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Part of that frustration stems from her inability to be in classrooms and with students because of required reporting, "there is much of that that is not meaningful because, because we do things in a different way that doesn't quite fit that format" (p. 3). Peg stated that she visited with her board and with the Montana Office of Public Instruction about the amount of time reporting takes and sometimes creating plans that "show goals, some are ridiculous goals and unachievable" which is how "I preface my statements for the goals" (p. 3). Her board is supportive of her and has even asked her rhetorically, "what if we say forget it, that we don't want you to spend your time this way" (p. 3)?

"Running interference" (p. 4) is a role Peg assumes, "I take care of some of the work that is not so meaningful, so teachers and board members aren't aware or feel the pressure that I take on" (p. 4). Peg reports that she has designed much of her school improvement plan and shares pertinent information for staff and board. She finds herself with a new board requiring additional education on accountability measures in the state.

Providing a "well rounded" education and school experience is a core value of Peg and her district. While she acknowledges that math and reading are considered high stakes when it comes to AYP status, she also says that "we are not going to take recess away and we are not taking kids out of science and social studies" (p. 5).

Much of that decision is based on conversations with board members, staff, and community. "I feel like I am a good collaborator and good at building coalitions. I give a

lot of voice to our stakeholders” (p. 8). Response to Intervention strategies were implemented because of Peg and her staff’s goal of reaching all students. However, she readily admits that she does not believe there is alignment of mission statement, board policies and strategic plans. Instead she believes her immediate goals are appropriate and “people feel we have a lot going on” (p. 8) but she credits her staff and “taking advantage of the people we have now and using the strengths they bring to the table” (p. 9).

Peg would like to have a more formal strategic plan in place with all stakeholders given the opportunity to participate, but she is equally passionate about revisiting the school’s purpose and asking the difficult questions at the local, state, and federal level.

I am happy for changes, but I think also we don’t protest enough, it’s still a shock to me that here we got all these years of No Child Left Behind and I don’t know that it’s going to get any better in what it morphs into, but we’ve said we’ve taken on that mantle of improving test scores, but why aren’t we screaming about all these other issues for our kids, kids who live in poverty or difficult economic factors, and social factors we pretend don’t exist. (p. 9)

### Superintendent 7 - Robert

Robert brings a personal and passionate advocacy for all students that while he succinctly describes a district’s purpose, he also states “everybody has a story.” His story includes that of being a foster child and later adopted by parents with non-negotiable high expectations which became the foundation of what he believes professionally. Clinically, he describes purpose as:

Our job is to prepare every kid to have the skills necessary to survive in the emerging job field. Our goal as educators is to first of all figure out what kids need, what employers are looking for, what colleges want, and making sure we are providing them in our curriculum and standards (2010, p. 1)

Behind the purpose is a personal drive, “I don’t want to see any kid left behind and we can make the difference and we are small enough to let that happen.” Robert’s district has 630 students, an 18% free and reduced rate, with 51 teachers serving grades K-12. S7 taught for 13 years before serving as a superintendent in two districts for two and three years respectively. He is completing his 10<sup>th</sup> year in his current position in a town that has a strong agricultural and mining economy.

I came in here 10 years ago and there wasn’t really any sort of plan. Principals sort of ran their own show. With No Child Left Behind being implemented but no one doing anything before I got here, I said the district would be in trouble if we didn’t start looking at what students were doing. I ended up educating the staff on the law, and getting the staff to see the urgency helped us get back in front of the curve again. (p. 3)

On top of educating the staff, Robert had to address a community that was dissatisfied with their schools, working with a split board, and developing a plan of improvement for the district’s schools. While the community welcomed Robert as a new superintendent, “at first about half of the teachers were resistant and the other half said they wanted more rigor” (p. 5). Robert was not just concerned about curriculum, standards, and assessment, but also concerned with the learning environment.

You can’t have good learning in the classroom without a good learning environment, and the learning environment had to change. I am a little less forgiving when it comes to some people’s expectations. This isn’t your living room, this is a public educational facility, let’s act like it. (p. 7)

Along with higher expectations for the learning environment, the district spent time aligning its curriculum with national standards and articulating grade level benchmarks from kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. “We’ve aligned our instruction and curriculum with the state standards but even more importantly, we’ve been using national standards, you know OPI had state standards but they were really nebulous” (p. 8).

Further, Robert remarked, “The thing is, the ideas are good behind NCLB and 5 Year Plans, but in honesty, I think a lot of that in meeting the mandates takes away from the actual, our actual ability to improve education” (p. 8).

Much of this work was done in a collaborative manner. “There’s time for top down directives, and there is time for collaborative work” (p. 9). However, Robert believes the superintendent’s role as instructional leader determines the success or failure of a district regardless of the amount of collaboration going on. “Regardless of NCLB, a superintendent is either going to care about student achievement or he isn’t. If he doesn’t, the district probably won’t perform well” (p. 10). Robert believes the same way about the use of data. “I’ve always used data, I think it’s just common sense ingrained. We have more research for techniques, but data has always been there to some degree” (p. 10).

Today Robert is pleased with the instruction, learning environment, and student performance. He utilizes professional development to focus on weak areas, and has implemented Response to Intervention in his schools. And according to Robert, the community and board are pleased with the results leaving Robert to set the direction and develop school improvement plans. “My board isn’t terribly involved with Five Year Plans and strategic planning. We do those things but not to the level the BPE wants” (p. 10). That does bring up a source of frustration for Robert and the planning and reporting in this era of accountability.

The disruption has gotten almost overwhelming. I do all those reports because I try to keep all this stuff out of the principals’ hands so it doesn’t disrupt them from being in the classrooms with teachers and students. I’ve assumed the role that all of that stuff stops with me. We have a mission and a strategic plan, but to do the state’s Five Year Plan, I’ll tell you, it was completed simply to meet a

requirement. I'm tired of putting a lot of energy into writing that stuff and then it's changed that it isn't relevant now. (p.10 )

### Superintendent 8 - John

John recently retired after spending his entire career in the same K-12 district starting as a teacher for 14 years, moving to elementary principal for 6 years followed by 6 years as superintendent. In his last year as superintendent there were 700 students and 80 certified staff members. Having been removed from his position for five months, he offered reflection that he felt he did not have the time to engage in while working 60 hour weeks. He offered a perspective on the purpose of schools and community merging together to meet needs of lifelong learners that exceed the traditional K-12 setting.

I don't see school boundaries anymore. I don't see grade levels. It's overlapping so much more now, and I don't know how we will get schools to that point where there is no longer kindergarten, first grade, second grade, third grade, whatever, but it's you moving at your own pace as you go through school and it never ends. So that's how I see it, but once they get out there the schools still need to be a support mechanism within the community and that if they decide to change, because they are going to change what they want to do with their lives, the school is still there (2010, p. 1)

The strategic plan of this district expanded on this concept by stating it will “focus resources on identified wants, preferences, and needs of its community.” John and his district formulated one of the first strategic plans in the state concurrent and in support of NCLB, and with the recognition of lifelong learning for all.

John is clear that the educational system needs to be in support of student learning and “for too many years we had students who weren't challenged by teachers who weren't pushing them hard enough” (p. 3). He used NCLB as a catalyst for change within his district.

I had to go to the teachers and say, listen, accountability is here to stay. It's going nowhere, and I do not wish to be part of a system that's failing, and we were, we hadn't made AYP the first year I was superintendent. So I changed the way I approached my job, and I expected others to change their approach as well" (p. 3)

John reports that his board applied pressure for change to occur within the district and that they expected improved test scores. "My administrative team needed some shake up, and actually two of them returned to the classroom" (p. 3). He met with the teachers to share his vision of change and accountability and was met with little resistance, however his principals experienced pushback as they implemented new programs. John also shared that students could sense a change and that a more "business like environment" (p. 5) was present. He credits RTI and a renewed focus on curriculum development as instrumental to their success.

John enthusiastically embraces the accountability movement and cites missed opportunities stemming back almost 30 years.

I became a principal in 2000, and then came No Child Left Behind, but accountability goes back further than that. If you take a look back at, and it's been such a long time but it was the *Nation at Risk* report written during the Reagan administration. That was a huge message to us and I think we missed for many, many years, and it took three Presidents before everyone said okay, there is going to be accountability, we are going to raise the bar. Now throw in NCLB and AYP, I don't necessarily agree with all of it, but the accountability piece I do agree with. (p. 8)

As part of the accountability piece, both for economic and academic reasons, the district went to grade leveled schools. "Grade leveling and RTI were probably the two best things to happen to our district" (p. 5). "We saw tremendous growth and when you consider everything we were doing, except the 5 Year Plan, it drove up to making the gains that we had" (p. 5). John reports some resistance initially to the overall changes:









purpose of public education reaching a pinnacle in this current time advocating for more and more education in order for the United States to be competitive and for all students to possess critical thinking skills.

We need to have our students ready to either enter the work place or advance their educational progress, either to the junior colleges or to the 4 year colleges in order to meet both the national and international competitiveness. And with everything that's out there available, they need to be able to evaluate and make their decisions based on thorough evaluation or investigation of whatever that they are working on or whatever they are into. I know it's good thinking skills. (2010, p. 3)

While James readily embraces higher standards and student expectations, he readily points out flaws in the accountability systems that have cause him, his staff, and his students great distress.

I think it's taken too much time away from what we need to actually do in the classroom and time in the learning process because there are so many tests, reports, and programs we are required to do. Some of them have been good, ones that tell a student and teacher where a weakness is. However, they make all these requirements but they don't send the money. (p. 4)

James felt obligated to share his concerns with the Montana State Schools Superintendent, Denise Juneau in an email dated September 28, 2010:

Superintendent Juneau:

We as school administrators are being overrun with reports and data collection required by the OPI. The ADC for a school district our size is ridiculous. We have to enter data on five separate reports. It takes approximately 30 to 40 hours to complete this report along with all the other data which seems to be increasing. We used to complete the fall report in 8 hours. Currently there is a shortage of school administrators and many are being driven out due to the increasing required paperwork. It is easy to be removed from the frontlines and then develop another program, survey, or report and have the schools do it. I do appreciate your staff, they are really good to work with. We need your leadership to correct this situation. I look forward to your response.

According to James, he received words of encouragement from his fellow superintendents who shared similar feelings. For James the greatest impact for him is “it takes me out away from the halls and kids and puts me behind the desk more than I want” (p. 4).

We are not administrators, we are computer operators, and I think what they are passing down to us comes from Washington, and it’s real easy for the people in Helena to give it to the schools without realizing the time and impact. (p. 5)

The district’s stakeholders may have similar feelings, but in spite of the time and energy it takes for planning and reporting, James is pleased with the marked improvement in student performance. “The parents are with us making sure kids are well educated, and they know about the testing we do because we communicate that with them (p. 5). For the teachers, the accountability movement has “been evolution” (p. 6). James says that he is very proud of the teachers’ ability to “accept the changes in the classrooms, the open mindedness, and probably the biggest thing is departmentalization in our intermediate grades” (p. 6). The district continues to have a small student-teacher ratio which pleases teachers and parents. James says the board is also supportive and sets up to five goals per year in which they evaluate with the superintendent and administrative staff annually.

The adoption of Saxon math was a “difficult but necessary change we made” (p. 6). James said that specialists were brought in along with a curriculum consultant who helped the district to vertically align grade level standards. Our scores “show what a difference these changes made for us and both the students and teachers have really responded positively (p. 7).

Returning to the idea of accountability, James says, “while I think philosophically that NCLB is probably good, I don’t think it is practical.” He says that that he “takes care of the reports and planning, but it isn’t anything formal like some of the bigger districts” (p. 8). He feels challenged himself with the new technology and graciously gives praise to his administrative team for “helping him out at least once a day” (p. 8). His praise goes beyond the technological support from his administrators but also for their ability to facilitate change and help teachers collaborate on school improvement committees, curriculum and professional development. “You surround yourself with good people, give them direction, and get the hell out of the way” (p. 10).

#### Superintendent 11 - Martha

Martha is the superintendent of a K-8 school district that feeds into Billings School District #2. With just 154 students and 15 certified staff members, this superintendent and district strive to meet the mission statement “Where Excellence and Enthusiasm Collide.” This is further discussed by Martha (2010) in her description of a 21<sup>st</sup> century district’s purpose.

I think we are not preparing our students for jobs that don’t exist right now, we are still preparing them for jobs that are in existence, so we have to focus more on critical thinking skills, problem solving, communication, how to work collaboratively and not, when we were taught it was you need to know this because you might need to know this someday, and now it’s you need to know how to find the information and to be able to problem solve. The foundation of public education remains the same in creating a productive community who are contributing to society. It’s still embedded in our education, but for the 21<sup>st</sup> century we need adjust our approach to what students need for tomorrow. (p. 3)

A sense of belonging and service is also of importance to Martha, “when you build self-efficacy and they are good problem solvers, they enjoy learning and feel like they belong.”

The accountability measures, even prior to NCLB, have “generated conversations between teachers that never happened before” (p. 3). Martha reports that in her district such conversations have led to a “streamlined curriculum so that we are aligned horizontally and vertically” (p. 3). Further, she states that teachers are now more accountable for making sure students are learning and “figuring out ways to change our instruction.”

Until accountability standards came along, we didn’t practice differentiated instruction. So really, though I don’t agree 100% with NCLB, proficiency for all by 2014, especially certain subsets of a school population, but I think it has translated into us at least looking at how we teach and how students learn. (p. 4)

Martha expresses gratitude to her staff for “shifting their paradigm” (p. 5) of teaching. “There were some tears the first year as we went through data” (p. 5) but they approached it by accepting the data and then “setting priorities of where we needed to improve and designing curriculum revision and staff development around a few goals (p. 6). Similarly the board of trustees is supportive, according to Martha.

The board members I have right now, they are supportive of the district, they are very supportive of me, they want what is best for kids. The trouble is the board I have now weren’t on the board when academics and scores weren’t a priority, so they haven’t seen that part of building up to that (p. 6)

There are three measures taken by Martha and her teachers that have helped propel the district to greater student performance. The first has been curriculum alignment that started with partnering with two other area school districts that had similar

sized staffs. Creating a consistent curriculum and common assessments in collaboration “validated all of the teachers from the three districts so we believed we were on the right track” (p. 5). Second, professional development in RTI and MBI were “critical if we were to expect different results” (p. 8). To change the culture of learning, “we needed to raise the expectations of student behavior and have everyone on board, so we are a big MBI school” (p. 8).

“It’s no longer just pull out for gifted, but putting kids in the right class regardless of their age” (p. 4). Thus the approach taken in the district is to meet students at their performance level, not necessarily their chronological age. Third, Martha cited the use of data to make such decisions. “I’m the data queen” she proclaims (p. 9). “We do cross grade level meetings, meetings that are sacred as we analyze data. It’s build into our master schedule.” Data is also used to drive the goals of the district as well.

While she is pleased with the data analysis and data drive decisions made in her district, she expresses frustration at the expectations placed on her district by the state when it comes to planning and reporting.

My passion is not submitting a Five Year plan, much to the dismay of OPI. My passion is being a superintendent and instructional leader. What’s frustrating is our district has a nice system for creating our own five year plan, but it doesn’t fit into what the state wants, so then I have to redo it all. I think there is a disconnect between what’s going on with what the state requires and what is realistic for schools. I really feel a huge disconnect there and I know that they are mandated by the Feds for a lot of things, but I just get frustrated with them on paper work, especially in the fall when we are trying to be in classrooms. I think it’s taken too much time away from what we need to actually need to do in the classroom and learning process (p. 9)

She also believes to be successful in a district,

A superintendent certainly has to have a balance of the instructional leadership part and balance of the managerial part because the fact remains that is part of our job. We have to balance that and the key is getting good people to you balance it. But honestly, I'm tired. (p. 11)

### Answering the Research Questions

Research Question One: How has accountability resulted in disequilibrium and change within school districts?

The first research question examined how the accountability movement had resulted in disequilibrium within school districts. The responses fell into one of three groups when participants were asked about accountability. This general question yielded responses of assumption; notably that the research study was narrowed and specifically asking about the measures of No Child Left Behind. The first group included those school districts that had implemented school improvement plans prior to 2001. Specifically, William and Peg were in school districts or had experience in school districts pre-NCLB, which had implemented school improvement plans that included data examination for the purpose of adjusting curriculum and instruction. Robert had mentioned the use of data in the past, but not to the extent that it was used now. The second group included Charles, Michael, Thomas, and James; participants whose districts had high expectations, were making AYP, but utilized the accountability measures to encourage greater growth. The third group, Richard, Taylor, Susan, Peg, Robert, John, Maria, and Martha, is made up of superintendents whose districts did not make AYP at least once since its inception, and who provided leadership in creating a focus on student

learning rather than teacher driven instruction with other initiatives discussed later in this chapter.

Emergent Theme One: Purpose All of the participants in the pilot study and research study were given the opportunity to discuss the purpose of the 21<sup>st</sup> century school district. While elements of the traditional mission statement were cited, specifically developing an intelligent and productive citizenry who would contribute to society, there was an urgent sense that technological skills, critical thinking skills, and lifelong learning skills were more necessary than ever. Now 11 years into the new century, these superintendents felt an urgency and necessity in preparing students for a rapidly changing technological world, for jobs do not exist yet, and with critical thinking skills that give students the ability to sift and sort through incredible amounts of information. Susan and John summarized this overarching purpose best as they addressed the likely trend that many future jobs have yet to be created, that individuals will change jobs often, and that lifelong learning will be a requirement for continued success throughout students' lives. Charles, Thomas, Susan, Peg, Robert, John and Martha, all made reference that the purpose has remained the same but emphasized students must have the preparation in anticipation to fill future jobs that have yet to be created. Charles commented:

There is direct economic benefit tied to the higher educated populace that you have. We need to be able to teach kids to learn their skills, have solid skills to be able to learn anything at any given time and to challenge themselves for the future of democracy so that they are never stuck in a position where they have no choice. (2010, p. 1)

Along similar lines the importance of critical thinking skills was paramount to Taylor, William, Peg, and Martha. Finally, two of the study's superintendents, Peg and James, cited global competition as a component factoring into a district's purpose in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Martin was cited earlier advocating for the preparation of students "in order to meet both national and international competitiveness". He expanded on this idea in his district:

Everything we do. Everything that is out there. Everything that is available. We investigate it and evaluate it to see if it falls within our purpose of preparing our students for a global perspective in whatever they are working on or they are into. It all comes down to students having good thinking skills. (2010, p. 3)

Emergent Theme Two: Accountability Regardless of how many ways it was stated, the second common theme that emerged was the ready acknowledgement that accountability for America's public schools is a phenomenon that will continue into the future. All 11 participants stated that there were some flaws with the current laws under No Child Left Behind, but that the idea of schools being accountable for student learning was embraced. Many remarked that their superintendent counterparts may have objected to accountability, NCLB in particular, but theirs was a welcoming of a system that placed responsibility for student learning at the local level. John stated "It's the best thing that ever happened to education" (p. 5).

The idea that all students would reach proficiency by 2014 was received with little more than a chuckle or roll of the eyes rather than a distraction to their own commitment to student learning for all. One would get the sense that accountability in

education was a welcomed opportunity for school districts to improve despite the requirements that were imposed by the federal and state departments of education.

Continuing on this subject, two contrasting positions about accountability were taken by all participants in the study. Remembering that the context of accountability was assumed to be driven by NCLB, participants welcomed a system of accountability philosophically, but had grave concerns about its end goal. Michael stated the statistical impossibility of 100% of all students reaching proficiency, Taylor cited it was a system to see what district will be the last one to fail, and S6 simply indicated it was a system of accountability designed to fail. The interesting contrast to this was the ready acceptance by superintendents for some sort of accountability system and an assumption that changes to NCLB were inevitable, but that in the end, accountability was here to stay.

In making connections to purpose and accountability, Charles summed it up by simply saying that “accountability hasn’t impacted our purpose, it has helped us achieve our purpose” (p. 2). Charles and his colleagues in the study have found similar connections, again leading to the embrace of accountability in public education. William and his staff made a conscious decision regarding accountability in his district:

We don’t accept anymore that kids in the lower math and reading groups can never be good at math or reading. We changed. We adapted. Not so much because of some standardized test, but because it is our obligation to teach all students wherever they level they are at. (2010, p. 14)

Robert was the most impassioned of the superintendents when it came to accountability because he saw this as the opportunity to ensure all students will learn, and for him, the needs of the at-risk, “throw away child” (p. 3) could now be addressed.

Emergent Theme Three: Stakeholders' Response The stakeholders' responses in the 11 districts, according to the participants interviewed, varied little. On a spectrum of total resistance to ready acceptance, the superintendents reported that many of their teaching staffs believed that NCLB would be a short-lived initiative but realized relatively quickly that accountability was not going to be eliminated. Some teaching staffs were defensive or as Martha reported "shed some tears" (2010, p. 5). All participants were complimentary of their teaching staffs for embracing the accountability movement and began a collaborative approach of how to improve. James said, "I am just so pleased with the staff and how they are able to accept changes in their classrooms. They have met this challenge with being very open minded" (2010, p. 4).

The role and response of the school board and community varied among our participants. A general sense of support was shared almost universally among superintendents. For some, they reported spending time teaching board members about the new accountability measures, and in turn share progress and updates on a regular basis. The majority of the participants reported that their school boards were not as involved or knowledgeable in the intricacies of NCLB and the accountability movement. For other participants, they reported educating their board about NCLB and its impact, their boards viewed them as the district leader and expert, therefore the trustees did not immerse themselves in the data, implementation or reporting. The participants reported that as long as there were gains and AYP was being made, their boards did not have much input or interest. The one outlier in this study was Peg and her board of trustees who openly suggested defiance of the various state and federal mandates. Most common

were comments about community stakeholders who were not engaged in matters of accountability except when AYP status was not attained.

Though the 11 superintendents did not believe that most students could not articulate what the impact of accountability was for them, the participants could report indirectly of a more business like environment in their schools. Further they indicated that through revamped behavioral plans, most notably the Montana Behavioral Initiative, discipline referrals dropped significantly as improved learning environments were created. This, according to Robert, Martha, and Charles, translated into a peer influenced intolerance by engaged students for other students who attempted to pull classes off task.

Stakeholders' response was a critical element of this study as the researcher wanted to determine if there was a sense of disequilibrium or chaos within the participants' districts according to the superintendents in the study. With the three pilot study superintendents and 11 research study superintendents, only one reported that there is continued resistance by members of his teaching staff to the idea of accountability and the measures and programs implemented to support accountability. Richard stated that organized labor had filed grievances related to actions he had taken. As reported in Appendix E, he said his staff was split when it came to embracing these changes.

Remarkably, all other participants in this study reported that there were no longer arguments, discussions or debates about accountability, and that there was realization of "accountability is here to stay." Clearly this was not the case early on as participants reported that staff believed NCLB would be eliminated due to the early discourse and demerits of the law. With the ready acceptance of accountability, and despite its assumed

flaws, superintendents reported this was an opportunity to make systemic changes that emphasized student learning for all. As time progressed, teaching staffs quickly moved from suspicion and reluctance to working collaboratively to analyze data, align curriculum, and implement best instructional practices. Martha reported that “it’s not threatening, it’s more of goal development and determining what we need to do, so they have appreciated being part of the process” (2010, p. 5).

Research Question Two: How does the superintendent address accountability as a catalyst for promoting growth as measured by student achievement?

Emergent Theme Four: Re-organization There are a number of effects from re-organization resulting from the increased accountability in which the superintendent uses as a catalyst for promoting academic growth. Such efforts reported by the participants have changed the complexion and focus of these districts. A sense of an accountability movement appeared on the educational horizon with the publication of the 1983 Nation at Risk followed by individual states implementing high stakes graduation exams. With the passage of NCLB in 2001, the examination of student performance has become an expectation in each state with deeper analysis in the breakdown of student subgroups. The superintendents in this phenomenological study all made reference to colleagues within the profession who “railed against NCLB” (Susan, 2010, p. 3), however these participants whose students have outperformed the state over the last five years reported their embrace of accountability and the relatively quick acceptance of accountability by their teaching staffs. Though this theme was reported previously under research question one, it is relevant as a prelude to research question two for this acceptance and embrace

of accountability appeared to be a catalyst that propelled these superintendents to lead change in their districts.

The effects of reorganization that emerged as a result of its disequilibrium within districts included some systemic changes including the manner in which those changes were created and implemented. The participants reported sharing information about accountability, specifically NCLB, test scores, and the incremental steps found in growing expectations in student test scores.

Collaborative efforts resulted in schools planning and participating in programs commonly found among these districts. These included curriculum development that emphasized vertical and horizontal alignment. In other words, teachers in the same grade level and between grade levels were having regular conversations about subject content and articulated who would teach what standard and when. Superintendents reported that this team or department time was valued and scheduled as a non-negotiable time to accomplish this articulation. Professional development became more focused and deliberate. With an expectation that all students are to learn, differentiated instruction and the state sponsored Response to Intervention, became opportunities that professional development committees, with superintendents' guidance, planned and participated in. Michael, Thomas, Joseph, Robert, Maria, James, and Martha, along with Richard and Charles, all reported bringing in academic coaches. Some districts have hired permanent reading coaches, others contracted with coaches to come in periodically. Robert reported that there was push back from organized labor when a reading coach was hired until test

scores started improving. Charles reports that the coach in his district remarked how the culture had positively changed with a greater academic focus.

Learning for students, especially in the elementary grades, took on a new secondary look as some schools either departmentalized in math and language arts in which flex math groups or walk to read groups were created based on students abilities. In other words, students now traveled to other teachers' classrooms for their math and language arts based on their skill level rather than staying with the same teacher all day long. Similarly, some schools reported students now transcended grade levels to be taught at their level rather their chronological age.

Finally, it is apparent that these high achieving school districts deliberately implemented some sort of behavioral plan. As mentioned in the stakeholders section, many of the superintendents reported that MBI improved their learning environment resulting in improved test scores. As Michael reported, teachers and engaged students helped create an atmosphere that minimized any distractions from those disengaged students, often times resulting in those same detractors becoming engaged themselves. Susan and Martha remarked that they recognized the need to implement a behavioral plan simultaneously with the changes in curriculum and instruction.

Three final residual effects of this theme that are related included (1) the superintendents' obvious disdain for the reporting expectations set by the Montana Office of Public Instruction; (2) that a dual set of plans are maintained, specifically the Five-Year Plan required by OPI in which minimal data and plans are maintained. Clearly these are completed just to get them done, not as a tool for sustaining continuous school

improvement. These same superintendents had devised their own school improvement plans that they utilized in spite of the OPI plans expressing frustration that “their plans didn’t fit the OPI model” (Martha, 2010, p. 8). (3) Our study’s superintendents “ran interference” for their principals and teachers “dealing with the yuck” (Michael, 2010, p. 12) so teachers could take care of student learning in the classroom. The fallout of running interference was an equally frustrating removal from daily interaction from students and teachers because of computer generated obligations. As articulated earlier in Chapter 4, there were a number of superintendents who were frustrated that they find themselves removed from students and teachers, working 60 to 70 hour weeks, and that they long for the days when their jobs were not “computer operators” (James, 2010, p. 6).

Research Question Two (A): Is there evidence of transformational leadership by the superintendent in creating such change?

Emergent Theme Five: Transformational Leadership Evidence of transformational leadership was presented by participants during the interviews and site visits. The superintendent participants all reported that the accountability measures have been good for their districts. Despite the reporting demands, they embraced this as an opportunity for all students to learn. While some reported a “not sure where to go from here” to “here’s our data, together let’s do something about this,” transparency and a staff collaboration were two ingredients that allowed stakeholders to commit to their school improvement process. Participants chose to accept the demands of accountability rather than expending energy fighting against something that had improved student learning for all as a core belief.

From the data it was evident that these superintendents drew from transformational leadership skill sets. The superintendents interviewed stated that in order to be successful, top down directives were not effective. Thomas reported that their changes in accountability were “not top down directed” (2010, p. 6). Remaining optimistic, supporting deep change with professional development, and using data driven decisions removed any “gotcha” from the accountability measures have been actions these superintendents have taken. “Our teachers meet in small groups or committees collaborating on concerns, expectations or curriculum. It’s all very functional” (Michael, 2010, p. 7). As time proceeded and plans were put into action, those staff members who were not in compliance or did not exhibit buy-in found themselves in difficult discussions with their superintendents sometimes resulting in non-renewals. Susan reported that most of her staff participated and appreciated collaborative efforts in reform but she did “have some difficult discussions with teachers and needing to say ‘this is the way it’s going to be’” (2010, p. 4). William spoke of his role as the instructional leader this way:

I feel the accountability movement has impacted me a lot. I have to admit that I feel an obligation when held to this certain measuring stick of NCLB; I think there is an obligation that I will do anything to get us to that point. Don’t get me wrong, a lot of the ideas and programs going on came from the staff, but I have to create the atmosphere, the environment in which we can strive to meet those accountability goals. (2010, p. 14)

### Summary

This chapter examined the emergent themes of this phenomenological study by telling the stories of 11 superintendents who led districts with significant growth in student achievement in an educational climate of accountability. Greater expectations

placed on school districts has created disequilibrium, but for these 11 superintendents, they have been able (a) identify a more urgent purpose for the 21<sup>st</sup> century school district; (b) embrace accountability as benefit for student learning; (c) lead stakeholders through this era of accountability factoring in purpose and accountability; (d) focus on a few goals that support student learning, quality instruction, and student management; (e) lead with transparency, trust, encouraging collaboration among stakeholders despite bureaucratic paperwork that infringes on their time typically spent in classrooms.

## CHAPTER 5 - ANALYSIS AND REFLECTION

Introduction

“The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality” (DePree, 1989, p. 11).

“The ultimate purpose of leadership is to bring order out of chaos” (Murphy & Murphy, 2002, p. 193).

Whether the call for accountability and improved student performance in K-12 public education originated from the pressures of the global marketplace, the think tanks that compared international test scores, the bi-partisan effort to demand proficiency by 2014, the local businessmen who simply want employees capable of counting out correct change, or the school boards and parents who did not want neighboring districts outscoring their student, the fact remains that the clock has been ticking for improvement. Educational reform in America’s schools has a well deserved and undeniable reputation for failing to gain traction. However, greater pressure has been applied in this current era of accountability. And while passive resistance may have worked previously, there is a sense that this current pressure for performance is not short-lived. What has occurred for many districts has been a disruption, disequilibrium, chaos. This phenomenological study examined the responses of 11 Montana superintendents who, despite the disequilibrium that came with accountability, used this as an opportunity to transform their districts and demonstrate academic growth.

### Research Questions

Chapter 5 will present an interpretation of the data in the context of the research questions and the theoretical framework. This study was a phenomenological investigation of superintendents as instructional leaders in this era of accountability. The research questions were:

(1) How has accountability resulted in disequilibrium and change within school districts?

(2) How does the superintendent address accountability as a catalyst for promoting growth as measured by student achievement?

(2A) Is there evidence of transformational leadership by the superintendent in creating such change?

A brief summary of the theoretical framework used will be presented. Salient points related to current literature regarding chaos theory, accountability, and transformational leadership will be reviewed to provide context. The researcher's intent was to review literature on chaos theory and transformational leadership moving from broad concepts to actual data collection whereby the findings from 11 superintendents could contribute to the body of knowledge in these intersecting areas.

### Previous Research on Chaos Theory

Chaos theory allows for a system to re-group or re-create itself, but a system must recognize the need to change. Both transformational leadership and chaos theory allow for solutions and changes to manifest themselves in different ways from different

sources. Transformational leadership looks upon chaos as opportunity for further growth, acknowledging that such growth will create disequilibrium (Wheatley, 1999; Marzano et al., 2005.)

Science now utilizes chaos theory to explain how simple changes at a basic level can lead to complex and sophisticated organisms (Wolfram, 2002). Systems theory and chaos theory have some similar origins and conclusions, specifically in that solutions or change come from unexpected sources (Senge, 2006; Wheatley, 2007). Business and commerce address chaos and complexity through adaptation and application in which various problem-solving and interdependence is utilized (Murphy & Murphy, 2002). Education, which is in the greatest period of change in decades with the implementation and expectations of the No Child Left Behind laws, could position itself to learn from science, systems theory, and the business model as it attempts to transform itself from a public system of mandatory attendance to mandatory learning (Lezotte, 2006 & McKee).

However, there must be a focused empowerment, in which comes a shift in superintendents' actions and skill set, and in which individual teachers and administrators would embrace change, change that result in greater student achievement. Similarly, human and financial resources must be directed by the boards of trustees' overarching purpose and core values. Difficult employee decisions, such as job assignments for administrators, must be made with the idea of student achievement not popularity kept in mind. Students, parents, and community members must also be given opportunities for their voices to be heard in shaping a school under the leadership of a transformational superintendent in chaotic times.

Undergoing such deep change creates systems in which people become effective and structured interactions become efficient. Such human effectiveness and structural efficiency, a foundation of transformational leadership, builds capacity and allows for self-organization (Glor, 2007). The research of Bommer et al., (2005) indicates when change implementers engage in transformational leadership there is a reduction in employee cynicism and greater buy in. “People in an organization or any kind of system can get through anything as long as they realize they know they are all in it together” (M. Wheatley, personal communication August 17, 2009). “Only as we’re engaged together in work that is meaningful do we learn to work through the differences and value them. Change becomes much easier when we focus on creating a meaning for the work that can embrace us all” (Wheatley, 2007, pp.147-148).

Wheatley (2007) adds that a leader’s role is not to make sure everyone knows what to do and how to do it but rather ensuring people have clarity about the mission and purpose of the organization. People organize in order to gain purpose, identity, and to affirm our identity (Wheatley, 1999). Organizations that have a defined purpose succeed and are distinguished in two ways because (a) the same outcome is produced under different circumstances; and (b) different outcomes are produced in the same or slightly different environments, (Gharajedaghi, 2006). In Glor’s study, there is an assumption that change occurs easier in complex, self-organizing entities than through traditional, linear dimensions. Educational leaders can learn from the world of commerce in chaotic and complex periods. These measures may address what occurs to many groups who are on

the edge of chaos, teetering between the strains of too much organizational stress and exhausting a group's energy supply (Butz, 1997).

Transformational leadership is a process that changes the dynamics of the interactions among people. It takes into account the vision, values, short-term and long-term goals, along with emotions, motivation and ethics of those involved in a system in an attempt to make their work meaningful and engaging. What is unique is the distributed planning and authority that is shared willingly by a transformational leader. The Kouzes and Posner (2007) model lists five practices that enable leaders to get extraordinary things accomplished: (a) model the way; (b) inspire a shared vision; (c) challenge the process; (d) enable others to act; (e) encourage the heart. Similarly, Reeves (2006) identifies dimensions of leadership that will assist a transformational leader through chaotic periods as it narrowly focuses vision and action.

Wheatley (2007) states public schools are not necessarily systems if they do not draw from a common purpose. In these chaotic times there is an opportunity for transformational leaders to draw from the stakeholders, stakeholders who do care about the education of its community's children but whose purpose has not been weaved together. Marzano et al. recognizes that transformational leaders do the works of second order change and lead with seven specific traits. Second order change is defined as deep change that alters a system with substantive governance, problem solving, planning, and implementation. Sources for such change break from the traditional top down model and include educators who demonstrate comparative advantage due to their competence and experiences. The seven key traits found in the second order change model include

knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment, being an optimizer, providing intellectual stimulation, facilitation as a change agent, monitoring and evaluating change, demonstrating flexibility, and being well-grounded in beliefs and ideals (2005).

Transformational leadership calls for collaboration with various stakeholders. Chaos theory acknowledges that solutions during disequilibrium may come from unexpected sources. For the superintendent to lead a district through chaotic times, it is imperative to involve stakeholders. “What is lacking are not case examples or processes but the commitment to involve everybody. We keep hoping we don’t need to – that if we design a good plan, people will accept it on its merits. Who is missing? Who else needs to do this work? What about partnering with confusion and chaos?” (Wheatley, 2007 p. 111).

#### The Phenomenological Study Summary

The researcher designed a phenomenological study to examine the responses of superintendents in this era of educational accountability during which change is present and student achievement is expected. The theoretical framework of this study was derived from various research and conceptual ideals of chaos theory and transformational leadership. As cited earlier in this chapter, the expectation for present day public K-12 education is mandatory learning. This is a significant shift from the previous era whose sole accountable benchmark was mandatory school attendance for children. Such a shift has created disequilibrium in America’s schools with greater attention focused on student performance; specifically NCLB laws state that 100% of students in public education will be proficient in mathematics and reading by 2014.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the actions taken by district superintendents in response to greater expectations in this era of accountability. This study examined how accountability measures and subsequent changes within districts and schools were addressed by the districts' instructional leader, the superintendents. Within the context of chaos theory, 11 district superintendents who have served in their districts for a minimum of five years and whose students in their respective districts outperformed students in the state with growth above the state average were questioned about how they have addressed accountability and how their actions have led to increased student achievement.

Chaos theory allows for a system to re-group or self-organize, but a system must recognize the need to change. Both transformational leadership and chaos theory allow for solutions and changes to manifest themselves in different ways from different sources. Figure 4 returns to the chaos theory cycle for K-12 education introduced in chapter one. Clockwise from the upper left hand corner, this depiction identifies the status quo, followed by some change variable that creates disruption or disequilibrium in which re-organization of the system is necessary. The lower left hand quadrant is one in which successful systems adjust when transformational leaders embrace change and solutions emerge from self-organization.

With reflection upon these concepts, an overarching question asked will be: how does the superintendent address expectations and accountability measures associated with organizational change and improvement? Two research questions emerged that examined the actions of the superintendent as instructional leader. There were five

themes that answered the research questions which emerged from the interviews and artifact examination with the 11 superintendents.

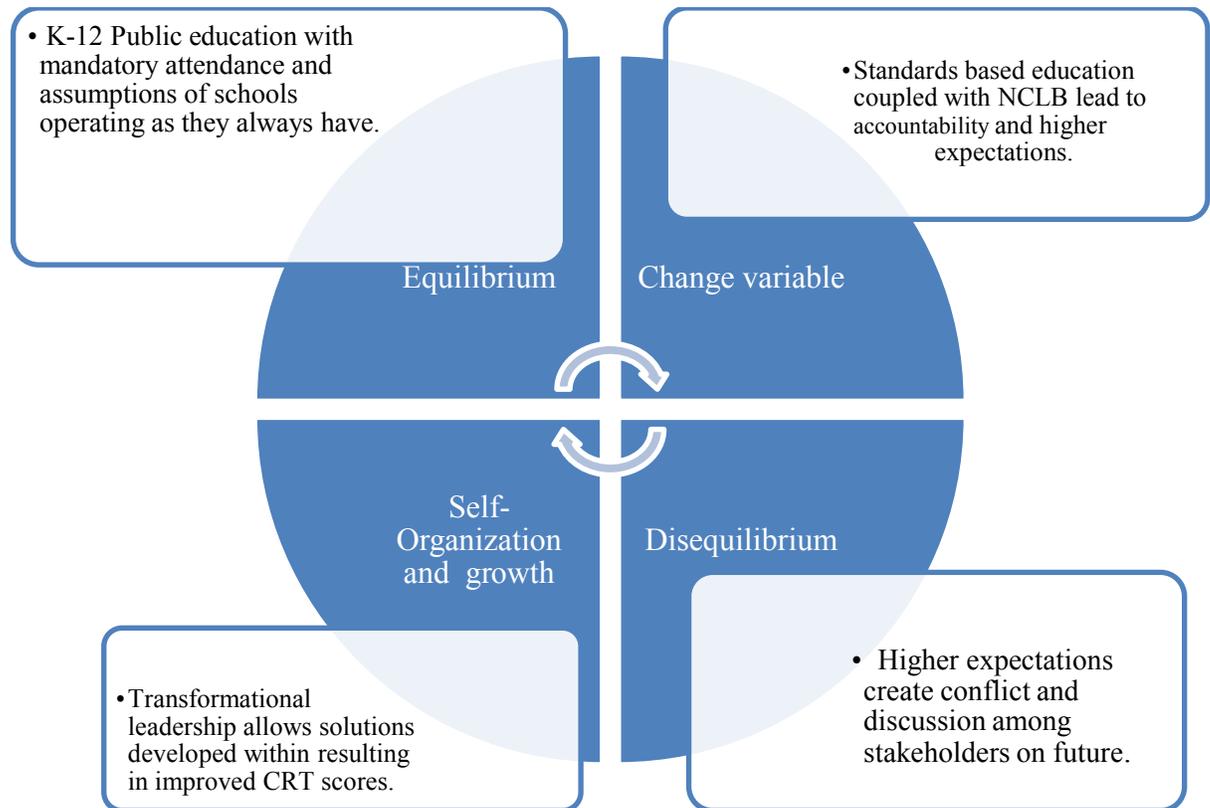
- (1) How has accountability resulted in disequilibrium and change within school districts?

The *first theme* that emerged that answers the first research question is purpose. Superintendents reported that their districts' purpose involved an urgent need to equip students with critical thinking and technological skills, in addition to the traditional democratic values and becoming productive citizens. The fast paced, ever changing society demands lifelong learning as students must prepare for jobs that are yet to be created.

The *second theme* under research question one to emerge was accountability within the school district. Superintendents stated that accountability was a welcomed and integral part of the K-12 public school landscape. Despite exasperation with many of the tenets and demands of NCLB, all participants stated that accountability helped achieve the districts' purpose.

The *third theme* to emerge was stakeholders' responses. Superintendents reported that did not need significant convincing or cajoling of their stakeholders to help them realize that accountability of some form was here to stay. School boards relied on their superintendents to guide them through the nuances of NCLB. Teachers may have had some initial reluctance for two reasons. First, their initial response was accountability was a short lived experiment that would change due to political pressures. Second, teachers

Figure 4. Chaos theory cycle in K-12 education.



did not want to give up favorite lessons or practices. However, they quickly became collaborative partners with educational leaders when they accepted this newly focus system on student learning. Students also noticed the change in climate and that school developed a more business like atmosphere.

(2) How does the superintendent address accountability as a catalyst for promoting growth as measured by student achievement?

The *fourth theme* that emerged under question two was tied to the re-organization of the school district under the leadership of the superintendent. Participants reported that a more collaborative environment was created in which changes and solutions to problems came from within the organization and not solely from top-down directives. Teachers, principals, and superintendents implemented programs, such as Response to Intervention and student behavioral plans, to ensure learning for all students. One irony discovered in this study was while accountability relied on superintendents playing a larger role as instructional leaders, the immense paperwork and reporting led to frustration as it forced them to have less interaction with teachers and students. Related to this finding was the consistent report of superintendents filling out state required plans and reports, but having another set of specific goals and plans in a format that was district designed and more meaningful for their stakeholders instead of a state mandated one.

(2A) Is there evidence of transformational leadership by the superintendent in creating such change?

The *fifth emergent theme* is evidence of transformational leadership. Superintendents report this skill set is needed in systems of accountability. Moving away from top-down directives, participants set up teacher teams to examine data and to be part of the problem solving decision making process as issues and concerns arose within the district. Professional development was designed with specific goals for grade levels or schools instead of self-selected by individual teachers. Though a punitive system to measure teacher effectiveness was not embraced by participants, they also reported not

shying away from having difficult conversations or making difficult recommendations if they felt instructors were not performing at a level that met student needs.

### Implications

Wheatley has written in support for the desired state of disequilibrium, a time of imbalance in which an organization will change (2007, 2006). Within the chaos theory cycle, transformational leadership allows for the type of growth that Wheatley discusses when solutions are sought from stakeholders rather than in a linear and traditional hierarchy (2006). The researcher found within the data collected, support for the work of Marzano and Waters which indicates a correlation between student achievement and educational leaders who take an active role in instructional leadership (2009). However, there was information derived from this research that has new theoretical and professional implications. First, Murphy and Murphy (2002) advise in a chaotic business environment that it is prudent to avoid the “ready, fire, aim” approach to change and instead be aiming at multiple targets. From this research there is evidence of success in aiming, or in educational terms, strategically planning after taking steps in implementing change. Similar to Murphy and Murphy’s rush to think concept, the participants in this study shared their rush to embrace accountability and developed cultures within their districts a sense of urgency.

Second, there emerged a four-pronged approach to accountability that superintendents implemented. The first prong was focused goals (Marzano & Waters, 2009). Under the first two emergent themes of purpose and accountability, the researcher

found the participants to have a few focused goals to meet districts' goals. The second prong was curriculum alignment. Time and effort was spent in these districts to ensure vertical and horizontal curricular alignment (Marzano et al., 2005).

The third prong that was evident was the implementation of student behavioral and management plan. Though the implementation was through a collaborative effort typical of transformational leadership, this finding is identified as unique considering the number of participants who cited the Montana Behavioral Initiative, or some other student management plan, as a key ingredient leading to the improved student achievement. Marzano wrote:

Safety and order (by other names) are addressed in all five of the studies reviewed in Chapter 2. Edmonds calls them "a safe and orderly atmosphere conducive for learning"; Levine and Lezotte use "productive climate and culture." Sammons calls them "learning environment," "positive reinforcement," and "pupils rights and expectations"; Bosker and Scheerens use the terms "school climate." (2003, p. 53)

Regardless of the name, Marzano (2003) wrote that in order to achieve a safe and orderly environment there must be "ecological interventions, establishing school wide rules and procedures and consequences." (p. 59)

The fourth prong that is directly related to the emergent theme of re-organization is the provision of professional development in the areas of the first three prongs. Superintendent participants reiterated the importance of being having professional development in alignment with their purpose, goals, and re-organizational efforts (Reeves, 2006).

For the first time in American history, public education is on the clock for improvement and to attain a level of proficiency for all students. Zhao wrote:

No Child Left Behind has undoubtedly been the most significant component of recent educational reform efforts in the United States. Although it intends to ensure every child receives a good education so no child is left behind, its definition of good education is good scores on standardized tests in reading and math. (p. 2)

While many programs at the local, state, and national level have come and gone, the broad implications of NCLB were for states to hold the local district accountable for student performance. This bi-partisan legislation did not disappear or disintegrate like many predicted soon after its approval in 2001 (Lewis, 2005). Despite a change in political power and a change in presidents, the expectations of student learning for all remain. Through the lens of chaos theory it was evident by the response of the educational community that disequilibrium had disrupted the American school system. The former Montana state superintendent had pleaded her case with the Department of Education that students were well educated in Montana, and had attempted to set up measurements that would not be intrusive to local districts. When denied, large annual measurable objectives had to be implemented which meant large gains over a short amount of time were required as opposed to smaller gains over a longer amount of time (J. Staab, personal communication, September 14, 2010). The Montana Office of Public Instruction also set into motion an accountability system that required Effectiveness Reports and Five-Year Plans.

As the 11 participants shared, they perceived many of their colleagues to be in opposition of an accountability system, but they viewed the greater expectations as a necessary tool to improve student achievement in their districts. Chaos theory states that systems that are in a state of disequilibrium have the greatest potential to change when

there is a perceived need to change, and that change is most efficient when the system can self-organize. Research was presented in previous sections of this study of how the business and science models follow this pattern. This phenomenological study revealed how in an educational system disequilibrium can create a re-organized and re-generated system when transformational leadership allows for solutions to arise from within the system rather than from top-down directives.

In spite of the state's efforts to impose school improvement plans on these 11 districts, the participants reported two common findings: (a) these districts formulated school improvement plans that were tailored to their district based on the goals they set for improvement; and (b) often these superintendents ran interference from the demands of state reporting by planning and reporting themselves on the mandated plans, but facilitated second order change within their districts with their district designed plans. In other words, through the chaos of accountability, these superintendents embraced it, formulated plans to fit their districts, and prevented external "noise" from interfering with their principals' and teachers' work with students.

These 11 school districts all had improvement in their state test scores at a percentage significantly higher than the state average. The 11 superintendents all reported earnestly embracing the accountability movement and that most of the teachers within their districts also embraced this, and as one superintendent stated, they were no longer having conversations of whether NCLB would remain in place. Recognizing the need to change coupled with an invitation to work collaboratively to re-organize signals a change in the way second order change can occur in school districts.

The researcher found that the self-organized efforts contained a common four-pronged approach for school improvement among the districts studied and as reported by the respective superintendents. The first prong was focused goals. As referenced earlier in this chapter, superintendents used a school improvement plan designed specifically for their district. However, the finding is that these plans were narrowly focused for short amounts of time. The second prong was collaborative efforts at aligning curriculum vertically and horizontally. The third prong was implementing a school wide behavioral plan. The fourth prong was having a professional development plan that directly linked back to one of the first three prongs. As a result of implementing this four-pronged approach, superintendents reported a decline in special education referrals, a decline in discipline referrals, a more business like atmosphere environment that promoted learning, and ultimately significantly higher growth in student achievement as measured by the state criterion referenced tests. Robert's experience during his tenure at his district is a good example of this four-pronged approach that has resulted in academic achievement. Figure 5 depicts the chaos theory cycle when the 11 transformational leaders' actions are taken into account from this study.

Re-examining Robert's experiences in his district is one way to examine how his actions align with the four-pronged approach while following the chaos theory cycle. Robert's passion was evident in his expressed purpose, "Our job is to prep every kid to have the skills necessary to survive in the emerging job field" (2010, p. 1). Coming into a district that was in disequilibrium, he discovered that the staff had not embraced accountability. He found an equally frustrated community that was not pleased with the

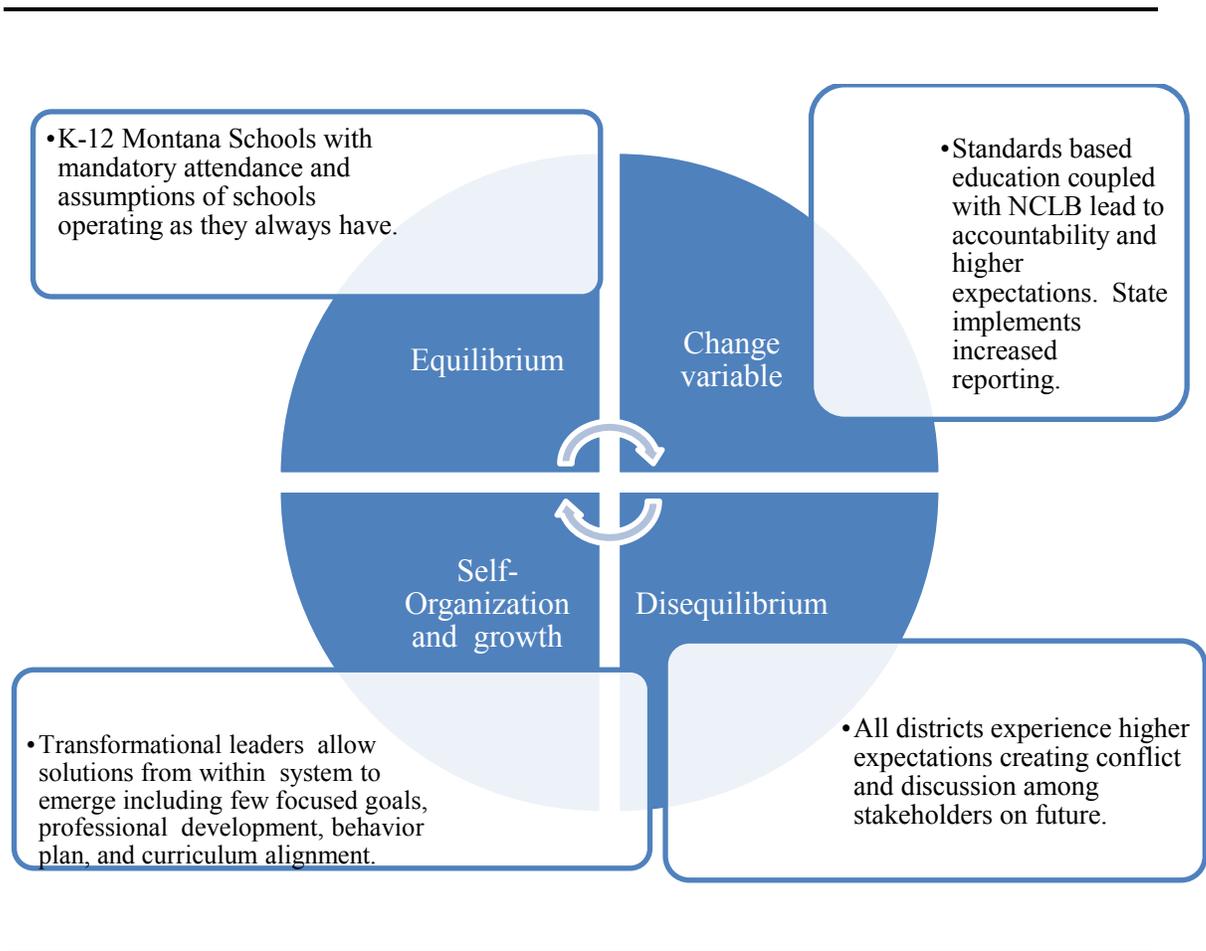
academic program. Robert found himself providing inservices and holding expectations for the staff about NCLB, but also providing professional development in curriculum development, standards, assessment, and creating positive learning environment. Inviting staff to participate in collaborative work, teachers began to vertically and horizontally align their curriculum. Implementing Response to Intervention and having higher standards for both staff and student behavior helped create an environment conducive for learning (2010).

#### Future Research

The results of this study suggest several opportunities for further inquiry. First, it would be useful to replicate this study with a larger population of participants. Though a saturation of findings was discovered with the number of participants, reaching out to the entire group of eligible participants across the state to discover if findings were consistent would be of interest in how change and accountability are best received and implemented. Second, the methodology selected for this study was appropriate; however including members of the various stakeholders groups would provide validation of the participants' responses. Third, while it was not the researcher's intent in this study to discover why most districts make modest, average gains in student achievement despite having the same superintendent for at least five years, for someone it may be of interest to discover through a comparison study what hurdles prevent significant growth. Fourth, it would be of interest to work with the Montana Office of Public Instruction and in sharing this research allow districts that are achieving significantly higher than the state average growth to opt out of the mandatory state regulated Five Year Plan and to use the

district plan that they currently use in a dual manner. Fifth, the participants of this research came primarily from smaller K-8 Montana districts or districts classified as Class B or Class C in which there are enrollments up to 1000 students. The majority of Montana school districts are Class C schools, but expanding the study with eligible participants from Class AA and Class A districts would be of interest for a wider lens.

Figure 5. Chaos theory cycle in participants' districts.



### Conclusion

As we entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a number of educators spent time writing satirical articles about No Child Left Behind using sports analogies describing the unrealistic expectation that all teams would win championships because all athletes would be proficient in their sport. Their points were absurd and missed the underlying theme of accountability. The researcher also wrote an Op-Ed piece using a sports analogy entitled “No Hockey Team Left Behind” (Appendix G).

That article discussed the progressive improvement the author’s hockey team made over a four year period. In other words, it was not about developing the team into a championship caliber team, but having a coach who monitored our collective and individual improvements during this time frame.

The 11 superintendents studied in this phenomenological study were educators who have shared their philosophical approval of NCLB and all students can learn, and used a skill set of a transformational leader by defining for their stakeholders the impact of accountability. Instead of lobbying against an enacted law, or waiting for direction for the state for federal departments of education, they brought stakeholders together to “define reality” and to “create order out of chaos.” In the case of William, a system of self-accountability was already in place, but for all participants, they used the new expectations as a catalyst for school improvement.

The implications of this study are not causal. The researcher initially inquired about the academic success that students in these superintendents’ district were experiencing. What were the responses by the superintendent that could have contributed

to growth in student achievement that was significantly higher than the state average in a period of accountability that created disequilibrium or chaos in school districts?

The researcher believes from the data collection that these 11 superintendents held core beliefs that (a) all students can learn and (b) they agreed with the general ideal of accountability in schools, therefore reduced the amount of time to “buy in” for themselves and in turn, for their teachers. However, they also knew that positive participation in accountability measures could not occur as a top down directive or in any linear pattern, but through collaborative efforts in which solutions could come from anyone, not just the person with the title of superintendent.

These superintendents also engaged their boards, community, and teachers in a way that helped keep the focus of school improvement to just a few goals. Though there was minimal participation by the board and community stakeholders, superintendents readily gave praise to their teaching staffs for embracing change and accountability. Granted, for some it was a three to four year process, but now 10 years into No Child Left Behind, these superintendents are no longer being asked “when will NCLB go away?”

In the collaborative planning, it was evident that not only curriculum and professional development were needed, but a student behavioral management plan was also implemented in many of the districts. Most of the districts participated in curriculum alignment, the Montana Behavioral Initiative program, differentiated instruction, and Response to Intervention. These districts were putting in place school improvement plans that worked for their districts, and as confessed by many of the participants, a dual set of school improvement plans were maintained due to the frustration with the Office of

Public Instruction's set of required plans. The work of maintaining these plans with staff has required participants to be more involved in the instructional leadership role, but it has also taken a toll on these superintendents as over half the participants expressed health concerns and have retired or are planning their retirement. However, Maria, the 50 year career educator has changed her mind. She believes there is more work to be done and she recognized that her role as a leader has changed. As Senge (2008) aptly wrote:

As people work together they also come to focus on what truly matters to them, and their thinking evolves from a reactive problem-solving mode to creating futures they desire. With this comes a level of commitment, imagination, patience, and perseverance far beyond what happens when we are just reacting to problems (2008, p. 48).

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT DATA SHEET

Participant Information

1. Participant's

Name \_\_\_\_\_

2. Position \_\_\_\_\_

3. How many years have you been the superintendent of this district? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Were you ever a superintendent in another district? \_\_\_\_\_

a. Where and for how many years? \_\_\_\_\_

5. How many total years have you served as a district superintendent? \_\_\_\_\_

6. How many years were you a teacher? \_\_\_\_\_

7. What grades and/or area did you teach? \_\_\_\_\_

8. Current District \_\_\_\_\_

9. District Address \_\_\_\_\_

10. Phone number \_\_\_\_\_

11. Fax number \_\_\_\_\_

12. Number of certified staff members \_\_\_\_\_

13. Student enrollment \_\_\_\_\_

14. District grade span \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Notes

\_\_\_\_\_ Informed Consent Form Signed                      Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Interview Appointment on \_\_\_\_\_                      Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Interview Completed    Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Artifacts Collected

Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Study Codes Assigned

Code \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Appreciation Note Sent

Date \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX B

CORRESPONDING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
<p>1. How has accountability resulted in disequilibrium and change within school districts?</p>	<p>1. How would you describe the purpose of a 21<sup>st</sup> century school district?</p> <p>2. Has today's accountability measures impacted a district's purpose?</p> <p>3. Describe stakeholders' reactions to the growing expectations?</p> <p>4. No Child Left Behind. Adequate Yearly Progress. 5 Year Plans. Annual Measurable Objectives. Differentiated Instruction. Response to Intervention. How have these measures of accountability impacted your district?</p>
<p>2. How does the superintendent address accountability as a catalyst for promoting growth as measured by student achievement?</p> <p>2A. Is there evidence of transformational leadership by the superintendent in creating such change?</p>	<p>5. Have new leadership expectations evolved for you during your tenure as a district superintendent?</p> <p>6. To succeed as the district's instructional leader in today's era of accountability, are additional skills needed for superintendents?</p> <p>7. Describe the changes and respective achievement within your district as a result of greater accountability?</p> <p>8. How would you describe your superintendent leadership skill set in relation to the increased levels of accountability?</p> <p>9. Please share any plans, policies, documents, or other artifacts that indicate your response and your district's response to increased accountability measures. How would you assess the alignment of such artifacts with the district's mission and your leadership in this era of accountability?</p>

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND PROBES

1. How would you describe the purpose of a 21<sup>st</sup> century school district?

- Mission statement
- Productive Citizenry
- Learning for all students
- Lifelong learning
- Opportunities

2. Has today's accountability measures impacted a district's purpose?

- Community involvement
- Strategic planning
- Defined roles
- Collaboration

3. Describe stakeholders' reactions to the growing expectations.

- Local control
- National, international pressure
- Range of responses, emotions

4. No Child Left Behind. Adequate Yearly Progress. 5 Year Plans. Annual Measurable Objectives. Differentiated Instruction. Response to Intervention. How have these measures of accountability impacted your district?

- Time
- Opportunity versus obligation
- Meaningful or superficial changes

5. Have new leadership expectations evolved for you during your tenure as a district superintendent?

- Priorities
- Burden or benefit
- Stakeholders view

6. To succeed as the district's instructional leader in today's era of accountability, are additional skills needed for superintendents?

- New, additional roles
- Skills present or new skill set
- Data driven decision making

7. Describe the changes and respective achievement within your district as a result of greater accountability.

- Shared leadership
- Teaming
- Collaboration
- Stakeholders voice
- Professional development
- Student achievement

8. How would you describe your superintendent leadership skill set in relation to the increased levels of accountability?

- Collaboration
- Communication

- Empowerment
- Top down versus solutions from within

9. Please share any plans, policies, documents, or other artifacts that indicate your response and your district's response to increased accountability measures. How would you assess the alignment of such artifacts with your district's mission and your leadership in this era of accountability?

- Alignment of practice and policies
- Stakeholders
- School improvement process
- Collaboration
- Professional development plans

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**Montana State University**

**Informed Consent Form**

**A Phenomenological Study Examining the Transformational Leadership Through  
the Lens of Chaos**

The study in which you will be participating examines the superintendent in the role of instructional leader in this era of accountability and as a result of No Child Left Behind and related local, state, and federal expectations.

If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to participate in a 60 to 90 minute interview regarding superintendents' actions in the role of instructional leader in this era of accountability. I will ask you questions regarding the impact of No Child Left Behind on teaching practices, professional development, strategic planning, and/or data based decision making in relation to the superintendent. You will be invited to share artifacts, such as mission statement and school improvement plans. The interview will be audio taped. The tapes will be transcribed verbatim by the interviewer. Only I will have access to the tapes from the interviews. These tapes will be erased by June 1, 2013. I may also contact you at a future date to clarify questions or to provide insight into my interpretation of the data. Copies of artifacts will be made. Field notes will be taken during data collection.

**Your participation in this research is voluntary.** You are free to stop participating at any time, or to decline to answer any specific questions. You may ask me about the research procedures and I will answer your questions to the best of my ability. **Your participation in this research study is confidential.** Following our initial conversations, I will identify you using a code number. I will be the only person with access to the key linking your name with this code number. Results of this study will be reported using pseudonyms. If I believe that information from this interview could result in you or your school being uniquely identifiable, I will decline to disclose this information.

If you have any questions regarding this research project you can contact me, Josh Middleton, at (406) 628-3356. Any additional questions about the rights of human subjects can be answered by Dr. Joanne Erickson (406) 994-6670, my academic advisor and dissertation committee chair, or by the chair of the MSU Human Subjects Committee, Dr. Mark Quinn, (406) 994-4707.

**I agree to participate in a study examining Transformational Leadership through the Lens of Chaos. I understand the information given to me, and I have received answers to any questions I may have had about the research procedures. I understand and agree to the conditions of this study as described. I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and that I may withdraw from this study at any time by notifying me, Josh Middleton.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Interviewer Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

APPENDIX E

PILOT STUDY

The researcher conducted a pilot study involving three superintendents to determine if interview protocol, questions, and artifact review yielded robust information about each district.

### Pilot Study Participants

#### Superintendent Pilot 1 - Richard

Richard has served as a Montana school superintendent for a total of twelve years; eight years in his current K-8 district and four years in a K-12 district. Prior to his positions as superintendent he was a principal in another district for four years and a teacher in two other districts for six years. His current district has 370 students of whom 59% participate in the district's free and reduced lunch program. There are 38 certified members on his staff. His district is located in a depressed logging area in western Montana.

Richard describes the purpose of the 21<sup>st</sup> century school district with the following. We need to make sure our kids are literate and technologically literate. I believe they should be fluent in English, and have the ability to classify and evaluate information if it is valid and authentic. I think they get bombarded with so much information that they've got to have better critical thinking analytic skills (p. 2)

Richard believes that an educated democratic society who have opportunities for lifelong learning are still foundational in our system, but "students must possess technological skills as part of that well rounded education" (p. 2).

Accountability measures are welcomed by Richard and "mirrors the right thing to do." Admittedly not "too excited about test scores versus student skills" (p. 2), believes that if his teachers are true to the standards in their instruction, including differentiated

instruction, then the “test scores will take care of themselves” (p. 2). “I’m not afraid of accountability, I think it does make some people do what they are supposed to do” (p. 3). Being proactive is an action Richard takes pride in and being “proactive starts with the focus of a school” (p. 3).

I know we’ve had a reduction in our special education population by instituting a reading program in kindergarten through third grade. We push so that by the time that our students are in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, they are all on grade level. Everyone is aware of what we are doing as well. The board knows, parents are appreciative, and while teachers were resistant at first, once we got a reading specialist and got focused, our scores went up, but more importantly, student skill levels improved and they started to feel better about themselves (p. 3)

Expanding on teacher resistance, Richard identified two extremes on his teaching staff. Those “who have been here for 22 years pulling out the same teaching material each February” (p. 3), and the other extreme of teachers who will do whatever it takes for student learning to take place “because they really care” (p. 4). Further he states that “our new teachers that come straight in from the universities do a great job with our prescriptive reading program but for some of our veterans, it’s been a battle” (p. 7). He said he has had to involuntarily reassign staff and faces a grievance arbitration hearing as a result. “I was brought in by my board to improve math and reading skills. I submitted my plan, which included a reading specialist” (p. 7).

Though Richard does not consider himself a collaborative type leader, he does believe that RTI strategies and the professional development opportunities to support that initiative have been “a huge component of what we do here to make us unique” (p. 5). He believes the departmentalizing of math and reading at early grades along with hiring

secondary teachers with specific subject endorsements for his upper elementary grades has helped “maintain academic focus” (p. 5).

Richard describes the NCLB accountability measures as “broad, generic guidelines that might help some schools, but we are ahead of the curve, so it’s just paperwork for us” (p. 5).

October is extremely time consuming and takes me away more and more from students. In fact the irony is I keep posted on my bulletin board a copy of the 1958 Fall Report (Appendix F); one legal page, double sided, hand written. Compare that with the size of reports we are doing now (p. 6)

One aspect of accountability that is local in nature is the expectation that differentiated instruction is used in every classroom as appropriate, and for students on Individual Educational Plans, teachers sign an additional district form acknowledging the modifications needed for their IEP students and that they will implement them in their classrooms.

This is the direction we are headed. I went to the board directly with our RTI plan and school wide improvement plan, the board signed off, and then from there I have been implementing it. My staff; some are embracing our plan, some are walking along, and some are getting dragged (p. 8)

#### Superintendent Pilot 2 - Charles

Charles is in his fourth year as superintendent and principal in a small town outside of the state’s capital. Prior to his current role he was a high school teacher for 12 years. In his current district, there are 200 students and 18 certified staff members. Of the student population, 70% qualify for free or reduced lunch participation. The chief employer in the area is state and local government agencies that include departments

within the county seat to state correctional facilities, as well as opportunities to commute to Helena.

Charles believed that the purpose of school district had far reaching effects into each students future.

To ensure a) in the beginning kids are given the essential skills needed for the rest of days in school and b) as kids evolve through system, preparing them for next level in their lives from pre-K to post high school. There is direct economic benefits to populous and so they can learn anything at anytime. Never stuck in their lives without options. Need basic skills to attain additional skills. To live their lives with choices but with umbrella that is quite a responsibility that a school district has. (2010, p. 1)

He also believes that the accountability movement has actually helped define the purpose of school districts “with positive influence and gives a common purpose” (p. 2).

As he discussed the accountability movement, he made it clear he was advocate for the measures and standards.

I think NCLB has impacted us in a good way. I know a lot of my colleagues across the state and nation probably disagree, you might be one of them, but I think the key word is accountability. Montana is notorious for doing what it wants. Now people are saying you are paid to teach. I like it. I like accountability because it gives us all a common goal to work towards (p. 2)

Charles states that most stakeholders have different reactions to accountability. Boards like accountability because we have done good job cultivating mission, purpose, planning of what is best for kids and its’ focused on instruction. Indirect feedback from community is positive. Staff struggle with it. Most have twenty or more years of experience in their career and I’m not sure if it is accountability or the lack of ability in being flexible. Younger teachers are more flexible. Students, I notice, take things a lot more seriously. School has become a place of business, not a place for dinking off. (p. 4)

Upon reflection, Charles believes that NCLB, the benchmarks established to meet adequate yearly progress, the Five Year Plan all fit together, but he credits response to intervention as the key to the marked improvement in student achievement. Coupled with the use of data, Charles states that “at the end of the day conversation is involves data that shows the job is getting done or isn’t getting done” (p. 4). Coming back to the theme of accountability, Charles adds,

We are still in midst of significant change process --- its impacted time, but greater impact is long term... not about me being here or it will go away when I leave. There is no going back. Just no going back. Provided vehicle for leadership to strategically say, this is what test scores say. Still in infancy but it still coming along. (p. 5)

Charles shared that his own expectations of goals and mission have not changed significantly, but expectations for leadership has changed significantly by staff and board compared to when he first started the job.

The biggest change is leadership in the past has been management but now the board still wants to fall back to talk about boilers, budgets, roofs, but knowing I’m competent, but not concerned. My forte is not these things. The expectation has changed because of what they expected and what they got. You will do managerial stuff but everyone will take care of self, but the superintendent needs to be instructional leader. A board might think they want a manager, but they are getting a leader in me. (p. 7)

Part of that leadership is to develop teachers to be about student learning and becoming “masters of the craft of education” (p. 5). For him as a leader, it means a deep understanding of teaching initiatives, organizational theory, change theory, and leadership theory. “You need a good personality that can build strong relationships. The skill set was bricks and mortar, the new skill set is people skills...lead people to see new things” (p. 5).

Charles reflected on a comment made by the instructional coach who said the district environment was a completely different culture; a culture that Charles includes strong collaboration and a focused professional development plan. He credits having a bigger picture in mind for a vision and “not get fired up about a lot of things that people think you are prodding at them” (p. 7). He believes building strong relationships and having a wide knowledge base assists with every interaction. “I’m honest and upfront with stakeholders to get them to see the common good of excellent schools” (p. 7). Every conversation Charles holds in the context of education is centered on “what about the student” (p. 7). “There are no more exclusively top down decisions. It’s your decision, our decision, my decision. I’ll even say this is “my decision and I’ll deal with consequences.”

The district culture has been developed so that “it wouldn’t fall apart under new leadership, but to safeguard, we don’t have alignment. It’s more “strategic doing” than “strategic planning.” Further, “We have made level two changes but haven’t formalized it” (p 8). Part of that planning meant taking professional development out of the individual hands of teachers and into the collective plan for improvement so it is more systemic.

The RTI process has helped us create an instructional manual. We have lots of PD centered on instruction, it is all about instruction. That has been biggest key to what we are doing. We don’t have good planning until you build relationships and set down the road acknowledging and embracing accountability, perhaps not even knowing where it is going to take you because the change is fluid and you have to be flexible and adaptable. (p. 9)

Superintendent Pilot 3 - Taylor

Taylor is in his 10<sup>th</sup> year in education. He served two years as a middle school teacher before becoming a principal and superintendent in smaller districts in Montana, Wyoming, and Alaska. Currently he is the superintendent of a K-8 district that feeds into the larger Billings High School District. He has approximately 370 students who he describes as coming from two economic extremes: deep poverty or from million dollar houses. He has 28 certified members on his staff.

Taylor stated that the core purpose of a school district has not changed very much despite entrance into the 21<sup>st</sup> century except that now teachers are more the facilitators of information rather than the sole source of information. He believes that democratic ideals are still suited for K-12 public education but critical thinking skills are necessary for students to know “what sources are valid and reliable” (p 1).

Taylor cites the popular fight against NCLB, but welcomes the idea of accountability in schools. “The model right now isn’t the way, but it has provided improvement” (p. 2). He believes NCLB has created more focus on how students learn and how student are doing. And while he embraces accountability he said that it took some time for his district stakeholders to welcome it. A turning point was when the district did not make AYP and “the finger pointing started for a short time, but more importantly it helped us realize we needed an alignment of our curriculum” (p. 5) He reports that “the teachers who have embraced the growth model have revitalized their careers. As educators we must model lifelong learners” (p. 6).

While he believes it has helped with student achievement and teacher instruction, it has caused frustration for him as a superintendent due to planning and reporting expectations.

First thing, overall the more we have put on plate, the further and further away it takes us away from being instructional leader. October is a killer with all the paperwork. I left one position for this one is because I wore all the hats. I was jack of all trades and master of none. I love instructional leadership so I moved. The more paperwork that is given the more I'm taken away. It is self defeating. (p. 5)

Another source of frustration with the current accountability for Taylor is the intangibles such as pride or community support are not measurable in AYP status reports. "AYP is more a measure of who is the last to fail. Stay ahead of the curve, eventually all schools will fail under this system" (p. 5).

While Taylor recognizes the changes in education and how accountability can lead to improvement, he believes "the old model was the Bs – budget, buses, beans. But today it is about student learning so I try to build connections with stakeholders" (p. 6). He has led discussions with staff members to determine "where our holes are, let's say in math curriculum or text books" (p. 7). He advocates teacher collaboration and everyone "must be open to ideas no matter where they come from" (p. 8).

I have teacher committees, based on correlates of effective schools, and I give them more and more power. I'm a facilitator to help our schools improve. Most things are things I would do, but by giving that to the teachers, there is a lot more buy in. You need to delegate things to both teachers and community. Differentiated instruction and RTI need to be integrated so all students are challenged. This is just solid education. (p. 9).

And while his stakeholders are supportive of this transformational leadership, Taylor readily admits that "it's a work in progress" (p. 9), and that the district is working on

alignment of plans, policies, and mission, but right now they are focusing on a few areas for improvement.

APPENDIX F

1958-59 DISTRICT REPORT

## Superintendent's, Principal's or Teacher's Report

TO COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT AND DISTRICT CLERK

Report of the Public Schools in District No. \_\_\_\_\_ In the County of Missoula Montana, from the first day of July, 1958 to the thirtieth day of June, 1959

	Kindergarten	Elementary (Grades)	High School
1. Aggregate days of teaching (No. days school was actually taught excluding holidays when school was not in session)		184	
2. No. pupils enrolled during year: Boys		122	
Girls		114	
Total		236	
3. No. original enrollments (See Register page 2) Boys		116	
Girls		111	
Total		227	
4. No. received by transfer from another school in the county		4	
5. No. received by transfer from another school in the State outside the county		3	
6. Aggregate attendance (sum of daily attendance)		36965	
7. Aggregate absence (sum of daily absences)		1808	
8. Average daily attendance (6 divided by 1)		205	
9. Average number belonging (sum of 6 and 7 divided by 1)		215	
10. Per cent of attendance (6 divided by sum of 6 and 7)	95.33		No. cases of tardiness <u>24</u>
11. No. cases corporal punishment <u>0</u> ; No. cases suspension <u>0</u> ; No. cases expulsion <u>0</u>			
12. No. visits by county supt. and deputies <u>2</u> ; No. visits by trustees <u>1</u> ; No. visits parents of pupils			
13. Has the school a library? <u>Yes</u> How many volumes were added to the library this past year? <u>200</u> At what cost? <u>\$350</u> No. of books in library, not including Dictionary or textbooks? <u>1130</u>			
14. No. of globes <u>7</u> No. of wall maps <u>20</u> No. of large Dictionaries in school <u>4</u>			
15. Does the district comply with the law in regard to the purchase of textbooks used by pupils? <u>Yes</u>			
16. Was Arbor Day observed in accordance with the law? <u>Yes</u> Pioneer Day? <u>Yes</u>			
17. Was instruction given regarding the effects of alcoholic drinks and narcotics? <u>Yes</u> Regarding the prevention of communicable diseases? <u>Yes</u> (See Sections 1054 and 1078 Revised Codes, 1921.)			
18. Has your building been thoroughly cleaned at least once every three months as provided by law? <u>Yes</u>			
19. No. pupils receiving eighth grade diplomas <u>25</u>			
20. No. supervisors of instruction of special subjects and grades <u>0</u> No. supervising principals <u>0</u>			
21. No. positions (No. teachers required to fill all positions at the same time):	Kindergarten	Elementary (Grades)	High School
Men		3	
Women		7	
22. No. different individuals (excluding superintendent) employed as teachers during the year: Men		3	
Women		7	
	Men	Women	
23. No. teachers not high school graduates and with no normal training			
24. No. teachers who are high school graduates but without college or normal training			
25. No. teachers with 1 yr. preparation beyond 4 yr. high school			
26. No. teachers with 2 yrs. beyond 4 yr. high school but without advanced diploma			
27. No. teachers with 3 yrs. beyond 4 yr. high school but without advanced diploma			
28. No. teachers who are graduates of normal courses 2 yrs. beyond 4 yr. high school			5
29. No. of teachers who are graduates of four-year college courses		3	5

NOTE: If data for 30 to 32 are not kept separately, segregate on basis of number of teachers employed in each department:

	Kindergarten	Elementary (Grades)	High School
30. Total annual salaries and expenses of supervisors of instruction: Men			
Women			
31. Total annual salaries and expenses of supervising principals: Men			
Women			
32. Total annual salaries of teachers (excluding supt. or prin. if 3rd class): Men		10,660	Inst. Bond
Women		35,870	Inst. Bond
33. Annual salary and expenses of superintendent (principal if 3rd class) \$ <u>8100</u> Salary of high school principal \$ _____			
34. Expenses of special departments: Manual training \$ _____; home economics \$ _____; art \$ _____; music \$ <u>260</u> ; other special departments \$ _____			
35. Date of opening school <u>9/2/58</u> date of closing school <u>5/29/59</u>			
36. I have filled out the age-grade table on the back of this sheet.			

\*According to law, only first and second class districts can employ superintendents. A third class district should report the head of the school as principal.  
(NOT heads of systems.)

APPENDIX G

QUESTIONS AND THEMES

Research Question	Theme	Participant Support
(1) How has accountability resulted in disequilibrium and change within school districts?	Purpose	“I used to believe we prepared students for the world of work and active citizenry but it’s now, for me, about having kids find work that is fulfilling and meaningful to them.” (Peg, 2010, p. 2)
	Accountability	“No Child Left Behind, I think the positive thing that occurred there is just the focus that are put on students and student achievement.” (Robert, 2010, p. 4)
	Stakeholders	“Our community values education. We did not need have to state our case of what we wanted to do.” (Michael, 2010, p. 8)
(2) How does the superintendent address accountability as a catalyst for promoting growth as measured by student achievement?	Re-organization	“We don’t accept anymore that kids in the lower math and reading groups can never be good at math or reading. We changed. We adapted. Not so much because of some standardized test, but because it is our obligation to teach all students wherever they level they are at.” (John, 2010, p. 4)
(2A) Is there evidence of transformational leadership by the superintendent in creating such change?	Transformational Leadership	“We have the Five Year Plan and generated staff input, and we have various committees on instruction and assessment, and that’s where we get the collaboration of staff, we get staff concerns, we communicate our expectations and the process is efficient and functional.” (Michael, 2010, p. 9)

APPENDIX H

*LAUREL OUTLOOK* GUEST EDITORIAL, JULY 2005

## Leaving No Hockey Team Behind

### Educational Changes for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

By Josh J. Middleton, Laurel Superintendent

Between 1978 and 1981 there were 8 games played between the high school aged hockey teams in Butte and Billings. Similar to American Legion Baseball, these hockey teams represented their home towns, not specific high schools. The following are the scores of those games, two per year, during that four year period.

	<b>Game 1</b>	<b>Game 2</b>
1978	Billings 21 Butte 3	Billings 20 Butte 1
1979	Billings 15 Butte 4	Billings 13 Butte 2
1980	Billings 8 Butte 3	Billings 7 Butte 4
1981	Billings 5 Butte 4	Billings 3 Butte 3

As a member of that Butte squad during those four years I can share some background information that will help put this hockey history into perspective:

- Butte began their formal youth hockey program in 1977. Billings was well established by the mid-70s.
- Butte had an outside rink that required flooding and shoveling by hand, and at first only occasionally did the Butte Civic Center provide indoor ice time. Billings also had an outside rink but with artificial ice and a Zamboni, and they had greater access to indoor facilities.
- Butte changed coaches after 1979 from someone who had never played the game before to an ex- professional hockey player.
- Greater expectations were placed on the Butte players in the 1980 and 1981 seasons and off seasons, i.e. more ice time, longer practices, conditioning, and summer camps, just to name a few.
- The Billings team **did not** “ease up” during the ’80 and ’81 seasons so the Butte players would “feel good about themselves.”

Before we examine some of the hockey lessons that can apply to education today, let me reiterate some of the philosophical beliefs that I embrace as superintendent. In Jim Collins' book, *"Good to Great"* he states that the "enemy of great" is not bad, but "good." In other words, an institution stops performing at high levels when complacency seeps in. We should not be satisfied with good efforts and results, but always be striving for excellence. Likewise, Collins is also a believer of having the "right people on the bus, in the right seats." He has found that great companies have properly placed employees performing the necessary tasks at high levels of efficiency, referred to as "on the bus in the right seats." Equally important, according to Collins, is getting the right people off the bus because before you figure out where to drive the bus (meeting goals and objectives), one must be sure the right leadership is in place. The district has worked at getting the right people on and off the bus.

The educational model I embrace and continue to promote is The Effective Schools approach and its 7 Correlates or characteristics. This is not a program as much as a belief system that learning for all occurs when these correlates are in place. They are: 1) Clear and focused mission 2) Strong instructional leadership 3) Safe and orderly learning environment 4) Protected time to teach 5) Good school and home relations 6) Climate of high expectations and 7) Frequent monitoring of student progress. Many of these correlates are sprinkled throughout our district, but the goal is to use this mind set as a filter and foundation in making sound educational decisions at every level.

Recently, a woman who volunteers for the district commented to me that she thought recent decisions in the district had been hastily made. I vehemently, yet respectfully, disagreed stating that on the contrary, many developments and implementations had been very deliberate and thought out. Here are four examples:

1. **MAP Testing twice a year:** MAP (Measures of Academic Progress) allows us to track how our students are doing and what areas we need to improve. Over testing? I would rather monitor progress and adjust instruction in a timely manner than teach material and hope students get it.
2. **All day, every day kindergarten:** I cannot believe Montana is still having this debate! The research is clear on the subject. Early intervention for the neediest 5 year old students may be the only timely intervention that closes the achievement gap. Our one section of all day, every day kindergarten is a highly successful pilot program. It is time for the legislature to fund full time kindergarten with a parental option of sending children full or part-time!
3. **Construction and remodeling** – I continue to be in awe of the community support for our construction projects that will bring about facilities that are safe and conducive for learning.
4. **ACE Curriculum** – The decision has been made to join the ACE Curriculum Consortium. The question shouldn't be, "Why is a Class A district joining with smaller Class B and C districts for curriculum?" The questions should really be, "What took so long? And why do 20 + similar sized Class A districts in this state work independently when an interdependence with other districts would yield greater results and validation?" Such collaboration makes educational and economic sense.

I know school is not hockey and hockey is not school. But there are some parallels between the Laurel schools and a Butte hockey team from 25 years ago that highlight similar fundamental changes. At that time, a highly qualified coach held higher expectations of players, demanded more time on the ice, monitored our progress by having us scrimmage against the adult men's team, got us into better facilities on regular basis, and developed our work ethic/mission as individuals and teammates. He even transferred us into the positions that he thought we would perform at best, though not

necessarily the ones we wanted or thought we were entitled. And though I was not part of the squad after graduating and leaving Butte, the team continued to improve (and win) due to this shift in philosophy.

We have been refining our philosophy or belief system about how we do education here in Laurel. Educational change, innovation and accountability are here to stay. The sooner we embrace the shift from teacher lead instruction to student and standards based learning, the sooner we can honestly say that in the Laurel School District there is learning for all, whatever it takes.