

**ADDRESSING SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH
IN A TEXAS PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT: AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY**

By

Anita M. Killea

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Addressing School Mental Health in a Texas School District:

An Action Research Study

A Dissertation Presented

By

ANITA M. KILLEA

Approved as to style and content by:

Margarita R. O'Neill, Chair

Joy McGhee, Member

Jennifer Ossege, Member

Donna Black, Member

William Lax, Dean, Psychology Graduate Programs

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Abstract

According to the Centers for Disease Control (2013), every year an estimated 13 to 20% of children in the United States suffer from mental health disorders. School mental health services developed to address the learning barriers experienced by these children achieve variable rates of success (Adelman & Taylor, 2011; Center for School Mental Health, 2011). Reasons for this variability include lack of integration of these initiatives into comprehensive school reform efforts (Adelman & Taylor, 2011), lack of inclusion of school mental health staff in the school improvement planning process (Nastasi, Varjas & Moore, 2004), and lack of consideration of the local school context in their selection and implementation (Ringisen, Hendersen & Hoagwood, 2003). A group of 15 school teachers and mental health staff of a small Texas school district conducted this action research study about the status of its school mental health services. Individual interviews of the participants served as the initial basis for group meetings during which participants identified weaknesses in their mental health services, prioritized issues to be addressed, and developed an action plan to be presented to school administrators, and the Board of Education. Consistent with the findings of other research studies on school mental health (Center for School Mental Health, 2011), the three main areas of concern identified by the group included poor role clarification among school personnel responsible for mental health functions, lack of teacher training about mental health disorders and related classroom management strategies, and unclear policies and procedures. The process and outcome of the study support the use of participant action research as a method to aid in the development of locally relevant school mental health programs.

Key words: school mental health, action research, participatory action research, school improvement, problem-solving teams, learning supports

Dedication

To John, Lannon, and Jack, thank you for your love and support in what has been a long journey. You are the best family in the world. I love you all so very much.

To Dr. Magui O’Neill, thank you for your stellar support and guidance during the dissertation process and otherwise...you are a true friend for life.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Abstract.....	i
List of Tables	v
List of Figures.....	vi
Chapter	
1. Introduction.....	1
2. Review of the Literature	3
3. Methodology.....	14
4. Findings.....	26
5. Discussion and Conclusions	34
References.....	49
Appendices	
A. Letter to School District Superintendents	53
B. IRB Approval Letter	54
C. Informed Consent - Adult	55
D. Informed Consent – Student	59
E. Sample Qualitative Questions.....	63
F. PowerPoint “Talking Points” Presentation	64
G. Time Table.....	71
H. The 34 Themes.....	72
I. Action Plan for the school district	96

List of Tables

	<u>Page</u>
Table 1. Participant Demographics.....	19
Table 2. Themes Identified as Major Issues and/or Focus.....	28
Table 3. Themes Combined	28

List of Figures

	<u>Page</u>
Figure 1. Moving From a Two- to a Three-Component Framework for Improving Schools	8
Figure 2. Texas School-Based Social/Emotional Wellness Model	12

Chapter 1

Introduction

Healthcare and educational reform are two areas at the center of current public debate that directly relate to the field of school mental health. Nastasi, Varjas and Moore (2004) suggested that comprehensive health care should include recognition of “the interrelationships among health, mental health and education; concerns for the needs of youths, particularly those living in urban communities; and concomitant demands for school and educational reform” (p. 20). Leaders in the field of school mental health point out that efforts have been made by researchers to improve education and to change the present mental health system by taking a new look at schools (Adelman & Taylor, 2008, 2009, 2010; Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2004c; Kutash, Duchnowski, & Lynn, 2006; O’Connell, Boat & Warner, 2009). Statistical data on children with mental health related issues also suggests further need to strengthen school mental health services. Recently, the Centers for Disease Control (2013) estimated that annually, 13 to 20% of children in the United States suffer from a mental health disorder.

However, responding to the mental health needs of children has proven to be challenging. Stephan, Weist, Kataoka, Adelsheim and Mills (2007) stated that the organizations charged with delivering mental health services in the United States have not been successful in comprehensively responding to the mental health needs of children and adolescents, and that there is now a greater need to review current policy and practice. Lourie and Hernandez (2003) examined child mental health policy and found that “the failure to formulate and implement a child mental health policy in the United States has led to the frustrating position of recognizing children’s mental health needs, having the technologies to ameliorate these needs, yet being

unable to find ways of ensuring that those in need receive appropriate services” (p. 8). Mills, Stephan, Moore, Weist, Daly, and Edwards (2006) also suggested that mental health organizations have failed to consider options such as providing mental health services to children and adolescents in schools. The President’s New Freedom Commission on Mental Health (2003) also found that mental health services are “fragmented and in disarray...leading to unnecessary and costly disability, homelessness, school failure and incarceration” (p. 4).

Statement of the Problem

Every year an estimated 13 to 20% of children in the United States suffer from a mental health disorder (Centers for Disease Control, 2013). Children’s capacity to learn can be compromised when they are experiencing these disorders. In order to improve learning outcomes, schools must attend to these barriers to academic achievement (Adelman & Taylor, 2011; Center for School Mental Health, 2011). While many school mental health interventions and systems can be found in the literature, the local school context is seldom taken into consideration when selecting and planning to implement them, thus reducing the likelihood that the intended outcomes will be achieved, (Ringeisen, Hendersen & Hoagwood, 2003).

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

Children's mental health

The 2011 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011) found that in a national sample of approximately 15,425 high school students, 15.8% had seriously considered attempting suicide, 12.8% had made a plan for attempting suicide, 7.8% had attempted suicide one or more times, and 2.4% had made an attempt requiring medical attention. On school property, 5.4 % of students carried a weapon, 7.4% were threatened or injured with a weapon, 20.1% were bullied, 16.2% were bullied electronically, and 5.9% of students did not attend school due to fear of safety either at school or on their way home. In its policy statement on school-based mental health services, the American Academy of Pediatrics (2004) reported that more than 20% of children and adolescents experience mental health issues and that the number of pediatric patients who have psychosocial issues has more than doubled over the past twenty years.

Problems such as poor psychosocial and physical health problems among school-aged youth can negatively affect their learning and development. Mental health professionals in schools not only have access to youth, but also have the expertise to recognize many issues occurring with them. Many identify schools as the most appropriate places in which to detect youth with mental health concerns (Hogan, 2003; Lever et al, 2004, Slade, 2002) and provide families with support as well as with linkages to outside support services (Hogan, 2003).

If schools are the first place in which to identify at-risk children, then schools need to determine how they might build school mental health programs. In 2003, the Chair of The President's New Freedom Commission, recommended the advancement of school mental health programs nationwide (Hogan). However, while it is evident that mental health initiatives are being implemented in many school districts around the country, schools face issues of competition for resources which can often become counterproductive. What typically occurs is the fostering of "piecemeal, fragmented and redundant policies and practices" (<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/aboutmh/mhinschools.html>).

Linking Mental Health Programs to School Improvement Planning

The current literature in school mental health supports the inclusion of 'learning supports' as an additional component to school improvement planning. Learning supports as part of a comprehensive system includes a collection of resources, strategies and practices — as well as environmental and cultural factors extending beyond the classroom — that together provide the physical, cognitive, social and emotional support that every student needs to succeed in school and in life (State of California, SB 288; Adelman and Taylor, 2006). School improvement planning intersects with school mental health as it is here that school leaders and other stakeholders can work collaboratively. It is also an entry point for stakeholders involved to show the importance of building comprehensive programs that can create change on all levels, (i.e., in schools, families and in communities), and that this is a contributing factor to the psychosocial health of all students. In a sense, school improvement planning can also empower mental health and other professionals to become leaders in their districts, because they, in turn, can educate all other stakeholders about specific or particular needs in their respective schools and communities.

There are specific concerns, however, about how this is currently happening. Adelman and Taylor (2010) found that while school mental health is being widely addressed, discussions occur in numerous ways that create conflict among school professionals. Differences in policies, practices, research, and training among school districts often create these conflicts and as they point out, varied opinions only add to marginalized efforts that do not support advancement of mental health in schools. This status may continue to exist if school improvement planning does not include a restructuring of what support professionals do in schools. These researchers underscored the idea that while schools generally address myriad psychosocial problems, mental health is not seen as a priority in school planning policies or practice. Schools typically treat mental health support as an added benefit, but do not consider this type of support as essential or urgent. They also suggested that student support personnel are not placed in prominent places of organizational taxonomies and that these support positions are typically the first to be cut when budget crises occur.

Proponents of school mental health such as the School Mental Health Project (SMHP) at the University of California, Los Angeles, (UCLA), the Center for School Mental Health (CSMH) at The University of Maryland, the Center for School-Based Mental Health (CSBMH) at Miami University (Ohio) and the University of South Florida (Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute) are exploring the realignment of school mental health in school improvement planning and have expressed the need for comprehensive and cohesive initiatives that address ‘barriers to learning’ and that connect school policy and missions within educational support systems (Adelman & Taylor, 2011; Center for School Mental Health, 2011). According to The Center for School Mental Health (2007), analysis and mapping of resources is essential in order to determine program effectiveness, but the challenges are many. Much of the concern

begins with the idea that while mental health activity is occurring in schools, it often involves the aforementioned competition for resources. At the same time, school and community stakeholders make attempts to address mental health issues, but they do so in ways that lead to competition for those resources and this inevitably leads to poor results.

Upon analyzing public policy, staff at the Center for Mental Health in Schools (2011) concluded that current recommendations for schools “amount to mere tinkering with our educational systems” (p. 1) and that reform cannot be achieved based upon current policy planning due to its sole focus on instructional and organizational components. While these components are essential, they do not address barriers to learning, such as poverty and homelessness, school climate and safety, student engagement, individual learning and mental health challenges (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2011). The Center also stated that the focus should include school reform that ensures learning takes place for *all* students. As they suggested, children who struggle to overcome barriers are not mentally available even with the best instruction, curricula and accountability measures.

Effective School Mental Health Initiatives: Systems of Learning Supports

Currently, three states, Ohio, Louisiana and Iowa, are pioneering the addition of ‘systems of learning supports’ that address school improvement policy, frameworks that guide and create systemic change, (<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/iowabriefsummaryofdesign>). This three-component approach consists of academic instruction, leadership, and the proposed ‘learning supports’ for students (See Figure 1 below). Previously, in most instances, only the first two components have been utilized by school systems. The academic instructional component includes high quality instruction, teacher quality and standards. The organizational management component consists of accountability, budgets and governance, and resources and facilities

management. It also attempts to address how and where school improvement planning is duplicated. The third component, a system of learning supports, includes the resources, strategies and practices that provide physical, social, emotional, and intellectual supports to enable all students to have equal opportunity for success in school by directly addressing barriers to learning and teaching by reengaging disconnected students. Efforts by mental health personnel, a part of the learning supports component, support both teachers and instruction through the promotion of healthy development while helping to alleviate barriers interfering with both learning and teaching, (<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/trailblazing.htm>.)

Congruent with the notion of learning supports, the National Association of School Psychology (2011) espouses a problem-solving approach as “a broad sequenced *model* (often referred to as a “three tiered model” although some district designs use more than three stages) that seeks to determine what instructional supports are needed to solve student achievement problems” (<http://www.nasponline.org/publications/cq/cq345rti.aspx>). An example of this problem-solving approach is an initiative called Response to Intervention (RTI). In this initiative, problem identification and problem analysis are used to aid students who require more support in the form of behavioral interventions or in core curriculum. This process requires the assistance of many stakeholders in identifying problems and developing strategies and interventions. According to The Center for School Mental Health, this initiative fits neatly under the ‘system of learning supports’ because it is considered a good fit and provides “an opportunity to move forward in fully integrating a comprehensive system of supports into school improvement policy and practice,” (<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefs/threetier.pdf>).

Figure 1:

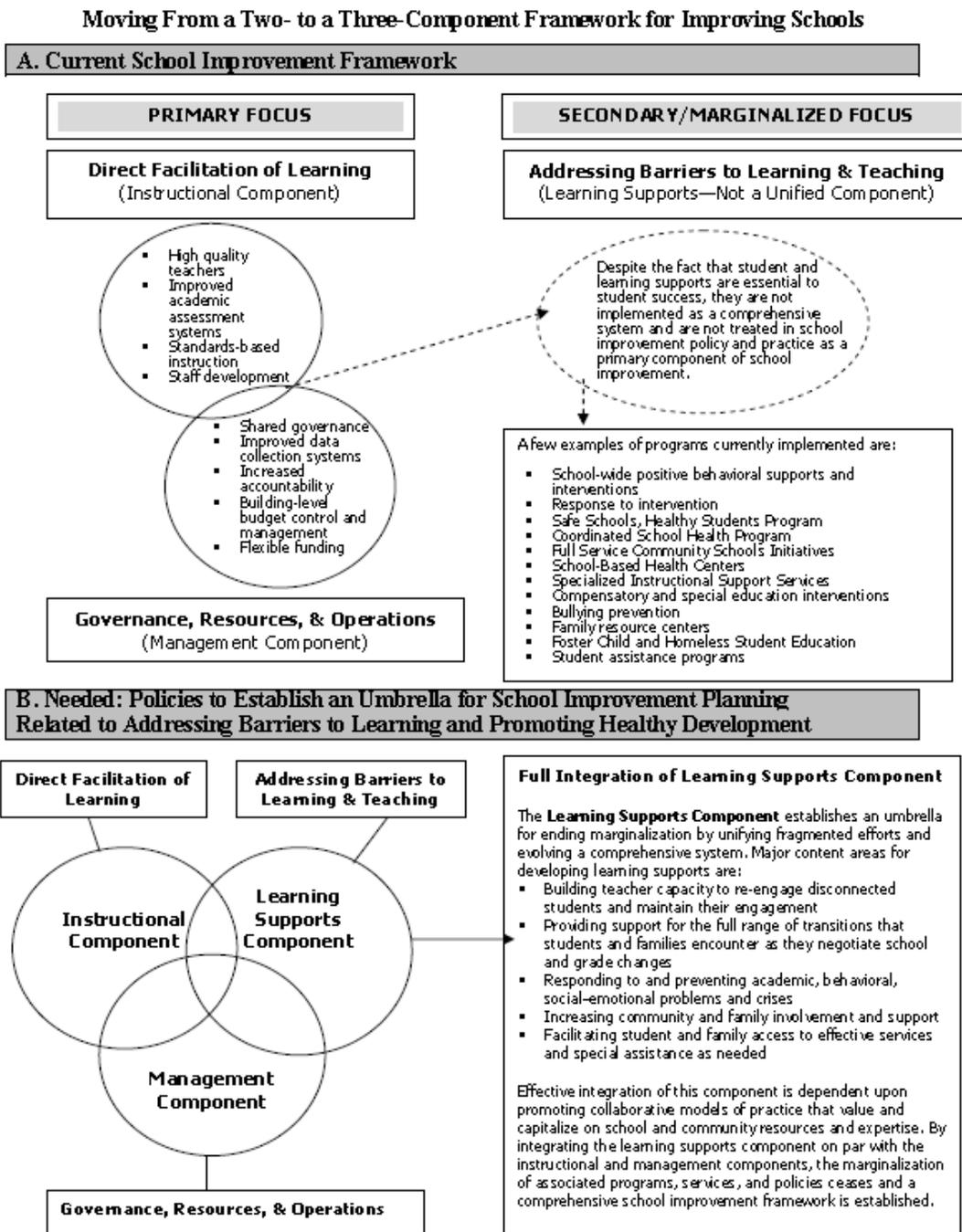


Figure 1. Section A “Current School Improvement Framework” indicates that school improvement currently addresses instruction and management components, but does not include addressing barriers to learning. In Section B, a unified approach to school improvement planning is integrated under an umbrella to unify and build a comprehensive system. Copyright 2011 by The Center for School Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, (<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefs/threetier.pdf>). Reprinted with permission.

Some states are moving from a two- to a three-component framework for improving schools. For example, in Iowa's schools the enhancement of learning supports requires "strong leadership to steer systemic changes and [to be able to] construct the necessary infrastructure [by] establishment and maintenance of a potent learning support component [which] requires continuous, proactive, effecting teaming, organization, and accountability"

(<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/iowabriefsummaryofdesign.pdf>). Leaders and teams are designed to work on these changes as "teams are crucial elements of any infrastructure for implementing a cohesive system of learning supports"

(<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/iowabriefsummaryofdesign.pdf>). Planning and implementation are two stages that require careful attention in establishing systems of learning supports. Planning requires a shared vision, adopting long-term results and measures, negotiation of formal and informal partnership agreements, mapping and analyzing existing resources for effectiveness, and reframing student support into an infrastructure for learning supports; implementation requires phasing in contents of an intervention framework, reviewing policies, integrating resources, and professional development. There is ongoing research in states such as Iowa on building consensus and working with stakeholders.

School Mental Health Initiatives in Texas

Mental health experts and participants from all over the State of Texas met in 2005 to discuss advancing policy for mental health in schools. Called the Policy Leadership Cadre for Mental Health in Schools, this meeting was facilitated by the Center for Mental Health in Schools together with school professionals and other stakeholders to raise awareness of school mental health and comprehensive policy. A number of agenda items and participant suggestions

included the idea that “researchers should increase their efforts to help schools by conducting quantitative and qualitative research designed to contribute to the knowledge base the school needs to improve practices” (Policy Leadership for Mental Health in Schools, 2005, p. 9). Other suggestions included discussing research as a means to show its relevance to school practice and showing evidence that doing research can be used in various ways.

In 2006, the Texas Education Agency’s (TEA) Division of IDEA Coordination along with the Texas Collaborative for Emotional Development in Schools (TxCEDs) developed a model to address the social, emotional, and behavioral development for Texas children and was made part of the Texas Continuous Improvement Process (TCIP). Essentially, the TxCEDs (2006) model began with a collaborative group made up of various stakeholders who developed “a systems approach that includes a multifaceted, comprehensive school and community continuum of quality programs and family supports, which can be infused into existing school-based delivery models” (p. iii). Like school improvement planning, this process is designed to improve strategies in special education, but also to “identify barriers to student learning and performance and to develop guiding policy for delivery of school-based mental health services for all students in Texas schools” (TxCEDs Guide for Schools, Agencies, Organizations, Parents and Communities, 2006, p. i). The model seeks to examine data and information that “drive improvements in the overall process,” (p. 19).

According to Donna Black, the former Project Coordinator of the TxCEDs project at the Region 4 Education Service Center in Houston, Texas, this model was designed to give guidance in developing a framework which is guided by the research at the Center for School Mental Health at UCLA (D. Black, personal communication, December 6, 2011). Inherent in the use of this model is that it is also designed to be used in a flexible manner to meet the needs of each

particular district and community. It should be noted that professional development opportunities to incorporate this model were provided at the 20 regional educational service centers in Texas and with stakeholders in numerous school districts across the State. The extent to which this model has been utilized varies in districts across the State, and it is not known how many are actually utilizing it.

Figure 2

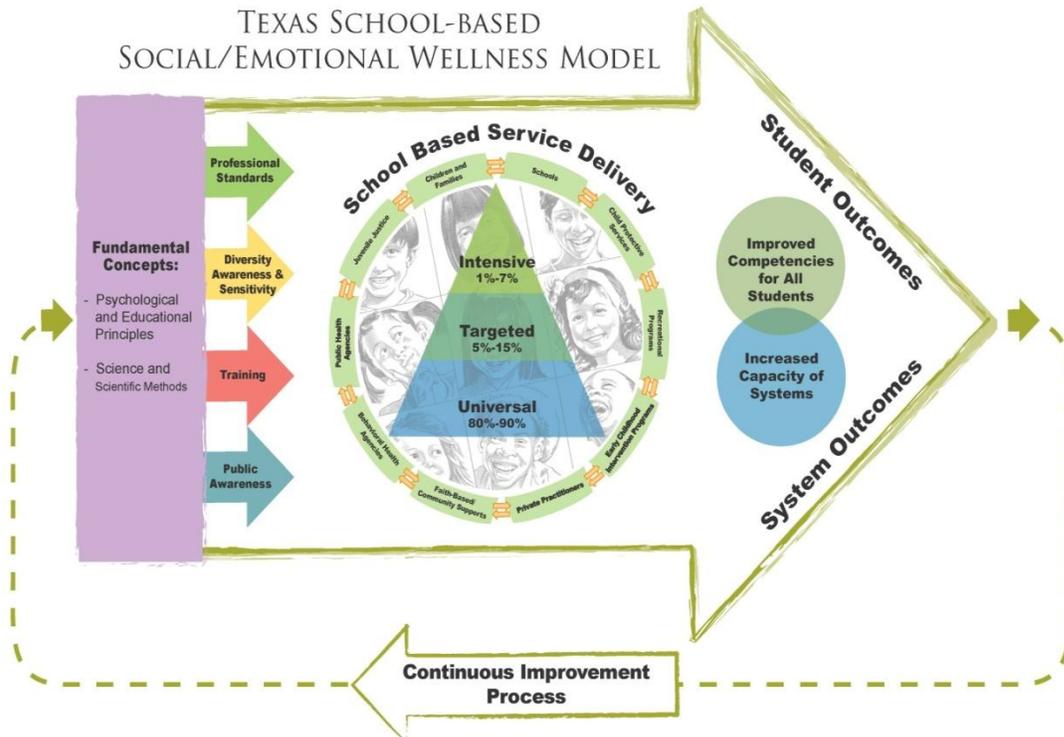


Figure 2. The model indicates foundational concepts which guide the process of service delivery. It is a child-centered model of service delivery that addresses barriers to learning and performance by connecting services within and between schools and communities. It provides a framework that encourages collaborative partnerships between schools, communities, agencies and organizations. These partnerships are incorporated into a school’s systematic problem-solving process. Copyright 2007 by the Texas Education Agency, Division of IDEA Coordination. Reprinted with permission.

Researching the Local School Context

Ringeisen, Hendersen & Hoagwood (2003) identified the local school context as a gap between the research on children's mental health and the application of those findings. They found that while there has been considerable attention to children's mental health issues in schools, the local context within which those issues exist has been largely absent from research studies. Similarly, Masten (2003) pointed out that as mental health experts, we need to know our schools and the people who populate them as each school has its own distinct culture and ways of being, and they must answer to larger systems. Adelman and Taylor (2010) also support this type of research and stated that, in the future, the need will emerge for individuals who can help reform implementation by delivering instruction, consultation, advocacy and guidance to school systems.

Research questions

How might a school system begin to address building a mental health program in its schools? In what ways do schools take on the challenge of implementing a comprehensive umbrella of services that begins with a system of learning supports? What can stakeholders gain by becoming involved in such activity? How do they become empowered to create change in their current school climates? How would a school system begin to define what it needs? How might this be accomplished?

Chapter III

Methods

This study used action research methodology as a means to research school mental health services in a public school district in Texas.

Design

Qualitative research and, specifically, action research (AR) was selected as the method that would best achieve the goals of this study. In order to understand school mental health issues in this particular district, it was important to locate and empower appropriate stakeholders to investigate their own context and to engage in a problem-solving process relevant to their self-identified needs.

The current study primarily followed the AR methodology developed by Stringer, a pioneer of action research. Stringer (2007) suggested that the primary goal of action AR “is to provide a means for people to engage in systematic inquiry and investigation to ‘design an appropriate way of accomplishing a desired goal and to evaluate its effectiveness’” (p. 6). It assumes that all those who are affected by a particular problem or concern should be involved in problem-solving inquiry. In community action research, Stringer described the community as “a community of interest” (p. 6).

Stringer (2007) described action research as follows:

Formally, then, action research, in its most effective forms, is phenomenological (focused on people’s actual lived experiences/reality), interpretive (focusing on their interpretation of acts and activities), and hermeneutic (incorporating the

meaning people make of events in their lives). It provides the means by which stakeholders – those centrally affected by the issue investigated—explore their experience, gain greater clarity and understanding of events and activities, and use those extended understandings to construct effective solutions to the problem(s) on which the study was focused. (p. 20)

The study also incorporated Stein and Mankowski's (2004) three assumptions about qualitative inquiry: a) qualitative research allows participants to be heard, but their voices are not transformed....; b) qualitative research needs to be considered as part of the research process that promotes both social change and social action; c) including qualitative research serves to empower marginalized groups but it also may be used to transform privileged groups.

Action research has been implemented in a broad range of settings and by various academic disciplines. Koch and Kralich (2006) have written extensively on action research in health care practice. Stringer and Dwyer (2005) showed that action research is of relevance to social work and human service professionals and in organizational settings. Holly, Arhar and Kasten (2004) stated that action research has been used in education for its relevance in working with teachers in classrooms. Mills (2006) posited that action research is a major component in teaching as it aligns with the development of curriculum, assessment, and classroom management. The current literature on school mental health supports action research as a method of qualitative inquiry to investigate and/or remediate school mental health problems. The data derived from these projects can contribute to laying a foundation for more comprehensive school mental health programs to be designed. Nastasi, Varjas and Moore (2004) stated that action research in school mental health necessitates examining “local theories and practices of stakeholders, form[ing] partnerships, conduct[ing] formative research, identify[ing]

the problem, and generate[ing] culture-specific theory” (p. 55). More specifically, Nastasi (1998) stated that the goal of this type of research reflects “the shared language, ideas, beliefs, values and behavioral norms of the members of the target culture” (p. 169). The UCLA Center for Mental Health (2011) also endorsed this research approach. It recommended that stakeholders place themselves in appropriate positions in order to raise school mental health to the level of inclusion in school improvement planning and policy-making. Similarly, Adelman and Taylor (2001) suggested that pupil personnel professionals must take the initiative to participate in school reform efforts whenever possible. Masten (2003) pointed out that it is important for school mental health experts to know the unique organization and culture of each school setting and its members.

Additionally, there are procedures already in use on school campuses, such as the RtI problem-solving method that can be considered complimentary to the action research process, and may be a natural and familiar fit for various stakeholders at the local school level.

The Local Context

The study took place in the State of Texas within a school district of a small city with a population of approximately 18,000 residents in the State of Texas. According to the Superintendent of Schools, the district comprised a student population of approximately 3,500 children. At the time of this research study, the community demographics identified by the Superintendent consisted of approximately 42% Latino, 40% African American, 10% Asian, 6% Anglo-American, and 2% “Other” (L. Hindt, personal communication, July 16, 2013). Between 40 and 60 percent of the students in the various schools in the district qualify for free or reduced lunch. There are five schools in the district with approximately 200 teachers, and a mental health

staff consisting of seven school counselors and two Licensed Specialists in School Psychology. Mental health services are primarily handled by both school psychologists and counselors. These services include counseling, crisis intervention, and developmental counseling lessons. At the writing of this study, a comprehensive school mental health program was not in place.

Procedure

Once Union Institute & University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted approval for the research study, packets of information were sent to fifteen (15) area school districts in Texas inviting them to participate in the study. The packets contained a formal letter to district superintendents (see Appendix A) as well as copies of both the IRB university approval letter (see Appendix B) and a PowerPoint presentation describing action research (see Appendix E). Within approximately one week, a school district replied to the researcher via email giving permission to conduct the study in their district the following fall. The Superintendent designated the Director of State and Federal Programs to communicate with the researcher to discuss the study and to be the designated contact person. A meeting between the researcher and the school's contact person was held in which the study was explained using the above-mentioned PowerPoint presentation.

Recruitment of Participants

The study sought to recruit a purposive sample of school personnel, parents of students in the school district and students over the age of 18. After the first meeting with the district liaison, the researcher was then given permission to contact school administrators (principals) to introduce the study. After meeting individually with four administrators (one administrator in charge of both high school and middle school) from the primary to secondary level, permission

was granted to address school members at staff meetings. A brief introduction to the study was given at each of these meetings and flyers with the researcher's email address were distributed at those locations. Flyers were also posted in each school in the faculty lounges. At the secondary level, a flyer was posted in one newsletter in order to attract both teachers and parents. In order to attract 18 year old students to participate in the study, flyers were also distributed in senior English classes. Administrators also gave the researcher names of identified "change agents" on their respective campuses, whom they thought might be interested in participating. Potential participants who were interested contacted the researcher via email. Over a period of three weeks, individual meetings were held in teacher classrooms and/or mental health offices to explain the study and answer any questions that potential participants might have had. These private locations ensured confidentiality and safety within which the potential participants could ask about study details.

At those individual meetings, once participants agreed to take part in the study, informed consent was explained and consent forms were distributed, and signed by individuals. Participants were provided with copies of consent forms (see Appendix C). Original consent forms were kept by the researcher in a secure place. In addition, staff members who participated initially, but who at some point did not wish to participate further in the study had access to ongoing activities via email so as to be kept informed of the study. Only one initial participant could not continue with the study due to other school commitments. This participant was kept informed of meeting dates and documents until the study was completed. As Stringer (2007) stated, "there is a particular imperative to ensure that all participants know what is going on, that the processes are inherently transparent to all" (p. 55).

Sample

A total of 15 school and mental health professionals and the researcher were the participants in this study. The group consisted of ten teachers (both general and special education), three School Counselors and two Licensed Specialists in School Psychology. Fourteen participants were female. A table below presents the demographics of the participant group (Table 1). The researcher's role as facilitator was to aid the stakeholders to define problems, support them regarding the selected issues, and attempt to create better solutions, all under the umbrella and guidance of the current literature on school mental health.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Participants	African American	White	Latino	Middle Eastern	Male Total	Female Total
General Education	3	1	3	1	1	7
Special Education	1		1			2
School Counselor	1	1	1			3
Licensed Specialist	1	1				2

Data Collection

Interviews

Information gathering was initially accomplished by conducting semi-structured individual interviews with each participant using a set of qualitative questions (see Appendix E). Interviews were then transcribed verbatim and subsequently checked for accuracy with each participant. Participants viewed the transcribed interviews during one meeting to confirm data.

Regarding the collection of data, Stringer (2007) stated that most data in action research comes from interviewing key participants. The use of qualitative questioning in the current study served as a means for stakeholders to “give voice” to what they thought about mental health in public schools and to describe the current issues in their district. Giving voice is a term used by Stein and Mankowski (2004) to describe how to conduct qualitative research in community psychology and is connected to creating social change. In that context, it provokes reflection about “who is allowed to speak, on what topics, and for what ends” (p. 21).

In action research, questions are formulated once the purpose and focus of the study have been agreed upon and reached by all participants. Stringer (2007) suggested “Six Questions – Why, What, How, Who, Where, When” as a means to identify how a problem exists in context (p. 84). An example of questions is located in Appendix E. These questions were the basis for the interviews that were conducted and designed to elucidate participants’ experiences.

Research group meetings

At the first meeting with the participants, a PowerPoint (Appendix F) presentation was conducted to provide the participants with a baseline level of knowledge about the current

literature on school mental health and about action research methodology. Specifically, Stringer's "Look-Think-Act" spiral of inquiry process was explained to the participants. The "Look-Think-Act" spiral of inquiry process "looks" to gather relevant information or data by building a picture or describing a situation; "thinks" about, explores and analyzes what is happening in a given place, and interprets and explains why and why things occur; and, "acts" by coming up with a plan that is implemented and then evaluated. Stringer noted that it is a "continually recycling set of activities" (p. 9).

A question-and-answer period was also provided. Participants were given an explanation of the role of the researcher as facilitator and participant in this study. A total of six (6) one-hour meetings were held from early February through May 2013. In each meeting, ground rules were presented. The agendas included purpose, how each meeting would proceed, and the activities to be accomplished. The agendas included presentations on action research methodology and literature on school mental health by the principal researcher to ensure that participants had the necessary background to conduct the study as participant-researchers. These agendas were sent weekly via email to participants prior to each meeting. Time was given to participants to discuss or comment about the proposed agenda at the beginning of each of the meetings. This was important in these meetings so that participants were afforded the opportunity to speak about their thoughts and ideas in a safe manner. This also ensured that all participants provided their own perspectives and that those with power could not control meetings. Ground rules were agreed upon and held to 1) "whatever is said here stays here" and 2) data being generated in the meetings was to be protected by the researcher (i.e., in the form of poster boards, agenda notes, hard copies of interviews). A timekeeper and a note taker volunteered to keep notes for each meeting.

Participants agreed early on that the data gathered by the group would ultimately be shared with the Superintendent in an informal preliminary meeting. A discussion was held with the participants regarding their thoughts about allowing the data to be viewed. The overall consensus was that the data should be immediately shared. The meeting was subsequently set up (with an invitation to participants to attend) with the Superintendent. Only one participant was able to attend this meeting. Data from the study as well as literature on building school mental health programs was sent to the Superintendent via email, so that he could review it prior to the meeting. At the meeting, an additional hard copy of the “raw” data organized into themes, and literature on building school mental health programs was given to the Superintendent. The goal of the meeting was to relay the lived experiences of participants and to relate those to the possibility of building a comprehensive mental health program, taking the experiences and ideas of the participants into consideration. Additionally, at the meeting it was agreed upon that an action plan report for the district would be developed with the participants which would be the current study’s culminating project.

Prior to the Superintendent meeting, the participants and the researcher decided that the name of the district would not be mentioned in the dissertation in order to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Anonymity regarding the location of this study was also to be maintained, if the study was to be published in a professional journal. It was agreed upon, however, by the Superintendent and the participants, that the study and the data generated, as well as information about current research on school mental health, would be presented at a formal board meeting after the study was completed and at a mutually agreed upon later date. The purpose of addressing the administrators and the school board and presenting the action plan

was to create awareness and elicit discussion of future implications for school improvement planning.

Data Analysis

Upon looking at the data collected, participants identified information that would help them understand both the activities and/or events on which they were focused. Using action research methods, they sought to examine or uncover salient features located in the data. The result was a set of ideas or “themes” that helped participants to clearly articulate problems. Analyzing data became, as Stringer (2007) stated “a process of reflection and interpretation, providing participants and other stakeholding audiences with new ways of thinking about the issues and events investigated” (p. 95). Tanden, Kelly and Mock (2001) stated that “the underlying importance of the data analysis stage of participatory action research (PAR) is to stimulate research participants’ thinking about the potential utility of collected data” (as cited in Herr& Anderson, 2005, p. 95).

Data was “distilled” as Stringer (2007) suggested in that *categorizing and coding* helped to identify “units of meaning” (experience/perception) inside the data and then organized categories were identified to summarize participant experiences. *Key experiences* as the second process were viewed as “transformational moments” because they allowed for the identification of elements that illuminated participant experiences. Essentially, procedures for analyzing data in action research may be termed as “an act of interpretation,” but Stringer maintained that the goal is to “identify information that clearly represents the perspective and experience of the stakeholding participants” (p. 98). According to Stringer (2007), the steps in categorizing and coding involved reviewing the collected data, unitizing the data, categorizing and coding,

identifying themes, organizing a category system, and developing a report framework (action plan) (p. 99).

Analyzing data through action research is not unlike Rossman and Rallis' (2003) generic analysis approach. In this approach, seven phases need to be considered -- organization of the data, familiarization, generating categories, coding, and interpreting searching for alternative reasoning are essential to analyzing the data. The constructs of immersion, incubation, insight and interpretation are similar to Stringer's action research methods. Once the data was compiled, stakeholders were able to 'immerse' themselves in them, sit with the data and then build 'salient themes' and meanings.

Each interview was transcribed and put into written form capturing salient content and reviewed by participants to ensure accuracy. With consent from each participant, the interviews were initially unitized and coded by the researcher and then verified by each participant and sent to them via email for review and to "sit with the data." In a subsequent meeting, the unitized and coded data was reviewed by participants for accuracy once again. Any discrepancies were noted and changed. Participants were then asked to review the data as a group and jointly began to categorize it into "themes" at a subsequent meeting. Poster boards, wall putty, markers, and copies of the data were used so that data could be pasted to particular emerging themes that were being developed by the group. A total of 34 themes were identified and mutually agreed upon by the participants, (see Appendix H).

Stringer's (2007) cycles of the action research process ensures that participants are able to understand and focus on the manner in which primary stakeholders "experience and interpret emerging issues" (p. 106). The way in which this process is done is through the use of secondary

stakeholders who can help to clarify or extend understanding and add information from other stakeholders or sources (Stringer, 2007). The purpose was to consider and incorporate other factors which may have had an impact on the current problems being experienced. On two separate occasions, administrators were invited to dinner meetings in order to view the data. One administrator, an assistant principal plus a designee attended one meeting. No other administrators either responded to email invitations or attended the second meeting.

Following attempts to include other salient participants in extending understandings, the next step was to work with the data and place it in order of importance or salience. Using Stringer's (2007) technique of concept mapping, participants and the researcher attempted to re-conceptualize the significant elements that affected their situation. Themes were printed and set up on a work table in order to link the elements that appeared to be related to one another. The goal of linking the themes was designed to help participants 'visualize' these major elements.

Chapter 4

Findings

Making sense of the data arising from the interviews was essential in identifying participant perceptions using “situation coding.” Craig’s (2009). Situation coding allows participants to gain insight and focus on their views, beliefs and preferences, as well as constructing meaning in this school setting. As a starting point, the initial reasons participants engaged in this study bears mentioning, as they relate to experience and meaning. Participants expressed personal as well as professional reasons for participating in the study. The following are representative examples of participant statements at the first group meeting:

“I work in special education and with kids who are Bipolar, Emotionally Disturbed, [who have] ADHD and several mental health issues. I am vested because I want to see the school embrace all children when they have needs. I am interested to see what policies we can adapt in our district to better serve the children that we serve.”

“I’m noticing more and more students at a younger age are coming into our classrooms and it makes we wonder if it is behavior problems or more than that.”

“Already even at a young age, we have so many kids with so many issues and they are all just classified as behavioral issues and end up getting in trouble or suspended and the issues are never actually addressed.”

“There are mental health issues in my family and I see a great need for improved mental health services in the schools”

“I have worked with ED students and I have worked at a psychiatric prison institution and so I have seen first-hand the things that have not been taken care of along the way and has elevated to a higher level. It’s my interest to see what it is we can do to bring something here to this district so we can help.”

“I feel like there’s a whole lot more that we can address in terms of the mental health issues of our students. I think I get lost in the shuffle with all the other duties I have.”

Understanding the initial reasons why participants joined the study assisted the facilitator in understanding and locating their experiences. Once the data from the interviews was analyzed through unitizing, coding, and through the development of themes, this knowledge about their motivations for participating served as a means to further help participants make decisions about what areas they wanted to focus. Eventually, the data yielded 34 identified themes (see Appendix G). The participants were faced with the challenge of making decisions about what areas could be addressed or brought forward to the Superintendent and the Board of Education. In one meeting where concept mapping was employed, not only did participants categorize data, but they were able to organize data into overarching categories. For instance, themes such as, “Mindset” and “Resistance to Change” were viewed by the group in some circumstances as having the same meaning. “Teacher Frustration” and “Behavior” or “Parental Involvement” were also interpreted as being related. In other cases, the participants found that some themes were hierarchical in nature, whereas others could be subsumed under related categories. As an example, the group felt that “Procedures and Policies” was a strong indicator of “Accountability.” Participants agreed that, while all the data would be shared, it was important

to make decisions about to how to report on the most salient concerns. The participants collectively decided on a number of items that could be included in the action plan. Six main themes were ultimately chosen as areas to be presented to the Superintendent. Using the concept mapping approach once more, themes were broken down into three final areas of salience. A table below indicates the themes and/or items of importance.

Table 2.

Themes Identified as Major Issues and/or Focus

Testing Coordinator	PASS Program	Role Clarification	Policies and Procedures	Teacher Training	Social and Emotional Learning for Students and Staff
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There was a second opportunity to break down the themes since the participants agreed that some themes could be subsumed under others, as follows (see Table 4). At the last meeting before the end of the school year, the group made the decision to include items from Table 3 above in their action plan.

Table 3.

Themes Combined

Role Clarification (Testing Coordinator) (PASS Program)	Teacher Training Social and Emotional Learning for Students and Staff	Policies and Procedures
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Lived Experiences, Meaning Making and Group Consensus Building Using the Data

Once the 34 themes were identified, participants engaged in an hour-long meeting in which they made decisions about what were the most salient areas upon which to focus. Throughout this meeting, the facilitator asked questions such as, “In your view, which of these areas are the most important to address? What do you view as areas to be described in your action plan?” Often, repeating these two questions allowed the participants to make more focused decisions.

Using the concept mapping exercise, the participants worked with the enlarged, typed out themes by physically moving them into categories to visually organize and prioritize salient areas. The facilitator used open questions such as, “Tell me what you mean as you describe “X” as a problem?” in order to allow participants to describe their thoughts, feelings and interpretation of events or issues. Overarching themes agreed upon by participants were “Mindset,” “The Current State of Things,” “Global Perspectives,” “Resistance to Change,” and “Politics,” and all were viewed as long-standing issues that prevented the district from moving forward. These were not areas that the participants believed could be immediately resolved because they were considered to be too broad in nature and difficult to address; however, the participants agreed that these themes and many others that were developed could indirectly connect to the areas of importance that were ultimately selected.

For instance, Teacher Training was highlighted as a concern for several reasons. First, participants discussed the fact that too many initiatives were being conducted in the district and that they were not provided with the training they needed in the classroom. Reviews of lived

experiences, meaning-making and consensus building occurred as represented by the following statements:

“I think we’re just tired of all the trainings being thrown at us, so we’re closed to it and our minds are closed to it, and then we’re already not paying attention.”

“It’s not just the teachers who need training, it’s also the administrators. I feel like they need it, too.”

“A lot of our colleagues reject it, because to them, it’s just another training. It has to be valuable, it has to see meaningful.”

“We’re overloaded. We’re extremely overloaded.”

“We’re not as productive as we could be.”

The theme of Teacher training, therefore, was viewed as an indirect result of the overarching themes of “Resistance to Change”, “Mindset,” and “The Current State of Things.” Participants felt that lack of training placed them in situations that exacerbated and kept current problems and concerns in place. The need for training in Social and Emotional Learning for Students and Staff was connected to teacher training because it was agreed that, if staff were also trained and subsequently all students and parents, the behavioral issues being experienced in the classroom (and the lack of parent participation) would decrease.

Policies and Procedures were viewed by the group as having an overwhelming impact on the school system. The participants felt that having no policies and procedures outlined and modeled for them could also be connected to other themes such as Mindset, Staff Mental Health,

and Role Clarification. Review of lived experiences and meaning making occurred as represented by the following participant statements:

“Along the way, we have lost that sense of authority, something along the lines of policies and procedures; and that in turn would train the teachers, train the counselors and that in turn would assign duties that need to be assigned, have people held accountable for what they’re supposed to be accountable for, and then in turn, staff mental health and mindset would be better. I think we’ve just lost our policies and procedures.”

“It’s just not consistent anymore.”

“We need policies that the whole school can practice in the same way.”

“In my last district, we had committees that set up what we did.”

The theme of Role clarification, and in particular, the testing coordinator and PASS Program themes were chosen by the participants to represent issues and concerns about roles and duties that they felt were incorrectly assigned, and programs that needed to be correctly implemented. Role clarification was viewed as being connected to Policies and Procedures and Teacher Training because the group felt that clearly defined roles would enable particular staff members to implement much needed strategies. Review of lived experiences and meaning making is reflected in the following statements:

“We need testing taken off our plates immediately”.

“We need a testing coordinator. That would free us up to train people.”

“Our counselors are so tied up. There are some serious situations that need to be addressed immediately.”

“If certain programs were in place, it would alleviate a lot of the pressures going

on in the everyday classrooms, especially kids with behaviors and emotional concerns.”

“They (administrators) have a mindset about what it is they think I should be doing, but that’s not what I should be doing.”

“The PASS Program would help at-risk students to respond to appropriate and expected behaviors. It would replace the current BAC class which does not work. We need a PASS teacher to help these students.”

The Action Plan

In action research, the final product is the development of an action plan that outlines next steps. In general, an action plan may describe the activities that took place and the data that was generated (see Appendix I). As Stringer (2007) stated, the action plan may also define objectives of the project, tasks to be done, steps to be taken, people involved, places where activity will occur, timelines and durations of activities, and resources required. The participants agreed that many of these areas could be included as part of their plan, but also wanted to describe the action research process and the commitment they showed in wanting to create change. It should be noted that not all participants wanted to be recognized for their work; however, most participants agreed that they would like to become involved with next steps. Some participants, however, noted that time was a factor in not wanting to continue further with the rest of the process.

In the last meeting with the Superintendent, it was agreed that the Action Plan would be shared first with administrators. The Superintendent felt that it was important for them to “hear” and “see” the lived experiences of the participants prior to addressing the Board of Education. The Superintendent also invited the facilitator and the stakeholders to first meet with him to

review the finalized action research report. The group was also invited to meet with the administrators when the plan was finally presented. The Superintendent also stated that this would not be doable until sometime in the Winter of 2014. It should be noted that the facilitator offered the data to the school district and that they would “own” this data moving forward in order to use it for next steps in building their unique school mental health program.

In the meeting with the Superintendent, the facilitator and one participant who attended, a decision was made that the action plan was to be submitted in the early winter 2014 to the Superintendent for review with the facilitator and participants in preparation for the proposed Board meeting (to be held at a future date, see Appendix G). The other participant members were notified via email as to their opinion about this suggested plan. No participants raised issues or concerns about the proposed plan.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

Participants in this action research study about mental health services in a school district in Texas concluded that the three main areas of concern that impact the quality of mental health services in their system were Role Clarification, Teacher Training, and Policies and Procedures. Role clarification was considered important because it reflected the need for the school district to clarify duties assigned to various personnel in order to deliver successful services and programs. Teacher training was salient based upon participant concerns regarding teacher's ability to manage student's behavioral difficulties. . Policies and Procedures was also chosen as an important theme as it represented their perceived need to have a system of accountability in place in the district.

Each of the themes identified by the participants in the current study is consistent with the content areas outlined in the System of Learning Supports Component in the current school improvement framework. This framework for improving schools designed by The Center for School Mental Health (2011) recommends the inclusion of a System of Learning Supports -- (see Figure 1) that has been largely absent from reform efforts in schools today. This component, when integrated with the two existing components of instruction and management, completes the model for the "umbrella" of services to be provided in schools. If a full component of Learning Supports is integrated into existing school improvement planning, many of the issues and problems that this school district experiences may be remediated. For instance, two of the content areas within Learning Supports -- "building teacher capacity to re-engage disconnected

students and maintain their engagement” and “responding to and preventing academic, behavioral, social-emotional problems and crises” are directly related to many of the themes and areas of concern prioritized by the participants. For example, regarding the theme of “Teacher Training,” building teacher capacity by appropriately training teachers and administrators to deliver effective behavioral strategies within or outside the classroom may decrease both students’ negative behaviors and teacher frustration described by the participants. If student behaviors are remediated, overall staff satisfaction may also increase. “Mindset” is another identified theme that may be impacted if teachers and staff were to experience positive results. The problem of the lack of role definition described by the participants has contributed to their feelings that they were not providing the right services to their students. This finding is consistent with the presence of marginalization and fragmented efforts that exist in many school districts. If, as recommended in the action plan, policies and procedures are clearly delineated, and staff are able to adhere to and model school expectations consistently, teachers and staff may stop feeling that their capacity to adequately perform their jobs is compromised. The need for clarity of role expectations is documented in the literature on school mental health that specifically calls for personnel to be given appropriate correct job descriptions in order to provide programs and services correctly

(<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefs/threetier.pdf>).

Lack of parent participation was a theme identified early in the study. Although the participants did not select it as a priority issue to be addressed, the Learning Supports content area for “increasing community and family involvement” is an area that the district may want to review in the future. In addition, the content area of “providing support to the full range of transitions that students and families encounter as they negotiate school and grade changes” may

also be a future consideration for the district. These, in turn, may be areas that can be said to directly relate to and create change in the overarching themes of “Mindset”, “Resistance to Change” or “The Current State of Things.” Including parental input in the development of these areas of Learning Supports would improve the likelihood that these services would be relevant to the particular needs of students and families in this community. As demonstrated by the unsuccessful attempts to involve parents as participants in the current study, obtaining parental participation may require special efforts and persistence on the part of the school district.

Ultimately, this research study served several purposes. First, it provided a window to understanding issues related to school mental health from the lived experiences of teachers and school mental health personnel within the context of this school district. It was essential to “join” this particular school system by learning about its culture in order to understand local issues and problems being experienced by some of its stakeholders. As Nastasi, Moore and Varjas (2004) indicated, the purpose of understanding a particular culture requires gaining an *emic* perspective – the view from the insiders inside the setting. It was important for the research process to use participant observation, group meetings and individual interviews in order to gain those perspectives of the lived experiences of the participants. Second, participants were given an opportunity to have their voices heard and to be seen as potentially able to assist in developing policy, programs and services. This is consistent with Adelman and Taylor’s (2001) recommendation that taking part in school improvement policy and planning allows participants “to place themselves at relevant tables” and become part of that process.

Third, participants collected data and examined their lived experiences together. Many of the participants who work at the various grade levels (elementary through high school) had never had opportunities to collectively share their experiences district-wide. The participants from

primary to secondary levels found that they shared similar concerns about the identified areas, as well as other issues. This allowed for feelings of camaraderie and shared meaning-making. Participants in the study also reported that their school district was steeped in top-down reforms that required it to implement numerous initiatives that, in their opinions subsequently overwhelmed the system. In their article regarding the importance of considering “context” when discussing schools and children’s mental health, Ringeisen, Henderson, and Hoagwood (2003) discussed the emphasis on accountability in educational reforms that focus solely on student outcomes in the form of standardized state assessments. Goodlad (2002) questioned the outcomes of “top-down” accountability-driven reforms that serve to increase attention on improving performance of students. School districts, like the one studied must demonstrate improvement of student outcomes. Both federal and state mandates are “top-down” accountability measures that serve to increase attention and redirection of efforts and resources to improve assessment results. To add to this pressure, standardized statewide assessment performance is not only reported publicly, but has significant consequences, such as: mention at least a couple (loss of funding, the closing of schools, for example) for school districts that impact staff and students. This was an area of focus driving this district to implement many new initiatives during this current year that participants perceived as excessive and stressful. Given these circumstances, participants appreciated the opportunity to express and/or share lived experiences with others. The lack of opportunities for staff to bring up their experiences and issues of concern to decision-makers and to become involved in school improvement efforts may have limited the capacity of the school district to achieve necessary improvements in its performance.

Fourth, creating awareness among participants about current research practices -- action research methodology as a problem solving process focusing on school mental health, and the most up to date research in the field of school mental health -- and about the linkage between those practices and school improvement planning was purposeful. Analyzing the data, and identifying issues of concern and subsequently relating them to the literature on school mental health became a vehicle through which participants began to set the stage for the possibility of building a comprehensive school mental health program relevant to local needs. By developing awareness of how school mental health reform and action research two areas of research are connected, participants realized how that knowledge may benefit and empower stakeholders (and ultimately the school district), and resulted in the development of an action plan. The action plan, to be shared with district leaders (i.e. Superintendent, Board members, administrators), was written with the goal of relating the experiences and perspectives of participants who are on the ‘front line’ of providing services to students. Mertler (2012) recommended that action plan results be shared with all stakeholders in order to reflect on next steps. As Mertler suggested, next steps might include debriefing, making decisions about future plans, collecting additional data, or implementing new strategies.

The suggestion from the Texas Leadership Cadre in 2006 for stakeholders in the State to collect more qualitative data bears consideration, as attested by the present study. Most school districts use quantitative data in school improvement planning and policy making. This approach neglects attention to the ‘lived experiences’ of members of school communities that provide access to their worldviews and day to day problems in ways that could otherwise not be described using quantitative data. As Stringer (2007) stated, “...numbers are misleading..... and often oversimplify the state of affairs” (p. 141).

The literature on school mental health also lends support to the idea of placing stakeholders at relevant tables to discuss mental health programming. Technical centers such as UCLA Center for School Mental Health have suggested that those who are on the front lines in schools and have firsthand knowledge can contribute to existing school improvement planning and policy. The processes of analysis and mapping of resources that were part of the action research process in this study can enable the redefinition of roles and responsibilities and the development of appropriate training of staff. These were areas that emerged as major themes in this study. Additionally, stakeholders with knowledge of current literature about school mental health best practices can be empowered to provide consultation to school policy makers.

The connection between stakeholder participation and school improvement processes is underscored by Nastasi, Varjas and Moore (2004) who argued that their model of participatory culturally specific interventions necessitates the use of the action research process. Participation and reflective practice as well as allowing stakeholders to be involved in the planning, implementation, evaluation and decision-making that links data to both population and context are crucial. Mental health professionals are in unique positions to contribute to such discussions because of their expertise and facilitative qualities, but the collaboration of other stakeholders (such as teachers) who bring other skills and points of view is also important. As the authors pointed out, presenting and discussing data and experiences promotes “understanding of the diversity of perspectives....toward a shared framework and vocabulary for approaching mental health programming” (p. 87).

Ethical Concerns

There were not many ethical concerns in the study. One exception was the researcher's interest in the comprehensive development of mental health in public schools. It was acknowledged early on that the researcher entered this project with a unique set of experiences. The project was reframed as a unique interest and 'curiosity' about what mental health and other stakeholders in public schools would like to address at the local level. Stringer (2007) insisted on objectivity in gathering data in action research as the facilitator needs to be sure that information comes directly from participants and is not spoiled by "perspectives, biases or experiences of research facilitators" (p. 66). The interview process and the subsequent data collected were able to "reveal the reality that makes up people's day-to-day experience, bringing their assumptions, views, and beliefs out in the open and making them available for reflection" (p. 66). This was done as stated earlier by interviewing the participants and clarifying meanings or 'lived experiences' and the ways in which participants were impacted.

Herr and Anderson (2005) suggested that "bias and subjectivity are natural and acceptable in action research as long as they are critically examined rather than ignored, [and] other mechanisms may need to be put into place to ensure they do not have a distorting effect on outcomes" (p. 60). Critical reflexivity was necessary. Reflexivity has its roots in the reactions that facilitators have in hearing participants' words; and also involves the reactions that participants have of the facilitator. Another meaning of reflexivity derives from understanding and reflection. The *Oxford English Dictionary*, (2008) defines reflexivity (noun) as the "taking account of itself or the effect of the researcher on what is being investigated" (<http://www.oxfordreference.com>). Rossman and Rallis (2003) endorse the idea that reflexivity is "present in social interactions, [and] they focus on understanding and explain the effects of

reflexivity” (p. 51). As they pointed out researchers must make the intent of the study ‘explicit’ and thus, this makes inquiry in action research both “systematic and rigorous” (p. 51).

The ‘self at work’ in qualitative research suggests that researchers need to be reflexive about their ability to question and explore their research with other participants. It was imperative for the researcher to examine personal assumptions and interests and to understand that her presence may have influenced the research process and outcomes. The researcher needed to be aware of participant reactions because they, too, had their own biases and assumptions. As Rossman and Rallis (2003) suggested, reflexivity is “a package of reciprocal interactions between the researcher and the participants in the setting” (p. 50). Rossman and Rallis also elucidated the idea that as a researcher collecting data, one should be forthright about the purpose of the study and articulate a balanced perspective about the topic. Careful examination required knowing the researchers’ beliefs, values, assumptions, and biases and as the research suggests, being able “to reflect on the self as learner and knower” (p. 55).

‘Community of practice’ is a term used by qualitative researchers that describes those who work together; they may also be considered ‘critical friends’ as is often seen in school improvement practices. Being able to work together actually strengthens learning and as suggested by Rossman and Rallis (2003), it is important to “subject your work to scrutiny from this community, eliciting the tough questions and exploring the possible answers that deepen your understanding and make your study robust” (p. 35). In order to preserve objectivity on the part of the researcher, at each weekly meeting discussions were held to “check for understanding” about the work being generated by all participants, and to ensure that the facilitator was capturing the correct meaning or interpretation of participant views. Examples

were questions such as, “What are your thoughts about how last week’s meeting went? Did you feel there were areas that needed to be further discussed?”

Limitations

As Stringer (2007) suggested, action research “is not a neat, orderly activity that allows participants to proceed step-by-step to the end of the process” (p. 9). It is expected that participants may work backward, repeat some of the steps, revise along the way, make various interpretations, skip stages, and make radical changes. It is particularly necessary to understand the values and assumptions that are part and parcel of action research, and the importance of using what Stringer cited as “a democratic, participatory, liberating, and life-enhancing approach to research” (p. 10).

One limitation of the study was the makeup of participants. While it was relatively easy to obtain a group of participants who had an interest in this research study, it is also possible that as Meltzoff states, the “use of volunteers” may have been biased as “all volunteers are not equal” (p. 57). The idea that volunteers had power differentials might have impacted the study. The study, however, resulted in having participants consisting of teachers, counselors and school psychologists. What might have been considered a ‘power differential’ was the idea that mental health participants had more knowledge about school mental health issues than teacher participants; however, this did not emerge as a conflict as it was evident throughout the study that all participants had general concerns about the overall way in which the district was handling behavioral, discipline and mental health procedures. Hierarchy and power differentials were also not observed regarding titles of participants, rather, in the way that some participants were more vocal than others.

Another weakness of the participant group was the limited participation by administrative personnel. Only three administrators joined the participant group at one meeting. Email messages and invitations sent to other administrators to participate in order to extend the participants' understandings of the data, a part of the action research cycle were not acknowledged, even after subsequent follow-up emails were sent. The researcher did not follow-up to ascertain the reasons for the lack of participation, however, given the many pressures the school district was under, one could speculate that the lack of participation on the part of the administrators could have been due to lack of time due to the many initiatives taking place at the time. Another possible reason for the limited participation of administrators could have been "bad timing" since the period in which administrators were invited to join the participants was close to the end of the academic year, during which administrators may have had additional end-of-year activities. It is also possible that administrators may not have been interested in the study or may not have perceived it as important.

Another limitation of the study was that participants included school personnel only. Attempts were made to involve parent participants in the study. Participants and the researcher used opportunities at various meetings and through personal contacts and snowball sampling to attempt to engage parents. While there were emails from parents stating they wanted to be involved, they did not appear for any of the scheduled meetings. In addition, 18 year old students were invited to participate and were viewed as potential participants as they were exiting the school system and may have been able to share valuable information. Attempts were made to recruit students in all senior English classes through the use of a script and flyers. No students volunteered to take part in the study. This may have been due to the fact that senior students were in the college planning process at the time this study began. Additionally, the

history of the relationship between the community and the school system, and the political climate created by the student performance challenges the schools were facing may have created negative feelings on the part of parents and students. This was not, however, confirmed by the facilitator.

There were other potential teacher participants who inquired about the study and its timeframe, and information was shared with them via email. Once these participants understood the purpose of the study, they expressed concerns regarding issues of confidentiality and about who might view their accounts of issues being experienced in the district. The researcher made attempts to clarify that all data would be secure, but these potential participants expressed fears of being singled out or possible employment termination. The fears expressed may have been due to the history of previous terminations of personnel in the recent past, but was not corroborated by the researcher. Further, issues of power and fear of retaliation were not addressed in this study, but may have had some bearing on participation.

An additional limitation of the study was that analysis of the data was not examined by many other stakeholders, as had been intended, to provide alternative perspectives. Only two administrators took an active approach in one meeting and provided factual knowledge regarding current procedures taking place. However, Stringer (2007) described “enriching the analysis” in order that participants are able to explore “extended understandings” from other resources (p. 106). For example, had this action research process included more administrative or parent and student participants, a much broader view of “the way things are” may have extended participant understandings.

Some other possible limitations are related to doing work in schools or organizations include the politics of action research and insider/outsider status. The researcher would have been negligent in not addressing these items. In this research project, the researcher as facilitator understood that both might play a role. As Herr and Anderson (2005) stated, the politics of action research are only “marginally related” but as a researcher it was important to attend to this in this setting. As they stated, “those who do action research have a special need to be aware of its effects” (p. 64). Institutions are typically political and politics abound. As the researchers suggested, “the work of doctors, social workers, and teachers is becoming more fragmented, more supervised, more assessed, and consequently more controlled from the outside” (p. 64). Attempts to control and define any profession in their words results in “essentially a political move” (p. 64). Who creates knowledge may also be political; that knowledge can sometimes be unappreciated or considered invalid by those who plan policy and “may seldom [be] given legitimacy by those who make policy” (p. 65). It is suggested that given the research on building comprehensive school mental health programs that has been generated by major universities and technical centers around the country, which also has the support of federal funding, it is specifically appropriate as a foundation for an action research study. Concurrently, the initiatives currently being practiced in several states indicate a trend in moving school mental health initiatives forward. However, concerns were voiced by some of the participants as to their involvement and sharing of information. The facilitator had to ensure confidentiality as well as protection of interviews and data arising out of the study at all times until it was agreed that it could be shared with others. More importantly, the participants were not sure of the researcher’s relationship to the district and that had to be clarified at the first

meeting. The researcher explained there was no prior relationship, with anyone including administrative personnel.

Linked to political concerns of action research was the perceived status of the researcher. In the case of this study, the researcher/facilitator was positioned as an outsider and therefore the 'positionality' suggested an outsider/insider status. Since action research is generally concerned with relationship issues between insiders and outsiders, this, too, required consideration. As Herr and Anderson (2005) stated, in participatory action research, "the insider-outside team would probably fit the bill" of being an ideal form (p. 38). In reciprocal collaboration (insider/outsider teams), there is a knowledge base, improved/critiqued practice, and professional/organization transformation. In addition, "collaborative forms of participatory action research...achieve equitable power relations" (p. 31). This suggestion is made about the awareness of the politics of action research and as stated earlier, the research participants were informed about the concept of equality between the researcher and participants at the initial meeting using the PowerPoint presentation (see Appendix F).

Another possible limitation of the study was the amount of time spent in the district. Initially, the Superintendent approved the study in the Spring of 2012 with a start date of Fall 2012, however due to school district's administrative issues, the start date was delayed. The study officially began in January 2013 with the researcher conducting initial meetings with administrators, presentations at individual faculty meetings, followed by recruitment and subsequent personal interviews of participants. Participant group meetings did not begin until early Spring. Rossman and Rallis (2003) stated that in qualitative research, the necessity for the researcher to be immersed in the environment for as long as possible is a consideration. While participation can be viewed on a continuum that may span joint participation to being immersed

to being an observer “that ranges from co-participation to immersion as a participant to isolation as an onlooker,” in this particular study, the sensitive nature of the data that was generated required more time for the study. More time may have afforded opportunities to engage more participants and to extend understandings through the use of administrators, parents and students, as the study might have otherwise revealed more valuable insight into issues being experienced in this district. Additional time talking to community members or agencies may also have afforded the ability of adding to the current data. In total, the researcher spent approximately seven months up to and including the reporting of the action plan to the Superintendent. At the writing of this dissertation, the plan to present to the Board of Education was being negotiated and therefore was not included in the time frame.

The generalizability of the study’s findings is limited. Data arising from action research studies such as this will be, by design, different depending on the culture of the stakeholders and the school community itself. For instance, this action research study could be utilized in another school district, and would see different results through the activities, decisions, and personal reflection on the part of stakeholders. However, ‘transferability’ is the term often used in action research and its meaning is derived from Nastasi, Varjas and Moore’s (2004) tenets of program development using their participatory culture-specific intervention model (PCSIM). In this intervention model, transferability suggests that the findings of this study may be applicable “to other situations based on comparability with the research context” (p. 48). It is suggested, therefore, that while stakeholders may be similar from one school district to another, i.e., school mental health professionals and/or teachers, the data generated is not.

Future Implications

The Center for School Mental Health at UCLA identified four core problems in the building of comprehensive school mental health programs – not having a unified system of learning supports, not having a whole framework, appropriate policy and school improvement change, and overall systemic change. “Buy-in” from leadership and school staff is a continual process that will allow teachers to talk about where issues are happening, identify barriers to learning, and to discover issues that are most pressing (Dr. Howard Adelman, personal communication, February 15, 2012). Using action research to identify ‘lived experiences’ can serve school districts through the use of cooperation, collaboration, and communication in their endeavors to build comprehensive school mental health programs. As was identified by the participants in this study, role clarification, teacher training and policies and procedures are areas which are consistent with the research on school mental health in that failure to address policy, practice, research and training will only serve to reveal conflicts in school systems, marginalized efforts and the advancement of mental health in schools. School personnel on the front lines who are charged with delivering services to children deserve at the very least to be heard, to gain understanding, and to be part of the creation of appropriate policy making and school mental health programs.

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Appendix A

Dear School District Superintendent:

I am a doctoral student in the Psy.D. program in clinical psychology at Union Institute & University. I would like to invite your school district to participate in my dissertation research which focuses on school mental health. I entered the Doctoral program with a professional background in School Counseling and administrative assistance to an Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and District-Wide Testing. The combination of my professional experience and my Doctoral training has led me to a research interest in school mental health.

As I am sure you are aware, the field of school mental health has been studied for several years by four technical centers around the country. Their efforts are seeing results at national, state and local levels in the States of Ohio, Louisiana, and Iowa. Other school districts such as in Tucson, Arizona and in Gainesville, Georgia and Indian River, Florida have also begun work in an effort to incorporate a three-tiered approach to school improvement planning. This consists of academic and leadership components which already occur in school districts around the country. The third component, learning supports, incorporates mental health as a part of school improvement planning.

I am planning to investigate school mental health using an action research method of inquiry. Action research is a means to collaborate with stakeholders interested in defining and solving a mental health issue or programmatic problem within their school system. It seeks to collect and analyze data with participants using shared inquiry in order to transform understanding about the nature of a problem, and then apply strategies for resolution of that problem. I have chosen this research methodology because it is very similar conceptually to the process already utilized within schools to identify, define, and generate solutions to school mental health issues. The findings of the study will be shared with you, and with the study participants. They may also be shared with your Board of Education, if requested. The dissertation findings will be submitted for publication in a scholarly journal and may be presented at professional conferences as a way to disseminate information about school reform regarding school mental health services. I have enclosed a copy of the abstract which I hope will further clarify my research intent and focus. Please note that there is no cost to the district for this study.

If you have any questions, I may be reached at anitakillea@yahoo.com, or you may contact my Dissertation Chair, Dr. Margarita O'Neill at 802-254-0152, Ext. 6403, or margarita.oneill@myunion.edu.

Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Anita M. Killea, M.S., School Counseling
Doctoral Candidate, Union Institute & University

Appendix B

IRB Approval Letter



UNION INSTITUTE & UNIVERSITY

April 4, 2012

Ms. Anita M. Killea
3315 S. Lake Village Drive
Katy, TX 77450

Dear Anita

Your research proposal has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board.

IRB ID: IRB 00575
Human Subjects Project: *Addressing School Mental Health in a Texas Public School District: An Action Research Study*

Project Purpose: Dissertation Research Study

Approval Start Date: April 4, 2012

Approval Expiration Date: April 3, 2013

As you conduct your research project, please keep in mind that you are to:

- Respond to the notification of the IRB's annual continuing review process. You will receive notice of the continuing review **two months** prior to the expiration of IRB approval for your project. A response is required even if your study is completed.
- Request and receive IRB approval for any changes that you wish to make prior to or during your project. They cannot be implemented without IRB approval.
- Notify the IRB within 48 hours if any unanticipated events occur. Suspend your study and notify the IRB immediately if any subjects have an adverse experience as a result of participating in your research project.
- Notify the IRB when you have completed all data collection and will have no further contact with participants for data collection purposes.

On behalf of the IRB and the university, I thank you for your efforts to conduct your research in compliance with federal regulations for the protection of human subjects.

Best wishes for the success of your research project.

Sincerely yours,

Mary Ginn, Ph.D., Director
Institutional Review Board

c: Dr. Margarita O'Neill, Dissertation Chair
Dr. Bill Lax, Dean
Dr. Lewis Mehl-Madrona

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

Project Title: Addressing School Mental Health in a Texas Public School District: An Action Research Study

Principal Investigator (PI): Anita M. Killea

PI Telephone Numbers: 281-392-2188 (H)

203-417-5634 (C)

PI Email: anita.killea@email.myunion.edu

Faculty Advisor/Faculty PI/Dissertation Chair: Dr. Margarita O’Neill

Faculty Telephone Numbers: 802-254-0152, X8403

Faculty Email: margarita.oneill@myunion.edu

Location of Study: Houston, Texas

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Anita M. Killea. The purpose of this study is to engage school personnel and other interested individuals in an action research project in order to select, study and develop ideas to address an issue related to school mental health within your school district. The researcher conducting this study will describe this study in more detail to you and answer any questions you may have. Please read the following information and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether to take part in the study. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You can refuse to participate without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You can refuse to participate at any time, and you can decline to answer any questions at any time. Simply tell the researcher that you wish to stop participating. All the data collected before you stop will be destroyed and not used in the data analysis or results of this study. The researcher will provide you with a copy of this consent form for your records. A summary of the study results will be provided to you upon request.

The purpose of this study is to engage school mental health and other stakeholders in a Texas school district in an action research project in order to select, study and address a mental health issue(s) in your school district.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

- Participate in a one-hour, audio-recorded interview.
- Review a transcript of your interview tape for accuracy
- Participate in focus groups
- Participate in group meetings
- Keep comments made by other individual participants in the study confidential

The total estimated amount of time that you will be involved in this study is

- Ultimately to be determined by the study participant group and may include
 - A 2 to 3 months span of time
 - Between four to eight 60 to 90 minutes meetings
 - An individual hour-long interview.

Potential risks of being in this study:

- Loss of confidentiality if your name is associated with your responses.
- This potential risk is minimized through the use of pseudonyms that will be written onto interview tapes and used in the transcript of your interview tape.
- If recalling certain events during the interview causes you to become emotional, you may take a break for a few minutes. You may choose to continue, reschedule, or withdraw from the study. All data collected before your withdrawal will be destroyed and not used in the data analysis

Potential benefits of being in the study:

- Opportunities for personal and professional growth
- Opportunities to learn about the current literature in the area of school mental health
- To learn additional strategies of group process via action research
- The opportunity to make suggestions that may help other school districts in similar situations in the future.

Compensation/Costs:

You will not receive any financial compensation for your participation nor will you incur any costs as a result of your participation in this research.

Confidentiality and Privacy Protections:

Your identity in this study will be treated as confidential. Results of the study, including all collected data, may be published in my dissertation, in future journal articles, or professional presentations, and Internet sites, but your name or any identifiable references to you will not be included. However, any records or data obtained as a result of your participation in this study may be inspected by persons conducting this study and/or Union Institute & University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), provided that such inspectors are legally obligated to protect any identifiable information from public disclosure, except where disclosure is otherwise required by law or a court of competent jurisdiction. These records will be kept private in so far as permitted by law. All study data will be retained for a minimum of five years as required by the IRB and then destroyed. If we communicate by email during this study, please be aware that email is not a secure form of communication. However, my computer has security software, and I am the only person who has access to my email account. No one else will read our communications.

Termination of Study

Your participation in the study may be terminated by the investigator without your consent under the following circumstances: You fail to appear at a scheduled time for participation or fail to respond to a request to set up a time for your participation on two occasions. This study may need to be terminated without prior notice to, or consent of, participants in the event of illness or other pertinent reasons.

Subject and Researcher Authorization

I have read and understand this consent form, and I volunteer to participate in this research study. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form. I voluntarily choose to participate, but I understand that my consent does not take away any legal rights in the case of negligence or other legal fault of anyone who is involved in this study. I further understand that nothing in this consent form is intended to replace any applicable federal, state or local laws.

Signatures

Participant Name

(printed): _____

Participant

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Principal Researcher's Name

(printed) _____

Principal Researcher's

Signature: _____

Date _____

Note: You may contact the individuals listed at the top of this form with any questions about this study. You may also contact the IRB Director at Union Institute & University with any questions about your rights as a participant at 800=861-6400, ext. 1153, or at irb@myunion.edu. In the event of a study-related emergency, contact the individuals listed at the top of this form and the IRB Director within 48 hours.

Comprehensive Informed Consent Form

FORM IRB002

Rev. 3/12

Appendix D

Informed Consent Form – Students

Project Title: Addressing School Mental Health in a Texas Public School District: An Action Research Study

Principal Investigator (PI): Anita M. Killea

PI Telephone Numbers: 281-392-2188 (H)

203-417-5634 (C)

PI Email: anita.killea@email.myunion.edu

Faculty Advisor/Faculty PI/Dissertation Chair: Dr. Margarita O’Neill

Faculty Telephone Numbers: 802-254-0152, X8403

Faculty Email: margarita.oneill@myunion.edu

Location of Study: Houston, Texas

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Anita M. Killea. The purpose of this study is to engage school personnel and other interested individuals in an action research project in order to select, study and develop ideas to address an issue related to school mental health within your school district. The researcher conducting this study will describe this study in more detail to you and answer any questions you may have. The researcher conducting this study will describe this study to you and answer all your questions. Please read the following information and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether to take part in the study. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You can refuse to participate without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You can refuse to participate at any time, and you can decline to answer any questions at any time. Simply tell the researcher that you wish to stop participating. All the data collected before you stop will be destroyed and not used in the data analysis or results of this study. The researcher will provide you with a copy of this consent form for your records. A summary of the study results will be provided to you upon request.

The purpose of this study is to engage school mental health and other stakeholders in a Texas school district in an action research project in order to select, study and address a mental health issue(s) in your school district.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

- Participate in a one-hour, audio-recorded interview.
- Review a transcript of your interview tape for accuracy
- Participate in focus groups
- Participate in group meetings
- Keep comments made by other individual participants in the study confidential

The total estimated amount of time that you will be involved in this study is

- Ultimately to be determined by the study participant group and may include
 - A 2 to 3 months span of time
 - Between four to eight 60 to 90 minutes meetings
 - An individual hour-long interview

Potential risks of being in this study:

- Loss of confidentiality if your name is associated with your responses.
- This potential risk is minimized through the use of pseudonyms that will be written onto interview tapes and used in the transcript of your interview tape.
- If recalling certain events during the interview causes you to become emotional, you may take a break for a few minutes. You may choose to continue, reschedule, or withdraw from the study. All data collected before your withdrawal will be destroyed and not used in the data analysis and written report.
- The school supports student participants in this study and has assured that the students will not be penalized or have repercussions on their grades, curricular activities or school involvement.

Potential benefits of being in the study:

- Opportunities to learn about the current literature in the area of school mental health
- Opportunities to take part and contribute to the improvement of student services
- To learn about group process and research methods via action research which may be helpful in future careers or studies
- The opportunity to make suggestions that may help others in similar situations in the future.

Compensation/Costs:

You will not receive any financial compensation for your participation nor will you incur any costs as a result of your participation in this research.

Confidentiality and Privacy Protections:

Your identity in this study will be treated as confidential. Results of the study, including all collected data, may be published in my dissertation in future journal articles, professional presentations, and Internet sites, but your name or any identifiable references to you will not be included. However, any records or data obtained as a result of your participation in this study may be inspected by persons conducting this study and/or Union Institute & University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), provided that such inspectors are legally obligated to protect any identifiable information from public disclosure, except where disclosure is otherwise required by law or a court of competent jurisdiction. These records will be kept private in so far as permitted by law. All study data will be retained for a minimum of five years as required by the IRB and then destroyed.

If we communicate by email during this study, please be aware that email is not a secure form of communication. However, my computer has security software, and I am the only person who has access to my email account. No one else will read our communications.

Termination of Study

Your participation in the study may be terminated by the investigator without your consent under the following circumstances: You fail to appear at a scheduled time for participation or fail to respond to a request to set up a time for your participation on two occasions. This study may need to be terminated without prior notice to, or consent of, participants in the event of illness or other pertinent reasons.

Subject and Researcher Authorization

I have read and understand this consent form, and I volunteer to participate in this research study. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form. I voluntarily choose to participate, but I understand that my consent does not take away any legal rights in the case of negligence or other legal fault of anyone who is involved in this study. I further understand that nothing in this consent form is intended to replace any applicable federal, state or local laws.

Signatures

Participant Name

(printed): _____

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

Principal Researcher's Name

(printed) _____

Principal Researcher's

Signature: _____

Date _____

Note: You may contact the individuals listed at the top of this form with any questions about this study. You may also contact the IRB Director at Union Institute & University with any questions about your rights as a participant at 800=861-6400, ext. 1153, or at irb@myunion.edu. In the event of a study-related emergency, contact the individuals listed at the top of this form and the IRB Director within 48 hours.

Comprehensive Informed Consent Form

FORM IRB002

Rev. 3/12

Appendix E

Sample Qualitative and Focus Group questions:

1. What is/are the problem(s)? What is happening?
2. How does it affect our work/lives?
3. Who is being affected?
4. Where/When are things happening?
5. How does your group usually work?
6. What do you consider as strengths and/or weakness in how you are currently working as stakeholders?
7. Describe a typical day in your office.
8. Can you tell me about the organizational taxonomy of your district and where you fit in?
9. Describe what happened in a meeting where your department discussed mental health programs and initiatives.
10. Tell me more about what mental health professionals do in your district.
11. Tell me more about.....your work, your experiences, etc.
12. Have you tried to implement a program? What happened in the process?
13. What initiatives for school mental health have been addressed thus far in your district?

Appendix F

PowerPoint “Talking Points” Presentation

ACTION RESEARCH and PROBLEM-SOLVING
In Public Schools
With Stakeholders in School Mental Health

Application of Action Research Can Be Found In.....

- Education
- Health Care
- Social Work
- Organizational Development
- Planning and Architecture

AR in Education.....

- School improvement plans
- Curriculum development
- Evaluation
- Classroom instruction
- Class projects
- Special programs
- Parent participation
- Site-based management

Did You Know?

Action Research methods and Problem-Solving Teams in schools have complimentary and similar processes

Problem Solving Teams

- A Problem-Solving Team is a school-based group composed of various school personnel, such as teachers, school counselors, school psychologists, and administrators, who meet to provide assistance to children who are having academic or behavioral difficulties in school. The team is responsible for implementing a problem-solving approach to identify and intervene in response to students' needs within the arena of general education

Action Research Approach	Problem-Solving Teams Approach
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance everyday work practices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing goals and procedures: What are we doing? How are we doing them? • Evaluating effectiveness: To what extent are we achieving our objectives? How effective is our work? • Planning activities and strategies: What needs to be done? How do we get it done? • Resolve specific problems and crises <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defining the problem • Exploring its context • Analyzing its component parts • Developing strategies for its resolution • Develop special projects and programs • Planning • Implementing • Evaluating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describing and analyzing a student concern • Identifying potential strategies to address the concern • Testing the selected alternative strategies by implementing them and evaluating their effectiveness • The use of a systematic, problem-solving process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A focus on modifying the environment to assist students • A focus on assessment of what the student knows and can do, and not on weaknesses • The use of functional assessments that can be performed by teachers • Interventions that have been shown by research to have a high probability of success • The use of strategies to ensure that the interventions are implemented consistently and accurately • The use of systematic data collection and progress monitoring to determine the

Other stakeholders to consider...

- Parents
- Students
- Board members
- Community members
 - Mayor, Selectmen, Representatives
 - Law Enforcement, Juvenile Justice
 - Clinical/Community Psychologists
 - State Advocates
 - Colleges and Universities
 - Technical Centers

A Little More About Action Research ...

- "The act of observing and reflecting on our own practices can be an enlightening experience, enabling us to see ourselves more clearly and to formulate ways of working that are more effective and that enhance the lives of people with whom we work."

A Recursive Process.....

- Questioning a particular issue
- Reflecting upon and investigating the issue
- Developing an action plan
- Implementing and refining said plan

(McIntyre, 2008, p. 6).

How Can AR be Utilized?

Enhance everyday work practices

- **Revising goals and procedures:** What are we doing? How are we doing them?
- **Evaluating effectiveness:** To what extent are we achieving our objectives? How effective is our work?
- **Planning activities and strategies:** What needs to be done? How do we get it done?

Resolve specific problems and crises

- **Defining the problem**
- **Exploring its context**
- **Analyzing its component parts**
- **Developing strategies for its resolution**

Develop special projects and programs

- **Planning**
- **Implementing**
- **Evaluating**

What the current research tells us...

- In recent years, schools have begun addressing barriers to student learning and performance by implementing a Response to Intervention (RTI) model for student support. While this model provides schools with a systematic process for identifying and providing academic interventions and supports, many barriers to student learning and performance cannot be addressed through academic support alone. More and more schools across the nation are facing increased demands for support services relating to social, emotional, and behavioral problems. While many behavioral problems can and are being addressed through Positive Behavioral Supports (PBS), the need for more expanded services is critical. Growing evidence shows that school-based mental health programs improve educational outcomes by decreasing absences, discipline referrals, and high risk behaviors, while also improving test scores.
- TxCEDS, 2011

In Light of Current Major Budget Cuts: A Reason to Do Research at the School Level

- As a principal wrote us recently:

"Resources" seem to be dwindling in all areas. This year we have big cuts in certain areas, but this could also allow us to uncover different/creative ways to reach students - as we are forced to work smarter with less personnel and the onus is placed back on the classroom teacher. However, it could place a huge stress on teachers who are lacking the skill to seek out alternative solutions. As education looks to refigure our support services and incorporate more comprehensive systems, it is ironic, that with cuts could come gains."

UCLA, Center for School Mental Health (2011)
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/newschoolyr.pdf>

A Braided Process of Exploration, Reflection & Action

- Participant generated actions can range from changing public policy, to making recommendations to government agencies, to making informal changes in the community that benefit the people living there, to organizing a local event, to simply increasing awareness about an issue native to a particular locale,"

(McIntyre, 2008, p. 5)

In Action Research...

- "There is the necessity within the social sciences and the need for researchers from across a number of disciplines to participate with people in improving and understanding the world by changing it." (McTaggart, 1999)
- Active participation in the co-construction of knowledge
- The promotion of self- and critical awareness leads to individual, collective, and/or social change; and the building of alliances between researchers and participants in the planning, implementation, and dissemination of the research process.
- Enhancement of understanding and knowledge of issues through individual and collective reflection and investigation. (McIntyre, 2008)

ACTION RESEARCH is.....

"...a legitimate, authentic, and rigorous approach to inquiry." (Stringer, 2007, p. 191)

- It requires people to define clearly and observe the phenomena under investigation
- Offers an opportunity to investigate human affairs in order to provide knowledge that will make a difference
- Provides answers to social problems

The Literature on Action Research

In Schools:

- Action Research: Improving Schools and Empowering Educators (Mertler, 2012)
- Action Research: A Guide for the Teacher Researcher (Mills, 2011)
- Action Research for Teachers: Traveling the Yellow Brick Road (Arhar, Holly & Kasten, 2001)
- Integrating Teaching, Learning, and Action Research (Stringer, Christensen, & Baldwin, 2010)
- The Role of Qualitative Research Methods in Evidence-Based Practice (NASP, 2006)

The Literature on Action Research

- Handbook of Action Research, Reason & Bradbury, 2007
- Handbook of Qualitative Research, Denzin & Lincoln, 2005
- Principles of Community Psychology, Levine, Perkins & Perkins, 2005
- The Power of Collaborative Solutions, Wolfe, 2010
- Learning in the Field, Rossman & Rallis, 2003
- The Action Research Dissertation, Herr & Anderson, 2005
- Naturalistic Inquiry, Lincoln & Guba, 1985

Other Action Research Resources

- Action Research Journal
- ALAR—The Action Learning/Action Research Journal
- International Journal of Action Research
- Educational Action Research
- APA, Division 27, Society for Community Research and Action: Division of Community Psychology

Incentive to participate....some ideas

- Special incentives for or participating, i.e. personal and professional growth
- Credit in annual evaluations, earning compensatory time, receiving special recognition.
- Opportunity to share project and data with others, i.e., Boards of Education, communities, colleges and technical centers, etc.

Presenting report to the Board

- To get their feedback
- To implement following year
- Or , just to consider how data affects personnel; as one endpoint, and the beginning of another;
- To educate Board about trends in SMH
- To place participants in positions of leadership and in school improvement policy planning
- To increase knowledge about where field of SMH is headed

Contact Information

Anita M. Killea
xxxxxx.study@yahoo.com

Union Institute & University
Brattleboro, Vermont
margarita.oneill@myunion.edu (Dissertation Chair)

Appendix G

Time Table

By May 2010: Committee Chair selected

By June-July 2010: Additional committee members selected

August 2010-December 2010: Dissertation Proposal II to fine-tune my research proposal draft; choose third committee member

August 2012: Defend proposal, send formal letters and arrange presentations to local school districts and/or Boards of Education

April 2012: IRB approval

May 2012: School District approved study to begin in September 2012

August 2012: District Superintendent postponed study to January 2013

January 2013: Begin action research project;

May –June 2013: Data analysis, conclusions with stakeholders

June 2013: Meet with Superintendent to discuss action plan;

August 2013: Submit action research plan to stakeholders for review

September 2013: Submit action plan school district; present plan to stakeholder team and Board of Education, if applicable, in 2014.

Appendix H

THE “34” THEMES

TEACHER TRAINING

- Lack of training, fearfulness and stress about whether what they are doing is correct.
- Special ed teachers – no one showed them how to deal with a student that’s ED or ADHD or Bipolar
- They get a legal document that they must follow but not one gave them a the training on how to respond to the student
- They’re frustrated because typically that one student throws off the entire class andthen if you’re hearing you have a classroom management problem, they feel unsupported...
- So instead of de-escalating the behavior they don’t realize some of the things they’re doing even though they’re seeking control is escalating a lot of the students’ behavior
- I do have some issues with some classeskids who are always causing problems and just knowing how to deal with them I went to a workshop.....it really helped, it really calmed the kids down...
- How would I know if it’s a student with mental health issues?
- I have some [teacher skills], but definitely, because they work for a while and then they stop working
- Kids with ADHD, they’re under the 504 umbrella, and to me it’s like a piece of paper that’s in the file that we’re supposed to follow. They say it’s different from Special Ed but even I’m still so confused about what’s the difference
- But definitely proper training and I don’t mean the type of training where you just lecture and you just give us the information because no one learns from that, but actually hands on activities, role playing whatever it takes for our kids to be okay.
- I want a problem-preventing method.
- Wanting to know more as far as strategies and techniques to help children in the classroom when you have a crisis or when you know there is a child that has emotional issues.
- As teachers – I’m not trained and I don’t know how to help. I can listen, I can guide – my motherly instinct – I can do all that, but when it comes to actually knowing what to do, that’s where I have that barrier. I’m like, I’m at an ends and I don’t know what to do.
- We had a week to get our classrooms ready, and in that week we had staff development which I feel none of us really gained anything from it.
- I would say the teachers are frustrated – what I see? I don’t know what they’re saying, but I think that they feel that they don’t get enough training

- And I just feel like they throw these things at us and we struggle with it for a year and the next year something else. I feel like we just keep up with whatever the trend is and we don't really stick to anything, they don't train us properly, they throw it at us, figure it out...
- I feel like we're left to do things on our own and to figure things out.
- ...cause I still don't think the teacher knows or watches or sees or any of that [on bullying]
- I think they gave them an online presentation and that was it and I think that's probably as far as it went with it. But if they had more and had refreshers I think that would be better.
- I think it would be helpful to learn how to support these kids and to give these teachers the training
- I think that yes the number one thing is that the teachers don't have any training dealing with students with difficult behavior or emotional problems or who don't have support at home. We also don't get any support for working with children with those problems.
- I definitely do think we do need to train them on that sort of thing but there's also other stuff that they need to be trained on like how to follow an accommodation for 504 for special ed. There's a lot that I think that they don't know. And they don't do it not because they are trying to be malicious and I'm not gonna do my job – they just don't know how to do it.
- And at the beginning of the year we didn't teach the kids behavior. Like in a positive behavioral support system you're supposed to have specific rules in each location and bring the kids there and teach them those rules in that location and be very specific and it should be the same. We have just like 3 rules, be safe, be respectful, be responsible. And that's all that's said from administration. Well for teachers that's different and it's not...what does be responsible mean to me, is not be the same for somebody else.

RESOURCES

- Those who work here wear so many hats that they are pulled in too many different directions to be effective at any one thing. Likely do to resources.
- Extra people to help with behavior issues
- I can't see why the behavior support program can't be started again.....but I think that it deals with money they have to pay a person in that capacity...
- I think one of the teachers asked to go [to a conference]. I think it was a conference or something. She asked if the school could fund it and they said no. And it was too expensive for her to go.
- They're frustrated.

TOO MANY INITIATIVES

- There's a lot of teacher frustration
- The mental health of teachers is being affected
- Physical stress
- Lots of absenteeism
- I think everybody's burned out. I think from the beginning, from the very beginning, we've been burnt out.

ROLE CLARIFICATION

- Those who work here wear so many hats that they are pulled in too many different directions to be effective at any one thing.
- Likely due to resources
- Assigning responsibilities/delegating to others (and training them) is an area that has to be addressed.
- Once a responsibility is assigned, it should be expected to be accomplished as opposed to people trying to pass the buck onto someone else to do their job
- Never a reorganization of who does what, who has what roles [school mental health]
- And I don't think that there is a clear picture for my job description.
- sometimes conflict with what my role should be

PROCEDURES, POLICIES

- Handling situations differently and it keeps changing
- Everybody kinda tells me what to do
- Lack of standard policies, procedures, and model documents
- No attorney on staff to guide district
- Lack of common knowledge, training, and ready access to documentation about the “District X Way” means that when there is a change or departure of one staff member those remaining have difficulty or are unwilling to help orient newcomers
- Opportunities to be trained in what procedures have been in place (few)
- They get a legal document that they must follow but not one gave them a the training on how to respond to the student
- They did a PowerPoint on bullying
- We’ve had like CPI training.
- You cut me off at the knees and I can only – I feel too afraid to address too much.
- One person would be told one thing, another person would be told another, so nobody was really clear, and still we’re not clear as to what – but from my understanding is you have to fill the whole thing up before you can send the child to the office.
- So now the care team process has changed so it’s not as easy now to say I’m care teaming this kid because of behavior not academics – behavior.
- The way they changed care team and a lot of people don’t understand how it’s working even though they have the meetings and explaining it to us, we don’t really understand.
- There isn’t, nothing is outlined as far as when does a child get sent to the office, when does a child see a counselor, none of that is in writing none of that is outlined.
- There’s no real procedures to follow. You might send a student to the office for throwing a pencil versus this teacher might send a child kicking the wall but still not send them to the office. Nothing is actually in writing, and it’s really just up to the teacher, how the teacher is feeling that day.
- Those 3 rules are supposed to be consistent throughout the school. Be safe, be responsible, be respectful and then they say be exceptional. But none of that is outlined in the school as far as what does that mean in different places within in the school so that it’s consistent.

SUPERINTENDENT

- And that's the thing, it's like, some of us wonder how much he knows as far as what's going on in the schools because for example they have this new policy where if we have to be away from the kids for more than 45 minutes, we need to put in for a half day. So you know, some of us, if we have to go to a doctor's appointment, say the doctor's appointment is at 2:30 or at 3 so if we're asking to leave at 2:30 and the kids are out at 3:15, I mean we shouldn't have to take a half day for that.
- Well you wouldn't know it because it seems to be only open with him – what I'm saying is, "Is that passed down through everyone cause his openness, I don't feel it. " I'm not saying he isn't, cause it sounds like he is, but when you pass down the rest of his people, that's not what you see.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

- I feel like we have a structure, we just have to reorganize it
- Financial stress
- I feel like we're just constantly at the bottom of the totem pole. You know, they just dump everything on us. It's just do this, do this, do this. I feel like we don't have a voice – nobody's there to fight for us.
- Never a reorganization of who does what, who has what roles

TESTING

- We need an instructional coordinator to be dealing with testing

MINDSET

- Follow-through on directives, staying current on one's training, maintaining organization has appeared optional as opposed to an expectation that will impact an individual's job evaluation
- Lack of common knowledge, training, and ready access to documentation about the "District X Way" means that when there is a change or departure of one staff member those remaining have difficulty or are unwilling to help orient newcomers
- It's a mindset.....punishing kids in SAC or ISS or OSS
- The father became very belligerent with me.
- We're just here to teach, we're not here to deal with those kinds of things, and that's fine, you can have that attitude, but how do you know you're reaching your student if you're not reaching out? Or at least collaborating with the mental health people or the admin.
- I feel it's numbers. They want to be that ideal school. I feel like it's more about a show and it's not really about the kids.
- I feel like we're just constantly at the bottom of the totem pole. You know, they just dump everything on us. It's just do this, do this, do this. I feel like we don't have a voice – nobody's there to fight for us.
- "This is the chain of command, and this is what you do..."
- This particular parent that I have this year, I can't get a hold of and is not responsive. The parent I had last year was responsive so then that would help because the child didn't want be in trouble when they got home or wouldn't want their parent called. Sometimes they don't care if their parent was notified or the parent isn't responsive

POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

- We could have some positive reinforcers – an ice cream social or some free time in the gym....students who are following the code of conduct.
- Not just tangible rewards but praise and recognition
- Getting awards, having a forum with their peers
- I really believe we would see a difference in some students trying to do better at improving their behaviors instead of hunting kids down in between their classes and teachers yelling, “Get to your tardy stations.”

NEGATIVE REINFORCEMENT

- We have tardy stations and that’s a problem. We have the same group of students that are consistently tardy. So it’s not effective for all students.
- If you track the data and see how many kids are receiving in-school suspensions, how many kids are receiving out of school suspensions, how many kids are issued a SAC replacement....it’s astounding to me that....they’re just continuously going through the cycle.
- Obviously what we are doing is not effective. We dropped the ball on these kids but we want to yet still hold them accountable and punish them.
- There are some parents that are interested but all they get is phone calls going home that are negative. Or they’re hearing from administrators it may be more on a negative basis.
- I just don’t think we have a system, like if a child misbehaves he goes to ISS, does that really help?

STAFF MENTAL HEALTH

- We have to look at the mental health of all of our students because it's wearing on the staff and our performance in the classrooms.
- One thing I'm seeing is the mental health of the teachers being affected – it's leading to a lot of absenteeism with staff
- We're overloaded
- And then sometimes, and I know it's wrong, but sometimes it really changes my mood, it's like you know, I know that's wrong but it's human nature you know
- Yes, so I keep thinking, okay I know and who's being affected, we're all being affected. I think even the kids who want to learn are being affected because they're not learning
- I had to remove myself from that situation because it was going to drive me crazy and I couldn't get more involved...
- I think the morale over here is pretty low.
- I think everybody's burned out. I think from the beginning, from the very beginning, we've been burnt out.
- I think we need to have something for us.
- I'm concerned about the faculty and the staff because if you watch everyone is so overworked and everyone is so, I mean I so worry about some of the staff people here, that they are....I mean I feel like there are days when I feel like I'm gonna lose my mind. I'm glad that other teachers go through this, too, I mean they are going through what I'm going through, it's not just me

TARDY POLICY

- We have tardy stations and that's a problem. We have the same group of students that are consistently tardy. So it's not effective for all students.
- I really believe we would see a difference in some students trying to do better at improving their behaviors instead of hunting kids down in between their classes and teachers yelling, "Get to your tardy stations."

STUDENTS

- We need to teach these students how to replace these inappropriate behaviors with socially appropriate behaviors.
- Unfortunately, this year I'm hearing a lot of negativity from students. They're not happy with their schools. I hear this all day long, negative comments about their own school. That tells me the structure of the school is affected
- I get the feeling that the kids, they're used to, not used to working hard to get what they want.
- Diagnosed with ADHD
- I have a few students with ADHD.
- I see a lot of kids that need medication.
- It was something that had started last year and no one could connect with this child so I felt that I needed to help him.
- ...so it's situations like that, that I can see children need extra support.
- ...this particular student has exhausted everyone in school as well as exhausted the father and...
- With the girls, as far as self-esteem, I know that's a big issue.
- One of my students...has totally isolated himself.
- Their stomachs are hurting [due to hunger]
- It's like we set them up to fail.
- ...[students need] Just being polite, manners, ...their answers would be "Yeah" so training them to say Yes Ma'am or yes or excuse me. It's probably not done at home so they don't have that practice.
- I think some of it is environment and some of it is just what you're getting when you arrive here at school because I think a lot of kids don't feel they are getting nurtured or getting what they need from the adults in their lives
- My students, I don't think I'm there for them enough
- The kid last year was a perfectionist and if he wasn't going to be the best, then he would act out. The kid this year -- it's definitely his home life, well I think it's just the way his life is at home; he acts the same way here that he acts at home. I think a lot of the kids act the same way here that they act at home. They don't know that it's not normal
- And so my fear is that they're coming down, seeing that my door is closed and then walking away instead of leaving a note or seeing, you know
- I also think that a lot of these kids have been taught "don't bring your problems to school" or don't talk about your problems. Because I've had some of them get upset – parents – when we've called and expressed concern, sort of like it's none of your business.

- Yeah, I mean just looking at just attendance alone....not all of it is “I hate school” – talk about going back to “why” and there’s always underlying reasons, it’s just finding the time to get at it
- I definitely think there’s a need. I think as a school I think a lot of them are in pain of some sort, they just don’t feel like there is anywhere to necessarily go.

COUNSELORS

- And unfortunately even our counselors I feel are not working in the capacity that they should be working in. they're not being utilized like they should be which would also help with our school mental health
- Well I know the counselors have a lot on their plates –
- They are focused on other issues
-especially this year with the new administration I think they have no time because they're being pulled in all different directions.
- Testing, college prep, sped issues
- She's got a lot of things that are expected of her that shouldn't be expected of her.
- ...last year I guess there was more time for the kids to do groups and counseling sessions but because her time is so busy with just other administrative stuff, she just doesn't have the time to focus mainly on that. That's what we need here, these kids need it here.
- Sometimes some of the discipline issues are sent over to the counselors too.
- We are so busy with so much stuff.
- Testing. Cause testing plays a big piece. Once testing starts it's like 2-3 weeks preparation just getting it together for the big day.
- And we do have a lot of meetings. Too many meetings.
- I've been wanting to do it [a program] but there's just no time to.
- That's what they do is all this testing and it's not helping the kids.
- Because the counselor here, it wasn't like this back home, the counselor in this school district, I don't know if it's the state, is in charge of assessments and testing. So it's not really an option to the counselor because there'll be a sign on the door that says "Do Not Interrupt".
- I think the biggest problem we have is lack of time. As you've seen we're sort of pulled in many different directions and we're asked to do things that aren't school mental health related the biggest piece of that that takes up most of the time being testing. Like as of right now I have so many students that need to be seen but I can't see them because I'm tied up with testing
- I think it has a lot impact. You can have one kid and he's taking away an hour a day and you don't have the kids that much time, and then it frustrates you, and then you're annoyed at the other kids because your frustrated or overwhelmed trying to deal with this particular child and your other kids are doing busy work or something while you're trying to figure out what to do with that kid and then that kid is not learning anything
- I think we sort of triage.
- I miss being able to talk about problems and issues that are going on. I don't have a whole lot of time for that.

- So that's the stuff I miss, that's why I went to grad school, to get my degree in counseling.
- I love going into the classroom talking to kids about things. I just don't have time right now.
-we are not as readily available as we should be and I think a lot of them don't realize that that's what we're here for. [on whether students know what the counselor's role is]
- And so my fear is that they're coming down, seeing that my door is closed and then walking away instead of leaving a note or seeing, you know we had kids at the very end who were just breaking down because she hadn't been there and they hadn't been able to get her, but they would not come down another door to the next office to talk to somebody else. They just saw that she wasn't there and they went back to class. And we found them because one of them was an emergency – he broke down in the hallway and I had to go out there and help.
- And at risk kids are even more at risk here and something could happen and that's a constant worry.

THE CURRENT STATE OF THINGS

- And we would see everything – if we do this over time we’re going to see the data show that there’s an increase – a positive increase academically across the board – but if we continue to ignore it, we’re going to continue on the trend that we are on.
- Everybody should be on the same page.
- People are really focusing on documentation right now. I go t them, it’s document, document. It seems like a lot of people are focusing on documentation to save themselves.
- It’s basically, “Let’s get through the curriculum.”
- “You’re the only teacher I can trust.”
- The kids say, “You have my back and you’re not going to do anything to hurt me or to make me look bad. You’re gonna give me the benefit of the doubt.”
- I think it’s both the parents and teachers that let the students down and therefore the students do not trust them.
- Financial stress
- We had a week to get our classrooms ready, and in that week we had staff development which I feel none of us really gained anything from it.
- And we would see everything – if we do this over time we’re going to see the data show that there’s an increase – a positive increase academically across the board – but if we continue to ignore it, we’re going to continue on the trend that we are on.
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- I think it’s both the parents and teachers that let the students down and therefore the students do not trust them.
- And I just feel like they throw these things at us and we struggle with it for a year and the next year something else. I feel like we just keep up with whatever the trend is and we don’t really stick to anything, they don’t train us properly, they throw it at us, figure it out...
- It used to be a really good district and to see what’s going on.

- I think some of it is environment and some of it is just what you're getting when you arrive here at school because I think a lot of kids don't feel they are getting nurtured or getting what they need from the adults in their lives.
- "This is the chain of command, and this is what you do..."
- Because there's no respect, there's no delineation between what jobs should be, you just become overwhelmed by a big system and the politics that are going on and I started out with all these fresh thoughts about
- And it gonna be more and more, look at what's in the news, what's in the news more is that we need more and more mental health because the issues
- I just try to deal with it, because no one's really gonna help, but those are the only choices, and it's not a choice to send a student to the counselor [On behavior]
- I think it has a lot impact. You can have one kid and he's taking away an hour a day and you don't have the kids that much time, and then it frustrates you, and then you're annoyed at the other kids because your frustrated or overwhelmed trying to deal with this particular child and your other kids are doing busy work or something while you're trying to figure out what to do with that kid and then that kid is not learning anything
- There might be a teacher who does that but then there might be a teacher who never sends a kid to the office. So then they'll get on the teacher saying its inconsistent this teacher sends a kid to the office everyday versus some teachers will never send their kid to the office, because they know it's not really gonna help. And so the child is gonna get suspended and what does that do. [on sending students to office for not doing homework]
- The kid last year was a perfectionist and if he wasn't going to be the best, then he would act out. The kid this year -- it's definitely his home life, well I think it's just the way his life is at home; he acts the same way here that he acts at home. I think a lot of the kids act the same way here that they act at home. They don't know that it's not normal.
- We have a team lead meeting twice a month, but usually we can bring up things that we are concerned about. But usually big huge things like that are pushed to the side because it's not something we can resolve at that moment. So if I bring to the table that we don't have any discipline plan, "Oh, well we need to "talk" about that" and then it never gets talked about and then it gets pushed to next year.

ADMINISTRATORS

- Limited time – so many responsibilities
- “He understands the culture of this district, he’s vested in this district, it’s been proven with the tenure he’s had with this district”
- I feel the administrators need training also (on behavior) They lack the training as well and they see it as bad behavior and so when they sit down to determine discipline for these students ...they’re not looking at positive reinforcement as part of it. There needs to be a balance of positive reinforcement
- Tunnel vision (on behavior)
- The administrators having to spend the majority of their time handling discipline instead of going into the classrooms and looking at curriculum and instruction
- And some of them we should meet – some of them should be there. One of them or something [referring to the study].
- Well you wouldn’t know it because it seems to be only open with him – what I’m saying is, “Is that passed down through everyone cause his openness, I don’t feel it. “ I’m not saying he isn’t, cause it sounds like he is, but when you pass down the rest of his people, that’s not what you see.
- I’ve brought up that we don’t have a consistent behavior plan in the school. Administrators will get upset if kids are going to the office because they didn’t do their homework and they’ll say that the teachers are not consistent with or doing their part. At the same time they’re not doing their part
-bless their hearts the administration does as good of a job as they possibly can, but a lot of times they’re not necessarily trained either; some of them are very good at the de-escalation but, if we’re out of pocket they’re the ones that are dealing with it

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

- Very little proactive participation
- Parent involvement in the middle school is low
- We may have to reach out more, but the payoff will be great in terms of student success and achievement as well as an improvement in the sense of well-being among all stakeholders: students, parents, staff, and board members.
- It would be so helpful if we could foster more of a community spirit and active involvement in the school
- I really believe that parents would come out and support their kids, their school, their community if we showed them that we support our kids, our school, our community
- The parent became belligerent with me.
- Because of lack of family support, I can see him being part of a gang.
- Parent support [it's an issue].
- I've tried repeatedly to get a conference with the parents. There's never an answer. I've called, sent home notes, nothing....
- I think the priorities are not there, so for them, I feel like it's oh well she's gonna fail anyways, she's not getting it so why bother.
-and then we have the other end where they're just absent, they're completely absent.
- I think some of it is environment and some of it is just what you're getting when you arrive here at school because I think a lot of kids don't feel they are getting nurtured or getting what they need from the adults in their lives
- These parents may not know I mean they may not know the system sometimes enough, because sometimes I think that if this was ...parents, they would not be doing this.
- There's a lot of home issues – a lot of kids are coming from broken homes or parents are not necessarily huge advocates of education.
- You know I can't begin to tell you how many parents I've suggested that it would be really helpful for your child to have some counseling
- This particular parent that I have this year, I can't get a hold of and is not responsive. The parent I had last year was responsive so then that would help because the child didn't want to be in trouble when they got home or wouldn't want their parent called. Sometimes they don't care if their parent was notified or the parent isn't responsive
- This year the child that I have if I can get a hold of the parent which is not often, it might be like once a month that I can actually get a hold of or get a phone call back from this particular parent that I have this year. And this parent just will say that the child is doing it on purpose and that he can control it, and he knows better and just gets punished

- There is no discipline at home then they have no discipline at school. It's just normal to talk back to the teacher. You'll bring a parent on the field trip and you'll see that the kid acts the exact same way around the parents.
- They don't want the medicine being given in school, and they get offended if you suggest in any way that the child didn't have their medicine even though the child will say I didn't take my medicine or I took 3 medicines or it's very reflective in their behavior.
- A lot of things that you can tell that the parents are very, they don't even wanna...and then there are parents that don't want their kids on medicine at all or that they're hesitant...and like last year there was signs in this child with schizophrenia and but they don't identify that with kids that are so young but the parents didn't want to reveal everything in their family history, so other people they felt like they were hiding history from their family but then we don't know what's wrong with the child that we're dealing with because you don't want to be forthcoming about issues in your family's mental health
- I think they need to know you're not trying to blame them and say that they are bad parents. It's okay that if their child does have a problem that there is support here in the school rather than trying to hide it or not let them have support because they think it's gonna make the kid look different.
- Yeah, also just getting parents involved in the school. If you call home, they don't want to call back because they are anti-school or they think you're going to say something bad, and they don't want to hear what you have to say. Honestly, this year, the rest of my kids, they're okay, they won't do homework, and if you call home the parent has a million excuses for why a child did this or didn't do their homework or why they don't have to do this. It's always about defending their child instead of listening to what is happening

LSSP'S

- LSSP? [as in what is that, who is that?]

BEHAVIORAL ISSUES

- Adequate systems are needed to manage behavior
- I see it in the classrooms
- It (behavior) interferes with learning, with teaching them, you know, and it frustrates me, it's like other kids want to learn so why don't you just be quiet. It's the talking and the socializing...
- I feel like there is a need in this district and I know that it's definitely something we struggle with here in the classroom.
- I have behavioral issues
- I don't think there's any consequences at home forbehavior.
- There's no follow through at home
- I'm noticing a change coming through back where when I first started teaching you would have maybe one issue with a child, on child out of twenty, but now it's becoming 4 and 5 kids with problems.
- You know that there's something wrong and then sometimes just passing in the hallway you know I'll see teachers sometimes having trouble with their kids, trying to get them in line.....
- I think it's more kids with mental and behavioral issues in the classroom, more than it should be
- I think that yes the number one thing is that the teachers don't have any training dealing with students with difficult behavior or emotional problems or who don't have support at home. We also don't get any support for working with children with those problems.

SCHOOL CONDITIONS

- Appearance of the workplace – color scheme and décor are harsh and institutional feeling. Artwork is needed.
- Things need cleaning out. Old materials left in piles.
- Link between student performance and the condition of their school environment
- We need a library of resources that we can go to read for our teachers.

COMPLIANCE WITH FEDERAL AND STATE RULES AND REGULATIONS

- Lack of compliance with federal and state laws
- Little training in rules and regulations

SAC

- A substantial number of students that are enrolled in SAC in comparison to the data we had last year
- I think right now while he is in SAC he's tucked away somewhere so everybody's okay dealing with other issues.
- Instead they're in mainstream kind of, because they're behavior kids but they're put in mainstream classes where they act out, they're put in SAC, where they learn nothing, they just stay there and it feels like to me it feels like we're setting up kids to feel and it keeps going in that cycle
-overrepresentation of all these kids in SAC, cause it's clear

ACCOUNTABILITY

- Holding people accountable for follow through

POLITICS

- Whoever screams the loudest is rewarded with action.
- Small town environment; school should assert its authority to say no when no is the right thing to say.
- District X has been described as a little "island" and people have concerns that our way of doing is out of step with the larger districts
- It is a process to get through the political issues at times
- There is a lot of "politicking" that to me impedes what I'm supposed to do
- "this is the chain of command, and this is what you do..."

RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

- Follow-through on directives, staying current on one's training, maintaining organization has appeared optional as opposed to an expectation that will impact an individual's job evaluation
- There can be great resistance to change

ANY MENTAL HEALTH INITIATIVES

- Absolutely not. We're not being proactive and saying, "Hey we're seeing this problem."
- We have over 9 kids with behavioral plans
- No.
- We've done suicide prevention.
- Nothing on mental health.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- I don't know if I have her book, she writes about, she helps teachers, she was a teacher, she was an educator, she helps teachers...
- I would say that no but you'll see it in the school improvement plan, like PBS, but it does not happen. [on any programs that are implemented]

SPECIAL EDUCATION

- Kids with ADHD, they're under the 504 umbrella, and to me it's like a piece of paper that's in the file that we're supposed to follow. They say it's different from Special Ed but even I'm still so confused about what's the difference.

TEACHER FRUSTRATION

- And then sometimes, and I know it's wrong, but sometimes it really changes my mood, it's like you know, I know that's wrong but it's human nature you know.
- And I realized that I was dealing with people that were stuck, that didn't want to hear new knowledge, that didn't want to grow or change and so I had to constantly learn how to redirect my own energy.
- I think it has a lot impact. You can have one kid and he's taking away an hour a day and you don't have the kids that much time, and then it frustrates you, and then you're annoyed at the other kids because your frustrated or overwhelmed trying to deal with this particular child and your other kids are doing busy work or something while you're trying to figure out what to do with that kid and then that kid is not learning anything
- I think some of it is environment and some of it is just what you're getting when you arrive here at school because I think a lot of kids don't feel they are getting nurtured or getting what they need from the adults in their lives
- Teachers....some of us are not patient with the kids [teachers].
- By the adults you know, some of the adults. And you know I really hate to say this here but it's true. Some adults can't get past, something that happened between them and the kid. You know, some of them can't get past it and they target that kid and that's miserable to a kid. And you think of a kid that has emotional issues and then they're being targeted by a particular teacher because of something in particular that happened with them in past and they haven't moved on and it causes mental and emotional stress for the child, too
- I don't feel there's really is anyone to talk to. I feel like the counselor is always too busy. I feel like the lssp would help.
- I've brought up that we don't have a consistent behavior plan in the school. Administrators will get upset if kids are going to the office because they didn't do their homework and they'll say that the teachers are not consistent with or doing their part. At the same time they're not doing their part
- And at the beginning of the year we didn't teach the kids behavior. Like in a positive behavioral support system you're supposed to have specific rules in each location and bring the kids there and teach them those rules in that location and be very specific and it should be the same. We have just like 3 rules, be safe, be respectful, be responsible. And that's all that's said from administration. Well for teachers that's different and it's not....what does be responsible mean to me, is not be the same for somebody else.
- We have a team lead meeting twice a month, but usually we can bring up things that we are concerned about. But usually big huge things like that are pushed to the side because it's not something we can resolve at that moment. So if I bring to the table that we don't have any discipline plan, "Oh, well we need to "talk" about that" and then it never gets talked about and then it gets pushed to next year.

- There might be a teacher who does that but then there might be a teacher who never sends a kid to the office. So then they'll get on the teacher saying its inconsistent this teacher sends a kid to the office everyday versus some teachers will never send their kid to the office, because they know it's not really gonna help. And so the child is gonna get suspended and what does that do.
- People will talk about behavioral issues all the time just because it drives people crazy here, but I feel like it's worse the structure of the school is wrong and unorganized, and difficult, even in your classroom
- It leads to a lot of frustration on the part of the teacher and then it leads to them not being able to put up with the kids that are acting that way because you're already annoyed with everything else that is going on [on last minute notices]

MENTAL HEALTH TRAINING

- Nothing.

ON BUILDING A SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM

- I feel like we have to take care of Tier 1 also before anything like that [meaning putting an initiative together) can get into place. If you don't have a steady foundation for anyone, which we don't, I feel like that has to be taken care of before anything that you're talking about could actually be implemented
- I think it can have a positive effect if it's actually put into effect.
- Because this is a great opportunity for someone else to tell the Board what's going on.

ON DOING THIS STUDY

- Because this is a great opportunity for someone else to tell the Board what's going on.

THE GOOD THINGS BEING SAID

Usually those around me are cooperative and friendly	Sense of community and common decency	I want to continue toward a better District X	Intentions of administrators and the superintendent to create positive change.	I am around many people who care about children and want to help them
District X has the right foundation in my mind; we need to build on it	I have felt supported to implement positive changes	I'm very passionate about children	All of us are stakeholders in this process	I'm willing to learn, I'm willing to grow
Parent trainings have been provided to assist with behavior management, crisis situations, and autism.	There is a focus on trying to ensure district-wide legal compliance.	Plans for school-wide and individual crisis response have been developed and implemented.	I have a vested interest in seeing all of the children in the community, in the district...thrive educationally and behaviorally	A manual for positive behavioral interventions was developed and provided to assist in the RtI process
I want to grow as a new teacher I mean some parents are really good about – we do have some really active parents....	I want to be a part of something that is a big change. I just want to be able to contribute. I walk around a lot. I'm not in my office a lot. I'm out and about.	I like to read and I will go to trainings, I will ask questions. I will ask my colleagues, and if I don't see anything working, then I will pull something out of the hat, but a lot of times I will pull whatever it takes. And sometimes it's just natural to work with that kid.	I think I understand the students, I have the patience, I'm not just a....teacher. I will help them with anything that they need help with...	I do think I have more energy. I do think I have more tenacity. Because I make it a point to call them in, see him, you know, I have sent messages to all my students, I see them all...
I will always be honest with them [students]. I will always tell them the truth. We go to a counselor or a principal, their doors are always open.	The counselor's pretty helpful. We have a good relationship so if I need something or if I need her to talk about a student... she came in here and spoke to the class ... there was an issue with them making fun of one of my kids She's proactive.	Yes, we help each other. I think we're more of the support system. I think because we feel like we understand so its better to keep it amongst us....so I think we help each other a lot.	Well I just love my team. I think I have a really great group of....that I work with.	The Superintendent is supportive.

Appendix I

BUILDING A SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM: ACTION PLAN FOR THE X SCHOOL DISTRICT

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT AND THE INTENDED AUDIENCE(S)

The intended audience for this report includes participants in the study, the **X school district** administrative team, other school staff, as well as Board of Education members. Its purposes are: 1) to raise awareness about current status of mental health needs and services within the district as perceived by a group of teachers and mental health staff who participated in a 5-month long study, and 2) to offer a set of recommendations for improvement of school mental health services generated by the study group based upon current best practices in school improvement and school mental health literature.

INTRODUCTION

This report outlines an action research study of school mental health needs and services conducted by various staff in the X school district, and facilitated by Anita Killea, M.S., M.A., a doctoral candidate in the Doctorate in Clinical Psychology Program at Union Institute & University, as part of her dissertation research.

The purpose of the study was to provide opportunities for staff and other stakeholders such as, parents and students of the X school district to collectively study their own school mental health system; and to identify its strengths, weaknesses and needs with the goal of developing a set of recommendations for improvements to be submitted to the School Superintendent and Board of Education. The study was designed in response to recommendations found in the recent school mental health research literature. Experts in the field state that, while many school mental health interventions and systems have been developed, the local school context is seldom taken into consideration (Nastasi et al.; 2004; Ringeisen et al, 2003)) when selecting and planning to implement them. These experts have called for the inclusion of local stakeholders in school mental health and school reform efforts to ensure that school mental health undertakings are relevant to the particular school context in which they will be implemented, thus improving the likelihood that the intended outcomes will be achieved.

BACKGROUND

According to the Centers for Disease Control (2013), every year an estimated 13 to 20% of children in the United States suffer from a mental health disorder. These conditions range from Attention Deficit Disorder with Hyperactivity and Autism Spectrum Disorders to substance abuse and suicidality. Children's capacity to learn is compromised when they are experiencing these disorders. While instruction is the main function of school systems, in order to improve learning outcomes, schools must attend to these barriers to academic achievement. Additionally, because of their access to children and because staff expertise in working with children, schools are uniquely positioned to address their students' mental health needs. School mental health components are an essential part of any comprehensive school reform efforts.

THE TEXAS CONTEXT

A considerable number of intervention approaches, strategies and models to address children's mental health problems in community as well as in school settings have been developed nationally and in specific states across the country. The most comprehensive model, a three-component framework developed by UCLA's Center for School Mental Health, was designed to assist school districts in establishing comprehensive programs that build infrastructure and cohesive systems of Learning Supports, (see Appendix C). Building this infrastructure requires that school districts have a vision, adopt long-term results and measures, negotiate formal and informal partnership agreements, and map and analyze existing resources for effectiveness. Building a framework, reviewing current policies and practices and integrating resources, and providing professional development are necessary,

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/iowabriefsummaryofdesign.pdf>).

Additionally, the Center for School Mental Health also began this work with Texas leaders and various stakeholders in 2005. Called the Policy Leadership Cadre for Mental Health in Schools, this meeting raised awareness of school mental health and comprehensive policy. Finally, the Texas Education Agency (TEA), Division of IDEA Coordination, along with the Texas Collaborative for Emotional Development in Schools (TxCEDS), developed a model to address the social, emotional, and behavioral development for Texas children and was made part of the Texas Continuous Improvement Process (TCIP). This process was designed to improve strategies in special education, was also to "identify barriers to student learning and performance and to develop guiding policy for delivery of school-based mental health services for students in Texas schools, (TxCEDS Guide for Schools, Agencies, Organizations, Parents and Communities, 2006). It was a framework guided by UCLA that is designed to be used in a flexible manner to meet the needs of each particular district and community – hence the "local context." Using local stakeholders as participants and the subsequent development of the action plan aligned with the current research in school mental health and action research in that it addressed the local perspectives and experiences in the district.

DESIGN

Fifteen school staff members including teachers (general and special education) as well as various mental health staff in the X school district volunteered to participate in the study.

Upon receiving approval from the school superintendent to conduct the study in the X school district, Ms. Killea conducted information sessions about the study and distributed flyers and other information inviting staff, parents and students over 18 years of age to participate in the study.

Initially, individual interviews were conducted with each of the participants to ascertain their individual perspectives such as their views of problems and/or current issues being experienced, status of services and programs in school mental health, and needs of the district. The information from the individual interviews was then shared and discussed in a series of six group

meetings in order to arrive at consensus about what were the commonly held views about the status of mental health needs and services in the district. Eventually, the group selected three themes as what they considered to be priority areas to be addressed. Finally, the participants developed a series of recommendations to address those priority areas. This report is the culmination of collaborative inquiry and reflection and dialogue to identify specific issues and educate participants both on action research and the current literature on school mental health. Additionally, this was an opportunity to create awareness in the district in order to address school mental health issues.

A series of meetings utilizing a problem-solving strategy designed to give voice to issues currently being experienced in the district. The study attempted to draw attention to phenomenological (lived experiences), interpretive (interpretation of activities), and hermeneutics (the meaning of events) in order to gain understanding and to create effective solutions leading to the building of an appropriate school mental health program.

Action research methodology placed the facilitator in an appropriate position to “join” participants who were interested in creating change. Following this methodology, a Look-Think-Act model of inquiry was used to identify, gather information, and review the literature on building comprehensive school mental health program (Look). Data was collected and analyzed in order to highlight experiences and issues in the district (Think). The action plan below both describes the data and communicates the results of this process (Act).

THIS REPORT RAISES IMPORTANT QUESTIONS:

Can this action plan lead to the development of a comprehensive school mental health program that addresses issues being experienced in the district as identified by the participants? Can the data derived from this study aid the district in its school improvement planning and policy?

PROCEDURES USED TO CARRY OUT THE STUDY:

Data gathering:

Artifacts:

Before the study began, the facilitator gathered artifacts about the district which included brochures, standardized test scores, school calendar, teacher appraisal system, discipline flow-chart, and school newsletter. Preliminary meetings with school administrators were held and additional data about the district was shared. In addition, the facilitator also attended various faculty meetings, a board meeting, and parent night.

Recruitment:

After receiving permission from the Superintendent, Ms. Killea was directed to the Director for State and Federal Programs who served as the liaison. The Director gave Ms. Killea permission to contact all principals Pre-K through 12 to introduce the study by making presentations at faculty meetings. She conducted information sessions about the study and distributed flyers and other information inviting staff, parents and students over 18 years of age to participate in the study. The principals also gave preliminary historical information about the district, i.e., change

taking place. The facilitator recruited participants at the faculty meetings contacted other potential participants suggested to her at various schools. Some participants contacted the facilitator by the email provided in the flyer. Several individual meetings were held in order to explain the study and to give informed consent to participate.

Participants:

The study group consisted of 15 participants. It included classroom teachers Pre-K through high school as well as mental health personnel.

Interviews:

Initially, individual interviews were conducted with each of the participants to ascertain their individual perspectives on current problems and/or issues, programs or initiatives that were being utilized, through a series of open-ended questions (see Appendix C). While the artifacts allowed the facilitator to learn about the history of the district, the participants also were providers of valuable information about the history, as well as current and past developments.

Group meetings:

Meetings were held in an all-purpose room equipped with whiteboard, work tables and chairs, as well as access to the Internet. Participants gathered each week for six weeks to learn about the action research process, school mental health literature and to develop the action plan for the district. Initially, information from the individual interviews was shared and discussed in a series of six group meetings in order to arrive at consensus about what were the commonly held views about the status of mental health needs and services in the district. Eventually, the group initially selected six themes that were subsequently condensed into three as what they considered to be priority areas to be addressed. Finally, the participants developed a series of recommendations to address those priority areas.

Meetings with the Superintendent:

Ms. Killea met with the Superintendent in three separate meetings; the first was to give a brief introduction to the study; the second, with permission from the group of participants, was to share the initial raw data indicating the areas of concern that were identified by participants and share literature on building comprehensive school mental health programs; the third meeting had several items to address as follows:

1. To ascertain if there were follow-up questions and comments by the Superintendent (i.e., technical questions, research or literature-related questions).
2. A plan to present the action plan as well as the data that arose to the administrators in order to raise awareness at the building levels.
3. A plan for the facilitator to address the Board of Education about the study (i.e., secure a date, structure of the presentation) and to create awareness.

Participation of school administrators

School administrators were invited to attend meetings to offer their perspectives on the study group's data. One principal and one assistant principal, plus an advocate attended one meeting.

DATA ANALYSIS

Procedures

The content of the individual interviews were reviewed first, by the facilitator and then by the interviewees to identify pertinent data. Initially, thirty-four (34) themes that described the experiences of the participants were identified and verified by the group. The themes ranged from such concerns as Teacher Frustration to Parent Participation and are listed in no particular order. (See themes in Appendix A). The group analyzed and discussed these themes as a group and eventually identified six key areas of concern. Because they were too great in number, the participant group made decisions in order to subsume some areas under others as they were considered to be sub-categories. For instance, the six key areas decided upon by the group are listed in Table 1.

Table 1.

Testing Coordinator	PASS Program	Role Clarification	Policies and Procedures	Teacher Training	Social and Emotional Learning for Students and Staff
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The six key areas were later reorganized into the final three priority areas of concern.

Role clarification was an important theme as it related to job descriptions and expectations carried out by participants. Additionally, it was felt that staff members are not clear on job descriptions and appropriate roles to be carried out.

The group prioritized the themes listed below in Table 2.

Table 2.

<p>Role Clarification (Testing Coordinator) (PASS Program)</p>	<p>Teacher Training Social and Emotional Learning for Students and Staff</p>	<p>Policies and Procedures</p>
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------

The participants prioritized these issues that they believed to be the most salient in terms of improving mental health services in the schools, and developed an action plan that includes recommendations for addressing them.

OUTCOMES OF THE STUDY:

PRIORITY AREAS:

The three priority areas for improvement of mental health services identified by the participants in the study are the focus of this action plan. These priority areas are consistent with those found in other current research on building school mental health programs. Examples of participant concerns are listed in narrative form as follows:

Policies and Procedures

The participants described policies and procedures as a problem area. They perceived that these were not clearly outlined or modeled correctly for them. Participant views included the following:

“Along the way, we have lost that sense of authority, something along the lines of policies and procedures; and that in turn would train the teachers, train the counselors and that in turn would assign duties that need to be assigned, have people held accountable for what they’re supposed to be accountable for, and then in turn, staff mental health and mindset would be better. I think we’ve just lost our policies and procedures.”

“It’s just not consistent anymore.”

“We need policies that the whole school can practice in the same way.”

“In my last district, we had committees that set up what we did.”

“There’s no real procedures to follow. You might send a student to the office for throwing a pencil versus this teacher might send a child kicking the wall but still

not send them to the office. Nothing is actually in writing, and it's really just up to the teacher, how the teacher is feeling that day."

Teacher Training and Social/Emotional Learning for Students and Staff

The participants described inadequate teacher training about strategies to alleviate negative student behaviors. They supported the use of "Social/Emotional Learning for Students and Staff", a service based training program about strategies designed to elicit positive student-family-staff behaviors. Participants discussed the fact that too many initiatives were being simultaneously undertaken in the district that did not allow time for the types of training they needed. Participant views included the following:

"Lack of training, fearfulness and stress about whether what they are doing is correct."

"So instead of de-escalating the behavior they don't realize some of the things they're doing even though they're seeking control is escalating a lot of the students' behavior."

"But definitely proper training and I don't mean the type of training where you just lecture and you just give us the information because no one learns from that, but actually hands on activities, role playing whatever it takes for our kids to be okay."

"As teachers – I'm not trained and I don't know how to help. I can listen, I can guide – my motherly instinct – I can do all that, but when it comes to actually knowing what to do, that's where I have that barrier. I'm like, I'm at an ends and I don't know what to do."

Role clarification: Need for testing coordinator and PASS Program

The need for role clarification was another priority theme chosen by the participants, who felt that teachers' and other staff's job descriptions and expectations were unclear. Additionally, they felt that they were expected to carry out tasks that were not appropriate to their roles. Specifically related to services for children with mental health problems, the group felt that the roles and duties of the testing coordinator and the PASS Program staff needed to be correctly implemented. Role clarification was viewed as being connected to the other priority areas: Policies and Procedures and Teacher Training because clearly defined roles would enable particular staff members to implement much needed strategies.

"You cut me off at the knees and I can only – I feel too afraid to address too much."

"Those who work here wear so many hats that they are pulled in too many different directions to be effective at any one thing."

"Assigning responsibilities/delegating to others (and training them) is an area that has to be addressed."

“Never a reorganization of who does what, who has what roles.”

COMMENTS:

The experiences that participants described were important to highlight for several reasons. Although problems of all kinds occur routinely in school districts everywhere, it should be noted that problems are also unique to school settings and culture. Data arising from one school district to another cannot be compared; however, action research projects often involve organizing themes that may potentially be similar in nature. One of the many goals of the action research process is to help participants “situate” and “locate” meaningful data that describes their experiences. Gaining insight and focus on views, beliefs, and preferences is important in constructing meaning (Craig, 2009). This, in turn, helps to compile human data and experience that serves to both illuminate and identify next steps in problem solving.

The participants have demonstrated the need to prioritize, analyze and build a comprehensive school mental health program by identifying in numerous ways and through well-developed themes that change must occur on many levels in order to see success. Concurrently, as is consistent and overwhelmingly pervasive in both action research and school mental health research literature, many of the planning processes cannot be assembled without the qualitative knowledge that is available from those on the front lines on public school campuses. In order to perform mapping and analyzing infrastructures, it is necessary to identify and clarify strengths, weaknesses, and needed changes for developing a unified and comprehensive system of learning supports, (Center for School Mental Health, (2010).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION:

The 34 Themes and subsequent areas that were chosen to be addressed are consistent with the research in school mental health that promote the full integration of Learning Supports and the development of specific content areas. Some of the content areas within the Learning Supports framework are building teacher capacity, responding to and preventing academic, behavioral, social-emotional problems and crises, and the realignment of staff so that fragmented, duplicated services do not occur and these were the areas that participants both identified and saw as vital concerns to address.

As is consistent with the research from the Center for School Mental Health, participants felt that the X school district may consider designing and developing a system of student and learning supports that is conjoined with its current school improvement practices (see diagram entitled, “Move From a Two- to a Three Component Framework”, Appendix D). Moving to this framework may enable the district to streamline, organize and address ongoing and reoccurring district issues.

Also consistent with the literature is the recommendation to develop a leadership team and work groups, including those participants who took part in this action research study, to further identify and streamline comprehensive services. The Center for School Mental Health offers a proto-type infrastructure tool to guide districts in clarifying their strengths, weaknesses and much needed changes (see Appendix E). This tool is designed so that districts can organize how well existing efforts address barriers to learning and teaching across the school district as well as in the classroom. It may also be used to chart activities currently occurring, identify gaps and prioritize for the future.

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/tool%20mapping%20current%20status.pdf>

Furthermore, the study group suggested that the district may wish to utilize the infrastructure diagram designed by The Center for School Mental Health to help them organize a school improvement planning team, along with leaders and work groups at building levels for such content areas as classroom learning supports (see Appendix F).

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/tool%20infrastructure.pdf>

Finally, the district may wish to employ a questionnaire using the qualitative questions in this study to elicit additional concerns from other staff who did not participate in the study and from other stakeholders, such as parents and students who were not accessed by the current study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to for allowing me the opportunity to enter your system and make discoveries right along with you.

To the Superintendent of Schools, thank you for your generous invitation to learn about. May this action research report be helpful in supporting you and your staff in the development of a comprehensive school mental health program that creates change and success for your community.

To the participants in the action research study – you were all stellar participants and I am glad to call all of you “my friends.” Thank you for your commitment to the study. Your students are lucky to have you in their lives....

Respectfully submitted by:

Anita M. Killea, M.S., M.A., Doctoral Candidate in Clinical Psychology, Union Institute & University, 28 Vernon St., Brattleboro, VT 05301 on behalf of the study group.

Appendix A

IDENTIFIED THEMES FROM RAW DATA

THEME	PAGE
1. Teacher Training	12
2. Resources	13
3. Procedures and Policies	13
4. Role Clarification	14
5. Superintendent	14
6. Global Perspectives	14
7. Testing	15
8. Mindset	15
9. Positive Reinforcement	15
10. Negative Reinforcement	15
11. Too Many Initiatives	16
12. Staff Mental Health	16
13. Students	17
14. Tardy Policy	18
15. Counselors	18
16. The Current State of Things	19
17. Administrators	21
18. Parental Involvement	21
19. Behavioral Issues	22
20. School Conditions	23
21. Compliance with Federal and State Rules and Regulations	23
22. SAC	23
23. Accountability	23
24. Politics	24
25. Resistance to Change	24
26. Any Mental Health Initiatives	24
27. Professional Development	24
28. Teacher Frustration	24
29. Licensed Specialists in School Psychology (LSSP's)	25
30. Special Education	25
31. Mental Health Training	25
32. Doing This Study	26
33. On Building a School Mental Health Program	26
34. The Good Things Being Said	27

Appendix B

RAW DATA

TEACHER TRAINING

- Lack of training, fearfulness and stress about whether what they are doing is correct.
- Special ed teachers – no one showed them how to deal with a student that's ED or ADHD or Bipolar
- They get a legal document that they must follow but not one gave them a the training on how to respond to the student
- They're frustrated because typically that one student throws off the entire class andthen if you're hearing you have a classroom management problem, they feel unsupported...
- So instead of de-escalating the behavior they don't realize some of the things they're doing even though they're seeking control is escalating a lot of the students' behavior
- I do have some issues with some classeskids who are always causing problems and just knowing how to deal with them I went to a workshop.....it really helped, it really calmed the kids down...
- How would I know if it's a student with mental health issues?
- I have some [teacher skills], but definitely, because they work for a while and then they stop working
- Kids with ADHD, they're under the 504 umbrella, and to me it's like a piece of paper that's in the file that we're supposed to follow. They say it's different from Special Ed but even I'm still so confused about what's the difference
- But definitely proper training and I don't mean the type of training where you just lecture and you just give us the information because no one learns from that, but actually hands on activities, role playing whatever it takes for our kids to be okay.
- I want a problem-preventing method.
- Wanting to know more as far as strategies and techniques to help children in the classroom when you have a crisis or when you know there is a child that has emotional issues.
- As teachers – I'm not trained and I don't know how to help. I can listen, I can guide – my motherly instinct – I can do all that, but when it comes to actually knowing what to do, that's where I have that barrier. I'm like, I'm at an ends and I don't know what to do.
- We had a week to get our classrooms ready, and in that week we had staff development which I feel none of us really gained anything from it.
- I would say the teachers are frustrated – what I see? I don't know what they're saying, but I think that they feel that they don't get enough training
- And I just feel like they throw these things at us and we struggle with it for a year and the next year something else. I feel like we just keep up with whatever the trend is and we don't really stick to anything, they don't train us properly, they throw it at us, figure it out...
- I feel like we're left to do things on our own and to figure things out.
-cause I still don't think the teacher knows or watches or sees or any of that [on bullying] I think they gave them an online presentation and that was it and I think that's probably as far as it went with it. But if they had more and had refreshers I think that would be better.
- I think it would be helpful to learn how to support these kids and to give these teachers the training

- I think that yes the number one thing is that the teachers don't have any training dealing with students with difficult behavior or emotional problems or who don't have support at home. We also don't get any support for working with children with those problems.
- I definitely do think we do need to train them on that sort of thing but there's also other stuff that they need to be trained on like how to follow an accommodation for 504 for special ed. There's a lot that I think that they don't know. And they don't do it not because they are trying to be malicious and I'm not gonna do my job – they just don't know how to do it.
- And at the beginning of the year we didn't teach the kids behavior. Like in a positive behavioral support system you're supposed to have specific rules in each location and bring the kids there and teach them those rules in that location and be very specific and it should be the same. We have just like 3 rules, be safe, be respectful, be responsible. And that's all that's said from administration. Well for teachers that's different and it's not....what does be responsible mean to me, is not be the same for somebody else.

RESOURCES

- Those who work here wear so many hats that they are pulled in too many different directions to be effective at any one thing. Likely do to resources.
- Extra people to help with behavior issues
- I can't see why the behavior support program can't be started again....but I think that it deals with money they have to pay a person in that capacity...
- I think one of the teachers asked to go [to a conference]. I think it was a conference or something. She asked if the school could fund it and they said no. And it was too expensive for her to go.
- They're frustrated.

PROCEDURES, POLICIES

- Handling situations differently and it keeps changing
- Everybody kinda tells me what to do
- Lack of standard policies, procedures, and model documents
- No attorney on staff to guide district
- Lack of common knowledge, training, and ready access to documentation about the "District X District X Way" means that when there is a change or departure of one staff member those remaining have difficulty or are unwilling to help orient newcomers
- Opportunities to be trained in what procedures have been in place (few)
- They get a legal document that they must follow but not one gave them a the training on how to respond to the student
- They did a PowerPoint on bullying
- We've had like CPI training.
- You cut me off at the knees and I can only – I feel too afraid to address too much.
- One person would be told one thing, another person would be told another, so nobody was really clear, and still we're not clear as to what – but from my understanding is you have to fill the whole thing up before you can send the child to the office.
- So now the care team process has changed so it's not as easy now to say I'm care teaming this kid because of behavior not academics – behavior.
- The way they changed care team and a lot of people don't understand how it's working even though they have the meetings and explaining it to us, we don't really understand.

- There isn't, nothing is outlined as far as when does a child get sent to the office, when does a child see a counselor, none of that is in writing none of that is outlined.
- There's no real procedures to follow. You might send a student to the office for throwing a pencil versus this teacher might send a child kicking the wall but still not send them to the office. Nothing is actually in writing, and it's really just up to the teacher, how the teacher is feeling that day.
- Those 3 rules are supposed to be consistent throughout the school. Be safe, be responsible, be respectful and then they say be exceptional. But none of that is outlined in the school as far as what does that mean in different places within in the school so that it's consistent.

ROLE CLARIFICATION

- Those who work here wear so many hats that they are pulled in too many different directions to be effective at any one thing.
- Likely due to resources
- Assigning responsibilities/delegating to others (and training them) is an area that has to be addressed.
- Once a responsibility is assigned, it should be expected to be accomplished as opposed to people trying to pass the buck onto someone else to do their job
- Never a reorganization of who does what, who has what roles [school mental health]
- And I don't think that there is a clear picture for my job description.
- sometimes conflict with what my role should be

SUPERINTENDENT

- And that's the thing, it's like, some of us wonder how much he knows as far as what's going on in the schools because for example they have this new policy where if we have to be away from the kids for more than 45 minutes, we need to put in for a half day. So you know, some of us, if we have to go to a doctor's appointment, say the doctor's appointment is at 2:30 or at 3 so if we're asking to leave at 2:30 and the kids are out at 3:15, I mean we shouldn't have to take a half day for that.
- Well you wouldn't know it because it seems to be only open with him – what I'm saying is, "Is that passed down through everyone cause his openness, I don't feel it. " I'm not saying he isn't, cause it sounds like he is, but when you pass down the rest of his people, that's not what you see.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

- I feel like we have a structure, we just have to reorganize it
- Financial stress
- I feel like we're just constantly at the bottom of the totem pole. You know, they just dump everything on us. It's just do this, do this, do this. I feel like we don't have a voice – nobody's there to fight for us.
- Never a reorganization of who does what, who has what roles

TESTING

- We need an instructional coordinator to be dealing with testing

MINDSET

- Follow-through on directives, staying current on one's training, maintaining organization has appeared optional as opposed to an expectation that will impact an individual's job evaluation
- Lack of common knowledge, training, and ready access to documentation about the "District X Way" means that when there is a change or departure of one staff member those remaining have difficulty or are unwilling to help orient newcomers
- It's a mindset.....punishing kids in SAC or ISS or OSS
- The father became very belligerent with me.
- We're just here to teach, we're not here to deal with those kinds of things, and that's fine, you can have that attitude, but how do you know you're reaching your student if you're not reaching out? Or at least collaborating with the mental health people or the admin.
- I feel it's numbers. They want to be that ideal school. I feel like it's more about a show and it's not really about the kids.
- I feel like we're just constantly at the bottom of the totem pole. You know, they just dump everything on us. It's just do this, do this, do this. I feel like we don't have a voice – nobody's there to fight for us.
- "This is the chain of command, and this is what you do..."
- This particular parent that I have this year, I can't get a hold of and is not responsive. The parent I had last year was responsive so then that would help because the child didn't want to be in trouble when they got home or wouldn't want their parent called. Sometimes they don't care if their parent was notified or the parent isn't responsive

POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

- We could have some positive reinforcers – an ice cream social or some free time in the gym....students who are following the code of conduct.
- Not just tangible rewards but praise and recognition
- Getting awards, having a forum with their peers
- I really believe we would see a difference in some students trying to do better at improving their behaviors instead of hunting kids down in between their classes and teachers yelling, "Get to your tardy stations."

NEGATIVE REINFORCEMENT

- We have tardy stations and that's a problem. We have the same group of students that are consistently tardy. So it's not effective for all students.
- If you track the data and see how many kids are receiving in-school suspensions, how many kids are receiving out of school suspensions, how many kids are issued a SAC replacement....it's astounding to me that....they're just continuously going through the cycle.
- Obviously what we are doing is not effective. We dropped the ball on these kids but we want to yet still hold them accountable and punish them.
- There are some parents that are interested but all they get is phone calls going home that are negative. Or they're hearing from administrators it may be more on a negative basis.
- I just don't think we have a system, like if a child misbehaves he goes to ISS, does that really help?

TOO MANY INITIATIVES

- There's a lot of teacher frustration
- The mental health of teachers is being affected
- Physical stress
- Lots of absenteeism
- I think everybody's burned out. I think from the beginning, from the very beginning, we've been burnt out.

STAFF MENTAL HEALTH

- We have to look at the mental health of all of our students because it's wearing on the staff and our performance in the classrooms.
- One thing I'm seeing is the mental health of the teachers being affected – it's leading to a lot of absenteeism with staff
- We're overloaded
- And then sometimes, and I know it's wrong, but sometimes it really changes my mood, it's like you know, I know that's wrong but it's human nature you know
- Yes, so I keep thinking, okay I know and who's being affected, we're all being affected. I think even the kids who want to learn are being affected because they're not learning
- I had to remove myself from that situation because it was going to drive me crazy and I couldn't get more involved...
- I think the morale over here is pretty low.
- I think everybody's burned out. I think from the beginning, from the very beginning, we've been burnt out.
- I think we need to have something for us.
- I'm concerned about the faculty and the staff because if you watch everyone is so overworked and everyone is so, I mean I so worry about some of the staff people here, that they are....I mean I feel like there are days when I feel like I'm gonna lose my mind. I'm glad that other teachers go through this, too, I mean they are going through what I'm going through, it's not just me

STUDENTS

- We need to teach these students how to replace these inappropriate behaviors with socially appropriate behaviors.
- Unfortunately, this year I'm hearing a lot of negativity from students. They're not happy with their schools. I hear this all day long, negative comments about their own school. That tells me the structure of the school is affected
- I get the feeling that the kids, they're used to, not used to working hard to get what they want.
- Diagnosed with ADHD
- I have a few students with ADHD.
- I see a lot of kids that need medication.
- It was something that had started last year and no one could connect with this child so I felt that I needed to help him.
- ...so it's situations like that, that I can see children need extra support.
- ...this particular student has exhausted everyone in school as well as exhausted the father and...
- With the girls, as far as self-esteem, I know that's a big issue.
- One of my students...has totally isolated himself.
- Their stomachs are hurting [due to hunger]
- It's like we set them up to fail.
- ...[students need] Just being polite, manners, ...their answers would be "Yeah" so training them to say Yes Ma'am or yes or excuse me. It's probably not done at home so they don't have that practice.
- I think some of it is environment and some of it is just what you're getting when you arrive here at school because I think a lot of kids don't feel they are getting nurtured or getting what they need from the adults in their lives
- My students, I don't think I'm there for them enough
- The kid last year was a perfectionist and if he wasn't going to be the best, then he would act out. The kid this year – it's definitely his home life, well I think it's just the way his life is at home; he acts the same way here that he acts at home. I think a lot of the kids act the same way here that they act at home. They don't know that it's not normal
- And so my fear is that they're coming down, seeing that my door is closed and then walking away instead of leaving a note or seeing, you know
- I also think that a lot of these kids have been taught "don't bring your problems to school" or don't talk about your problems. Because I've had some of them get upset – parents – when we've called and expressed concern, sort of like it's none of your business.
- Yeah, I mean just looking at just attendance alone...not all of it is "I hate school" – talk about going back to "why" and there's always underlying reasons, it's just finding the time to get at it
- I definitely think there's a need. I think as a school I think a lot of them are in pain of some sort, they just don't feel like there is anywhere to necessarily go.

TARDY POLICY

- We have tardy stations and that's a problem. We have the same group of students that are consistently tardy. So it's not effective for all students.
- I really believe we would see a difference in some students trying to do better at improving their behaviors instead of hunting kids down in between their classes and teachers yelling, "Get to your tardy stations."

COUNSELORS

- And unfortunately even our counselors I feel are not working in the capacity that they should be working in. they're not being utilized like they should be which would also help with our school mental health
- Well I know the counselors have a lot on their plates –
- They are focused on other issues
-especially this year with the new administration I think they have no time because they're being pulled in all different directions.
- Testing, college prep, sped issues
- She's got a lot of things that are expected of her that shouldn't be expected of her.
-last year I guess there was more time for the kids to do groups and counseling sessions but because her time is so busy with just other administrative stuff, she just doesn't have the time to focus mainly on that. That's what we need here, these kids need it here.
- Sometimes some of the discipline issues are sent over to the counselors too.
- We are so busy with so much stuff.
- Testing. Cause testing plays a big piece. Once testing starts it's like 2-3 weeks preparation just getting it together for the big day.
- And we do have a lot of meetings. Too many meetings.
- I've been wanting to do it [a program] but there's just no time to.
- That's what they do is all this testing and it's not helping the kids.
- Because the counselor here, it wasn't like this back home, the counselor in this school district, I don't know if it's the state, is in charge of assessments and testing. So it's not really an option to the counselor because there'll be a sign on the door that says "Do Not Interrupt".
- I think the biggest problem we have is lack of time. As you've seen we're sort of pulled in many different directions and we're asked to do things that aren't school mental health related the biggest piece of that that takes up most of the time being testing. Like as of right now I have so many students that need to be seen but I can't see them because I'm tied up with testing
- I think it has a lot impact. You can have one kid and he's taking away an hour a day and you don't have the kids that much time, and then it frustrates you, and then you're annoyed at the other kids because your frustrated or overwhelmed trying to deal with this particular child and your other kids are doing busy work or something while you're trying to figure out what to do with that kid and then that kid is not learning anything
- I think we sort of triage.
- I miss being able to talk about problems and issues that are going on. I don't have a whole lot of time for that.
- So that's the stuff I miss, that's why I went to grad school, to get my degree in counseling.

COUNSELORS (cont)

- I love going into the classroom talking to kids about things. I just don't have time right now.
- ...we are not as readily available as we should be and I think a lot of them don't realize that that's what we're here for. [on whether students know what the counselor's role is]
- And so my fear is that they're coming down, seeing that my door is closed and then walking away instead of leaving a note or seeing, you know we had kids at the very end who were just breaking down because she hadn't been there and they hadn't been able to get her, but they would not come down another door to the next office to talk to somebody else. They just saw that she wasn't there and they went back to class. And we found them because one of them was an emergency – he broke down in the hallway and I had to go out there and help.
- And at risk kids are even more at risk here and something could happen and that's a constant worry.

THE CURRENT STATE OF THINGS

- And we would see everything – if we do this over time we're going to see the data show that there's an increase – a positive increase academically across the board – but if we continue to ignore it, we're going to continue on the trend that we are on.
- Everybody should be on the same page.
- People are really focusing on documentation right now. I got them, it's document, document. It seems like a lot of people are focusing on documentation to save themselves.
- It's basically, "Let's get through the curriculum."
- "You're the only teacher I can trust."
- The kids say, "You have my back and you're not going to do anything to hurt me or to make me look bad. You're gonna give me the benefit of the doubt."
- I think it's both the parents and teachers that let the students down and therefore the students do not trust them.
- Financial stress
- We had a week to get our classrooms ready, and in that week we had staff development which I feel none of us really gained anything from it.
- And we would see everything – if we do this over time we're going to see the data show that there's an increase – a positive increase academically across the board – but if we continue to ignore it, we're going to continue on the trend that we are on.
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- I think it's both the parents and teachers that let the students down and therefore the students do not trust them.
- And I just feel like they throw these things at us and we struggle with it for a year and the next year something else. I feel like we just keep up with whatever the trend is and we don't really stick to anything, they don't train us properly, they throw it at us, figure it out.
-

THE CURRENT STATE OF THINGS (Cont)

- It used to be a really good district and to see what's going on.
- I think some of it is environment and some of it is just what you're getting when you arrive here at school because I think a lot of kids don't feel they are getting nurtured or getting what they need from the adults in their lives.
- "This is the chain of command, and this is what you do..."
- Because there's no respect, there's no delineation between what jobs should be, you just become overwhelmed by a big system and the politics that are going on and I started out with all these fresh thoughts about
- And it gonna be more and more, look at what's in the news, what's in the news more is that we need more and more mental health because the issues
- I just try to deal with it, because no one's really gonna help, but those are the only choices, and it's not a choice to send a student to the counselor [On behavior]
- I think it has a lot impact. You can have one kid and he's taking away an hour a day and you don't have the kids that much time, and then it frustrates you, and then you're annoyed at the other kids because your frustrated or overwhelmed trying to deal with this particular child and your other kids are doing busy work or something while you're trying to figure out what to do with that kid and then that kid is not learning anything
- There might be a teacher who does that but then there might be a teacher who never sends a kid to the office. So then they'll get on the teacher saying its inconsistent this teacher sends a kid to the office everyday versus some teachers will never send their kid to the office, because they know it's not really gonna help. And so the child is gonna get suspended and what does that do. [on sending students to office for not doing homework]
- The kid last year was a perfectionist and if he wasn't going to be the best, then he would act out. The kid this year – it's definitely his home life, well I think it's just the way his life is at home; he acts the same way here that he acts at home. I think a lot of the kids act the same way here that they act at home. They don't know that it's not normal.
- We have a team lead meeting twice a month, but usually we can bring up things that we are concerned about. But usually big huge things like that are pushed to the side because it's not something we can resolve at that moment. So if I bring to the table that we don't have any discipline plan, "Oh, well we need to "talk" about that" and then it never gets talked about and then it gets pushed to next year.

ADMINISTRATORS

- Limited time – so many responsibilities
- “He understands the culture of this district, he’s vested in this district, it’s been proven with the tenure he’s had with this district”
- I feel the administrators need training also (on behavior) They lack the training as well and they see it as bad behavior and so when they sit down to determine discipline for these students ...they’re not looking at positive reinforcement as part of it. There needs to be a balance of positive reinforcement
- Tunnel vision (on behavior)
- The administrators having to spend the majority of their time handling discipline instead of going into the classrooms and looking at curriculum and instruction
- And some of them we should meet – some of them should be there. One of them or something [referring to the study].
- Well you wouldn’t know it because it seems to be only open with him – what I’m saying is, “Is that passed down through everyone cause his openness, I don’t feel it. “ I’m not saying he isn’t, cause it sounds like he is, but when you pass down the rest of his people, that’s not what you see.
- I’ve brought up that we don’t have a consistent behavior plan in the school. Administrators will get upset if kids are going to the office because they didn’t do their homework and they’ll say that the teachers are not consistent with or doing their part. At the same time they’re not doing their part
-bless their hearts the administration does as good of a job as they possibly can, but a lot of times they’re not necessarily trained either; some of them are very good at the de-escalation but, if we’re out of pocket they’re the ones that are dealing with it

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

- Very little proactive participation
- Parent involvement in the middle school is low
- We may have to reach out more, but the payoff will be great in terms of student success and achievement as well as an improvement in the sense of well-being among all stakeholders: students, parents, staff, and board members.
- It would be so helpful if we could foster more of a community spirit and active involvement in the school
- I really believe that parents would come out and support their kids, their school, their community if we showed them that we support our kids, our school, our community
- The parent became belligerent with me.
- Because of lack of family support, I can see him being part of a gang.
- Parent support [it’s an issue].
- I’ve tried repeatedly to get a conference with the parents. There’s never an answer. I’ve called, sent home notes, nothing.....
- I think the priorities are not there, so for them, I feel like it’s oh well she’s gonna fail anyways, she’s not getting it so why bother.
-and then we have the other end where they’re just absent, they’re completely absent.
- I think some of it is environment and some of it is just what you’re getting when you arrive here at school because I think a lot of kids don’t feel they are getting nurtured or getting what they need from the adults in their lives.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT (Cont).

- These parents may not know I mean they may not know the system sometimes enough, because sometimes I think that if this was ...parents, they would not be doing this.
- There's a lot of home issues – a lot of kids are coming from broken homes or parents are not necessarily huge advocates of education.
- You know I can't begin to tell you how many parents I've suggested that it would be really helpful for your child to have some counseling
- This particular parent that I have this year, I can't get a hold of and is not responsive. The parent I had last year was responsive so then that would help because the child didn't want to be in trouble when they got home or wouldn't want their parent called. Sometimes they don't care if their parent was notified or the parent isn't responsive
- This year the child that I have if I can get a hold of the parent which is not often, it might be like be like once a month that I can actually get a hold of or get a phone call back from this particular parent that I have this year. And this parent just will say that the child is doing it on purpose and that he can control it, and he knows better and just gets punished
- There is no discipline at home then they have no discipline at school. It's just normal to talk back to the teacher. You'll bring a parent on the field trip and you'll see that the kid acts the exact same way around the parents.
- They don't want the medicine being given in school, and they get offended if you suggest in any way that the child didn't have their medicine even though the child will say I didn't take my medicine or I took 3 medicines or it's very reflective in their behavior.
- A lot of things that you can tell that the parents are very, they don't even wanna...and then there are parents that don't want their kids on medicine at all or that they're hesitant...and like last year there was signs in this child with schizophrenia and but they don't identify that with kids that are so young but the parents didn't want to reveal everything in their family history, so other people they felt like they were hiding history from their family but then we don't know what's wrong with the child that we're dealing with because you don't want to be forthcoming about issues in your family's mental health
- I think they need to know you're not trying to blame them and say that they are bad parents. It's okay that if their child does have a problem that there is support here in the school rather than trying to hide it or not let them have support because they think it's gonna make the kid look different.
- Yeah, also just getting parents involved in the school. If you call home, they don't want to call back because they are anti-school or they think you're going to say something bad, and they don't want to hear what you have to say. Honestly, this year, the rest of my kids, they're okay, they won't do homework, and if you call home the parent has a million excuses for why a child did this or didn't do their homework or why they don't have to do this. It's always about defending their child instead of listening to what is happening

BEHAVIORAL ISSUES

- Adequate systems are needed to manage behavior
- I see it in the classrooms
- It (behavior) interferes with learning, with teaching them, you know, and it frustrates me, it's like other kids want to learn so why don't you just be quiet. It's the talking and the socializing.

BEHAVIORAL ISSUES (Cont).

- I feel like there is a need in this district and I know that it's definitely something we struggle with here in the classroom.
- I have behavioral issues
- I don't think there's any consequences at home forbehavior.
- There's no follow through at home
- I'm noticing a change coming through back where when I first started teaching you would have maybe one issue with a child, on child out of twenty, but now it's becoming 4 and 5 kids with problems.
- You know that there's something wrong and then sometimes just passing in the hallway you know I'll see teachers sometimes having trouble with their kids, trying to get them in line.....
- I think it's more kids with mental and behavioral issues in the classroom, more than it should be
- I think that yes the number one thing is that the teachers don't have any training dealing with students with difficult behavior or emotional problems or who don't have support at home. We also don't get any support for working with children with those problems.

SCHOOL CONDITIONS

- Appearance of the workplace – color scheme and décor are harsh and institutional feeling. Artwork is needed.
- Things need cleaning out. Old materials left in piles.
- Link between student performance and the condition of their school environment
- We need a library of resources that we can go to read for our teachers.

COMPLIANCE WITH FEDERAL AND STATE RULES AND REGULATIONS

- Lack of compliance with federal and state laws
- Little training in rules and regulations

SAC

- A substantial number of students that are enrolled in SAC in comparison to the data we had last year
- I think right now while he is in SAC he's tucked away somewhere so everybody's okay dealing with other issues.
- Instead they're in mainstream kind of, because they're behavior kids but they're put in mainstream classes where they act out, they're put in SAC, where they learn nothing, they just stay there and it feels like to me it feels like we're setting up kids to feel and it keeps going in that cycle
-overrepresentation of all these kids in SAC, cause it's clear

ACCOUNTABILITY

- Holding people accountable for follow through

POLITICS

- Whoever screams the loudest is rewarded with action.
- Small town environment; school should assert its authority to say no when no is the right thing to say.
- District X has been described as a little “island” and people have concerns that our way of doing is out of step with the larger districts
- It is a process to get through the political issues at times
- There is a lot of “politicking” that to me impedes what I’m supposed to do
- “this is the chain of command, and this is what you do...”

RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

- Follow-through on directives, staying current on one’s training, maintaining organization has appeared optional as opposed to an expectation that will impact an individual’s job evaluation
- There can be great resistance to change

ANY MENTAL HEALTH INITIATIVES

- Absolutely not. We’re not being proactive and saying, “Hey we’re seeing this problem.”
- We have over 9 kids with behavioral plans
- No.
- We’ve done suicide prevention.
- Nothing on mental health.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- I don’t know if I have her book, she writes about, she helps teachers, she was a teacher, she was an educator, she helps teachers...
- I would say that no but you’ll see it in the school improvement plan, like PBS, but it does not happen. [on any programs that are implemented]

TEACHER FRUSTRATION

- And then sometimes, and I know it’s wrong, but sometimes it really changes my mood, it’s like you know, I know that’s wrong but it’s human nature you know.
- And I realized that I was dealing with people that were stuck, that didn’t want to hear new knowledge, that didn’t want to grow or change and so I had to constantly learn how to redirect my own energy.
- I think it has a lot impact. You can have one kid and he’s taking away an hour a day and you don’t have the kids that much time, and then it frustrates you, and then you’re annoyed at the other kids because your frustrated or overwhelmed trying to deal with this particular child and your other kids are doing busy work or something while you’re trying to figure out what to do with that kid and then that kid is not learning anything
- I think some of it is environment and some of it is just what you’re getting when you arrive here at school because I think a lot of kids don’t feel they are getting nurtured or getting what they need from the adults in their lives
- Teachers....some of us are not patient with the kids [teachers].

TEACHER FRUSTRATION (Cont)

- By the adults you know, some of the adults. And you know I really hate to say this here but it's true. Some adults can't get past, something that happened between them and the kid. You know, some of them can't get past it and they target that kid and that's miserable to a kid. And you think of a kid that has emotional issues and then they're being targeted by a particular teacher because of something in particular that happened with them in past and they haven't moved on and it causes mental and emotional stress for the child, too
- I don't feel there's really is anyone to talk to. I feel like the counselor is always too busy. I feel like the lssp would help.
- I've brought up that we don't have a consistent behavior plan in the school. Administrators will get upset if kids are going to the office because they didn't do their homework and they'll say that the teachers are not consistent with or doing their part. At the same time they're not doing their part
- And at the beginning of the year we didn't teach the kids behavior. Like in a positive behavioral support system you're supposed to have specific rules in each location and bring the kids there and teach them those rules in that location and be very specific and it should be the same. We have just like 3 rules, be safe, be respectful, be responsible. And that's all that's said from administration. Well for teachers that's different and it's not....what does be responsible mean to me, is not be the same for somebody else.
- We have a team lead meeting twice a month, but usually we can bring up things that we are concerned about. But usually big huge things like that are pushed to the side because it's not something we can resolve at that moment. So if I bring to the table that we don't have any discipline plan, "Oh, well we need to "talk" about that" and then it never gets talked about and then it gets pushed to next year.
- There might be a teacher who does that but then there might be a teacher who never sends a kid to the office. So then they'll get on the teacher saying its inconsistent this teacher sends a kid to the office everyday versus some teachers will never send their kid to the office, because they know it's not really gonna help. And so the child is gonna get suspended and what does that do.
- People will talk about behavioral issues all the time just because it drives people crazy here, but I feel like it's worse the structure of the school is wrong and unorganized, and difficult, even in your classroom
- It leads to a lot of frustration on the part of the teacher and then it leads to them not being able to put up with the kids that are acting that way because you're already annoyed with everything else that is going on [on last minute notices]

LSSP'S

- LSSP? [as in what is that, who is that?]

SPECIAL EDUCATION

- Kids with ADHD, they're under the 504 umbrella, and to me it's like a piece of paper that's in the file that we're supposed to follow. They say it's different from Special Ed but even I'm still so confused about what's the difference.

MENTAL HEALTH TRAINING

- Nothing.

ON DOING THIS STUDY

- Because this is a great opportunity for someone else to tell the Board what's going on.

ON BUILDING A SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM

- I feel like we have to take care of Tier 1 also before anything like that [meaning putting an initiative together) can get into place. If you don't have a steady foundation for anyone, which we don't, I feel like that has to be taken care of before anything that you're talking about could actually be implemented
- I think it can have a positive effect if it's actually put into effect.
- Because this is a great opportunity for someone else to tell the Board what's going on.

The Good Things Being Said				
Usually those around me are cooperative and friendly	Sense of community and common decency	I want to continue toward a better District X	Intentions of administrators and the superintendent to create positive change.	I am around many people who care about children and want to help them
District X has the right foundation in my mind; we need to build on it	I have felt supported to implement positive changes	I'm very passionate about children	All of us are stakeholders in this process	I'm willing to learn, I'm willing to grow
Parent trainings have been provided to assist with behavior management, crisis situations, and autism.	There is a focus on trying to ensure district-wide legal compliance.	Plans for school-wide and individual crisis response have been developed and implemented.	I have a vested interest in seeing all of the children in the community, in the district...thrive educationally and behaviorally	A manual for positive behavioral interventions was developed and provided to assist in the RtI process
I want to grow as a new teacher I mean some parents are really good about – we do have some really active parents....	I want to be a part of something that is a big change. I just want to be able to contribute. I walk around a lot. I'm not in my office a lot. I'm out and about.	I like to read and I will go to trainings, I will ask questions. I will ask my colleagues, and if I don't see anything working, then I will pull something out of the hat, but a lot of times I will pull whatever it takes. And sometimes it's just natural to work with that kid.	I think I understand the students, I have the patience, I'm not just a....teacher. I will help them with anything that they need help with...	I do think I have more energy. I do think I have more tenacity. Because I make it a point to call them in, see him, you know, I have sent messages to all my students, I see them all...
I will always be honest with them [students]. I will always tell them the truth. We go to a counselor or a principal, their doors are always open.	The counselor's pretty helpful. We have a good relationship so if I need something or if I need her to talk about a student... she came in here and spoke to the class ... there was an issue with them making fun of one of my kids She's proactive.	Yes, we help each other. I think we're more of the support system. I think because we feel like we understand so it's better to keep it amongst us....so I think we help each other a lot.	Well I just love my team. I think I have a really great group of....that I work with.	The Superintendent is supportive.

Appendix C

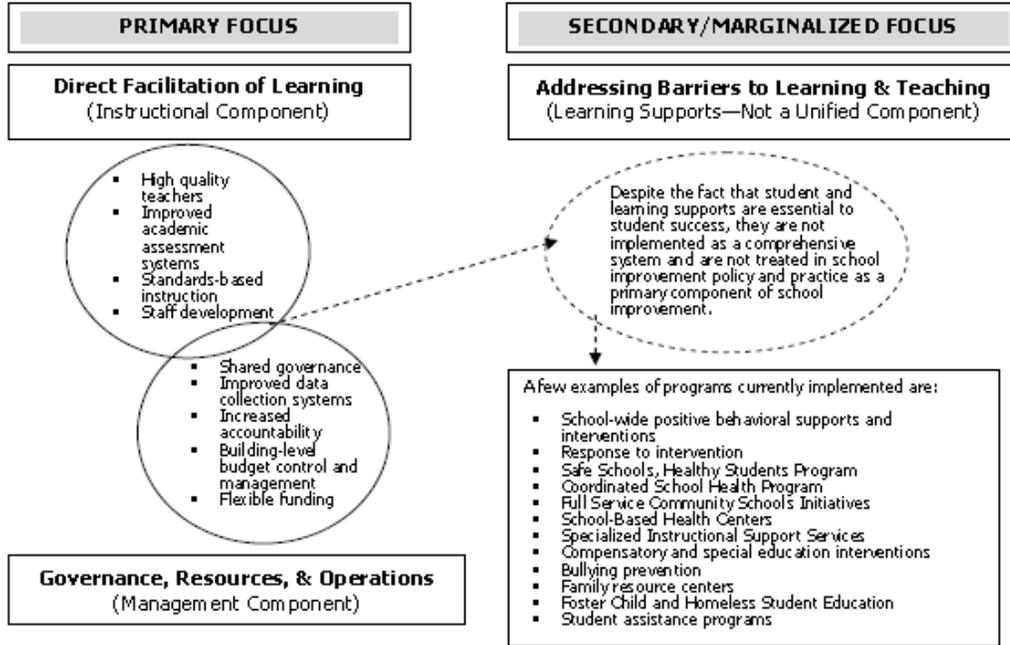
Sample Qualitative and Focus Group questions:

1. What is/are the problem(s)? What is happening?
2. How does it affect our work/lives?
3. Who is being affected?
4. Where/When are things happening?
5. How does your group usually work?
6. What do you consider as strengths and/or weakness in how you are currently working as stakeholders?
7. Describe a typical day in your office.
8. Can you tell me about the organizational taxonomy of your district and where you fit in?
9. Describe what happened in a meeting where your department discussed mental health programs and initiatives.
10. Tell me more about what mental health professionals do in your district.
11. Tell me more about.....your work, your experiences, etc.
12. Have you tried to implement a program? What happened in the process?
13. What initiatives for school mental health have been addressed thus far in your district?

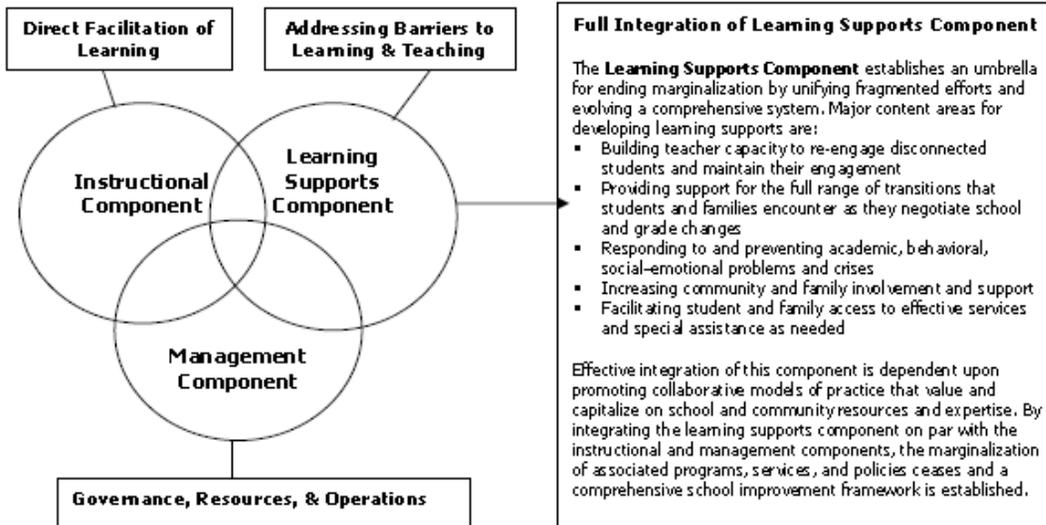
Appendix D

Moving From a Two- to a Three-Component Framework for Improving Schools

A. Current School Improvement Framework



B. Needed: Policies to Establish an Umbrella for School Improvement Planning Related to Addressing Barriers to Learning and Promoting Healthy Development



Appendix E

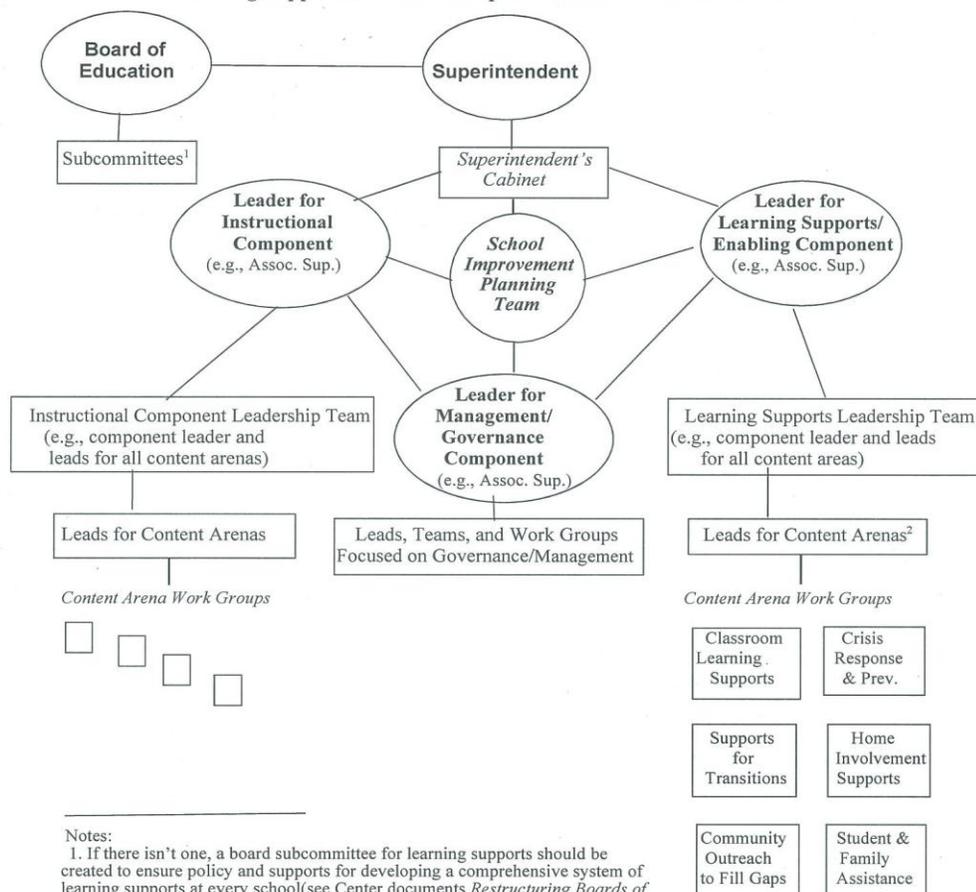
Matrix for reviewing scope and content of a component to address barriers to learning

	Scope of Intervention		
	Systems for Promoting Healthy Development & Preventing Problems	Systems for Early Intervention (Early after problem onset)	Systems of Care
Classroom: Reduced Enabling	-----	-----	-----
(Risk) Emergency Assistance & Prevention	-----	-----	-----
Organizing around the "curriculum" Support for (enabling or learning supports) Home Investment for addressing barriers to learning & promoting healthy development)	-----	-----	-----
Community Outreach/ Volunteers Student and Family Assistance	-----	-----	-----

Accommodations for differences & disabilities Specialized assistance & other
 individualized interventions
 (e.g., Special Education & School-Based Behavioral Health)
 *Embedded into the above content areas are specific school-based and classroom-based activities related to such concepts as social-emotional learning and initiatives such as positive behavior support, response to intervention, and CDC's Coordinated School Health Program.

Appendix F

Prototype for an Integrated Infrastructure at the District Level with Mechanisms for Learning Supports That Are Comparable to Those for Instruction



Notes:

1. If there isn't one, a board subcommittee for learning supports should be created to ensure policy and supports for developing a comprehensive system of learning supports at every school (see Center documents *Restructuring Boards of Education to Enhance Schools' Effectiveness in Addressing Barriers to Student Learning* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/boardrep.pdf> and Example of a Formal Proposal for Moving in New Directions for Student Support <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/newdirections/exampleproposal.pdf>)

2. All resources related to addressing barriers to learning and teaching (e.g., student support personnel, compensatory and special education staff and interventions, special initiatives, grants, and programs) are integrated into a refined set of major content arenas such as those indicated here. Leads are assigned for each arena and work groups are established.