Change strategies utilized in rural Alaskan schools when implementing an innovation
by Terry Dale Bentley

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education
Montana State University

Abstract:
In 1994 the Commissioner of Education in the state of Alaska mandated the implementation of the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative for all school districts. Using a telephone survey, superintendents in thirty-two Alaskan rural school districts were interviewed about the progress of the Initiative's implementation in their districts. Specifically, the research focused on the relationship of the success of implementation to the school districts' culture, size, and the method of implementation.

Results of the study revealed that after five years only about half of the districts had successfully implemented the mandated Initiative. In the larger districts, which for the most part reflected a secular culture, adoption of a modified version of the Initiative proved to be a successful strategy. There seemed to be no visible pattern for successful implementation in the smaller districts.

Attitudes of the superintendents toward the changes mandated by the Initiative varied in relation to the success of their district's implementation. However, it was felt by all that a lack of funding, little or no support from the Alaska Department of Education, and short timelines for implementation all constituted real and significant barriers to the success of their district's implementation efforts.

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Terry Dale Bentley

This thesis has been read by each member of the thesis committee and has been found to be satisfactory regarding content, English usage, citations, biblographic style, and consistency, and is ready for submission to the College of Graduate Studies.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

page

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure

Page

LIST OF TABLES

ABSTRACT

In 1994 the Commissioner of Education in the state of Alaska mandated the implementation of the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative for all school districts. Using a telephone survey, superintendents in thirty-two Alaskan rural school districts were interviewed about the progress of the Initiative's implementation in their districts. Specifically, the research focused on the relationship of the success of implementation to the school districts' culture, size, and the method of implementation.

Results of the study revealed that after five years only about half of the districts had successfully implemented the mandated Initiative. In the larger districts, which for the most part reflected a secular culture, adoption of a modified version of the Initiative proved to be a successful strategy. There seemed to be no visible pattern for successful implementation in the smaller districts.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Since the first village schools were established in the New England colonies in the seventeenth century, American education has been inherently a political institution. The school is a visible emblem of the community and of participatory democracy. It is no accident that when Americans vote, they usually do so at our neighborhood elementary school. As a political entity, the American school is therefore subject to and frequently buffeted by the winds of political change. In no other country of the western world do citizens routinely go to the polls to vote on initiatives about the school. State legislatures annually vote, not merely on educational spending, but on whether to include, among other things, specific components of history, reading methodology, or mathematics in the school program (Lutz & Merz, 1992).

As political entities, schools are subject to constant change,

and Alaskan schools are no more protected from the winds of political change than those of any other state. In 1994 the Governor's State Commissioner of Education mandated change for Alaskan School Districts through the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative (Referred to as the Initiative). This was a politically powered reform directed primarily at rural Alaskan schools. Legislators perceived rural schools to be more expensive and less effective than their urban counterparts (Holloway, 1996).

Change is a topic of enormous importance to educational leaders in Alaska as well as the rest of the United States. A consensus has emerged in the educational research base that since change is inevitable, the educational leaders of a school district must systematically manage that change rather than let it occur incidentally. Through research and practice, educators have identified and explored many types and philosophies of change and the best ways to successfully implement it (Cuban, 1992; Deal, 1990; DiNatale, 1994; Foley, 1994 & McKenzie, 1985). One of the most popular methods of change, or reform, is for a district to

identify a particular practice or program which has been validated in another district and to implement that innovation (Hall & Hord, 1987).

The primary question for a school district's leadership seeking to achieve reform or change through the implementation of an existing practice is whether to adopt faithfully and exactly all the key elements of the innovation or to thoughtfully adapt only some elements of the innovation. Fullan and Pomfret (1977) call faithful adoption "fidelity adoption" and adaptation adoption "mutual adaptation". The choice whether to use the fidelity adoption or the mutual adaptation approach faces each school leader.

Educational researchers have also noted that one of the key variables in predicting the success of a school reform effort is not only the selection of the external program to be introduced into the school, but the prevailing internal school culture or climate. Researchers studying this variable have identified two facets of school culture - secular, which embraces change, and sacred, which resists change (Iannacoccone & Lutz, 1970).

It has been suggested by Iannacoccone and Lutz (1970), that these variables, the school culture (secular/sacred) and the type of change process selected (fidelity/mutual adaptation), will impact both the degree to which reforms are implemented and actually improving education (Hansen, 1985). Since most rural schools in Alaska have responded to the political demand for reform by adopting or adapting existing programs, practices, and standards, the Initiative provides a virtual laboratory to analyze the dynamics of change.

It was the intent of this study to identify and describe patterns of relationships among the types of change processes and the prevailing school cultures in the context of recent educational reform in rural Alaskan Schools. This study, which focused on the relationship of the two variables (fidelity/mutual adaptation change and secular/sacred culture) to successful implementation of the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative, focused on the 37 rural school districts of Alaska. Information was gathered from each district's superintendent. It was anticipated that the analysis of the survey

results would reveal for each district what was generated by the Initiative, how the reform was managed, which type of culture existed, and the success of the reform. Of primary interest was the question of which change management approach was related to a particular type of school culture.

The basis for this study was the implementation of the ten core content standards of the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative (see Appendix B). The Alaska Quality Schools Initiative was to have been fully implemented by the start of the 1999-2000 school year.

Theoretical Basis

It is crucial that educators understand the process of change. Whenever new educational standards are developed, a solid understanding of the change process is necessary in order for meaningful and lasting change to occur (Osborne, 1993). Dynamic organizations, such as schools, are constantly under public scrutiny and therefore subject to pressures for change from sources

outside of the school (Champlin, 1991). Although change is inevitable, desirable change is not always the result. While, desirable change may occur by chance, the likelihood of it occurring is increased if the change is planned (Griffith, 1979).

Change can be incorporated into the culture of an organization. However, for full incorporation to occur, the appropriate approach to implementing an innovation must be utilized. In this study, two approaches to the change process were examined. These approaches are categorized by Fullan and Pomfret as: 1) fidelity adoption, and 2) mutual adaptation (1977).

The fidelity adoption model is often associated with a linear approach to change that is directed at a defined organizational goal. Usually these goals are imposed from the top down. The fidelity approach requires that the innovation be adhered to as closely as possible. Implementation must follow the original plan, and any variation is discouraged (Fullan, 1991; Hall & Hord, 1987; Snyder, Bolin & Zumwalt, 1992).

In contrast, the mutual adaptation approach allows for

modification of the innovation by individuals in the organization to adapt changes at a lower level during implementation (Fullan, 1991; Hall & Hord, 1987; Snyder, Bolin, & Zumwalt, 1992). Mutual adaptation provides the flexibility to adapt to organizational needs, supporting personal and growth within an organization or school.

When attempting to bring about organizational level planned change, some basic cornerstones must be built into the foundation of the change for success. According to Fullan (1991) these strategies for change should include: "an active initiation and participation, pressure and support, changes in behavior and beliefs, and the overriding problem of ownership" (p. 91).

By applying a systems view to organizational change, interrelationships should be noted which will assist in planning for the change. Leaders within the organization should remember that:

1. Change is a process, not an event;
2. Change is accomplished by individuals;
3. Change is a highly personal experience;
4. Change involves developmental growth;
5. Change is best understood in operational terms; and,
6. The focus of facilitation should be on individuals, innovations, and the context (Hall & Hord, 1984).

According to Hersey and Blanchard (1988) there are three elements to changing an organization: 1) use of personal or organizational power, 2) behavior modification, and 3) planning for and implementing a planned change. These authors examined change from more than just a behavioral perspective. Changes in behavior often result from applying new knowledge, which often leads to a change in attitude.

Organizational structure and culture can have a direct impact on the nature of change. There is a growing awareness that the success of any organization is directly dependent upon its effective use of available human resources. Change and growth involve changing people at four different areas: 1) knowledge, 2) attitudes, 3) behavior, and 4) group or organizational behavior (Osborne, 1993). The relative difficulty involved in making each of the above areas of change from a voluntary perspective is illustrated in Figure 1.

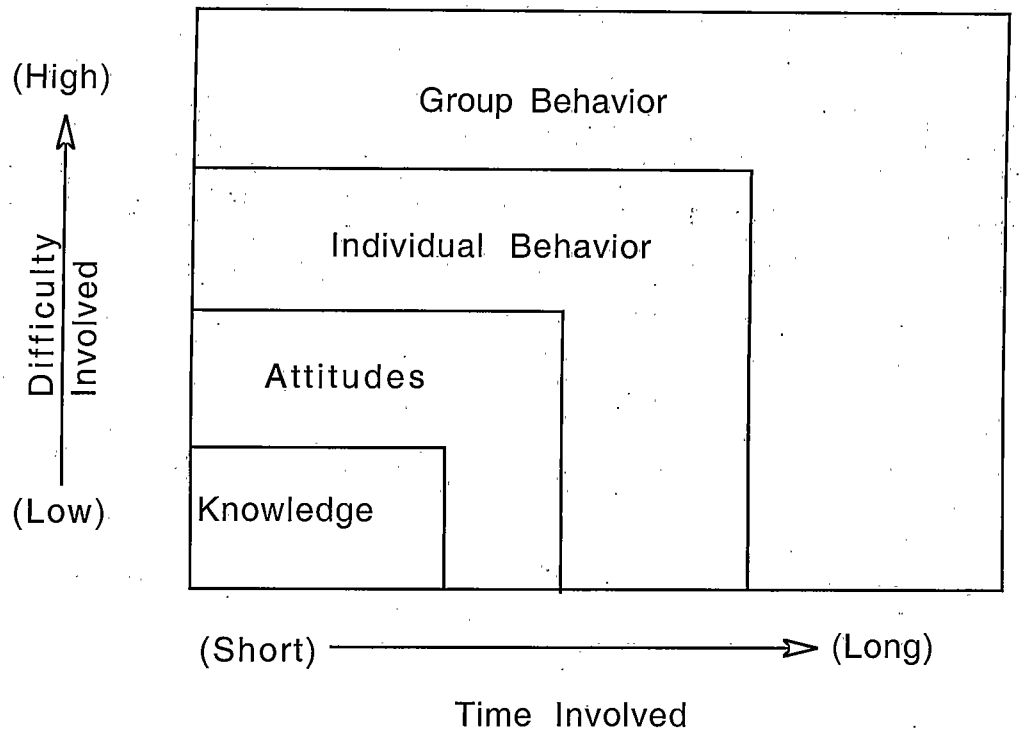

Figure 1. Time and difficulty involved in making various changes. Hersey and Blanchard. (1988) Management of Organizational Behavior. (5th ed.). Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall p.4.

Change in individual knowledge tends to be the easiest to make. This may be accomplished in a variety of ways such as giving a person a book or an article to read, or having someone learn something new through a workshop. When a change in attitude involves highly emotional issues, the change requires a longer time period and is more difficult to accomplish (Owens, 1991).

Affective attitudes differ from cognitive knowledge in that

people's emotions reflect either a positive or negative view of the proposed change. Changes in individual behavior seem to be significantly more difficult and time consuming than either knowledge or attitude. A person may change their knowledge base or attitudes by reading and watching others over a period of time. To actually learn a new behavior, a person must practice that which is to be learned and make the new course of action relevant to his/her own behavior (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988).

Change in teaching practices is brought about by individual teachers, not by institutions. Research by Joyce and Showers (1983) on teacher motivation indicates it is the teacher who makes the difference. Without committed, educated teachers any instructional reform effort will be muted and short-lived. Although many worry about teachers' motivation and willingness to learn, teachers have been found to be able to withstand the discomfort involved in new learning and change (Joyce & Showers, 1983).

Even more difficult than a change in individual behavior is a change in group or organizational behavior, because it is at the

organizational level that customs, mores and traditions are changed. Customs, mores, and traditions are steeped in attitudes of the individual, and those individual attitudes make up group norms. Groups tend to be self-reinforcing units and therefore, a person's behavior as a member of a group is more difficult to alter without first modifying the group norms (Owens, 1991).

The question is not whether schools will change, but how and who will manage the change. In an attempt to keep a school viable and current, the issue is how to cope with the inevitable barrage of change that confronts the school daily. Effective leaders can no longer be content to let change occur at random; they must be able to control change through a systematic process. Change is constant, nothing remains the same from one moment to another, especially in schools which are steeped in societal politics. This is especially true in rural schools where the districts tend to be, as Iannaccone and Lutz (1970) have described, sacred societies, or those that tend to avoid change.

Sacred societies are those which are highly resistant to

change. The sacred community may display sentiments which are consistent with a central characteristic of avoiding or resisting change (Lipham & Hoeh, 1974). The secular community has the tendency to welcome or seek change and expresses sentiments consistent with its major characteristic of pursuing new innovations (Lipham & Hoeh, 1974).

Statement of the Problem

That schools are in need of fundamental change is no longer debated by much of society (McNeil, 1988; Shanker, 1988 & Timar and Kirp, 1989). The Alaska Quality Schools Initiative was mandated as a result of the changing demographics in Alaskan communities and of societal demands for educational improvement.

Appropriate strategic implementation of a change process may mean the difference between a successful and unsuccessful innovation implementation. The problem is that it is unknown what the relationship is between successful implementation strategies

and demographic characteristics in the school district.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze the implementation strategies of the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative in Alaska's rural school districts. To accomplish this, the study focused on four areas of change. Which change process was being used when implementing the innovation? What was the district's culture (secular or sacred) in regard to change? Was the innovation being successfully implemented? Was there a discernible relationship between the change process, culture of the district, size of the district, and success of the implementation?

The first task was to determine what change processes were being utilized in Alaska's rural schools when implementing the Initiative. Twenty years of research about change processes in schools have provided a wealth of information about these processes. However, it was unclear from the literature if rural

schools respond best to the fidelity approach or to the mutual adaptation approach in order to accomplish the desired change (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970).

Second, the researcher needed to determine if the success of Alaska's Quality Schools Initiative related to a specific change process. Most school change studies focus on how administrators (at the top) manage the change process implemented by teachers (at the bottom).

Third, did the characteristics of each district relate to a sacred or secular culture? The successful implementation of an innovation in a sacred rural environment remained somewhat of a dilemma. Was it better to utilize a fidelity approach in a sacred society or was it better to use mutual adaptation? The school leaders needed to know which process to select as they attempted to positively impact student outcomes (Steigelbauer, 1994).

The final point involved school district size. Did the size of the student population relate to the district's successful implementation of the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative? Was it

better to utilize a fidelity or mutual adaptation approach to change with a large, small, or very small school district?

Importance of the Study

Studies related to change in rural Alaska were few in number and therefore were hard to relate to this study. Most rural studies have been conducted in the lower forty-eight states. The literature on rural schools focused on the choice between the fidelity approach and the mutual adaptation approach (Iannacoccone & Lutz, 1970). Little relevant research was available concerning either the fidelity-mutual adaptation and the sacred-secular societies issues which were derived from rural, or specifically Alaskan schools.

If administrators want change to be successful, they have to manage change. Successful implementation of any innovation requires not only that organizational problems be clearly identified and appropriate solutions selected, but that they be correctly introduced depending upon the school culture. Successful

innovations may be either fully adopted (fidelity) or adapted (mutual adaptation) to meet the needs of the school. A successful innovation is one that has achieved the desired outcomes and becomes enculturated or imbedded into the practice of the school. It is important that rural school administrators know which process to use to achieve the best results (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988).

It is unclear which change process, the fidelity approach or mutual adaptation approach, actually works best in Alaska's rural school environment. The prevailing role of an educational administrative leader in rural Alaska has been one of an external benefactor providing services to an indigenous, largely Native, population. This is all the more compelling because much of the early education in rural Alaska was sacred and was done by missionaries, priests, or nuns. Inherent within this traditional model is the highly centralized process of command and control of educational programs. Administrators are perceived as authority figures responsible for making changes and seeing that subordinates follow through on the implementation of these changes (Barnhardt,

1979).

In Alaska, the hierarchical structure has had the effect of stifling new innovations, except those that are introduced or blessed by officially sanctioned administrators. It is possible that subordinates are accustomed to implementing innovations through a fidelity approach instead of allowing for mutual adaptation. As a result, program innovations which have introduced new variables or have posed a threat to established procedures have been successfully resisted (Barnhardt, 1979). The continued use of a fidelity approach may reinforce the resistance to change that the administrator seeks to avoid in the first place. It is questionable if it is possible to implement adaptive change in a sacred society at all. Yet, adaptive implementation is more likely to be successful. Therefore, it is important to know if a fidelity approach or a mutual adaptation approach seems to be most related to success.

This study has focused on the results of using different approaches (mutual adaptation or fidelity) in Alaska's rural schools or societies (secular or sacred). An administrator needs to

understand the local educational setting in which the innovation is to be implemented. Without this understanding of the educational setting and the understanding of the innovation process, change will not be easily implemented or institutionalized (Eastwood & Louis, 1992).

Research Questions

This study focused on: analyzing the implementation of the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative; identifying relationships between change process, school culture, district size, and innovation success; and describing the personal response of superintendents to the demand for change posed by the Initiative. To explore these areas, several questions were posed.

1. Which change process was used when implementing the innovation?

2. What was the district's culture (secular or sacred) in regard to change?

3. Was the innovation successfully implemented?

4. Was there a discernible relationship between the change process, culture of the district, size of the district and success of the implementation?

Definitions

Rural district. A rural district is a district that is not on the highway or road systems of Alaska (Air or marine travel is necessary to reach the school.), or does not have a student population over 3,500 (Digest of Educational Statistics, 1997).

Change process. A change process is the strategy by which schools accomplish their goals more effectively by replacing some structures, programs and/or practices with better ones (Fullan, 1991).

Innovation. An innovation is any thought, behavior, or idea that is new because it is qualitatively different from the existing educational approach which is being used (Owens, 1991).

Successful change. A successful change is one that has achieved the desired effects, and the results of which may be placed on a continuum ranging from very desirable outcomes to very undesirable outcomes (Hanson, 1985; Hersey & Blanchard, 1988).

Successful innovation. A successful innovation is an innovation that has achieved its desired outcomes or implementation and the results may be placed on a continuum ranging from very desirable outcomes to very undesirable outcomes (Hanson, 1985; Hersey & Blanchard, 1988).

Sacred society. A sacred society is a school, school district, institution, or community whose culture tends to be more highly resistant to or tends to avoid change (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970).

Secular society. A secular society is a school, school district, institution, or community whose culture tends to be more open to or seeks change (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970).

Fidelity approach to change. The fidelity approach is characterized by a high degree of adherence to the developer's model that is expected from the school or teacher (Fullan, 1991).

Mutual adaptation approach. The mutual adaptation approach is the process by which schools can make adaptations or improvements to the developer's innovation (Hall & Hord, 1987).

Limitations

1. The study was limited to the districts from rural Alaska that had a district student population under three-thousand-five-hundred (3,500).

2. This study used only rural public K-12 districts and no private school districts were included.

3. Districts that were K-6, K-8, K-10, or any configuration other than K-12 were not included.

Delimitations

1. The data collection covered a period of time from February, 1999 to March, 1999.

2. The results of the study reflect the bias of the persons who completed the survey.

3. The results of the study reflect the bias of the researcher's interpretation of the answers of the survey.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Education is constantly coping with change that originates from many sources. This investigation was concerned with change which is planned versus change which occurs as a result of political forces or through the natural process of organizational evolution.

Any change is difficult and resistance to change is natural, occurring at both the personal and organizational level. This reality often impacts school administrators attempting to make changes within rural schools. It is well-known that teachers often resist well thought out reasonable changes (Hall & Hord, 1987). Most administrators have been surprised when innovations that are near and dear to their core beliefs fail due to a lack of teacher support. Therefore, in order to understand the change process, administrators need an understanding of the historical perspective of change. Knowledge of past change processes will help today's

administrators manage change innovations.

This chapter is divided into the following major areas of literature review: a) educational history of Alaska, b) history of change, c) mutual adaptation, d) the fidelity perspective, and e) barriers to change.

Educational History of Alaska

Formal education in Alaska began with Gregory Shelikov when he began teaching for the Russian colony in 1784 on Kodiak Island. The first recorded school was a Russian Orthodox school at Sitka in 1805. The American religious and educational missionaries made a great educational effort to educate the Alaskan population (Carpenter, 1978).

Congress passed the Organic Act in 1884, which directed the Secretary of the Interior to provide education for all children in Alaska without regard to race. Although Congress appropriated monies for education, the funds were inadequate to accomplish the

task of educating the children of Alaska. It was therefore necessary for the Director of Education, Sheldon Jackson, to appeal to various religious organizations to help in the educational process (Naske & Slotnick, 1987).

The state was divided into areas by the church organizations for missionary education - southeast Alaska was for the Presbyterians, upper Bristol Bay and Kuskokwim area for the Moravians, Lower Yukon or Holy Cross area for the Roman Catholics, the Alaskan Peninsula and Aleutians for the Methodists, Cook Inlet and Prince William Sound for the Baptists, the Interior and North Slope for the Episcopalians, the Bering Sea and Bering Strait for the Congregationalists, the Norton Sound and Port Clarence for the Swedish and Norwegian missions (Carpenter, 1978).

In 1912, towns supported education for non-Natives and the Bureau of Education operated schools for non-Natives. When Alaska became a territory, the territorial legistature passed a law that all children would be educated (Naske & Slotnick, 1987).

In 1931, the Bureau of Indian Affairs took over the operation

of rural schools in Alaska. The State of Alaska opened several regional high schools for educating the high school students. The villages missed having high school students in their communities and in 1972, the State of Alaska was sued by Molly Hootch, a student from Emmonak, because she had to attend high school in Anchorage rather than in her hometown. In 1976, the State agreed with the plantiff and with the consent decree and constructed high schools in villages that had an elementary school. In 1984, the Bureau of Indian Affairs turned over the education of Alaska Natives to the State of Alaska. Senate Bill 36, passed in the spring of 1999, has funded those K-12 schools with student populations of ten or more (Antonson & Hanable, 1985).

History of Educational Change

In American schools, change has traditionally been implemented through a process of natural diffusion. Natural diffusion is the process by which new ideas and practices are spread

in an unplanned way from school district to school district (Owens, 1991). The result is that schools adopt changes haphazardly or adopt innovations very slowly. Innovations that are implemented through natural diffusion often fail to produce the results that are desired (Mort, 1958). Change takes about fifty years to be diffused and accepted in school districts throughout the country. Consequently, the average district lags twenty-five years behind the accepted best practice of the times (Mort, 1958).

> Educational change proceeds very slowly. After an invention which is destined to spread throughout the school appears, fifteen years typically elapse before it is found in three percent of the school systems....After practices reach the three percent point of diffusion, their rate of spread accelerates. An additional 20 years usually suffices for an almost complete diffusion in an area the size of an average state. There are indications that the rate of spread throughout the nation is not much slower today.

The launch of Sputnik I in 1957 accelerated the development of innovations during the 1960s. The sixties brought about new math and science curriculums, ungraded schools, open classrooms, audio-lingual language laboratories, and programmed instruction (Fullan, 1991; Gibboney, 1991). According to Fullan (1991), the sixties were

known as the adoption period because districts were preoccupied with how many innovations could be implemented. The more innovations, the better the district and this was how districts were judged as being successful.

During the sixties, new ideas were adopted without question and with little or no thought to follow-through activities. The consequences of wholesale adoptions of innovations resulted in dissatisfaction with any improvement project and many implementation efforts failed (Fullan, 1991).

Innovations in the late seventies and early eighties were starting to emerge with successful ideas including behavioral objectives, mastery learning, accountability, and competency based curriculum and testing (Gibboney, 1991). The eighties also culminated the research based on effective schools and effective teaching that began in the seventies. Within the same time frame the Department of Education released A Nation at Risk, (1983).

A Nation at Risk (1983) proposed changes that were assumed essential for education in today's competitive world. These

recommendations called for tougher course work requirements, higher admissions standards to universities, a longer school day, merit pay for teachers, and more participation by parents in schools (Keedy, 1990).

During the eighties all states made changes in their schools as a result of A Nation at Risk (1983). Chief among these changes were higher standards for high school graduation, competency testing for teachers, open enrollment, and magnet schools (Doyle, Cooper & Trachtman, 1991).

During the early nineties, many states and districts turned to mandatory solutions, and with a crisis mentality, schools quickly adopted solutions that were believed to address a specific issue. Primary changes implemented during the nineties were site-based management, teacher empowerment, collaborative work cultures, and strategic planning (Fullan, 1991). These changes came at a time when there was less funding for schools and a greater demand made for quality in education (Cuban, 1992).

In past decades, efforts to improve schools came about partly

due to a wave of prosperity, implementing successful change will become harder in the future. The 1990s and beyond will be different; schools will have limited resources to deal with more mandates from state level authorities. Excellence in schools can be attained in the future by using the positive focused approaches to change that occurred in the eighties and nineties (Doyle, Cooper & Trachtman, 1991).

The purpose of planned change is to help school districts accomplish their stated mission more effectively by replacing some structures, programs, and/or practices with something better. Current approaches to change are dominated by developing strategies and tactics to control the change process (Owens, 1991).

There are numerous definition and methodological problems involved with assessment of the success of the innovation being implemented. One direction for research about implementation processes tends to study the degree of implementation of the innovation according to the intended or planned use; this is called fidelity of implementation. The second primary direction for

implementation is to examine how the innovation is modified during the adaptation process; this is called mutual adaptation (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977).

Fidelity Perspective

The study of the fidelity perspective in implementation has focused on the degree of adherence to the original tenets of the innovation. By closely following the innovation, the desired outcome of the change occurs. Innovations consist of a number of relatively well-designed components called key elements, and should closely follow rigorously developed and evaluated programs. Innovations are supposed to be implemented as closely as possible to the original models. Doing otherwise will lead to innovations that are less than effective (Boruch & Gomez, 1977; Calsyn, Tornatzky & Dittmar, 1977).

A more moderate approach to fidelity was taken by Hall and Loucks (1978) who stated that adaptation is acceptable up to a

point, beyond which the innovation loses its integrity. Therefore, the parameters of fidelity are of crucial importance to the innovation being implemented.

There are five situational parameters of change to be considered when planning to implement an innovation: (1) incremental or major change, (2) theoretical or technological certainty, (3) conflict over goals and means, (4) institutional structure, and (5) stability of environment. A relatively structured environment supports the fidelity approach (Berman, 1980).

Administrators within the central office level or at the building level often fail to acknowledge the needs of those who are being asked to implement the change in the classroom. Educators are taught to respond to the needs of students, but somehow administrators forget to respond to the needs of those required to implement instructional change, the teachers (White, 1990).

Some of the benefits of the fidelity approach are that it works, saves money, and saves time with little exploration (Berman,1980). The problems that can arise from the fidelity

approach are the lack of ownership by those who are implementing the change and the use of canned programs (McLaughlin, 1989).

Mutual Adaptation

In the mid-seventies researchers began to document that educators, when implementing innovations, changed those innovations to fit their own situations. This is known as mutual adaptation, a process that allows components of the innovation to adapt to the individual culture within an organization (Loucks, 1983 & Meara, 1979).

The Rand study group found that federal policies had a major role in encouraging local school districts to undertake projects that were generally congruent with federal guidelines, but that adoption of a project consistent with federal goals did not ensure successful implementation. The Rand study further found that although successful implementation did not predict long-run continuation of the project, effective innovation did promote mutual adaptation in

each institutional setting. Effective implementation of an innovation supported the process of adaptation through feedback, identification and correction of mistakes, and building support for the project. The Rand study group concluded that local choices about how to put an innovation into practice have more significance for change than the innovation itself (McLaughlin, 1989).

Research has cast considerable doubt on the validity of the fidelity approach to implementation (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977). Fullan's and Pomfret's study concluded that any description of the use of the innovation should take into account not only the characteristics of the organization, but the process by which the innovation is adapted and implemented. Researchers have cast doubt on the assumption that the degree of effectiveness is often influenced by the degree of implementation (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977; Hall & Loucks, 1977).

As the new program is implemented, the participants begin to identify different needs and therefore make modifications to fit the needs identified within the organization. Successful

implementation of an innovation will not occur unless it is perceived as meeting a specific need in the organization, identified during the adaptation of the innovation (White, 1990).

Proponents of the mutual adaptation process have stated that adopters of the innovation (teachers) have a greater understanding of the organizational climate and structure which relate to the use of the innovation than those who developed the change or those who require the change (Hall & Hord, 1987). The differing organizational context results in a need to incorporate the level and degree of teacher involvement in the change process:

1. Frequent staff development opportunities designed to meet the developmental needs of the teachers are seen as a supporting factor (Guskey, 1986).

2. The length of teaching career is negatively correlated with successful implementation and is generally seen as an obstacle to the process (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978).

3. When teachers view the principal as supportive of an innovation, the level of implementation tends to increase (Hall & Hord, 1987).

4. The availability and variety of incentives encouraging participation in an innovation are important factors in determining the level of teacher involvement in the change process (Hall & Hord, 1987).

Fidelity or mutual adaptation differ to the degree to which the implemented innovation is similar to the innovation in its original form and to the degree that participants effect the formation of the adoption. It is possible that adoption would become routinized and survive because it was used with a high degree of fidelity. On the other hand, a program that is adapted would become routinized and survive because the teachers or change agents changed the innovation to fit the school culture (Blakely, 1983). The implementation of the innovation, whether it be large or small, adapted partially or adopted as a whole, is as important to the success of its outcome as the organizational structure of the school (White, 1990).

Other research suggests that organizational structure, culture, and political factors can have a direct impact on the nature and extent of change occurring within the school. The importance of teacher participation is a critical element in the successful implementation of change. Administrators should view change as an ongoing process, not as a single event (White, 1990).

Barriers to Change

Sacred-secular concepts help us understand barriers to change. It is predictable that conflict will occur in public education because schools which are sacred societies impress upon their members certain organizational behaviors, and this culture of tradition makes for a higher degree of resistance to change. A secular school is not likely to be as isolated or as resistant to change and tends to be more open without the rigid barriers to change (Lutz & Merz, 1992).

Small rural Alaskan schools provide a natural environment for sacred behaviors. Education literally was synonymous with sacred societies in rural areas due to the early presence of missionaries, priests, and nuns who started rural schools. Also, in rural Alaskan communities everyone knows nearly everyone else, of what they are capable, and not only what they are doing, but also their faults, needs, potential, and background (Barnhardt, 1979). This is not to say that all small schools are sacred or that large urban schools are secular (Lutz & Merz, 1992). The schools that tend to search for

consensus, avoid conflict, or resist change are considered sacred (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970).

A secular society is likely to be less isolated than a sacred society because a secular society is one in which resistance to change is at a minimum. Secular societies are normally open to change, whereas sacred societies are communities that resist change and value tradition (Lutz & Merz, 1992).

Communities exist along the sacred-secular continuum; they tend to be more one or the other, and more than likely the community will exhibit some elements at both ends of the continuum (Lutz & Merz, 1992). Successful introduction of innovations may require different and sometimes opposite methods of implementation depending on whether the community is sacred or secular.

Most school reformers are frustrated as a result of organizational structure, culture, and the political nature of communities. Most Americans still regard schools as successful according to Haberman (1994). The public wants to improve the educational system that it believes in, while most experts or

reformers want to change it in part or in totality (Haberman, 1994).

Despite the widespread call for educational reform, the literature on change states that change is difficult and resistance is natural (Margolis, 1991). There is a natural conflict between traditional views and reform in American education. Parents want schools to be like they were in the past but know their children must be prepared for a different future (Margolis, 1991).

At the building level, successful change requires that the administrators understand why teachers are resistant to change. Resistance is less likely to occur when teachers view the change or innovation as meaningful to their lives. Margolis (1991) has urged that those desiring change should:

*Not impose solutions upon people.
*Concentrate on beliefs and perceptions.
*Emphasize processes and open systems thinking.
*Focus on what people think is immediately important and troublesome.
*Encourage innovation and change with the potential to achieve mutually desired goals.
*Eliminate barriers to reform.

Keys to overcoming barriers to change are understanding and responding to both the structural and personal factors causing

resistance. Open communication is invaluable in breaking the barriers to change. When implementing innovations the change agent must remember that changing a teacher's belief system is a task that is far more complicated, difficult, and time consuming than leaders expect (Hanson, 1985). Therefore, being knowledgeable about change process may be both the best offense and the best defense that administrators have in managing educational change.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The review of the literature has suggested a difference in levels of resistance to change in sacred and secular societies. The purpose of this study was to discover and analyze the implementation of the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative, to identify relationships between change processes, school culture, district size, innovation success, and to describe the personal responses of superintendents to the demand for change posed by the Initiative.

The purpose was defined by four research questions. 1. Which change process was being used when implementing the innovation? 2. What is the district's culture (secular or sacred) in regard to change? 3. Was the innovation being successfully implemented? 4. Was there a discernible relationship between the change processes, culture of the district, size of the district, and success of the implementation?

The qualitative nature of the study allowed the researcher to

analyze how superintendents have responded to the demand for systemic change posed by the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative, and to assess the success of the implementation, in relation to the local district's culture and the change process employed.

Description of Population

The definition of a rural school district in Alaska is based on its size and location. A rural district is one that is located off of the State road system and has a population of less than 3,500 students (Digest of Education Statistics, 1997). With only a total of 54 school districts in the state of Alaska, all rural districts that met the above criteria were examined in this study. This involved a total of 37 districts which were divided into three categories (very small, small, or large) as described in Table 1 on the next page.

Table 1. Public school districts and enrollment by size of district. Digest of Education Statistics (1997).

Number of Alaska School Districts by Organizational Category

District size	Number of districts	Percent of total
1. very small 1 to 300 pupils	12	32%
2. small 301 to 700 pupils	14	38%
3. large 701 to 3,500 pupils	11	30%
Total	37	100%

The twelve very small districts averaged 1.8 in central office personnel. The very small districts' personnel usually included the superintendent and a business manager. The fourteen small districts averaged 4.2 central office personnel which included a superintendent, business manager, special education director and a director of maintenance. The eleven large districts had an average of 8.1 personnel in their central offices with personnel titles ranging from superintendent, assistant superintendent, director of curriculum, business manager and other assorted positions. Secretaries and accounts payable personnel were not included in these personnel counts as these information numbers were not

available for all districts (Office of Data Management, 1997).

Data Collection

Data about the implementation of the Initiative was collected from each of the superintendents through a telephone survey. Each question in the survey focused on only one concept and no item was included that did not relate to the objectives of this study. Success of the research depended entirely on verbal communication; i.e., the clarity of the questions and the rapport that was established between the interviewer and the superintendents. To inform the superintendents about the telephone survey and the questions to be asked, each superintendent was contacted through an e-mail several weeks before the calls were made. This communication provided each superintendent an opportunity to prepare for the interview.

The Interview

At the outset of the interview the researcher tried to set a businesslike tone using a moderate pace. The format for each phone contact included the introduction as outlined by Salant and Dillman (1994):

1. the interviewer's name;
2. the purpose of the interview;
3. a short description of the survey; and,
4. a conservative time estimate of how long the interview would take.

The interview protocol began with simple questions and progressed to more complex questions. There was a transition from one subject to the next throughout the interview. The interview was tape recorded for ease and accuracy in analyzing the data. If a superintendent refused to be tape recorded, the researcher hand-wrote the responses.

Superintendents were interviewed regarding their perception of the effectiveness of the implementation of the Initiative. Each superintendent was also asked questions about their school's culture

(secular versus sacred) to establish in which society or culture the superintendent was working. Questions about the process of implementation were asked to establish which approach (mutual adaptation versus fidelity) was being utilized. Inquiry was also made regarding success of the implementation.

The Survey Protocol

The survey protocol was developed for this study using information developed from the review of literature. Specifically, literature in the areas of: (1) school cultures, sacred societies versus secular societies; (2) approach to change, mutual adaptation versus fidelity approach to change; (3) the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative; and (4) the effectiveness of implementation of the Initiative, provided the basis for the protocol. Twenty open ended questions designed to elicit discussion from the superintendents were developed.

The survey protocol was pilot tested with three Alaskan

school district superintendents not included in this study. The pilot study was conducted using a telephone survey protocol. The purpose of this pilot test was to check that the content and sequence of the questions were understandable and logical. The pilot subjects were asked to indicate when there was confusion or questions about the information being asked. Based on these three conversations, adjustments were made to the survey protocol.

A part of the pilot test was to analyze the data provided by the three superintendents. The results of this analysis were reviewed and verified by a former superintendent. This same process was used in the analysis and interpretation of the data collected from the superintendents involved in this study.

Data Analysis

The telephone interviews were conducted during the months of February and March, 1999. The analysis of the data came from responses to the interview questions. The open-ended questions

produced lengthy comments from the superintendents. Responses varied according to the specific situation of the superintendent. Consistency of definition was key to placing districts on the continuum for the areas of type of society (secular/sacred), implementation (mutual adaptation/fidelity approach), and the degree of successful implementation.

A set of benchmark words and/or phrases, related to the definitions of mutual adaptation and the fidelity approach to change and sacred or secular societies were utilized to help identify the implementation strategy used and the type of society the school served. The benchmark words and phrases were identified from various authors describing the change approaches. The benchmark words or phrases used to reflect mutual adaptation strategies by the school district were:

variation,
process with adjustments,
negotiation,
flexibility,
new methodology,
modifications,
local fit, and
manipulating (Elmore, 1978; Fullen & Pomfret, 1977; Fullan,

1991; Fullan & Miles, 1992; Hall & Hord, 1987; Huberman & Miles, 1984 & Mort, 1958).

Likewise, a set of benchmark words or phrases that defined a fidelity approach were identified. These words and phrases were:

little or no change,
learning new behaviors,
implemented models,
created outside of school,
original design,
intended use, and
planned use (Elmore, 1978; Fullen & Pomfret, 1977; Fullan, 1991; Fullan & Miles, 1992; Hall & Hord, 1987; Huberman & Miles, 1984 & Mort, 1958).

Placement of a district on the fidelity/mutual adaptation continuum was based on the number of times the words and phrases were used by the superintendent during the interview. Also, the intensity and force of the superintendent's voice and inflections of words associated with the change approach, provided indication of the extent that the implementation strategy was used.

The degree of mutual adaptation for a district was placed along a continuum ranging from minor adaptation to total adaptation. Those districts using a fidelity approach to implementing Alaska's Quality Schools Initiative were placed on the continuum indicating

no changes to very minor changes in the innovation. In Figure 2, the continuum used for indicating each district's implementation strategy is illustrated.

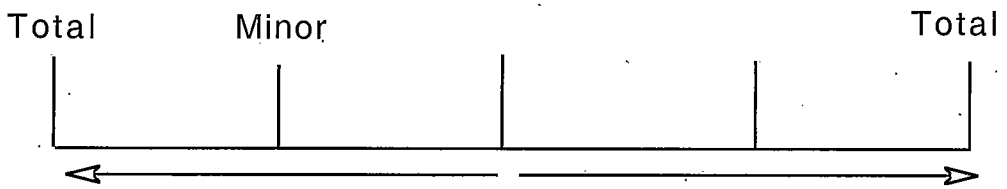

Figure 2. Fidelity or mutual adaptation continuum.

A continuum was used to indicate where the district was in relationship to sacred versus secular societies (See Figure 3). The sacred societies were placed on the far left of the continuum, while secular societies were placed along the continuum from left to right.

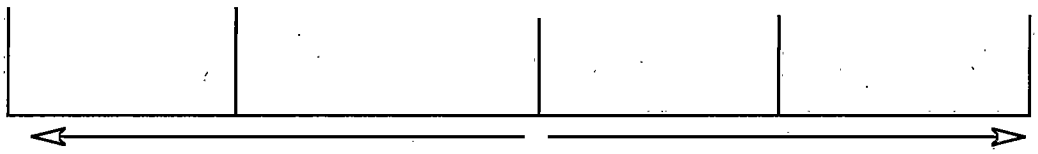

Figure 3. Sacred or secular continuum.

The placement on the model was determined by using

benchmark words or phrases for sacred and secular societies. The words or phrases used to identify a sacred society were:

closed,
closed-minded,
stable,
avoid conflict,
no risk taking,
resistance to state assessment programs,
consensus decision making,
rejection of product measures,
loss of local control,
old ways are better, and
resistance to the change of teacher evaluation forms(Getzels, Lipham & Campbell, 1968; Iannacconne & Lutz, 1970; Lipham & Hoeh, 1974; Lutz & Merz, 1992).

Secular societies were identified by the superintendents use of the following words or phrases when describing the communities in which they worked:

conflict,
accessible,
open,
reform,
open-minded,
high pressure,
constant flux,
emotional neutrality,
up-to-date is prized,
modern is better, and
positive toward change (Getzels, Lipham & Campbell, 1968; Iannacconne & Lutz, 1970; Lipham & Hoeh, 1974; Lutz &

Merz, 1992).

Analysis of the use of the words and phrases in these two lists resulted in the identification of the secular versus sacred nature of the school district's communities. Once identified, the districts were classified as sacred or secular. Secular societies range from accepting some changes to accepting every change, while a sacred society was resistant to any change or adaptation.

When determining successful versus unsuccessful implementation of the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative, a continuum was used to indicate the degree of success in the district's implementation. Unsuccessful implementation was reflected on the extreme left of the design while successful implementation was indicated on the right of the continuum (See Figure 4). The placement, unsuccessful versus successful implementation on the continuum, was determined by having the superintendents rate their district's success from one to ten with one being unsuccessful and ten being successful.

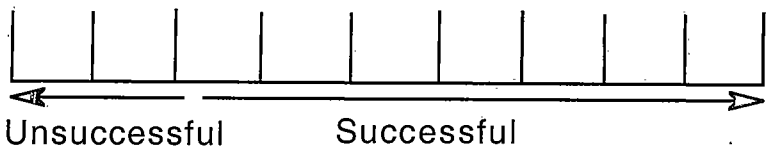

Figure 4. Unsuccessful or successful continuum.

The success of implementation of the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative by a district was indicated by degrees of success. For this study, a successful innovation was one that met one of the two following criteria; the innovation had achieved the desired outcomes or become enculturated or imbedded into the practice of the school. A district that had accomplished less than half of implementation of the Initiative was categorized as unsuccessful.

Analysis of Relationships of Implementation Strategies and Culture to Success of Implementation

To analyze the relationship of the degree of success in implementation to the implementation strategy, size of the school

district, and nature of the school's society, a series of matrices were developed. Specifically, for successful implementations a 2 X 2 matrix was created identifying the number of districts using a fidelity approach and mutual adaptation by the type of culture (See Figure 5). A similar matrix was developed for districts with an unsuccessful implementation effort (See Figure 6).

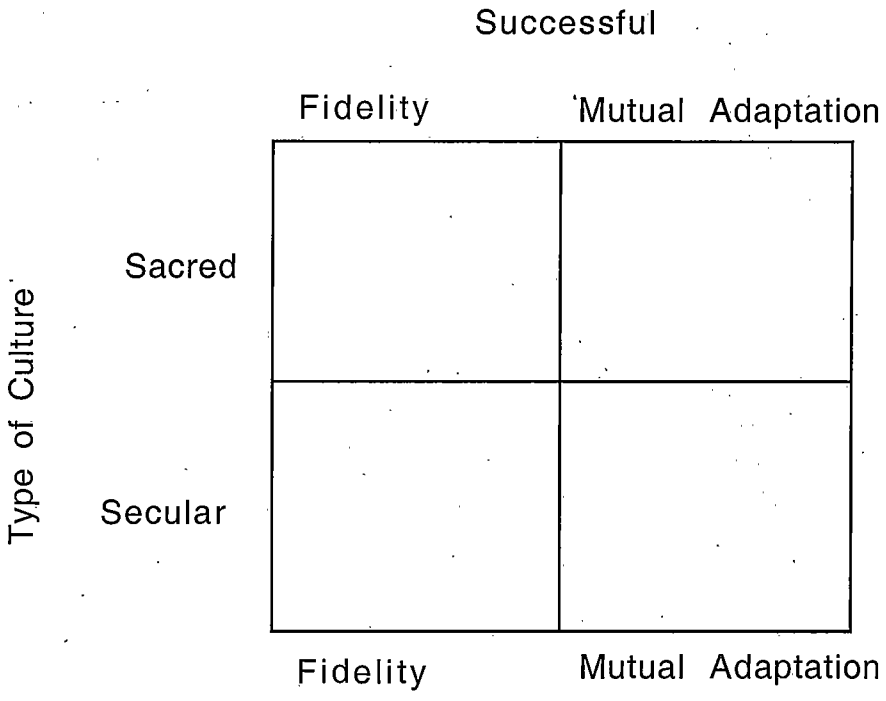

Figure 5. Successful implementation matrix by type of culture and change model.

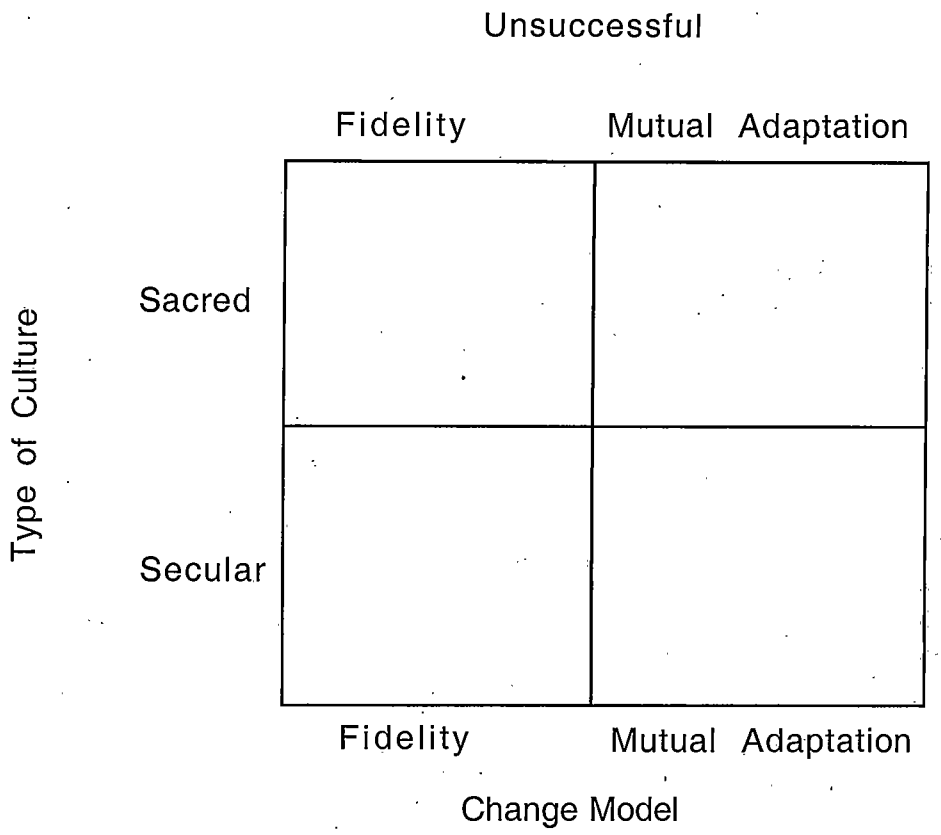

Figure 6. Unsuccessful implementation matrix by type of culture and change model.

The relationship of the degree of success of implementation to the implementation strategy, size of the school district, and nature of the schools culture, for successful implementation was analyzed. Specifically, for successful implementations a 2 X 3 matrix was created identifying the number of districts using a fidelity approach and mutual adaptation approach by the size of the school district

(See Figure 7). A similar matrix was developed for districts with unsuccessful implementation effort (See Figure 8).

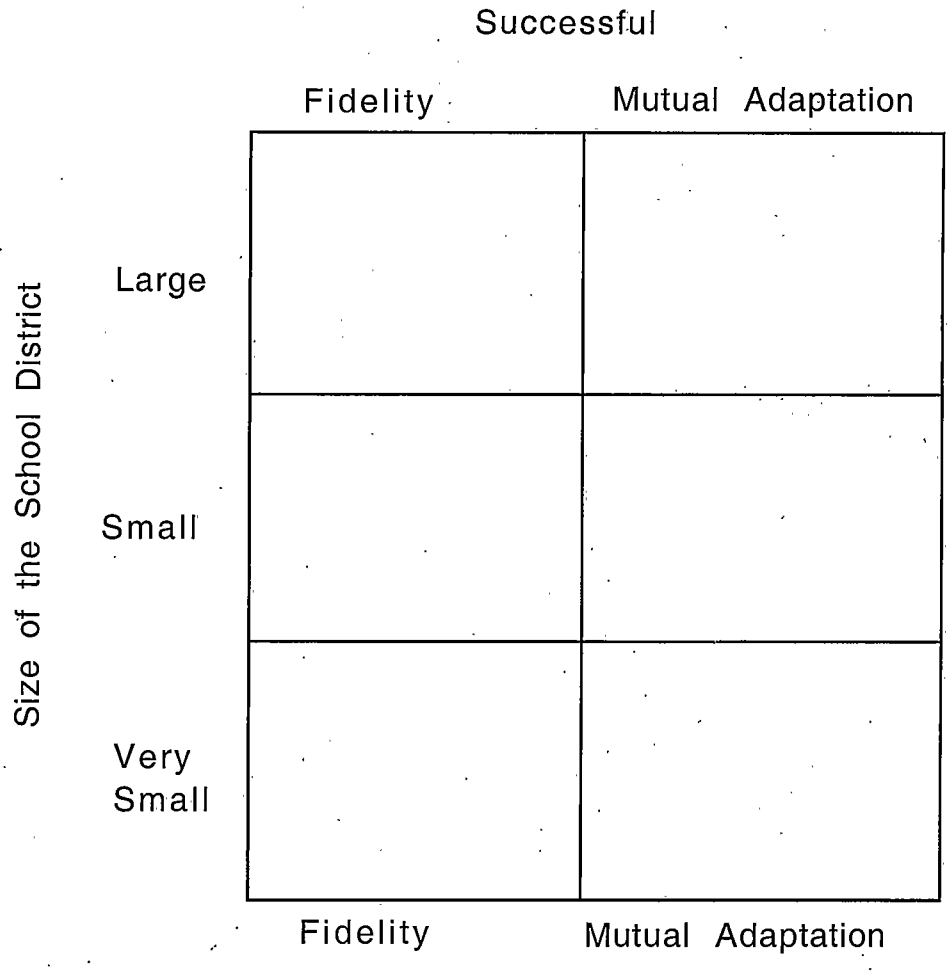

Figure 7. Successful implementation matrix by size of school district and change model.

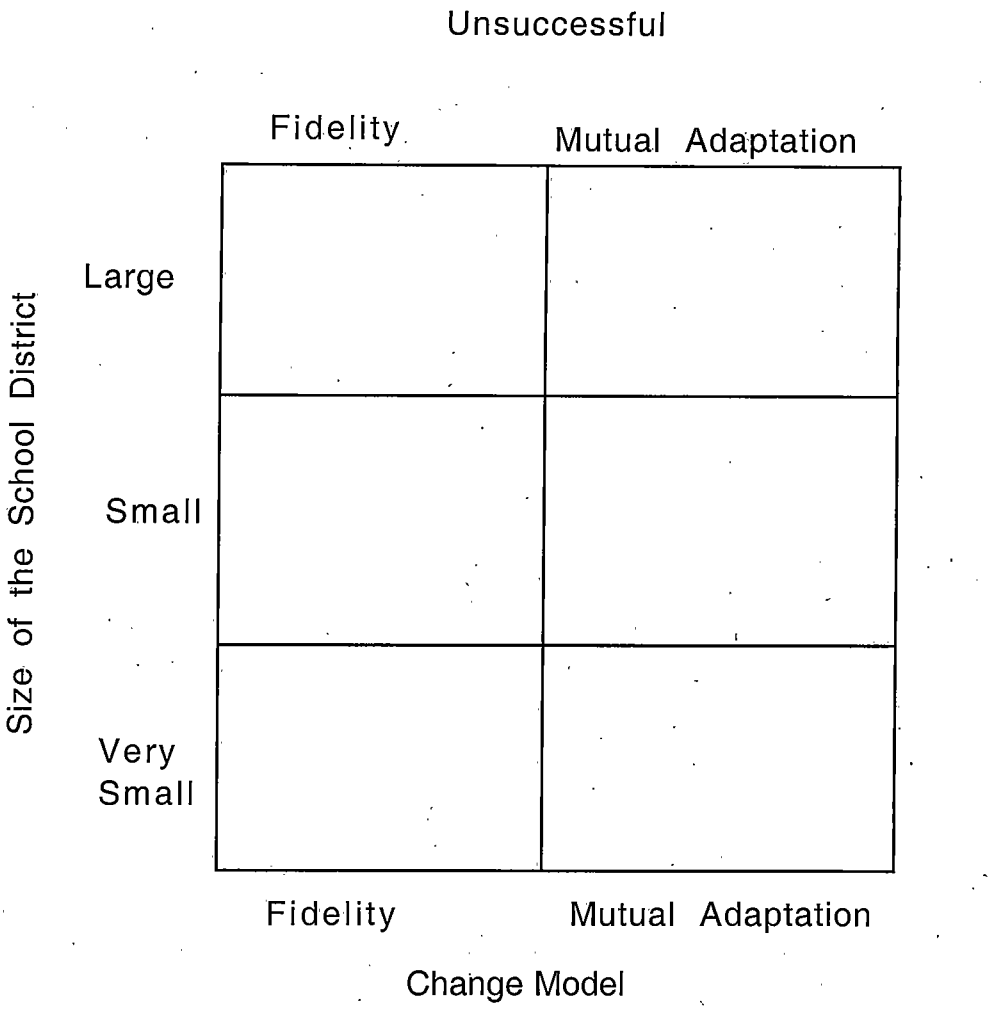

Figure 8. Unsuccessful implementation matrix by size of school district and change model.

With permission, audio tapes were used during the interviews. The recordings were transcribed verbatim. The open-ended nature of the questions allowed the researcher to analyze not only specific word responses to questions, but also to evaluate the

superintendent's attitudes and feelings toward the Initiative. The researcher listened to the tapes and reviewed the transcripts looking for factors such as tone of voice, word choice, conversational emphasis, and examples of actions taken to implement the change. Based on the text and audio tapes, a continuum was developed that provided a measure of the superintendent's attitude about the implementation of the Initiative.

Categories of responses developed readily from comments and tone of conversation from the superintendents. The superintendents' responses were placed on a continuum of denial, anger, resignation, acceptance, and excitement about the Initiative. The attitude of the superintendent was placed on the continuum and compared to the success, culture, and implementation strategy of their districts. Matrices were developed in the same way as those previously described and reflected the relationship of the superintendents' attitude toward the Initiative and its successful implementation strategy, and culture of the school district.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to analyze implementation strategies of the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative in Alaska's rural school districts. The purpose was subdivided into four major research questions: 1. Which change process was being used when implementing the innovation? 2. What is the district's culture (secular or sacred) in regard to change? 3. Was the innovation being successfully implemented? 4. Was there a discernible relationship between the change processes, culture of the district, size of the district and success of the implementation?

The qualitative nature of the study allowed the researcher to analyze how superintendents responded to the demand for systemic change posed by the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative, and to assess whether success of this initiative varied based on district culture, the change process, and size of the district.

To answer to these questions, a comprehensive telephone survey was conducted of rural Alaskan district superintendents that fall within the definition of rural Alaskan school districts (Digest of Educational Statistics, 1997). A protocol was developed to structure the interview and the interviews were tape recorded. In addition, interviewer took notes during the interview.

Analysis of Data from the Interviews

Of the 37 superintendents who had an opportunity to be included in this study, 32 were actually interviewed. Of the five superintendents who were not interviewed, one refused to be interviewed, and the other four were unavailable when calls were placed. This researcher attempted to contact each superintendent on ten different days and at least two to three times each day. The districts of the five superintendents who were not interviewed in this study included two very small districts, one small district, and two large districts. Of the 32 superintendents who were

interviewed, only one refused to be tape recorded. Two of the interviewed superintendents were new to the state of Alaska, five had been superintendents in another district the previous year, and the other 25 superintendents held the same position the previous year.

Of the 32 districts which were studied, 15 "adapted" the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative. Of these 15 districts; five were large, six were small, and four were very small. Of the 17 districts which "adopted" the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative, four were large, six were small, and seven were very small. (See Figure 9).

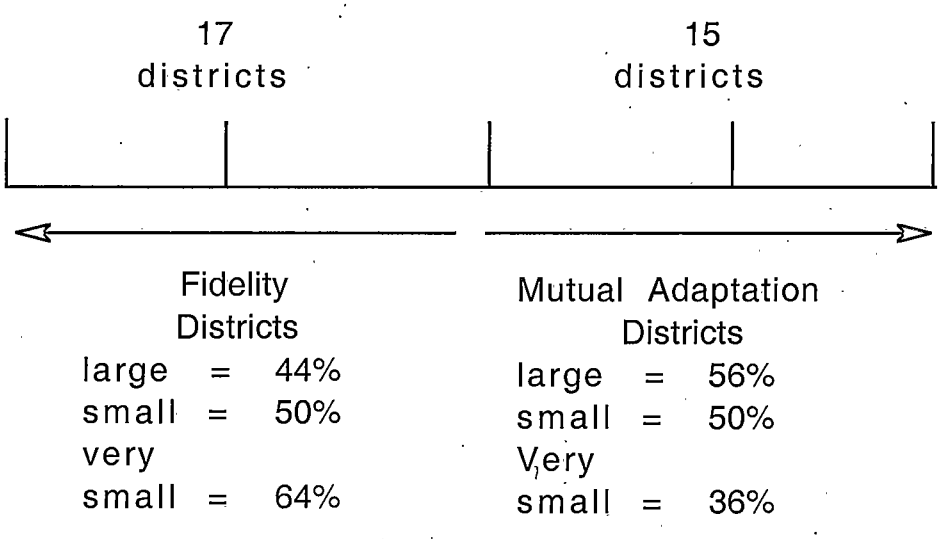

Figure 9. Fidelity or mutual adaptation continuum of the Alaska initiative by size of school district.

Results from the telephone survey indicated that 16 school districts were secular and 16 were sacred. The 16 secular districts were represented by seven large districts, five small districts and four very small districts. The 16 sacred districts consisted of two large districts, seven small districts, and seven very small districts (see Figure 10).

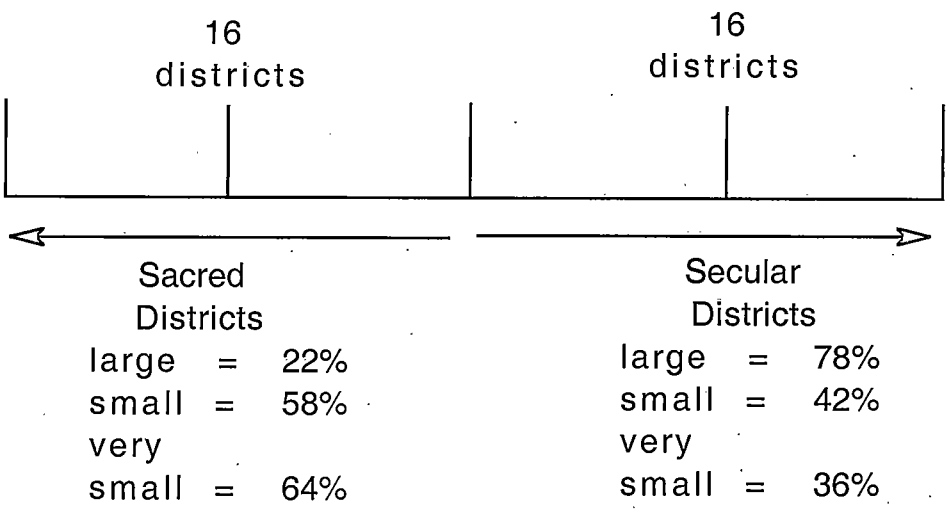

Figure 10. Sacred or secular culture continuum by size of school districts.

Success versus lack of success was derived from the information which the superintendents gave during the survey. This was based on a rating scale from one to ten with ten being the highest. The researcher's assessment as to whether the district

was successful or unsuccessful was also, in part, based on the superintendent's emphasis of voice when responding to the question regarding the success of implementation of the Alaska Quality School Initiative. The definition of success is that the desired outcomes or effects have been achieved (Hanson, 1985; Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). This researcher used five as the dividing line between success and lack of success, as well as the emphasis the superintendent placed on the number when being interviewed. Three superintendents stated they were successful at the rating of five in the implementation of the Initiative. All three school districts were classified as being unsuccessful. The reason for this classification was related to the districts not achieving the desired outcomes or effects.

Seventeen school districts were identified as being successful in their implementation of Alaska Quality Schools Initiative. Seven of these were large districts, five small districts, and five very small districts. There were 15 unsuccessful school districts, of which two were large districts, seven were small districts, and six

were very small districts. These unsuccessful districts were in the beginning stages of implementation of the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative. The districts' superintendents defined themselves as unsuccessful since the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative should have been implemented prior to this study. In Figure 11, a breakdown of successful versus unsuccessful districts by size of school district, is presented.

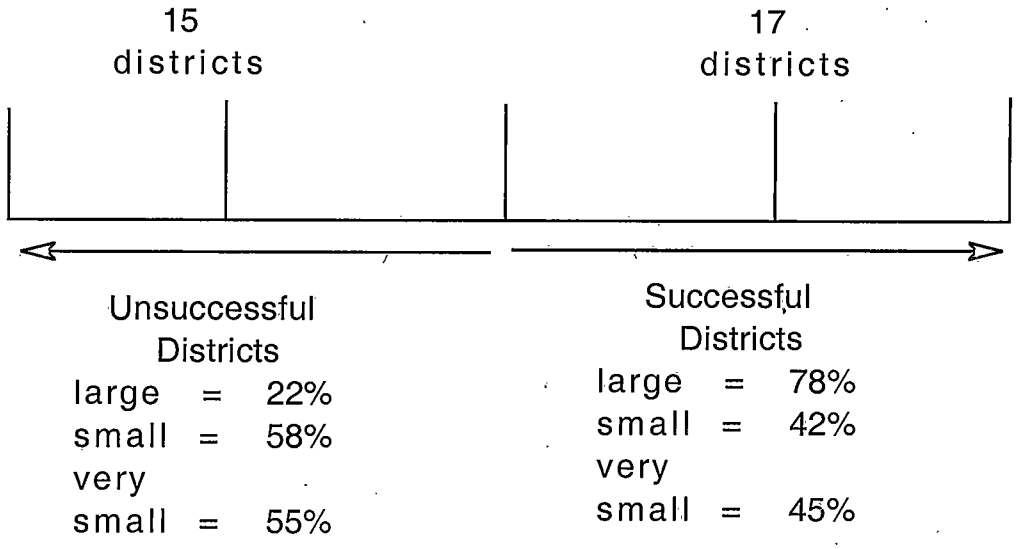

Figure 11. Unsuccessful and successful continuum by size of school district.

A 2 X2 matrix was used to show the relationship or effect between change models used, type of school district culture, and successful or unsuccessful implementation of the Initiative. The

data reflected in the following matrices reflect, the data presented in Figures 9, 10, and 11.

Seventeen districts were successful in implementation of Alaska Quality Schools Initiative with 11 of the districts using a mutual adaptation strategy (See Figure 12). Ten districts were secular and seven were sacred. The greatest success in implementation was found when a mutual adaptation strategy was used in a secular society The other three combinations were approximately equal, with two to four districts represented in each cell.

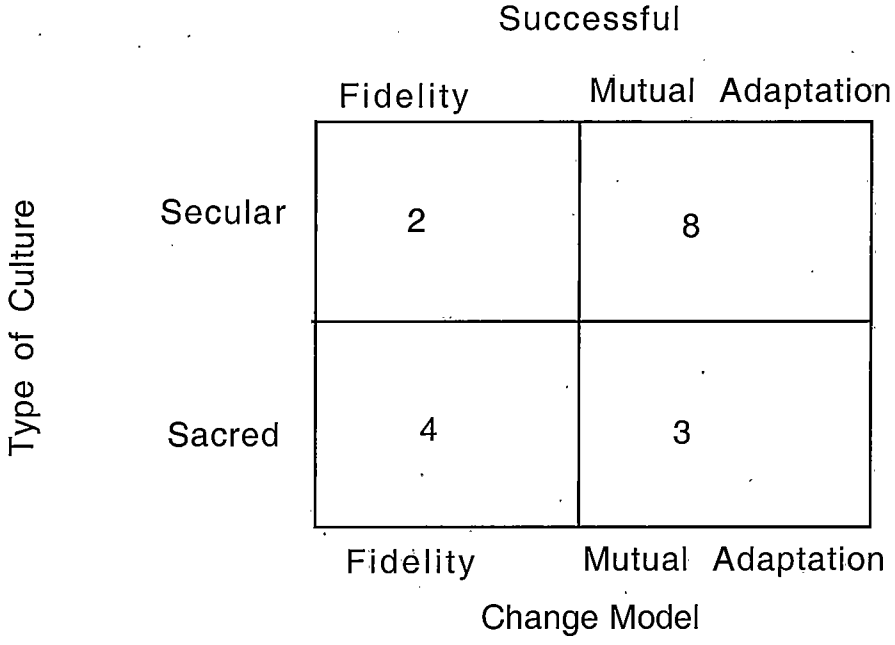

Figure 12. Successful implementation matrix by type of culture versus change model.

Fifteen districts were unsuccessful in implementing the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative (See Figure 13). Seven of these were sacred districts and used the fidelity change model. Two sacred districts that used the mutual adaptation change model. Of the six secular society districts that were unsuccessful, four districts used the fidelity approach to change and two district used a mutual adaptation approach.

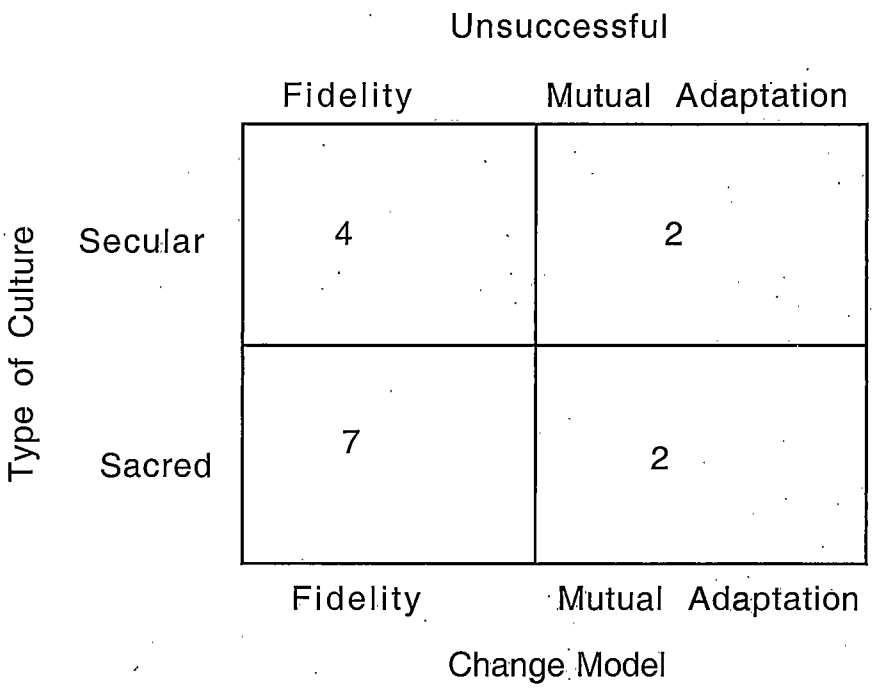

Figure 13. Unsuccessful implementation matrix by type of culture versus change model.

A 2 X 3 matrix (See Figure 14) reflects the relationships between size of the district and change model utilized for the 17 successful districts that implemented the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative innovation. These data are illustrated in Figures 9, 11, and Table 1.

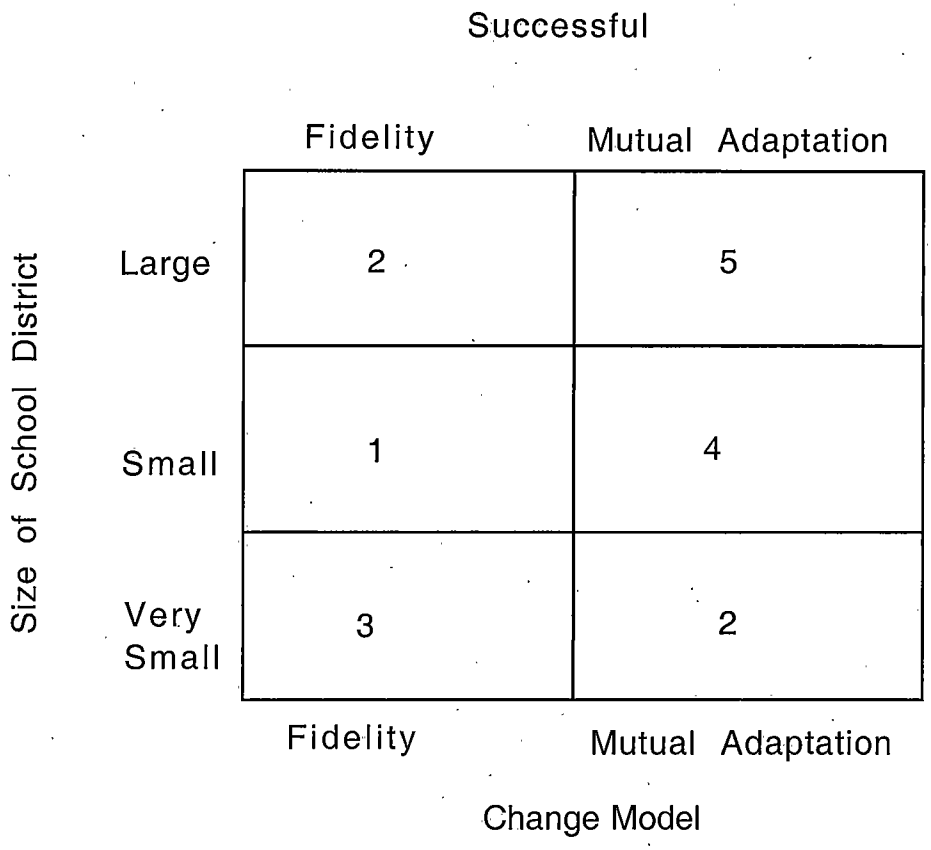

Figure 14. Successful implementation matrix by size of district and change model.

In Figure 14, the distribution of the successful implementation

of the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative is presented, indicating the relationship between the size of district, change model utilized and success of implementation. Seventeen districts were successful in implementing in the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative. Seven large school districts were successful, with two of these districts used the fidelity approach to change, whereas the other five large districts used a mutual adaptation approach to change. Five small districts successfully implemented the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative. Of these, one small district used the fidelity approach and four used the mutual adaptation approach. Five very small districts were successful in implementing the innovation. Three districts used the fidelity approach, whereas two districts used the mutual adaptation approach to change.

Unsuccessful implementation of the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative was found in 15 districts (See Figure 15). Two large districts were unsuccessful using the fidelity approach to change, whereas no large district was unsuccessful in using the mutual adaptation approach. Seven small districts were unsuccessful, with

five using the fidelity model of change and two using the mutual adaptation model. Six very small districts were unsuccessful in implementing the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative; four were unsuccessful using the fidelity approach, and two were unsuccessful using the mutual adaptation approach to change.

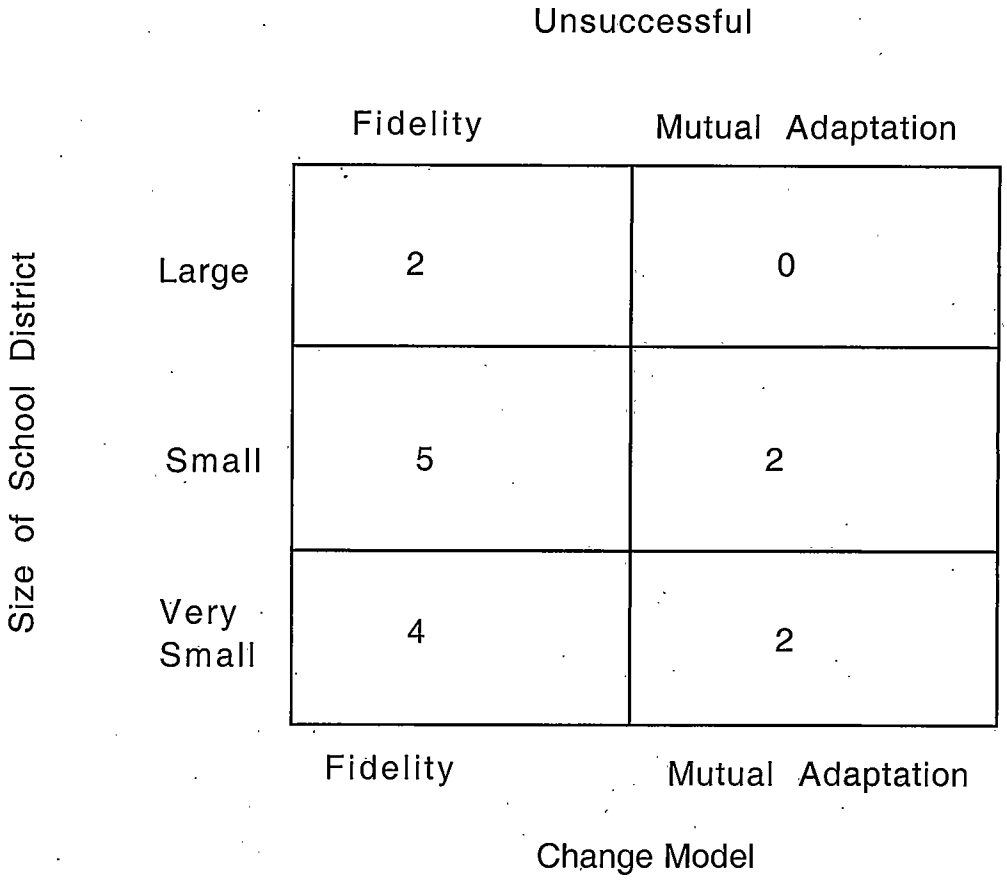

Figure 15. Unsuccessful implementation matrix by size of school district and change model.

Questions 3 and 4 of the telephone protocol (See Appendix A) addressed the district's implementation plan or strategy for the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative innovation. No very small district shared a written implementation plan, while only three written plans by large districts where shared with this researcher.

Superintendent's Attitude Toward the Initiative

In addition to eliciting information for this study's four major research questions, the superintendent interviews yielded a wealth of rich data on how superintendents responded personally to the State's demand for systemic reform in their school districts. These comments occurred spontaneously as part of the structured interview, with the researcher allowing the respondent latitude in bringing forward feelings relevant to the topic. As noted above, interviews were transcribed to facilitate the analysis. The researcher listened to the tapes and read the transcripts with an eye for tone of voice, word choice, conversational emphasis, and

examples of actions taken to implement the change as indicators of the superintendents' personal response to the Quality Schools Initiative. Such an analysis informs this study because of the critical role superintendents play in implementing change in their districts. Regulations such as the Quality Schools Initiative are put in place by people, and the feelings that key leaders, such as superintendents, experience in response to the situation influence the outcome.

For purposes of analysis, respondents were categorized on a continuum according to their dominant feelings. Categories included feelings of denial, anger, resignation, acceptance, or excitement about the Initiative. Categories of responses developed readily and were an elaboration on the change theory cited by several superintendents, one of whom described the following paradigm. "You know change theory as well as I do. There is always a group that resists, a group that is eager, and a group that needs time." The first part of this analysis will elaborate on these categories, and the second part will relate these categories to the four major

research questions. Comments from two superintendents were not included in this analysis as they were not taped. One superintendent refused to be tape recorded, and in conducting the interview with a second superintendent the tape was not started.

Denial

One superintendent appeared to be in denial that his district had to respond to the Quality Schools Initiative with meaningful, systemic changes. Coming from a very small district that is arguably the most isolated in the State, he stated "we really haven't done much" in response to the Initiative. Instead, the superintendent described a district that was focused on internal problems such as "negotiations and other stuff and (we) haven't focused on those type of things, and even our Board hasn't set goals for the last few years." Asked about the changes he had made or planned to make, he responded, "I don't know that we will take any drastic steps. Let me take that back, I think the immediacy of the benchmark and the

qualifying exams are probably . . . going to force awareness and then change." Attempting to justify the district's lack of action, he stated, "I think there is some good to waiting in a sense that we don't have to reinvent the wheel, we can just take those things . . . I think we're doing OK, I don't think that we'll be left out in the cold." This researcher believed that the superintendent shed insight on his motivation in a concluding statement, "I'll be glad when I retire next year." Although this superintendent may have taken some preliminary steps, such as forming a teacher-dominated curriculum committee and assisting his Board in adopting the Standards as written, no specific progress was reported on implementation.

This district appeared to be among the least advanced in the State in implementation of the Quality Schools Initiative as a result of the superintendent's denial of the need to take action. Based on the superintendent's remarks, this researcher believed that substantive implementation would be left for the superintendent hired after the incumbent's retirement, potentially placing the school district at risk of being far behind other districts in the

State in implementation of the Initiative.

Anger

Anger about the Quality Schools Initiative was the predominant focus of four superintendents. Although members of this group had taken some steps to implement the Initiative, they peppered nearly every response with negative remarks about the mandated change. Three of the four superintendents characterized the Initiative as being counterproductive to previous, local efforts at school reform that were perceived to be superior to the Initiative. Describing his feelings, a superintendent from a small district stated, "we were one of the extremely frustrated districts because we were developing district standards way before Department of Education got on the stick, and so I feel . . . now we are having to drop all that work and adopt State standards. We're not real happy with that." Speaking from the viewpoint of a district challenged with significant cross-cultural issues, a superintendent from a very

small district commented that the teacher evaluation tool "met the district's needs more appropriately before we made the changes . . . now the instrument is very specific to state standards, but it doesn't have a whole lot to do with people's ability to get along in the community." A superintendent from a large district also voiced anger about the impact of the revised teacher evaluation tool, "well, we went back to a checklist evaluation for tenured teachers instead of doing something that was really directed toward professional development." A fourth superintendent, who characterized her community as being progressive and willing to make changes to support education, found that the Quality Schools Initiative "has not . . . caused people here to get real excited because" it was not addressing the community's "biggest problem, that we're at 212 percent capacity in a school building . . . and people are concerned about fire safety."

The superintendents' anger extended to the more global issue of the State's right to impose change upon the district. A superintendent from a small district summarized his feelings by

saying, "To be real frank, I think that everybody thinks that we are just getting layer upon layer of bureaucracy imposed on us and losing local control . . . there is a very real danger of actually harming our educational product through increased bureaucracy." A superintendent from a very small district questioned the effectiveness of such a highly structured change imposed from outside the district, saying "I don't think that things work when they are shoved down people's throats." Challenging the essence of the Quality Schools Initiative, a superintendent from a large district stated, "I'm not sure that it's going to have the effect that some would like it to have, which is improvement in the schools that need to improve the most. I'm not sure there is enough meat to it. It's a lot of PR."

Too much change imposed at once, coupled with inability to mobilize support from key groups of stakeholders, especially community members, was a theme repeated again and again. Commenting on mistakes his district had made with implementation, a superintendent from a small school district remarked, "...there are

so many changes coming down so quickly that nobody wants anything to do with them anymore just because it's so overwhelming." Describing his inability to mobilize support from the teaching staff, a superintendent from a small district reported, "for the QSI, there has probably been . . . reticence." A superintendent from a very small district recounted several months of efforts to gather community comment forms for use in the evaluation process with discouraging results, "when I look at the amount of time and effort that I put into that . . . I got just very, very low response." Using a metaphor to describe this situation, a fourth superintendent from a large district commented that "....it's a little like squeezing an elephant into a pop bottle. Change . . . in a school district? Most people don't use those two words in the same sentence . . ."

Feelings of being overwhelmed with change paired with a sense of lack of support in its implementation were reflected in the lack of success these superintendents reported. Three of the four superintendents rated their districts as being unsuccessful in implementing the Quality Schools Initiative. The relationship

between not supporting the change and not being able to implement it was apparent when one superintendent from a small district acknowledged, "I can't say that I have had a very good experience implementing changes that are not needed." Two of the four superintendents acknowledged their efforts were limited because they saw little value in the Initiative. According to a superintendent from a small district, "...we feel like we had an intact program, and to some extent we have had to disrupt it to meet the requirements. I can't be a real cheerleader about needing to jump through more hoops." A second superintendent from a large district, who rated his district as successful, stated that he was dealing with the Initiative by making as few changes as possible, "...we're going to do whatever they tell us we have to do to stay in compliance, and then we're going to try and not have a negative impact on our district in any way."

Concerns about lack of funding to support the Quality Schools Initiative affected two superintendents from small districts in this category. The implications of being asked to implement systemic

change on a reduced budget were the focus of their comments, with one superintendent summing it up by saying, "philosophically, I am opposed to the 'do more with less' message, which is what I feel that I am getting." Going further, a second superintendent despaired of being able to implement the Initiative in this context, saying "...this plan is being put on us . . . financially we can't meet (it) anyway."

In conclusion, this researcher found a relationship between the anger and frustration expressed by this group of superintendents and the extent and effectiveness of actions they were taking to implement the Initiative. Even though their feelings ranged from cynicism to despair, they were similar in their inability to let go of anger as a predominant mood and replace it with concrete, positive steps to move the Initiative forward in their district.

Resignation

Twelve superintendents were categorized as being "resigned" to implementation of the Quality Schools Initiative. As a group, their predominant mood could be characterized by lack of enthusiasm. Although several superintendents mentioned the potential for positive outcomes in their district from the Initiative, they combined these remarks with negative comments about the change. This mixture of feelings caused this researcher to place them in an intermediate category between superintendents whose predominant mood was anger and superintendents who experienced increasingly positive feelings toward the change.

For instance, a superintendent from a very small district found some benefits to the program because "...we are all on the same page now as far as working toward standards across the district" but went on to say "that it has hurt our kids . . . because the teachers are out of the classroom often to get this training. I feel it would have been more successful had we done it the other way around—have teachers trained before we had to plug this thing in." Another

superintendent from a very small district expressed a similar mixture of support and criticism, "I feel that it is a worthy initiative, but I do feel that our state has gone about it in the wrong way with not starting with our younger kids and working up, rather than just starting with the 9th graders and expecting miracles . . ."

The theme of concern about the way the State was approaching the Initiative was replayed by seven of the twelve superintendents. "I think that in the whole state of Alaska, we've got the cart before the horse," a superintendent from a very small district reiterated criticisms about project sequence. Focusing on the tools that superintendents had to implement the Initiative, a superintendent from a small district found that "DOE should take more of a leadership role in some issues that would solve a lot of problems, and I'll use the one example being there are not adequate regulations written for H.B. 465." In this superintendent's experience, an absence of adequate regulations for the mandated teacher evaluation (H.B. 465) had led to teacher union arbitration and law suits when arbitration failed. Finally, looking at the future of the Initiative, a

superintendent from a very small district questioned how it could be sustained in the face of political realities, "...with Governor Knowles' term about to end, and we'll get a new governor in the next few years, I think there will be a question in the state of how this kind of massive change can be sustained."

Frustration with funding for the Initiative was echoed by five of the twelve superintendents in this category. Their concerns were similar to those expressed by superintendents whose predominant mood was anger. Portraying a school system under constant financial stress, a superintendent from a small district described how difficult it was "...to keep morale and standards high when every year you talk about cutting." The relationship between funding and quality surfaced again when a superintendent from a small district commented, "...you can't cut funding to schools and expect performance to go up." Perhaps a superintendent from a large district summed up the dilemma best when he recounted how he explained the situation to his Board, "I keep telling the board, we have the best education we can afford, not the best education we

know how to deliver."

The mixed support for the Initiative expressed by this group of superintendents was exemplified by the fact that only four of twelve had written implementation plans for the Initiative. Although most superintendents voiced a general idea of the direction in which they were heading, they had not committed the project to paper, established action steps, or targeted completion dates. Characterizing this approach, a superintendent from a small district commented, "...we have a plan in terms of we want to get all of our content standards rewritten just as quickly as possible . . . but we didn't put any dates to that because we find that if they are not realistic, then we just can't work up to them." Superintendents whose districts had a written plan tended to describe it as "brief" or integrated with the five–year plan . . . (which) actually does state 'Alaska Content Standards.' " A large district whose plan included "objectives for students, objectives for professional standards . . . a timeline for the next year and a half," reported that is was developed with funding from a grant.

Lack of community involvement in the Quality Schools Initiative was another common concern expressed by superintendents in this category. Eight of twelve superintendents described difficulties obtaining participation from community members as evidenced by low attendance at planning meetings and a low return rate for teacher evaluation forms. Typical remarks from superintendents representing districts of all sizes included, "...community involvement—it has not been the best" . . . "getting more community members and parents involved has been a real problem for us" . . . "very low input from community members" . . . "as far as the community (participation), very little." Of the four superintendents who described a process for obtaining community involvement, three pointed to systems that were in place prior to the Initiative. Even among these superintendents, community involvement was found to be a mixed blessing. A superintendent from a small district reported the process led to delays. "When you involve the public like we do, it can be year–long just to get a certain goal approved that maybe before you could have handled just

as quick and got there much quicker . . ." Talking about working with a community that had a long history of debate on school issues, a superintendent from a large district cited the difficulty of assuring that diverse groups were included, "...sometimes, we weren't as careful as we should have been to make sure that various points of view in the community were represented."

Accountability for the outcomes produced by the districts was not always seen as positive. Fear of being blamed for students' performance on the exit exam was voiced by a superintendent from a small district because "...it will come down to individual school districts being at fault when we start experiencing student failure . . . I see it as some hard times for schools . . . not only funding wise but accountability wise." Taking the problem one step further, a superintendent from a very small district predicted that because of the "high school graduation assessment, it's only just begun when it comes to law suits." However, four superintendents expressed support for the Initiative voicing remarks such as "...we do have to be accountable for teaching and student learning," and we have to

"take this whole assessment business seriously, and begin doing a better job . . ."

In conclusion, this researcher found a relationship between the mixed feelings these superintendents voiced about the Quality Schools Initiative and the uneven nature and results of the actions they were taking to implement the program. A full half of the superintendents reported their districts were unsuccessful in implementing the change.

Acceptance

Six superintendents were categorized as being "accepting" of the Quality Schools Initiative. The predominant mood of members of this category was positive toward the innovation as characterized by their description of benefits from the change, their elaboration on actions taken to implement programs in support of it, and their positive statements regarding community involvement and local support for the Initiative. Despite this more optimistic attitude,

they balanced their remarks with concerns about funding, the timeline for implementation, and lack of support from the State Department of Education.

Positive comments from superintendents reflected the value of a change that promoted standardization. A superintendent from a small district reported that his schools had never had "a clearly articulated or aligned curriculum . . . this was the first systemic curricular change that we've had in recorded history (in the district) . . . and the Quality Schools Initiative gave us the impetus to do so." A superintendent from a large district commented that the Initiative allowed his staff to "focus on fewer things. I think it's going to pull us together (because) we're going to be . . . focused on the same outcomes." Echoing these thoughts, a superintendent from a very small district found that "teachers have always followed the curriculum, but now (they are) . . . more attuned to it. I think that's a positive."

Perhaps what distinguished this category of superintendents the most from those classified as resigned to the change was the

depth and breadth of their descriptions regarding actions they had taken to implement the Initiative, as well as the innovative nature of many of those activities. This observation was noted for all six districts in the category, including the one out of six whose superintendent rated implementation in the district as unsuccessful. Examples of innovative activities undertaken to support the change included: (a) an educational summit with more than 80 people involved, including community leaders and parents; (b) workshops for parent advisory committees to develop their skill level; (c) an early release schedule for students that allowed for development of standards within the existing budget; and (d) a literacy program that included an emphasis on outreach to families with children age birth up to five years old. In addition to these innovations, all districts described typical efforts, such as training for staff and curriculum committees.

Unlike members of previous categories, a majority of superintendents in this group, four, praised the involvement of their communities, and three enthused about the support they felt from

teachers and the community. The educational summit held in a very small district was described as creating "tremendous community involvement . . ." Training for parent advisory committees held in a small district provided the opportunity for "suggestions for 18 to 20 really solid items that we were able to load onto the (school improvement) matrix." A superintendent from a large district reported that "representatives of each one of the elements of the communities have been working on our teams." The superintendent from a very small district who used early release to develop standards reported "a real united front when this decision was made that this was good for kids and that therefore we were going to make it happen with the very limited resources that we have." In every instance, superintendents created a venue for community participation that drew residents into the change process in a meaningful way.

Although the predominant mood of superintendents in this category was positive, an undercurrent of discontent with support from the Department of Education, concerns about funding, and the

timeline for implementation remained. Reiterating concerns heard before, a superintendent from a small district reported that "the biggest problem we have, there is no real help coming out of DOE in terms of sending in a SWAT team or something to deal with this for the small schools. The big schools, they got more pocket change than God's got apples." Understanding what needed to be accomplished, another recurrent theme, was cited as a problem by a superintendent from a very small district, "once again, we are told to do these things. They're not operationalized, they're not explained well."

Lack of funding drew comments from three superintendents who reiterated feelings expressed by members of previous categories. The common thread among all these remarks was concern about "unfunded mandates." A superintendent from a very small district commented, "it's the State's responsibility to fund education. If we have a requirement that we remediate these kids, you have to be telling us where the money is coming from," and from another superintendent in a very small district, "I'm very frustrated

about the fact that financing has not at all followed."

Although this group of superintendents expressed greater support for the Initiative than other groups, only two of six had written implementation plans. However, two more were actively working on developing plans, one with support from a grant, and those without written plans described efforts that included action steps and timelines. For example, a superintendent from a small district without a plan reported, "we have a curriculum plan that calls for curriculum review of two major topics each year, then in the off–year to do authentic assessment and evaluation and tweak it as we go along." A second superintendent from a very small district reported that "we know where we want to be at the end of four years, but because we are so dollar poor, and dependent upon the resources of our personnel, and whatever grants we can raise, we have target goals we're working on, but not dates . . . we hit a real target this year to develop what was going to be in our portfolio."

Despite the presence of plans, written and unwritten, superintendents from this group voiced concerns about the timeline

for implementation. Two superintendents reported that the greatest mistake they made with implementation was trying to move too fast in order to accommodate the State's timeline. For example, a superintendent from a very small district reported, "...we tried to do too much too soon with too little funding. Made people tired." Voicing the same concerns, a superintendent from a small district stated "the impact here has just been overwhelming and massive and if I had it to do over again, I'd thumb my noise and say 'you guys just wait your turn, we'll take it one at a time, and it's going to take us five times as long to do what you're doing, or if you want to shove it down our throats, come on in and just do it, you know, but give us a hand, give us the money.' I suppose the smart thing to do would have been not to jump into this wholeheartedly."

In conclusion, this researcher found that there was a relationship between the more accepting attitude these superintendents displayed and the positive steps they were taking to implement the program. Five of six of these superintendents rated their districts as being successful in implementing the Initiative.

Despite this approach, these superintendents reported significant barriers to successful implementation, such as funding, tight timelines, and lack of substantial support from the State.

Excitement

Seven superintendents were categorized as being "excited" about the Quality Schools Initiative. Their predominant attitude toward the innovation was very positive, making them similar to the group of superintendents categorized as "accepting" of the change. Moving further along the continuum, members of this group distinguished themselves by emphasizing the benefits of strategic planning, community and board involvement, and the value of a formal implementation plan while voicing fewer complaints about factors such as funding, the timeline, and support from the Department of Education. Also, two had successfully engaged the Department of Education in helping them implement the change.

Five of seven superintendents reported that their districts had

conducted strategic planning that led to significant systemic change. For example, a superintendent from a large district reported using a "model for strategic planning . . . we came up with our district goals and strategies . . . then we went to each of our 15 sites and held a site–based strategic planning session. All of the sites now have their own school improvement plan." Describing the results of the strategic planning process, a superintendent from a very small district reported "...we've done so much dramatic reform. It's not been piecemeal. We didn't think that we could just change instructional strategies, or just teacher evaluation, or just assessment strategies, or just Board policy. We felt like we had to do whole thing. Otherwise, we were trying to run the Indy 500 in a Model A Ford." A superintendent from a large district enthused about strategic planning, saying "Of the strategic plan that we adopted in 1994 . . . 95 percent or more of what we said . . . has been done. It's been amazing to watch. I'm an absolute advocate of strategic planning . . ."

Community involvement was a key ingredient in the strategic

planning process. Getting input from the widest array of stakeholders was the aim of two superintendents (very small and large districts) who chose the Alaska Onward to Excellence process because it "really pushes community involvement . . . everybody in the community—students, staff, community members, parents, and everybody. There are some of our villages that have had huge turnouts at our meetings." Another superintendent from a large district focused on involving "...every single parent. We did an overall generic (plan), then we sent it out to schools, (where it was) modified after meeting with parents and teachers . . . so we have had a tremendous amount of public participation." The superintendent of a large district whose initial planning process took place six years ago reported that "more than half of the people involved with the annual review (of our plan) are community members."

Four of the five superintendents reported that strategic planning efforts began with their arrival in the district at the charge of the Board. In three instances, strategic planning began well before the Quality Schools Initiative program was announced,

and in all five cases support from the Board was integral. Strategic planning was initiated in response to problems with educational outcomes in the district. For example, a superintendent from a very small district reported that "...when I came on board, the Board said 'we don't know what is wrong, but when our kids leave these schools they're not being successful in college, they're not being successful in transitioning into the world of work. Something has got to be different.' So, based on that we started to identify what was not working, and better ways to do it." A superintendent in a large district echoed these comments, "I think the district was ripe for (change). They had gone through a period of several years of very flat plateau . . . the Board was concerned about it, the communities were concerned, our graduates were going nowhere." A second superintendent from a large district reported that "...the Board hired me because they liked the idea of strategic planning and they knew that I knew how to do that . . . we had crises coming out of our ears and the Board chair said strategic planning was important before the mill closed . . . now it's essential." As noted above, support from the

Board was cited as a key ingredient to the success of innovations in the district. Adding to the comments above, a superintendent from a large district noted that he attributed his success in making changes to "to total 100 percent visionary quality Board."

Unlike previous groups, six of seven superintendents in this category reported that they had an implementation plan for the Initiative, and the seventh superintendent noted that he was working on one. Another distinction between this group and previous ones was the use of consultants to help with implementation; their presence was thought critical to success.

Three superintendents voiced strong support for accountability for educational outcomes, while at the same time reflecting on the resistance coming from other superintendents in the state. Noted a superintendent from a large district, "I believe in accountability, and I'm glad that it's here. I think that we should not resist it, we should come on board because it will improve the educational system of the state." Comparing education to other sectors that measure quality, a superintendent from a small district stated "I

know there are some superintendents that are resistant to it, but I'm not. To me, standards make sense. We have them for everything else." Summing up the feelings of this group, a superintendent from a large district stated "that this is the best thing that ever happened to us. It's our opportunity to save ourselves."

Unlike previous groups, superintendents in this category voiced few complaints. Only one superintendent (from a large district) talked about funding, saying simply, "I wish that I had been funded better." A second superintendent (large district) reiterated complaints heard from other superintendents about the qualifying exam. "I think that it's setting up kids for failure. I think that the effort to not prepare schools, not being able to tell them what was going to be tested on the benchmark tests and the graduation test is basically saying 'we don't want you to know what is on the test, and we'll see how many of your kids fail.' " Concerns about timeline came up only once from a superintendent in a large district, "...when I look at everything that (my staff) are trying to do all at once . . . I feel they are a bit overwhelmed because they are trying to do so

much so quickly . . ."

In conclusion, this researcher found that there was a relationship between the excitement about the Quality Schools Initiative experienced by superintendents in this category and comprehensive, planned approach they were taking to its implementation. Five of seven superintendents rated themselves as successful in implementing the Initiative. Of the two unsuccessful superintendents, both were in the process of implementing steps to move the district forward. There was a relative absence of focus on barriers to successful implementation. Instead, members of this group discussed community involvement and school reform accomplishments with pride, focusing on the value of accountability in the educational system.

Superintendent Reactions and the Four Major Research Questions

Superintendent reactions to the Quality Schools Initiative were plotted on continuums similar to those used to analyze the four major research questions. Of the 32 districts interviewed, 30 are included in this analysis based on the availability of transcripts and tape recorded conversations.

Results from the analysis of superintendents' reactions to the Quality Schools Initiative demonstrated that among the 15 fidelity approach districts, reactions were as follows: denial–one superintendent, anger–two superintendents, resignation–eight superintendents, acceptance–two superintendents, and excitement–two superintendents. Among the 15 mutual adaptation districts, superintendents' reactions were as follows: denial–zero superintendent, anger–two superintendents, resignation–four superintendents, acceptance–four superintendents, and excitement–five superintendents(See Figure 16).

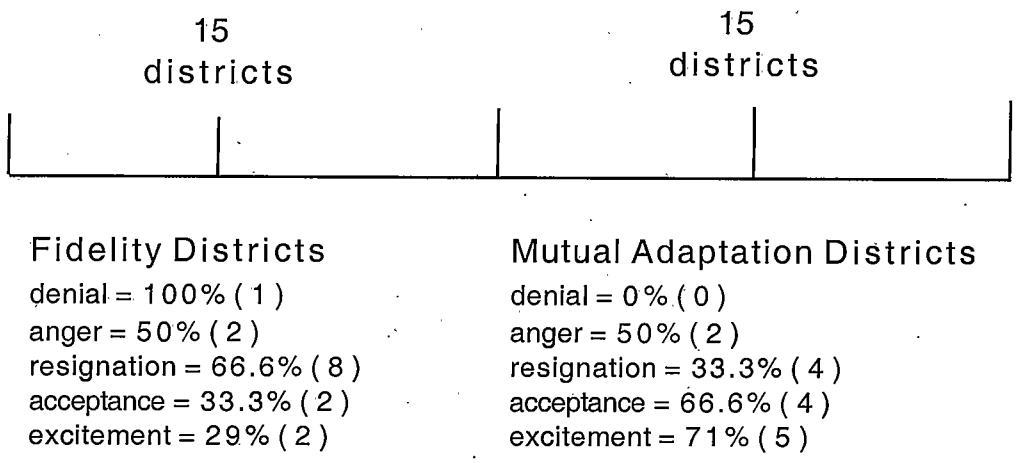

Figure 16. Superintendent reactions by fidelity or mutual adaptation.

Results from the analysis of superintendents' reaction to the Quality Schools Initiative demonstrated that among the 14 sacred districts reactions were as follows: denial–one superintendent, anger–three superintendents, resignation–six superintendents, acceptance–four superintendents, and excitement–zero superintendents. Among the 16 secular districts reactions were as follows: denial–no superintendent, anger–one superintendent, resignation–six superintendents, acceptance--two superintendents, and excitement–seven superintendents (See Figure 17).

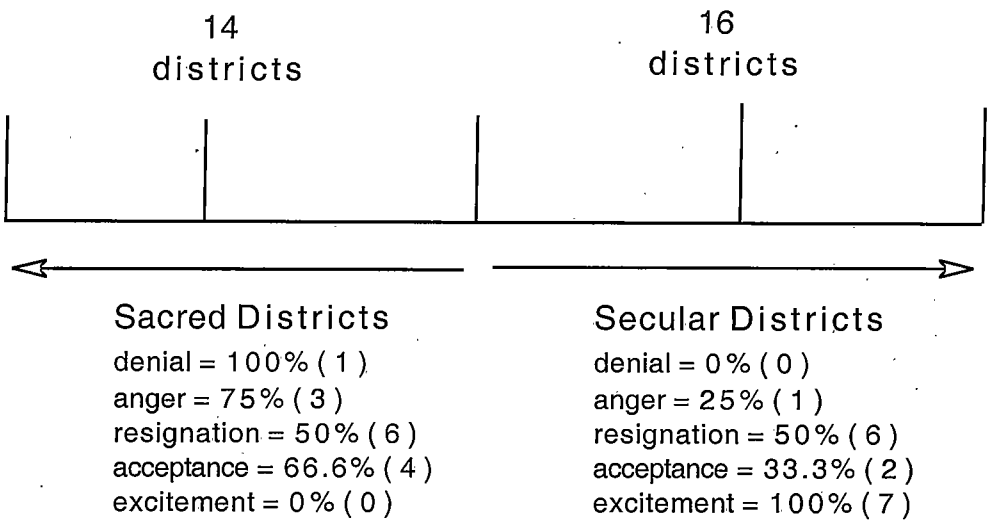

Figure 17. Superintendent reactions by sacred or secular districts.

Results from the analysis of superintendents' reaction to the Quality Schools Initiative demonstrated that among the 13 unsuccessful districts, superintendents' reactions were as follows: denial–one superintendent, anger–three superintendents, resignation–six superintendents, acceptance–one superintendent, and excitement–two superintendents. Among the 17 successful districts superintendents' reactions were as follows: denial–no superintendent, anger–one superintendent, resignation–six superintendents, acceptance–five superintendents, and excitement–five superintendents (See Figure 18).

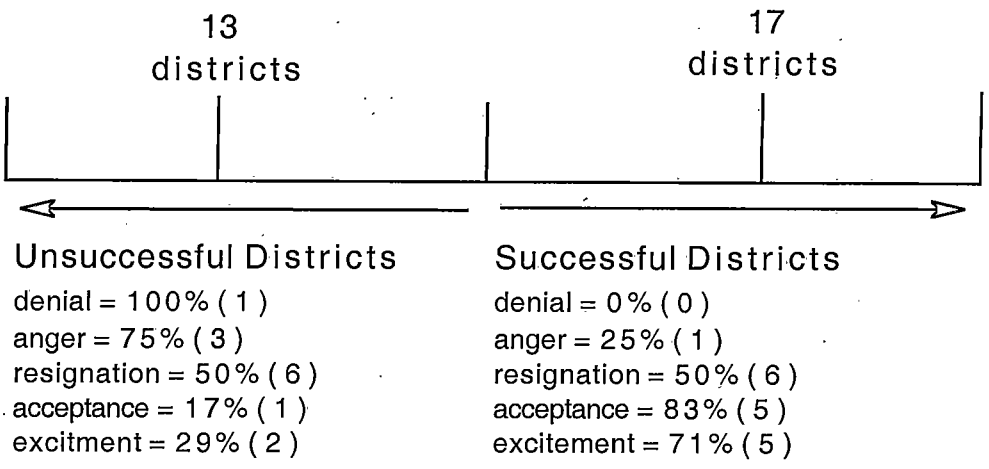

Figure 18. Superintendent reactions by unsuccessful or successful districts.

Results from the analysis of superintendents' reaction to the Quality Schools Initiative demonstrated that among the 11 very small districts, superintendents' reactions were as follows: denial–one superintendent, anger–one superintendent, resignation–four superintendents, acceptance–three superintendents, and excitement–one superintendents. Among the 12 small districts superintendents' reactions were as follows: denial–no superintendent, anger–two superintendents, resignation–six superintendents, acceptance–two superintendents, and excitement–one superintendent. Among the nine large districts superintendents' reactions were as follows: denial-no superintendent, anger-1 superintendent, resignation-2

superintendents, acceptance-1 superintendent, and excitement-5 superintendents (See Figure 19).

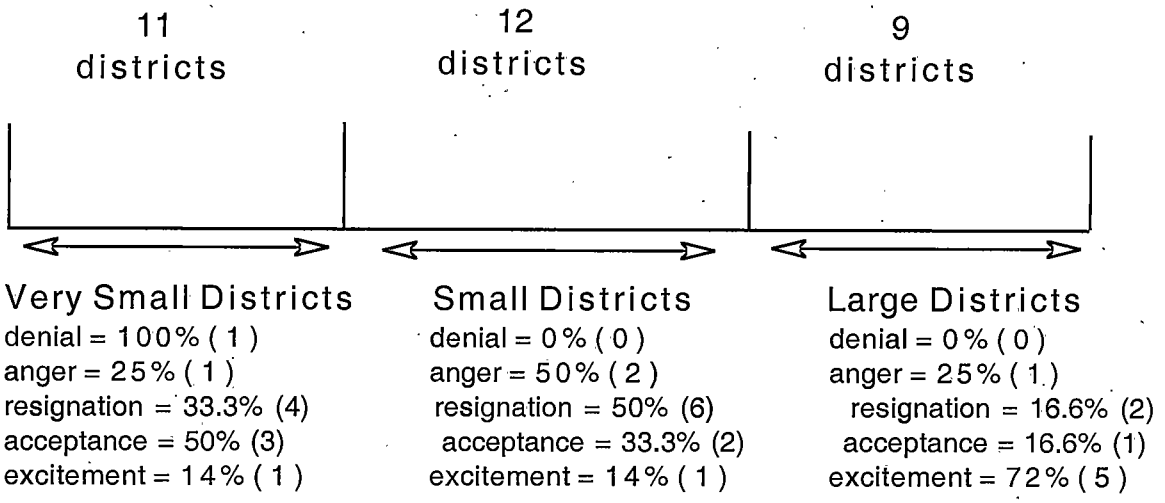

Figure 19. Superintendent reactions by very small, small, and large districts.

In the next chapter, the results are summarized and conclusions developed. The chapter ends with recommendations for further research and recommendations to the State of Alaska.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to analyze the implementation strategies of the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative in rural Alaskan school districts. The purpose was subdivided into four major research questions. 1. Which change process was being used when implementing the innovation? 2. What is the district's culture (secular or sacred) in regard to change? 3. Was the innovation being successfully implemented? 4. Was there a discernible relationship between the change processes, culture of the district, size of the district, and success of the implementation?

The qualitative nature of the study allowed the researcher to analyze how superintendents have responded to the demand for systemic change posed by the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative, and to assess whether the success of this initiative varied in relation to district culture, the change process, and the size of the district.

Summary of Findings

Implementation of the Alaska Quality School Initiative in 32 rural Alaskan school districts was the focus of this study. Of those 32 districts, 15 used a mutual adaptation approach to change and 17 used the fidelity approach. Among the latter, four were large districts, six were small districts, and seven were very small districts. Of the districts which used a mutual adaptation approach to change, five were large, six were small, and four were very small.

Sixteen of the 32 districts were classified as sacred districts, with two large districts, seven small districts, and seven very small districts. The 16 districts classified as secular included seven large districts, five small districts, and four very small districts.

Of the 32 districts, 17 were successful and 15 were unsuccessful in implementing the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative. Among the successful districts, seven were large, five were small, and five were very small. Of the 15 unsuccessful districts, two

were large, seven were small, and six were very small. The unsuccessful districts were in the beginning stage of implementation of the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative.

Of the 17 successful districts, 10 districts were identified as secular and seven were identified as sacred and six of these districts used the fidelity approach to change and 11 used the mutual adaptation approach. There were 15 unsuccessful districts. Six of these were secular; four used the fidelity approach, and two used the mutual adaptation approach. The remaining nine districts (unsuccessful) were sacred; seven used the fidelity approach, whereas two used the mutual adaptation approach to change.

It is apparent that a relationship exists between the size of the district and the change model used when analyzed in relation to the success of the implementation. Of the 17 successful districts, seven were large districts. Two of these districts used the fidelity approach to change, and the other five used the mutual adaptation approach. Among the five successful small districts, one district used the fidelity approach and four districts used the mutual

adaptation approach to change. There were five very small districts, three of which used the fidelity approach and two used a mutual adaptation.

The two large unsuccessful districts used the fidelity approach to change. Seven small districts were unsuccessful, with five districts utilizing the fidelity approach, and two utilizing the mutual adaptation approach. Of the six unsuccessful very small districts, four used the fidelity approach and two used the mutual adaptation approach to change.

Taped interviews and transcripts from the interviews of 30 of the 32 superintendents were studied to assess the superintendents' predominant reactions to the demand for systemic change created by the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative. Of those 30 superintendents, one was categorized as being in denial regarding the change, four were angry, 12 were resigned, six were accepting, and seven, excited about the change.

Among the superintendents whose districts used the fidelity approach to change, one superintendent was in denial regarding the

change, two were angry, eight were resigned, two were accepting, and two were excited about the change. For those districts that used the mutual adaptation approach to change, no superintendents were categorized as being in denial, two were angry, four were resigned, four were accepting, and five were excited about the change.

For superintendents whose districts were sacred societies, one was in denial regarding the change, three were angry, six were resigned, four were accepting, and none were excited about the change. Among the superintendents whose districts were secular societies, none were categorized as being in denial, one was angry, six were resigned, two were accepting, and seven were excited about the change.

In districts that were unsuccessful in implementing the change, one superintendent was in denial regarding the change, three were angry, six were resigned, one was accepting, and two were excited about the change. Among the superintendents whose districts were successful in implementing the change, none were

categorized as being in denial, one was angry, six were resigned, five were accepting, and five were excited about the change.

Among the superintendents whose districts were very small, one was in denial regarding the change, one was angry, four were resigned, three were accepting, and one was excited about the change. In districts that were small, no superintendents were categorized as being in denial, two were angry, six were resigned, two were accepting, and one was excited about the change. Among the superintendents whose districts were large, none were categorized as being in denial, one was angry, two were resigned, one was accepting, and five excited about the change.

Conclusions

The Alaska Quality Schools Initiative was a politically motivated reform from the Office of the Commissioner of Education that started in 1994 with the Content Standards for Students. Each rural Alaskan school district had to accept the standards or develop

their own set of standards which incorporated the State's standards. The Alaskan rural school districts were given a choice in how to proceed with the Content Standards: they could adopt the standards verbatim (fidelity approach), or make significant adaptations (mutual adaptations approach). One issue which the Commissioner of Education did consider was the importance of the culture of the school districts, i.e. sacred or secular societies. An understanding of these two types of cultures is critical to successfully enculturating change brought about by an innovation into an organization.

Was there a pattern of the success of implementation of Alaska's Quality Schools Initiative as related to the sacred versus secular nature of the district and the mode of implementation, fidelity versus mutual adaptation? To answer the above question a breakdown of the central research question into individual components formed the ancillary research questions.

Was there a pattern in the success of the implementation in secular or sacred cultures? School districts in secular cultures had

the best success when a mutual adaptation approach was used. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that secular districts using the mutual adaptation approach to innovation have a greater chance of success than do secular districts using the fidelity approach to change. Sacred districts had a roughly equal chance of success using either fidelity or mutual adaptation approach to change.

Do the sacred societies show a pattern in which they are more likely to change if the fidelity approach is used or if the mutual adaptation approach is used? The mutual adaptation approach to change offers a greater chance of success for sacred societies than does the fidelity approach to change. The reason that the fidelity approach to change is ineffective was characterized by a superintendent who described the process as having very little community involvement and very little support from teachers who needed to be convinced that this was not just another passing fad. Neither sacred nor secular cultures using the fidelity approach were very successful.

Did secular societies show a pattern in which change was more likely to be successful if the mutual adaptation approach was used or if the fidelity approach was used? This researcher concluded secular districts using the mutual adaptation approach to change have a greater chance of success than when using the fidelity approach to change.

Is a large district more or less likely to change successfully using a fidelity or a mutual adaptation approach to change? Large districts were more successful using a mutual adaptation approach to change but when these districts used the fidelity approach, they had a greater chance of failure.

The small districts which used mutual adaptation achieved successful implementation more than the small districts which used the fidelity approach to change. The small districts which used fidelity approach to change were more apt to be unsuccessful than successful in implementing change.

Implementation of the fidelity approach to change produced the greatest number of failures in very small districts. Therefore, this

researcher concluded that even though the fidelity approach to change is the most successful strategy for innovation in these situations, it also has the greatest failure rate. Management of change in very small districts may be more difficult than in other districts because of the complexity of a superintendent's job. As one small school superintendent stated, "change is like squeezing an elephant into a pop bottle in this district."

Are large districts more likely to be secular in their approach to change? The larger the district, the more secular they become, and conversely, the smaller the district, the more sacred they were likely to be. Smaller districts were more likely to use the fidelity approach while larger districts used a mutual adaptation approach to change. Therefore, this researcher concluded that the larger the district, the more secular it becomes and the more apt it was to use a mutual adaptation approach to change. The converse also holds true in this study. The smaller the district, the more sacred the district becomes and the more apt it was to use the fidelity approach to change. Therefore, this researcher concluded that the

larger the district was, the more successful it was likely to be implementing the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative while small districts were a little less successful, and very small districts were, for the most part, unsuccessful.

Was there a pattern of relationships between sacred and secular districts, fidelity and mutual adaptation change strategies, and the success of implementation? The results of this study point to a pattern of large districts being secular, choosing the mutual adaptation approach to change, and implementing change successfully. Another pattern was that very small districts were sacred, choose the fidelity approach to change, and often failed to successfully implement the innovation. Further, small districts tend to be more sacred than secular and are more likely to use the fidelity approach to change.

What attitudes toward change were predominate among superintendents? The attitudes displayed by superintendents from negative to positive formed a bell–shaped curve, skewed toward a positive response to the change. The conclusion to be drawn is that

only a minority of superintendents displayed a predominantly negative attitude toward the mandate for change, and that a majority were either resigned to the need for change or exhibited a positive attitude toward it.

Is there a pattern in Alaskan rural school district superintendents' attitudes toward change and the factors fidelity or mutual adaptation approach to change, secular or sacred culture, success or lack of success in implementation, and the size of districts? Superintendents displaying positive attitudes toward change (acceptance, excitement) were more likely to choose a mutual adaptation approach than a fidelity approach. The conclusion to be drawn is that there is a relationship between the mutual adaptation approach, which differs from the fidelity approach in the "degree that participants affect the formation of the adoption," and the positive attitudes displayed by superintendents choosing that approach. Conversely, this researcher concluded that there is a relationship between the fidelity approach to change in which innovations are adopted, not adapted, and feelings of resignation

(mixture of positive and negative feelings) about the change.

In Alaskan rural school districts with secular societies, superintendents displayed positive attitudes toward the change more often than those working in districts with sacred societies. Superintendents working in districts with sacred societies displayed negative attitudes toward the change more often than those working in districts with secular societies. This indicates that there is a relationship between the factors in a secular society that make it less resistant to change and the more positive attitudes displayed by superintendents working in that environment who are faced with the need for systemic change. Conversely, it appears that a relationship existed between the forces in a sacred society that resist change and the negative attitudes toward change displayed by superintendents working in that environment.

Superintendents who rated their districts as successful in implementing the change displayed positive attitudes toward the change more often than those who rated their districts as being unsuccessful. The latter group rated their districts as unsuccessful

in implementing the change and displayed negative attitudes toward the change more often than in the former group. The conclusion to be drawn is that there is a relationship between the superintendent's predominant attitude toward the change, either positive or negative, and the degree of success of the change.

Superintendents resigned to the change were drawn primarily from very small and small districts. This leads to the conclusion that there is a relationship between the conditions in both very small and small districts and the predominant attitude of superintendents in those districts. This attitude is one of mixed emotions toward the change.

Are there consistent themes that came forward during the interviews that should be considered when designing a statewide change of such magnitude? The issues of adequate funding, support from the Department of Education, and the timeline for implementing the Quality Schools Initiative came up again and again during the superintendent interviews. The absence of support from the Department of Education was another prominent theme,

especially in terms of helping the smallest and most vulnerable schools. Specific concerns included unclear regulations, lack of explanation or guidance on how to implement non-operationalized mandates and lack of connection to existing programs that were deemed superior to the Initiative. Several superintendents indicated they were unwilling to commit to any particular target dates because of the difficulty of meeting them. The question these findings raise was whether superintendents, especially those in very small and small districts, will be able to marshal the resources, determination, and creativity to overcome these barriers on behalf of their students and communities.

Summary of Conclusions

The following list provides a concise summary of the study conclusions.

- Secular districts were more successful when they used mutual adaptation.
- Sacred districts did not change or adapt easily, if at all.
- The larger the district, the more successful it may be, by using the mutual adaptation approach to implementation.
- Mutual adaptation was a more successful approach to change than the fidelity approach to implementation.
- The larger a district, the more secular it's culture, and, conversely, the smaller the district, the more sacred it's culture.
- Only a minority of superintendents displayed a predominantly negative attitude toward the mandate for change, and a majority were either resigned to the need for change or exhibited a positive attitude toward it.
- There was a relationship between the mutual adaptation approach and the positive attitudes displayed by superintendents choosing

that approach.

- There was a relationship between the fidelity approach to change and feelings of resignation about the change.
- There was a relationship between a secular society and positive attitudes among superintendents faced with the need for systemic change.
- There was a relationship between a sacred society and negative attitudes toward change among superintendents working in that environment.
- There was a relationship between the superintendents' predominant attitude toward the change, either positive or negative, and the success of the change.
- There was a relationship between very small and small districts and feelings of being resigned to the change on the part of the superintendents.
- There was a relationship between large districts and the extremely positive attitudes of superintendents in those districts.

- Funding, lack of support from the Department of Education, and the timeline imposed for the change all constituted real and significant barriers to the success of implementation.

Recommendations for Further Research

Due to the narrow time frame of this study, further study needs to be conducted to understand the full impact of Alaska's Quality School Initiative. The Alaska Quality School Initiative is just starting to result in changes in the State's educational system. Alaska will start to feel the full impact of there changes in the next two to three years. Legislative action to reduce school funding while at the same time demanding implementation of the Initiative has put a stress on the implementation process as well in rural schools and communities.

Further it is recommended that research be conducted on the impact of change processes when state laws, regulations, and rules require the implementation of new programs and expectations. In

Alaska, districts had to comply or run the risk of being taken over by the Alaska's Department of Education.

The loss of local control is another issue raised by mandated programs that needs to be studied. As one large district superintendent stated, "the State Department of Education needs to stand up and be counted. They need to work with the most fragile and least capable districts by building bridges to them with teams and money." Another small rural district superintendent voiced concern that this top down change comes from our present leadership, the Commissioner and the Governor. What happens when they leave office?

A major theme running through most superintendents' responses was a concern for adequate funding to meet the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative. They voiced concern that this reform is about teaching, and that the State Department of Education has to take the leadership role in making sure that the Alaska Quality School Initiative works for all districts. This research needs to be repeated on an ongoing basis until all schools have completed the

implementation process.

Recommendations for Action

The first action recommendation is that Alaska's State Department of Education help move the districts to action within a timeframe that protects student outcomes on the high school qualifying exams while preserving the district's local control of elementary and secondary education.

A second recommendation is for the Department of Education to help those superintendents move beyond their anger to constructive action within a timeframe that protects the districts' ability to succeed with implementation of the Quality Schools Initiative.

The third action recommendation is that, as high school qualifying exams approach, the Alaska Department of Education must help accelerate the momentum for change in these districts. The focus needs to be tightened toward measurable, achievable results

that will lead to compliance with the Quality Schools Initiative.

The final action recommendation is that the Alaska State Department of Education must have greater support among superintendents in the face of very real issues. The Department of Education must hold inservices for superintendents to face the above issues and gain support or facilitate the training of new superintendents. The angry, in-denial, and obedient superintendents must be brought to a point of acceptance and excitement about the Quality Schools Initiative.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Telephone Protocol

Hello, (superintendent's name).

I am Terry Bentley, Superintendent of the Nenana School District here in Alaska. I know that you, as a school administrator, have a busy schedule, but I would like to impose on your time for a few minutes to ask you some questions.

I am working on a study related to the change strategies being used in Alaska. As you know, change always seems to be occurring in our districts. It is important that educators develop some understanding of the change strategies being used in our schools and how the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative is being implemented.

Are you comfortable with my asking you a few questions pertaining to change and the Quality Schools Initiative in your district? This conversation will be taped recorded so that I can understand and not make any errors for the purpose of this study. By the way, you can be assured of anonymity regarding your responses. I will use only pseudonyms in writing up the results.

May I proceed?

Questions:

1. In the process of implementing the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative in your district, has there been significant change to the original plan supplied by the Alaska Department of Education?

a. Did your district change the format that the state furnished for teacher evaluation, or did your district use the format style as suggested by the state?

b. Does the evluation process now meet the district needs?

c. Did your district change or adopt the Content Standards for Alaska Students, if you did change by adding or rewritting, how much did you change the standards from one to ten in the amount of change with ten being high amount of change?

d. Does the content standards relate to your district standards or goals? If not how do they not meet your district's goals or

objectives?

e. Please describe the most important changes that have been made.

2. What do you believe is unique about your district or community that promoted the modifications, if any, to the original plan?

3. Does your district have an overall plan or strategy for implementing the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative?

4. Is the implementation plan or strategy for your district written up? Would you send a copy to me?

5. Please describe the nature or amount of the participation by teachers and community members in developing the district's Alaska Quality Schools Initiative implementation plan.

6. Overall, how successful do you perceive the implementation of

Alaska Quality Schools Initiative to be in your district at the present time?

7. Do you feel that the district has made any mistakes in the implementation process of Alaska Quality Schools Initiative?

a. If so, what were they?

8. In the past, what has been your experience in implementing changes in your district?

a. Is there generally resistance or openness to change from the teaching staff?

b. Is there generally resistance or openness to change from classified staff?

9. With the community in mind, would you say it is easy or difficult to make changes?

10. Do you have any other thoughts or comments regarding implementation of the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative?

Would you like a copy of the executive summary of the results?
yes no.

Thank you again for your time and effort in helping me complete the questionnaire.

Good Bye.

APPENDIX B

Alaska Quality Schools Initiative

Alaska Quality Schools Initiative

High Student and Academic Standards and Performance

*School districts develop and adopt standards and assessments

*State supports districts by developing

~content standards in ten core subject areas

~student benchmarks and performance standards for basic skills

~curriculum frameworks

*State supports school districts through statewide assessments of standards

~California Achievement Test

~Direct writing assessment

~National Assessment of Educational Progress

Quality Professional Standards

*Standards-based licensure

~Meet state standards for initial preparation

~Professional development for continuing licensure

~National board certified

*University preparation becomes standard based

*Performance-based evaluation at district level

Family, School and Community Network

*Research-based family, school and community partnerships

*Collaboration among education organizations and parent organizations

*Facilitating student transitions throughout their schooling

*Business, agency, community partnerships

School Excellence Standards

*State school accreditation

~State standards for successful schools

~School profiling process

~Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges partnership

~Distinguished school recognition

*Network of distinguished schools and educators to provide technical assistance for school improvement (Holloway, 1997).