theoretical terms, the researcher believes that in practical terms the role has changed. The concept of role, as discussed in Chapter 2, emphasized role as sets of interrelated expectations for a position. It seemed to the researcher that the expectations for the principalship clearly were changed by restructuring, so the role is changed. Parents, school councils, school boards, and central administrators look on the role differently now than they did before restructuring. Role also involves self-perception and the researcher suspects that many principals see changes in what they do: they may not be comfortable or pleased with

what they see, but their own expectations for the role are likely expanded by decentralization.

Dealing With Researcher Bias

In order to identify possible biases the researcher may have brought to the study, a discussion paper was prepared describing my views and expectations on issues associated with the changing role of the principalship. This is summarized in the following comments.

Research Question 1: "How is implementation of school-based management and decision making changing the role of the principal?" The researcher anticipated that these measures were causing principals to focus more time on the management aspects of the role. The site-based emphasis on collaborative and collegial decision making models made it likely that more meetings and more time were being committed to management.

Research Question 2: "How is increased parental involvement with schooling, particularly in the form of school councils and choice of schools, changing the role of the principal?" The researcher expected this aspect of restructuring would make principals more political and more accountable to external clients. These provisions were seen as exposing the principal to show more site-level leadership on issues of concern to the school community.

Research Question 3: "What effects are the limits which have been placed on financial expenditures for central administration and instructional support services having on the role of the principal?" The researcher anticipated that the consequence of capping administration and instructional support was that principals were left more on their own to sort out what to do, and had fewer solution strategies available to them. It was expected that the accountability provisions of the provincial education plan shifted the emphasis from mentoring and coaching by central office personnel to monitoring and evaluating. This was also seen as increasing the political dimension of the

principal's role, to find solutions and implement actions in ways that avoided issues re-surfacing as problems at the central administration level.

Research Question 4: "What effect is the reduction in the number of school jurisdictions having on the role of the principal?" The researcher expected that in the cases of substantial regionalizations principals would see less central support and would be left on their own to fare as best they could. More and longer meetings with more participants and requiring increased travel time was also expected.

In summary, the researcher anticipated that the changes to the role of the principal would be seen as increasing the demands on and the difficulty of the job. It was expected that some participants would see this as justified or offset by the perceived benefits of decentralization, while for others it would be frustrating and disappointing as it took them further away from what they believed to be the core function of the job.

Ethical Considerations

No ethical problems were encountered in the study. Participation by principals was voluntary, and participants were advised that they could withdraw at any time. All participants were from school systems other than the one in which the researcher was employed. Physical or mental harm to participants was not anticipated: the interests and protection of the research subjects was safeguarded at all times. The names of all participants remained confidential and the information and opinions provided by the subjects were treated confidentially. Participants were afforded the opportunity to exercise veto powers over inclusion of their data. Audio-tape recordings of interviews remained under the secure care of the researcher and were erased after an appropriate time upon conclusion of the study. Where textual data are reported in the thesis, pseudonyms are used throughout for anonymity.

Research Timetable

Research on the topic proceeded on the following schedule:

January 1997	Pilot testing of interview questions.
February 1997	Contact with superintendents to identify principals.
	Contact with principals to secure participation.
March - April 1997	Interviews with participants.
	Collection of documentary information.
	Preparation of interview transcripts.
May – June 1997	Member checking of transcript data.
June – July 1997	Primary analysis of data.
August –	
October 1997	Further review and analysis of data.
July 1997 –	
January 1999	Preparation of thesis.

Chapter 4

Context and Participants

The purpose of this chapter is to establish the context of the study. Each of the participants is described in terms of their personal backgrounds in school administration and the characteristics of their schools. The purpose of providing this information is to help the reader determine relevance of the findings subsequently reported to the reader's situation or interest.

Overview

The pilot study and main study combined, resulted in a cohort of 12 participants. The twelve divided along geographical lines into four clusters of three each. One cluster, created by the pilot study process reflected schools in an urban setting. They were from schools in or immediately adjacent to one of Alberta's major metropolitan centres. The other three clusters were in rural areas of central and north-central Alberta, in school jurisdictions which could be described as large rural systems. Their system enrollments were not particularly large (less than 10,000 students), but they encompassed large areas of territory. Of these three school jurisdictions, one could be considered to be a natural resource oriented area, one primarily an agricultural region, and one a mixed agriculture and resource area. All three rural jurisdictions were affected by the regionalization of school systems, as was one of the jurisdictions in the urban group.

The participants were all what might be termed veteran school administrators, with a range of 6 to 25 years of experience in the principalship, and in all but two cases, three or more years in their current position, up to a maximum of 20 years in the same school. The two exceptions had one and two years respectively in their present schools but had previous principalship experience. There were 10 men and two women in the study group. Their teaching backgrounds could be characterized as five from the

humanities, two elementary specialists, and five from a math/science orientation. The proportion of their assignment devoted to administration varied from about .4 to 1.0 with the lesser time allocations being in smaller schools. A substantial majority of the participants (8 of the 12) maintained some teaching duties, typically one or two classes to stay in touch, and therefore had administrative time allocations in the order of .75 to .9.

The participants' schools ranged in size from just over 100 students to about 1000 students. Three of the schools could be characterized as being large, seven as being of a medium size, and the other two as small schools. Three of the schools were kindergarten to grade six, three were kindergarten to grade nine, two were grade seven to nine junior high schools, three were grade ten to twelve high schools, and one was a grade seven to twelve secondary school. These school grade groupings were typical for Alberta where kindergarten through grade six is generally described as the elementary level, grades seven through nine as junior high school, and grades ten through twelve as high school or senior high school. Some of the schools were co-located in the same community, so the study represented schools in 10 different communities.

The Participants

Alexi

Alexi was in his first year in a new assignment at a combined elementary and junior high school of about 500 students, but he came to this position from five years in the principalship of another school in the jurisdiction that was in a nearby location. This afforded him familiarity with the administrative context of the system and the circumstances of the community. The school had a teaching staff of 22 and a support staff of 16 positions. It operated in a campus environment with the program divided between two buildings. Two part-time assistant principal positions were designated, one in each building. The enrollment had resulted in the school being crowded. Alexi's school was in one of the large rural school systems in a mixed agriculture and natural

resource-oriented community. This particular community was characterized as something of a bedroom community for a larger centre nearby, and was seen as more characteristic of workers in the resource industries than agriculture: some might refer to it as being a "blue collar" community. Alexi's own teaching background was in social studies, mostly at the junior high level but he maintained a small teaching assignment at the elementary level for familiarity, leaving about .8 of his time allocated to administration.

Ashley

Ashley was in her fifth year as principal of an elementary school of about 150 students. Prior to this she held an assistant principal role at another school in the jurisdiction. The school had eight teaching staff members providing 7.75 full time equivalent positions and another seven support staff persons providing four full time equivalent positions, so part-time staff members were a significant part of the school's personnel. The smaller size of the school precluded an assistant principal position. Ashley's teaching background was as an elementary generalist. However, her career experiences involved a lot of work in the special education area, and her current work allocation reflected this, with special education being her main teaching activity in conjunction with her administrative responsibilities. This combination allowed some flexibility in time allocation over the course of the school year with more time available for administration at the beginning and end of the year, with teaching duties representing .5 to .7 of her assignment and correspondingly .3 to .5 being administration.

The school was located in a well-established rural area which was primarily agricultural, characterized by mixed farming. Unlike some rural areas with declining populations, this one appeared to be stabilized, resulting in a consistent enrollment level for the school.

Brandon

Brandon had completed two years as principal of a larger elementary and junior high school of about 720 students. Before that he had held two other principalships, both also in kindergarten to grade nine schools, for a total of eight years. The school had 35 full time equivalent teaching positions filled by about 42 staff members, and an additional nine support staff positions. Brandon's own teaching background was in science and physical education and he maintained some teaching duties, with .7 of his position being allocated to the administrative role. His administrative responsibilities were assisted by a vice-principal.

This school was part of the urban cluster, being located in an affluent acreage area adjacent to the metropolitan centre. The community could be described as upper middle class, with a significant number of business and professional parents. In this environment the school enjoyed considerable parent volunteer support and the benefit of extensive parent fundraising to support its activities. The school was in a growing area and therefore experienced an expanding enrollment trend to the point where crowding and the need for additional facilities was considered to be a major problem by the community, and the subject of political action by parents directed at both the school jurisdiction and provincial officials.

Horace

Horace had been the principal of an elementary school of about 340 students for ten years. Prior to that he spent five years as vice principal at another school in the jurisdiction. His teaching background was in science and mathematics although at the present time he retained a .2 allocation teaching a second languages class, leaving about .8 for administration. His administrative responsibilities were assisted by a vice-principal.

The school had 19 teachers filling 18.5 full time equivalent positions, and a complement of 10 support staff. The support staff included several special, grant-funded positions related to programs at the school and extra to the regular budget allocation for the operation. The school was located in a larger rural community in an area primarily oriented to natural resource industries. In addition to its regular program catchment area the school provided a French Immersion program for the entire community, including at the kindergarten level. The kindergarten program was also a consolidated operation, with some of the students moving on to other elementary schools for grade one. The parents served by the school were regarded as reflecting a broad range of socio-economic status with an upper-middle tendency evident in the French immersion group and a lower-middle characteristic of the English program group. This was not seen as problematic and the working relationship between the two program parent groups was reported as effective.

Ian

Ian was in his seventh year as principal of a junior high school of about 470 students with 27 professional staff and nine support staff positions. Prior to this position he had been a vice-principal for three years. His teaching background was in social studies and he continued to teach one class, resulting in his administrative time allotment being about .8 of his total assignment. The administrative organization of the school was non-traditional, with six of the staff members being designated to assistant-principal functions, each with a small amount of administrative time released from their teaching function.

The school had initiated an alternative organizational structure several years ago as an initiative to improve student performance. This involved cohorts of students and teachers moving through the three grades together in a large group setting. The initiative had met with mixed support from parents, resulting in re-establishment of a conventional classroom/grade program running in parallel with the cohort arrangement.

The school also provided a French Immersion program in the traditional configuration. The school was located in a larger rural community oriented to natural resource production activities. The community was seen as being of a normal range of characteristics, but having a higher than average transience of population which resulted in a significant turnover rate in the school's students.

Joshua

Joshua was the principal for four years at a junior high school with an enrollment of about 350 students. The school was staffed by 16.5 teaching positions and six support staff. Prior to this position he had accumulated four years of school administration experience in assistant principal roles at two other schools in the jurisdiction. His teaching background was in mathematics and industrial education, but in the present role full-time was allocated to administration and no regular teaching duties were assumed. Joshua's administrative duties were shared with two assistant principals.

The school was in a jurisdiction making up the urban cluster, in a smaller industrial community adjacent to the metropolitan centre. The school's community could be described as "blue collar". The school had experienced a significant staff downsizing, from 20 to the 16.5 positions, as part of fiscal restraint measures implemented by the jurisdiction in response to implementation of the provincial funding framework.

Luke

Luke had been principal of a 650 student senior high school for eight years, and prior to that had been vice-principal in a smaller kindergarten to grade nine school for two years. His teaching background was originally in English, but his experiences included various subjects at all grade levels. He described his assignment as full-time administration, but indicated that occasionally he taught a class, to keep in touch with the instructional environment. The school had a staff of 35 teachers and six support

staff positions and the administrative organization included two assistant principal designations.

The school was located in one of the major towns in the jurisdiction, a location with a strong agricultural orientation. The community was well established, with a stable population base, which provided enrollment stability to the school. The school also provided high school service to a neighbouring, but quite distant, natural resource-based community. These students made up about 10% of the enrollment, and a substantial daily commute by school bus was an integral part of their high school experience. This arrangement was being replaced by a local high school program for these students; consequently, Luke's school faced a significant one-time enrollment decline. The school's community was described as traditional, with somewhat of a WASP outlook, holding high expectations for the high school, which has maintained a high profile in the community for many years.

Mark

The senior of the participants, Mark had been principal for 20 years at a high school of about 550 students. Prior to this position, he had served for five years as vice-principal at the same school. The school had 30 teaching staff and six support staff positions. Mark's teaching background was in mathematics, and although his administrative allocation was full-time, he continued to provide some teaching through a weekend seminar course delivery format the school established several years ago, primarily to accommodate students' needs regarding the Career and Life Management curriculum. The organization of Mark's school included two assistant principal positions.

The school was located in a large town with a natural-resource based economy. One descriptor of the community indicated it reflected above average income levels for rural Alberta at the same time as below average education levels. This was described as

a concern in that the community was not generally supportive of the expectations and demands of the senior levels of schooling, particularly in the academic disciplines.

Matthew

One of the pilot study participants, Matthew had a perspective that was different than that of the rest of the study group. He had completed five years as principal of a senior high school of about 1,000 students located in the major western Canadian city that formed the core of the urban cluster. The school had a staff of about 45 teachers and 15 support positions and, along with three assistant principals, had a department head structure. Matthew had a diverse background in teaching and school administration prior to this position, including teaching at the kindergarten and elementary levels as well as high school, and a year as an assistant principal at a different high school, as well as five years as principal of an elementary school, all in the same jurisdiction. His administrative experience also included central office line administration duties for four years.

While the school jurisdiction had an open enrollment policy so that students attending the school could be from any part of the city, most of the enrollment was indicated as being from the communities adjacent to the school. These were described as representing a full range of socio-economic activities and standing, giving the school a heterogeneous population, rather than one more specialized in academics, sports, or performing arts like some of the other city high schools tended to be. Inclusiveness was described as an important characteristic of the school's approach to its community.

Ryan

Ryan had been principal for eight years at a combined elementary and junior high school of almost 750 students. The school had 39 professional staff filling 35 full time equivalent positions, and a support staff of 16 positions which reflected a substantial level of special needs programming. Prior to this position, he held

administrative roles at two other schools for a total of 7.5 years. His teaching background was in social studies and he still maintained a small teaching role, allocating about .9 of his assignment to administration. The principal's role was supported by two assistant principal positions.

The school was interesting in that while it was located in the major urban centre of the region, its catchment was the rural students in the areas adjoining the city. The school was operated by the rural jurisdiction, not by the city district. This resulted in a very diverse community, or actually collection of communities, being served by the school, ranging from very affluent acreage locations to trailer court communities with high transient rates. The school was experiencing a growth trend and had a high utilization rate. Advocacy for construction of a new facility by the jurisdiction, which would indirectly relieve some of the capacity pressure on this school, was a substantial issue for parents in this catchment area.

Sarah

Sarah had been principal of an elementary school for six years. The school was in a rural location, with an enrollment of about 110 students. The staff was made up of six teachers and six support positions. This school was Sarah's first administrative appointment, and its size precluded the designation of an assistant or vice principal. Her teaching background was as an elementary generalist with an emphasis on language arts. Again reflecting the small school environment, .55 of her job was classroom teaching, leaving about .45 of her time allocation for administration.

The school was situated in a small rural community and most of its enrollment was from farms and acreages in the surrounding countryside. It was one of the sites in the cluster characterized as primarily agricultural. The school's community, in the sense of both the hamlet and the rural area, was well established with an established population, resulting in a stable enrollment trend for the school. The location was adjacent to several other similar rural communities with similar schools, so student

catchment areas tended to be regulated by school bus transportation boundaries that had the potential for significant effect on enrollments.

Tyler

Tyler had been principal for three years at a junior-senior high, grade seven to twelve secondary school of about 285 students. He had been vice-principal at the same school for five years immediately prior to assuming the principalship, for a total of eight years of administrative experience at the site. Tyler's teaching background was in science, mathematics and in industrial education. He taught a .25 assignment and the remaining .75 of his time was allocated for administration. Administration duties were shared with the vice-principal role, which was also a part-time designation.

The school was located in a medium sized rural town which developed as an agricultural centre and which now also supported natural resource production activities. This location was part of the mixed agriculture and resource cluster. The high school program provided by the school was regional, while the junior high program served a more localized population. Several adjoining communities had schools with programs up to grade nine, after which their students were bussed to Tyler's school. This created a situation where parent choice of schools at the junior high level was regulated by the school bus transportation policies of the jurisdiction, which had a significant effect on catchment areas and enrollments at the neighbouring schools.

<center>**Summary**</center>

This chapter has described the participants in the research project and the school environments and community contexts in which their experiences are rooted. The main characteristics of the participant group are summarized in Table 4.1.

The participants' schools averaged just under 500 students with about 25 teachers and 10 support staff, and their mean experience in the principalship was 8.5 years. The 12 participants were regarded as forming four clusters of three participants each, reflecting different school and community context characteristics. Three of these

clusters reflected the characteristics of large rural school jurisdictions, and the other cluster reflected more of an urban context where population size rather than geographic location was the principal characteristic.

Table 4.1

Description of Participants and Context

Pseudonym	School level	Enrollment	Staff complement		Experience as principal
			T	S	
Alexi	K - 9	500	22	16	1 + 5
Ashley	K - 6	150	8	7	5
Brandon	K - 9	720	42	9	2 + 8
Horace	K - 6	‥ 340	19	10	10
Ian	7 - 9	470	27	9	7
Joshua	7 - 9	350	17	6	4
Luke	10 - 12	650	35	6	8
Mark	10 - 12	550	30	6	20
Matthew	10 - 12	1000	45	15	5 + 5
Ryan	K - 9	740	39	16	8
Sarah	K - 6	110	6	6	6
Tyler	7-12	285	19	8	3 + 5
Averages		489	25.8	9.5	8.5

Notes:

K = kindergarten
T = teachers
S = support staff
Experience = 1st number is years at current school, + other years as a principal

Chapter 5

School-based Management and the Principal

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings related to Specific Research Question 1: How is implementation of site-based management changing the role of the principal? Four major questions about this aspect of restructuring were raised with participants in the interviews:

1. How does school-based management operate at your school and how is it implemented?

2. What does this arrangement of school-based management mean for you operationally as principal?

3. How much has your work as principal changed because of school-based management?

4. How do you handle decision making now?

On the last question participants were also asked to describe how they would now make a school-level, policy-type decision, and to comment on the extent this may have changed since restructuring.

The responses are presented for each of the participants, grouped into clusters for convenience of presentation. The chapter concludes with a summary and discussion of the findings, and an overall response to Specific Research Question 1.

Rural Mixed Cluster

The school jurisdiction that encompassed the principals in this cluster was still working through the implementation details of a substantial regionalization, and the extent to which the management of professional staffing should be decentralized to schools was still under review. At the time of the study, it remained a centralized function: teacher personnel dollars remained in a central budget and staff were allocated by central administration using a formula guideline, rather than the dollar

resources being allocated to each school. This circumstance is different than was the case in the other jurisdictions involved in the study.

Alexi

Alexi described the implementation of school-based management and decision making in terms of the development of a series of inter-related handbooks, including an administration handbook, a staff handbook, and a parent and school handbook. He emphasized the implementation of ideas, the importance of setting out clear expectations for staff, and the need to clarify the role of the school council. In this context he described his role as that of a facilitator.

In terms of what this meant for his role, he described an approach which emphasized the co-ordination of staff decision making, and an important need to maintain balance among the different interests represented in any major decision. Building trustworthiness with stakeholders, particularly the school council, was described as an essential part of this approach. In this context Alexi described one of his significant functions as providing policy research. His role was being a resource person for the staff members and parents to whom he was seeking to shift decision-making responsibility.

> *My job is to be task-oriented, "we need to make a decision on this, this, and this" and my job is to push for the decision, my job is not to make the decision, ok? Lead policy development, lead staff discussions, access resources required to put the decision in place, communicate the school goals to central office and the community. But it's not to make the decision; we're talking major decisions in school policy, things like that. Now once the decision has come to by the staff, my job is then to see that it is implemented . . . obviously since I'm the one that's going to be implementing it, I'm going to have quite a bit of influence here.*

He also indicated that this approach to management changed his role by requiring him to devote more time to the policy development process and to the paperwork associated with that process.

With respect to decision making, Alexi described a situational approach based on the impact of the policy and the "zone of indifference" of the participants in the school community. He described retaining considerable directive control in cases where safety or other similar concerns were paramount, but indicated the intention of delegating a lot of decision making responsibility wherever this was appropriate.

By way of example, he described the following policy-level decision making problem arising from attendance at the school of a student with an acute food allergy to peanut butter.

We started this in September, developing this policy. To get this right the first time I contacted the asthmatic societies and got everything they had to do with school, so I had to read that. Then I got stuff from the parents to make sure they didn't have anything coming that was going to be a surprise, and I got the Educator and the Law *issues on asthmatics in schools so that we could have a legal perspective. I had to create a guideline for parents on creating a policy statement - these are the steps you've got to go through. And then the central office provided us with a handbook for school boards and you had to read through that and provide that to the parents. Then, this one came from the Health Unit, I guess what I'm saying is that you end up doing a literature search for the policy because it's important. You wouldn't be able to do this for all the policies; put this all together, coalesced it, the relevant documents, provided it to the committee. They meet, they come up with a roughed out one, they go to the school council. The school council looks it over and talks about it, but we can't vote on it this time because it's a contentious issue, we have to wait. We finally get it through, and then it goes to Teacher - Board Liaison because now*

the Board wants to take a look at it to see if it's something that should be within

all of their schools . . . so right now it's off to the lawyers. Total time,

somewhere in October to March. Our school policy is done, but this policy may

not be if it goes to the lawyers and says, "nope, can't do that".

Ryan

Ryan's feeling was that he had at least partially implemented school-based management prior to the provincially mandated initiative, and so he saw this as an ongoing process and one which involved fine tuning of measures he had initiated earlier in his principalship. He described his style with staff as consulting, trying to decentralize decisions as much as possible to committees of staff, while recognizing that staff members would not always consider this valid. He described the approach of using a budget committee and having this function default back to the principal. He noted that the jurisdiction's current arrangement of centralized decisions on staffing required a negotiating function on his part for the implementation of decisions in this area that were significant to the school.

Operationally, Ryan described his approach as one of involving people as much as possible where appropriate.

I think just involving the people in the school, teachers, support staff, students,

parents in as much as possible where it's appropriate . . . if people are involved

and it's not meaningful to them, their involvement doesn't mean anything,

doesn't give them anything and it's probably what you get from them doesn't

mean so much.

He provided an example with respect to involving students:

The last round of decentralization included a chunk of money for minor

maintenance areas, for instance property damage . . . if something gets broken it

has to be fixed and we pay for it. So we took that to the students and said "you

look after the school. If I don't have to pay to look after getting toilets

unclogged, I don't have to pay to get desks repaired, door closers replaced, etc.
we can use that money for something that will benefit you and will improve the
school." An issue here with the junior high was a set of old lockers that were
ugly and not very serviceable any longer. I said this new locker is something
that would be a priority . . . so we spent $13,000 on new lockers last year for
that wing and most of that was money that was in that property damage account
that hadn't been spent because the vandalism was so low.

He described this as a positive benefit of school-based management which he was able
to relate directly to the school's goals of responsible citizenship development for its
students.

Ryan felt that school-based management changed the nature of his role in that it
required more communication initiatives on his part, along with more financial
management duties. He felt the positive benefits of decentralization justified the added
work and responsibilities necessary for implementation, and saw the management
functions as necessary to facilitate effective educational leadership. He described the
example of implementation of the new science curriculum as an example of a major
educational initiative facilitated by school-based management and decision making
flexibility.

I really believe that the implementation of the new elementary science
curriculum in this school was the first properly implemented curriculum and
resource change that I've been involved in since I started teaching in 1978.
When the new science curriculum came in, the teachers said, "We don't want to
spend a bunch of money on textbooks, it's supposed to be activity based, could
we put that money toward that?" I answered "Yes, it that's what you want." The
result was they went and developed kits, little boxes with all the materials in for
every unit in science, and a process for every unit in science. The only thing I
had to do was make sure the money was there to buy the materials and then find

some place to store them so that they were readily accessible. So, I think there

are much better decisions being made.

Ryan raised the question of workload with the suggestion that from his point of view it has not really changed that much. *I know this is almost heretical to say . . . but I don't think the workload has increased dramatically.* He reiterated the shift in priorities he perceived.

With respect to decision making strategies, Ryan described a situational approach, emphasizing staff and school council involvement depending on the issue. He indicated a preference for purposeful discussion at staff meetings as the venue for this involvement, and a desire to see discussions with school council proceed in parallel with staff consideration of an issue whenever this was possible.

Tyler

Tyler's primary reaction to school-based management was in terms of budgeting, teacher evaluation, and building maintenance. He recognized the jurisdiction's initiative to provide for more staff involvement in decisions, and the sense of responsibility and ownership that can instill. *How do we do it here? Well, a lot more responsibility on the school level, which has resulted in ownership as far as our staff and in some cases on the part of students as well.* He described his approach as being as open as possible for participation, using a process of polling staff for their advice.

I've always tried to be very open . . . has it changed? . . . in volume, I'd say yes.

In my approach . . . I guess in some degree more delegation to others who would

be able to work more effectively. But as far as my approach otherwise is

concerned, I don't think there would be a lot of change.

This decision making environment was recognized as instrumental in helping improve the school's climate.

In terms of workload, budgeting and financial management duties were identified as more extensive than before, giving rise to the question of what the

principal should attend to personally and what might be delegated to support staff, depending on the secretarial support staffing level considered appropriate for the school.

> *Ideally it would be nice that you could hire another half time person in our*
>
> *office area, and get our main secretary off the phone, because there are days*
>
> *that I don't know how she gets her work done, and have to do the accounting*
>
> *otherwise. The principal does have to be able to understand what the*
>
> *accountant, the secretary is doing, but to actually go through the procedure and*
>
> *do all that, like the GST rebates, I don't want to have to deal with that: that's*
>
> *someone else's responsibility, so I think there should be more time in the office*
>
> *area to do that.*

Generally Tyler's remarks reflected a lot of responsibility for operation and management of the school remaining directly with the principal.

In terms of decision making, Tyler felt that regionalization had resulted in more independence at the school from system-level direction and governance, allowing him and the staff more flexibility within parameters set by the jurisdiction. The larger jurisdiction was apparently less interested in the specifics of school-level policy decisions than had been the case before regionalization. In this context he described a decision making process characterized by the initiation of proposals by the administration for consideration and reaction by stakeholders, primarily the staff and the school council. He described a review and tightening up of the school's attendance policy as an example:

> *We ran that by the school council. First of all the administration came up with*
>
> *the need, like "we have a problem here we need to deal with". So we discussed*
>
> *it at the staff level because staff deals with that on a regular basis as well. We*
>
> *came up with ideas, we formulated a draft, brought that to our school council.*
>
> *There's student union representation on school council so we got the*
>
> *information out.*

He also described a policy situation where a system level imperative (a restriction on smoking) required a change in approach by the school from its former policy, established prior to regionalization, which was to phase out smoking entitlement grade by grade. Notwithstanding this, on balance the benefits of more independence were described as positive.

Rural Resource-based Cluster

The participants in this group enjoyed a more stable organizational context in that the regionalization process, while changing their jurisdiction somewhat, did not appear to have a major impact on the core characteristics of the system. This system also appeared to have a reasonably established delegation of administrative functions to its principals.

Horace

Horace indicated that his management approach in the principalship was well established before restructuring and felt that there was no real change associated with the school-based management and decision making initiative. He indicated his process was one of ongoing, open collaboration with staff which was input oriented and "up front" with them. He characterized the process as one of principal's recommendations for verification with the staff. In short, it was a comfortably established approach that could be quite directive, based on established credibility with the staff and parents.

Operationally, for the principal, Horace saw school-based management as a confirmation of his approach, which made things somewhat more concrete than they previously were. He noted the mandated Educational Plan process created additional time demands, but recognized the participation involved in its development resulted in improved "ownership" and more focus by the staff on improving areas of weakness. He described his role in this as maximizing others' strengths. *I think we've got some really good people that have got some great ideas and some great talents. We want to bring*

those out in them and so we try to encourage, some people you have to encourage a little bit more, but most people are really quite good.

In terms of changes to the work of the principal, Horace referred to increased paperwork, and discussed the problem of increasing management task demands conflicting with leadership functions.

> *One of the real differences I'm seeing is the difference between management and leadership. The management factor, I think is more of what is burdening down a person like myself, just getting the nuts and bolts together to work and everything to function properly. Whereas a leadership role, looking down the road and saying "what are our needs going to be, what are we going to have to do here, how are we going to do it, what are some things that we should be looking at?" You get so burdened down in the actual management of the school, a lot of stuff downloaded from central office, Alberta Education, is piling up. You know, you've got pieces of paper all over the place, different things that have to be done and done this way and reported that way, that type of thing.*

With respect to his concern about the demands of financial management, he related:

> *You would think the budget would be simple. We've gone through probably twenty revisions of budget from last spring until January. And to re-do everything, and re-do it again, and re-do it again and re-do it again occupies a certain amount of time you know, and the whole business operation of the school . . . all that financial organizational accountability type of stuff is the heavy stuff.*

He went on to talk about coping strategies to accommodate these new realities: *I guess we become visionary sometimes and become practical a lot of the time.* The benefit making the additional work bearable was described as increased flexibility in decision making. Horace described several examples of staff development activities, which he was able to accommodate through school-based program and resource decisions.

For decision making in relationship to school level policy issues, Horace described a process of issue identification, referral to an ad hoc type of staff policy development team for a recommendation to forward to a staff meeting and to the school council.

> *We would identify it first and say that we would like to look at a policy on discipline, for an example; we bring that to staff, we bring it to school council, and we'd establish a committee to look at it and review it and revise it, bring some recommendations. There may be several staff who volunteer, there may be only a few, might have to ask them, might have to identify a volunteer. And you would take the school council and say "we're going to work on this policy, are there any people that would like to work on this with us?" And they bring forth their recommendations, we take them to staff, we take them to school council, we get support from everybody and away we go.*

While Horace did not take a leadership role in each and every such initiative, he indicated that he kept in touch with the processes as they developed, to provide influence and leadership as he felt was needed.

Ian

Ian described school-based management primarily in terms of the budgeting process. He described a downloading of expenses and indicated that this, coupled with a system wide pooling arrangement to fund central services, left him unsure if he really had any greater effective control at the site level than before.

> *Basically what's happened is I don't see a lot of difference other than a lot of the expenses have been downloaded . . . staffing is charged at $55,000 per teacher, so once you deal with that the rest of the money that's coming in is what we used to have in the old days; except now that support services like testing, we have pooled our money as a group of principals, so we go through the process with central office of "here's your money, now here's the things we used to have, are*

you willing to parcel money back". I don't necessarily disagree with that, the

point is I'm not sure I'm in any more control of the money than I was before.

He described an approach strongly oriented to the administration team. As was

described in Chapter 4, this school's organization involved six assistant principals, and

Ian emphasized developing shared leadership.

> *My belief is that I'm, I use the term "principal less school" and I don't mean it*
>
> *that there's no one in charge. I mean that the principal needs to come from*
>
> *within the group to say "hold it, I'm just doing the job that's for all of us: I'm*
>
> *not this special person out here that comes riding in on a white horse and knows*
>
> *all the answers and will solve all your problems". That's sort of where I'm*
>
> *moving. The admin. team is sort of the embodiment of that. Each of those*
>
> *administrators has two or three teachers that they listen to and bring their ideas.*
>
> *So we meet every other week and we have staff meetings every other week so we*
>
> *sit with the admin. team, I get their opinions, we decide what we're going to do,*
>
> *we go to the staff with it. I find them to be open - good discussions and we move*
>
> *along as a group with them being sort of the feelers out into the staff.*

Ian also mentioned efforts to secure more parental involvement as part of his approach

to school-based management, but one that was somewhat problematic at the time.

In terms of the operational changes to his role, Ian felt that for him it had not

really changed in that the restructuring emphasis on school-based management and

decision making were consistent with his own philosophy, which he had already

established at the school. He observed a "tightening up" of the policy and procedural

parameters imposed on the school by the jurisdiction and the province and an increase

in "paperwork" as a consequence of these impositions.

> *So, from seven years ago, if I put myself in today, site-based management really*
>
> *hasn't been a big change to me. I call it "smoke and mirrors", it's downloading*
>
> *problems and I'm not sure I can really do what I want to do. . . . now "you forgot*

these two rules, well I thought it was site based management, well it is, but . . ."

I don't know.

In reflecting on this, Ian also raised the distinction between the management functions provided by the principal and the educational dimension of his role.

> *I believe, as I sit and watch principals' meetings and I see what administrators*
>
> *talk about, I believe we're moving more and more to managers. To making sure*
>
> *that the building is running smoothly financially, the building is being kept*
>
> *clean, the plans are in order, all of those kinds of things. Moving away from*
>
> *"what are we doing together as a staff in our classrooms", those kinds of things*
>
> *which is the part of administration that I wanted to be involved with.*

With respect to the decision making processes he used, Ian described a situational approach. Various paths emerged to initiate consideration on a question or issue, depending on its nature. Again, the administrative team figured prominently in the process as the venue to develop a recommendation to forward to a staff meeting. School council input was described as being through the annual planning process rather than an item specific type of refer, review, and comment approach.

Mark

An increased emphasis on budgeting characterized Mark's assessment of school-based management and decision making. He indicated that with respect to the way he operates in his role the restructuring has not really changed much. Increased responsibility for the staffing element was identified as one area where change was significant. He continued to rely on input processes, particularly from staff, which he had previously developed. He also identified a problem with the imposition of provincial goals and direction on the school through the education plan process:

> *A lot of the operational part hasn't really changed that much from my*
>
> *perspective. I felt that we always had a lot of input from and staff involvement*
>
> *in decision making and parent council involvement and had good support that*

way. . . . I think staff felt more involved prior to some of the Department goals

and priorities coming down, and now they're saying "well this is really

interesting, you know, it's all supposed to be site based management but we're

being told more specifically what we're working on than ever before, so how is

this really site based management?"

The size of the school facilitated using a departmental approach to securing budget

input. Securing input from the school council was reported as problematic due its desire

for only limited involvement.

One area of change Mark identified was with respect to both the nature and

extent of the workload now attached to the role. *The change has been that I find myself*

dealing with more central office types of issues. The day to day operation as far as the

school is concerned, it's just increased my load, basically is what it's done. He offered

the following example of this shift:

The fact that we've got a two full day meeting, tomorrow and Wednesday, all the

principals, to deal with the Division's priorities and Education Plan. And then

following that of course the Education Plan for the school and how that fits in to

all the priorities. and the reporting and documentation that goes along with

that certainly is an addition. Also, many of us feel there are inequities in the

way the Divisional budget is coming down to the schools . . . I'm on a committee

to look at the Divisional budget. So that's what I'm saying, a lot of those things

weren't in my territory before.

With respect to administrative workload, Mark particularly identified the work

associated with Credit Enrollment Unit funding for high school students as a problem

area, not only at the school management level, but also in terms of school office support

staff time allocation.

In the area of decision making, Mark described an administration initiated

process using referral to a staff committee for recommendations back to the

administration before being forwarded to a staff meeting and the school council for responses. He indicated there was an increase in the volume of school-level policy making required by the new context, more than a change in the decision process. He also pointed out the increased responsibility and accountability of the principal for school-level activities.

> *There's another subtle change here. Divisional policy used to have a lot of stipulations, for example the field trip policy, on how many adults had to be with each number of students, special procedures for going out of the province, and so on. This now has been rolled together into a fairly simple, general policy and the bottom line of it is that the school principal is responsible and the school is responsible for coming up with the policy. So now I'm responsible for it, not the Superintendent or the Assistant Superintendent.*

Rural Agricultural Cluster

The school jurisdiction that encompassed this group was the product of a substantial regionalization, and at the system level considerable effort was directed to establishing policy and operating parameters for the schools. The schools in this cluster operated with the direction of a School-Based Management Manual which set out the system's beliefs, definition, organizational model and policy direction, along with detailed directions regarding school-based budgeting. The model provided by the jurisdiction emphasized stakeholder collaboration in decision making at the school level.

Ashley

An annual goal setting process involving staff and parents was one of the principal ways that Ashley characterized the implementation of school-based management at her school.

> *We meet first as a staff because I believe that we have primary responsibility for the running of the school and the parents can offer us advice and be consulted.*

But it shouldn't be up to them to be the generators of all the ideas. Each person is asked individually to have thought ahead of time what they think we should have as our goals for the coming year. We begin with everybody writing those down, and they meet with another person to discuss their goals and decide, they have a bigger piece of paper than they started with. If they think they have a goal that is the same they can write down just one goal. If they feel there is a substantial difference, they just keep their goals. Then those two people meet with two others, with another pair so there are four of them talking, then we meet as eight and continue to sixteen, depending on how many there are, building up and combining the lists of goals. We all come together as a big group and all the goals go up, they're on quite a large sheet by then, and then we do dots. Sometimes it's stickers, but everybody gets kind of dots and if the goal that you said is absolutely most important, you go and put ten of your dots over there by it. The result is that you can kind of see the priority as a staff. From there the list will go to our parents, to a school council meeting, and parents who aren't able to make it to the school council get a questionnaire to rate the goals. The parents use the same process and you see what they want and they have some idea of what goals the staff wants, and I've found there has been a really good match up. From there we'll come back with our top three things that we're going to work on for the year.

The other aspect of school-based management Ashley mentioned was more involvement of staff in operational decisions in addition to planning activities, with the consequence of more and longer meetings for everyone. One of the consequences of this was a reluctance of staff to participate fully, for example declining to form a budget committee and in effect delegating their decision input on this back to the principal. Her view was that they would restrict their involvement to issues that were of immediate significance to them.

Ashley regarded the new school-based management structure as a more formalized arrangement than existed when she assumed the principalship, particularly with respect to the functions of the school council. She expressed concern about the workload of the role becoming unmanageable, mentioning some of the functions that principals now have more complete responsibility for, including staff evaluation, analysis of achievement test results, budget decisions, and reporting on the school to the jurisdiction and the community.

The kind of report that we were asked to submit when I first began this job would have been a three- or four-page principal's report that could be quite informal, to the Superintendent about what your school had accomplished that year. It now requires a School Report that is something we publish. It goes out to our parents and the wider community, so to me it has to have a really finished, polished look; so that isn't something you can just casually have a secretary type up and send out after a couple of days of thought. You're having to do all of your graphs and your analysis of your achievement test results right away in September when those results come. I think that you feel a lot of stress as a principal because your staff feels greater stress, because we're not used to having to make all the budget decisions.

The pressures of coping with the situation gave rise to a unique strategy on Ashley's part:

I decided that something had to give, and that 60 or 70 hours a week wasn't doing it, so I spoke to the staff. "You know there's been a referendum in Quebec and actually, we're declaring sovereignty from the School Division, but we're not telling anybody." And so when they are asking for all of these things I'm just not going to be doing it. "Now, there could be a slight downside to doing this; we may miss a committee meeting we really wanted to go to, and we may not fill in the form that could win us free Oilers' tickets, but we're just going to

separate". And no one noticed! That to me was the thing that was expendable,

and that once the staffing was set and the budget monies come to your school,

you can operate quite independently.

She went on to identify several other factors in the role which she felt were moving the principal away from being an instructional leader, including budgeting and the political dimension of lobbying - representing the school and doing public relations along with liaison to the Board of Trustees. *I believe the principal is the instructional leader in the school. Where do you need to be? You need to be in classrooms, you need to be available to teachers to talk about curriculum changes and student evaluation, and instead of that . . .* She was not optimistic about the current demands being temporary or transitional so that she would be able to get back to the educational leader functions.

I think that as long as the responsibilities reside with principals as they do now,

I have to do a lot of lobbying, to really watch my public relations. I never would

have spoken to Board members in a way to try to get action at the Board level.

I'm now encouraged by my Superintendent to do that. And all of those things

take a lot of time, to build those kinds of networks and to have that kind of

access.

The decision making approaches described by Ashley were situational with respect to involvement of her staff, depending on assessment of the issue at hand.

There are some things that teachers will be absolutely up in arms about if they

aren't part of the decision making process; and there are some things that they

really would rather you just went away and left them alone and let them know . .

. I felt the first year we did school-based management we did some things by

trial and error and we learned that there were some things the staff does not

want to know about and we've been still trying to sort through that.

As a consequence her approach was consensus oriented where necessary, but she indicated a sometimes more arbitrary approach when this was appropriate, for example

with respect to meeting requirements established by the *School Act* and ensuring consistent communications to parents about their students' performance.

Luke

Luke emphasized maximizing flexibility as one of the key elements in his approach to school-based management, along with an emphasis on budgeting and reorganizing accounting procedures to facilitate school leadership based on a strategic or "big picture" approach to the role.

> *That was the first part of it, to increase flexibility with the use of part time contracts for teaching positions whenever possible. The second part of it was to totally go through and change the accounting procedures used in the school to create a single budget and accounting rollup so that all of the fiscal side of site based management could be easily managed.*

He described the significance of being proactive with the high school program to maximize revenue through the Credit Enrollment Unit approach of the new funding framework, to establish a financial surplus position and provide a strong base that would enable the school to adapt to new changes. The approach was problematic with staff who were more concerned with pupil-teacher ratios than the aggregate position of the school over time.

Luke described the impact of the school-based management initiative as being very demanding on the principal's role, but at the same time creating some powerful opportunities.

> *Eighteen hours a day. A lot of proactive thinking, a lot more of the kind of thinking that required that you see things in relation to everything else. The idea that you could look at something in isolation disappeared with site based management. Every problem became associated with something else, everything more clearly became connected and interconnected that it was before. So you could see the relationship between this, this, and this, and this. By not being*

able to just look at the bottom line, but recognizing where the bottom line is and then recognizing the impact it has on all these other things. So I really tried to be proactive in the sense of not being driven by the dollar. I tried instead to make the dollars work in a different way. but that required more time, a much greater sense of integration and a much greater sense of connectivity that I even thought was necessary.

This view gave rise to what Luke saw as the underlying flaw in how site based management was being implemented and was influencing the principal. *You're never going to be in charge of that bottom line, it's going to be in charge of you and what you do. To me that's the greatest problem facing school-based administrators, is when site based management controls what you do: you don't control it.* To overcome this difficulty he emphasized maximizing revenue and establishing a strong surplus position so that the principal's focus could be on the "big picture" of where the school realistically should be going.

Luke saw site-based management very much as an administrative domain, not an educational one, and he indicated the failure of education officials at the provincial and jurisdictional levels to recognize this was frustrating and disheartening.

It's not related to student achievement whatsoever, it's not related to anything educational whatsoever. There is no correlation; it's simply a means of operating, it's an accountability measure. It's a way of making sure that everyone understands that education costs money, but it has no correlation with student performance. and the idea that it creates within the school decision making closer at the centre is bogus. I think there are a lot of superintendents out there who don't know anything about management either, who are selling something they don't even know what it is, which they don't understand how it works.

In terms of changes in the role, Luke reiterated the increased focus on money and the involvement of fiscal considerations in educational decisions rather than these being focused on educational considerations. He referred to this tendency as becoming intimate with the Secretary-Treasurer instead of the Superintendent, and he reflected an interesting double perspective on living with site-based management. While skeptical about its value to students, at the same time he acknowledged its opportunities in a personal dimension.

> *Site-based management provided me with lots of opportunities to try stuff. I tried to make the potential frustration not be a factor, and it wasn't. Other than the fact that I had to do all that work, but I got to see education in a different way, which is both a personal up side but I think a professional down side. But I'm not so sure that people really truly understood, least of all myself, what a principal was supposed to do anyway; because you always had terms like educational leadership, what does that mean?*

He summarized this outlook as one of leadership opportunity and a bunch of extra work. The environment he described provided an opening to someone who has a sense of what they want to do and how they want to proceed, otherwise in his view it became "a big so what?"

Luke described a decision making process, which tended to be administratively initiated, putting out ideas for discussion and reaction with the staff. The focus initially was described as being with those most affected or involved with the issue or question, and when there was a solid grasp of what should be done, then presentation to the staff as a whole for further reaction. He emphasized the importance of keeping rules to a minimum and basing the school's operation on principles, and he acknowledged that his philosophy about what a school was about and how it should function was at times directive, in that ideas contrary to his guiding principles would not go anywhere.

It was the philosophy of the person in charge of the school . . . So you come to
me with a problem and it doesn't speak to this well, then I'm not going to hear it
very well, it's that simple. I really don't understand any other philosophy of
operating a school. If schools aren't for kids and about kids, and if we don't
give kids good reason to be in school, I can not figure out why we would have a
school.

Sarah

Sarah responded to the question about school-based management and decision making with a clear emphasis on collaborative decision making which immediately faced the management and leadership issue.

What I'm looking at is shared decision making, and so I'm going to change terms
on you here a little bit because much of my leadership style is participatory and
as a result I like to refer to it as "shared decision making" and I think that
shared decision making includes a very, very important component that perhaps
school-based management doesn't. I think that shared decision making enables
me to lead - school based management looks at managers, and I see those two
things as being very, very different. so we at our school talk about shared
decision making.

She described working to maintain a team environment at the school with a positive climate that promoted a school culture oriented to continuous improvement.

Sarah identified the Education Plan development process as a central part of this initiative. She outlined a brainstorming-based approach used with both staff and parents to generate and then prioritize options about what's meaningful and practical for kids at her school. She characterized this process as meeting-intensive, being very much a communication process on her part. *It's all people management and communication management that takes us through the process.*

In terms of operational effects on her role, Sarah described herself as a change agent and reiterated the importance of more emphasis on communication processes, and on attention to practicing participatory decision making strategies. She noted this required additional effort on her part as an information disseminator, and at times to assume the role of a consultant. She emphasized the importance of the principal being engaged with the school's community to earn trust and respect, which in turn became an ingredient the principal could bring to the change and development process.

Sarah also acknowledged spending a lot more time on budgeting and financial considerations related to the school, particularly where the implementation of provincial and school jurisdiction funding arrangements had negative impacts on school programs, such as service for high-incidence special needs students. This included both proposal development to seek additional funding from the system level, and personnel discussions with the staff to reorganize the school's internal operations.

In terms of changes to her role, Sarah tended to describe the impacts of restructuring as extending the ways of operating she had previously established in her role. One characteristic she identified was effective delegation of many of the management functions to the school secretary, who she regarded as an integral part of the staff team. In essence Sarah described an approach of leadership by the principal and management by the secretary. A concern she noted arising from restructuring was the tendency of system-level issues such as policy consolidation, kindergarten services, and student transportation boundaries to become impositions or distractions for the principal, requiring attention to be directed away from the primary functions of her school.

Within the general parameters of her approach, Sarah described a situational strategy for decision making, particularly with determining whom to include at the initial stages. She described an approach characterized by the principal suggesting some alternatives on an issue for reaction and determination by the staff. She acknowledged

that involving staff in substantive decisions was stressful and required some tough tradeoffs to be made, but she felt these were best worked through at the site level rather than being imposed from the central level.

> *There was a lot of discussion, there were a lot of tears attached to jobs, because of course we had people coming and going and if the student goes so do you. Oh it was extremely stressful and messy but I think what brought us all through was the fact that we made the decisions in community, and so while they weren't the best decisions for all they were the best decisions for kids . . . having gone through it I would love to pass the buck on that one, but I know that if you give those kinds of things up you also give up your ability to design programming. And we know the kids best, so I believe that the decisions for programming should be made at the school.*

For Sarah there was satisfaction in seeing growth in her staff in terms of dealing with the main issues of the school, particularly in terms of a willingness to share responsibility in the collaborative environment she worked at establishing.

Urban Cluster

Unlike the three other groups of participants, this group did not share a common employing jurisdiction, and there was substantial variance in the maturity and nature of each of the jurisdiction's approaches to school-based management, so the responses of these participants are unique to their particular context, unlike the data in the preceding clusters.

Brandon

Brandon described the formalization of school-based management and decision making as confirming what was already in place, rather than being a major change of emphasis for direction in his case. He recognized the implications of more direction and focus from parents with respect to the programs for their children, and offered as an example the implementation of and access to instructional technology at the school. He

also identified increased participation by staff as a unit, for example in budgeting and team planning activities, as characteristic of the site-based environment.

> *I think for the staff it was a bit of a change . . . my mode of delivery and my style were more participatory, and laid out to them whatever school budget we had; it was wide open to them, and I said "here, we can divide it up by grade instead of program." Basically we had three classes at every grade level, so they met as a team, we planned for preps and things all at the same time so they could get together to do their planning and they worked out a budget for their grade. Programs like music and library and Phys. Ed. had different budgets and we worked those out as a staff.*

In operational terms, Brandon emphasized keeping balance in the school's programs and using a strategy of adjusting class size (which could be interpreted as teacher workload) rather than modifying programming. He identified school-level control of staffing as an important consideration, and described the challenges of resolving duties and assignments in a participatory manner with staff. The place of elementary level specialist positions such as music and physical education, trade-offs regarding preparation time, and teacher professional development arrangements were examples of issues which challenged the staff.

With respect to changes in the role, Brandon immediately identified the tension between leadership and management functions:

> *I don't know if I can put a percentage or a number to it, but when I take a look at it, say over the 12 years that I was a principal, that the job has changed. Initially coming in, spending a lot of time on working with teachers, developing programs, I guess what I consider educational leadership, helping teachers, helping students, helping parents, working in that capacity, building professional development with them, knowing what's going on. I found that I have lost a lot of time in that area, and the role of management which I used to*

tend to dump on my vice-principal or my secretary and say "there's no budget to look after so here's ten bucks, look after it". Now when you have 2.5 million and you have all the staffing and all the planning and you have to tie in school goals, there's a lot more meeting time with school council, staff and staff committees in establishing goals and writing them and making sure they coincide with the District goals and Provincial goals; and more analysis of data in terms of achievement exams or other kinds of assessments that we had, whether it was questionnaires for different grade levels or parental questionnaire, but the management issue became real big time . . . that accountability factor, the management factor just ate up so much time.

He noted that teachers were noticing his absence from wandering around and visiting their classrooms. They expressed back to him a concern about not dropping in to see them.

The decision process Brandon described was situational and participatory, depending of the source of the issue under consideration. Generally a proposal would move from the principal's administration council to the staff and then to the school council for discussion. Brandon indicated that this process was well established and did not change as a consequence of restructuring.

Matthew

Matthew's context was in a jurisdiction that had pioneered school-based management some fifteen years previous, so his perspective was one of fine-tuning, rather than one of responding to substantive change. He did note that there were other aspects of restructuring which he felt were having a substantial impact, and these will be addressed in subsequent chapters.

Matthew described school-based management in terms of getting people involved and getting lots of input from them, particularly with respect to the mission they sought for the school. He indicated that the planning process was rooted in the

jurisdiction's funding allocation to schools, with the school's allocation becoming the key or initiating component of the annual planning process.

> *To me it is not a matter of how you are going to spend $50 here and $50 there. It's got a lot more to do with getting a lot of people involved in what the overall program of the school is all about. As an example, usually in about mid November with staff meetings and parent meetings I would start to throw out questions about where are we going for next year, perhaps have some informal discussion at a staff meeting and with parents. I've often used stuff like "What are the three things we are doing right now that are exceptional? What are the three things that we really need to change? What three things do you think we should do that we've never thought of doing before?" Just that kind of stuff to get people talking. Often what I would do in December would be a matter of sharing what parents have said and what staff have said: I tended to involve the kids more in the January time period . . . that kind of thing is certainly a part of site based decision making.*

The implications of this for the principal's role performance were seen as providing opportunity and responsibility.

Matthew described approaching decisions at the lowest possible organizational level for effective problem solving, and he emphasized the desire to get people working for "win-win" solutions. He tied this to people taking responsibility for what they were doing.

> *The biggest lesson that we learned in the last number of years with a leadership team was that we needed to work for win-win solutions to everything we were working on. What I mean by that is that it's one thing to make a decision and then not feel mush responsibility for it. It's a very different thing to realize that it's my responsibility and if I don't work it through, when the principal becomes*

involved he is going to come right back to us and say "what are we going to do

now?" rather than dealing with it to rescue us.

He described an approach based on modeling the decision making strategy he was

implementing, and the importance of the principal spending a lot of time just wandering

around the school so as to be really well informed about what was happening in all

aspects of its operation as a necessary requirement to provide leadership in collaborative

decision making. He described this as a process of direction setting and facilitation of

distributed leadership responsibility rather than attempting to maintain a controlling

function in his role. *The principal sets the tone, and I knew what was happening in the*

school, and by knowing I was able to facilitate other people as opposed to telling them

what to do. It just gave people all kinds of opportunity to take a creative idea and fly

with it.

In terms of changes to his role, Matthew identified increased responsibility for

the personnel administration aspects of staffing, and more responsibility for

management and control of the physical plant as recent shifts. With respect to his

process for policy type school level decisions, Matthew described a situational approach

and pointed out that he only embarked on a collaborative strategy if he was prepared to

live with the consequences: if there were imperatives for him, then other strategies were

necessary. *I would never be prepared to negotiate away something that I felt very*

strongly about. Where this was not an issue, he described an approach based on

extensive consultation with staff, students, and parents. He also noted that much of this

type of policy related decision making was of an evolutionary nature, with refinements

being developed over time as the members of the school community worked on a

problem.

Joshua

Joshua described his principalship as being part of a system-level pilot project

for implementation of school-based management, so his experiences spanned the four

years in the role, not just the last two of provincially initiated restructuring. He emphasized an "open book" approach with staff, sharing information with them on the resources and needs of the school, and referred to a matrix approach to match people with needs.

The main strategy I used with staff was open book. Here's the money, here's the game plan, here's the f.t.e.'s, here's the matrix where staffing positions are, and the one that was most interesting was "here's the matrix of unassigned duties". He described this approach as effective, but indicated that staff involvement suffered due to the negative effect on teacher morale associated with the 5% salary rollback implemented province-wide as part of the government's funding framework.

With respect to his role, Joshua described changes he perceived as significant, relating to a shift in focus from activities internal to the school to activities more related to the external relations of the school with its community and with the jurisdiction.

My job is massively different. I saved my Day-Timers for the four years and I look at where I was, just open up any month and you could see: teaching a challenge class here, taking a group of kids to the space Science Centre; I was much more in the classroom with kids and teachers at the start than I was in my last two years. In the last two years you could open it and it would say at the school board meeting, representing principals at this or that; it changed to more of a role where I was an agent for the District.

He went on to discuss this in the context of district-level reorganization:

Principals used to stay in the schools and deal with the administration of the schools. And then, in our first year of piloting we had an elementary rep., a junior high rep., and a senior high principal rep. that started to attend Board functions and meetings with Alberta Education, so you had a significant role change for at least three people. And then reporting back, we had sectional meetings with principals to talk about what our principal rep. had learned and

how it would affect our operation. So it was a huge change; before, central

office used to do all those roles.

Joshua described a decision making approach based on participation of the staff as a whole in a staff meeting context, as opposed to groups or segments of staff working informally. The dissemination of information and alternatives for consideration in advance to the staff was identified as important to the effectiveness of this approach. The actual workings of the process were situational, depending on the issue and appropriateness of collaboration or the need for other decision mechanisms.

The way we handled this the last two years was to provide information in the

staffroom, put it on the fridge or something. "These are the issues that are being

covered, here is the background information, that is what was, this is what is

being proposed, and these are some of the alternatives that may come up, and

we will also have time for more input at the staff meeting." Then the staff

decided how they wanted to be involved. They did things many different ways;

we never used one process for everything. We didn't use consensus for

everything, we didn't use a vote for everything, we mixed them up.

Joshua's approach appeared to combine a considerable amount of delegation to the staff while at the same time maintaining quite a lot of structure and organizational control by the principal.

Summary and Discussion

This discussion focuses on the areas explored by the questions associated with Specific Research Question 1: the effects of the school-based management and decision making initiative on the principal's role. An interesting observation is that many of the respondents commented initially that this initiative was no real change to their role, but then went on to identify significant changes. This could be seen as the principals' way of managing the change itself, by incorporating it into their approach as a way of

exercising some control over the context in which they function. In a sense, the view was that "school-based management in my school will be what I make it".

Budgeting

For all of the respondents, more time and effort were required on the fiscal aspects of their role. The term budgeting takes on a wide meaning as used by these principals, from an accounting orientation of keeping track of where the money is coming from and where it is going, to a more policy oriented approach related to priority setting and the trade-offs necessary to realize the planned objectives. In most cases budgeting involved substantial input-gathering and consultation, particularly with staff, on proposed courses of action. The resource implications for personnel management decisions were, in several cases, significant complications to the decision making stress related to the budgeting process. For the principal, increased stakeholder participation in the budget has a bigger impact on the school than the traditional mini-budget structure did. Effectively this means that negotiating and facilitating a balance between competing interests becomes very important.

Staff Involvement

While the respondents generally recognized increased staff involvement in decisions, there was divergence on the nature of this participation. The more common approach was one of consultation by the principal or administrative team, by way of presenting proposals or alternatives to the staff for feedback. In this approach, the administration essentially retained control of the decisions by defining the parameters of what an acceptable outcome could be. Some of the principals described the use of a more collaborative approach, where more decision-making authority was delegated to the staff. In these situations the principals tended to see themselves as facilitators and consultants to the staff, and maintained control through their philosophical position with the staff rather than more direct intervention in the specifics of the decision at hand.

Goal Setting

The more formalized process of planning, including articulating mission and goals for the school was recognized as a function receiving more time and attention. While several of the respondents indicated they used planning processes of one type or another before the requirement for Education Plans, they were now doing this in a more comprehensive way. This was seen as beneficial, but it was also a source of considerable extra work for the principals. They were more engaged in terms of arranging meetings for stakeholder input, analysis of the information generated, and developing decisions which were articulated with jurisdictional and provincial goals. While all of the respondents attended to this function, there appeared to be divergence in the significance they afforded in their approach to operating the school. For some, it was a foundation activity, on which they built their administrative activities, while for others it was more a report to be produced for external requirements.

Communication

In several respects, increased emphasis by the principals on communication tasks were part of the school-based management approach. The emphasis on at least consultation or more extensive collaboration for decision making required more time and attention to communicating with the stakeholders. In particular, several respondents recognized the importance of providing information in advance of discussions, both with respect to staff and school council meetings. Increased responsibility for external communications, representing the school and its interests to the broader community and the school jurisdiction, were recognized as increased responsibilities of principals in a decentralized structure.

Decision Making

There was a high degree of consistency among the respondents in using what might be termed a situational approach to decision making. The strategies considered appropriate depended on what the issue was and who would be affected by the decision.

Other than some general dispositions to approach things in either a collaborative or a directive way, there was little indication by any of the principals to a set approach on how to make a management decision at their schools. There was more consistency indicated with respect to process, which tended to be the development of suggestions or alternatives by the principal or administration team, and then the soliciting of reactions to the proposed or alternative courses of action. The consequence of this seemed to be retention of decision authority by the principals -- not a lot of real delegation of authority was evident. Except in a few cases, the principals were keeping control! In at least some instances this can be seen as the respondents' way of reacting to the responsibility for being accountable for the school's performance assigned to their role.

Management and Leadership

In one way or another the respondents all commented about the tension between these two elements of their roles. Most of the principals believed that their educational leadership activities were being crowded out by the time demands required for increased management tasks of the school-based structure. Frequent references were made to downloading of administrative tasks and to more paperwork, mostly associated with fiscal and personnel management and with planning and reporting. The optimists among the participants saw this an a difficult but worthwhile situation because of what they considered to be increased flexibility it afforded schools to make important program and operational decisions for the benefit of their students. Other participants diverged on this, seeing little or no benefit to student learning through the additional responsibilities of their role, and suggesting or implying that educational leadership at the school level has to emerge in other ways.

Conclusion

While in some respects school-based management and decision making may not seem to have affected the principal's role very much, there appear to be several areas where change is noticeable. These changes have tended to increase the management

task workload of the principals in the study, raising questions about their capacity to maintain the educational leadership function of the role. The participants have tended toward processes which appear to allow them to retain a lot of control over site-level decisions. In working to accommodate the expectations associated with school-based management, these principals reported being more consultative with staff and, to a lesser extent, with other stakeholders. But they appear to have used strategies which have allowed them to retain substantive control over the significant decisions at their schools.

Chapter 6

Parent Involvement and the Principal

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings related to Specific Research Question 2: How is increased parental involvement with schooling, particularly in the form of school councils and choice of schools, changing the role of the principal? During the interviews, participants were prompted to comment on three questions about this aspect of restructuring.

1. How is your school council influencing the way you operate?

2. How do you, as principal, work with the school council? Has this changed from when it was a parent advisory council?

3. How are you responding to the opportunity that parents have to choose the school at which they register their children? Is this a change for you?

The responses are presented in the same order as in the previous chapter, retaining the cluster organization for these data. The chapter ends with a summary and discussion of the findings, and a concluding response to specific Research Question 2.

Rural Mixed Cluster

Alexi

Alexi distinguished between the dynamics of dealing with parents who were core supporters of the school and those whose involvement was characterized by interest in a single issue. *For the most part the people I've dealt with here on school council are school promoters otherwise they wouldn't be here. You know, there's not*

really anyone in there who is out to burn the system. On the other hand he described a group that are difficult to engage in a systematic or ongoing way.

> *They show up for one parent council meeting, they take their shots, you answer*
>
> *their questions and you know that they won't be there next month because their*
>
> *concerns are addressed and they're happy, but next month someone else with a*
>
> *different hat and a different face will ask the same questions.*

Alexi described a process of informal contact with the school council chair, particularly by telephone, as an important liaison process for working in this context, particularly with respect to keeping each other advised of emerging problems and issues that might be characterized as having political consequences for the principal and the council to deal with.

Alexi identified the importance of building a trust relationship between the principal and the school council, and recognized that in a new placement this was particularly important. He indicated there had been a history of tension between the school's administration and the parent council, which he was working to overcome.

> *They've asked a number of times for a parent rep. at staff meetings, but the staff*
>
> *·have said "no, it's a staff meeting, we want to discuss kids, we want to discuss*
>
> *problems that we don't want out in the community." When I talked to the*
>
> *person making the request I said, "the bottom line is the reason why you're*
>
> *requesting this is you don't think that I'll bring back the message about how my*
>
> *staff feels to you", and she said "yeah."*

He described developing a process of additional staff involvement in the school council as a strategy for helping address this concern.

Alexi described an arrangement in which the principal had an important function in shaping the school council's role and place in the affairs of the school. He described a flow control or pacing function by the principal in moving school policy topics through the council and parent input phases, and recognized part of his function was one of balancing interests among the parent group. He described a belief that the extent and effectiveness of parental involvement through the school council mechanism was dependent on the leadership provided by the principal; that the principal's approach to parent involvement was a key difference between significant change and no real shift in practice. *My experience has been in some schools, school councils have an active role in policy formation. In other schools I think they feel alienated: the way it works depends on the principal.*

For Alexi the school choice option afforded parents was not much of a consideration. His school had a high utilization rate to the extent he viewed it as overcrowded, so competition for students was not relevant to the situation. He indicated that there was not much movement of students between schools, and that in some circumstances he was prepared to encourage parents to consider going elsewhere if they were not satisfied with the service his school was able to provide.

Ryan

For Ryan, a well-established tradition of parental involvement through the parent advisory and then school council created a very political context for the principal to deal with. He characterized this political nature of parental involvement as external rather than internal, focusing on the school's relationship with the school district, with Alberta Education and with the provincial government on issues such as facilities and

funding levels, rather than on the internal operation of the school. He recognized this situation as requiring something of a balancing act by the principal between the desires of the parents, as articulated through the school council, and the parameters and priorities established by the Board of Trustees, but indicated this was not something he worried about.

Ryan recognized the importance of his administrative relationship with central office in working with this situation:

In terms of being caught between central office and parent council I think I have a very understanding Superintendent, who is quite aware that sometimes I will bring up issues that I would like to see the parent council put some pressure on. I think we have a good enough relationship that he recognizes my primary job is for this school's students, parents and staff, while his job is the system and so forth. I try to maintain a system perspective as well and I have spent time with the school council explaining, in terms of money, that some district redistribution is necessary and so long as we are getting enough to operate reasonably it doesn't really matter whether we're getting every last possible dollar, so long as we've got enough.

He also recognized that this relationship rested in part on a kind of earned credibility or stock of good will arising from his effective operation of the school.

The Superintendent's comment is that there's only an occasional thing that causes him problems coming through that way. He says he rarely gets any phone calls from parents or anybody else upset about the school or what I'm doing, so I don't make much work for him in that area because things run well.

He went on to speculate about the connection between parental advocacy and effective operation at the school level.

Maybe the two are connected, the fact that your parents are involved and know that you support them and are seen as a spokesman for the school means that people come to you when they have problems instead of going directly to the Superintendent, so I think he sees there's a trade-off there for him as well.

The opportunity for parents to choose schools was not a significant factor for Ryan due to the school having a high utilization rate and therefore not considering itself in competition for students to sustain its revenue and programs. He did indicate the importance of District level policy on admission of students to provide a base for school level decisions where restricting the registration of non-residents was necessary because of space constraints. He described an ongoing informal understanding with neighbouring schools and Districts to accommodate particular circumstances where conflicts or other considerations in a student's best interest justified an alternative arrangement.

Tyler

In Tyler's situation, an increased information-sharing function was the main change for the principal in terms of parental involvement with the school council. *More things are being shared with the school council than was the case with the PAC, not because things were being kept secret but the trend is open your books, put them on the table and show us what it's all about. So we do share a lot more information.* He characterized the school council's role as one of monitoring, maintaining awareness, more than on of directive involvement.

We've got a good group . . . asked them if they wanted to be involved in the

three-year plan; the response was "show it to us when you're done and we'll go

over it with you." The message we get from parents is "yes we are interested

and concerned about what happens but we're being stretched too far, just keep

us informed how things are going".

In this context he regarded the principal as the main liaison person between the school

and the parent group, and described an informal, conversational arrangement with the

school council chairperson as a primary process for supporting this function. Other

actions he identified as important for the principal in this regard were communication to

parents beyond the immediate school council group, and working to secure involvement

on the school council.

With respect to the school choice issue, Tyler described an approach which

emphasized protecting relationships with the smaller feeder schools in his area over

soliciting for extra students by trying to draw from them. The consequence of this

collaborating rather than competing was that choice of school was seen as having little

impact on his role, but his discussion did indicate attention to inter-school co-

ordination.

I know some of the larger systems are out there pounding the streets to get more

students at their school. We're not doing that. We've got communications out

there between our feeder schools, we're trying to improve that, we've taken

some steps in that direction. One of the criticisms we've gotten when you have

three or four schools feeding into one is doubt about whether the students are

ready for the larger school. What we've done to deal with that is to get teachers

of common courses, language arts for example, from the feeder schools and the high school to meet together and discuss how they are doing the program: we get the communication lines open.

His view was that the consequence of this kind of effort was that most of the students would stay in their local schools, and he indicated there had been few requests by parents to choose an alternate location.

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Rural Resource-based Cluster

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Horace

Supportive input and volunteerism characterized Horace's assessment of parental involvement at his school. He described the school council as providing suggestions, feedback, ideas on how it could be involved, and as being a sounding board for the administration. This related to a consultative style on his part: *We take quite a few things and see how they react to them, or see how they would feel as parents if something happened or was changed, if we moved in a particular direction. So they provide a lot of very supportive input into the school.*

Horace also described extensive parent volunteer involvement with the school's programs and with various activities such as fundraising to support school initiatives such as playground enhancements. He described an arrangement in which organizing responsibilities were distributed among numerous parents, depending on their particular interests, and in which the principal had an extensive monitoring function, one of keeping in touch with what was going on with each of the initiatives but not attempting to lead them all.

Different people take on different things . . . There are committees that the school council will organize; a lot of things I'm part of. For example I was part of the playground development, I did all the association applications, the financial reconciliation, the grant applications. I do all that because it's probably easier for me to do it. But I did it hand in hand with the school council chairperson so they know exactly what was going on, and we met many, many times.

He went on to summarize it this way:

I'm involved fairly intricately but I'm not necessarily the leader of all things, because we've got some great parents who have lots of strengths. They want me there with them and there hand in hand, body to body type of thing, but our school council chairman will say "whose going to take the lead on this, and let's go". I'd say I'm involved in almost everything but I certainly like to see the people, staff or parents, become involved, children as well, the students.

Specifically in terms of the school council, Horace described a liaison relationship between the principal and the executive, what he referred to as "the nucleus" of the group, as a key process based on a lot of informal communications as well as more formal, structured meetings and activities.

Parents' choice of schools for their children was a major consideration for Horace due to some recent history at the school regarding a staff member who had been charged with an offence relating to a student, which was alleged to have happened five or six years previous. The teacher had been removed from the school until the completion of judicial procedures, in which he was found innocent. He was scheduled

to come back to Horace's school and, as a result of his being brought back the school lost about 30 students. Horace noted that the parents who rallied against the teacher's placement said, "we don't want this person back regardless of if he's innocent or guilty. It doesn't really matter to us, so therefore we want to have him somewhere else or we don't want our kids in this school".

The approach Horace used to deal with this situation involved substantial consultation.

He was assigned to this school and we decided to accept that. We took him back, basically said if he's going to make it anywhere, he'll make it here. We met early in the year that we saw this drop in enrollment. I said "Ok, over the last number of years we've had an accumulated surplus in the budget to "x" thousands of dollars, we can ride this storm out, but we have to do it as a staff. There will be some classes that have 26 or 27 students, whatever, maybe more, and there may be his class, this one particular individual's class that has 15. There might be siblings of these children who were in this particular grade level that might not be here, we might have more than one class with a lower enrollment. Are we going to support each other, or what was the decision of staff?" So the decision of staff was that we go, they said it's amazing that we've been able to manage the budget that we've got tens of thousands of dollars to support an extra teaching position or more for a year to ride the storm out. So we've ridden the storm out and we've had these people choose to go to other schools. We've had some people leave other schools and choose to come to this school type of thing also, but overall we've lost about 30 students in that

particular situation. Now is that good or bad? Well, I guess if you're going to

support a colleague who was found innocent in the judicial process, I guess

that's good.

In discussing this situation, Horace described his interaction with the staff as sharing the problem with them and then responding to their inquiries about what he thought they should do by describing alternative strategies, and in the end being asked by the staff to make the decision with their support. He also acknowledged the significance of a cautious approach to fiscal management that built up the financial flexibility that made the "ride out the storm" option possible.

Ian

Ian described an arrangement in which parent involvement through the school council was focused on the school's annual planning activities. He indicated that securing parent participation in the school council process was a problem, which he attributed in part to differences among parents in the previous year about school organization issues. The consequence for the principal was that sustaining a viable school council organization proved difficult.

Parents are . . . you get the good with the bad. Parents sometimes get mad but

they can also be powerful helpers if you get them on line. So my difficulty this

year has been recruiting that group of parents to come back as a stable force in

our council, because last year there was just really a lot of animosity.

Ian indicated a concern from this experience about parents being preoccupied with secondary issues, in this case the way the school reported student grades, rather than the

best way to organize the school for its students. He also described a shift in thinking regarding the nature of parent involvement as a result of this experience:

The people I work with now see their role as not to run the school, but their role is to input to people who are trying to make decisions about their kids. They want to know that their kids are being looked after, that they have a voice in what goes on, and if they have a concern who to talk to.

The consequence of these dynamics for Ian was that he ended up assuming most of the tasks, which would otherwise be done by the school council executive. Essentially the chairperson and he provided the executive function in support of the general meeting or "town hall" sessions.

He also indicated that in some respects the school's "leadership team" of teachers, administrators, parents and students called for by District policy could assume some of these functions but mobilizing that structure was also problem. In spite of these difficulties, Ian was positive about the potential of parental involvement and saw it as an area to work on.

That team is also supposed to meet and I really haven't moved that way. It's been hard enough just to keep the president: I have two vice-presidents; no one wants to be president. It's like "nope, I'll be vice-president", but finally a lady came up after she saw meetings where people weren't coming, so she came forward. I would say that to me, the way I work hasn't been changed a lot by this although I think it's more formalized and I think that's good, and I also believe there is more work it can do in leadership. In another year when people sit down and talk about the plan that's been developed by myself and the staff

and look at that more closely. Budget for example. We put together a budget

with the staff and we go to this leadership team. We sit down and look at it

before we send our final copy to the Board: that's an area I think we need to

work at.

Mark

Mark described the situation at his school as being characterized by small

turnouts of parents for school council involvement, resulting in limited formal parent

input. He indicated that parent input was issue specific, with substantial involvement

only on items such as graduation arrangements rather than substantive school policy and

operations questions.

At the same time, he recognized the parent group was a significant source of

influence on his administration of the school in an informal way. In one respect,

Mark's long term status with the school and in the community afforded him an

extensive interpersonal network with parents so that his administrative practice was

well informed by parent and public views.

He summarized parental involvement through the school council affecting his

role this way:

At this point very little in the direct sense. I say very little in the direct sense

because they are very strong supporters of the school and the administration.

They do have a significant impact in the indirect sense in that I try to be very

sensitive to the things that are issues to them, and respond to them.

This situation was something of a problem for Mark in the context of provincial and

jurisdiction initiatives for increased parent involvement. He discussed the phenomenon

of needing controversy to get parents to turn out, but rejected contriving controversy as a useful strategy in his situation, and he reflected on the extent to which promoting increased parent involvement through the formal structures of the school council should be assumed by the principal.

> *It's a question mark for me because I wonder, when I look at some of the things that are out there as far as workshops and so on are concerned, I ask myself now is this another area that I should add to my load in terms of making sure that we do get more parents involved, and spend time working with that whole end of things to get a stronger council representation.*

In terms of the actual operation of the core group that forms the school council, Mark described his role as one of giving input to the meeting agendas and providing information to keep participants up to date on activities and developments at the school. His concern was with the area of promotion and expanded involvement, not with the area of demands on his role from operation of the council.

Mark indicated that geographically there were no substantive alternatives to his school, so the competition issues arising from choice of schools were not a factor in his principalship. In spite of this he emphasized the importance of staying flexible with respect to programming offered by the school, so that course offerings were continually improved to respond to students' needs and interests.

Rural Agricultural Cluster

Ashley

Ashley described an atypical situation in that the school council for her school functioned as a combined council with the junior high school that served students in the

same catchment area. This arose from an organizational decision made before restructuring to provide elementary schooling in one community and secondary schooling in the other. She described a council that was a strong conduit for parent involvement in the affairs of the school. *The school council definitely influences the way we operate. I think we're much more conscious of parents as partners, and parents as powerful partners, in their children's education.* She identified two distinctly different ways in which the school council provided significant parent involvement with relationship to her role. One was in the external representation of the school and the other was with respect to internal leadership.

> *For example we just recently had our meeting at the Division level to look at goals for the school jurisdiction, and there we would have had one or two representatives, who of the eighteen school council chairmen who come, there are eighteen principals who come, and there are trustees, so that you can see that just by the sheer weight of parents in the group there, they represent more than the combined administrators do. So, I think that they are influential in the political way with the school board. I also think that they have influence in our .case because of the people that happen to have taken these executive positions. They're people who have a lot of stature or credibility in the community so when they speak about school issues, when they run a meeting, they tend to have a lot of credibility and people are inclined to get involved with the things that they want to do, and follow their leadership.*

In terms of her role, Ashley recognized that the formal school council structure required more attention to organization than did the previous parent council

arrangement. *You have to follow the regulation, you have to give notice, you have to make sure that you've accommodated the school council in every way possible, to make sure they have secretarial help and those kinds of things . . . we have to make sure we've done it all.* She also described the sensitivity of the principal's relationship with the council, particularly its executive, in a rural context where everyone knows everyone else and there tend to be various divisions of interest within the community. She identified the need for the principal to be able to vary her approach depending on who assumed the position of school council chairperson, and to continually seek the inclusion of all the viewpoints. Ashley described a tenuousness this contributed to the role: I *think that probably everybody in a small school like this knows that they walk a line that you could fall off either side, and within a few weeks find that your entire school was in jeopardy.*

In summarizing this discussion Ashley distinguished between parent support and direct involvement of parents in school operation decisions. She noted the importance of the principal's administrative style fitting the expectations of the parent community as an important ingredient for success in this context.

On the question of choice of schools, Ashley noted that district policy on school bus transportation service area boundaries effectively limited the impact, but that this protection of the school's enrollment base was subject to erosion by policy changes affording parents more bussing options. In recognition of this she described it as the principal's job to ensure that the school maintained a positive climate, attractive to students and their parents.

Luke

Luke reported frustration with the process of trying to secure parent involvement in his school through the school council structure.

> *I tried for five years to create a school council. Parents just weren't interested. It was the toughest job I had, and the only hook I had was grad. If I held a meeting about grad, I'd have 100 parents there. If I had a meeting with school budget, I'd have four, none of them with a particular axe to grind. It was a really difficult situation because in the community there was solid support for the school and the door was always open. If people had a concern there were no hidden agendas, and they felt they knew what was going on with the school, they felt secure in that knowledge . . . school surveys came back 97% - 98% parental support; they just weren't interested in it* [the council].

Notwithstanding this lack of participation, Luke described the consequence of restructuring as having a tangible effect on his role in terms of workload and accountability.

> *You have a new audience that you're theoretically and I guess in real terms accountable to. So you now have to explain your budget, your school operations, you have to be able to answer questions of people who don't have any real knowledge of it. So it's added to your accountability list, it's added to your workload. Even if nobody shows up you still have to be able to do that, because the Superintendent is no longer prepared, nor should he be, to do that.*

Luke's view was that even if the school council was typically a small group of parents, proactive behaviors were still necessary by the principal to anticipate and respond to

these people's needs. He recognized the political dynamic of even a small number of parents speaking to school board members about their perceptions of the school's operations as being significant, and he confirmed that a change in the community dynamic could quite suddenly change a traditionally benign group into a significant force in the principal's life: you *start dealing with parents in any other capacity than with their children, it's a political thing.*

In reflecting on this, Luke discussed parental involvement in terms of control rather than improving student learning. He made the distinction between parents involved with their children's learning and parents involved with the school's operation, and raised the issue of parent versus professional control of the education enterprise.

I personally am sort of tired of de-professionalizing teaching and de-professionalizing educators as if they somehow don't really know a hell of a lot more than Joe average citizen about schooling and learning! I can't see how this improves education. I think if we have parents who are concerned with their children and involved with their children, we have a different learning-teaching dynamic happening. But if we have parents involved with schools and the operation of schools on the assumption that there is some big connection between that and what happens in a classroom every day, I think we stretch it.

He observed that this catches principals in a difficult context, one which has resulted in what he referred to as a "negative dip" in the outlook of his colleagues in the principalship, not just in his own district but among other principal contacts in the province.

As principal of a centralized high school in a rural area, the choice of school option was not a direct concern to Luke. He observed that rural jurisdictions were using school bus transportation boundaries and fees to manage the impact of school choice on small school, declining enrollment situations. *I think the school choice concept is something that's urban, very urban in concept. I find it interesting the way it's interpreted in rural Alberta to mean any real choice, because for most people in rural Alberta you have to pay for your choice.*

Sarah

Sarah described an arrangement in which parent involvement through the school council was integral to her administrative practice. She characterized her role as working with the parents to secure their ongoing support for the school and involvement with its activities. She indicated that she strove to focus the involvement as a sounding board for the school's instructional programs and other student-related projects.

Our school council has changed in the time I've been here. We have a very supportive school community. So we've seen our school council go from a group of people who supported us in terms of providing what I would call "needs" to the school, and when I talk about needs I mean they filled our bellies with wonderful hot lunches and they did various fund raising projects to provide us with things that would improve instruction. They're still doing that to a certain extent except we've done some trade-offs. While our school still does lunches and some fund raising for bigger projects, the facet the I think they've assumed, which I appreciate and draw on their expertise as parents, is the facet of instructional programming. They've become more knowledgeable in terms of

*what does it take to run a school. From that perspective, I mean not only money
but also human resources: here's what we do, here's why we do it, and here's
how much it costs, and I think that was a real eye opener for our school
community.*

Sarah talked in terms of educating the parents about what the school was doing in with
respect to instruction and of feeding them information about the school. She pointed
out that classrooms have changed from the parents' generation, and discussed strategies
with the staff to keep parents up to date on what was happening in the school's
classrooms. She identified providing consistent information to parents as an important
aspect of this for her: both *through formal and informal channels, so they're almost
getting bombarded with information, but over time they start using the words we're
using and start articulating what we're articulating.* She emphasized the importance of
the principal establishing and communicating a positive, motivating environment at the
school for parents to see.

Sarah's approach to involving parents more with the instructional aspects of the
school reflected a conscious application of time, effort and forethought on her part as
principal.

*I guess we're spending more time talking about improving instruction and how
we might do that. We also try to involve our school community as much as
possible and I guess what I say to them is "school doesn't begin at 9:00 and end
at 3:30, school begins in your home and it needs to work both ways". So
education works – it's a flow back and forth . . . and I guess with my school*

council I'm very open about this, but I'm also selective in when I provide people

information: I make sure I've done my homework.

Sarah's comments on involvement reflected purposefulness on her part: openness and sharing, but clearly in pursuit of some objectives that for her were well defined.

Sarah's school operated in an environment where nearby schools did provide parents with some opportunity for choice of school, although some student transportation restrictions constrained this. Its location near the boundary of the jurisdiction allowed for a higher level of competitiveness toward out-of-district students and a more constrained stance toward students in the catchment areas of neighbouring district schools. Her strategy in this school-comparative environment was to be very positive about what her school offered its students, particularly emphasizing its priority for meeting the individual needs of each student, and for promoting an exciting learning climate.

First and foremost I think we strive to meet the individual needs of the child and

so we run a lot of programs that enable us to do that: we have early intervention

programs, and we do a lot of programs that enable kids to shine in different

areas. We also have a dynamic staff and so there's always something fun

happening, it's very, very busy. Our days fly and there's always something

that's kind of new or inspiring, "let's try this", we're never static in the sense

that what we did last year is what we're going to do this year. Good is not good

enough – we're striving for better.

In this kind of a choice environment she described the importance of fostering parents as advocates for the school. She related this back to the responsibility of the

principal to be an effective information provider to parents, so they were well informed to speak to newcomers about the school's programs and strengths. She summarized this very succinctly: *It's my job to sell my school and I think I've done that.*

<div align="center">**Urban Cluster**</div>

Brandon

Brandon described a smooth transition from the previous parent advisory committee arrangement to the school council format at his school, where extensive parent volunteer participation was well established.

He explained how he tried to be proactive in dealing with individual parents' concerns rather than having these become school council issues, with support from the school council executive.

> *Meetings were open to anybody who wanted to come, although we, more so through the parents than me, took the position that parents shouldn't be allowed to just come in and gripe at a meeting without notice in advance either to the chairperson or myself. Our response was "bring it to me, maybe we can resolve it without going to a meeting", because lots of times it was a personal issue and they'd vent their spleen and air their laundry out and bring three or four supporters. Then it could become a fight between some parents and other parents over blaming the school. The council was very supportive of the school and didn't like the school taking the blame for something like that: most times it was resolved just by walking into my office.*

As this discussion suggested, Brandon considered his role to have become more political with the increased emphasis on parental involvement. He observed that the

political dimension of administration, which had formerly been attended to by the Superintendent, had shifted, at least in part, to the principal, changing the emphasis of his role.

> *The role is more political than it was. I think it's almost shifted into what the superintendent's role was like before, and now it's come down more to the principal. The principal's job has gone from being maybe 20% political to now being 50% or 60%, so you are spending more and more time with parents. Just making sure that things are the way the community wants, though for what one group wants, like black paint, another wants white, so you can never please them all, but at least you can have some input and ask ideas from them. Parents are much more aware because we give them so much more information in terms of the budget, the program, and requirements from Alberta Education.*

The increased awareness by parents he attributed both to the information provided and the dedication of considerable time and effort to communication with the parent group. He described a strategy of making positive telephone contact with as many parents as possible about the accomplishments of their children, so that if other contact became necessary a positive framework had been established.

Brandon also described a negotiation or mediation function for his role with respect to the parents and the school's staff.

> *Finding a balance. Lots of times between teachers and what they perceived as their professional ability or academic freedom in terms of doing certain things as compared to maybe what the community wants or certain parents, or conflicts between groups of parents. Coming up with some kind of resolutions,*

sometimes they're just . . . you find a resolution, but it's not a win-win or a

100% solution.

He described the problem of drawing up class lists and parents wanting to choose particular teachers for their children as a repetitive example of this kind of challenge.

Brandon reported the more formal school council arrangement has added liaison and planning meetings with the chair and executive to his duties, and that the separation of fundraising activities into a separate society has also added to administration time for meetings.

So there were a lot more meetings on the council's business, plus the

fundraising arm became a separate entity and there were meetings on that all

the time too. I guess that's one of the areas where there was a lot more

communication: a lot more sit down, a lot more contact, and a lot more

meetings.

In addition to meeting time, Brandon outlined time and effort devoted to building an efficient contact network with parents which facilitated polling them for comments and ideas on emerging topics or issues important to the school.

Brandon reported that open boundaries to accommodate parent choice of schools was an established practice in the jurisdiction prior to the provincial restructuring, so there was no adjustment or accommodation required. His school had experienced a period of rapid enrollment growth and was utilized at or above its capacity, so competing for students was not an issue in his context.

Matthew

Matthew described a significant change in the character of the school council, but attributed this to changes in the character of the school, not to restructuring from a parent advisory council to a school council format. He indicated that initially securing parent participation was very difficult, but as the school established a more academic focus it attracted different students and different parents, whom he felt were more interested and involved.

As this developed he described an added information-provider function as part of his role. *In the last three years, we've had a portion of the parent council meeting that was called the question to the principal. I didn't always like it, but it was very positive. Parents knew that if they had a question, it was on.*

A concern Matthew identified was getting the school council to deal with what he called bigger issues, to take major initiatives. He described some frustration with the extent to which things were initiated by the school's administration, rather than being initiated by the parents, a sense that he did more coaching of the council than should have been necessary.

> *I still struggle with this because part of me can say I was a failure in not getting them as involved as I should have. On the other hand I look back at their mission statement at what they said they wanted to do and it was that they wanted to support the school and make our job easier. I know for a year or so our council was not making my job easier. I felt like I was running around, doing stuff for them all the time. I started saying what is this all about and is the purpose; and partly it is.*

The strategy he described for working with this, getting the parents to take more responsibility for the operation of their council, was one of liaison with and coaching the school council chairperson, particularly with respect to meeting agendas and processes.

Matthew's school was in a location where both geographically and by district policy, the movement of students between schools was easily accomplished, so responding to students and their parents' choice of schools was a significant consideration for him. *We are becoming very, very good at public relations and marketing, and we are spending a fair bit of money on it. There are some very polished promotional things happening within schools right now.* He was clear in his assessment that the leadership provided by the principal was critical in this kind of environment, and that this was necessarily an important part of the principal's role. *The principal makes or breaks it. Part of our success has been that we've had two or three people who did a good job of going out and promoting our school.*

He described three examples which contributed to this success: developing a strong sense of school pride among the students and staff; developing a strong visual image for the school, including the powerful use of colors; and using planning process input from students and parents as the basis of promotional information.

Matthew was generally supportive of the promotion process in spite of the effort it required because of the positive aspects he perceived it reinforcing, such as school climate and school pride. He emphasized the significance of the school being a friendly and open community. The proviso he attached to this was for the school to accept all comers: he was not comfortable with the practice of promoting for the recruitment of

select groups of students. In funding and budget terms, this created tension for the principal:

> *I've never been very good with a parent who has been turned away from three*
>
> *different schools. So we ended up taking more special needs kids than were our*
>
> *share. There are some that would say to this day that that was a mistake I*
>
> *made. I don't think it was.*

This concern regarding the fiscal impact of special needs students on the school will receive further attention in a subsequent chapter.

Joshua

Joshua described using a recruitment strategy to shift his school council from a negative to a supportive group. The process he described required considerable work on the part of the principal and the staff.

> *Parental involvement changed. The first year was a carry over from the*
>
> *previous year's school council. At that time we called them parent advisory*
>
> *councils. The group was very negative . . . negative towards each other,*
>
> *negative towards kids, negative towards administrators and teachers. That was*
>
> *an awful year. So we actively recruited new parents with children coming into*
>
> *the school for fresh blood and spent - as a staff - spent a significant amount of*
>
> *time with the feeder schools to invite possible parents, council parents who were*
>
> *actively involved in the elementary schools, to come to our grade seven*
>
> *orientation night or our band nights. We treated them very well and encouraged*
>
> *them to come, and explained we wouldn't abuse them, and we wouldn't turn*
>
> *them into little gophers, we wanted their input. For the next three years we had*

a beautiful council. I shared everything with them and they shared with me, and

we talked very openly.

In addition to recruiting participants, providing and presenting information were described by Joshua as an expanded responsibility of the principal. He also noted that the school council was at times overwhelmed by the amount of information to be considered, and to some extent delegated back to him decisions about how to organize what was important for the council. *They wanted more and more for us to put it together in a package and more or less tell them what we were going to do.* Concern about liability for the consequences of decisions was also identified as a constraint felt by the school council, which tended to formalize their deliberations and leave operational decision making with the administration and the District.

Facilitation of the school council required Joshua to maintain a liaison role with the chairperson on meeting agendas and the details of key issues such as initiatives in the school budget. He also described an advisor or consultant function, counseling at the school council meetings on what was appropriate, what should not be dealt with, and ways to say and do things. He expressed concern that the formalization associated with restructuring had interfered with effective parent involvement through the school council, complicating the position of the principal.

Our real role hasn't changed since when we were just a parent council, but I

think it's harder for parents. They are doing more work than they used to, they

are very worried about legal structure . . . are they wearing the fundraiser hat,

does that mean they have to close this part of the meeting? How to type up the

minutes, who gets a copy of them? It makes them nervous, and that's too bad.

All these things really are interfering with the process and wasting their time.

Joshua indicated that his school was operating at full utilization, and that this

included some external enrollment on a first come, first in basis. As a consequence he

was not actively seeking additional students, but he indicated that the sense of

competition for students was still a factor for him and the staff. *We don't actively seek*

students, but we do feel, and the staff comment often, that we are in competition with

other schools just to hold on to the students we have. So they want to do the best job

they can to keep what the have. He indicated this placed more responsibility on the

principal for promotion of the school, both in terms of organizing promotional activities

and of encouraging staff to be more overt about how good a job they are doing, selling

what they do to other students.

Summary and Discussion

On both the aspects of parent involvement, the participants tend to diverge.

With respect to school council involvement there is a strong school council group

characterized by substantial involvement and supportive relationships between the

principal and the parent group, and there is a reluctant school council group,

characterized by a small core of participants and an issue-by-issue focus. Both

categories have significant implications for the principal's role, but the climate seems to

be quite different between the two. Similarly the school choice provision was of little

significance to one group of respondents, whether because of their school's geographic

situation or because it was fully utilized, but to another group it implied significant

promotional duties for their roles.

Information Provider

The participants described various ways in which both of these parent involvement situations called on them to provide and often organize information for the understanding of people who characteristically approach the school with limited awareness of the details of a complex operation. Liaison arrangements were a common strategy, most often with the chairperson or in some cases the executive, of the school council. Several of the respondents commented on the extra work and meeting time required accommodating these needs.

Facilitator

Facilitation of the school council process was frequently mentioned, in both the formation of the council and in its ongoing deliberations. Several of the respondents discussed recruitment in one way or another, commenting on difficulties in securing participation to meet provincial and jurisdictional expectations. The respondents discussed numerous other consulting or advisory functions to their councils, ranging from legal considerations to fundraising measures. While in the context of school-based management and decision making, the school councils acted in an advisory way to the administration, the principals also acted in an advisory way to their councils with respect to council processes.

Politician

Several of the participants recognized that increased parental involvement made their roles more political in the non-partisan sense of the term. They recognized that as they become more involved with issues, people and interests external to the school, and

as they had to increasingly find "balancing of interest" types of solutions, they were behaving more politically than had been the nature of their roles previously.

Communicator

An emphasis on effective communication by the principal was implicit in the comments of most respondents and was made explicit by some. To provide information to parents effectively, to convey a positive sense of their school's climate, to facilitate school council functions, and to "sell their school", the principals were challenged to be very good communicators.

Conclusions

The specific impacts of parental involvement through school councils and choice of schools appears to differ significantly depending on the particular circumstances of each school. Regardless of the specifics, principals are devoting more time and attention to these matters than they had tended to do in the past.

Peters (1996) used the term "provider capture" to describe control of schools by the professional staff, and suggested that initiatives such as school council structures were a response by governments to populist pressures for more parental control of education (p. 22). A consequence is that for the principals in this study, role complexity was increased by this shift to expanded external influence.

Chapter 7

Structural Changes and the Principal

The purpose of this chapter is to present findings respecting Specific Research Questions 3 and 4. What effects are the limits which have been placed on financial expenditures for central administration and instructional support services having on the role of the principal? And what effect is the reduction in the number of school jurisdictions having on the role of the principal? Both of these questions relate to changes in the structure of the organizations in which the respondents worked, and for effective organization of the data they are combined in this chapter.

With respect to these Research Questions, respondents were prompted during the interviews to comment on the following aspects of their role:

1. The frequency of contact with the superintendent of schools or other administrative staff from central office, the extent this had changed, and its effects on the principal.

2. The effect of system size (geographic as well as enrollment) on the respondents' work as principals.

3. The effects of the limit on central instructional support, and the implications of this for administrative decisions on obtaining such services.

4. The process utilized for finalizing the school budget and associated changes to the respondents' work.

The latter question is included here because it relates to the funding framework's effects at the site level.

Many of the structural characteristics of schools can be seen as related to the size of the school operation as reflected by enrollment. To organize this section of the

data, respondents are grouped into categories of smaller schools, middle-sized schools and larger schools.

Smaller Schools

These schools were fewer than 200 students in size, with less than 10 professional staff and typically a half dozen or fewer support staff. The principals in this group used various references and expressions that suggested the idea of the staff as a "family". The group was small enough that extensive informal interaction was natural, and this relationship tended to pervade the way things got done at these sites.

Ashley

Ashley described the reduction in contact at the school with central office personnel, particularly the superintendent, as a dramatic change from administrative practice before regionalization. She indicated that in the former jurisdiction the superintendent would have visited her school a couple of times a month, whereas now the visits occurred two or three times in the school year. She described this as resulting in an increased feeling of isolation, and a concern that the superintendent was unable to have the same degree of awareness about how things were going at the school as was the case before. In reflecting on the position of the principal with the superintendent now she explained:

> *I think that principals are a lot more vulnerable now. I don't know how a*
>
> *superintendent would be able to support a principal like they used to . . . . I*
>
> *don't know what would happen if you got into a critical situation – I think it*
>
> *would be a lot more difficult for the superintendent to be really available, he just*

doesn't have time, given the number of schools he has to look after – he's more

distant from us.

For example, she reflected on a difficult teacher evaluation experience she worked

through with considerable central office support several years before restructuring, and

expressed concern that the kind of consultation and support she felt was essential to deal

with that situation was no longer available in the larger, more decentralized jurisdiction.

While the decreased contact with the superintendent was significant for Ashley,

she did not express the same level of concern about the reduction of central instructional

support in personnel or human resource terms. She did, however, identify a grave

concern about the loss of central support in the funding structure with respect to

program services for severe special needs students at her school. She described the

situation of two severe needs students moving up from kindergarten. In kindergarten

they were supported by program unit grants, but in her grade one program, with funding

framework support of about $8,900 each in addition to the basic instructional grant,

there was a shortfall of $8,000 to $10,000 in the costs of serving them.

In the case of both of the kids, they require an individual aide with them, unless

there are major changes in the next few months. We can't handle that; we can't

survive. The $8,000 or $10,000 that that takes basically wipes our entire

instructional budget for buying paper supplies and art supplies and running the

photocopier and any of the supply things like pens and pencils that teachers

might use, that's all gone. So how a small school does it . . . I'm not exactly

sure; how we're going to do it next year.

She went on to describe some very political consequences of this situation, both externally to the school jurisdiction and within the school system's administrative personnel.

> *Fortunately we have two great families with these kids. Both of them are willing to operate on the political level, have started the process of contacting the MLA, writing to the Minister of Education, going that route to try to get support that way. Having the allocation formula provide additional money, that's another way. But what I worry about is that in some school, somewhere a parent will start screaming "the money that you're taking for these high incidence kids is being withdrawn from the general funds for all these average kids, one of whom is my kid". And so it seems that we're always snitching bits from our bigger schools that were more economic or efficient or something, especially our high schools . . . it's been coming up constantly at Administrators' Association.*

With respect to instructional support staff functions, Ashley described a "co-op pooling" system established for the jurisdiction, which was able to provide appropriate consulting support for her school's needs, retaining essentially the same services as were in place before restructuring.

Ashley's main observation on the funding arrangements and budgeting related to decentralized management and to the dramatic impact of relatively small fluctuations in student enrollment on the school's budget and operations. *I look at this and I think, three more kids move in than our projected enrollment and I'll be close to being able to cover this, three kids move out, we're dead. But I don't think kids and teachers should be that vulnerable and so I think there needs to be a buffer.* She discussed the tendency

for principals to become preoccupied with budgeting and the financial dimension of

school operations now, and related working through a series of budget revisions as

enrollments and other factors fluctuated through the course of the school year.

>*I don't know that as a superintendent or as a parent that you're wishing for*
>
>*principals to be more focused on enrollment and budget issues and money*
>
>*matters. . . . I've talked to the staff about what are our connections to one*
>
>*another and how do we work together – that I am an important link among the*
>
>*teachers in terms of curriculum and teaching. But if you get so wrapped up in*
>
>*budget and E-mail, and you get so far away from, like new things happening in*
>
>*mathematics that you don't know about it or can't say "here's something new in*
>
>*mathematics do you want to have a look at it?" That's a trade off that I'm not*
>
>*comfortable with.*

Sarah

On the question of contact with the Superintendent and other central office

personnel, Sarah described arrangements that she felt were adequate in meeting her

needs. She characterized her Superintendent as understanding and supportive, and

indicated that while she experienced less face-to-face contact after regionalization,

electronic technologies such as computer e-mail and traditional telephone conversations

had effectively maintained the necessary communications contact. She indicated an

appreciation of the expanded contact and travel demands on the central office

administrators, reducing their capacity to visit the school frequently and be visible, but

felt they were able to be supportive on an "as needed" basis.

Sarah saw the increased size of the jurisdiction after regionalization as a source of both benefits and disadvantages. She identified the benefits as relating to economies of scale: more colleagues and more expertise to draw on. She described the disadvantages as "growing pains" arising from combining jurisdictions with different administrative cultures. Her view was that the disadvantages were transitional in nature while the benefits would be long-term advantages.

The main size-related concern, that Sarah identified, was between the small schools and the large schools in the jurisdiction. She indicated a concern that the large schools' approach to funding allocation within the jurisdiction was oriented toward their economies of scale, which, if they had their way, left small schools like hers with insufficient support, particularly for high cost programs such as special education.

> It's easy to lose perspective, but we can't do that; I don't like to use the term but I think you'll get the analogy here, we have to look at the weakest link. Or we have to look at the smallest ratio and say, "how can we make this applicable to our largest school?" So if the weakest link is that there's no administration time in the very small school, we have to somehow give from Peter to Paul. . . . I'll tell you how I feel about the big schools: they need some education. You have to be an advocate for your school, ok? And so you have to gently, gently, gently show them the way. Of course I've done that with rings in all their noses – no! . . . "We're the ones that can make money, and the small schools need to be better at standing on their own, blah, blah, blah." That was very strong the first year, so much it was almost awe – they kind of think, it has dissipated some with the movement of administrators between schools, but it's still there.

Sarah regarded the implications of the limit on central instructional support in the same kind of way. She felt the larger system generally had managed to maintain an appropriate level of central services. The creation of a "co-operative pool" of school based funds to support high cost program needs such as high incidence special education students was perceived as subject to the large school versus small school tension she described.

Sarah described her approach to budgeting as driven by the school's Education Plan. She indicated that the process was more time consuming than in the previous centralized environment, and that it forced the principal and staff to be more extensively involved in tough decisions. The benefit she perceived for this increased commitment and difficulty was the ability to be more creative in problem solving about the school's needs.

Two budget features, which Sarah attributed to the small school characteristics of her situation, were a strong emphasis on staffing and a lot of time spent on measures to augment her budget allocation. She described her arrangement by which over 90% of the school budget was allocated to personnel at the professional and support staff levels, in order to maximize the school's programming to address the needs of its students. She also described a significant time commitment on her part devoted to the development of proposals for consideration by the school jurisdiction for additional funding for special education and by the school community for facility enhancement. In both areas she stressed strongly the importance of participative decision making, involving the staff and the community through the school council, in the priorities and initiatives pursued through the budget. She also identified the importance of part-time

staff positions as a means of gaining flexibility in adjusting the school's operations to the constraints of its budget.

Middle Sized Schools

These schools had between 200 and 600 students, with a professional staff complement ranging from above 10 up to about 30 teachers. The support staff deployment was from 6 to 16 persons, and while the teaching staff tended to correlate closely with student enrollment, the distribution of support staff was more variable with respect to enrollment. The principals in this group primarily did administration, although all but one also retained some teaching duties. They typically described their assignments as about 80% administration and 20% teaching. These administrators were all assisted by assistant-principal or vice-principal arrangements. In most cases this took the form of one assistant who typically taught for 50% or more of the time and did administrative duties under the direction of the principal for the remainder. One of the principals in this group had organized a larger number of teachers into assistant administrator roles, each for a small portion of their respective assignments.

Alexi

Alexi reported that contact with the superintendent remained reasonably frequent, once or twice a month, but attributed this to the proximity of his school to the jurisdiction's central office. He indicated it was his perception that the distant or outlying schools did not enjoy this level of contact. For him the main impact of the size of the new jurisdiction was less time for team-building among the school administrators.

We used to meet once a month as administrators to get together and discuss

concerns. We now meet once every two or three months. There's less time for .

. . and I hate to use the cliché, team building; trust building – getting to know

the people on the other end of the phone.

Alexi described the consequence of this as one of increased competition among

principals, with more of a focus on the individual interests of their particular schools

than a concern about the interests of the jurisdiction as a whole. He also suggested this

lack of melding by the administrators contributed to a continuing sense of division

among the formerly separate areas consolidated through the regionalization process.

I don't concern myself with Division wide concerns. I know the bottom line is

the superintendent has to worry about the small schools, not me. That's really

unfortunate, but when you come to make decisions for your school now it's

mercenary. We're deciding right now on one committee whether or not we

retain an educational psychologist position. What it will come down to in the

administrators' vote is not philosophically what's the best thing to do, what's

best for all the schools. It comes down to "how many hours of time can I get

from this position, and how many hours would I get if I went to a contract

provider?" That'll be the basis of my decision, so it's more mercenary.

The previous conversation afforded an insight into the broad area of limitations

on centralized instructional support. Alexi described his perception of four degrees or

levels of decentralization in the jurisdiction: centralized, controlled centralized,

consulted – administration council, and decentralized to school. He placed most of the

decisions relating to instructional support services in the consulted – administration

council category, and indicated that differences between the approaches taken in the

different areas of the jurisdiction before regionalization had a significant bearing on

how principals approached these decisions. These differences were described both in terms of the services, such as an instructional resource centre, that the principals were previously familiar or unfamiliar with, and in terms of the trust level among the different communities of administrators. In summary, Alexi suggested this was an area still being sorted out by the regionalized jurisdiction: he indicated the importance of the Board of Trustees being clear with principals as to what allocation decisions it was going to retain, and which ones it was prepared to delegate to the administrators council to make.

> *The bottom line is wë need to know up front . . . I recognize the Board [of Trustees] has a right to decide these things; in a democracy the elected people are going to decide over the appointed people and I accept that. But I want to know ahead of time what they're going to decide and what they want me to do.*

Alexi described a procedure for budget development which changed substantially in the site-based environment. Rather than using a principal-directed approach, he had implemented a staff committee process for making the budget. In this process he described the role of the school council as being at the front end, with input into planning and priorities for the school. Following the staff development of the budget and confirmation with the principal, it was reviewed with the school council chairperson to clarify the measures addressed by the budget. The approach was described as securing considerable staff understanding of the resources allocated to the school's priorities. Since the jurisdiction still allocated teaching staff centrally, the staff participating in the budget committee were not directly confronted by personnel issues.

Horace

Horace characterized the superintendent's contact with his school now as very infrequent. He indicated that while communications contact with the superintendent and the central office person directly responsible for his school was good, these personnel were very stretched in their work responsibilities and had minimal opportunity for face-to-face contact with him. He recognized that in part this was a reflection of the absence of issues at his school that required direct central office involvement. On the positive side, Horace recognized this situation as a reflection of a very high level of trust by the jurisdiction's central administration: *They basically said, "you're capable of doing the job, do it". And that's a great deal of trust put in to the principals and I'm sure almost every principal rallies to that level of trust.*

Horace indicated he did not feel the expanded size of the jurisdiction had affected his role, but attributed this to the central location of his school. He expressed concern for the effects of distance on his colleagues in outlying locations, particularly with respect to their travel time requirements for system meetings. He also noted that travel requirements affected the nature of the superintendent's role with respect to the schools in a similar way, that while there is a lot of effort in visiting schools and a lot of exposure from this, the travel time overhead was high.

With respect to the funding framework's limitation on central instructional support, Horace indicated that the jurisdiction had established a system of school-based curriculum coordinators to stay abreast of developments in each area. He noted that three of these persons were on the staff of his school, so he felt that his curriculum support needs were reasonably well met internally, and by exchanging information with

the other schools. He reported that in addition to these arrangements, the school pooled

some funds for centrally provided services at the jurisdiction level, and also contracted

outside of the system for some needs. He indicated that basically the effect of this

change was for the school to be more reliant on its own staff capabilities.

We've had to become a little bit more capable of doing it on our own staff. But

we've got capable people who we can phone at a moment's notice to give us

advice . . . but it's another thing which is within the school, again it's coming

more and more to the school level: we're lucky we have some dandy people.

The school budgeting process Horace described focused on optimizing

arrangements for the school's program. He described an approach that provided more

flexibility for decision making at the school level than was easily accommodated under

the traditional, more centralized arrangement. His process tended to be an

administrator-initiated one, developing a prospective budget for consideration with the

staff and, subsequently, the school council. Again, a high trust level among the parties

figured in the process, with endorsement of proposed measures a frequent characteristic.

Horace talked about this in terms of directing as much of the school's human resources

as possible into the instructional program, and noted that one of the consequences of

this priority was that in some cases the approach strained collective agreement

provisions. He also observed that much of his approach to the budget involved fine

tuning the school's organization to balance out assignments, and again to optimize the

application of resources.

Ian

Ian indicated that the superintendent rarely visited the school since restructuring, but that their personal contact was extensive at regional and division level meetings. He was not critical of this reality, but he expressed a concern that the effect of this situation was the distancing of central administration from curriculum matters at the school.

> *I really think central office is getting away from the curriculum. I really miss*
>
> *having a consultant for secondary, who has helped us a lot with our*
>
> *restructuring. I see the central office as the connection outside, the watch to*
>
> *look around out there, to report back, keeping an eye on the world. . . . What I*
>
> *find, the downside of all the things that have happened, they're just run off their*
>
> *feet, people doing more. They can't do much more than putting out fires.*

He recognized the consequence of this as principals being more on their own, with central leadership being more indirect and focused more on the big, directive issues rather than operational decisions. A related concern Ian identified with this thin supervisory arrangement was the absence of the opportunity to receive evaluation and feedback from the superintendent on his performance as a principal, which he felt was an important need.

Ian described the effect of expanded system size on his role in terms of increased travel time burdens for people attending meetings. He also noted that the direct costs associated with participation in school division meetings fell on the school's budget, even when the expectation for attendance was imposed by the jurisdiction. This situation was described as another, additional form of cost downloading on schools.

The restriction on central instructional support was considered by Ian to be having a negative effect on curriculum support, and was seen as resulting in excessive dependence on volunteer curriculum coordination arrangements at the school level. This was regarded as a form of downloading from central office, to find someone who could stay up with the paper flow and information related to the various curriculum areas. From Ian's perspective it was not very helpful when he needed information that was being looked after by a teacher outside of his school.

In addition to the curriculum volunteers, a pooling arrangement by the principals for purchasing centralized services was seen by Ian as a partial solution at best, and in the area of special education it was pre-empted by funding requirements.

> *We've pooled some money but mostly the pooled money went towards testing. Because now all of a sudden, you see we never used to label kids, we never went for any kind of funding. Now with the high incidence you've got to go through this whole process, so we're still finding we don't have enough money to get all this testing done. So that money is pooled there; technology we've pooled, which I think has been a good thing for us. Other than that, nothing.*

He summarized with the observation that whatever was accomplished now with respect to curriculum leadership and development depended on whatever could be done at the school level.

Ian regarded the shift to site-based budgeting as providing the school with increased flexibility over the marginal dollars in the budget, which allowed for better fine tuning of the school's operations. Ian indicated that the amount of discretionary funds he had to work with in the new budget after staffing was accounted for was

approximately the same amount he worked with in the old budgeting format. He also recognized increased flexibility with these funds for addressing the local priorities of the school, again within the constraint of staffing costs consuming most of the budget allocation. The process Ian described for establishment of the school budget began with a draft by the principal, which was reviewed with the staff, then presented to parents, before submission to the Board of Trustees. He explained that the parent consultation was broader than just a review with the school council executive, using a town hall meeting format open to all the parents.

Joshua

The most significant change identified by Joshua in terms of contact with central office was with respect to specialist support for his role, and he identified a problem emerging from this.

> *What has really changed are the specialists from central office: they're gone now. So if you require a French supervisor, a consultant or advisor in math or science or health, guidance, we don't have any. There are none, so you do more networking within your school, or you go to another school where you know there's a very good teacher. For example a social studies teacher for grade nine and they share some of their exams and so on, but it becomes a big drain on the teachers. At first they're very willing to share, and then over time they will openly say, "can't you go and ask somebody else this time? I've already helped your school twice this year".*

He also indicated that the supervisory span over which central office administrators were now stretched created a situation that, where when there was contact with the

principal, it was often by a person who did not have the background on a particular question to give the principal useful advice. The result was that central office personnel were spending time chasing other colleagues to find information for principals, when prior to regionalization, the principals would have had direct contact with the knowledgeable individual. In Joshua's terms: *That was very difficult. It is the sharing of the senior brain wealth that everyone needs. It was hurting, it was hurting a lot.*

In terms of the effect of system size and reduced contact with central office on his work as principal, Joshua indicated that more networking and contact with other principals for information and support had developed. This development tended to serve as compensation for the reduced supervisory contact. While he felt this was beneficial in getting a good perspective on problems, he felt it was a limited strategy because he was often looking for advice on questions with which others in his network had no more recent experience than he did. When faced with a problem not in his contacts' resource pool, the principal was alone in dealing with it.

The other size-related change identified by Joshua was increased meeting time and in particular increased *travel time* for attending meetings. He suggested that the additional time for meetings was perhaps a transitional situation, part of the team building and information sharing required to merge personnel from several former jurisdictions. In his view, this requirement might decline as the new jurisdiction stabilized. The travel situation was regarded as a permanent feature of the new arrangement.

Central instructional support was described by Joshua as being met through a pooling arrangement, effectively being decided on by the principals as a group through

providing a recommendation to the Superintendent as to what services should be
purchased by funds taken from the instructional block of the funding framework.
Joshua felt that this arrangement was all right for what he termed the "big problems" or
"acute needs" of the schools, but was not adequate to address longer-term difficulties.
He also recognized that the reduction in central instructional support, along with the
larger span of supervision for the superintendent, resulted in a loss of both monitoring
capacity and of direction-setting by the jurisdiction.

For Joshua the process of establishing the school's budget was straightforward, -
- *black and white* in his terms. He described the activity as one of calculating the
revenue allocation to the school and using a computer spreadsheet with school level
formulae for staffing, support personnel, fixed costs, and so on to draft the school's
budget. This was then reviewed with the staff and the school council before being
finalized for submission to the jurisdiction. In this process, full disclosure of the
financial information was essential, and the personnel component of the budget was
difficult for staff to deal with because of Alberta Teachers' Association constraints.

> *Now they're becoming very uptight about commenting because if they comment*
>
> *they are talking about each other's jobs. When they could single it out, like a*
>
> *special education teacher, that didn't matter. But now when you start talking*
>
> *about whether we're going to offer four homerooms or five homerooms of grade*
>
> *nine, that means someone isn't having a homeroom next year. So, I think that*
>
> *the ATA'ers are finding it difficult to provide advice to the principal because*
>
> *they may not want to say what they honestly want to say.*

He observed the implication of this for his role:

Of course it's political, but it is the staff that are making their role more

political . . . they're starting to understand how the principal did his work . . .

they see there's one less slot to fill when you fill out the matrix, one less body,

there's your $55,000 saving this year. Who's leaving? They start to look at

each other.

Joshua's experience was that the principal had to take a very honest, up-front approach

with staff in dealing with this situation credibly. He described this need for openness as

a change faced by the principal as a consequence of budgeting in the restructured

system.

Mark

Mark operated one of the larger schools in this category and did not comment on

jurisdiction size with respect to access to the superintendent. He did, however, discuss

a concern about comparability among the different sizes of schools in the system and

the difficulty this created in establishing equity in the relationships among them,

particularly relating to the allocation of funds. He noted that his school was the only

one of its grade structure in the jurisdiction, so comparisons with the others were often

problematic for him in system decision-making.

Another size-related concern he identified was the increased difficulty of

interaction with other school administrators, particularly those with the same type of

school setting as his. He indicated that he benefited from attending zone level

principals' meetings periodically, outside of the jurisdiction, to share in a broader high

school perspective.

As principal of one of the larger schools in the jurisdiction, he was concerned about the allocation of funds away from his operation to support the smaller schools through pooling arrangements.

> *I said "why don't we allocate the sparsity and distance grants . . . all of that money to the small schools, rather than some mysterious fudge factors that the Treasurer makes up?" Because we know small schools take more to operate, why doesn't that money go there? And so he drew up a schedule based on that but he felt they still wouldn't be able to operate even given all that money.*

Mark felt that there was still strong central control of instructional services and that his school received little benefit from the central services supported by pooling, particularly the student services component.

> *In the first year we saw very little, I ask myself of all this that we're paying for back into central budget, what are we getting for service? In terms of students with special needs, kids with behavior problems, all those kinds of things, we're getting very little service. Then last year they said, "there's such a demand on this we're going to increase the budget – we need more to be centrally operated", and now they're saying the same thing this year. But again we're getting very little service at the high school level out of that. They say there's such a backlog, we put three names in to have some testing done. "Oh there's such a backlog we won't be able to do that until next year – we need more funds", and I'm saying to myself "why should I be voting for putting more funds in when I'm not even getting the service now?" Student population-wise I'm*

contributing a fair amount and I'm getting very little service for it, so that's a

sore point with me.

Mark was more accepting of the central pooling to support technology, but again felt

that the level of central direction and the magnitude of the costs imposed on the school

were substantial. In summary he indicated that he would prefer more flexibility to

contract directly for some of his instructional support needs rather than being tied to the

jurisdiction's arrangements. He felt these were directed more toward the needs of the

smaller elementary level schools.

Mark reacted positively to the school-based budgeting element of restructuring;

recognizing that this provided good opportunity to involve the staff in decisions about

the school's organization and operations. He described a process of sharing more

information about program costs with teachers and securing budget inputs from them

for consolidation into the school's budget. He regarded the personnel component of

budget development as effective, with the staff being able to recommend reasonable

adjustments in the deployment of manpower and the mix of support staff arrangements

for special needs and large class situations.

We've got some really full classes here, so I went to the staff and said, "we've

got some options that we can look at. We could split some classes", although at

the high school level that's complicated with the timetable once it's set. "We can

take some of the additional revenue here and hire teaching staff to split classes,

or we can look at hiring aides to help out with the classes that are already set",

and the staff said "hire teacher aides at this point".

In summary, Mark emphasized the increase in flexibility to address his school's needs and determine the best course of action at the site level as a positive benefit of this element of restructuring.

Tyler

Tyler reported a significant change in the interaction between the principal and superintendent as a result of regionalization. His school was formerly part of a relatively small system in which he had frequent face-to-face contact with the superintendent to discuss operational issues. He indicated that since regionalization the superintendent was rarely present at the school (a couple of times a year only), but that he had good communications contact with him by telephone and electronic mail. He also noted that the regionalized system maintained a sub-office arrangement, and that frequent direct contact with the deputy superintendent at the local sub-office was common.

Tyler indicated that most of his personal contact with central office administrators now occurred at system meetings, and he noted concerns related to the meeting format for a geographically large system. Travel distances and times were reported as being significantly greater now that the main population centre of the jurisdiction was elsewhere, and the former practice of rotating meetings among schools so principals got to visit each other's sites was no longer feasible.

From Tyler's perspective, central instructional services were in some flux, largely due to the differences between the approaches taken by the different jurisdictions prior to regionalization. While the provision of some special needs' consulting services on a central base seemed to be accepted as common ground among

the schools, the arrangements for services such as an Instructional Materials Centre and use of resident versus contracted psychological testing were issues still being rationalized. In essence, Tyler's perception was that the schools which had developed with these system services available tended to support their continuation, while principals whose schools had always managed without system-provided supports tended to prefer having the resources in their site budgets. His own situation was supportive of the centrally provided services, but he was uncertain about their viability in the long term as other schools chose to opt out and make their own arrangements.

Tyler viewed restructuring as providing him with more flexibility and more resources to work with at the site level.

> *Now there are changes: at the school level it seems like we have more money,*
>
> *well we do have more money overall, and more responsibilities added to that.*
>
> *Greater flexibility: the last couple of years under the old system we were tied –*
>
> *if you wanted to make some capital purchase that wasn't even heard of – we just*
>
> *maintained. When we regionalized, becoming part of a larger system, more*
>
> *monies were decentralized. Let's say, for example, if I had 20 budget lines,*
>
> *department budgets, that number of budget lines doubled: we added in a lot of*
>
> *other areas.*

He viewed this arrangement as providing more decentralization of purchasing decisions, and allowing more choice at the school level among alternatives, including capital equipment and facility modification needs.

Tyler indicated that teaching staff was allocated centrally by formula, so his budgeting did not have to contend directly with the costs associated with personnel and

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the related alternative deployment questions. His budgeting process was to solicit
subject department input from staff and to work this up into a draft budget that he then
shared with staff for feedback. Budgeting was described as primarily an activity he did
with the vice-principal. He indicated that attempts to extend the consultation process to
include the school council had not been very effective because of limited turnouts at the
meetings. His interpretation was that this was not an issue with the parents: they
wanted to be informed about the school's plans and to be assured that nothing was
changing drastically from the previous year.

Larger Schools

The principals of the larger schools, in excess of 600 students and more than 30
teaching staff, operated with a somewhat different set of arrangements that the others
did. These principals were essentially full-time administrators, in most cases retaining a
small teaching assignment to stay in touch with teaching. Several of these participants
were supported by more than one assistant principal or similar positions and the size of
the staffs resulted in organizational structures that provided for some type of department
arrangements. This characteristic resulted in the prevalence of Department Head roles
to share some of the administrative activities with the principal and assistants. In this
context, delegation was a significant factor for the administrators in these
principalships.

Brandon

Restructuring, in Brandon's view reduced direct contact with central office
administration. *You can get them on the phone whenever you want, before and now,
and talk to them. But, them coming out to the schools and sitting down, and walking*

around and being visible isn't happening anymore. He felt that this resulted in a loss of the "sounding board" and mentoring type of interaction which he felt was part of the relationship between the principal and the superintendent's office before restructuring.

> *I guess just that contact, the ability to bounce things off and when they come in*
>
> *you sit down you have coffee, it's a lot easier to get to know the person, tell them*
>
> *what's going on than getting on the phone or reviewing a formal document – the*
>
> *education plan, the budget, the programs. They were always informal, or*
>
> *sometimes they were formal because you were dealing on an issue with a*
>
> *teacher or a parent, but generally you could sit down and kind of brag about*
>
> *your school and what's going on. They knew what you were doing and what the*
>
> *school was doing. Now, I kind of feel it's more by a sense of reputation and*
>
> *rumor than from an actual being there, seeing it, experiencing it kind of level.*

He described his concern about this as being a loss of important feedback on how he was doing and how the school was doing, which he felt contributed to increased stress for both the staff and the principal as the effect accumulated over time.

Brandon's jurisdiction was not changed in size by restructuring and he did not consider the size of the school system to be a factor in changes to his role. For him size issues related to growth of the school's enrollment and the pressures this created for facility development. He indicated that this situation added a significant political dimension to his role, placing him between the facility-development initiatives of his school's very active parent group and the facility-planning imperatives of the school board. He described a process of dealing with this by providing information to the

parents in their advocacy initiatives, but not taking an active role with them on the issue.

Brandon described a major change in instructional support arrangements as a consequence of restructuring. He indicated that previously the school system had a significant central instructional support staff complement which was almost entirely eliminated, with the consequence that response times to school needs, particularly for student assessments, became intolerable. He noted the high level of parent expectations for service in this regard, and advised that as a consequence the school shifted to extensive contracting for these services. Since the school was located relatively close to an urban center where educational consulting was readily available, this arrangement met the school's needs.

Brandon considered the area of curriculum leadership and implementation to be more problematic. He described the loss of system level coordination for inservice, review of new learning resources, and implementation planning, and indicated that these now fell to the schools individually to manage as best they could.

It's been thrown in our laps, and I think different schools respond differently depending on the staffs and what they want to do. We've slowed down in that area, but we still see some critical areas where we need to develop. That was part of the reason of the timetable planning in each grade so the teachers in that grade would have prep time at the same time, so they could work together and review some of the programs or units or whatever.

In terms of inter-school collaboration on curriculum needs, he indicated increased difficulty, in large part attributed to time demands on staff. *I think there was more*

before. Now, I think people are just so busy and whatnot with budgets and plans, when times are tough you kind of batten down the hatches and look after yourself. And that's too bad because I think there's a real loss there. By way of example, Brandon described a former process in which staff from around the jurisdiction met every two or three months to develop common teaching units and select learning materials. He indicated this no longer happens: *It's a combination of loss of funds for covering substitute time and release time – people are so busy they don't want to give up their time. . . . "I've got too many kids, I've got too much to do, I can't put something else on my plate".* In his estimation the system's capacity to develop shared curriculum initiatives was substantially lost with the disappearance of central instructional support positions in the restructuring.

Brandon related that the school staff had traditionally been involved in the budget making process, but the increased scope of that activity had changed the emphasis. He described this as taking more time, more debates, and more attention to program changes and staffing questions. He indicated that decentralization of decisions about staffing levels was the most significant change, and described his approach to dealing with this.

I've up fronted it by stating to the staff that this can't be personal attacks on anybody. We start off by brainstorming, so nothing is right or wrong. But if it came to you hearing "we should get rid of all grade eight teachers and students" we wrote it down and kind of went from there, grouped some of them or put them together or eliminated some things that just weren't justifiable. And so we got down to a manageable 10 to 15 ideas and started looking at each of

them and working through. People couldn't say something negative about somebody else or be personal. That was the rule that was set up and people had an opportunity to defend first. So they could sell their program and defend, that put it in a positive light for anybody who was thinking against it. I think when you start off with positive ideas in your head it's tougher to run it down.

Clearly, Brandon considered maintaining a positive focus to be an important element of working with his staff in this context. His approach to involvement of the school council in this process was to develop the budget to the proposal level at the internal, staff level and then present it for discussion at a general rather than detailed level.

Luke

Luke saw the principal's relationship with the superintendent change with restructuring through an implicit redefinition of the superintendent's role. He described this as resulting in a downloading of responsibilities to the principal at the school site.

District image, putting all the reports together, so now they are responsible for the big picture of education, not the minutiae, the small detail: that's now in the school. They're quite willing to offload that; they're quite willing to act as a sort of court of second hearing, not first hearing. They're essentially saying "you now have the responsibility and accountability for doing these things, and we will implement procedures or evaluation tools or whatever to help you in the process." Which is also just their way of making sure that they can report to the Board with some authority and knowledge about what's going on.

Luke saw this as putting an end to any kind of useful mentorship type of relationship between the principal and the superintendent. *People don't have time to share ideas*

anymore. Everybody's running around doing stuff. Nobody can afford or has the time

to be proactive – when you're in that situation you're not mentoring either. He

expressed considerable skepticism that the current emphasis on an outcome indicators-

based model of monitoring. In his view it was an ineffective approach to the

management organization of the school system, an approach which created a lot of busy

work for central office personnel but which did not really achieve anything useful.

> *You get people giving you all kinds of rhetoric; performance indicators, quality*
>
> *indicators, achievement indicators, and if you read past the small print and you*
>
> *do any depth reading in that stuff, you know that every indicator project that's*
>
> *ever been started hasn't worked. Why are people putting forward models of*
>
> *something that doesn't damn work, trying to convince people that they do?*

In summary Luke suggested that the relationship between the superintendency and the

principalship after restructuring has resulted in a lot of misdirected effort.

Luke indicated that the main size-related impact of restructuring was the

increased diversity in school sizes and program varieties, which had to be

accommodated within the new jurisdiction. This had the effect of magnifying the

internal equity issues and funding allocation decisions that faced principals and which

the system had to resolve in some fashion.

> *I think in site based management when you get into a larger system you also get*
>
> *into an interesting configuration of schools. Anybody who thinks that per pupil*
>
> *grants operationalize schools the way that they were operationalized before in a*
>
> *District that could more or less pay its own way is kidding themselves: you still*
>
> *need to subsidize the operation of schools. Superintendents used to do that, I*

know they used to do that. They used to steal money from large high schools and redistribute it so that these other schools worked. I don't think enough administrators knew that. Now they know that and they resent it, and they resent being told they have to operationalize their school when they know full well that doesn't make any difference. There's an optimum size for which the formula works, with the smallest percentage possible for central pooling, and there's still a size at which schools cannot operate. If you follow the natural consequences of the arguments that have been used to put forward the changes that have been implemented there is only one driver. The one driver that's there is economic efficiency, accountability, and cost-value ratios and cost-value benefits. Well I'm sorry, you cannot operationalize small schools in rural Alberta on any of those bases. They just simply do not make it.

Luke saw the consequences of this dilemma affecting the jurisdiction in terms of transportation arrangements and in terms of teacher salary negotiation issues. Both had serious impacts on the differential status among the schools. He was concerned that the effect of the cost-benefit approach over time was to move schools away from the broad educational responsibilities of their mandate toward a narrower, training type of function, particularly in smaller enrollment situations where program flexibility was limited.

Luke did not see the capping of expenditure on central instructional services as a significant factor. He indicated that the arrangements in the jurisdiction previous to restructuring were of little use at the high school level, so he had already compensated for this situation. He described an approach that was based on the school developing its

internal capacity and expertise that provided for instructional support and curriculum leadership.

> *Part of the implementation model that I developed was based around developing staff expertise with professional development, based around creating expert teachers who understood what they were doing and why they were doing it, and who could then provide for other teachers good initiatives to start team building and a whole bunch of other stuff.*

Luke indicated that his budgeting process at the school was changed more by the credit enrollment unit component of the funding framework than it was by the implementation of site-based management. He described a process initiated with department level input, developed into a budget by the administration and presented to the staff for review before finalization. He indicated that the staff tended to be divided in this process between those who recognized the importance of building flexibility into the budget and those who saw it as an exercise in managing class sizes and pupil teacher ratios. He noted that after he came to know staff members' positions well, his consultation tended to be focused with those staff who he felt provided useful feedback which contributed to the quality of his decision making. He also noted that with a very inactive school council, it had minimal involvement in the process of finalizing the school budget.

In terms of interaction at the system level, Luke supported the pooling approach taken by the District for the principals to decide on the things that could be done better by all of them acting together. He did express reservations, however, about increased

competitiveness between the schools because of the business-oriented focus of the framework.

> *I think as soon as anybody talks about efficiencies and effectiveness that are driven by accounting procedures, you get competition, you get people who become focused only on their own school. Where you create competition, this very narrow perspective, people don't really care what goes on at other schools. I think my experience over the last three or four years working with site based management and working in these sort of cooperative efforts, has shown that competition will begin to surface more.*

Matthew

Matthew's observations about the effects of system size were different from the other participants in the sense that he was part of a very large jurisdiction which did not change due to regionalization. He pointed out that other restructuring measures, particularly the funding framework limitation on central administration, were significant changes in his context. That constraint and an orientation by the jurisdiction to a "flat" organizational structure resulted in Matthew being part of a very broad span of control on the part of the superintendent. He saw this as having both a positive and a negative effect on his role. It was beneficial in that it afforded him a lot of independence, opportunity for individualization, and the possibility of considerable peer consultation and collaboration. On the other hand, it effectively eliminated meaningful supervisory feedback on performance, and it impeded development of an understanding-based relationship with the superintendent.

It virtually means that you might see the person who is supervising you individually once maybe twice a year if you are being evaluated within that year. That's what happened to me: I had one meeting with my boss at my school and one at his office. That was it. For me that was fine – I know the system; I have lots of experience. But . . . I question how long it can be sustained. I tend to believe that part of leadership is providing a safe, open environment where people can take some risks and I don't know how you do that without some form of getting to know them as people.

He expressed reservations about the viability of this approach, and concern about the absence of any meaningful mentoring opportunity for principals with their supervisor.

Matthew also discussed the role of peer mentoring in this situation, but suggested that while it was helpful at times, it was often an ineffective model to try to follow because of the level of competition between the schools in the system.

In fairness, we do have various groups. The high school principals do get together to work on various things. In an ideal situation colleagues should be able to assist colleagues, but it goes back to this other issue . . . I don't know how much assistance is going on between the president of Petro Canada and the president of Shell to support each other so they can both be successful. To a lesser extent that is what we get ourselves into in high schools where we are competing for students.

He also shared the observation, based on his previous experience as an elementary level principal in the system, that competition was less of a factor at that level so peer mentoring was a useful organizational function in that context.

The limit on central instructional support and consequent downsizing of his jurisdiction's central services staff was not a direct concern to Matthew. He had decided at the school level to move away from extensive use of consulting services and promote the concept of developing in-school expertise. Located in an urban environment, Matthew had choices available for obtaining consultant support to the extent his school wanted it. His concern was that consultants operating in a market-type environment tended to lose the capacity to stay on the leading edge of their fields, over time becoming less able to provide the supports they are needed for.

> *I am now in a position, I think, of saying what kind of expertise do I need and then I buy it. I either buy it from within the District or buy it from another district. Now there is a downside to that too, in a sense that consultants are very different than they used to be. I'm not sure that we have people within our District right now who are on the cutting edge of, say, what's happening in language arts or mathematics that we used to. That is the responsibility of the principal to know all that stuff, but you don't. . . .It's easy for a consultant to walk into a place, do your workshop and then leave . . . they have to be really careful on that because it's circular, so you spend more time performing and not keeping up before long you spend less time performing because you're not keeping up.*

He noted, almost in passing, that the responsibility for the curriculum leadership functions formerly assumed by central instructional services had shifted to become a responsibility of the principal. A consequence of this was the delegation of curriculum responsibilities among the school's administrative team, and an increased expectation

for the teachers to assume a greater individual and collegial responsibility for currency on curriculum and instructional practice in their subject areas.

Matthew viewed the budget development process at his school as integral to his planning process. He described a model in which major directional decisions were made at the administrative level after substantial consultation with staff and consideration of feedback from parents and students. Following this, operational decisions for implementation were developed at the department level. Examples of such decisions included shifts in staff allocations and school-wide technology upgrading initiatives.

A significant internal consideration faced in this approach was that of equity in allocating budget resources among departments. The school's history was that some departments had traditionally been highly funded compared to others, due to perceptions about the relative cost of delivering the programs. Mathew indicated that, notwithstanding his consultative style, he took a directive position on this, insisting that resources were allocated to departments on a credits-provided basis, and reported that after a transition period this became accepted.

Matthew indicated that parent and student input to the budgeting process tended to be in the form of input on new initiatives rather than as a review activity at the end of the decision cycle. He illustrated that in the last school year the student input focused on technology issues while the parents' input focused on development of the school's code of ethics for the use of technology. In summary, his approach to budgeting was well established at the school administration and staff levels. While some of the needs,

initiatives and resource level questions reflected restructuring impacts, the process itself was not significantly altered.

Ryan

Ryan described restructuring as resulting in less school-level contact with the superintendent and other central office administrators. Because of other contact opportunities he did not regard this as a problem for him, but he noted it was a concern with his staff.

> *Even recognizing that we're physically located in the same place as central office, so there is no driving thing, the superintendent used to drop by once a month. I think he's been here once this year. The assistant superintendent for this area, you'd probably see him about half as often. For the most part, before and now they were just sort of informal drop-in visits. For myself, I just drop in there so contact with central office is not significantly less or a problem. The staff has noticed that they don't see the big boys around as much as they used to. I think that's sort of an issue.*

He described the consequence of this change on his role as becoming more of an intermediary on questions and concerns between his staff members and central office. He anticipated that what he regarded as a very comfortable relationship between his staff and the central office would gradually harden due to the lack of opportunity to interact as had been the past practice.

Ryan noted several effects of increased jurisdiction size on his role, mostly relating to his interaction with the rest of the system's administrators. He indicated that administrators' association meetings were more irregular than formerly and attributed

this to the size and geographic dispersion of the group. He also felt that the larger administrators' group was more fragmented, and brought together principals who often were at substantially different levels of understanding on some of the issues they discussed. In both cases these factors served to reduce the association's effectiveness in Ryan's mind.

A related problem was the difficulty of having meaningful deliberations among a group of more than 40 people, because of the constraints of physical meeting space and conversation dynamics. He explained that one of the consequences of the difficulty with general administrators' meetings was that more discussion and decisions were defaulted to committees of administrators, simply because that was more manageable, but this concerned Ryan because of the fragmentation it created. He summarized his concern about this aspect of restructuring with a comment about camaraderie in the principalship.

> There's not the same camaraderie between administrators. We don't know each
>
> other as well as you did in the smaller system because before you'd have an
>
> admin. meeting and then you'd go to the Legion for a drink or you know, you'd
>
> get together afterwards and so forth. But now the meeting ends and people have
>
> to drive so they're off. And so, even the opportunities for the informal
>
> discussion where good things can happen, even venting can happen or
>
> whatever, isn't occurring either, so I think that's a problem. So the physical size
>
> of the jurisdiction and the number of schools has made a difference.

Ryan did not see the limit on central instructional support as having any significant effect on his situation. He indicated this applied mostly to special needs

student services, and that in this area he had considerable in-house expertise on his staff. At the same time he recognized the need for this type of consulting support, particularly for smaller schools in the jurisdiction, and indicated he supported the central pooling scheme developed by the system to support these activities.

In terms of contracting out for specialized services or establishing the capacity to provide them internally at the system level, Ryan viewed this on a "best value for the cost" basis for his school. He was not opposed to additional centrally provided services provided the volume of service he received, including the overhead costs which had to be absorbed, was better than he could accomplish by contracting for the same services from providers outside of the jurisdiction. He acknowledged that a couple of services were under consideration in this category, as a result of differential practices among the former jurisdictions prior to regionalization. He indicated these issues were ones he was disinclined to be involved with extensively at the system level, because of their relatively minor impact on his operation.

Ryan's perspective on the budgeting process in terms of restructuring was that the process for him was the same, but with increased dollar amounts flowing through the site budget now. He described a relationship with his staff that reflected a high level of trust built up over time. This enabled him to share ideas and consider suggestions in developing his budget which, when drafted, typically enjoyed a lot of consensus support from the staff. He noted that the system was still in transition on determining how to handle teacher staffing in site-based management. He indicated that he was comfortable with this being done either centrally by formula, or being decentralized to the site. Ryan's main concern with a decentralized approach to staffing was with

respect to decisions about school-based support staff positions and the limitations he felt

necessary with respect to staff input on these decisions. *I think it's important staff not*

be involved in directly deciding who's going to have to go and who's not.

As well as discussing his own situation with the site-based budget framework,

Ryan observed the extent of its impact on his colleagues, in particular the added

responsibility it placed on them for difficult or unpopular decisions.

> *I think a lot of the principals just feel overwhelmed, you know, "how do we do*
>
> *that, how do we make the decisions – I don't want this. If I've got to split a*
>
> *class, I could say it's central office's fault – the staff they gave me". They don't*
>
> *want to have to deal directly with the parents on those issues.*

He went on to observe that this was weighing on some colleagues thinking about

staying in the role. *We have quite a number of principals in the system that are within a*

few years of eligibility for retirement, and I think their feeling is "Do I really need this?

Do all this work, go through the adjustment, and then I'm gone".

Ryan noted that in spite of the very activist nature of his school council, their

input into the budgeting process was quite limited, taking the form of a review of the

organizational plan for the upcoming year which he had developed with the staff.

Again he recognized the distinction for the principal between the context of his large

school and the smaller schools in the jurisdiction.

> *The smaller the community the more aggressive influential parents are, from my*
>
> *experience. So, dealing with the parent body here, even though they are very*
>
> *politically active, I think would be easier in many ways than dealing with*

parents, especially on staffing, class size and programming issues in a smaller school.

Summary and Discussion

This chapter examined the effects of restrictions on central administration and of regionalization of jurisdictions. The structural changes reported on in this chapter appear to have had generally similar effects on the experiences of the participants, with the distinctions being mostly matters of degree. Unlike some of the other changes, where the impacts were divergent or paradoxical, here the impacts seem to have been more consistent in their effects on the principals' roles.

Administrative Isolation

The participants consistently reported a reduction in face-to-face contact with the superintendent and other supervisory officers. This gave rise to concerns about a loss of awareness or "loss of feel" on the part of the superintendent and doubts by the principals about the capacity of central office to understand and support what they were doing at the site. The other characteristic of this increased independence from central supervision was a reduction in feedback on performance, leaving principals perhaps feeling more vulnerable about their role performance. Several of the participants made reference to peer mentoring or other information networking arrangements as increasingly significant for them. While perhaps a necessary substitute for supervisory mentoring, these approaches were not seen as an equivalent.

Geographic Isolation

Increased travel time for meetings and the increased difficulty of getting a larger number of people together over greater distances to do business were significant factors

for many of the participants. Even some of those whose schools provided them a location advantage recognized that the travel burdens on other participants diminished the effectiveness of system-level gatherings. This tended to make the building of effective working relationships more difficult, resulted in more dependence on committee procedures, and fragmented understanding among the administrators.

Internal Equity

Regionalization measures tended to increase the range of diversity among schools in most of the participants' jurisdictions. One consequence of this was the need for principals to consider how they should respond to equalization arrangements or internal subsidies, which generally transferred resources away from larger schools to support smaller ones. While the participants recognized the reality of this situation, they varied considerably in their acceptance of redistribution, either by differential funding or by pooling measures resulting in services of considerably more use to some schools than others.

In-House Arrangements, Sharing and Pooling

The participants reported significant reductions in central instructional support personnel in conjunction with the expenditure limits established in the new funding framework. Most of them did not describe this as presenting major problems or difficulties. They described a variety of school-level measures developed to compensate for this shift in emphasis. References to expanding expertise on the schools' staff so that student needs and curriculum leadership needs could be addressed internally were common. As mentioned above, the concept of central pooling of some instructional block money to fund shared services also seemed to be supported by these

principals. Concerns in this area related to loss of coordination and to the weaknesses inherent in arrangements that are substantially dependent on volunteer commitments by teaching staff.

Budget Process

The respondents indicated that the processes by which they developed and implemented their school budgets did not change a great deal as a result of restructuring, with the exception in some jurisdictions of greater responsibility for staffing level and deployment decisions. Generally, they reported an increased volume of dollars in the budget, increased flexibility, and more disclosure and sharing of information, particularly with staff. School council input seemed to be minimal, limited to preliminary planning input in some cases and a final draft review process in others. In this area the principals seemed to retain considerable direction with respect to process at their schools.

Conclusions

The funding framework constraints on administration implemented through restructuring reduced the amount of direct contact the principals had with their supervisors, leaving them in a more isolated, autonomous role with less opportunity for coaching and career development guided by their superintendents. The limits on central instructional support resulted in the principals shifting emphasis to increasing site-level, staff based expertise and to system-level shared service measures, despite the equity problems attached to these approaches. The funding framework did not significantly change the procedural aspects of budgeting for the participants.

The reduction in the number of jurisdictions, achieved through the regionalization of adjacent systems, affected the participants in some basic and practical terms. Increased travel demands, increased difficulty of holding effective meetings, and reduced camaraderie with administrative colleagues were indicative of these effects.

Chapter 8

Responsibility, Accountability and the Principal

The purpose of this chapter is to present findings related to Specific Research Question 5: Are there other significant effects of restructuring on the role of the principal unanticipated by the previous questions, and if so what are they? Upon reflection it was apparent that many thoughts expressed by the respondents related to their feelings about the responsibility and accountability demands attached to their roles. While not tied to a specific research question, a number of the prompts in the interview schedule and some of the unstructured conversation in the interviews elicited insights from the participants about changes they perceive in this important aspect of the principal's role. Topics raised in the interviews that contributed to this section included personnel management and teacher evaluation, scope of responsibilities, role expectations, and accountability measures. In particular, items on the interview schedule about personnel evaluation, changes in and manageability of workload, and sources of role expectations contributed to the responses reported in this chapter. These questions on the interview schedule were initially considered as probes to follow up the previous research questions, but the pilot study suggested a focus on the area of accountability and this became increasingly apparent as the main study progressed.

The nature of this content is perhaps more thematic than the previous chapters, in which the data tended to be classified around the research questions. The findings in this chapter are organized on the basis of the clusters of school community types that were followed in chapters five and six: rural mixed, rural resource based, rural agricultural, and urban.

Rural Mixed Sites

Alexi

Alexi indicated that he felt the parents in his community tended to be more demanding of the school than was his previous experience. Along with this, his perception was that they were more prone to blame the school for shortcomings with their students' education, even if important factors were not necessarily school related. He described a perception that the rate of complaints to central office was an indicator used by the superintendent and deputy superintendent to assess how well the school was operating and how involved they should become.

In discussing how to deal with this, Alexi noted the importance of finding a balance among stakeholders' interests, particularly with issues that had a substantial values component. He described this in terms of part of his leadership job being to act as a facilitator.

> *My job is to be task oriented, "we need to make a decision on this" and my job is to push for the decision, my job is not to make the decision, ok? Lead policy development, lead staff discussion, access resources required to put the decision in place, communicate the school's goals to central office and the community. But it's not to make the decision – we're talking major decisions.*

He identified two major components of maintaining a positive level of satisfaction toward his school in the restructured environment: care in the teacher staffing process, and the principal's trust relationship with the staff.

With respect to teacher staffing Alexi described an arrangement in which teachers were hired by the principal and teacher transfers were accepted or rejected by

the principal on the basis of an assessment of appropriateness for the school. He acknowledged the authority of the superintendent to override this, but indicated that centrally directed placements were rare and were subject to some negotiation between the principal and the superintendent. Alexi indicated some reluctance toward the transfer process: *I would like to see him [the superintendent] make us live with our decisions, I notice that sometimes he puts pressure on for transfers and my reaction is "whoever hired this person should keep him".* The implication was that hiring would be done more carefully if the principal knew he had to deal with the consequences himself.

This view placed a substantial emphasis on the teacher evaluation process used by Alexi. He acknowledged that the principal's role now included supervision and evaluation of teachers in the clearly summative sense that if the teachers' performance is not working out for the school it was the principal's responsibility to initiate and document termination. He acknowledged a legacy of some weak or problem teachers on the staff, and described approaching this by implementing a renewed cycle of evaluations with the staff, sharing the duties between his assistant principals and himself. At the same time he indicated some difficulty with implementation, and he expressed the view that despite the increased responsibility of the principals, central office would still be extensively involved in the termination of continuing teacher contracts because of the legal processes involved. Alexi also noted increased pressure to evaluate teachers rigorously during their first year, while they are on a probationary contract, in order to take advantage of the more straightforward termination process if there was any doubt about performance. In summary he described this critical aspect of

the principal's role in terms of being given a lot if input in teacher selection decisions and living with the responsibilities and consequences for the ones that did not work out well.

Alexi saw establishing a solid trust relationship with the staff as the other important necessity for his leadership effectiveness. His observation was that *unless they really learn to trust and support me, I've got to keep them happy* and that to be effective he had to get beyond the trying to keep everyone happy stage. He also reflected on the other side of this idea: *to a certain extent, the role of the principal will be defined by the amount of trust he has in his staff.* Alexi described this in terms of leadership *density*; the competence and capacity of staff members to do things for the school in a self-directed way.

> *Here's what I'm thinking: first off within the staff you have some people like Lisa, grade six teacher, for example. If she says we should do this – I trust her that's probably the best decision and as a result that's going to affect my role. If another teacher comes in who I don't trust and says "we should do this", I'm going to double check, to make sure, I'm going to take some admin. time to make sure that this is the best decision, so we're going to talk about trust. I'm going to trust Rose, who is an excellent secretary, who defines efficiency, when she says, "within the budget we can't do that". I'm going to believe her, so that's first off, trust the staff.*

He concluded his reflection with the assertion that *if site based management will work; it will work based on trust* so clearly for him this was a core requirement for the principal.

Ryan

Ryan described a feeling of internal accountability for his role. He acknowledged that the Province, the school system, and the school council had views on this, but for him it was *from myself: my expectations of what I'm going to do in this position for this school, for this staff, with this staff, with these parents – I would say most of the expectations I put on myself.* He went on to describe how this changed in the restructured environment:

> *Where the frustration comes in is when somebody else drops something in that doesn't fit in with the plan and so forth and interferes with me completing what I expected I should be doing in some other area. And I think there's been more of that. I guess that would be the one change in the last couple of years, that there seem to be more of the Department saying "we want this now", or central office saying "we want this", or the Board saying "we've got to do public relations, so we want this from you". There's been an increase, I think, in what seem almost unplanned expectations, unplanned activities, things that need to be done.*

The area of personnel management, while recognized as an important part of the role, was not a large area of concern to Ryan in terms of accountability. He emphasized strong support from the superintendent to always hire the person he felt was best for the job, and described a supervisory approach that concentrated on new staff during the interim certificate and probationary contract stages. While he expressed reservations about committing time to formal recurrent evaluation of established staff, he did indicate a sensitivity to parent input. This sensitivity was expressed in the form of concerns and complaints about teacher performance as a valid basis for intervening with

veteran teachers. *I think there's a basis there, you know, you start getting a pile of parent phone calls, you know there's a problem and you need to look into it, there's something going on.*

Ryan related his feelings about the decision-making aspects of restructuring as being positive, and he indicated that this had resulted in better decision outcomes. He described a view in which involvement constituted an important aspect of accountability.

> *I think the move to site-based is very positive. I think far better decisions are being made, at least in the areas that I've been involved in at this point, than in the centralized system. I think it's been better for students and I guess I always felt parents should be involved and staff should be involved. I think that a lot of the push, the impetus, for school councils, collaborative decision making, whatever, was that for too long in too many places those groups of people were left out of the decision making.*

He summarized with an observation about the relationship between parents and his role: *I don't have a lot of wannabe principals, there are a couple but I don't have a lot. I don't have parents that want to run the school. But I have a lot of people who want to know what the hell is going on, and as long as they feel they know what's going on and can have a say about something that's important to them.* He described an open approach to sharing the school's provincial achievement test results with parents as representative of this. In a year where the results were less positive than before, the school council already had the context and trend information and so was understanding

of the staff's approach to analysis rather than being critical of the teachers or the principal.

Tyler

Tyler described a notion of responsibility that was related to the concept of ownership, and indicated that this was increased by restructuring. *How do we do it here? Well, a lot more responsibility on the school level, which has resulted in greater ownership on our staff and I hope on the part of the students as well.* His reference to students was indicative of a view he mentioned several times, to the effect that while he reported to the school system and parents, he felt a sense of accountability to the needs of his students. In terms of his role, he described an approach based on monitoring as opposed to personally doing all of the functions he was responsible for. He described, for example, the importance of having a competent support staff person attending to the school's bookkeeping and accounting duties, while at the same time the principal required sufficient background to remain aware of and understand what was going on in the financial area.

Tyler also discussed his responsibility for staffing and personnel management in terms of ownership of the concerns and problems. In his view restructuring resulted in more responsibility on the principal for the initial stages of difficult personnel decisions. But substantial central office support and involvement would come into play if a situation proceeded toward termination. *Now if things don't go well, it starts off at the school level. We deal with it on the front lines and in a way this probably hasn't changed over the years, other than we now do most of the initial work as far as*

documentation is concerned. He reflected that this responsibility added to the demands of his role.

> *That adds to the pressure, to stress level there's no doubt. When dealing with contract matters that's one area that, because we don't deal with it on a regular basis, that today's administrators might feel somewhat ill informed or uncomfortable with. When you get to this situation, what do you do next?*

Tyler's view was that support from the superintendency in terms of both consultation and procedural advice was very important in these situations.

When he discussed the expectations that he perceived for his role, Tyler recognized the external expectations of the educational system, but again, he also recognized the place of students in his accountability framework.

> *There's what I have to do in the School Act and Board Policy; those are the things if I don't do them then I'm just not going to be here. After I've met that, those expectations, the expectations come from students, staff, and parents. We have to set up a program that meets the needs of our kids, and we go through that process every year in the spring.*

He went on to describe how he felt that expectations had changed with restructuring.

> *More so from the parents' direction, but also students' direction. They have more say, they're given the opportunity for more say as well. I think that's a positive step but it's a time consuming one. I mean we could create all kinds of wonderful things at the administration level or at the staff level, but if what we come up with is not well received by students and their parents, then we're barking up the wrong tree – it would be a losing battle. Whereas before, kids*

were sent to school and the school basically told the kid and the parents "this is

what's happening here", now we're looking for a lot more input and we ask for

feedback.

He described the consequence of this for the principal as involving the taking of more

time explaining the rationale behind administrative proposals and decisions.

Tyler expressed a concern that he was getting caught between student program

needs and what he described as fiscal imperatives imposed by restructuring. He

indicated that while some aspects of the instructional funding arrangements worked out

all right for his school, what he perceived as under funding of the building maintenance

and student transportation functions necessitated a transfer out of the instructional block

to the support block. He also expressed concern that the funding arrangements were too

inflexible, citing the example of having adequate funds for new computers but

insufficient funds to upgrade electrical wiring to supply the new computers. He

described system-level information meetings in which the process of sharing concerns

seemed to come down to fiscal priorities rather than student priorities.

What it boiled down to was "we understand your concerns, we're doing what we

can, these are the things we've tried to do; we'll look at changing other areas

too where we can", but it boiled down to the dollars, and that seems to be the

focus, the dollar. And as far as the School Board is concerned, yes they are

concerned about people, but they can't over spend just like we can't over spend

at the school level, so in a sense what is that saying: is it that the dollar is more

important than the student? You know, what we're all here for is the students

and it seems like that's being lost somewhere.

Rural Resource-based Sites

Horace

Horace described a view of his role that reflected considerable self-direction within the parameters established by his school jurisdiction. When he reflected on this, he attributed it in part to the fact that he was well established in the role, and that generally over time things had worked out well at his school. His view also reflected a distinction between outcomes and process, with the former being more external and the latter being more established by himself.

Within the confines of what I have to do, expectations are what I set. Alberta Education says you're going to do this, School Division says you're going to do that, and I've got to decide how to get that done. And I hope what I do get done is ok – I haven't had too many complaints so far, but I would expect if there was something I needed to address that a person would be up front coming and telling me, and I would look at that area and get it up to snuff if it needed to be brought up to snuff. I'm not adverse to that type of approach. Someone comes in and says "I've got good news and I've got bad news"- so give me the bad news first, what is it I need to do.

He observed that as the principal's role responsibilities changed, he felt it became increasingly necessary to be able to say "no" to some of the demands and requests for involvement, in order to keep the job manageable and keep focused on the elements he felt were important.

Horace expressed an outlook that placed increased emphasis on the principal's communication and personnel skills as essential ingredients for effectiveness.

People who can't deal with parents effectively, who can't deal with personnel

issues effectively, with kids, who can't market themselves or their schools or

their teachers, are going to have some real problems, I think. If you're sort of

an ok communicator that's not good enough, I don't think, in the world that's

coming.

He went on to discuss his concerns about the relationship between the principal and

professional staff, how changes in expectations here had placed a lot of additional

pressure and stress on the principal. *Onus is increasing on the principal to have the*

right people in place at the right time, to be flexible in the deployment and assignment

of staff to meet program expectations. He saw this as at times having placed the

principal in an awkward position with his staff which made a close, collegial

relationship difficult.

With respect to the management of teaching staff, Horace described an approach

which placed a lot of autonomy with the principal, but which had evolved on its own

within the school jurisdiction as opposed to being an imposed restructuring measure.

The direction the school system had developed was consistent with the new

accountability structures.

I think we've evolved, I'm not sure we've evolved simply because of Alberta

Education. I think it makes sense, some of the things that we've done, which our

School Division has said make sense. Why should the superintendent, for

example, be involved in the selection of a teacher aide here at the school, or a

teacher for that matter? We have to work with that person, so you make the

selection and involve the people you need to involve in making that decision.

He described an evaluation and supervision approach based on development and improvement of weaknesses, and indicated that this had been successful in that other than not renewing a few probationary contracts, he had not found it necessary to terminate staff. *So hopefully our hiring practice gives us the type of people we like to have and then our nurturing process helps them along and helps them get stronger.* One of the challenges identified by Horace was maintaining this kind of approach to teacher development and effectiveness in the face of external demands on the school.

Ian

Ian described an outlook in which the accountability aspects of restructuring had caused major change to his role. He expressed concern about the ongoing manageability of the role, particularly with respect to keeping the "paperwork" or management aspect under control. *I would say the expectations are tightening down. I'm not saying that's necessarily bad, but that's what's happening. Planning, budgeting, all of the policies, it's all closing in and saying it's got to be your ducks in order, in line.* He identified the Provincial Achievement Examinations in particular as indicative of this change.

> *The achievement exams for grade nine have probably been the largest impact on this school, and I won't say positive necessarily. I've got teachers who are doing good things now running scared, who think why do you change what you're teaching — because there are parents out there who see things in a different way. Yet when I sit with the parent council, they understand the numbers, they're willing to say, "hey, there's good things going on — these are not as important". But there are other people saying "Mr. Principal, you're not*

doing a very good job. Look, you're well below the provincial average, what's

going on". "Well, this school's different". "Well, how come the rest of the

province is better". "Well, because dynamically this town and the way this is

set up is different than any other school in the world". So you end up with that

kind of negotiation.

In terms of the supervision and evaluation of teaching staff, Ian maintained a
clear distinction between formative practices and summative measures. He indicated
that the school's autonomy in personnel selection decisions was established prior to
restructuring, but that he now saw an increased role for input from parent
representatives in school personnel decisions. He felt this involvement improved
parents' appreciation of the difficulties and intricacies of staffing, and resulted in
parents being more supportive of the staff. Ian felt that in deployment and staff
assignment decisions, he retained a quite directive role. If a personnel situation were
not working out well, his involvement would also be more directive. He described an
approach in which most of the formative work with staff was delegated to his assistant
administrators, but where summative steps were seen as necessary and possibly leading
to termination of a contract, he assumed the responsibility.

Here's the new system: termination would proceed when the admin. team

started to see problems and I started to see problems. It's up to me, I have a

process to go through to sit with them, tell them what the concerns are, make

sure it's documented, provide some support. . . . And at that point the

superintendent would know and would come in and document.

Ian described the expectations to which he answered as coming from the community, and indicated that he felt these had changed with people wanting a simple focus on outcome measures. He indicated concern about the implications of the expectations arising from this approach, with the consequences falling on the principal's role.

> *The expectations have changed somewhat in the sense that the belief out there in society is that a number or numbers or statistics can tell you what's going on in here, and that because we're in a fast paced world they also make it easier: "give me a sheet of paper that tells me". "I can see in a glance, and I can pretty well tell if the principal and his staff are doing a good job." That pressure, I think, is being put on. I've told my staff "they're not going to fire you: I'm the coach. If somebody's going it's going to be me, so lets just get out there and teach, do your best. I'm a big boy, I can survive." To me that's where I see it. It will be the principal who will be the defining person here. If it's not going well, bring somebody else in, to get the marks in order, to do those kinds of things.*

He also identified a contradiction between Alberta Education's influence on parent expectations regarding outcomes, and the nature of site-based management.

> *I think those parent expectations are being driven by the increased importance put on marks by the Department of Education. They just say "we give you the marks, we don't really care". If I'm site-based management, no we won't take those exams this year, we'd rather do our own thing here. See, it says site-based management but there are little strings that run up there that are hidden*

underneath, that makes it not really site-based management, and one of them is

the provincial accountability. "Go and do your thing, be accountable to your

parents and your local community and your Board, and oh, by the way to us as

well."

Even with this context of personal accountability for the principal, Ian re-emphasized his conclusion that to be effective principals needed to move away from a directive approach with staff to one which was more collegial and supportive. *I believe the principal's role has to be changed from the hierarchical person with all of the wisdom position to one in which they become almost blended into the staff.*

Mark

Mark described the expectations that determine his role as being a combination of internal thinking and external inputs from those close to the school.

Internal more than external, and when I say that I'm talking about both my own

kind of picture of what I should be responsible for, as well as what the staff and

students and school council think, that kind of thing. I respond a lot more to

that than I do formal documents about what should be done.

He did not attribute much weight to provincial and jurisdiction expectations, but he identified these as complications to the focus and workload of the principal. Mark described tension between some of the priorities and directions established by the Board of Trustees and the practical realities of the principal's work. He described this frustration for example with the documentary aspect of teacher evaluation.

It's frustrating, I have some hang-ups about doing something just for the sake of

having the paper on file, and so I had some difficulties with that one. I like the

informal set up much better. I like to be in and out of the classrooms on a fairly

regular basis and get a sense of what's happening and deal with situations as

they arise that way.

Mark viewed the principal's workload as increased by restructuring, and he did not see this as a transitional event that would revert back to the previous level. In spite of this he felt that he was still able to identify the priorities that he needed to concentrate on, but meeting external requirements increasingly required "out of school" time.

The struggle for me is between being available to teachers and students, and

getting the paperwork done. I think the paperwork part of it is increasing, and

so that means more after hours stuff, because that's the kind of stuff that doesn't

get done during the day. Sometimes my secretary helps me out, she just comes

and shuts the door when she knows that I've got some paperwork that has to be

done. But generally speaking, I've always managed to have the door open most

of the time and have students and teachers feel like they can walk in anytime.

I've always kind of operated that way, been willing to put in the hours to get it

done.

Concerning the management and supervision of staff, Mark described arrangements by which this was substantially delegated to him at the site level, and which had not changed appreciably with restructuring. He recounted experiences with formal summative evaluations leading to termination procedures that he did not feel were very effective. He noted that he had moved to an approach oriented toward counseling weak staff towards improvement or withdrawal from teaching. His discussion in this area did indicate one source of concern: the opportunity for conflict

between site-level selection of staff and system-level placement of staff because of overriding contractual commitments. In the increasingly site-oriented approach to professional staffing, an intervention by the superintendent with a less appropriate placement on his staff, however necessary this was, created a difficult and frustrating operational situation for Mark.

Although some of the concerns related to restructuring troubled Mark, he saw an important aspect of his role as drawing on his experience and standing in the school community to provide kind of a gyrocompass for the school as restructuring occurred.

Some ways, rightly or wrongly, I still think in the midst of all the change there has to be some stability that people can tie in to. When there's so much else going on outside, it's important that the staff can have something to tie in to – that's kind of what keeps me coming back. I think that's important to me.

Rural Agricultural Sites

Ashley

Ashley expressed concern about the expanding demands and stress she experienced in her role, but at the same time she described the major expectations on her as being internally established, rather than externally imposed.

I realize that probably a lot of the things that I do, I do because I think they are the things that should be done. I don't really feel like I have a superintendent who bosses me in any way, or that I sit with the School Act every night wondering what it is I'm supposed to do. I feel much more driven by myself and what I think needs to be done and how I think it should be done; and the

satisfaction then of seeing things that you do, which is why I like school

administration.

She observed that the quantity of demands and expectations she faced had increased with restructuring, in terms of both paperwork and of people-related issues and processes. Her observation was that the latter dimension was where the biggest changes had developed, and she attributed this increase in interpersonal time demands to increased stress on the staff.

We're certainly, in our jurisdiction, seeing more people suffering from stress

and more stress related leaves. I think that whether you can pick up on those

things and make adjustments or whether you can be a support to a person so

they can avoid a difficulty, I think this is one of the roles we're going to have

here. I don't think we can keep downloading with fewer resources. I think the

real dollars for education have shrunk and the expectations have risen

dramatically for what people are expected to do with curriculum.

For Ashley, the consequence of this was that more of her time was allocated to interpersonal matters:

More time that you need to spend with people who are here in the school.

Whether it's the school council president or the trustee that you are trying to

lobby, or whether you're trying to get your school picture in the paper for

something that you've done, or teachers feel stress and have questions and

they're dealing with kids who are difficult, that they need to come to you, and

there aren't other people for them to come to, you're the person they come to.

While on one hand Ashley felt the workload of her role was quite difficult and had dramatically increased from the way it was before site based management, she described focusing her energy where she felt it yielded the best instructional leadership for the students at her school. This was the area of teacher supervision and evaluation. She indicated that she was effectively up to date with implementation of the school jurisdiction's three-year evaluation cycle for teachers. She had made this a time priority for herself and in her school budget had allocated appropriate release time covered by a substitute teacher. She firmly supported site-level responsibility of the principal for teacher evaluation, and emphasized that thoroughness was important for this to be effective.

> *I think on balance it's better for kids, I think it is better for the teacher, and I think it's a reasonable responsibility for the principal, who can see and take into account all the things that contribute to a staff member being effective in the school. Yes, I think it's a reasonable role to have. Unfortunately I see that the plate is already getting quite full, but to me doing a good teacher evaluation is a way that I think I can directly impact on kids. As direct as I can be as a principal, to impact on kids' achievement and their enjoyment and their motivation to learn -- those are the kinds of things, I think, you get happening in a good teacher evaluation, so yes, I'm happy to do it.*

Despite her dedication to instructional improvement and provision of a quality program for the students at her school, Ashley expressed concern about the magnitude of the present role, and its decline in attractiveness, particularly to prospective new administrators.

An acquaintance from a large jurisdiction mentioned that they have had

principalship and assistant principalship postings where no one in the system

had applied, which was unheard of in the past. People are just saying no, and I

think that's sad, because I think that there are some quality teachers who would

make excellent administrators. Two people I've tried to encourage at this

school. A year ago they kind of nibbled a bit, "oh, might start working on a

masters" some things appealed to them -- this year they wouldn't touch it with a

ten-foot pole.

Ashley also observed that the hectic pace of the role made it difficult to establish an

overall sense of perspective, and that the role tended to be an increasingly lonely one.

She pointed out the need for feedback on performance as an important consideration

that lacked attention in the restructured environment.

Luke

In a quite different view, Luke attributed the current role expectations for

principals directly to Alberta Education, and linked them to the accountability

framework element of the restructuring program. He was critical of this development,

both for the effect he felt it was having on the nature of the principalship, and for the

implications for educational leadership in the province.

It's just jiggery-pokery, and everybody's running around doing the little dance --

it's absolutely bizarre. . . . they did exactly what the script basically said they

were capable and willing to do: to dance with the devil, and that's what they're

doing. I haven't heard anybody stand up and tell them what for who.

Luke expressed concern that restructuring was about fiscal control rather than about instructional improvement, and suggested that the consequence of this was the principalship shifting from a focus on educational processes to a focus on managerial activities and superficial accountability based on things that could be measured with relative ease.

> *I think we're going to see people who are accountants, business managers, in terms of people that are attracted to it, and people with even greater interest in maintenance of the status quo than we've had in the past. . . . The leadership in education in this province has gone through this period and been as docile and non-responsive, as quiet, as complacent, as roll over and play dead; then it creates the next generation of leaders who will do exactly the same thing.*

In the same vein he went on to observe: *I can't see any real value in, or any real skill or talent or ability that's necessary to do what this job now demands people do. It's now very much a routine, operational, functional task, that some people do very well.*

Luke also recounted reservations about the accountability aspect of teacher evaluation now placed on the principal. He described his experience with a recent teacher termination and in particular the negative experience of the adversarial nature of the process when he was also a member of the professional association that defended the teacher. He concluded emphatically that this process was inappropriate, and that the only viable option for a principal was to take a collegial, developmental approach to teacher supervision.

> *I have lived through a termination, which I will never do again, ever. I don't give a . . . [expletive] how bad somebody is, I'll just go "oh, we'll have to work*

on that". I'm not going to ever get involved in that again. The whole idea is to improve the quality of instruction and in order to do that you have to involve teachers with teachers. . . . I think that one of the systematic problems that's going to show up as a result of site based management — you're going to get performance measure indicators because of a management function that essentially is going to be applied to teachers as if there's some magic in the formula, which I think is totally bogus.

With respect to the management of teacher personnel, Luke also identified a distinction between personnel management options for principals in rural versus urban settings.

There isn't a principal of a school who isn't saddled with what he has; and is virtually unable to do anything about it. So we've said to them "you're responsible", but unless you're in a big urban area what are you going to do? In the city a principal can go in and flush with transfers and can then hand pick people. . . in a rural district I don't think so. I don't know of any rural school district that could do that.

Luke also reported a positive dimension to the changes. He distinguished between an organizational perspective and a personal perspective, and described the experience and the expectations as manageable: onerous in terms of time and responsibilities, but not debilitatingly so. He recognized that site-based management afforded him greater flexibility and scope to take new initiatives in his principalship. *I think what's happening, in my estimation anyway, has been very liberating in the personal sense — to try stuff that was exciting and interesting.*

Sarah

Sarah described a view of her role which recognized the provincial and jurisdiction expectations, but which for her was rooted in expectations close to the school and within her own outlook.

> *Jurisdiction policy, that's the overall nuts and bolts of things, and the big roles and responsibilities document from the province, but most of my role description comes from my staff, my students, and my parent community, and what doesn't come from there I initiate it. I think you have to build excitement, part of being a principal is all about attitude and positive attitudes are contagious, and attitudes that build change for kids are contagious, provided people can see an end result that's productive for their children.*

She expressed a leadership-oriented view that her role made a significant difference to the students and the school. *I can see that my vision for kids and learning and what makes a school work efficiently is achieved. I'm the principal person, no pun intended, the person who can see that happen through good leadership.*

Sarah indicated that with respect to her workload the total time commitment had not really changed with restructuring, but that the priorities she concentrated on had changed. She made reference to more time devoted to preparing documents and proposals to ensure they reflected well on her school, and correspondingly less time for organizing instructional activities such as field trips. In particular she recognized the time needed to prepare the school's education plan as a significant undertaking.

Sarah recognized that she conveyed strong expectations to her staff, and this figured significantly in her thinking on supervision and evaluation. She recognized

teacher supervision as being an integral aspect of her role, and described an approach based on a clinical supervision model and involving a lot of work with the staff members being evaluated. She clearly distinguished between developmental supervision with experienced staff and summative assessment of new and probationary teachers.

Yes, I ultimately have to be the person that writes the report but let's make this process a learning experience and I guess I approach it from two different avenues. With my seasoned teachers I approach if from this avenue: what goals can we set, what do you need from me to help you grow professionally, and so we've done all kinds of things.

Sarah described her main concern as being with marginally performing teachers who tended to be moved about the jurisdiction from school to school, and she noted that some of these placements had not met her requirements.

Well we've had considerable turn over for various reasons. We've had medical, we've had a couple of stress leaves – you know not everybody is going to work in conjunction and collaboration with you and I am a very demanding person, and I like to think that I get as much as I give, so there are people who have been here and have started with me will end with me, but there are definitely people who have needed to find other places where they can show what they've got, this was not the place for them.

Sarah also reiterated the importance of maintaining a positive outlook and promoting humor as part of staff wellness. *I think you have to have a sense of humor to keep things healthy and you have to do a lot of things socially on your staff as well. You*

have to keep the wellness component there too because I do recognize that we burn the candle at both ends a lot of time.

Sarah summarized her view on the responsibilities of her restructured role in a very positive way. She was able to relate the demands of the role to the things it now allowed her to do, and was able to tie this directly to her concept of leadership and benefit for students.

I think it's a very, very exciting time to be a principal because you can demonstrate your leadership skills. It's an opportunity to have your vision come true so to speak, or bring it to the forefront because there aren't as many hurdles and you have permission to do so, because you have more power. Overall I think the benefits outweigh the disadvantages and I think that we just need to continue to give shared decision making a chance and I think it's going to make us better in the long run. It definitely gives us a greater potential for commitment, risk taking, creativity, and I mean those are all the things that we're wanting kids to have and that's why we keep changing the face of how we educate kids.

Urban Sites

Brandon

Brandon attributed the main expectations about his role to the community, to parents, and to the needs of students. He also recognized the requirements of the provincial government and the school jurisdiction as significant elements in which he felt more expectations had been downloaded onto the role.

There is the expectation [by parents] that there is somebody there to listen;

there is somebody there that will take their ideas or their thoughts and put them

in action; there is somebody there from both sides – from the parents' side and

the Board or superintendent's side, that makes three sides plus the teacher side

and the student side are also factors. You try to put them all together, to align

themselves, to work and do the right thing for kids. And that's becoming harder

to do.

He reflected on how the expectations about his role had evolved, and expressed concern about the change of focus he saw. He described this as a shift in emphasis from decisions based on considerations that were mainly internal to the school to considerations that recognized the increased influence of external factors such as funding.

I thought that when I went into this business that when I made decisions that

were right for kids, that 100% of the time that was the right decision.

Sometimes now I am not so sure, because you take a political beating on some

things and people, the community, rumors and everything else, like "they didn't

listen, didn't do this . . ." or whatever. You know it was right for the kid and you

know it was right for all the kids in the school, but there are people who think

that it wasn't or didn't: kids don't matter. It's something else that matters here,

like the budget matters, kids don't matter.

Brandon did not identify much change in his approach to personnel supervision and evaluation with respect to restructuring. He indicated that the site level had considerable decision making flexibility in this area, and that the main constraint from

the jurisdiction level was with respect to placing continuous contract teachers who were surplus from other sites, or who required transfers due to functional difficulties at other schools. He recognized that placements were rare and tended to take an "it's your turn" format and this was not problematic for him.

He described shifting his management of teacher evaluation away from the traditional checklist used on a cycle approach to one based on following a program theme, such as teaching writing, across all of the teachers being evaluated. Brandon explained that this resulted in a more formative approach with an increased professional development emphasis while still producing a summative report for administrative purposes.

Restructuring had changed his role in several respects, Brandon felt, particularly with regard to his workload and priorities. In particular he noted an increased commitment to more and longer meetings, and to more organizing and communications tasks.

> *Where five years ago it was probably two, maybe three nights a month [for meetings] now it's somewhere in the neighborhood of seven, eight a month. . . . A lot more communication, and that takes a lot of time, a lot more management work, in terms of the planning, the organization, the budgeting, the accountability factors, the reviews, the checking. So time wise, politics wise, decision making wise, a great increase. The job is almost getting to the point that it's too much juggling, instead of being able to do a couple of things that you really want to concentrate on.*

He reflected on this and expressed concern about the viability of the role, and the implications over time of the intensity and complexity of the expectations. He noted that several of his colleagues had left the principalship since restructuring, and several others were considering this move. *We had three principals last year . . . bailed out and said it wasn't manageable, and another handful say "I don't know. If these same demands continue, to be honest, we have wives, we have families, we have kids, I can't spend 16 hours a day here"*. Brandon reiterated the observation that there was little opportunity for or occasion of positive feedback on performance in the role. The principal tended to see good work taken for granted, and to always hear complaints or criticism for the things left wanting.

In spite of these reservations, Brandon's overall assessment of restructuring remained positive and hopeful that the role would become more manageable after a transition period. *I think overall the process of site-based management is good for schools, good for kids, and good for communities. It takes a lot more work and I think that maybe it just takes time to develop*. His view was that the principal had to reassert the priority of an instructional focus for the role to be effective.

> *The principal will have to say "I have to juggle and I can't do this part, it's too much. I'm spending so much time at my office, looking at my computer screen and doing these goals and plans and budgets, I'm never in the classroom. And I need to be in the classroom, we need to be a community of learners, kids need to know me, teachers need to know that I'm here for support, to help out and provide some guidance, keep the cohesion of the school going, develop the*

culture." If you're not visible and you're not around fighting for teachers and

kids, then it doesn't happen.

Matthew

Matthew's outlook combined recognition of the importance of a well-understood structure for responsibility with the flexibility of a strongly personal sense of expectations about his role. He observed that in the complex and often chaotic world of a large high school, most people did not have a good sense of how the school operated. For him this meant it was important to clearly set out the lines of responsibility.

> *We have a very definite chart of who reports to whom in the school. Something*
>
> *that I thought was always important is that I don't really care how the school*
>
> *operates on a daily basis, but I want people to know that there is only one*
>
> *person who can tell them what to do. All kinds of damage can happen when one*
>
> *says "I talked to so and so over there and was told to do this" and that person*
>
> *over there had nothing to do with the decision. So part of the teacher*
>
> *supervision in the last couple of years is who is the leadership staff. Who is the*
>
> *·one person who can tell you what you must do.*

Within this context, it was clear that for Matthew the core expectations for his role were self-established at a level above or beyond the formal requirements of the jurisdiction.

> *That's something that's come over time. There is no question my harshest critic*
>
> *is me. I am quite aware of what the District expects me to do and I am*
>
> *conscientious enough to know that I will always do that, and that's where part*
>
> *of my stress comes from; knowing that there's lots of things I want to explore*

and push beyond limits. But I also have always done that within the confines of the rules and regulations. So if I want to do something a certain way I make sure the way that it was supposed to be done is done and done well, and I can go beyond that. Those kinds of things tend to make me work a bit too hard at times. But there's no question, it comes from me.

Matthew described the staffing or personnel function as critically important to his role, and while he delegated aspects of this and shared his authority with assistant principals and department heads, he related experiences that confirmed for him the importance of maintaining strong decision making input. He observed that while selection and evaluation processes had not changed with restructuring, a reduction in personnel management or human resources support available from the jurisdiction had occurred, leaving more of the burden at the site level. He indicated that district placements onto his staff were not common, and were perceived to be done fairly, but were still problematic for him in terms of acquiring performance problems. *So, I had to take some staff – I look back at the staff problems we had and a lot of it resulted from that.*

Matthew indicated that he had not dealt with any formal terminations of continuing teacher contracts, but that with the competition among schools for students, perceptions of teacher quality were very important. He noted that this tended to result in strategies to press marginal teachers for improvement or to counsel them toward a job change.

We had three people last year that we were documenting very, very closely and trying to work with them, because this goes back to the issue of competition.

Kids getting to choose their school and all you need is one or two [poorly performing] teachers in a high school and the word gets out that the teachers are all terrible, and I think that kids and parents are quite accurate if principals aren't prepared to deal with teacher problems, then I'm not sure that's the school I want to go to, because it makes all the difference in the world. It may only be one teacher for one semester, but why does a kid's life have to be made miserable for one period even . . . I take this issue really, really seriously.

Matthew felt that his workload expanded during the past year, and attributed this to the increase in what he termed "paperwork", which pressed his allocation of time away from the student and staff related activities that he felt were important for his effectiveness. *I think we are not doing enough as high school principals on the issue of visibility, of being there to react and support. I really saw a lot of my day as being walking around the school; and dropping into classes and learning what is happening in the school.* Despite this tension, he saw great potential for the decentralized approach afforded by restructuring because of the leadership opportunities it allowed.

I am an absolute strong believer in site based decision-making. It's the way we must go, but we have to help people understand it's more than just a formula, it's more than just a way of people controlling us, its a way of thinking and a way of acting. It has to be part of everything you do – my greatest disappointment would be having not taken the opportunity to really create the school that could have been created.

Joshua

Joshua's view of his role as a consequence of restructuring attributed a great deal of accountability to parents, both directly and through the political processes of government. *Parents see no value with speaking to anyone at central office right now. They may go to a Board member for political pressure, but they go to the principal a lot, they want action immediately.* He attributed the increased degree of political intervention to the funding framework and site-based allocation of resources:

> *I hear it directly in my office. "I've been having trouble placing my daughter. I phoned the Catholic school. I ended up phoning the MLA for our district, and I was told that you can provide a program for my child, that you have the money allocated directly to the school." There's a new role: the MLA and I run the school.*

In response to this situation, Joshua was of the view that his role had shifted to that of a site manager, away from the functions of educational leadership that formerly defined his job. He made a clear distinction between the two types of activities, and was of the view that a principal did one or the other, but could not really do both.

> *You're going to be managing the plant, you're not going to be the instructional leader as well. You can't be all things to all people, you're either in charge, hiring and firing, running things; or you're in the classrooms working with teachers, looking at curriculum, learning resources and evaluation. I don't think you're doing both.*

His assessment was that restructuring meant that the curriculum leadership function had effectively been removed from the principal and was shifted to department heads and

directly to teachers. He indicated that after an initial period of voluntary acceptance of this, staff were increasingly resistant to the associated time requirements and were participating less frequently. He also noted an increased expectation for administrative designations and allowances by teachers in consideration of assuming these instructional leadership duties.

Joshua explained that restructuring had shifted the onus on personnel management from the jurisdiction level to the principal. *Human Resources [department] becomes the administrator for us, we are the directors, they just administer what we want, while it used to be the other way around.* He attached much importance to the selection and evaluation of teaching staff, maintaining a personal involvement with all of the key decisions, although with considerable delegated input both for the selection and evaluation processes. He described a strong sense of responsibility for ensuring quality teacher performance, and recognized that this occasionally took him into contract termination issues.

> *Yes, and often it's based on performance. You've had "x" number of evaluations this year and you've been warned that performance is not acceptable, you've been put on a professional improvement plan and the plan is not working out: the principal does all this, not the assistant principal, nobody else, it's all the principal. At the last meeting with the teacher you say "you have not changed sufficiently, here's the documentation, recommend that you contact the ATA. My recommendation will be that your contract be terminated".*

Joshua preferred a "counseling out" approach for staff who were not performing well. His lingering concern with an outright dismissal was the protracted period of time that sometimes ensued before a termination was settled. He indicated that increased authority to directly negotiate severance arrangements would help avoid the awkward situation of trying to maintain a collegial relationship during a termination dispute.

Joshua expressed concern about the extent of the responsibilities and demands that now were part of the principal's role. He attributed his ability to cope to his position being a full time administration assignment, and indicated that a combined teaching and administration assignment would be unworkable. *I could not have survived if I would have had to make lesson plans and be in the classroom – I would have left.* He noted that even in the site-based budgeting environment, where other priorities could be traded against administration time, the staff remained clearly supportive of a full time principal. Joshua's view was that viability of the new role for the principal was at least to some extent tied to school size, and the level of resources and economies of scale that were available. He observed the stress of colleagues in his jurisdiction:

> *In a smaller school I don't think the role is manageable. I think the smaller schools are going to have a very tough time. In a larger school, a high school say, with four assistant principals and a principal, I think you can delegate work around issues; but when you're it for everybody . . . as far as I know there may be only one elementary principal that doesn't teach. They don't like it; many of them are leaving next year, leaving the principalship completely. They find the job undoable.*

Summary and Discussion

The respondents' information consistently suggested that restructuring measures have significantly affected the responsibilities of these principalships. In several forms, both direct and indirect, the respondents recognized that principals were more accountable for key functions at their schools. They recognized that these circumstances have made the job more challenging and demanding.

Responsibility Demands

The volume of work attached to the role was described in most cases as having increased, particularly with respect to administrative and managerial tasks such as planning, organizing, budgeting, and reporting. For a significant number of the respondents, the demands were such that sustainability was an issue for them. On the other hand, several saw the situation as one of the substitution of new priorities and demands to be attended to, with varying degrees of discomfort about functions which lost priority. The respondents indicated varying approaches to delegation and views on how to "do" leadership. Ideas that reflected a shift in leadership tactics away from directive behaviors and toward facilitative ones were more prevalent in the comments of some participants than others.

In at least some cases, optimism prevailed. The benefits gained at the site level from restructuring were seen as contributing to decisions that were better for students and thus worth the demands on the principal, but even in these cases, more stress was acknowledged.

Accountability

The respondents indicated that restructuring placed additional accountability responsibilities on their roles, both in a direct way and in several indirect ways. Reporting requirements, particularly with respect to student achievement results, were identified by some as very significant. The presence of a fiscal imperative throughout the restructuring process was noted as a serious constraint that escalated the management aspects of the role at the expense of instructional and curricular elements. The emphasis in the accountability framework of the government on measurable outcomes was also seen as pressuring the principal role into activities of a management nature that supported this approach, at a cost to an educational leadership emphasis.

Providing and sharing information was also recognized as being of increased importance as part of the reality for being more accountable. More attention to communication functions, particularly with parents and staff, was recognized in numerous ways as an increased requirement of the role.

Personnel

Most respondents attached a lot of importance to the deployment and evaluation of the teaching staff at their schools. They indicated in many ways that their decisions in this area were key to their effectiveness. They described seeking a balance between formative, trust-building approaches and summative measures where performance was inadequate. There were serious reservations about engaging in the formal termination of continuing contracts due to the adversarial nature of this process, resulting in pressure to make retention decisions during the probationary period. Placements of marginal or problematic staff into the school were seen as being often problematic for

the principal. Perceptions by parents about the performance of staff, particularly in a school choice environment, and the evaluation implications of having to deal more independently with marginal performers, were significant pressures for these respondents.

Expectations

Five of the respondents cited primarily external sources or factors that defined their roles. These included parents, community members, government and jurisdiction requirements. On the other hand, four participants identified essentially personal or intrinsic expectations as defining their principal's role. The remaining three could be described as citing a mixed or balanced explanation, blending personal and external considerations to form their understanding of what their role required in the restructured environment.

Conclusions

The respondents were generally supportive of the changes that have taken place, but this would have to be characterized as concerned support. From their vantage points in the midst of restructuring experiences, they identified a number of characteristics that were significantly impacting their roles.

1. Frustration levels were increasing.

2. Pressures were increased with respect to teacher staffing and teacher performance.

3. Effective communication was increasingly important.

4. Maintaining stability or direction in the midst of major change was necessary.

5. Management was replacing instructional leadership as their central function.

Chapter 9

**Summary, Findings and Observations, Conclusions,
Implications for Practice, Recommendations,
Further Research, and Reflections**

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the study and the findings and to

conclude the study with a review of the findings and themes. These concluding

comments are followed by a discussion of major implications and recommendations for

practice. Several suggestions for further research are identified. The investigator's

reflections provide additional insight into the study. While some discussion and

analysis have been provided in the previous chapters, the focus here is on broader

themes which are suggested by the study.

Summary

Research Questions

This study explored how recent changes in provincial legislation and

government policy regarding education in Alberta were changing the role of the school

principal. A set of government restructuring initiatives were introduced in 1994 and

1995, and had become part of the context of the principal's role by 1997 when the study

was conducted.

While the provincial restructuring addressed virtually the entire structure of

education including system organization and governance, funding, parent choice and

participation, and accountability, the areas pursued in the study were narrowed to

aspects which appeared to have major impacts on the principal's role. This resulted in

the investigation of the following specific research questions:

- How is the implementation of site-based management changing the role of the principal?

- How is increased parental involvement with schooling, particularly in the form of school councils and choice of schools, changing the role of the principal?

- What effects are the limits which have been placed on financial expenditures for central administration and instructional support services having on the role of the principal?

- What effect is the reduction in the number of school jurisdictions having on the role of the principal?

- Are there other significant effects of restructuring on the role of the principal unanticipated by the previous questions, and if so what are they?

Framework

The study was based on two related conceptualizations of the role of the principal. The first was that the principal's role was established by a complex interaction of internal and external influences and expectations, expressed through the many stakeholder or interest groups which make up a school and its school community. These elements included students, teachers and the Alberta Teachers' Association, parents and the school council, the school board and superintendent, support staff and support staff unions, Alberta Education, and community members not directly involved with schooling.

The second conceptualization was that in a period of change the principal's role was a transformational one. In some aspects it remained at the apex of the school

organization, directing and controlling the enterprise. At the same time it served as a fulcrum for an inverted organization, facilitating, enabling, and empowering new initiatives by staff and students.

Method and Design

The study focused on the principalship primarily in geographically large, rural school jurisdictions in north - central Alberta. The study was conducted from an interpretive perspective. The methodology was based on the assumptions of naturalistic inquiry and reflected an interpretive – interactionist approach.

A pilot study of three principals assisted in developing the interview schedule. These participants were selected by the researcher from a graduate student cohort on the basis of their availability and school experiences. They each worked in a different school jurisdiction. Data from the pilot study interviews were subsequently incorporated with the main study data.

The main study was undertaken using a purposeful sample of nine principals, nominated by the superintendents of three school jurisdictions. All of the participants were experienced school administrators, established in principalships prior to restructuring. The purposeful approach provided representation of small and large, elementary and secondary school settings from a variety of socio-economic contexts.

Data were collected mainly through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Other information was acquired from school handbooks, budget documents, policy statements, and similar artifacts provided by the respondents. Field log notations and reflections augmented the respondent data with the researcher's observations.

An analysis of the data collected was undertaken by using the research questions to group responses, and identify recurring comments and themes. For most of the analysis, respondents were also grouped into categories by the characteristics of their school communities. For analysis of comments on change relating to the size of school jurisdictions, respondents were grouped by school size. It is important to note that the study was exploratory and interpretive. The data reported were highly contextual and readers are cautioned that the approach does not support generalization to a broader population. It is incumbent on the reader to determine the extent to which the findings and insights from the data may be relevant to the reader's context.

Findings and Observations

Budgeting

Many of the respondents seemed to be preoccupied with budgeting. The activities and tasks associated with this function were reported most often as receiving a lot of direct attention by the respondents, rather than as being activities they delegated to others and monitored. Working at the line item level, calculating estimates, and calculating revisions as the year progressed seemed to be common, time consuming activities for all but a few of the participants. The budgeting activities were largely described in terms of activities at a technical level rather than as policy level work. The focus of comments tended to be on estimate details, spreadsheet work and calculations rather than on considerations about the budget as a tool to realize a plan to achieve goals. The time required for this function was regarded as having increased significantly from pre-reorganization arrangements, and was considered as a major detraction from the participants' ability to focus on instructional leadership activities.

Meetings

The respondents indicated that the current emphasis on collaborative decision making in the restructuring program resulted in a significant increase in their participation in meetings, both of the formal and informal type. This was also regarded as a significant change in the time demands of the role. Considerable ambivalence was expressed about the benefits of a highly participatory approach versus the problems associated with it. In particular, respondents noted the importance of recognizing the distinction between the times and the issues for which it was appropriate to ask staff and parents to make time commitments, and those which tended to frustrate people as being excessive demands on their time and of questionable value to them. Most of the respondents reported regular staff meetings as an important venue for discussion between administration and staff, with a number of the site-based issues such as budgets, receiving expanded consideration. Many also reported reliance on small group, informal meetings as they were developing their thinking on an issue. The reliance on informal meetings appeared greatest at the smaller sites.

The concern about meetings was not restricted to the jurisdiction level. The participants frequently noted additional meetings at the school staff level as an outcome of using collaborative or consultative strategies as part of their site-based decision making. Several respondents discussed uncertainty about judging how much and when to seek staff involvement, and it was common for the participants to report staff reaction encouraging the principal just to get on with doing whatever was under consideration. The concept of site-based decision making based on a highly collaborative relationship between the principal and the staff seemed often to fall short due to the reality of

excessive meeting demands on people who were already very busy with the immediate concerns of their own roles.

Communications

Communication activities, particularly with parents and the school community, were recognized as having become a much more significant activity for the principal than formerly was the case. While this was acknowledged as having always been important, it was considered to be an essential function for administrative and school success in the restructured environment. This was seen as shifting the principals' time and effort away from an internal focus to an external one. More time was devoted to better management of the schools' relations with parents and the community at a cost of less time for the principals' to devote to the school itself and working with teachers and students. Several respondents also placed emphasis on the importance of high quality in their external communications, taking the extra time to ensure their communications efforts were effective and reflected well on their schools.

Paperwork

Increased paperwork seemed to be the generic expression used by the respondents to describe the downloading of administrative tasks to the site level. From the perspective of the participants, this was a defining characteristic of the restructuring process. Activities that used to be done, or at least were mainly supported at the jurisdiction level were increasingly having to be done by the principal at the site level. This typically included increased planning and reporting duties, and increased personnel management tasks, particularly with respect to professional staff. The preparation of school three-year education plans, budget documentation, reports on student

achievement results, and the production of school-level policy documentation were typical of these paperwork activities.

The respondents generally accepted these tasks as an inevitable dimension of the role, but many indicated they were struggling with keeping up. They tended to indicate that the school operating part of the day was consumed by "people"-- human relations process activities, and that an increased amount of their personal time was being consumed by the paperwork. Many recognized this as a considerable source of stress, both personally and among their colleagues. Several speculated negatively on the sustainability over time of the role demands they were currently experiencing.

Decision Making

The respondents clearly described approaches to decision making that were varied depending on the situation. The concept of situational management or situational decision making fits well with the way the participants described how they operated. Their descriptions of significant decision making activities generally suggested an emphasis on consultation. The presentation of options and solicitation of feedback from stakeholders was more evident than fully collaborative or participative decision making. A few of the respondents described decision making strategies of a highly collaborative nature but, in the main, the participants did not seem to have made major changes in their approaches to reflect the declared emphasis of the restructuring initiative.

In spite of the restructured environment, the respondents' views on delegation of responsibility did not seem to have changed very much. They tended to accept a high degree of personal responsibility for the significant decisions about their schools' operations, and their decision-making processes reflected this. Ample opportunity was

usually afforded for suggestions, input, and ideas from stakeholders, and tentative decisions were frequently tested for comments, but in the end, these experienced administrators remained fairly directive of what happened.

School Councils

The respondents' information varied widely with respect to the changes in their role associated with school councils. One perspective tended to be that there was no real change from the former parent advisory council type of structure while another saw school councils as a significant new initiative requiring considerable attention and effort on the part of the principal. For some of the participants, the school or parent council was an important element of their work, and substantial liaison and consultation took place on a regular, often frequent, basis. For others it was a struggle just to facilitate the existence of a council. These respondents expressed frustration at the effort required to try to establish and maintain a council, and at the general ineffectiveness of this component of restructuring. A third perspective among the participants was that school councils served a booster function for the school but were of marginal significance to the real work of the school.

Regardless of their perspective on the place and merit of school councils, the respondents attributed additional work to their existence. This was generally described as additional facilitation, such as helping organize meetings and advising school council leaders on process. Information support for school councils was also quite consistently described as an additional requirement of the principal's role. Even when participation levels were low, the respondents regarded it as important and necessary for them to make the effort to provide comprehensive information to the council. A substantial

number of the participants recognized the school council chairperson as having a key relationship with their role. They devoted considerable attention to assuring this position was well-filled, and to maintaining ongoing communications contact with their chairperson. Whether or not school councils have realized the expectations intended by provincial restructuring, for the participants involved in this study, they have had a significant influence on the principals' role.

Choice and Competition

The respondents' views on the significance of parent choice of schools were quite site specific, and depended on the extent of choice that was available in their area. For most of the sites, choice was not much of a factor because geographical factors, (mainly distance) reduced this to a theoretical alternative for most parents. At the same time, there was some recognition by the principals that home education and distance education options could affect their schools' enrollments. For the sites where alternative schools were feasible choices for parents, the open attendance provision became a major, perhaps *the major*, factor changing the principal's role. In both cases the competition, real or imagined, was generally not regarded by the participants as beneficial. Distortion of priorities, misdirection of effort, and strains on collaboration with other schools were frequently identified as concerns now complicating the role of the principal.

The respondents acknowledged an increased sense of competition with schools belonging to other school jurisdictions. In some cases this was caused by changes to jurisdiction boundaries, where parents could choose to travel in different directions to access a school, and in some cases it was where public and separate jurisdictions both

operated facilities in the same community. With the exception of the urban environment where jurisdictional loyalties did not seem to influence thinking, the respondents described an approach of being collaborative with the neighbouring schools in their system, but feeling compelled to be more competitive with the others.

Another perspective was reported as the feeling of being in competition. Several respondents acknowledged that while their schools were not directly in a competitive situation, they and their staff felt that they were in a more competitive environment because of the choice and accountability emphasis of provincial policy. The increased emphasis on reporting provincial achievement and diploma test results on a school-by-school basis was an indication of such a shift. This accountability measure was seen as contributing significantly to stress. At the same time, it was doubtful in the minds of the respondents who commented on this measure that it contributed to any improvement in student learning.

Isolation

A common theme of the respondents' comments, regardless of school size or location, was of increased isolation for the principal. Whether in urban or remote rural settings, they reported a significantly reduced level of face-to-face contact with their supervisor, be it the superintendent or an area designate. A consistent message was that the restructuring provisions reduced the opportunity for direct interaction with supervisors. Both the travel constraints of expanded geography and the elimination of jurisdiction-level supervisory staff by the capping of central office expenditures were regarded as problems. The span of control reported by the respondents in this study had become exceedingly broad, to the point of being virtually meaningless in some

instances. Out of necessity telecommunication technologies, particularly traditional voice telephone and electronic mail, were frequently described as replacing personal supervisory contact.

The consequences of this change were generally reported as being a decline in feedback for the principals, and the demise of supervisory mentoring activities. The participants indicated several arrangements for consultative relationships with select peers to replace their previous connections with central office staff, but most expressed reservations about the effectiveness of such arrangements. Concerns were noted about the practical limits in terms of people's time, and the problems of depending for advice on others who may not have up-to-date knowledge or understanding. Some respondents also noted competitive considerations with peers as a limitation. Even those who were positive about peer mentoring relationships recognized that the process was not of the same nature and value as the mentoring relationships they recollected having with superintendents or other supervisors prior to restructuring.

Travel

Most of the respondents expressed concern about the increased amount of their time that was required for system-level meetings, in terms of both the frequency and extent of meetings necessitated by restructuring initiatives. The increased amount of travel required by the geographic scope of regionalized jurisdictions was also often referred to as a new problem that further complicated the collaborative aspects of the principals' role.

Self Reliance

In a variety of different ways, the respondents described changes that suggested their schools were more self-reliant and on their own than they were before restructuring. In some cases this was a consequence of workload and isolation; in others it appeared to be a more directed response on the part of the school with respect to its jurisdiction. Several aspects of restructuring, including the school based decision-making emphasis, the shift to a focus on outcomes and results, and the reduction in central office staff with more attention to monitoring, appeared to result in jurisdictions making less effort to coordinate and equalize their schools' programs. This effectively left individual schools more autonomous in deciding how to cope with provincial and system goals and requirements. A common sentiment of the respondents was that if their school was not generating much in the way of complaints at the system level, they did not receive much attention from the system.

Internal Equity

The respondents discussed a variety of circumstances and arrangements relating to concerns about fair treatment of schools with differing circumstances within their jurisdictions. The most common issue was between the interests of small rural schools and large secondary schools in more urbanized locations. Co-operative funding or revenue pooling for cost shared services were common mechanisms reported for maintaining system-level equity, but the participants often reported this as a source of divisiveness or conflict between themselves and their administrative colleagues arising from the allocation system of the new funding framework. In the old structure the directing of resources to support differing program and delivery needs tended to be

decided by the school board trustees in an environment of local political accountability, whereas in the new arrangement more responsibility for these decisions was placed on the principals.

In several instances references were made to strategies used to minimize the impact of these decisions, such as "negative option billing" while in others it was apparent that differing interests among site administrators was a significant source of tension. The latter situation was more apparent in the comments of respondents whose jurisdictions had been part of the regionalization of school systems, which tended to result in widely differing expectations and service expectations among the school administrators.

Teacher Personnel

The selection, supervision, evaluation, and in some cases termination of teachers was a complex area for the respondents in which some elements were seen as having changed substantially while others remained relatively unaffected by restructuring.

Generally the participants indicated that their role in the teacher hiring process had not changed significantly. They had a lot of responsibility in this area for screening and interviewing, resulting in a hiring recommendation that was normally accepted and formalized by the superintendent as a matter of routine. Issues of centrally directed transfers and placements of professional staff were of increased significance in the site-based environment for some of the respondents. Conflicts between the interests of principals' plans for personnel changes to enhance their schools and the staff assignments sometimes imposed by the superintendent due to contractual or other system-level imperatives were referred to by several respondents.

Teacher supervision and evaluation was a problem area for most of the respondents. Work with staff on their teaching practice was widely recognized as a significant element of instructional leadership, but only a small minority of the participants felt they were able to devote to this function the attention it deserved. The common response was that the teacher evaluation scheme required by their jurisdiction's policy was not being followed very thoroughly. These schemes typically required cyclical summative evaluations, and generally the respondents had trouble allocating the time necessary to maintain the cycle. They questioned the merit of such an investment of effort with teachers who they recognized as being effective from the many sources of perception about teacher performance available to them. Emphasis was directed at new hires and new teachers, to support judgements for permanent contracts and permanent certification. There was widespread anticipation that the professional improvement-oriented emphasis expressed in the *Quality Teaching Quality Learning* framework prepared by Alberta Education would improve this situation. Essentially the teacher evaluation model under which the respondents were working was inconsistent with the requirements or the restructured environment.

Only a few of the respondents had been involved with the termination of a teacher as a result of their supervision, and they were negative about the experiences. The conflict between increased responsibility for evaluation of staff and the collegial dimension of their role, as co-members of the Alberta Teachers' Association placed in an adversarial situation, was very difficult for the principals. Most of the other participants reported making negative teacher personnel decisions at the point of non-renewal of probationary contracts, and while this sometimes presented interpersonal

relations challenges, it appeared to be more accepted as consistent with the principal's current role.

Process and Outcomes

One of the principal characteristics of the provincial restructuring initiative is a purported shift in emphasis from educational processes to educational outcomes. This presented the respondents with some difficult challenges in their roles. In many respects, as the first level of management, the principals must be intimately involved in process decisions about how their schools staffs do things and the details of how their schools operate. The traditional operation of the role has emphasized this aspect, and the respondents recognized many strongly and deeply held expectations of this nature. The new emphasis on outcomes has challenged the respondents with tasks such as reporting and explaining student achievement results to parents and the school community, developing and reporting on local performance measures, and being much more responsive to satisfaction indicators. Many of the participants seemed to be dubious about the value of this approach, and expressed concern about reconciling their efforts in this area with all the process issues they had to deal with. Problems were described both with respect to the time allocation now required for planning and reporting, and the credibility difficulties that arose from their being seen as a perpetual apologist for their schools' apparent shortcomings.

Summary and Discussion

The findings and observations discussed in this chapter relate to the research questions in different ways. Some of the themes discussed are tied quite closely to one

area of the inquiry, while others cut broadly across all of the questions. Table 9.1 summarizes these relationships.

Themes and Areas of Inquiry

The area of school-based management and decision making indicated changes in the principal's role with respect to budgeting, meetings and communication activities, decision making processes, school council interaction, parent choice and inter-school competition, school self reliance, system equity issues, teacher personnel, and process versus outcome emphasis. Increased management task workload emerged as a major feature which raised questions about the principals' capacity to provide an effective educational leadership function. In working to accommodate school-based management expectations, respondents were more consultative with staff and, to a lesser extent, other stakeholders, but they tended to use procedures that allowed them to retain substantial control over the important decisions at their schools.

The area of increased parental involvement indicated changes in the role relating to budgeting, increased meetings, communication requirements, decision-making, school councils, choice and competition, and the process-outcome theme. The principals spent more time responding to external influences on their roles, shifting emphasis from the internal, staff and student related content that traditionally received their primary attention. School councils were recognized as an important factor in this external focus, but the structure was not valued as providing a very effective or representative voice for the school community.

Table 9.1

Principals' Role Change Themes and Restructuring Induced Areas of Inquiry

	Areas of Inquiry			
Themes	Site-based Decisions	Parental Involvement	Structural Changes	Responsibility Accountability
Budgeting	X	X		X
Meetings	X	X		
Communication	X	X		X
Paperwork			X	X
Decision Making	X	X	X	
School Councils	X	X		X
Choice & Competition	X	X		X
Isolation			X	
Travel			X	
Self Reliance	X		X	
Internal Equity	X		X	
Teacher Personnel	X			X
Process & Outcomes	X	X		X

The structural changes associated primarily with regionalization and funding framework constraints indicated role changes associated with increased paperwork, decision making processes, increased isolation, increased travel demands, self reliance, internal equity, and teacher personnel management. A reduction in direct contact with supervisors, decline in mentoring opportunities with their superintendents, reduced effectiveness of principals' meetings due to group size, and reduced camaraderie with administrative colleagues were all changes associated with this aspect of restructuring.

The area of responsibility and accountability indicated changes in the role relating to budgeting, communications, paperwork, school council relations, parent choice and school competition, teacher personnel, and process emphasis versus outcome emphasis. The respondents reflected concerned support with respect to this aspect of restructuring. They recognizing the value of expanded responsibility and flexibility at the site level, but worried about coping with the expanded expectations on their roles.

Conceptual Framework

The study used two related frames, the concepts of the principal's role being part of two views of leadership, and of the role being defined by a complex set of external and internal expectations. The framework was illustrated in Figures 1 and 2 in Chapter 2.

The themes of role change related to budgeting, meetings, and process & outcomes can be seen as strongly related to both the leadership and role set models. The paperwork, decision making, and teacher personnel themes seem to be related primarily to the leadership model, while the communication, school council, choice & competition, and internal equity themes related more to the role set model. The

isolation, travel, and self reliance themes reflected a somewhat different perspective than the models, being oriented to the processes experienced by the participants in both the leadership and role set frames.

The data supported the role conceptualization more than the leadership one. The themes discussed above present consistent examples of changed expectations by the role senders having influenced the role set as perceived by the participant principals. Not only were the expectations of the stakeholder groups identified in the model evident in this process, but the internal or self-imposed expectations of the principals were significant considerations for many of the respondents. The role set model effectively represented the centrality of the principal's role and the complexity of sources and change factors bearing on it.

The hourglass model of the principal's leadership role (as represented in Figure 1) provided a limited and only partial representation of the way most participants described their leadership activities. This in-the-middle, balanced between hierarchical and transformational concepts view of the role was indicative of its paradoxical nature, but while the participants frequently described the tension of being between contradictory expectations as an increased characteristic of the principalship, they seldom described the realization of transformational leadership. In most cases the principals remained traditional in their leadership approaches, while in a few instances a desire for transformational practice was described. This seemed more often an expression of good intentions than of well established practice. In the main the pressures of increased accountability disposed most of these principals to hold on to control over their schools as best they could.

Conclusions

The findings of the study supported the view that the provincial restructuring of education has significantly affected the role of the principal. Both of the framework conceptualizations of the role were consistent with the findings. The respondents' information supported the idea of the role as having changed in response to changes in the internal and external expectations held for the position, and that role has a transformational nature, particularly during this period of restructuring induced change.

The experiences related by the participants of this study confirm that in terms of roles defined by sets of expectations, the Alberta education restructuring measures significantly affected their roles. The new requirements to respond to school-based management and decision making structures, increased parental involvement through school councils and choice of schools, the structural impacts of regionalization and funding framework constraints on support all served to change the role of the principal. The increased responsibilities created by a results-oriented approach to accountability along with the devolution of more personnel decision making to the principal has also contributed new and expanded expectations to the role. The result of these changes was an increase in the complexity and demands of the role as perceived by these incumbents.

Paradox Intensified

The idea of paradox is present throughout the findings and themes that emerged from this study. The findings point to a number of contradictory elements of the principal's role and suggest that the restructuring program has heightened these contradictions. Deal and Peterson (1994) discussed the notion of paradox as a

characteristic of the principal's role and suggested that the requirement to blend seeming contradictory elements was an essential aspect of the complex work required for effective leadership of schools (pp. 9-10). That would clearly seem to be the case with the participants in this study. There was wide recognition that while paradoxical elements were always inherent in the role, the changes in role expectations associated with the restructuring program increased and in some cases added to the conflicting expectations of the principalship.

The tension between educational leadership and management is not new to the principalship. For the participants of this study it has been intensified by the restructuring-induced changes to the expectations they faced in their roles. In particular the financial aspects associated with site-based budgeting, new planning and reporting procedures, and the added organizational tasks associated with facilitating school councils were representative of pressures causing the principals to be more managerial at the cost of less time devoted to educational leadership. Badaracco (1998) discussed the leadership—management paradox in terms of the character challenge of making right versus right decisions, and suggested that successful executives "craft an authentic and strong identity based on their own, rather than someone else's, understanding of what is right. And in this way, they begin to make the transition from being a manager to becoming a leader" (p. 116). The people in this study repeatedly faced this challenge and opportunity.

Workload and effectiveness appeared troublesome. There was widespread agreement that changes to the role had increased the workload of the principals, but participants were unsure that this was having any beneficial effect. They regarded

restructuring as increasing their work and making their job more complex, but they did

not see this contributing to improved student learning. The view was of restructuring

addressing fiscal and populist control imperatives rather than educational ones.

Coupled to this was an uncertainty about whether the changes were ultimately

superficial, or would eventually be really substantive: while the expectations for the role

had changed on the surface, it was not clear that the real core work essential to the

running of an effective school had.

Accountability and collaboration appeared more contradictory as a result of

different expectations shifted to the principals. On one hand principals are now more

accountable for the performance of their schools and staffs. In the personnel area in

particular they have greater control of supervision and evaluation. On the other hand,

one of the fundamental constructs of the site based decision-making initiative is

collaboration with staff. Being an evaluator and a colleague at the same time was a new

challenge for principals who, in the main, were previously more consultative than

collaborative and who depended on central administration for summative evaluation of

their staff.

Different Impacts

In broad terms three kinds of principals could be seen in the study. The effects

of restructuring on the principal's role were different for each kind of principal.

One type of principal might be termed the educational statesman: master

teachers whose purpose in an administrative role was to secure effective student

learning by extending their own teaching influence beyond their classroom to all of the

teachers at their school. Barth's (1992) notion of the principal as "head learner" is

descriptive of this view. For these administrators the duties of the principal's role were those necessary to realize their primary task, and the changes caused by restructuring made this more difficult. They were trying to cope; to minimize the effects of role change, but tended to express a bleak outlook on the future of the principalship as they felt it should be. For these administrators, the principal's role no longer reflected the reason they got into administration; it had become inconsistent with their aspirations.

The second type could be described as leaders first, managers second. Their focus was strongly on educational leadership to secure effective student learning. The administrative duties attendant to their role were regarded as a necessary subset of tasks which had to be effectively handled to support their primary purpose. These administrators saw the additional work and demands of their role as the price they paid for the added flexibility and autonomy they now enjoyed in leading their schools. The growth in management tasks was worrisome and contributed to frustration, but it was balanced by the opportunity to get on with their leadership tasks. This group integrated the concepts associated with transformational leadership with the restructuring of the role.

The third category comprised the general managers, who shifted their attention between educational and operational concerns depending on the context and situation. They tended to engage issues on a situational basis as they perceived their importance, be they fiscal, educational, political or whatever. They tended to delegate aspects of all dimensions of their role – curriculum leadership functions in particular – as a way of empowering their staff. These principals were positive about their role as a result of restructuring – they had a bigger variety of tasks in their portfolio now, but that was

what they wanted all along, and so could now be more effective principals. These people reflected Dubin's (1991) categorization of the principal's role as akin to chief executive officer functions, including the aspects of facilitator, politician, entrepreneur, and consultant.

Implications for Practice and Recommendations

This study has confirmed that many aspects of the changes to the principal's role arose from fundamental changes in how education is now organized in Alberta. In this context, there are several areas where expectations formed by the decision making behavior of different stakeholders in the role set model (Figure 2) may have further effects and implications as the role continues to evolve.

Shaping Expectations

Provincial and school jurisdiction leadership, including the Minister of Education and Alberta Education, school boards, and school superintendents can have a considerable influence on the expectations that shape and change the principal's role. In many respects this influence is direct, through regulations, policy, and reporting requirements that speak directly to principals. In other respects the influence is indirect, through the expectations raised with other stakeholders via the messages communicated to them by the governing and regulating authorities. For example government and school board comments about the function of school councils affect the way school council members regard the role of the principal and their relationship to that role.

It is important that these agencies be cognizant of the implications of their decisions and initiatives on the principal's role. Policy measures, procedural requirements, -- and particularly new initiatives, -- should be screened at the

developmental stage in terms of implications for the role of the principal. The object should be to avoid a continual piling on of additional tasks and complexity. Where further new or additional functions or responsibilities must be added, attention should also be given to existing duties that could be diminished or re-assigned.

Jurisdictions should attempt to identify, as clearly as site-specific situations allow, the preferred style or approach desired of a principalship. If a strong focus on curriculum leadership is wanted, management task expectations should be softened. Conversely, if strong management performance is required, alternative approaches to curriculum leadership should be expected. In other words, the expectations communicated about a position should recognize and allow for the paradoxes inherent in the role.

Administrator Development

The changes restructuring has brought to the principal's role appear to have significant administrator personnel development implications for both school jurisdictions and education administration-oriented post-secondary institutions. Programs appropriately oriented to both current and prospective school administrators are needed. On one hand these should address staff development requirements for established principals to adapt to new expectations. On the other, preparation training for new or prospective administrators should adequately address the complex set of expectations now defining the role.

To the extent that changes to the role have pushed the principal toward being a site-level general manager, the development path most teachers follow into the principalship leaves them ill-prepared for this. The self-contained practice of the

classroom teacher is not necessarily a good development ground for the collaboration and delegation skills required of the contemporary principal. Additionally, there are sets of management skills such as interpreting financial information, budgeting, dealing with contractual arrangements, and so on that typically have not been developed in any systematic way.

For principals to take back more effective control of their jobs, inservice structures should be developed to strengthen expertise in deficient areas. Different approaches will likely be necessary for established administrators who entered the role when its expectations were substantially different than they are now, and for new principals who are entering the role with at least some appreciation of its current nature. Inservice attention should also be directed to the nature of leadership in the contemporary school environment. Rather than leaving principals' and staffs' understandings in this area up to chance, structures should be provided to engage their thinking about leadership in ways that would support and strengthen their practice.

Formal programs oriented to the academic preparation of school administrators should also recognize and respond to the expanded range of expertise now associated with the role. This should include programming to provide an appropriate range of courses and experience for students beyond the traditional areas of educational leadership, in particular addressing the inter-personal or "soft skills" required for collaborative strategies and also business management topics.

Connectedness

Restructuring has reduced system-level educational management personnel and at the same time, where regionalization has occurred, has increased the number and

dispersion of schools to be managed. The superintendent's span of control has been stretched in both cases, and that role has been shifted into more of a planning and monitoring function, leaving principals much more on their own for the process part of running their schools. Comments from the participants of this study about detachment, isolation, and the loss of mentorship opportunities reflect this concern.

It is difficult to recommend appropriate responses to this implication, because circumstances vary widely in terms of schools, jurisdictions, and personal needs, but this appears to be an important concern that should not be neglected. Superintendents in particular should consider developing strategies and practices that provide increased opportunity for direct personal interaction with the principals they supervise. It seems important to find time for developmental and idea-testing conversations with principals in addition to the problem solving and monitoring interactions that now appear to typify the relationship. Similarly, with newly appointed administrators, mentorship strategies should be facilitated. It appeared in the participants' comments that this need is increasingly being met through a peer-to-peer function, but while that is valuable interaction, it is not the same as a growth oriented relationship with a supervisor.

Professional Relationships

The experiences reported in this study suggest that changes to the role of the principal have increased the tensions between principals' interests and teachers' interests within their common professional association. The potential for adversarial proceedings arising from professional relations or performance evaluation issues pitting the Alberta Teachers' Association acting on behalf of a teacher against the principal is increased. Similarly the capacity of the principal to assume the traditional approach

toward teacher professional development is changed by the site-based environment, again with an increased possibility of conflict over priorities which could put the principal in conflict with the objectives of the Association. For all of these related reasons, the professional association should thoroughly review the role of the principal within its organization, and the manner in which the association relates to and supports principals. The Association's 1988 task force on the role of the school administrator appears to be a promising initiative in this regard.

Further Research

This study was exploratory and interpretive in nature, and as such does not support generalization. It may be worthwhile to pursue further the insights provided from the experiences reported and discussed here. Conceivably this could involve further interpretive approaches with larger groups and in different contextual situations. Alternatively, different methodologies could be employed to try to develop more generalizable findings.

Questions around leadership underlie much of this study. The kind or kinds of leadership approaches or styles that are effective in the contemporary principalship seems to be an important consideration because it could have significant implications for both recruitment decision making and for staff development planning.

The question of transitional or continuing effects arose in several aspects of this study. In a number of instances neither the respondents nor the researcher could come to terms with whether the effects of restructuring on the role were temporary and would

pass as changes stabilized, or would persist as ongoing demands. These issues could be revisited by a subsequent study after passage of a reasonable period of time.

Reflections

The researcher has worked in collaborative and supervisory relationships with principals for more that twenty years, and recognizes that the principalship has never been an easy job. The changes brought to the role by restructuring have, if nothing else, made it more complex and daunting for incumbents such as those the researcher met through the study. In spite of this, one could not help but be impressed by the commitment and effectiveness of the participants: the immense good they were accomplishing with their schools, although sometimes at very large personal costs of time and stress.

It is important to recognize that there is a great deal of diversity among schools, and approaches to school administration need to recognize and accommodate that diversity. Also, it is important to recognize that when roles grow or change the people in them grow and change as well. I heard from the participants a lot of frustration about unreasonable and sometimes ill-conceived expectations for their role, but I also heard and saw a great deal of pride in accomplishment and an underlying optimism. In the main they believed that as adjustments were made to the new ways, their schools would more effectively serve the learning needs of their students. Here again is paradox: for the next few years at least, contradictions in the complex expectations that frame the role will be the norm. The reality for principals will be an increased importance on finding workable balances, which will let them define and carry out their role viably.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - School Act, Section 17

(1) A school council shall be established in accordance with the regulations for each school operated by a board.

(2) The majority of the members of a school council shall be parents of students enrolled in the school.

(3) A board of a separate school district or a division made up only of separate school districts, by resolution, may require that the parents of students enrolled in a school operated by the board who are members of the school council must also be of the same faith as those who established the separate school districts, whether Protestant or Roman Catholic.

(4) A school council may, at its discretion,

(a) advise the principal and the board respecting any matter relating to the school,
(b) perform any duty or function delegated to it by the board in accordance with the delegation,
(c) consult with the principal so that the principal may ensure that students in the school have the opportunity to meet the standards of education set by the Minister,
(d) consult with the principal so that the principal may ensure that the fiscal management of the school is in accordance with the requirements of the board and the superintendent, and
(e) do anything it is authorized under the regulations to do.

(5) Subject to the regulations, a school council may make and implement policies in the school that the council considers necessary to carry out its functions.

(6) A school council may make by-laws governing its meetings and the conduct of its affairs.

(7) Subject to the regulations, a board may develop and implement policies respecting school councils.

(7.1) A board shall establish an appeal process or conflict resolution procedure under which the principal or the school council may apply respecting disputes on policies proposed or adopted for a school.

(8) The Minister, on the request of a board, may dissolve a school council without notice at any time it the Minister is of the opinion that the school council is not carrying out its responsibilities in accordance with this Act and the regulations.

(9) The Minister may make regulations

(a) respecting the election or appointment of the members of a school council and the term or other conditions of election or appointment and the dissolution of a school council;

(b) respecting the roles of the principal and the school council of a school and their respective powers, duties and responsibilities;

(c) respecting any other matter the Minister considers necessary respecting school councils;

(d) exempting a school or class of schools from the application of this section.

(SA 1988 cS-3.1 s17)

Appendix 2 – Interview Guide

Changing Role of the Principal: Interview Guide

A. Context Questions:

1.   Confirm current principalship location (school).

2.   What grade levels does it provide?

3.   What, approximately are the number of students? Teachers? Support staff?

4.   How would you briefly describe the school's community?

5.   How long have you been in this principalship?

6.   Have you held previous school level administration positions? [If yes] Where & how long?

7.   What was your teaching background?

8.   In this position, are you full time administration, or mixed admin. & teaching?

B. Content Questions:

1.   How does school-based management operate at your school? How is it implemented?

2.   What does this arrangement of school-based management mean for you operationally as principal (the way you do things day by day)?

3.   How much has your work as principal changed because of school-based management?

4.   How do you handle decision making now? Describe how you would make a school level policy type decision. Has this changed from before 1995-96?

5.   How is your school council influencing the way you operate?

6. How do you as principal work with the school council? Has this changed from when it was a parent advisory council?

7. How are you responding to the practice that parents can choose the school at which they register their children? Is this a change for you?

8. How often do you see the Superintendent or other administrative staff from central office now? Other kinds of contact? Has this changed? How is it affecting you?

9. Is the size (geographic as well as enrollment) of the school system affecting your work as principal? In what ways?

10. Is the limit on central instructional support affecting you? How? Do you make school level decisions to contract or purchase services from central office (or elsewhere)?

11. Describe how do you do your school budgeting now? Has this changed?

12. What is your involvement with personnel staffing decisions about selection, deployment and termination of teachers & support staff? Has this changed?

13. How are you doing teacher supervision and evaluation?

14. Overall, how manageable is your workload? Has it changed from before last year?

15. Where do the expectations that really define your role here come from?

16. Are there any other thoughts about changes to your role that you would like to share or make me aware of (something I should have asked about but didn't)?

Appendix 3 – Participant Contact Letter

February 28, 1997

Dear

Re: Study on Changing Role of the Principal

Further to our telephone conversation on February 28, 1997, this letter is to confirm your participation. The study will involve an initial interview of approximately one to one and a half hours, and probably a follow-up conversation of shorter duration. I hope you find this an interesting activity and contribution to an understanding of what is happening with the role of the principal. Our initial conversation is set for Tuesday, March 25, 1997, at 1:30 p.m. at School.

As I indicated, the study's methodology requires audio recording of the conversations and transcription, for analysis of the text. This material will be confidential and will be erased at the end of the study. All data reported will be without attribution or will use pseudonyms to protect anonymity. Text of the transcripts will be provided to you for review for accuracy, and you may exercise veto power over the inclusion of any data. Also, you can opt out of the study at any time.

A copy of the interview guide I will be following is enclosed for information. If there is any current documentation you could provide me on your role (role description, memoranda, etc.) that describe expectations for the position, particularly any new or changed emphasis, I would appreciate this when we meet.

I can be contacted via my home telephone number (403) 624-8435 if alternative arrangements become necessary.

Again, thank you for your interest and participation. I look forward to meeting with you.

Sincerely,

David van Tamelen
Ed. D. Student

Appendix 4 – Participant Acknowledgement & Consent Form

University of Alberta
Edmonton

Canada T6G 2G5

Department of Educational Policy Studies
Educational Administration, Educational Foundations, Adult and Higher Education
Faculty of Education

7-104 Education Building North,
Telephone (403) 492-7625
Fax (403) 492-2024

Acknowledgment Form

Please fill in the following information.

Yes, I would be willing to participate in the study on educational restructuring and the changing role of the school principal in Alberta. I understand that I have the right to opt out of this, or any part of this, study at any time and that confidentiality is ensured.

My name is _____

I may be contacted at _____ (Home phone)

_____ (Other phone)

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

David van Tamelen
Ed. D. Candidate
Dept. of Educational Policy Studies
University of Alberta

Dr. Ken Ward
Supervisor
Dept. of Educational Policy Studies
University of Alberta

Appendix 5 – Interview Transcript Verification Letter

MEMO

97/06/10

TO:

FR: Dave van Tamelen

RE: Interview Transcript

Enclosed is a transcription of our conversation earlier this spring on educational restructuring and the changing role of the school principal. I would appreciate you having a look through it to verify that the ideas and understandings are represented accurately. I'm not too concerned about grammar, style, punctuation and so on because you and I are the only readers in this form.

If you want to mark any changes or clarifications, please forward the marked up copy to me in the envelope provided. If you want to talk about any of it, please call me c/o 624-8435. Also, if there is any data you wish excluded, please mark it on the copy for me.

I am finding the information and insights it provides very helpful. Thanks again for your assistance.