

Experiences in Systemic Change

Reculturing Norfolk Public Schools

Scott Thompson

Between 1998 and 2005 the organizational culture of Norfolk Public Schools (NPS) was transformed, leading to dramatic increases in student performance outcomes and significant narrowing of achievement gaps that had widely separated groups and subgroups of students. The district serves 37,000 students in 49 schools, and the majority of those students (68%) are African American and qualify for free and reduced-priced lunches (63%).

Change process

The overarching process in the systemic improvement of NPS has been reculturing. Organizational culture can be defined as the underlying shared beliefs, history, assumptions, norms and values that manifest themselves in patterns of behavior. Reculturing, then, is fundamentally altering the invisible factors that influence behavior and thus transforming the organization's culture.

In Norfolk, reculturing has been accomplished through the following strategies:

- Establishing a “no excuses” philosophy. Denise Schnitzer, who was Norfolk's interim superintendent in 2004-05, says that before John Simpson became superintendent in 1998 the district had “an excuses mentality” — poverty and race were seen as an excuse, if not an outright justification, for low academic achievement of some students. Simpson brought a “no excuses” philosophy that now pervades the central office and schools.
- Developing a widely owned philosophy of teaching and learning. In group dialogues, facilitated by Panasonic Foundation consultants, NPS stakeholders talked through questions and issues of teaching and learning and developed a full-page statement of the system's Philosophy of Teaching and Learning, including descriptions of responsibilities for administrators, teachers, students, parents and community members.
- Building trust and encouraging risk-taking. According to John Simpson, when he arrived in the district in 1998, the culture was one in which “trust was not seen as a high value,” and people did not feel free to take risks. Cabinet member Linda O'Koneck says, “We had to build trust among ourselves and with the schools through our actions and through our words.” Sharon Byrdsong, a middle school principal in the district,

confirms the change: “I don't think we're afraid to take risks in our building, because the culture is so supportive.”

- Shifting the focus of central office from monitoring schools for compliance to active support of schools. Through most of the 1990's, the system had separate departments of professional development and curriculum and instruction. As part of the reculturing, these departments were merged in a new department called Leadership and Capacity Development. Whereas the members of the old departments spent little time in schools, LCD staffers spend 70 percent of their time in schools conducting workshops and responding to needs.
- Basing decisions on data, not favoritism or politics. With the old culture, promotions sometimes resulted from who knew whom on the school board. In the recultured system, positive results are rewarded, and programs that have no data to back up their claims are eliminated.
- Establishing a system of shared accountability focused on results. With assistance from the Center for Performance Assessment, the district developed a data-based, shared accountability system, where everyone from the school board to the superintendent to central office departments to schools is held publicly accountable for results. In Norfolk, technology directors and food service directors, not just principals, must report on their endeavors to improve student achievement.
- Engaging the business community in leadership development. District leaders in Norfolk worked with Greater Norfolk Corporation, an alliance of business executives, to develop a highly individualized school leadership development program that is, in large part, delivered by participating corporations.

For an in-depth description of the change process and outcomes in Norfolk Public Schools, see the December 2005 issue of *Strategies* (volume 11, number 1), which can be accessed on line at <http://www.aasa.org/publications/strategies/index.htm>.

New system

The NPS change process has fundamentally altered the relationship between the central office and schools around teaching and learning. Now the district's Leadership and Capacity Development department takes each school's data-rich accountability plan and determines what assistance each school needs, which means that the focus and content of professional development often varies dramatically in different schools.

Results

The most important results of Norfolk's thoroughgoing reculturing are the dramatic increase in student achievement *at all grades levels* and *in all subject areas*. For example, the percent of students passing third-grade

history and social studies increased from 28% in 1997-98 to 82% in 2003-04.

In July 2005, Stephen Jones arrived in Norfolk to assume the Superintendency. Around the same time, two senior cabinet members left. This transitional period represents a test of the durability of Norfolk's transformation process and an opportunity to extend and deepen it.

A Systemic Change Experience in the Chugach School District

Joe Clem and Wendy Battino

The Chugach School District won the 2001 Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award for creating a successful performance system using input from schools, communities and businesses and allowing all students to meet with success and take ownership of their educational careers. This systemic change was created by Chugach beginning in 1994 through a process that involved four distinct components for systemic transformation of education: shared vision, shared leadership, standards-based design and continuous improvement.

Shared Vision is a collective purpose derived by gathering input from all stakeholders (students, parents, community members, education staff, administrators, business people, elders, etc). Developing a shared vision was an essential part of the Chugach change process for real systemic reform, because it encouraged participants to explore new paradigms. Stakeholder input came from answers to questions concerning what stakeholders wanted for students and schools. The shared vision drove the entire systemic change process, including district planning, training, policies and budgets. To establish a shared vision, Chugach used the Onwards to Excellence (OTE) process. Community, school and business partner meetings were held on a regular basis. Input from all of these stakeholders held five common threads, which became our Organizational Performance Goals (OPG).

Shared leadership was crucial to sustain the shared vision in Chugach, and everyone had to take responsibility to be a leader and then cultivate leadership in others. To be effective, leaders considered the contribution that every member could make to help education and the change process. Leadership was grown at all stakeholder levels.

Standards-based design provided the roadmap. Therefore, a major focus of the systemic change process was on conducting standards-based design, which included standards, instruction, assessment and reporting. This kind of design used the "best of the best" practices and encouraged innovative thinking, teaching and effective instruction.

Continuous improvement processes were put in place to consistently evaluate and refine district practices through research and benchmarking in order to improve and address changing needs.

Due to the publicity generated by the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, a multitude of schools and communities have sought guidance and support for

engaging in a similar kind of effort. Consequently, the Re-Inventing Schools Coalition (RISC), a non-profit foundation, was established. Now, additional districts are replicating the processes used by Chugach, now known as the *Re-inventing Schools Model* (RSM). Their systemic change experiences with the RSM have met with encouraging results.

The RSM brings communities together to redesign their schools to better serve students of all ages, abilities and ethnicities. Proven best practices combined with groundbreaking approaches have enabled schools and districts to change their systems in new and meaningful ways.

Since its inception with the Chugach School District, RSM has been formalized from the Chugach processes by RISC and has been replicated in 15 districts and over 200 schools. RISC, in partnership with Chugach, has kept current with schools using RSM, maintaining fidelity of its use, providing quality training and support and using a critical eye to examine the results of RSM efforts. The processes used to nurture the four components (mentioned above) have been researched and acclaimed, namely through the prestigious Malcolm Baldrige Award and by education expert Dr. Robert Marzano (2005), who said:

As far as I can tell, the Re-Inventing Schools Model, as implemented by Chugach and other districts in Alaska involved with RISC, is the most comprehensive and well articulated approach to standards-based reform in the entire country.

RISC recently conducted an analysis of the implementation of the RIM and student performance results in the 15 districts that have taken a systemic approach to this innovative reform. What we found is extremely encouraging. Through external evaluation, a positive correlation was found between implementation and student performance, with district four-year trend lines of student performance showing significant gains in student achievement.*

More information about this reform process, including the "Guide to Re-Inventing Schools," is available at the RISC website, www.reinventingschools.org, or call us at 907-522-3132. We look forward to hearing from you and of your success!

*The Re-inventing Schools Implementation Monitoring Survey, Alaska Benchmark/High School Graduation Qualifying Examination Data, and Relationships between the Two, by Theodore Coladarci, University of Maine.

A Systemic Change Experience in Decatur Township

Kurt Richter and Charles Reigeluth

In January 2001 the Indianapolis Metropolitan School District of Decatur Township (referred to henceforth as

Decatur) and Indiana University entered into a long-term partnership for systemic transformation of the entire school district (see <http://www.indiana.edu/~syschang/decaturl/index.html>). Decatur is a small, partly urban and partly rural, school district on the southwest side of Indianapolis (see <http://www.msddecaturl.k12.in.us/>).

Decatur's change process

The systemic change process in Decatur is informed by the Guidance System for Transforming Education (see GSTE blurb in Section 5). In Phase I, "Initiate a systemic change effort," the initial co-facilitators (Charles Reigeluth and Roberto Joseph) assessed four school districts' readiness for systemic change and entered into an informal agreement for a long-term partnership with Decatur.

Central to the GSTE is the formation of a relatively large Leadership Team (about 25-30 highly respected leaders of all stakeholder groups) to provide the major engine and political support for the systemic change effort. Prior experience showed that such a large team often takes on a culture and dynamic that are not conducive of systemic change. Therefore, Phase II, "Develop a Starter Team," entailed helping each of the major stakeholder groups to select a key leader to be on a small Starter Team. Five people were selected: the superintendent, a prestigious principal, a parent leader (PTA president from one of the elementary schools), the president of the teachers' association and a new school board member.

The main purpose of the Starter Team was to develop a culture of shared leadership, stakeholder empowerment, consensus-building, trust and collaboration, and an understanding of systemic thinking, paradigm shift in society and the systemic change process in education. The Starter Team engaged in a retreat in June of 2001 and met bi-weekly to study readings, develop an agreement for systemic change and assess the district's capacity for systemic change (see Joseph, 2003, for details).

When the Starter Team reached a sufficient level of development (culture and understanding), it initiated Phase III, "Develop a district-wide framework and capacity for change." First, it expanded itself into the Leadership Team, and Starter Team members helped it develop a similar culture and understanding. Soon, the Leadership Team felt that too much time was being devoted to learning and not enough to action. It was decided that the Leadership Team's development should be done in the form of just-in-time learning as they developed a district-wide framework of information-age vision, mission and ideal beliefs about education.

The major obstacle encountered during this phase was the difficulty of finding enough time for the Leadership Team to do its work. Consequently, in December 2004 the Leadership Team created subcommittees to speed up their progress.

In December 2005 the Leadership Team formed a Central Support Team comprised of the superintendent's entire Cabinet (12 members) to be its "executive arm" in facilitating formation and support of school-based teams,

conducting workshops, fostering broader stakeholder ownership of the Framework and in other ways assisting the Leadership Team.

In January 2006 the Leadership Team and Central Support Team helped each school to form a Self Assessment Team to assess and enhance its readiness to redesign their school in a way that embodies the Framework.

Results

To date, the Leadership Team has developed the district-wide Framework, including mission, vision and ideal beliefs about education. This Framework represents a radical move from a sorting-focused educational system to a learning-focused system that is founded on research-based, learner-centered psychological principles and true customization to greatly accelerate learning for *all* students. It will be used to guide schools as they attempt to design a new paradigm of education. The Leadership Team has developed, throughout the district, a culture of collaboration, trust and consensus-building. It has cultivated a style of leadership that empowers all stakeholders to be leaders. It has also developed considerable enthusiasm to transform from an industrial-age system to the information-age system represented by the Framework. An indicator of the value of the accomplishments to date is that the superintendent received the Indiana Superintendent of the Year award in 2005.

The barriers to systemic change are many and varied, but "the ease or difficulty of transcending the existing system depends a great deal on our attitudes toward change" (Banathy, 1996, p. 117). This is a problem of mindset change, and our experience in Decatur points to this as an ongoing and entrenched problem that must be addressed throughout the process. The scarcity of time, money and resources allocated to the effort is also problematic. Systemic change does not come easily, and the products of change will take years to show fruition, but the end result promises to be well worth the effort.

A Systemic Change Experience in the Ditmas Educational Complex

Marcelle Doll

For the past five years, Co-nect has worked with IS #62, The Ditmas Educational Complex in Brooklyn, NY, around accelerating the integration of technology into teaching and learning. Ditmas has a diverse student population with 50% African American, 24% Hispanic, 17% Asian, and 9% Caucasian students. 17% of its students are recent immigrants. Almost all of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch.

As one of the first 1:1 schools, financed through JP Morgan Chase, each family receives a desktop computer for their home, once parents are trained. The ON_DEC (Our Neighborhood-Digital Education Community) goal was to bridge the Digital Divide between urban and suburban

students. The principal, Dr. Nancy Brogan, wanted to build a collaborative atmosphere that emphasized the sharing of ideas as teachers learned new technology skills to help students bridge the digital divide.

The change process

Co-nect support includes a professional development process, based on the National Staff Development Council Standards. In the beginning, teachers were surveyed on their technology skills and their ability to integrate the technology into teaching and learning. Co-nect provided support to the school as they:

- Mapped technology training to student achievement goals and instructional priorities which provided teachers with new ways to link technology and student achievement
- Facilitated faculty study groups to ensure teacher collaboration and classroom application
- Aligned the use of software, the Internet and other technologies with academic standards
- Helped teachers use technology to build students' higher-order thinking skills.

Based on the results of the technology survey, teachers were initially introduced to Co-nect's Exchange, which offers a comprehensive online source for professional development and best-practice instructional ideas. The Exchange provides:

- The Project Library — an award-winning library of more than 800 field-tested, standards-aligned projects covering a wide range of disciplines and grade levels.
- The Student Center — an online center for teachers to share classroom activities and initiatives with students and families.
- Professional Development Modules — “bite-sized” online training on topics such as literacy, mathematics, family engagement, assessment and technology.

A technology team was formed at the school to continuously address the needs of the teachers in Math and Literacy. The team, made up mostly of teachers and with the full support of the administration, provided leadership at the teacher level and served as technology leaders. The professional development was regularly adjusted, based upon school walkthroughs.

The new system

With Co-nect, technology isn't a mere enhancement — it is a means to change the way students learn. Co-nect helped the teachers realize new educational uses of technology. The major goals for Co-nect's work at IS #62 were to increase instructional technology leadership capacity, build a professional learning community and use data effectively to improve professional development and technology resource allocation.

What has changed at IS #62?

More teachers are included in the support and implementation of the systemic reforms, and this has

facilitated full-building ownership and desire to increase technology integration. Teachers regularly meet to discuss the issues and challenges of technology and share with each other the work they do in classrooms with technology. Classroom instruction has moved from the traditional teacher directed model to more hands-on engaging instruction where students are guided to produce work with real-world implications. These authentic experiences include tele-collaboration with schools around the world to enable a cultural exchange of ideas, building websites to make the work the students do around Math and Literacy public and allowing students to embark on virtual field trips to learn about the world outside of their neighborhood in Brooklyn.

Evaluation

Each year, Co-nect conducts a review of the services that have been provided. Based on the most recent walkthrough, the teachers at IS #62 were actively and successfully using a range of different technologies to extend and enrich teaching and learning in educationally important ways that would not otherwise be possible. According to an independent report prepared for the district, Co-nect has had significant, positive impact on teaching and learning in School 62. The evaluators found that Co-nect's work with teachers had resulted in

... greater understanding of how to harness technology to support classroom instruction, more effective use of teacher-preptime, renewed enthusiasm for teaching, and the development of more engaging and effective teaching reflecting the use of best practices and teacher collaboration. [And] ... students have provided evidence of increased technological skills, higher levels of social and cognitive learning, increased ownership of learning, and more investment [in] and identification with the learning process. (Barlin & Nash, 2002, p. 16)

A State-Level Systemic Change Experience: The Georgia Systemic Teacher Education Program

Julie Moore

The Georgia Systemic Teacher Education Program (GSTEP) has been a 6-year effort to reconceptualize teacher education in the state of Georgia. GSTEP is a collaborative effort of three universities (including both Arts & Sciences faculty and College of Education faculty), eleven school districts and all state agencies to develop a cohesive and coherent network of teacher support. As an example of systemic change at the higher education level, GSTEP underscores the value of relationship development and stakeholder participation in building a successful change

effort. Interestingly, our success has also led to a dilemma of an “unsystemic” nature.

Change process

Funded by a Teacher Quality Enhancement Partnership Grant in 1999, GSTEP began by creating several project teams to address teacher education at key stages. Early Experience Teams, Curriculum Development Teams and Induction Teams each developed a variety of initiatives within their respective areas. Each of the teams consisted of equal numbers of teachers, Arts & Sciences faculty and College of Education faculty — ensuring the inclusion of all these stakeholder groups in the process. Beginning Teacher panels were also formed, providing the voice of beginning teachers to a variety of GSTEP projects. As GSTEP began, project members quickly realized that they did not have a common understanding about what it meant to be a quality or accomplished teacher. Thus, one of the first activities of the Induction Teams was to find a common language about what it means to teach that could be utilized throughout a teachers’ career.

With iterative rounds of focus groups and writing, over 400 educators from around the state and a 14-person cross-institutional writing team helped craft two critical documents — the GSTEP Principles (<http://www.coe.uga.edu/gstep/documents/principles072803.pdf>) and The GSTEP Framework for Accomplished Teaching (http://www.coe.uga.edu/gstep/documents/gstep_framework0603.pdf). The Principles articulated the shared values that guided the rest of the work of GSTEP. The Framework provided a common language about good teaching that could be utilized both within Arts & Sciences and Colleges of Education, as well as across the lifetime of a teacher’s career.

Change products

The *GSTEP Principles* and the *GSTEP Framework for Accomplished Teaching*, while foundational, were only two products of the GSTEP initiative — there were many more. The Early Experiences Teams helped draft and institute new College of Education policies requiring that all applicants to the teacher education program first have an approved early experience in an educational setting. Additionally, they created and supported teams of Student Ambassadors that represented the College of Education and they sponsored panels on teaching for prospective students. The Curriculum Teams created dual-degrees in several areas and refined university courses to address state and national standards. The Induction Teams created not only the above documents, but also a living, growing articulation of the Framework — a web-based system called the BRIDGE (Bridging Resources: Induction and Development for Georgia Educators) which brings together teacher-developed or suggested resources around the GSTEP Framework. The BRIDGE will also host and support cross-community, teacher learning communities (groups made up of pre-service, inservice and university faculty) (<http://www.teachersbridge.org>). Additionally, teacher self-assessment and student-teacher observation

tools have been developed to match the framework. Lastly, Induction Teams raised the awareness of the importance of induction to local school districts to a point where each district now has induction programs in place and are actually sharing data on teacher turnover and retention.

Perhaps the most important products of the GSTEP project are the relationships that have been built within the College of Education, between the College of Education and Arts & Sciences, with local school districts, across universities in the state and with a variety of state agencies.

Our success “dilemma”

One of the signs of the success of the systemic process is the acceptance of the GSTEP Framework for Accomplished Teaching. Now re-titled the Georgia Framework for Teaching, it has been adopted by all major state agencies and is serving as the foundation for a new teacher assessment system under development. While we couldn’t be more thrilled that our work has been so well received, it creates a dilemma from a systemic perspective. Systemic change efforts on the scale of GSTEP can be more accurately described as “representatively systemic.” That is, representatives of various stakeholder groups are involved, but not entire stakeholder groups. Thus, what has been developed systemically for us, will now, because of state-level adoption, be top-down for others. Hopefully, knowledge of the systemic process used to develop the Framework will enhance its acceptance by teachers throughout the state. It’s an interesting dilemma that we are excited to tackle.

Systemic Change in Sun Microsystems

Janet Hoo

Working in a large company like Sun Microsystems is much like working in a large school system. Policies and procedures are often dictated from a corporate office with little say from the departments or individuals actually impacted by the change. In an international company with over 30,000 people worldwide, directing a change in policy is very difficult. Many departments make individual improvements to their areas without realizing the impact to other groups or the business as a whole. In this article, I discuss the systemic changes which were critical in making the Education Department a core part of doing business.

When I joined Sun nine years ago, Education was treated as a separate business unit from the rest of the company. Education was charged with the design, development and deployment of all internal and customer training. Decisions regarding which classes were to be run and their frequency, size and locations were made by Education. Since Education was a standalone business unit, it was very common to see other groups outside Education also developing training. This resulted in multiple groups within Sun developing training on the same products at the same time for the same audience. This duplication of

effort was very costly to the departments and to the overall business.

Individual groups would meet to discuss plans and procedures to implement change, but it never lasted. Direction changed, policies changed, and the result was confusion and more duplication of effort. Duplication was not limited to training — it was occurring in Sales, Marketing and Manufacturing. The only solution to this problem was to implement a systemic change.

The first change was in the management structure. The existing corporate structure was a CEO with individual Vice Presidents all running their own lines of business or “vertical silos.”

The vertical silo structure resulted in limited inter-departmental communication, and departments had no one with the authority to direct a change in policy. Before starting to implement change, a survey was sent to all employees at Sun to determine what was working and what was not. Management realized that if change was to be successful, the people asked to implement and support the change must have a stake in that change. Sun changed the management structure to be a single line of business with all related departments reporting to the same Vice President. Education was transformed from a standalone department to a key component in the product lifecycle. The education group was reorganized with a director who reported into the Vice President of Support. Training was also partnered with a group that reported to Human Resources.

The second corporate-wide change was to implement change tools. Following the direction of GE and other large companies, Sun adopted the use of a hybrid version of Six Sigma, called “Sun Sigma,” which is a process that assists in directing change. Education began using Sigma to step through a systemic change process. The first step was to talk to all the groups within Education to determine major issues. The second step was to interview stakeholders; both internal and external. The change in corporate structure to a single, high-level management reporting hierarchy simplified the task of identifying roles and responsibilities. Additionally, by identifying Education’s charter with all departments and the benefits that Education could provide to them, Education was then able to drive change.

The third major change was that Education was given the resources to manage the change process for their department. This was done by allowing Education to form and run Sigma teams when they identified an issue that required change. Running a Sigma team gave Education the ability to pull in members of other departments who would either impact or be impacted by the change. Education members also led other Sigma teams when training issues were identified. This gave each department a stake in solving the problems they identified and ownership in the solution.

Using a systemic change process for Education changed the entire scope of its business. The educational process no longer exists in a vacuum. Education has a direct line of communication with each of the business areas and is able to provide input into the overall direction

of the corporation. Weekly meetings with stakeholders, team members and employees involved with the flow of the training development or delivery process, such as the editorial group, are now common.

Education is now seen as a critical part of a larger system, and it impacts the entire corporation at all levels. Within Education each member is a critical part of the system, empowered to direct and impact change.

An International Experience in Systemic Change: Azerbaijan

Larissa V. Malopinsky

For many developing countries, change in their educational systems and integration of innovative pedagogical methods represent a critical path toward achieving competitive economic advantage and becoming a part of the global community (Chapman et al., 2005; Kozma, 2005). Since gaining its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Azerbaijan has been working on developing a framework for educational reform within the context of fundamental changes in social, economic, political and government structures. The focus has been on providing access to quality learning resources throughout the country and developing democratic educational strategies (Asian Bank Study, 2004).

The country’s changing economic and political landscape requires new approaches for educating an information-age workforce (Bagirov, 2001). Distance education (DE) is viewed as an opportunity to bring change to the traditional teaching and learning practices that evolved within the local socio-cultural context during the Soviet period, and introduce learner-centered pedagogy (Azerbaijan National Human Development Report, 2003).

A three-year partnership project between Indiana University, the Azerbaijan State Economic University and the Azerbaijan Research and Education Network Association, has been focusing on both developing online teaching capabilities in Azerbaijan and introducing a shift in pedagogical paradigm by growing change agents who can assist Azerbaijani faculty with implementation and justification of new pedagogical concepts in online teaching.

The project started in 2003 with the analysis of faculty readiness to teach at a distance and examining technological capabilities. Although many Azerbaijani universities developed sufficient technical capabilities for establishing online education, the only distance form offered to students has been correspondence education that allows limited interaction and no collaboration. The conclusion was drawn that the development of distance education in Azerbaijan was less of a technology issue and more a need for: a) defining a new paradigm of pedagogical approaches that would be effective in an online environment, b)

designing and delivering online curricula and c) managing and evaluating the online learning process.

In order to fulfill this need, the following strategy was developed by Azerbaijani and American partners:

- Prepare local experts in the new paradigm of online instruction through the Indiana University certification program.
- Establish an e-learning center providing instructional design support and consulting to Azerbaijani universities.
- Design an online curriculum for Azerbaijani faculty, offering problem-based courses focused on distance teaching and course management.
- Develop a demonstration online course for a specific discipline.

The process has been rewarding but difficult due to a number of epistemological, cultural, communication and administrative barriers. The most challenging aspect has been a difference in beliefs about the role of teachers and students in the instructional process and the role of collaboration in achieving individual learning goals. The industrial-age, teacher-centered pedagogy accepted in Azerbaijan and the lack of team-work experience made it difficult for the Azerbaijani group to establish effective communication, manage their project activities and provide peer feedback. In every design task, the Azerbaijani group left all decisions to the American team and preferred to view the IU partners as authority figures. They also found it challenging to conceive instructional situations where learners take responsibility for their own learning steps.

A number of cultural issues impacted the process: different expectations regarding time management; high vs. low tolerance of ambiguous situations that characterize any design process; and low trust within the Azerbaijani group in regards to the work produced by the teammates. The project partners conducted multiple work sessions for addressing those issues and establishing the models that would be acceptable to all participants. Lastly, several administrative barriers have delayed implementation of the new mode of instruction. The most critical ones relate to the fact that the Azerbaijani legislature has still not approved the use of distance education for obtaining university degrees.

Despite these challenges, there has been tremendous progress over the course of the two years of the project. The change in how Azerbaijani partners view distance education and collaborative work is evident on many levels. They continuously take more responsibility for various project aspects. Evidence of change in pedagogical approach can be seen in the instructional products designed for Azerbaijani faculty. In collaboration with the IU team, the Azerbaijani group has developed the first course that utilizes problem-based methodology and emphasizes each learner's ownership over her learning path.

The systematic collection of written evidence, observations and informal discussions will contribute to development of understanding of barriers and opportunities

for implementing a learner-centered paradigm of distance education in Azerbaijan and will assist in further facilitation of fundamental pedagogical change in this country.

Author Information and References for Section 4

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A Systemic Change Experience in Decatur Township

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Section 5

The Process of Systemic Change

Step-Up-To-Excellence: A Protocol for Navigating Whole-System Change in School Districts

Francis M. Duffy

Piecemeal change to improve schooling inside a school district is an approach that at its worst does more harm than good and at its best is limited to creating temporary pockets of “good” within school districts. When it comes to improving schooling in a district, however, creating temporary pockets of good isn’t good enough. Whole school systems need to be transformed in a sustainable way.

To transform an entire school system, change leaders in that system must know what a system is and how it functions, and they must be skillful in using a specially designed protocol to navigate whole-system change in their school districts. This article introduces readers to one example of a change protocol called *Step-Up-To-Excellence* (SUTE) (Duffy, 2003, 2004).

SUTE is a three-step process that is preceded by a Pre-Launch Preparation phase. (The original version of SUTE had 5 steps. In the spirit of continuous improvement, Steps 2-4 were combined to create Step 2 of the current

version, thereby reducing the protocol to three steps.) After a period of change followed by a period of stability, change leaders recycle the transformation process to begin a new pre-launch preparation period, since school system transformation is a never-ending journey that moves a district ever closer to its idealized vision. The process proceeds as follows:

- Pre-launch preparation
- Step 1: Redesign the entire school system
- Step 2: Create strategic alignment
- Step 3: Evaluate whole-system performance
- Recycle to the next pre-launch preparation phase

SUTE was designed to create and sustain systemic change inside school districts. Because the term “systemic change” has different meanings, it is important to clarify exactly which meaning was used to design the SUTE protocol. Squire and Reigeluth’s (2000) concept of ecological systemic change guided the design of SUTE.

Ecological systemic change views school districts as systems with rich networks of interrelationships and interdependencies within the district and between the district and its “systemic environment” (the larger system of which it is a part, its peer systems within that larger system and other systems with which it interacts outside of its larger system). This perspective recognizes that a significant change in one part of a school system requires changes in other parts of the system. This view of systemic change is how “systems thinkers” view systemic change in organizations (e.g., Ackoff, 1981; Banathy, 1996; Checkland, 1984; Emery & Purser, 1996; Senge, 1990).

SUTE is also designed on the premise that there are three paths that must be followed simultaneously to create and sustain whole-system change in school districts (Duffy, Rogerson, & Blick, 2000). The three paths are: Path 1, transform a district’s relationship with its external environment; Path 2, transform a district’s core and supporting work processes; and Path 3, transform a district’s internal social “architecture” (which includes organization design, reward systems, organization culture, job descriptions, administrative policies and procedures and so on).

Presently, SUTE is being used in conjunction with Reigeluth’s *Guidance System for Transforming Education* (GSTE) in the Metropolitan School District of Decatur Township, Indianapolis, Indiana. The principles that underpin the SUTE protocol are also part of several whole-system change initiatives in school districts like San Diego Public Schools, Kent County Public Schools (Maryland), the Chula Vista School District (California) and the Baldrige award-winning Chugach School District in Anchorage, Alaska.

Readers are invited to visit www.thefmduffygroup.com for additional information about SUTE. Those who would like to receive a free quarterly report about whole-system change distributed via E-mail may contact Dr. Duffy at duffy@thefmduffygroup.com and request that their name be included on his distribution list.