Oklahoma A+ Schools:
What the Research Tells Us
2002 - 2007

A Five Volume Research Report

Volume Five
Recognizably Different
Meta-analysis of Oklahoma A+ Schools®

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Volume 5 of 5

UNIVERSITY OF
Central Oklahoma

Oklahoma A+ Schools®

Research Report: 2002 – 2007

Volume Five: Recognizably Different
A Meta-analysis of
Oklahoma A+ Schools®
Framework Implementation 2000 - 2007

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Preface

From the very beginning, research has been an important component in the process of implementing the Oklahoma A+ Schools® framework in school communities across the state. In fact, the research team was assembled even before the administrative team was hired. That this is different from most major school reform initiatives may be considered an understatement. The current administrators of Oklahoma A+ Schools® (OAS) claim that three elements equally support the entire initiative. Those supports are the networking, the professional development and the research. The analogy of a three-legged stool is often used to depict how these three elements work to support "schools that work for every child" (Oklahoma A+ Schools®, 2009). Research informed practice has been not only a goal, but evidence shows it has been achieved in many parts of the OAS Network.

To truly reflect the nature, complexity, and depth of the implementation process and its impact on OAS Network sites, the research team has endeavored to produce a series of reports that address several different aspects of the process. The present volume is one in a set of five. Prior to these reports there have been also four yearly progress reports that have been published on the Oklahoma A+ School website (www.aplusok.org). The five-volume set of reports that make up the culminating research report is structured so it can be read in most any order. Each report stands alone but is interrelated as well. It may help the reader to understand the intent of each report as the other four reports are referenced in this volume. The reports have been written according to the following guidelines:

- **Volume 1—Composite Narratives**   Bryan L. Duke, Ph.D.

  This is a volume of three highly-complex descriptions of fictional schools involved in the process of transformation as they implement the Oklahoma A+ framework at different levels of engagement. This volume relies heavily on narrative inquiry and has some elements of ethnography.

- **Volume 2—History and Foundational Literature**   Charlene E. Dell, Ph.D.

  Through interviews with first-hand participants, a precise history from the initial investigation for a reform model to the implementation of the Oklahoma A+ Schools® framework has been constructed in this volume. A limited literature review of related issues has also been created to help the reader situate the current research in terms of extant literature.

- **Volume 3—Quantitative Measures**   Nancy H. Barry, Ph.D.

  This volume examines the impact of the Oklahoma A+ Schools® on the stakeholders (students, teachers, administration, A+ faculty and fellows, A+ administration, and community). The analysis includes examination of possible effects on academic achievement, as well as data from surveys investigating school climate from both the students' and the teachers' perspectives. Additionally, survey data from A+ faculty and fellows are analyzed and presented.

- **Volume 4—Qualitative Data Analysis: Organizational Role Transition Among Schools**   Michael Raiber, Ph.D. and Diane H. Jackson, Ph.D.

  In an attempt to provide the depth of analysis necessary to understand the impact of the A+ Schools framework on the culture of the schools, this volume employs methodology

both in grounded theory and ethnography to investigate the process of role transition experienced by each school in the Oklahoma A+ Network. Thousands of pages of field notes and other data have been analyzed in the process of writing this volume.

- **Volume 5—Recognizably Different: From Reformation to Transformation**

  Michael Raiber, Ph.D.; Bryan L. Duke, Ph.D.; Nancy H. Barry, Ph.D.; Charlene E. Dell, Ph.D.; and Diane H. Jackson, Ph.D.

  Data from all the previous volumes underwent a meta-analysis to create the themes for this volume. Primary findings led to the development of a continuum to describe the process for school entry and its movement from being a reform-minded culture to either an inform-minded culture or a transform-minded culture. Three primary drivers that empower transition with the school culture have also been identified in the data. They are (a) faculty engagement, (b) principal leadership, and (c) professional development. The degree to which these drivers work in moving a school community along the continuum described above is dependent upon the levels of coherence, commitment and cooperation present within each. After exploring the evidence from the data related to various levels of engagement, this report identifies five indicators of engagement. They are (a) resiliency (b) sustainability, (c) flexibility, (d) ownership, and (e) empowerment. Each indicator is defined in terms of current literature, and evidence from all available data is used to substantiate their use as reliable indicators.

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About the Authors

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Distinguished Teacher Award (UCO) in 2006 and the Jeannine Rainbolt College of Education's Young Educator Award (OU) in 2009. Duke has published and presented research at the state, regional, and national levels.

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The Process of Education

In an era of reform, schools are searching for ways in which they can best meet the educational needs of teachers and students, while also demonstrating achievement in the academic markers by which their schools will be assessed. In the process of reform, each school community must choose their own path, one that utilizes and enhances faculty expertise in order to develop a stronger school. In choosing and designing reform efforts for a specific school, the stakeholders must consider if the strategies being considered are beneficial for the students, the school, and the community. Teachers must believe the reform being considered will improve their ability to meet their students' needs as they see fit, or they likely will not engage the new process. They must easily see how the possible reform will enrich the current instructional practices and improve the educational process being offered daily to their students (Nunnery, 1998).

Oklahoma A+ Schools® Are "Not Your Average Schools"

School communities that are a part of the Oklahoma A+ Schools® (OAS) Network demonstrate a model of whole school reform that is "best fitted" for their school. Entering an OAS site, one quickly discovers that each school looks and feels unique. Unlike other whole school reform programs that insist upon stringent adherence to specific strategies and time constraints in order to promote a specific product-based outcome, each OAS site has the flexibility to decide how best to meet the educational needs of their students and faculty. Many stakeholders in these communities have considered the climate and faculty expertise in order to

determine how best to incorporate the OAS process into the daily workings of the school. Through the use of integration and curriculum mapping encouraged through OAS professional development, teachers are able to assist their students to make valuable connections between subject matter. Additionally, teachers often feel empowered to incorporate the arts in their teaching, allowing them to further strengthen their student's understanding of all subjects in the process.

The Process vs Product Dichotomy

Given the heightened expectation that test scores for all students will be raised by 2014, many schools are focusing instruction upon those academic benchmarks that will allow them to better demonstrate adequate yearly progress in order to meet the mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act (US Department of Education, 2009). These benchmarks figure greatly in how schools allocate resources and faculty. Despite drastic differences in socioeconomic levels and financial resources, each school must demonstrate that the product—in this case standardized test scores, end of instruction tests, and school report cards—has improved incrementally each year so the school will be in 95% compliance by 2014 (Chapman, 2007). Given the weight of the consequences resulting from a lack of improvement in math and reading, school administrators often feel pressured to focus upon those subjects. These consequences figure significantly in the decisions made by each school community on the ways in which they will meet these external pressures on a daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly basis.

Many school communities feel under duress to improve the product of education—test scores and improved state report cards—to the exclusion and detriment of those subjects not assessed by standardized testing. This sets up a false dichotomy between the need to improve the product and need to continue with the process of educating each child in the best and most

holistic manner available. School communities feel they must prioritize the use of the valuable resources of time and effort to achieve the greatest increase in their AYP. They often provide focused class time and tutoring in math and reading—essentially teaching to the test-in order to do so.

School communities in the OAS Network understand the need to improve the product of education and raise test scores, but teachers and administrators desire to foster the individual process of education for every child as well. The OAS process encourages instruction that addresses the diverse nature of each school, allowing its teachers the freedom to teach to multiple intelligences and learning styles, and through the integration of subjects, build a deeper, broader understanding of each subject area while encouraging the connections between them. Through integrating subjects and arts forms, the OAS process promotes a greater diversity in the manner and depth in which all subjects are taught. Through thorough training in curriculum mapping, each school is guided in aligning its curriculum among and between grade levels and subject matters. This greater awareness of curricular content is coupled with an emphasis on collaboration between faculty members. As a result, students begin to transfer knowledge and skills from one subject matter to another. Through the OAS process, each school community can address the curricular and developmental needs of its students while still meeting the academic benchmarks necessary to demonstrate adequate yearly progress. OAS principals do not feel they must choose between product and process—they find that they can have both.

To better understand how individual schools are able to strike the balance between product and process, one must better understand the professional development provided by OAS. From their entrance into the network, all professional development is tailored to each individual school community. School climate, infrastructure, and faculty expertise are taken into

consideration by the OAS administration as they develop each school's initial five-day training institute. Although the basic introductory training is similar, the OAS administration meets with stakeholders from each new school in order to foster growth in their understanding of themselves, their children, their community, and the ways in which all of these can be used to develop a school which will best meet the needs of all of its students. As schools continue in the network, they are provided with additional professional development throughout the school year, and additional summer workshops for the first three years. The OAS administration and peer training Fellows continue to work to individualize the professional development requested by each individual school. This individualized instruction allows each principal to balance the manner and degree to which the OAS process is integrated into the workings of the school community. This balance empowers teachers to incorporate the OAS process at their comfort level, while still meeting the pressures of increased testing and assessment (see Volume 1 for additional background on the OAS process and levels of engagement).

From a research standpoint, the degree of freedom by which OAS sites may choose to engage in the OAS process provides a unique opportunity to investigate the impact of varying levels of engagement upon the social and academic growth of the students in each school. As previously stated, the OAS administration and training Fellows assist school communities as each determines its own level of engagement in the OAS process. Though the initial training is similar, the choices made by each school community allow for a greater degree of self-determination, making between school comparisons possible. While school sites are far too complex to infer causality of the OAS process, an analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data in this descriptive study point to distinct trends between and among schools and their component stakeholders.

Several measures of successful school performance by the Oklahoma State Department of Education indicate positive rates of success by students attending schools in the OAS Network. When one examines the State Academic Performance Index (API), A+ Schools seem to consistently perform at or above the state average. When the API scores of OAS sites were compared to their district average API score (an average which includes the OAS sites), students in the OAS sites consistently demonstrated a higher rate of success during the 2002-06 school years. When one takes into consideration that OAS serves a greater number of students on free/reduced lunch in comparison to state averages, the differences between composite scores of OAS sites and their corresponding district averages becomes even more intriguing.

During the first five years of OAS implementation, researchers observed classroom interactions, writing and collecting field notes. In addition, they interviewed students, faculty, and administration in each of the OAS sites, chronicling each school's development in the OAS process. Considered longitudinally, these qualitative data demonstrate multiple levels of engagement in the OAS process that seems to fall along a continuum (see Volumes 1 and 4 of this study for further background). When one considers State Report Card and the Academic Performance Data over this same time period, between school differences become apparent. Schools with a deeper engagement in the OAS process appeared to have consistently higher API and State Report Card Scores. It appears that schools exhibiting more integration and more extensive engagement in the OAS process performed consistently higher on State Report Card and Academic Performance data than those schools that engaged the OAS processes as an add-on to more traditional ways of teaching.

Student Perception and Motivation Data

From almost the beginning, data were collected to measure the perception of the OAS process by students through the use of the *My Class Activities Survey* (MCA) by Marcia Gentry and Robert Gable (2001). This survey measured student perception of interest, challenge, choice, and enjoyment in the instructional activities used in their school. The MCA was administered to Grades 2 through 8 beginning in 2003 and repeated every year until 2007. Results of this survey indicate that students attending schools in the OAS Network found their schoolwork enjoyable, interesting, and challenging.

Data analysis shows that there were differences, however, from school to school. When considered in light of the qualitative data showing different levels of engagement in the OAS process, students' MCA responses in schools in which teachers and the principal generally viewed A+ as an add-on were consistently lower on all scales than students in schools in which teachers and principals (both in their stated beliefs and through observed practices) viewed A+ as a more fully integrated part of the schools' philosophy and practice.

Teacher Perception Data

In order to measure comparable teacher perception data, the OAS research team developed the Teacher Opinion Survey (TOS) during the 2002-03 school year. Modifications followed during the 2003-04 school year, and the survey was first administered to all OAS teachers beginning in the 2004-05 school year and was administered each year that followed until 2007. This survey was designed to measure teacher perception regarding the impact of the OAS process on their individual teaching style, and on their school. The TOS indicated the strongest level of agreement with questions regarding the positive impact of the use of the arts on

student outcomes. There was general agreement with questions that dealt with collaboration and planning to integrate the arts, as well as the role of teacher as artist. Additionally, teachers disagreed with negative statements regarding the value of arts.

Again, data analysis of the TOS results revealed differences among different school sites. Specifically, those questions dealing with collaboration and the arts as a special discipline varied significantly between school sites. The qualitative data also indicate that teacher attitudes varied according to individual school climate and level of OAS engagement that was evident across different school settings. Teachers in schools engaging in greater degrees of integration of the OAS process expressed consistently higher opinions about the value and level of collaboration within their schools in comparison with teachers in schools where principals and teachers largely viewed the OAS process as merely a program to be added to more traditional instructional strategies.

Additional qualitative data seem to indicate that teachers who already employ creative ways to integrate and include multiple intelligences feel as though OAS validates their teaching. They often feel empowered to step outside their comfort zone in order to integrate their subjects with others. Principal leadership seems to impact the level of integration within each school. Teachers in schools with strong principal leadership were encouraged to step outside of the box and use innovative approaches to teaching—especially those in which collaboration with other teachers was employed. Conversely, in schools where principal leadership was apathetic or non-supportive of OAS implementation little evidence of change can be found.

When the quantitative data and the qualitative data of this longitudinal study are taken together, trends seem to appear. Though not causal in nature, results seem to indicate that schools with a greater degree of engagement in the OAS process seem to demonstrate stronger scores on

state benchmark measurements. Students in these schools demonstrate more positive attitudes toward school in general. Teachers in these schools demonstrate more positive attitudes towards collaboration and a greater value for arts instruction than those that consider the OAS process as an add-on.

Meeting the Needs of All Children by Focusing on the Needs of One

When schools first enter the OAS network, they are encouraged to consider creating a "school for the child that they love" (Oklahoma A+ Schools® website, 2009); one that addresses the creative and affective needs of children in an effort to prepare them for the twenty-first century. In doing so, OAS demonstrates its focus on the development of instruction that considers what will work best in educating the whole child. As early as 2004, the OAS staff began to infuse the initial school training with this image of the individual "child in the chair" (Oklahoma A+ Schools®, 2004). Originally coined from Heidi Hayes Jacobs (2004), this metaphor greatly influenced the training offered by the faculty and fellows. According to Jacobs,

> We envision that a student sits in that chair. We even use the first name of
> an actual child who attends the school. . . .All our work that day must
> focus on Johnny, and all comments and questions are welcomed as long as
> they are in his best interest. (p. 2)

This image resonated with teachers, as they began to imagine a particular student in their classrooms (A+ Researcher field notes). Stakeholders were encouraged to consider the ways in which their school could incorporate the OAS process into the fabric of what they do in order to help each child reach their fullest potential. "Not the Average" was the theme song written for the first Oklahoma A+ Statewide conference in 2006 by A+ Fellow Cindy Scarberry. Its lyrics clearly articulated the importance of encouraging all students to not be "the average boy" or "not

the average anything." That first statewide conference was even given the name "Not the Average Statewide Conference" (Scarberry, 2006). This concept began to make its way into the framework of all OAS professional development, encouraging each school community to focus use of the OAS process to best meet the needs of each child in its classrooms. By developing instructional strategies that meet children at their own entry points, utilizing individual learning styles and multiple intelligences, schools could begin to meet the needs of all children. Stakeholders in schools new to the network began to realize that by teaching a broader, more integrated curriculum, they could better provide for the needs of their students, while still achieving adequate yearly progress on the requisite state measurements.

Recently, as new schools entered the network and began their OAS journey, they have been introduced to the A+ Essentials^{TM}, the set of commitments around which OAS schools focus their instruction. Schools have participated in professional development that included training in ways to include arts integration, experiential learning, multiple intelligences, and enriched assessment in their classrooms. Schools have been guided through an analysis of their curriculum, infrastructure, and climate in a manner that fostered curricular alignment and collaboration (Oklahoma A+ Schools®, 2009). The faculty and administration of each school worked with the A+ Faculty/Fellows to develop an understanding of how to weave the A+ Essentials^{TM} into the daily educational process of their school.

As practitioner trainers, the A+ Faculty and Fellows are in a unique position to understand OAS professional development from both sides, as they not only develop and present OAS professional development for Network schools but also participate in additional professional development as faculty members of their own schools. To better understand this process, the OAS research team designed and administered a survey of

the OAS Faculty and Fellows during the spring retreats in 2006 and 2007. This survey

provided insight into the ways in which school communities perceived the OAS process

as seen by the Faculty and Fellows. Results indicated there were differing levels of

engagement and buy-in among the OAS network schools. Schools that demonstrate

strong administrative leadership and greater faculty buy-in seemed to have integrated the

OAS process more deeply into the daily educational process: "A+ is woven into the

fabric of every day experiences" (OK A+ Faculty/Fellow, 2006). The greater the level of

engagement in the OAS process, the more effectively A+ brings about lasting school

change:

> If utilized, A+ completely changes a classroom. I have seen teachers who have
>
> gone from only paper/pencil work to using experiential learning. The impact was
>
> amazing. (OK A+ Fellow, 2007)

Faculty and Fellows reported that the main incentive for embracing A+ is the belief that this

process improves the quality of education with direct and tangible benefits for the children of

Oklahoma:

> A+ Essentials™, used correctly, guarantee an enriched environment full of
>
> creativity and thought processing. It requires thinking out of the box, using
>
> multiple intelligences, while thinking with a higher level. (OK A+
>
> Faculty/Fellow, 2006)

Given their position as both teacher and learner, the Faculty and Fellows perceptions provide an

insider's glimpse from both sides of the coin. They have an intimate understanding of the process

as taught through the professional development they design, while also seeing how that

professional development is accepted and embraced by their own school faculty. This dual

understanding of the ways in which each school community chooses and embraces the different A+ Essentials^{TM} in its own way provides a multi-dimensional understanding of how the OAS process is allowed to morph to fit the needs of the "child in the chair" in each school community. A stronger understanding of the ways in which the process is applied to individual schools may provide a greater understanding of the impact of the process upon the growth of a school over time.

The A+ Process

That the dynamics of whole-school change are complex is an understatement. This complexity is particularly true of the A+ process. With A+, it is a given that each school initially engaged in the network at a different entry point—with varying resources, different types of students and faculties, etc.—and each school will also uniquely be in its own "place" regarding the improvement process. Rather than utilizing a "canned" treatment typical of most reform models, A+ Fellows partner uniquely with each school to tailor implementation of the Essentials of A+™ based on each one's needs and characteristics. Whereas most reform models offer a set of prescribed, global practices to get schools "where they need to be," A+ offers a school-specific process that is self-identified and self-defined by each school's faculty to encourage their own vision and goals of school improvement. Given the fluidity of this process and ever changing school characteristics and demands, there is recognition that schools never arrive at the "destination" of improvement; it is a daily journey.

Our discussion thus far has centered on the OAS approaches and quantitative and qualitative evidence from network schools. A further investigation of the qualitative data reveals processes in which OAS appear to have engaged in the A+ Essentials^{TM}, processes evidencing

schools' tendencies to utilize professional development in the A+ network in *transformative*, *reformative* or *informative* ways.

We have conceptualized the differences between approaches to school reform versus transform similarly with Schlechty (2009):

> Reform usually means changing procedures, processes, and technologies with the intent of improving the performance of existing operating systems. The aim is to make existing systems more effective at doing what they have always been intended to do. Transformation is intended to make it possible to do things that have never been done….It involves metamorphosis: changing from one form to another form entirely. In organizational terms, transformation almost always involves…adopting a radically different means of doing the work it has traditionally done. Transformation by necessity includes altering the beliefs, values, and meanings—the culture—in which programs are embedded, as well as changing the current system of rules, roles, and relationships—social structure— so that the innovations needed will be supported. (p. 3)

The distinction here is that transformation involves qualitative school change through the reorganization, reorientation, and utilization of resources and practices to equip students with twenty-first century skills, while reform involves approaches intended to better current practices. In addition, we have also identified a school improvement approach we have termed *informative*. We have conceptualized this approach to reflect data evidencing schools' interest in learning about ways to improve yet rarely engaging meaningfully in a unified attempt that demonstrates

real change. Thus, schools in the informative process may learn more about what they could do, but there are few if any signs that they are doing anything differently.

Drawing on an analogy with drama, the schools highly engaged in the A+ process may be likened to a theatre performance in which an audience (students and potentially their parents or guardians) feels part of and affected by the experience. Creative liberties are taken with the script through informed improvisation. The actors (educators and potentially students) found meaning in their roles through interaction with the audience that informed their actions. Every player in the scene—regardless the size of their role—was essential to the effect. Cues were taken from one another, and the lighting, sound, sets, use of space and props together were in concord with the actors. In this sense, the sum of the show elements was greater than the parts. Conversely, schools not as engaged in the A+ Essentials™ seem more reflective of a production in which the audience (students and potentially their parents and guardians) was somewhat disconnected while a script was being performed (primarily by the educators). In this scenario the actors may know their lines but not observably comprehend the meaning behind them. The rehearsals were tightly based on the script without actors owning their roles and without license being taken to innovate and to engage various stage possibilities. The stage space, props, and potentially the set were underutilized. In the worst case, discord was demonstrated by missed cues, problematic timing, and disconnect between the production's players—whether on stage, behind the scenes, or in the booth. There was no commitment to the "scene," and the audience (in this case the students) was left unaffected or, even worse, disappointed.

Schools involved in the OAS network reflect varying degrees of similarity and difference with portions of this analogy, specifically regarding ownership of the essentials and the transformative process, as well as the concord and discord being evidenced. For example, even

among the highly-engaged A+ schools, there seem to be differences in whether there is full

commitment to all of the essentials and the degree of commitment to each one. Likewise, less-

engaged A+ schools may show a moderated commitment across all essentials or may vary by

stronger or lesser levels of (or lack of) commitment to particular essentials. No two actual

schools in the network observably seem identical in their levels of commitment to each essential.

However, Table 1 reveals categorical and qualitative differences from the five-year study in how

engagement levels could be collectively characterized concerning the A+ Essentials^{TM}.

Table 1   Engagement Levels

In a School Minimally Engaged in the A+ Process	In a School Moderately Engaged in the A+ Process	In a School Highly Engaged in the A+ Process
• Infrastructure—resources are utilized "as is," there is a lack of follow-through regarding changes to infrastructure • Climate—differences between individuals are obvious and often divisive resulting in unsettled feelings • Curriculum—content and lessons are somewhat isolated, and A+ approaches are utilized infrequently if at all • Experiential Learning—lessons rely mainly on direct instruction and "reproducibles" • Arts—there is a lack of interest in arts and/or integrating the arts • Multiple Intelligences—the instruction is somewhat teacher-centered • Enriched Assessment—learning is assessed in a somewhat traditional and teacher-centered fashion • Collaboration—the faculty is on different "pages," and there are obvious challenges in communication	• Infrastructure—schools perseverate on their limited resources and the lack of strategies for using available resources; progress is hindered by focusing on what they do NOT have rather than by contemplating what could be done with what they DO have • Climate—differences between individuals are somewhat recognized, and positive relations are desirable but not seemingly a priority for all • Curriculum—lessons are somewhat integrated and somewhat isolated with attempts to include meaningful approaches • Experiential Learning—lessons are somewhat hands-on and somewhat delivered through direct instruction • Arts—the arts are integrated on occasion, but mostly one-way and typically superficially • Multiple Intelligences—there is a belief in teaching to students' multiple intelligences but there are minimal efforts to this end reflected in practice • Enriched Assessment—there are occasional attempts to utilize creative, authentic and multiple pathways for assessing assessment of learning • Collaboration—cooperative efforts are mostly within "pockets" of teachers or are dominated by "key players"	• Infrastructure—resources are utilized creatively and deliberately • Climate—differences between individuals are respected, and positive relations and affect are encouraged • Curriculum—lessons are integrated, relevant, and "rich" in meaning • Experiential Learning—lessons engage students in meaningful learning and "deep" processing • Arts—the arts are integrated daily for context, to enhance other curricular content and for arts' sake • Multiple Intelligences—differentiated instruction and multiple approaches are used as a "tool" for learning and efficacy • Enriched Assessment—creative and multiple pathways are utilized for assessment of learning • Collaboration—cooperative faculty and students' efforts are evidenced widely and results in empowered teaching and learning, as well as open, two-way and widespread communication

The last column of Table 1 reflects a *transform-minded* school in that innovative thinking allows the administrator and teachers to transform the space, climate, and learning by creative utilization of time, physical and faculty resources, and instructional approaches that place students and student outcomes at the center of decision making. Thus, the mission and actions of the school are targeted to prepare students with relevant yet sometimes unconventional experiences in order to prepare them with learning opportunities directed at skills believed to be necessary in the world they will inherit in the twenty first century.

The middle column reflects a *reform-minded* school in that philosophically faculty may share, to a certain degree, the same aims as the transform-minded schools, yet the focus seems to be on doing what has been done in the past, better. In this regard, there may be the desire to improve and there may be pockets of advocacy within a faculty, yet the obstacles inherent with school change—how to best use the resources that *are* available, how to gain faculty commitment to approaches designed to advance the school's operations, etc.—have not been met with widespread or widely accepted innovative solutions. There seems to be one hand holding onto the past, while the other tentatively reaches toward moving the school forward into the future.

The first column is reflective of schools that could be characterized as more *inform-minded*, seeming to utilize developments from the A+ process as "add-ons," at best, to what already exists. To this end, most actions regarding the essentials evidence a tie to conventional uses of resources and traditional approaches to instruction. *The way we have always done school* is a driving force that seems to take precedence over allowing for possibilities, thinking about alternatives, and investing creatively with regard to *how school could be done*. In this sense, the knowledge and skills developed through A+ participation may be incorporated if they fit the

school's existing model. Of great influence, division apparent in faculty philosophies regarding students and instruction seem most common in the inform-minded schools. Consequently, divergent beliefs regarding education may be rooted deeply within "camps," and in the absence of strong administrative advocacy for A+ or any significant unity or willingness to collaborate amongst faculty, few actions demonstrating change actually come to fruition. Real change in these schools may be evidenced in isolation—in particular teachers' classrooms—but oftentimes these changes happen without recognition or celebration.

Figure 1   Levels of Engagement Continuum
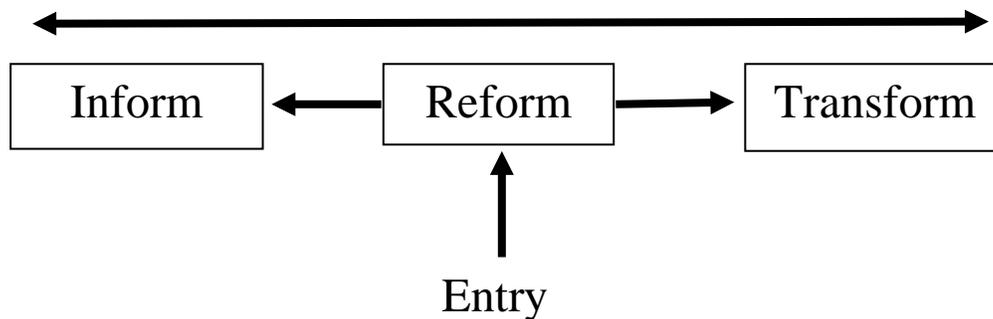
Figure 1 depicts how schools' engagement in the Oklahoma A+ process may be reflected on a continuum demonstrating movement along a sliding scale of inform-mindedness, reform-mindedness, or transform-mindedness. In this model, we claim that schools enter the network somewhere along the middle of the continuum with an eye toward reform. We have identified a mid-continuum entry point since prior to being accepted into the network, members of a school's faculty participate in pre-institutes to develop an awareness of the essentials of A+. They are provided experiences to "sample" professional development activities; to understand the commitment required of network schools, as well as the reciprocal commitment made by A+ as a partner in professional development; and to determine whether the partnership with A+ is a "fit."

By participating in this induction process, these schools are capable of making an informed decision when applying to belong to the network. As a demonstration of buy-in and as part of the application process, schools must evidence 85% faculty commitment to be accepted into this whole-school reform initiative. Thus, there is evidence of a legitimate interest in doing school differently. For schools to have participated as described and to have provided the requisite faculty commitment for acceptance suggests at least initial engagement in the A+ process. They are reform-minded in their willingness to contemplate, explore, and, at least initially, to implement possible approaches to re-form instruction and school operations.

It is possible schools who participate in the induction process of becoming A+ might approach the network just for information; however, it seems unlikely they would commit to this process and relinquish five days of summer vacation the first year of their involvement (and additional time over the course of their A+ involvement) to participate in intensive professional development unless there was a genuine desire for strategies to advance their schools—in other words, to seek reform. Thus, they seem to be beyond simply using the network for added information regarding teaching and learning.

Conversely, schools are not likely to enter the A+ process at the transformation end of the continuum. An inherent part of the A+ process is to advance current school practices and student learning by attending to all of the A+ Essentials^{TM} from the point at which each school entered the network. Even when a faculty may be unified philosophically to improve and possibly to restructure practices, schools are still faced with the daunting task and learning curve of developing truly transformative skills, practice, problem-solving and reflection that can advance its operations given unique school characteristics. Thus, it seems unlikely a school could enter

the process at a transformative level when it has not yet been equipped with the strategies that are inclusive of the A+ process.

Of particular importance in this section is how schools engage once they have committed to the A+ network. As schools begin their journey in this reform initiative, our qualitative data have reflected a disparity regarding how schools demonstrate implementation—whether the process seems to affect what they *know* versus what they *know and do*.

Some of the data reported in the composite narratives of Volume 1 provides an example. (Bolded quotes and paraphrases below reflect actual data). Scissortail Elementary demonstrated indicators of transforming school practices and operations. Teacher Ms. McLaughlin stated that she and other teachers really appreciated that the principal Dr. Davis had **"worked on creating more planning time built into the teachers' day to facilitate more opportunity for collaboration."** She was referring to a monthly practice new this year where **parent volunteers would come into the school and monitor an "event" that the students attended while the teachers were provided common planning time.** Ms. McLaughlin cited this extra planning time as being an extremely valuable resource. A third grade teacher claimed, **"What I do see is that we are more aware of trying to incorporate things. We are trying to be aware of it [A+] and trying to find more things [to use in our lessons]. . . .We plan together and our lessons are identical. I don't think we knew how to do integration before [A+]. We were doing some two-way [integration], but it wasn't intentional. Now we are communicating, working on intentional two-way integration, really working together. We're doing one overarching concept each nine weeks so that it's manageable."** Both of these quotes demonstrate deliberate changes the principal and teachers at the school made to transform their approaches to educating students.

In contrast to Scissortail Elementary, the school composite of Rose Rock reflected a reformative process. One teacher shared feelings of lacking efficacy and understanding regarding the implementation of some of the essentials in stating that **she understands the MI's [Multiple Intelligences] influence, but as far as applying and using that information for each kid, she still struggles.** Another teacher claimed, **"I don't think we are given time to collaborate. I don't know how we can really work together to integrate when there isn't any time for us to meet."** The school's principal **admitted that this indeed was an issue and agreed that currently collaboration was not built into teachers' planning time.** However, he replied, **"We are working on that right now."** Additionally, **several teachers claimed that their concern regarding standardized test scores and the time they felt it took to "teach what would be on the test" kept them from engaging much in the approaches espoused by A+. In fact, one mentioned and several others agreed that A+ "things" seemed to them like extracurricular events that were a luxury to fit in when they could find time—which admittedly, they rarely did.**

These sample quotes illustrate awareness on the part of the administrator and teachers of the A+ approaches; however, the school is still in the process of conceptualizing what A+ looks like at their school and of finding ways to make necessary changes for implementation. Although there seems to be a climate somewhat receptive to change, there is definitely hesitance in letting go of traditional practices used at the school, often attributed to the pressures of meeting mandated test scores. Consequently, the A+ approaches learned seem to encourage willingness (to some degree) to change, yet this willingness has resulted in limited variations in school practices. However, more often than not, most of the "change" was in the form of adding to current practices.

Conversely, Mountain Boomer exemplified a school that, although its faculty initially sought membership in the Oklahoma A+ network, the state of affairs reflected that the deliberate efforts to improve the school by attending to the A+ Essentials™ were only being made by a limited number of teachers. Faculty members were on different "pages" regarding philosophy and practice, and the unwillingness to engage in the process was quite apparent. On a school-level, faculty appeared to develop awareness of essential practices of A+, but the information gained was used predominantly to affirm what they already do or simply as information that infrequently translated into observable practice. For example, **the principal of the school who joined the faculty one year into A+ did not seem to actively oppose A+, yet she did not actively support it either.** She **was characterized as being willing to let those engaged in A+ teach in the manner they preferred, but she disregarded suggestions concerning efforts to promote curricular integration and cross-curricular collaboration.** One teacher emphasized her frustration, **"We [the Mountain Boomer faculty] haven't really followed through. Like vertical planning. We had a Fellow do a workshop, then we met once and did it. Then, nothing else."** Another teacher shared, **"I think the things I do [that are A+] are things I already did. I haven't added a whole lot just because of A+."** Yet another stated, **"I use bits and pieces [of A+]. . . .I get the feeling that that is how most of the people around the school are doing."** The disparity between the schools that seem more transformative, more reformative, or more informative regarding the A+ process is apparent.

In summarizing schools' movement along the engagement continuum, the more inform-minded schools demonstrate dispositions and practices in shallower ways to validate what they already do, to serve primarily as a source of information about school change, and to add-on selective approaches where they may be most convenient. The reform-minded schools

demonstrate dispositions and practices somewhat more meaningfully to plan and to make modest strides in changing what they do to make it "better." On the other hand, the transform-minded schools appear more unified by their dispositions and efforts by deliberate focus on addressing the A+ Essentials™ of quality schooling and operations, even when it involves restructuring what they do and how they do it, oftentimes departing from conventional practices that may have been longstanding in the school.

It is important to mention that as A+ is a process that is somewhat fluid. The researchers—who have made every attempt to avoid being evaluative of individual school sites and their faculties—have refrained from determining where any actual school in the network fits on the continuum. The reflective process of determining how well actual schools are cumulatively making strides in "whole-school" improvement is not our intent or purpose. To a greater or lesser degree, schools may identify themselves at different places of the engagement continuum depending on how they are addressing *each* of the A+ Essentials™. However, as researchers looking across all of the schools, data do indicate qualitative divisions suggesting overall approaches that may reflect some categorical depictions of schools that are more informative or more reformative or more transformative based on how their philosophies and daily practices translate into action.

<center>Drivers</center>

The previous section described significant, observable differences in the data among schools that are highly engaged, somewhat engaged, and lesser-engaged in the A+ process. These differences are conceptualized as varying locations on the engagement continuum, ranging from schools that are inform-minded to reform-minded schools to transform-minded schools.

Although each school is affected by various antecedent conditions and moderators unique to that school (see Volume 4 for discussion of antecedent conditions and moderators), one might wonder what actually propels a school along the engagement continuum. This section will focus on the following issues to address that question: (a) school movement along the continuum, (b) coherence, commitment, and cooperation, (c) and models of the drivers.

School Movement along the Continuum

Data analysis reveals that each school's movement along the engagement continuum is fueled by what the researchers have termed "drivers." These drivers have been identified as faculty engagement, principal leadership, and professional development. Just as an automobile is set in motion by a licensed driver who decides where and when to go, how fast to drive, what resources are needed for the trip, and how many stops or detours to make along the way, so each school's drivers exert similar influence on the destination, time needed for travel, resources needed, and stops or detours in that school's A+ journey. Additionally, each driver's influence varies in proportion to other drivers, and their unique interaction also varies proportionally.

Further analysis of data revealed three salient characteristics of each driver that varies noticeably in schools that are inform-minded, reform-minded, or transform-minded. These characteristics are coherence, commitment, and cooperation ("the 3 C's"). These will be discussed in the next section as they are evidenced by each of the drivers (i.e., faculty engagement, principal leadership, and professional development).

Coherence, Commitment, and Cooperation

Faculty Engagement

In transform-minded schools, faculty engagement has exceeded the 85% initial buy-in required of network schools, and their sense of **coherence** strengthens as they continue in their efforts to transform their school. For these schools, A+ becomes so ingrained that it does not feel like a separate program. "It's who we are and what we do" (Teacher, 2007). Faculty members in such schools consistently reference their shared vision, curriculum, and practices as they work together for common goals. One teacher explained that "because [A+ is] so much of who we are, hesitant teachers have been engaging in A+ without realizing it." She further explained that "most teachers realize how much fun and freedom you have in *how* you teach [with A+] . . . and realize how much more the kids retain" (2007). The "child in the chair" has become a galvanizing influence—and is understood by all. "When it boils down to it, it [A+] is what is right for kids. It's not a fad" (Principal, 2006).

Faculties with such coherence inevitably demonstrate greater **commitment** to achieving their self-identified and shared vision. As a result, changes are made in their individual and collective instructional practices, and motivational support from like-minded colleagues is evident. Even faculty who felt like they were "doing A+" prior to their school's entry into the network noticed changes in their own practices. One such teacher said she had always used music in her classes before coming to her OAS school but not in the amounts she was doing since joining the OAS school. She further said that *all* the teachers were doing it and that they shared ideas and asked each other for advice. "I didn't have that kind of support at my previous school" (2007).

Faculties seek further opportunities to expand their knowledge and skills and to take advantage of on-site professional development, not as an obligation that must be fulfilled as a condition of network membership, but purposefully and enthusiastically. The driving question often becomes "when can you come and how soon can you get here!" Transform-minded schools consistently and *en masse* attend A+ professional development events such as mini-institutes and summer conferences. Faculty seem to find renewal as they interact with colleagues at these events. "The best thing I get from the training is to get with other teachers and get ideas….You get all these ideas! I think the networking is the most important part. We need time to share with other teachers. That reenergizes me" (Teacher, 2007).

Finally, faculty in transform-minded schools report greater variety and depth of **cooperation** with colleagues, administration, community, and other change agents than do faculty from schools that are at other points on the engagement continuum. Team teaching, working on collaborative projects, and sharing ideas are viewed as essential, not optional, in such schools. Interactions with administration are more egalitarian, and there is open sharing of ideas during the decision-making process. Support from and cooperation with school administrators is viewed as critical to successful implementation of OAS principles and practices, and when this happens, teachers express personal and professional pride in the changes occurring in their schools:

> In years past, I may not have worked with everyone. I think after you spend time with the whole faculty, you get to know them better. If we hadn't spent time together at the A+ training, we would just stick to who we knew. It makes working with others easier. We try to work more as a group, a family of teachers. We feel more free about bringing things in to others and saying "look, I found this!" (Teacher, 2007)

Partnering with community groups and parental involvement in school activities are also prominent in transform-minded schools. This pride is further evidenced as teachers report the positive reactions of the community (parents and other stakeholders) and the power of positive public relations for the school. It is not uncommon for teachers to share stories contrasting their OAS school with "another school" not affiliated with OAS and their relief to be at an OAS where creativity, professionalism, and risk-taking are supported and not inhibited. One teacher (2007) revealed that she had often thought of transferring to a school that is closer to where she lives. She said she could "do my A+ way in class, but not all the teachers would be on the same page. When everyone has the same way to address students, the same expectations, it's better. It's harder to create the same atmosphere at a different place."

Principal Leadership

Not surprisingly, principal leadership is key to a school's progress toward transformation (see Volume 4 for a detailed discussion of principal leadership). In transform-minded schools, principals work extremely hard to keep all stakeholders (i.e., faculty, staff, parents, community) focused on transformation, and making steady and continuous progress toward that goal. Such **coherence** is vital for transformation, and transform-minded principals actively encourage it:

> The most difficult challenge . . . is keeping the initiative going. In any new thing
>
> there is a sense of excitement and strong energy. It is always the middle mile that
>
> is the toughest on the journey. And I feel in a lot of ways we are in the middle
>
> mile all the while recognizing there is no finish line. We are never going to have
>
> arrived, and that is the nature of our business. We are always going to be on the

journey. . . .The Summer Institutes are invaluable because it reinforces and

recharges the teachers to keep the initiative going. (Principal, 2006)

Principals in transform-minded schools demonstrate their **commitment** to A+ by their

observable support of the A+ Framework and Essentials. Principals who are committed to A+

Framework/Essentials make the necessary changes in the school's infrastructure to support A+,

removing any barriers to implementation that exist. Changing faculty schedules so they can have

sustainable, common planning times with both horizontal and vertical cohorts, as well as with

special area teachers, is a priority for transform-minded principals. "The school does not become

a canned program. It is a process of effectively teaching and doing school business. We are A+

because of how we use the process; we are not A+ because we belong to a network or because

we fulfill network expectations" (Principal, 2006). Further, principals at transform-minded

schools actively seek ways to showcase teacher and student successes (e.g., parent nights focused

on Multiple Intelligences, showcase of student and teacher art, invitations to local media, etc.).

They consistently take advantage of A+ professional development, attend institutes and

conferences with their faculty, and make sure that new faculty has the opportunity to attend the

mini-institutes designed just for them:

> One of the things I appreciate the most [about summer conference] is when I've
>
> had hesitation, we've talked about how we want to do something and that teacher
>
> is kind of hesitating….I say "Remember the conference? What was the most
>
> powerful part? It was when we were all together, singing together." You know,
>
> the conference models the [A+] philosophy. So in turn I'm modeling best
>
> practice, when I come back to my staff and say "Okay, you were at the

conference. You saw the power in this." And they go "You're right!" (Principal, 2007)

Principals in transform-minded schools foster **cooperation** among and between faculty, staff, parents, and other partners. Their active support during implementation of the A+ Framework sets the tone for all involved and underscores the value placed on improving their schools for the "child in the chair." Transform-minded principals demonstrate significant support for school change as a jointly owned enterprise between all stakeholders who share vision and experiences while striving for common goals. Stakeholders take pride when they recognize the changes in a school as the A+ framework is implemented:

There's a lot of collaboration. I feel very comfortable going to any of the teachers regarding my children. I feel like I could go to any of the teachers on the grade levels because they plan together and they know what each other is doing. I substituted [in] 5th grade last week and the other teacher . . . knew what we were doing. His lesson related to the one I was teaching. (Parent, 2007)

Professional Development

When considering the driver of professional development, a brief discussion of two related perspectives is necessary. First, the perspective of the transform-minded schools offers insights into their engagement and utilization of available resources for professional development. Coherence, commitment, and cooperation in these schools are qualitatively different from other schools on the engagement continuum. Second, the "3 C's" as demonstrated by the OAS staff play an integral role in assisting schools toward their goals. As might be expected, the intersection of OAS coherence, commitment, and cooperation with transform-

minded schools' "3 C's" (for both faculty and principals) creates a powerful professional development partnership with the increased potential of achieving meaningful and sustainable school transformation.

Transform-minded Schools

Schools that are transform-minded demonstrate a different level of interaction with the professional development opportunities offered by OAS than do schools at other points on the continuum. Faculty and principals at transform-minded schools define who they are and who they want to be, after personal and collaborative self-reflection, and request OAS professional development that will help them achieve their goals. They take full advantage of OAS's individualized professional development to help mediate the gap between the school's current and possible "self." In the process of identifying the remedy for such gap, transform-minded schools take ownership of the process, further developing **coherence** as their goals become realized**.** One principal (2006) emphasized that A+ had helped her faculty develop "a map toward our successes, toward our goal. It has helped . . . develop [our] mission. . . .It's just such a quality program."

One of the ways that transform-minded schools demonstrate their **commitment** to the A+ Framework is by their responsiveness to research findings published in the OAS annual research reports. Changing the term from A+ "essentials" to the A+ "commitments" indicates their commitment to the value of research, reflection about the findings, and making meaningful changes as a result. Additionally, repeated requests by these schools to have the OAS researchers on site speak to the value of the information they were gleaning from the research reports. Commitment to the A+ process helped them overcome their initial notions of the researchers as

"evaluators." During one researcher's interview with a teacher, the teacher commented that she

would like to see more communication between the researchers and the teachers. She "would

like to know more about how-why-what we're doing" (2007). When requests of this kind have

arisen, the researchers' standard response is to share the A+ website (www.aplusok.org) which

contains the annual research reports. Although the research team has studiously avoided an

evaluative stance regarding individual schools, this teacher demonstrated interest in the overall

research findings, as well as openness to the entire research process.

Cooperation is also evident in transform-minded schools as they actively participate

with OAS staff in professional development activities, both on and off site. They are justly proud

of their colleagues who present at the summer conferences, and are energized by their example.

"Teachers really enjoyed the break-out sessions. I think it's really nice for actual teachers who

are in the classrooms now to teach those sessions. It broadens your ability to teach, seeing other

teachers teach. It is very valid. Teachers like that" (Principal, 2006).

OAS Staff

The **coherence** of professional development offered by OAS staff is evidenced in three

major areas: the responsiveness of OAS in what types of professional development are offered to

network schools, dedication to meeting individual school requests, and the requirement that

schools themselves define what they need. These areas set OAS professional development apart

from the majority of professional development models available to schools today. Just as it is

more challenging to individualize instruction for a single student, it is even more challenging

(and rare) for professional development to be tailored to meet an individual school's self-

identified needs. "I think that this year they understood that there was a certain direction our

school was going, and they (A+) would work with us on that. . .[A+ staff] wanted to tailor the experience to us" (Principal, 2006).

OAS's insistence on a school's self-determination of their own professional development needs is often initially unsettling for schools who have become accustomed to having professional development imposed upon them. However, this coherence with OAS philosophy maintains the integrity of professional development in OAS and contributes to the effectiveness of the model. Meeting individual schools' needs translates into offering individualized professional development on-site, at times convenient to individual schools, and designing workshops to meet the school's specific request. As the network continued to grow, similar professional development needs were expressed by different schools, so workshops that had been successful with one school were often adjusted to meet the needs of a different school (see Volume 4 for a more detailed description of the evolution of OAS professional development). Although initially reluctant to provide a list of such workshops (to avoid the appearance of providing top-down professional development), the OAS staff realized that such a list would indeed be helpful to schools that might be uncertain about the types of professional development available. Interestingly, viewing such a list also inspired some schools to request related, but new topics for their individualized professional development workshops.

Commitment to the OAS philosophy of professional development (i.e., responsiveness to each school's unique and self-identified needs) is evidenced in the responsiveness of OAS staff to the research findings of the OAS research team as well as from research in current best practices in professional development. Modeling reflective practice, OAS staff adjusted professional development as necessary, sometimes changing terminology or types and formats of professional development sessions. Such changes based on reflections about research findings

are not easy, and the actions of OAS staff to continually reflect and adapt underscore their

commitment to the A+ framework, the schools in the network, and the value of research-based
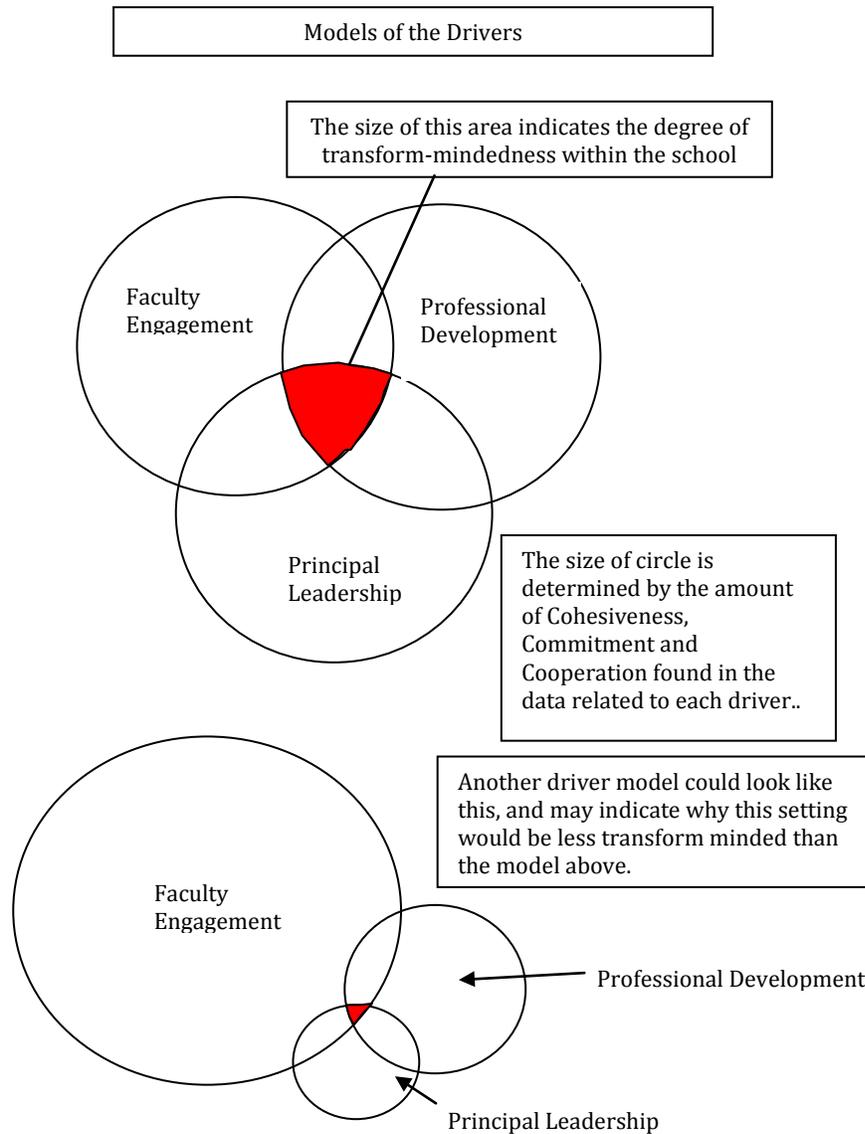
practices.

In addition to the flexible scheduling to meet school's needs mentioned above, OAS's

cooperation in partnership with local foundations, schools, and universities contrasts sharply

with the lack of such cooperation in other professional development initiatives. Opportunities

are provided for schools to send selected teachers to workshops outside the state (e.g., the San

Francisco Symphony Keeping Score Project). Institutes have been held in a variety of locations

(e.g., museums, art galleries, studios, and universities), providing alternate venues for schools to

explore and learn in unique settings, and to foster new partnerships between schools and other

organizations.

<u>Models of the Drivers</u>

In order to clarify the foregoing discussion of the drivers (i.e., faculty engagement,

principal leadership, and professional development), the researchers propose several models that

illustrate their interaction, proportionality, and their most significant characteristics (i.e.,

coherence, commitment, and cooperation). Venn diagrams, provided in Figure 2 are useful for

this illustration.

Figure 2: Driver model

Models of the Drivers

The size of this area indicates the degree of transform-mindedness within the school

Faculty Engagement

Professional Development

Principal Leadership

The size of circle is determined by the amount of Cohesiveness, Commitment and Cooperation found in the data related to each driver..

Another driver model could look like this, and may indicate why this setting would be less transform minded than the model above.

Faculty Engagement

Professional Development

Principal Leadership

The size of the area where the three circles converge indicates the degree of transform-mindedness within the school setting. In the driver model shown in the top diagram, the three drivers appear to be equally influential in a transform-minded school. The size of the circle is determined by the amount of coherence, commitment, and cooperation found in the data related to each of the drivers. In contrast, the driver model shown in the bottom diagram illustrates very little convergence of drivers and may indicate why this school would be less transform-minded

than the model above. Naturally, the diagram drivers' interactions for any particular school could reflect multiple interactions, depending on their unique situation.

<p style="text-align:center">Indicators of Transformation – Evidence in Process</p>

Macro analysis of the data from year one (2002) to year five (2007) reveals five traits exhibited by school communities that indicate their position along the Level of Engagement continuum: (1) Resiliency, (2) Sustainability, (3) Flexibility, (4) Ownership, and (5) Empowerment. Each indicator will be defined in terms of the existing literature and evidence will be presented from the data supporting the varying levels of engagement within each school community. The reader is cautioned not to assume all indicators are present at the same level within each school community. This discussion is intended to give evidence supporting the presence of these indicators within the entire network of schools and how their varying levels among individual school sites may indicate a school's level of engagement ranging from "Inform-mindedness" to "transform-mindedness."

Resiliency

The term *resilience* first appeared in the year-three report and refers to the phenomenon of schools continuing their presence in the A+ Network even when significant changes in leadership and personnel were occurring:

> Over the three years of implementation in Oklahoma, the A+ process had
> demonstrated remarkable resiliency. Even when there are changes in
> administration and personnel, A+ persists. Principals and teachers may leave and
> be replaced by new staff, but somehow the A+ process continues. Even in those
> schools that are struggling to overcome problems, A+ persists. Even in those

situations where school-wide faculty buy-in is not 100%, those who have invested

in the process report that A+ continues to provide advantages for teachers and

students. (Barry, Dell, & Raiber, 2004, p. 20)

Evidence in the current data continues to support the fact this remains a concern among

many of the stakeholders within the school community:

When asked about the benefits and challenges of the program [the principal]

replied "keeping staff" was a challenge; they have lost two art teachers in the past

three years and two music teachers in the same amount of time. "With them being

a vital part of the building, the heart, losing them is like losing an organ almost."

Due to these changes she explained that they are constantly "rebuilding and

redeveloping their program." (Principal Interview 4.8, 2006)

Further analysis of data indicates that resiliency among A+ schools is a more complex

issue than previously indicated. To more completely address this phenomenon, the definition of

resiliency has been broadened to include the overall capacity of a school to adjust successfully

to change with its concomitant stresses and strains. Research in school resiliency supports this

change in perspective (Patterson, 1997).

Patterson states that schools—like many social organizations—have historically

operated from a foundation of false assumptions concerning how organizational members

address change:

- People act first in the best interests of the organization.
- People want to understand the *what* and *why* of organizational change.

- People engage in change because of the merits of the change.

- People opt to be architects of change affecting them.

- Organizations are rationally functioning systems.

- Organizations are wired to assimilate systemic change.

- Organizations operate from a value-driven orientation.

- Organizations can effect long-term, systemic change even with short-term leadership.

- Organizations can achieve systemic change without creating conflict in the system. (p. 7)

These assumptions frame the ways school leadership engages other stakeholders in the school community during times of change. Patterson asserts the realities of how people address organizational change are different. He contends that in times of change, most people act from self-interest first, they do not care to understand the *what* and *why* of the change, they view the intentions of those effecting the change with suspicion, and they choose to be victims of change rather than architects. Further, he contends that organizations are not rational, they serve to protect the status quo, they engage in long-term change with short-term leadership and they expect the great change with little conflict.

Data from observations and interviews among schools operating at more inform-minded levels of engagement appear to support Patterson's (1997) assertions. Notes from an interview with an A+ Fellow (4.71, 2005) suggest that to move forward, professional development plans should focus on the self-interest concerns of those involved:

[The A+ Fellow] believes that they need on-site professional development. On-site is important because teachers with less buy-in are less likely to attend off-campus and summer events, particularly in the absence of administrative support. She believes that professional development needs to be very focused, helping teachers to use their own curriculum and the resources at their own school to develop learning activities.

Data also support Patterson's assertions that people tend to view those in charge of change with suspicion and that they view themselves as victims of the change. What is perhaps most intriguing is that this not only occurs among school stakeholders when moving toward transform-minded levels of engagement but also occurs as schools move toward more Inform-minded levels of engagement. Researcher field notes (4.85, 2007) from an interview with an A+ Fellow in a school that is struggling with principal support for A+ implementation record the following:

> The A+ Fellow says that the principal often talks about "different entry points." The Principal has used this term in conversations with me as well in describing the faculty and sends around emails reminding the faculty to respect "different entry points and different teaching styles." Interesting that later this morning, in a brief conversation, another teacher also mentioned the principal's emails about "different entry points" as a negative thing. Whether or not this is the Principal's intent, A+ Fellows at this school are interpreting these emails as the Principal's overt validation and support of those "worksheet" teachers who refuse to take a more integrated approach to instruction.

This same A+ fellow claimed her role as a victim of change: "We were an A+ School and these teachers were really doing great things, but then the principal changed and now they just aren't doing it anymore." These statements, and others like them, may provide some evidence of a school's level of engagement and, when combined with other indicators may suggest a school's overall level of engagement with the OAS Framework. In light of this, it is important to consider multiple data sources when attempting to determine the level of engagement of these complex communities.

Data from the Teacher Opinion Survey (TOS) appear to contradict the assertion that change is generally viewed as a negative noun. These data suggest that teachers in A+ schools have generally favorable attitudes about implementing the A+ Framework (see Volume 3). However, further analysis revealed statistically significant ($p \leq .000$) differences in teachers' attitudes across different school settings. These differences are supported in the observation and interview data as well.

In those schools with consistently positive principal leadership, high faculty engagement, and regular use of professional development opportunities, the A+ framework is viewed as a means to achieve effective educational outcomes. Often, stakeholders in these schools refer to the framework as unifying force within the entire school community. One teacher (3.57, 2006) remarked,

> The teachers are starting to realize they keep making connections that this is not extra work, but it is refining their skills and using them in effective ways. It's changed from "it's an arts integration thing" to "this is a whole-school thing." It's pretty cool to see the "aha's" that have taken place this year.

Another teacher (4.23, 2007) claimed the unifying force within the school is why she has remained at an A+ school even though it is a personal inconvenience to teach such a long distance from her home. When considering teaching at another school, she responded,

> [I could] do my A+ way in class, but not all the teachers would be on the same page. When everyone has the same way to address students, the same expectations, it's better; it's harder to create the same atmosphere at a different place.

As the levels of coherence, commitment and cooperation among the drivers (principal leadership, faculty engagement, and professional development) vary in each school community, descriptions of impact change. Statements tend to focus on single elements of the framework, indicating either an incomplete understanding of the entire framework or only partial implementation has been achieved. Many who function at this level of engagement focus on the *Multiple Intelligences*' impact on the school communities. The following principal's statement (4.72, 2006) is representative of others in the data:

> I think with A+, what it does for us when you look at the Multiple Intelligences with the children and you try to teach children based on their needs, they know that. They know you're looking at them. They know you care about them. They know you understand them. They perform for you because they know they're understood and cared about.

There is also evidence of focus on other aspects of the framework. When asked about the impact of A+, another principal (4.82, 2006) singled out the essential of experiential learning. A field researcher reported in her observational and interview notes with the principal:

He acknowledged the hands-on approach of A+ as being instrumental in this student difference. The students' attention increases because of this approach. He said that with this learning approach, 'the students do not have time to have discipline problems.'

There is support in the data that stakeholders in more inform-minded schools identify what they believe to be missing essentials and how that impacts potential outcomes. One A+ coordinator (4.84, 2006) discussed such a concern for lack of collaboration and poor climate to a field researcher during an interview:

> The coordinator finds this reluctance on the part of some teachers to change their very traditional approach to teaching very frustrating, because she believes that the A+ way is the best way to teach. She describes the school faculty as consisting of three types of teachers—"the traditional…worksheets, skill and drill…the theme type…a surface-level connections approach, A+ as an add-on…and then A+."

Statements of this nature appear to indicate that the coordinator has a well-developed understanding of the A+ framework. It seems to follow that lack of understanding was not the reason this school community tended to operate at an inform-minded level of engagement. To investigate what might be moving this school toward this level of engagement, data from this school were analyzed longitudinally. Information uncovered in this investigation supports the impact of the three drivers on the level of engagement in regards to resiliency. There were several references to a lack of high functioning drivers within this school community. The field researcher had been observing and interviewing in this school since its second year of inclusion

in the Oklahoma A+ Network. Her long-standing relationship with the stakeholders in this community provided this investigation with several insights concerning the impact of the drivers on this school's level of engagement. The following are excerpts from this data:

> The PE teacher explains that while a few…teachers are very dedicated to A+ as way of teaching, that the overall school policy does not actively support A+ and, due to this lack of top-down support, the majority of the teachers are not really on board with A+. (Teacher 2.30, 2005)

> The A+ Coordinator attributes this situation to a lack of buy-in to A+ on the part of the building principal. "It's the leadership. We just can't move forward without her support." (Researcher notes that this teacher has expressed on-going frustration about a lack of principal buy-in during previous interviews; A+ coordinator 4.84, 2006)

> My observation is that the principal does not actively oppose A+, but she doesn't actively support it either. From all of the observation and interview data that I have collected, it appears that the principal is quite willing to let the A+ teachers teach in the manner that they prefer. For example, she was willing to move teachers so that they could have adjoining rooms. However, according to reports from A+ Fellows serving on the…faculty, the principal disregards any request or suggestion that they might make concerning efforts to promote curricular integration and cross-curricular collaboration. According to the A+ coordinator, the principal believes that A+ imposes "too much extra work on the teachers . . . it's just asking too much." (Field researcher field notes, 4.84, 2006)

This teacher's comments echo what [the A+ coordinator] told me in that specialists are being completely left out of the planning loop. During our conversations last fall, this teacher was more optimistic about the potential for collaboration and developing a "more A+" approach to teaching across the entire faculty than the A+ coordinator. I'm a bit surprised to hear her relate that faculty planning committees are no longer active. Her impression is that all decisions are being made top down—that there's little collaboration and that the principal is making all of the decisions about school-wide policy and activities. (Researcher field notes 4.84, 2006)

One of the field researcher's final data entries explains how she interprets what has been occurring at this school:

It seems that in [this school], once appearing to be a "model" A+ school, A+ has now reached a plateau, and perhaps has even taken several steps backwards in the process of whole-school reform. Certainly, this will be an interesting case study in terms of resilience and ways that the A+ process changes in the face of leadership changes. (Researcher field notes 2.37, 2005)

From the data cited in this section, it appears resiliency is related to how stakeholders within the school community view and manage change. Further, schools operating as inform-minded communities cite issues in coherence, commitment and cooperation among faculty, principal leadership and professional development as factors contributing to this level of engagement. As the level of engagement within a school moves toward a more transform-minded community, references to the school as whole increase. In addition, when referring to

administration and colleagues, there are many more references that use inclusive pronouns such as "we" and "us" rather than "they." These references support the assertion that all drivers are committed to cooperate with the others creating a highly coherent vision of how the school manages change.

Sustainability

Definitions of *sustainability* vary widely in the literature. Sustainability can be discussed in terms of environmental, economic, sociological, or religious issues (Blewitt, 2004). It is a complex subject that crosses many disciplinary boundaries. To more clearly understand how sustainability may indicate the engagement level within OAS sites, it was defined as the degree to which practices are fully internalized and part of how the school community does business (Taylor, 2006). Schools modeling sustainability develop curricula and operations reflecting an integrative approach to learning and practice. The process of education emphasizes active, experiential, inquiry based learning and real-world problem solving (Blewitt, 2004).

Prior to an investigation of particular factors determining sustainability among OAS sites, three assumptions concerning effective education must be met for a school to sustain any initiative: student performance, positive teacher attitudes toward the initiative, and positive student perceptions of classroom activities. Often, when these assumptions have not been met, an initiative cannot be sustained.

The current political climate surrounding public education is largely focused on measurement results primarily gathered from standardized tests. Any change initiative within

public education must meet the demand for results placed upon each school if it is to be sustainable within this socio-political climate. It is for this reason, that school performance data were investigated as part of this research. Longitudinal results indicate that OAS, as a whole, consistently outperformed their district and state counterparts on the Academic Performance Index (API). Comparison of Average API scores for OAS with their district (all district schools, including A+) and state averages from the 2002-03 through 2005-06 academic years reveals higher scores for A+ schools (see Volume 3). When considering student performance data, Oklahoma Core Curriculum Tests (OCC) scores indicate that students in the majority of OAS have generally performed at or above state averages. However, when the data are considered at individual school levels, some important between-school differences emerge.

Owing to the notion that teaching has historically been focused on the individual efforts of teachers within separated classrooms, it would be fair to conclude that the integrated and collaborative nature of A+ implementation could upset the status quo in most school communities. Data from the *Teacher Opinion Survey* (TOS) previously reported in this volume appear to support this conjecture.

Student attitudes and perceptions related to what they do in their classrooms affect the impact of those activities and ultimately the sustainability of the same. Effective teachers will not continue to engage in activities that have limited or negative impact on student learning. Again, student attitudes as measured via the *My Class Activities* (MCA) survey were reported previously in the volume. These data support that students in highly-engaged environments view school as fun and challenging.

That the three assumptions of sustainability (student performance, positive teacher attitudes and positive student attitudes) are generally met when the population of OAS is considered in its entirety, suggests that a further investigation of the features of sustainability may be worthwhile. Had these assumptions not been met, any impact on sustainability from other features would likely have been rendered mute. The presence of between-school differences among these data investigating each of the assumptions also suggests that measures of the features affecting sustainability at individual OAS sites may be an effective indicator of a school's level of engagement.

Blewitt (2004) contends that in curricula focused on achieving the goals of sustainability, knowledge must be viewed differently than it traditionally has been. He states that "knowledge, as opposed to mere information, is becoming increasingly rooted in specific contexts of application that go beyond the rules and perspectives of single subject disciplines." (p. 2). Thus, the ability of OAS communities to develop and maintain true transdisciplinary models of instruction may impact their ability to sustain A+ implementation within their school community and, therefore, indicate a school communities' level of engagement.

Data show there are schools that appear to be achieving in their efforts to teach across subject matter boundaries. Those involved in these integration activities discuss the process using organic language suggesting these are the products of meaningful exchanges of ideas and concepts between all subjects involved. Some refer directly to the term supplied by A+ literature called *two-way integration,* referring to the idea that when combining instruction and learning in two subjects, each is informed by learning in the other subject area. There is also reference to a term that appears to have grown from the school faculty called *purposeful integration*. It appears this refers to the process of intentional planning for combined instruction. There are also

references to seamless integration, indicating that teaching and learning in several areas often look the same and that the learning in all areas is so intertwined it is difficult to determine what subject is the focus of the activity. Faculty and administration from more transform-minded schools tend to discuss their curricula in this manner:

> I don't think we knew how to do integration before—we were doing some 2-way, but it wasn't intentional. Now we are communicating, working on intentional two-way integration, really working together. We're doing one overarching concept each nine weeks so that it's manageable. (Site coordinator 4.14, 2006)

> The other goal we had was purposeful integration. The teachers all came up with, per grade level, 2 essential questions. They gave these to the specials teachers so that we all could be working together. It made our collaboration and the integration purposeful. I worked in the family of musical instruments. (Teacher 4.16, 2007)

> The way we use A+ in our school is that we use it as a framework to integrate everything we do in our everyday lives. It's so hard in schools to try to get everything in and A+ does a really good job of how to do curriculum alignment, differentiation, and enriched assessments to the point where it allows us to get it all in. It's really funny because a lot of times with evaluations that I do, when you walk in, you don't know if they're doing art, or science, or language arts because they do such a beautiful job of integrating. (Principal 4.72, 2006)

There is also evidence that suggests some OAS sites are in the process of finding ways to integrate their curricula in more meaningful ways. Within the data from these sites there is

evidence of misunderstanding of what is meant by integrated curriculum, as OAS defines it. When asked about how faculty at her school approached curriculum integration, one principal (4.82, 2006) responded,

> We have a great group of teachers that know their stuff, but there are probably a
> few perfectionists. That may be because of me and my personality, but they have
> tried very hard to strengthen every strand of the curriculum. They've worked on
> lessons to make sure as many of the multiple intelligences were covered as they
> could. One would teach the lesson and they would decide what the weak areas
> were. They would work on it and another would teach it and they kept on trying
> to make the lessons reach all the learners.

It seems that delivery of instruction via Multiple Intelligence theory (MI) is believed to be the focus on integrated curriculum within this faculty. While MI is one of the eight A+ Essentials[TM], its focus is on delivering instruction in multiple ways so that learners with varied ways of learning can be engaged in the activity. It may be confusing to some that music is considered an intelligence and a subject matter, but learning through music and learning about music are two different outcomes and should be considered separately.

Of most interest in these settings is that faculty and administration at these sites are often aware that they have not achieved what they believe is possible in their efforts to develop and implement a transdisciplinary approach within their curriculum. Some references to the planning process seem to indicate that integration was forced on the subject matter (or teacher) instead of growing from contextually appropriate exchanges between the subject matters:

When asked about curriculum, the site principal stated that another principal at

another school site was the supervisor of the district's curriculum development

and that I should speak with her for more details. He did add, "We know we need

improvement." This weakness is why he wants to work on collaboration on given

Saturdays. He said that collaboration and curriculum go "hand-in-hand."

(Interview transcription with principal 4.82, 2006)

I see it as a real positive and a plus. I find it hard to always find time to do the fun

things. I think we still get so caught up on testing stuff. We don't always take the

time. What I do see is that we are more aware of trying to incorporate things. I

meet with the 3rd grade team. We are trying to be aware of it and trying to find

more things. We even write A+ in our grade book. We plan together and our

lessons are identical. (Teacher 4.91, 2007)

Actors at OAS sites who are engaging in integrated curriculum in this manner tend to be more

reform-minded.

References to curriculum as the Priority Academic Student Skills (PASS) objectives are

found in the data from more inform-minded schools. Documents listing the PASS objectives and

desired learning outcomes for each grade level and subject are published by the Oklahoma State

Department of Education. Data from these OAS sites suggest that faculty and administration feel

as though these mandated outcomes serve as the curriculum for their school. There are few

references to multiple subjects being addressed in the same lesson. There are also increased

references to "ready-made" curricula from outside sources that appear to be used verbatim. This

appears to contradict the OAS goal of constructing curricula that address the unique needs of

children with each school. Much of the tone from the data conveys a sense of resignation to this as the way it must be done:

> She shares the Essential that she is focused upon, Curriculum. She believes that
> being an A+ school will hopefully improve testing scores and "student's
> expectations" since "monitoring lesson plans" will now be possible. This will
> assist teachers to understand if they are meeting "pass objectives" as they teach
> students. She states that she hopes to see more "carry-over" from grade to grade
> "ensuring objectives" are being met. She hopes in the future that high-school
> teachers "won't have to catch them up" when it is time to take the "end of
> instruction exams." She named this "curriculum alignment." (Interview transcript
> from school counselor 4.81, 2006)

> When talking about the Essential, "Curriculum," she showed us the [series name]
> textbooks that the students use in order to help with testing. The books provide
> curriculum for math and reading and also provide practice tests. (Interview
> transcript from site coordinator 4.81, 2006)

> On arts curriculum in general, there is no specific curriculum outside of satisfying
> the PASS skills.…The means don't have to justify the end, it's the end product
> that we are concerned about. (Principal 4.53, 2006)

> Gibbons et al. (1994) suggest that schools implementing integrated curricula exhibit four

common features. The features are not hierarchical and include the following:

1. There is a distinct, but evolving framework to guide problem-solving

   efforts.

2. Solutions involve movements in many directions and evidence is both

   theoretical and empirical in nature.

3. The diffusion and dissemination of new knowledge to participants takes

   place through, rather than after, the process.

4. It is dynamic and constantly evolving. (p. 17)

These features were also investigated among OAS sites as indicators of level of engagement in

terms of sustainability.

The A+ Essentials™ provide an eight-point framework that outlines a set of

commitments made by each school as they enter the OAS network. Designed as a reflective tool

enabling schools to self-assess their growth as an A+ School, the A+ Essentials™ continue to

guide the network as its overarching conceptual framework. In response to Gibbons' (1994) first

feature of sustainability, the application of this framework to problem solving among all

stakeholders was investigated. Data revealed OAS sites use the A+ Essentials™ to guide

problem solving to varying degrees.

Those schools that appear to be more transform-minded tend to use the A+ Essentials™

as the over arching decision-making framework in many endeavors. As an example of

engagement at this level, one principal (4.72, 2006) described the inclusion of the framework in a

district-mandated planning process:

We've got 5 site committees, and part of that's driven by your district and the site

plan that we have to provide for them. But even on our committee notes we try to

think how we tie that all into A+. As committees meet and as they plan what their committees are going to do and how we are going to do something, the A+ Essentials™ are at the bottom of the sheet and they are supposed to circle the essentials they felt like were to be addressed.

This same principal also described how the framework was used in other important decision-making among the faculty:

Well, I would just say that A+ provides the framework for what we do here and as we look at what we do here for example this summer, there was significant amount of us that went to *Responsive Classroom* training before we even decided to do that and look at that program, we met of course as a faculty and took time to see if it would...would that fall within the framework of A+? Would that support those essentials that we know are so important? All of my fellows were saying, "This is great! All of these things are also embedded into A+." So that was part of our decision to attend *Responsive Classroom* training, so I think that because we look at that as our framework, that it's uh helped drive our decision-making at our school. As well as our instructional practices, you know the experiences we're providing for our students; how they learn. I think A+ is a big part of how we're teaching our children.

This evidence suggests that the A+ Essentials™ can serve as a sustainable framework to guide problem-solving among school communities engaged at this level. Further, comments suggesting that all professional development activities within this school are evaluated through the OAS model indicate a level of coherence exceeding the norm in most school communities. Evidence

the A+ Essentials™ being applied in this manner and to this degree may help in determining a sites engagement level.

Data from other OAS sites indicate more inform-minded schools in the network apply the A+ Essentials™ in very little of their decision-making. These tend to be the same sites that seem to have resigned themselves to the idea that the PASS objectives are mandated curriculum. Actors within these schools are often not involved in collaborative decision-making:

> She [the counselor] believes that being an A+ school will hopefully improve
>
> testing scores and "student's expectations" since "monitoring lesson plans" will
>
> now be possible. This will "assist teachers in understanding if they are meeting
>
> pass objectives as they teach students." She states that she hopes to see more
>
> "carry-over" from grade to grade "ensuring objectives" are being met. She hopes
>
> in the future that…teachers "won't have to catch them (the students up" when it is
>
> time to take the "end of instruction exams." (Researcher field notes, 4.81, 2006)

Still, other OAS sites seem to compartmentalize the application of the framework to those aspects of the school they view as most suited to A+ and apply different frames for decision-making to those aspects that are not. These tend to be more reform-minded schools:

> She describes a conflict between a reading program and A+. A program
>
> consultant observed an art activity during reading time and argued that this was a
>
> violation of the program commitment to have dedicated reading time. I mention
>
> that I noticed more centers in classrooms than I have seen during previous visits.
>
> [The principal] explains that the centers are a result of the. . .program. (Interview
>
> transcript from Principal 2.9, 2005)

Again, the evidence of an outside program is apparent in both the teacher's language usage and instructional procedures. For example, the next class is invited to have a "celebration" because of the good behavior that they exhibited while entering the classroom. As with the previous class, the emphasis is upon singing along and moving to children's songs played on CDs. There is no evidence of academic content beyond encouraging social skills and on-task participation. And, as with the previous class, the majority of children are moving while only a subset are singing. (Researcher field notes music teacher 3.19, 2005)

A school's longevity within the OAS network does not appear to have bearing on the use of the framework as a problem-solving guide, suggesting it is a choice made by the stakeholders within each school community based upon how they view its usefulness. The degree to which a school applies the framework as a guide for decision-making may account for some of the between school differences among teacher opinions found in the quantitative data.

Gibbons (1994) suggests that another feature of sustainability is that solutions are many and they are evidenced both in theory and practice within the organization. Data support that those schools engaged at a transformative level apply multiple theoretical foundations to their problem solving. Three of the A+ Essentials^{TM} are primarily founded on contemporary learning theories. Those are Multiple Intelligence theory (MI) (Gardner, 1993), experiential learning theory (ELT) (Kolb & Fry, 1975; Rogers, 1969) and enriched assessment (EA) (Stiggins, 1987; Wiggins, 1993). Data analysis shows that OAS sites understand and apply these foundations at varying levels.

OAS sites engaged at the transform-minded level demonstrate an ability to apply all three of these theoretical foundations to the daily operation and decision-making within their community. Teachers in these schools constantly develop activities that apply all three foundations. Data from a classroom observation document this type of theoretical application:

> Their morning writing consists of writing a sentence about one person in their classroom. The sentence is written by the teacher and then copied down by the students. They are then asked to illustrate what that sentence means to them in the area provided above the sentence line. [This area is practically the whole page. This is invaluable for enriched assessment. The teacher cannot only evaluate handwriting ability but cognition and interpretation skills as well. Not to mention it gives the student the opportunity for free expression and allows the teacher to readily assess the MI's of her students.]. On this activity she tells me "We do this every morning." (Observation notes from teacher 4.57, 2007)

Data also show principal leadership is critical for engagement at this level to become sustained practice. Due to the current assessment driven climate in most schools, some teachers are reluctant to move beyond traditional instruction and practice. Even those who are highly trained in the learning theories and their application have concerns about attempting to change a culture supported by the administration. An A+ Fellow (3.33, 2005) stated, "It may be difficult (if not impossible) for teachers to view activity-based non-traditional teaching as valid when they are operating (and may feel compelled by administration) under a very narrow, high-stakes assessment paradigm." In a more transform-minded OAS site, a researcher noted that the principal openly supported a much different climate that endorsed a change in traditional practice through the application of these theoretical foundations:

She [the principal] said that because of what the teachers do in the classroom (with A+), kids have fewer struggles than they would have in earlier times. There are more opportunities for the kids to demonstrate their strengths and teachers are more open to the variety of ways kids can demonstrate their learning. Teachers know they have permission and an expectation to evaluate student knowledge in different ways. This approach works with accelerated, middle level, and free-and-reduced lunch kids. (Interview transcript from principal 3.4, 2005)

There are OAS sites that address some but not all of the theoretical foundations available to them through implementation of the A+ Essentials™. Most OAS sites demonstrate an application of MIT, and it is common among the OAS sites to see references in the building to the theory. Students and teachers use language that suggests a shared understanding. It is not uncommon for OAS sites to engage in "MI nights" where parents and other community members are invited to the school and are informed of the theory and its application to the faculty's practice. Similarly, there are many references in the data to applications of experiential learning. Students are often engaged in activities that require them to get out of their desks and move or otherwise actively engage with the subject matter. This will be discussed on more detail in the following section.

It appears that schools operating at a more reform-minded level do not address enriched assessment as completely as the other two foundations. These OAS sites openly acknowledge they are in need of help to understand this in theory and application:

That's [enriched assessment] something our teachers always ask for more information on. That is something that we're needing more, more information,

more samples. And they're trying to do this, but they're always wanting more.

(Site coordinator 4.59, 2006)

The teachers have a hard time with this [enriched assessment] because they need

something tangible, but they are becoming more comfortable with it little by little;

the teachers question how to use enriched assessment and still be fair and

objective. (Site coordinator 3.21, 2005)

Faculty and administration at more inform-minded sites are not as concerned with theoretical

foundations for practice. Data suggest they desire a predetermined activity list with step-by-step

instructions for application. There are clear indications that they believe there is a single

approach endorsed by OAS and they would like to know what that is. At the conclusion of an

interview in which the principal was asked about the application of these foundations, she spoke

of her faculty's frustration. The school needs "someone to come show us what to do; show us

how to do it (A+)." (Principal 4.66, 2007)

Gibbons' (1994) third feature of sustainability addresses the dissemination of knowledge

as a result of process rather than an artifact apart from process. This phenomenon may be best

studied in data concerning experiential learning as a primary feature of implementation. The

focus of these activities is students' active engagement within the learning process. Data support

the presence of experiential learning activities among all schools across all five years of

implementation. Data also show, however, that schools across the OAS network engage in

experiential learning endeavors to different degrees. Data from the 2006-07 school year were

examined for references to experiential learning. Because this was the latest year of

implementation, it was believed this would allow for the greatest opportunity for inclusion. Data

suggest that teachers within each school tend to engage in experiential learning activities to similar degrees as their colleagues. Those schools with more references to experiential learning also tend to be the schools that demonstrate more transform-minded engagement with A+ implementation. This suggests that engagement in experiential learning activities may be a product of the school culture in which a teacher works and that such cultures tend toward levels of engagement that are transform minded. It cannot be determined if the culture, the activities or the level of engagement lead to the others, but the data do show that all three exist in the schools that operate at this level of engagement.

Gibbons (1994) finally states that sustainable models are dynamic and constantly evolving. The dynamic nature of A+ Schools implementation has been most noted in the data from principal interviews concerning their views of A+ implementation its effect on their schools. Data suggest that many principals view A+ implementation as a constantly evolving process and value the dynamic nature of the framework:

> The most difficult challenge she sees is "keeping the initiative going. In any new thing there is a sense of excitement and strong energy. It is always the middle mile that is the toughest on the journey. And I feel in a lot of ways we are in the middle mile all the while recognizing there is no finish line. We are never going to have arrived, and that is the nature of our business. We are always going to be on the journey." She continues by saying that is why the Summer Institutes are invaluable because it reinforces and recharges the teachers to "keep the initiative going." (Interview transcript from principal 4.5, 2006)

> [A+ is] not a preconceived set of expectations and very visible things. These are
>
> visible, but you can look at the difference—I'm pointing to the 8 essentials—
>
> these are very open ended, these are guidelines, this is want we want to see
>
> happen. . . we want to see these 8 things, but how it implements and works in
>
> your school is going to be different that another school, so that's the difference.
>
> (Principal 3.31, 2004)

Leadership in more transform-minded OAS sites appear to view A+ implementation as whole

school endeavor and remark that the process of A+ implementation has evolved since its

inception in their school. Most importantly, they accept that implementation of the A+

framework will continue to evolve as the school changes and they value this as a strength in

framework.

There is evidence that some principals and faculty considered a more targeted A+

implementation of the A+ framework. These educators were initially attracted to OAS for very

specific and particular reasons. Many did not understand OAS as a whole school reform

initiative, and evidence demonstrates that some in this group have not changed this opinion even

after attending training. Initial attractors include the addition of arts to the curriculum:

> She understood that A+ was a music and arts integrated curriculum and will be
>
> very useful for counting, learning colors, singing. She said her children learn best
>
> using beads, color schemes, rhythms, engaging lessons. (Teacher 4.5, 2005)

> We wanted to move toward integrating the arts, just to change how we were doing
>
> things…. (Principal 4.28, 2005)

I love the arts. I had worked to secure and artist-in-residence each year. We were already going down that path. At that time we had music, and two half-days a week an artist would work with the fourth graders every so often. There was very limited art experience. I think it's [art education] important. (Principal 4.50, 2005) The faculty were led to believe that we would get more PE, music, art, (full time). That's why we bought in to A+. (Teacher 4.40.2, 2005)

He really likes the philosophy and mission of A+. Likes the idea of integrating arts into current curriculum. It sounds very positive and holds high standards. (Teacher 4.5.2, 2005)

Others targeted specific subjects they believed would be impacted by A+ implementation, while excluding others:

She said they became interested in A+ because they wanted to enhance their science and social studies programs and thought A+ would be a good way to do this. They are already doing well in math and reading areas. The faculty agreed to try this program. (Interview transcript from principal 4.5, 2005)

She [the teacher] said they were searching for an add-on to the school curriculum, especially something to help with social studies and science. We wanted to keep on doing the good things we're doing (mainly in reading and math) and just add to it. So far, it looks like a great tie-in and will work for us with what we're already doing. (Teacher 4.5.1, 2005)

The degree to which the faculty and administration view the application of the A+ Essentials™

to the whole school appears to be an additional indicator of sustainability. Those who tend to

compartmentalize its application and impact may be working at more reform-minded or inform-

minded levels.

These examples of the differences in the views concerning the nature of A+

implementation and its potential impact on the culture of the school support the data noting

differences among the schools and may suggest these differing views have an effect on the

sustainability of the initiative. Data support that those schools demonstrating all four features of

Gibbons et al. (1994) model are engaged with the A+ framework in an effort to transform their

schools. To the degree that schools vary from these features of sustainability, they tend to be

more information minded in their engagement.

Flexibility

Change is often part of any reform and a goal of these reforms is often to produce more

flexible environments (Smith & O'Day, 1990). The process of breaking down traditional

approaches and systems to allow for more flexibility is becoming a common occurrence in many

organizational settings. Common workplace changes include options to work from home via

technology or flexible hours allowing workers to meet individual schedules. Changes in

education for increased flexibility include redefining many aspects of common education

including the environment, instructional design, delivery of instruction, and assessment of

outcomes. Flexibility may allow schools to be more responsive to parents' wishes and students'

needs; may give teachers and administrators a stronger sense of purpose and responsibility; may

create models of innovation; and may encourage schools to use their resources more efficiently.

The range of strategies that promote flexibility can be divided into two broad categories: (1) those that are designed to apply to all schools; and (2) those that present individual schools, districts, and communities with options. The degree to which A+ schools manage the first category and become more flexible organizations within the second category appears to indicate their level of engagement with A+ implementation. For the purpose of this research, flexibility was therefore defined as the capacity of the school community to adapt to new, different or changing requirements from both external and internal forces.

It seems almost oxymoronic to address flexibility strategies that apply to all schools, as the process of applying strategies to all schools usually invokes compromises that result in more rigidity than flexibility. One such national initiative has been Title IX of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) as reauthorized by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). The act was signed into law in 2002 and has had an impact on A+ implementation. The focus of the act was to provide increased flexibility and local control for states and school districts, while emphasizing strong accountability for results. Authors of the bill suggest that it offers expanded options for parents of disadvantaged children, and supports teaching methods that have a solid scientific research foundation. Schools in the OAS network have worked to meet the expectations of this law and do appear to manage them in much the same fashion as other schools. There have been concerns, however, that the expectations of NCLB are not meeting the flexibility demands of individual school sites. "It is hard," as one principal stated clearly, "to balance No Child Left Behind with being an A+ school" (Principal, 2006). The scope of this legislation's impact is well beyond this portion of the report, but the reader must keep in mind that the expectations placed upon schools by this legislation have influenced implementation the A+ framework.

Quantitative analysis shows that school achievement indicators for the entire OAS population have improved over time (see Volume 3). While there can be no causal inference from these data, it can be assumed that, on a whole, implementation of the A+ framework does not interfere with meeting the expectations placed upon schools by NCLB. Further analysis of these data did reveal, however, significant differences between school sites. That these differences exist suggests an investigation of the elements impacting these differences may be fruitful. Since NCLB was the only overarching reform intended to apply to all schools and the focus of this reform was increased flexibility, elements of flexibility on each campus were investigated further as possible indicators of level of engagement within A+ implementation.

Changes in the school environment were examined as an indicator of flexibility in each school site. Data from site visits made by the research team indicate that some school settings demonstrate a great deal of flexibility. There were indicators that learning was taking place across curricula and that products of these engagements demonstrated understanding in multiple subject matters. One researcher related her reaction to items she found on display within the school:

> Around 9:45 a.m., I walked around the halls of [the school] and noticed an abundance of artwork, as well as projects reflecting experiential learning. Just outside of the fourth and fifth grade halls, there were shelves filled with 36 student generated "invertebrate exhibits." Each student's work included a replica of an invertebrate animal sculpted from clay on a paper or plastic plate. Each exhibit also included an index card on which the student provided a description of his/her animal. One example included, "My insect is a butterfly. A butterfly has three body parts. It's a arthropod. A butterfly usely [sic] when it lands lays one

egg. That is some information about my insect." Another example included, "I

have made a mollusk. It is a jellyfish. Jellyfish have poisonous stingers. They use

these stingers to catch it's [sic] food. You cannot see jellyfish sometimes.

Jellyfish are neat." (Observation notes from school 4.13, 2006)

The extent of flexibility in the educational settings among more transformation-minded school

communities appears to have empowered teacher decision making to be flexible in responding to

student needs. Teachers who address student learning beyond the boundaries of the subject

matter exemplify this in these settings. These teachers appear to find innovative ways to engage

students in their learning and the result in a very flexible and responsive learning environment.

Evidence also indicated some school communities were not as flexible in their defining

of educational setting. This might imply they are more information-minded in their level of

engagement. In some cases, it appears that these school communities engage in parts of the

framework for only short periods of time and then revert to familiar practices of isolated teaching

and learning. While no single piece of evidence can suggest that all student engagement is

affected in this way, it does appear that many instructional settings within these school

communities do not demonstrate the same level of flexibility as do the more transformation

minded school communities. One researcher (Observation notes from school 4.52, 2007) found

evidence to this effect on one of his visits to a school:

As I leave, I survey the halls and notice that there is only one new original display

in the halls that I have walked. The other display I pass I remember being there in

September. I just thought this was interesting to write down. Does this lack of

change illustrate resistance in some way or a lack of application?

Flexibility with the classroom was also investigated via instructional strategies employed by the teachers. Generally, more generative instructional strategies—those generated by the learner—demonstrate more flexibility than more supplantive strategies—those supplied by the teacher. Analysis of the data on instructional strategies reveals that the bulk of design is supplantive in nature, but some teachers in more transform-minded schools employed more generative strategies in their instructional design:

> Initial impressions are that the students as they finish are allowed to explore areas
> of the room for an activity that fits them well. All MI's (multiple intelligences)
> are readily present from my vantage point. There is intrapersonal with those
> reading alone on bean bags, interpersonal with those playing in groups,
> kinesthetic with those that are using building blocks or leap pad letters, visual
> with those that are looking at flash cards. This seems to be reinforcing their love
> of knowledge. There is music playing the entire time I am in the classroom. It is
> not a hindrance to the children; it is more for ambiance than function though. The
> smell in the room is also of some sort of scented candle or potpourri. It is quite
> pleasing. (Observation notes from teacher 4.57, 2007)

It appears that the climate and culture of more inform-minded schools strongly supports supplantive strategies. This may be due in part to testing pressure. One first grade teacher (4.105, 2007) proudly announced, "We practiced the writing test today, even though the students are 1st graders. We're trying to train them early." Observation notes from another inform-minded OAS sites suggest the climate of the school is having an impact on instructional design:

As I walked by numerous classrooms, I noticed that most of the teachers were

using traditional lecture, students working independently on reproducible

worksheets. . . .Only one classroom seemed to have students working in groups,

but I could not tell what the students were doing. I was interested in this class, and

while looking in, the teacher walked to the door, closed it, and walked back in. It

seemed to me that most of the teachers, although they were pleasant as indicated

by a mild "hello," were not very welcoming or open to my visit. (Observation

notes from school 4.36, 2006)

Again, no evidence can say beyond question that student needs were not being met, but this case

appears to indicate a more rigid educational setting. Coupled with other data, this might indicate

a school community that was less engaged in the implementation of the A+ framework.

Flexibility in forms and uses of assessment also appear to be a reliable indicator of a school

community's level of engagement.

Flexibility in the ways in which students are assessed was also investigated. The

definition and application of enriched assessment has proven to be a challenge to many OAS

sites. As a part of the A+ Essentials™, enriched assessment is defined as "on-going, designed for

learning, used as documentation, a reflective practice, helps meet school system requirements,

and is used to self-assess by teachers and students" (Oklahoma A+ Schools®, 2009). Evidence

shows that the previously mentioned issues with NCLB appear to have exacerbated the issue

with some schools flexibility in making use of alternative forms of assessment. Outcomes on

common assessments do still tend to drive many of the instructional decisions on some OAS

sites, and quite often the demands placed upon school districts to show adequate yearly progress

is extreme. With direct connections to funding and school governance, it is easy to understand

how school administration can become preoccupied with these data. When asked about how the site addresses and uses assessment, one principal (4.83, 2006) stated,

> When I formed site committees this past year, there is a committee now that is devoted to learning and assessment. . . .We're starting to take a hard look at how our students are performing on statewide assessments, which I think in turn, drive your individual classroom assessments. And then giving teachers collaborative time to put some common assessments in place that let us know how students are doing along the way.

There are OAS sites that appear to work from a more flexible definition of assessment. Some teachers at these sites appear to have made a shift in their thinking not necessarily about what they are assessing but how they are assessing. One researcher (observation notes from teacher 4.81, 2006) responded to an interview with a third grade teacher about assessment:

> She [the teacher] offered many examples to illustrate this philosophy such as having students act out a story to demonstrate comprehension rather than simply answering questions. Students also made masks to assist in learning their multiplication tables; these were displayed around the room. The last example she provided was also seen on a classroom wall. Each day the students write in their journal a quote that is written on the board. They are then asked to reflect and analyze what the quote means to them.

Those who have worked to address the forms and uses of assessment appear to have struggled getting the type of information they believe will help them. There are a number of references in

the data confirming that school communities are interested in enriched assessment but are unclear on its implementation.

Given all the mitigating factors mentioned above, the flexibility in uses and forms of assessment may not be a reliable single indicator of engagement. Considered with the other data, however, those schools that are demonstrating multiple forms and uses of assessment appear to be more transformation minded sites.

Ownership

Ownership has long been an issue in public education. Questions of who owns the curriculum, what values should drive decision making, and the appropriate roles for parents and community members have been and will continue to be debated in many educational systems. The ferocity of this discussion has most recently been brought to the forefront through the No Child Left Behind legislation. Abernathy (2007) states,

> Because the U.S. Constitution, unlike the state constitutions, contains no
> provision for or guarantee of an education, the federal government can directly
> order a state or its public schools only to do (or not do) very little. Instead, the
> federal government uses money for leverage, much as it did when it tied
> transportation funds to setting a fifty-five mile-per-hour speed limit. Federal
> funding represents about 7-8 percent of total public school revenues—not
> determinative but hardly trivial. Any state that chooses to opt out of NCLB—none
> have yet done so—stands to lose a significant amount of scarce money. It is not
> an easy bargain, however. By taking federal money, states commit themselves to

implementing a massive and detailed testing and sanction regime, resulting in

annual assessments of most students. The results of these tests will have

significant consequences for any school or district that does not meet the state's

standards of proficiency. As in the case with the tests themselves, states design

many of the details about how these tests are used but must have their plans

approved by the federal government.

It has been in this environment of contested ownership that OAS implementation has taken

place.

Dirkswager and Kolderie (2002) recognize that external forces affect ownership but

discuss the subject in terms of the individual school site. In this they recognize, at least

implicitly, the social powers at work within a typical school setting and note that school

communities exhibiting certain characteristics tend to demonstrate greater ownership of the

processes and products of their endeavors. Perhaps more importantly, they promote several ideas

that help define educational ownership. First among these ideas is that school communities

exhibiting greater levels of ownership recognize and address the written and hidden curriculum

at work within the culture of the school. Both are considered in the decision-making processes

with the school community. Such endeavors develop a culture and a leadership commitment that

supports creativity, achievement and accountability. As a result, Dirkswager and Kolderie

believe communities that sense greater ownership of their work are "caring, creative,

communicative, self-reflective, celebratory and purposeful" (p. 15).

In addition to these attributes, Dirkswager and Kolderie list seven characteristics of

school communities that demonstrate educational ownership. They note that power within these

sites resides within the members—teachers, students and local administrators—who make meaningful decisions concerning the educational endeavors of the school community. Ownership is also exhibited through collaborative work that is coordinated through shared professional knowledge. Activities such as curriculum development and assessment are worked on communally, giving all stakeholders equal input. Moreover, school communities demonstrating ownership exercise control by extensively meeting the needs of the children in their charge. Other controlling forces are placed in a secondary role. Parents and children within these school communities have a role in the coordination of activities. Functional units within the school setting are charged only with supporting the needs of the teachers who define those needs in contextually appropriate ways. In addition, Dirkswager and Kolderie contend that leaders within these communities are successful only when they are perceived as serving the children and teachers. These communities also exercise some control over the selection of additional members to the site. These attributes and characteristics have been the subject of investigation in this research. The extent to which these are present and at work within each school site may help determine a site's level of engagement with the A+ process.

Power structures within OAS school settings take on a number of different forms. Evidence of these differences can be found in both the quantitative and qualitative data. Student responses on the *My Class Activities* survey revealed that Oklahoma A+ students found their schoolwork *Enjoyable*, *Interesting*, and *Challenging*. They reported, however, lower levels of *Choice* in their schoolwork indicating that, in some cases, students are not given the power to make certain decisions within the classroom. Additional analysis showed statistically significant differences exist among school sites indicating that level of choice is significantly different

among the various OAS school sites. Identifying and understanding these differences may help determine a school community's level of engagement.

Qualitative data support and may illuminate how these differences manifest themselves in the day-to-day operations of each OAS school site. Those sites that indicate a more transform-minded level of engagement tend to give students the opportunities to make meaningful educational choices. A student (4.11, 2006) from such a school site talked about his favorite part of school. He stated, "We get to do a lot of science projects with electricity. We had to try to make a parallel circuit. We couldn't get it to work, so we made up different kinds of circuits. It was a fun way to learn." Data also indicate that educational decision-making is not only relegated to higher achieving students. Another student (4.124, 2006) claimed, "I think the best thing [about our school] is that they give everybody an equal chance like the people who don't get good grades, they get a chance and get to make their own decisions" Statements like this are typical across subjects and teachers in more transform-minded school communities.

Data also indicate power structures in these transform-minded schools support teacher decision making as well. Teacher interviews in these settings noted two issues they believed to be critically important within the structure of their school. They make decisions based upon what is best for the students and they make decisions in collaboration with other teachers. The following are typical responses from faculty at a transform-minded school:

It [A+] is very much part of everything that we do. It's really in-grained; we don't have to think about it much. We just do it….It is a major consideration when we plan and make decisions for our students….We do a lot more with collaboration. The biggest change is that we really do get to meet together as teams and with

groups of teachers from across the school to accomplish goals. (Teacher 4.59, 2007)

In contrast, data also suggest that all OAS sites are not operating at this same level of engagement. In some sites, the power structure tends to be more vertical rather than horizontal with administration and others not in direct daily contact with students, making decisions for those who are. Some teachers at these schools have voiced concern about this decision making process:

> Mrs. X's comments echo what Mrs. Y told me in that specialists are being completely left out of the planning loop. [During our conversations last fall, Mrs. X was more optimistic about the potential for collaboration and developing a "more A+" approach to teaching across the entire faculty than Mrs. Y.]. I'm a bit surprised to hear her relate that faculty planning committees are no longer active. Her impression is that all decisions are being made top down—that there's little collaboration and that the principal is making all of the decisions about school-wide policy and activities. Mrs. X also notes that the parent MI nights have been discontinued. (Observation notes from school 4.84, 2006)

The lack of ability to enact what they believe is in the best interest of the students is common in the data from teacher interviews at schools with similar power structures. These data may indicate that these sites engage with the OAS process at a more Inform-minded level.

Ownership is also indicated in the data though references to collaboration. The extent to which faculty are able to share their professional knowledge in, what are perceived as, meaningful ways appears to indicate more transform-minded levels of engagement. There are

clear indications in the qualitative data supporting the notion that teachers not only value these exchanges, but understand that such collaboration is not typical in public education. One teacher (4.23, 2007) made this point, stating, "Here we share ideas, we're a team and bringing, sharing with each other unifies us a unit, instead of just being little kingdoms, keeping ideas to ourselves." The indication that they are part of a larger educational team that is interdependent upon its members is common among more transform-minded school sites.

A common practice for collaboration among OAS schools is the process of curriculum mapping. This process starts for all school faculties at the initial summer workshop and is continued throughout their school year. This process is modeled as a collaborative faculty effort by the OAS faculty and fellows who train and mentor each school faculty at the summer workshops. The extent to which this is continued after the initial introduction appears to also be a reliable engagement level indicator in terms of ownership. Data show varying levels exist across all OAS sites. When asked about the role of the A+ program in her school, one principal (4.8, 2006) replied that her faculty "utilize the curriculum mapping, with our music and art teacher, both, as a vital part of our building. They meet with our grade level teachers each week and collaborate on developing the curriculum for our building." Data clearly show that inclusion of "specials" teachers (most commonly music, art, and physical education) in a meaningful collaborative process occurs among schools that are most transform-minded. School sites that are engaged in a more reform-minded manner indicate they are working on ways to collaborate, but there are some issues preventing a complete exchange of professional knowledge around the curriculum. Such may be indicated in the following field note excerpt:

> Researcher: Can you give me specific examples of how any of the eight essentials
>
> (arts integration, experiential learning, MIs, infrastructure,

collaboration, curriculum mapping, etc.) have changed since becoming A+?

Teacher A: I think we align and that it's [the curriculum is] cross-curricular.

Teacher B: We do a lot of horizontal; it's really good. We don't have vertical.

Teacher A: We still have the problem of time with vertical alignment. We did do it, and we were starting to make progress with vertical alignment, but then there was no time.

Teacher C: We still fill out sheets so the specials know what we are doing. (Interview notes from school 4.12, 2007)

Data also show some OAS sites have not achieved a means for meaningful exchange of professional knowledge to occur, and collaborative curriculum mapping has not yet been put in practice. School communities for which this is the case tend to engage at a more Inform-minded level. They may know of the importance of the endeavor, but actual practice in the way faculty and administration engage each other in the process of doing school has changed little. The following illustrates a school faculty engaged at this level:

Researcher: How are things going related to A+ this year?

Teacher A: Doesn't go really at all for me. [From this first item, this teacher seemed defensive and antagonistic regarding A+ by her crossed arms, stoic face, and tone of voice.]

Teacher B: I try to incorporate some of it. We have to do a performance "Rise

and Shine" that came from GE [Great Expectations]. When we have

to do our performance, we incorporate it [A+] more then. I don't do

a lot of that daily. Teaching lower grades we probably do more than

we realize. I just don't plan for it.

Teacher 1:   The only thing I noticed is that people write on the chalkboard what

they are doing. [This teacher referenced a chalkboard in the teachers'

workroom where teachers can share what they are doing regarding

A+.]

Teacher 2:   I don't collaborate very well. Like I haven't told the music teacher

what I'm doing when I could. To tell you the truth, my class is so far

behind. Half of mine are a year or half a year behind. I spend all of

my time trying to get them caught up. (Interview notes from school

4.25, 2007)

Placing student needs at the center of concern has also been cited as an indicator of

ownership (Dirkswager & Kolderie, 2004). Data indicate that many OAS sites cite the inclusion

of multiple intelligence theory in helping them accomplish this within the classroom. Teachers

and administrators in more transform-minded schools often refer to student needs first when

talking about the impact of A+ on their school site:

I think with A+, what it does for us when you look at the Multiple Intelligences

with the children and you try to teach children based on their needs, they know

that. They know you're looking at them, they know you care about them, they

know you understand them. They perform for you because they know they're

understood and cared about. A+ is part of that networking and support that helps

kind-of establish the climate. (Principal 4.72, 2006)

Data indicate these considerations are also present among faculty at more transform-minded

OAS sites. The following notes were written in response to a researcher interview with an A+

site coordinator. Since coordinators are classroom teachers, this may indicate faculty views on

this topic as well:

> On the strengths of A+, she sees "Teaching the kids the multiple intelligences" as
>
> a great strength. Letting students know "some kids are great at some things and
>
> other kids are great at others." She also notes that the other students are more
>
> willing to help in their strong areas to aide other students in their weaker areas.
>
> (Interview notes from school 4.5, 2006)

There are no data indicating that any OAS site has made an attempt to exclude student needs

from decision making. However, some administrators and teachers at more reform-minded or

Inform-minded schools have not indicated that student needs are initially at the center of their

decision-making process. Responses among administrators and faculty at these sites tend to

indicate that teacher concerns or instructional design are considered before student needs.

Nonetheless, in doing so, these sites do not ignore student needs. The indication is only that

student needs do not drive the initial decision-making process. The following excerpt indicates a

principal's concern with assessment and instructional design:

> On the changes in the school since A+, she notes "We always did a lot of A+.
>
> And so there has been a gradual change—we come up with more creative

assessments." She thinks the teachers have learned to trust the system to allow

them to break the chains of the textbook to teach the required curriculum.

(Interview notes principal 4.5, 2007)

Some may view this distinction as minimal, but the point must be made that the order in which

student needs are considered in the process of making decisions is an indicator of where

ownership is believed to reside. Those who place other considerations at the center of thinking

appear to view other entities as the primary owners of the curriculum. Those who place student

needs at the center prior to other considerations appear to view the students as the primary

owners of the curriculum. This view of curriculum as a living body of knowledge appears to be

especially prevalent in more transform-minded schools.

Ownership is also exemplified in some OAS sites in the roles afforded to parents and

students in the coordination of activities within the learning environment. Those sites that are

engaged at a transform-minded level tend to view parents as equal partners in the process of

education and empower them to make decisions that affect both the processes at home and at the

school site. Some educators at these sites consider parental input and direction as they design

learning activities:

The teacher set up the parameters for the project, and most followed the

directions, not all. The teacher claimed, "That's a good thing—it shares schooling

in a positive way at home. Mom or Dad or whoever could have some input in and

spend time with their kiddo doing it." (Teacher 4.38, 2007)

Educators at other transform-minded school sites note that sharing information on

multiple intelligences with parents has had positive effects in supporting parental decisions

concerning student learning. It appears that these teachers may be developing a purposeful culture that informs parents of their child's preferred learning styles, relying on parental partnership to enhance student achievement in the classroom:

> The very active parents are more interested in what's going on and how we are reaching their children. They can impact how I think my child is more auditory. They can be involved no matter what. They can be more involved when working with their students at home. I've had parents tell me that they have changed how they work with their children at home knowing how their kid learns. (Teacher 4.106, 2006)

Some more transform-minded OAS sites have gone as far as developing resources that bring parents onto the school sites. This process appears to not only establish a learning center for interested parents but also develops a partnership with parents on a collegial level. One principal (4.83, 2006) described this development:

> We're in the process of setting up a parent resource room. We have a space, we have it set up; I've got a parent working who's been very gung-ho and proactive on trying to get funding for our parent resource room. Really it's just to kind of pay her salary to oversee it, work it. We're getting that in place, we've talked to parents about that.

Other OAS sites that tend to be more reform-minded report the need to develop more meaningful partnerships with parents. School officials at these sites tend to speak of educating parents about the ways they can help their children. Most communication appears to be one way—from school to parents. There is some recognition that parental input is valuable, but there

does not appear to be any mechanism in place for parents to be involved in educational decision-making. Most parental involvement at these sites is to help with non-instructional activities. A principal (4.5, 2006) at one of these sites elaborated:

> I would like to get more parental involvement specifically in terms of A+. It has
>
> been a growing process in educating the parents in what A+ means. I have handed
>
> out the A+ information at PTA meetings, disseminated the information though the
>
> monthly newsletter and spoken with parents informally about the initiative. I
>
> believe the support in A+ will continue to grow as awareness for the initiative
>
> continues to grow. Right now parents help with A+ projects such as the Art
>
> Auction and whenever a teacher asks, they generally come to the aid of the
>
> teachers.

The ways in which the functional units of the school support the needs of the teachers has also emerged as an indicator of ownership level within an OAS site. Due to the varied structures within each school site, it is difficult to cite specific activities that have been observed across the OAS network in terms of functional unit support. Data do support, however, common issues that appear to affect this process. The most commonly cited issue is planning. It appears that finding common planning time for teachers of all subjects and levels continues to be a concern in many OAS sites. Some more transform-minded sites have implemented some non-traditional approaches to address this issue. Structures that address the unique needs of the faculty are implemented and valued by those involved. Statements like the following are common in data from these sites:

There're other things I've done with them. I've put in vertical and horizontal alignment day on our last staff meeting of the month. Everyone stays in the library so they can team and align up and down and with the specials. That's been really good. (4.72, Principal, 2006)

She credits that giving the teachers more planning time (the block schedule on Thursdays and Fridays) is a good step. (Principal 4.45, 2006)

Time is our only limitation. We could always use more time. But all the structures are there so we can be more successful. [Our principal] makes sure we have success through those structures. (Teacher 4.59, 2006)

By their own admission, other sites have not been quite as successful in addressing this issue. Some appear to be experimenting with ideas that have not yet met their needs. Often, outside issues like district or state mandates, are cited as the reason the solution has not been forthcoming:

From a scheduling standpoint and a district curriculum standpoint, it is difficult to get a viable schedule in place that can truly support total collaboration of the entire faculty. However, she says it is important even if it is through e-mail to have constant communication/collaboration with the faculty. (Principal 4.5, 2006)

At the beginning we tried to have all of the teachers at the same grade level have the same plan time so that they could collaborate. Due to an increase in requirements for more physical education time, our ability to do this is limited. To alleviate some of the problem, our counselor has tried every other month or every

month she tries to keep all of the students so that the "special teachers" can plan

together and the "other" teachers can plan together. We try to do that at least

twice in a semester, so they can do vertical planning. (Principal 4.53, 2006)

Of importance here is that some OAS sites appearing to be engaged at a transform-minded level

value the support of the OAS administration and professional development. These appear to

become additional functional units that support teacher needs within these schools. In response to

an interview question concerning the benefits of OAS membership, one principal (4.72, 2006)

stated:

They provide a wonderful support system. The training, they're coming, that

afternoon to talk to us about curriculum alignment. I have eleven new teachers, so

to talk to them about that and learn how to get that started and know how

important that process is and actually walk them through the steps as well as to

remind the other teachers to be focused and how important that is. In fact, I have a

list of different professional development topics that they will do, so that's really

nice to have as a part of the system and they don't charge us to do that. They will

also come any time like for staff meetings or anytime, I know I can call them

anytime. It's just a great networking and support system.

While these services are available to every OAS site, data show that some sites have not

requested use of workshops or other support. Those sites that tend to be more inform-minded

may not view OAS administration a part of their school's functional unit support system. The

ways in which school sites engage with OAS administration and take part in the professional

development provided by the same, appear to indicate level of engagement in terms of ownership.

Two additional indicators of ownership are present in the data. Dirkswager and Kolderie (2004) state that sites demonstrating high levels of ownership define successful leaders as those who are perceived as serving the needs of teachers and children. Additionally, they state that these sites also exercise control over how new members are selected. Many different leadership styles and strategies have been cited in the data. Many of the more transform-minded sites view leadership success in terms of how well the teachers and students are supported:

"[Our] principal is really good about knowing the teacher's limitations and that they can't do everything" (Teacher 3.3, 2005)

"When this principal first came, people were transferring out of the school; now kids are wanting to transfer back in. Parents say my children have never been so happy as they are here. They love coming to school every day" (Parent 4.16, 2007)

Often, when principals from these sites talk about their decisions, they frame it in terms of student and teacher success. One principal (2005) stated how she views her duties: "I try to be supportive if 'this didn't work' or if 'this kid is driving me crazy.' A lot of times they [the teachers] just need to be heard. Most times they have solutions themselves" (Principal 3.13, 2005).

In more reform-minded or inform-minded school sites, leadership retains a more top-down approach. Often, data suggest that leadership believes there is an approved approach to implementation and their objectives are to help make sure the teachers and students at their

schools learn how to operate in this manner. The following is an excerpt from field notes

documenting such an approach at one OAS site:

Researcher: How would you define your role in the A+ Schools process?

           [Note: the Principal expressed that her role was to see that the

           teachers were "trained the A+ way."]

Principal: I participate in the A+ training. We [she and the assistant principal]

           monitor to make sure the teachers implement what they learned

           [pause] in small increments.

Principal: Last year there was big turnover, about 20 people. About half needed

           to go [said with a chuckle]. A+ Schools is very good for us. We all

           like that training. (Principal 4.28, 2005)

Concerning the selection of new members to the site, data support there are two types of

approaches to the process. Among more transform-minded sites, administrators take a proactive

approach and address teacher buy-in to A+ implementation during the interview. Many state that

prospective teachers' willingness to adapt their teaching to OAS expectations and the A+

Essentials™ are part of the hiring process. The following excerpts support this conjecture:

I inquire about new hires and how [the principal] approaches A+ buy in. She

explains that this is addressed during the interview: "If I have a choice of faculty,

that's the first thing I talk about." (Principal 3.48, 2006)

The coordinator explains that new faculty is expected to buy-in to the A+ process.

During the interview, we question them about all that. We don't hire them [if they

do not buy in to A+]. . . .As a matter of fact, the principal has a form that we use

during the interview. (A+ coordinator 3.9, 2005)

At sites where this is not the case, some have stated there are possible issues with engagement

from these new teachers. Issues of motivation and climate within the school are also brought to

question. It appears established teachers within these communities do not feel a similar level of

ownership as do their colleagues from sites that address teacher engagement at the interview.

Researcher field notes from a teacher interview cite this issue:

The teacher does not believe the principal has been stressing A+ with new hires.

She's concerned that these new faculty members may be difficult to motivate to

change their teaching approach unless there is a clear mandate from the principal

to do so. (Interview notes from teacher 4.32, 2005)

These data pertaining to ownership appear to support its use as an engagement level indicator.

Combined with other assessments, measures of ownership levels across OAS sites may provide

useful information in determining a school sites level of engagement and help administrators

seeking to change a site's level of engagement.

Empowerment

Since the 1980s, the term empowerment has been included in most discussions on school

reform (Czubaj, 1999). This term has had many broad definitions that most often include

decentralization of school decision-making and student choice. However, owing to the structure

of OAS implementation, the current research will address this term differently, investigating it in

relation to the social power structure within the educational organization. In this sense,

empowerment is defined as a group's capacity to make effective choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Alsop, Bertelsen, and Holland (2006) state that "this capacity is primarily influenced by two sets of interrelated factors: agency and opportunity structure" (p. 10).

Agency can be defined as a group's ability to make purposeful choices (Alsop et al., 2006). Care should be taken to not equate agency with empowerment, as opportunity structure has influence on a group's ability to act. The institutional context within which the actors operate, influences their ability to transform agency into action In essence, the institution determines the "rules of the game" and has influence on the effectiveness of each group's agency. Asset endowment—the amount of economic, social and political power—also impacts a group's agency (Alsop et al., 2006).

Two groups of assets are of most interest to the current study. First are the measured assets which include—but are not limited to—academic achievement, student attendance, and discipline referrals. Within the educational institution, high levels of these assets translate to power and, therefore, increased agency. The second group includes those psychological assets that transform actors to agents. In other words, the ways in which agency is increased for those who traditionally have little or no power.

Opportunity structure is determined by the institution's ability to establish social constraints for human interaction and choice (North, 1990). These institutional structures are both formal and informal in nature. Formal structures might include administrative structures, state mandated curriculum, and OAS faculty/fellow organization. Informal structures may include interactions between teachers, students, administrators and parents where understood

norms direct behavior. Of particular interest to this study was the degree to which the opportunity structure influences choice. The degree to which "rational choice" was constrained by social circumstances, and rules of the OAS site was investigated. Additionally, the acceptance of "naturalized choice"—that "this is the way it has always been done" and is therefore the only choice as a course of action—was also investigated in the data.

Alsop et al. (2006) provide a useful framework for organizing the data and studying the phenomenon of empowerment with OAS. They state, "A prerequisite to empowerment is an opportunity structure that allows people to translate their asset base into effective agency though more equitable rules and expanded entitlements" (p. 16). They then suggest three direct measures of empowerment: "(1) Whether an opportunity to make a choice exists (existence of choice); (2) whether a person or group actually uses the opportunity to choose (use of choice); and (3) whether the choice brings about the desired result (achievement of choice)" (p. 17). The data were examined according to these direct measures.

An investigation of asset endowment revealed that, on a whole, OAS sites had increased levels of agency through several measured assets. Quantitative data reveal that when OAS sites are considered as a single entity, these sites have improved academic achievement across all levels. Oklahoma Core Curriculum Tests (OCC) scores indicate students in the majority of OAS sites have generally performed at or above state averages. In addition, OAS sites consistently outperformed their counterparts within their districts and the state on the Academic Performance Index (API). Comparison of Average API scores for OAS sites with their district (all district schools, including A+) and state averages from the 2002-03 through 2005-06 academic years reveals higher scores for A+ schools. School Report Card data also indicate relatively high rates

of parental involvement and relatively low absentee and suspension rates for students (see Volume 3 for details).

These measured assets afforded OAS members increased agency among some stakeholders. These are often the primary data considered by the opportunity structure composed of those controlling much of the economic and political power needed to enact change. Thus, the increased agency and opportunity structure among the state legislature contributed to greater empowerment across the entire population. Evidence of this was the inclusion of OAS in the Oklahoma state legislative budget for the past several years. The OAS garnered public funding has also led to increased agency among other funding organizations.

The importance of these measured assets and their impact on OAS should not be underestimated. However, all OAS sites have not achieved at the same levels in terms of these assets and the differences between sites are statistically significant. Data related to psychological assets were investigated to better understand these between-site differences. These assets may also serve as engagement level indicators for individual OAS sites.

Qualitative data relating to the agency of arts educators in OAS sites revealed wide variance among sites. Those sites that may be more transform-minded appear to not only view the arts as essential, but value the arts educator's expertise in addition to that of the regular classroom teacher. Data from these sites revealed that faculty value their own limited expertise in the various art forms but are especially empowered to collaborate with their arts specialist colleagues to develop integrated lessons that inform learners in both subjects. One classroom teacher (4.40, 2006) related her experience:

The music teacher and I have done this together a lot. I think she was the first one to do the A+ stuff. She gradually is getting the rest of us to come on board. It's been great for me. I've always connected literature and articulation. Now we're adding music and the movement. Connecting the work to sounds was the next step. It makes it more fun for the kids.

Even when it may not be possible to collaborate with arts specialist colleagues, it appears that non-arts teachers in these transform-minded cultures desire their students to have more specific art instruction. Often these teachers value the learning from these activities, but note their lack of discipline specific knowledge and technique as a detriment to student learning. A kindergarten teacher (3.41, 2006) expressed these desires for her students:

I'd like for the kids to be taken out for art. The only art they get is what we [the regular kindergarten teachers] give them. They do not get any outside art time. I have to think of one or two art things a week. I went to [an A+ Fellow's] class and got some great ideas, but they [the students] need more.

This teacher's willingness to include several visual art activities a week and attend workshops or ideas speaks to the value she places art instruction. Her admittance to "have to think" of ideas speaks to her lack of specific arts-based knowledge. Many teachers in transform-minded schools appear to share similar concerns.

In more inform-minded OAS sites, arts educators do not enjoy the same agency. Often they are included in a group of teachers referred to as "specials." Teaching visual art, music or physical education, these educators and their subjects are viewed differently than the subjects

and teachers in the "regular" classroom. One A+ coordinator (4.84, 2007) expressed her concerns

of this view during an interview:

> She believes that the view of specials as external to the teaching mission—just
>
> someone to provide release time for the other teachers is "the norm." She also
>
> acknowledges that this view is not one-sided on the part of the grade-level
>
> teachers and that special teachers are also contributing to this culture.

It also appears that the art educator's agency is undercut at these sites by some who believe that

specific knowledge and technique are not necessary for meaningful art integration. Another A+

coordinator (3.1, 2006) stated,

> I think A+ has helped some of the teachers who don't do much art to be more
>
> aware of it. I still hear teachers saying: I don't know how to do art. They think
>
> because they don't have a specific talent they can't do it. I tell people all the time
>
> that I taught myself how to draw. I play music, classical, when the kids are
>
> working in the class. It is amazing how this helps students, especially EDD kids,
>
> they begged me: put the music on, put the music on.

That the activity of playing "classical music" in the background as students work is considered

"doing art" may be of concern for music educators. While this passage supports the agency of

the classroom teachers who are enjoying additions to their classroom routines, it also indicates a

lowered agency for arts educators within this culture.

Quantitative data support the differences found between school sites. Results from the

Teacher Opinion Survey (see Volume 3) reveal that while teachers in OAS sites held favorable

attitudes about arts in education, arts integration, and teacher collaboration, significant between school differences did occur. Barry (2009) remarks,

> Teachers in those schools that had achieved more comprehensive integration of the A+ way of thinking and doing (based upon observations, interviews, and other data) expressed consistently higher opinions about the value and level of collaboration within their schools in comparison with teachers in schools where A+ is still largely viewed by principals and teachers as merely an add-on program.

It is also interesting to note that of the four scales on the survey (*Positive Impact of the Arts, Collaboration, Teacher as Artist, and Arts as a Separate Discipline*), *Teacher as Artist* recorded the lowest means. This may suggest that non-arts educators involved in arts integration recognize that their arts-education colleagues possess knowledge and skills different from their own. Combined with the high values non-arts educators place upon the impact of the arts, their desire for collaboration and their recognition of the arts as a worthy separate discipline, this can be a very positive result for increased agency among arts educators in these environments.

Agency among classroom teachers within transform-minded OAS sites appears to be high. These teachers report support for creative teaching:

> On the benefits of the A+ network, they say it has empowered creative teaching and increased the goals of creative teaching. I also see teachers trying to collaborate much more than before, using collaboration as a tool and a strength to benefit the students. I have seen changes. They are more comfortable and less resistant. (Principal 4.5, 2006)

Many also report enjoyment and freedom in what they do in their classroom. "Most teacher(s) realize how much fun and freedom you have in HOW you teach—you can still teach the PASS objectives—and realize how much more the kids retain" (Teacher 4.23, 2007). Teachers in these environments also report increased self-efficacy in relation to trying new ideas in the classroom:

> I could attribute to A+ that I have more confidence so I will try more things with my kids. Stuff to try on the fly. We were reading about the Boston Massacre, I taped out stage directions for a stage, we put the actors on the stage, we cast it, etc. Where I'm comfortable with drama I do more stuff with that. And even with things I'm not comfortable with like visual arts, I try more than I would have without A+. (Teacher 4.118, 2007)

Principals at these sites report a change in teacher energy and motivation as well. "The impact on faculty has been noticeable," stated one principal. "A+ has truly given them permission to teach in philosophically compatible style. They already believe in certain methods (i.e., hands-on, MI approach), and teachers seem more excited about teaching" (Principal 3.4, 2005). It appears that many of these teachers believe they can make purposeful choices in their classrooms.

Among more reform-minded OAS sites, teacher agency appears to be waning in a culture that continues to view OAS implementation as an add-on program. One principal (2007) expressed her frustration with this view:

> I think some teachers understand A+ better. They understand it's not a separate entity than the curriculum. I have those who are good at integrating the arts and those who still feel that…they need to do book learning. I think the understanding that A+ is not separate [from the curriculum] is an important thing because they

value time. Teachers who already feel pressured by time don't see how they can add on something else. She expressed that these teachers just do not see how to integrate. (Principal 4.129, 2007)

Teacher and principal interview data from these sites suggest many value the foundations and approaches that OAS implementation brings to the school and their students. They acknowledge, however, that applying these beliefs is difficult:

> She [the teacher] said that she was "trying to keep A+ in mind" as she created her lesson plans. She said although this is her first year trying A+, she is "all for it." It is a learning process, however, that will take time to implementing. She believes A+ is a "helpful" program for the students. (Researcher field notes, 2006)

> She [the principal] stated that the teachers have to commit to being "on-board" with the philosophy of A+. She added that teachers can see the benefits, "but it is much harder to put into practice." (Observation notes from teacher 4.45, 2006)

These data suggest that for various reasons, teachers in these environments do not feel they can make purposeful choices in all that they do. These differences in teacher agency among OAS sites, may imply that it is a reliable indicator of engagement level.

Student agency was also considered as a measure of asset endowment among OAS sites. Quantitative data from the *My Class Activities* survey show that students across the entire OAS population find their schoolwork enjoyable, interesting, and challenging, supporting a heightened sense of agency. However, means for the responses on the *student choice* scale of this survey were somewhat lower suggesting that state mandated curriculum may have some impact on the

student agency. Further analysis of these data found significant between school differences implying that elements at individual OAS sites may affect student agency.

Qualitative analysis revealed that Multiple Intelligence theory (MI) is overwhelmingly cited as a support for student agency. Among schools new to the OAS network, the research team identified the use of MI terminology by actors at the site as one of the first signs of coherence. Artifacts found in the schools (posters, projects, and centers) often refer to "smarts"—language common at many OAS sites—and faculty members, as well as students, make use of these to demonstrate how each learns best.

An analysis of how MI was addressed and viewed among OAS sites revealed some interesting differences. Teachers in transform-minded sites often refer to MI as a difference maker in the culture of the school and a contributor to student efficacy:

> On the strengths of A+, she [the teacher] sees "teaching the kids the multiple intelligences" as a great strength. Letting students know "some kids are great at some things and other kids are great at others. I really see a difference in the confidence when I bring up the different intelligences. You just see their shoulders relax and that they feel that it is a safe environment." She also notes that the other students are more willing to help in their strong areas to aide other students in their weaker areas. (Observation field notes from teacher 4.5, 2006)

Data from these sites show numerous references to MI materials visible in classrooms. There are also references to what most school personnel title "MI nights" where parents are invited to the school and informed about MI and their child's "smarts." Some sites report activities to help

parents discover their smarts as well. Principals at these sites often reference the impact on students at school and at home:

> The principal explains that through A+, the Parent Night events have taken on greater meaning. "What we've found is the quality of parent participation is higher . . . so at home . . . they're starting to make connections now at home. They [the parents] can do more things with their children." The principal explains that through MI nights, parents are learning how to do activities with the children. (Observation notes from principal 3.9, 2006)

Additionally, students often cite their knowledge of MI as a source of self-actualization in both academics and in social standing:

> [The smarts] are important so you can learn about other people, and you can learn more. When you find out what somebody's best smart is you can target that. They have fun and it just encourages them—makes them have a lot of fun. It really helps when they encourage what they're best at. It motivates them.
> Let's say that there's somebody in your school who is not so cool or not so popular and doesn't get attention. Let's say you are cool. You can ask them what they're doing. You can find out if like they are body smart. You can start talking and they can fit in with you and they can be more fun. That's what has been going on a lot. Like at the beginning of the year, there was a new kid who didn't have friends. They were down low and now they have friends because people talked about what they were good at. Now they're pretty high. (Fifth grade student 4.19, 2007)

Emphasis on MI appears to support high levels of agency among students at these sites.

OAS sites that appear not to be engaged at the transformation level often report that they need to make more use of MI. They state that students are not informed of their "smarts" and that MI is used more for teacher planning. "MI is not talked about with the students. More . . . for the teachers to think about in their planning" (A+ Coordinator 4.3, 2005). Students at these sites appear to be uninformed about MI. A transcript from a student group interview (4.80, 2006) revealed the following:

> Researcher: "Have any of you heard of the smarts?" Only one student knew about the smarts.

> Student: "They use to have a poster board, like two years ago." This student remembered that he was body smart. No one else remembered.

Some school administrators elected not to employ MI, perhaps suggesting they were misinformed about the theory and it applications to education. One principal (4.8, 2006) stated the position of her faculty: "We, my staff and I, feel that labeling students as certain types of learners is misleading and hard to do. We feel that most students, especially at a young age, are still developing what type of learner they are." Regardless of why MI is not employed, it appears that in schools where students are not made aware of their "smarts," student agency is affected.

Data revealed that a third asset *endowment* was also present among OAS sites and may be an additional indicator of engagement level. Local decision making in terms of professional development was indicative of increased agency among OAS sites. Personnel at sites that appear to be transform-minded iterated the process and procedures they used to decide on the professional development they required. They also appear to value the ability to choose the topics for professional development at their sites:

We love their staff development…last year. . . .A+ (faculty/fellows) came in and

did a computer workshop for the students and teachers. The teachers raved about

how great it was and how well spent the time was when they were here. And they

helped them a lot. [I am] in the process of deciding what areas [we] would like to

have A+ staff development in this year. (Principal 4.86, 2007)

It appears that teachers and administrators at these sites believe they can make purposeful

choices in regards to their own professional development.

Data show that all OAS sites are granted this agency through the central A+

administration, but some have not elected to exercise its use. By their own admission, personnel

at these sites acknowledged this is an area in which they could be more engaged. They often cite

outside forces—institutional limiters—that impact these decisions:

A+ has been very clear about what they could do to support our school and have

been very supportive. I especially appreciated A+ staff's sensitivity to our unique

school situation. I have not really utilized the A+ Fellows as much as I could.

They have come once. I have not used Professional Development Day (from our

district) for this due to the emphasis on standardized test evaluations and

processes. (Principal 4.49, 2005)

The exercise of local decision making in terms of professional development indicates the

recognition of a unique agency among OAS school sites. The extent to which this agency is

exercised may serve as an indicator of engagement level.

As social institutions, schools often impose "rules" either explicitly or implicitly that constrain human interaction and choice. In doing so, these institutions function in determining the opportunity source for the educators, administrators and students involved. Opportunity structure among OAS sites was examined in terms of choices made regarding infrastructure and collaboration. Data reveal that differences exist between school sites in how decisions concerning scheduling and collaborative planning were made. References to why decisions were made suggest some were products of what the literature refers to as *rationale choice*—making decisions based only on what is best for the actors in the current situation—while others perpetuated the status quo through *naturalized* or *habitual choice*—this is the way it has always been done (Alsop et al., 2006). Data also suggest that curriculum mapping appears to serve as a formal opportunity source among some OAS sites and combined with the asset endowments (teacher agency, student agency, and local decision making) increases empowerment.

Among more transform-minded OAS sites there is evidence the interaction between agency and opportunity source supports a degree of empowerment that leads to desired outcomes. A particularly strong example of this interaction can be seen in the field note excerpt below:

> In regard to the eight essentials we asked what essential was the most difficult to implement and keep in place. Her response was infrastructure from the standpoint of plan time structure. "At the beginning we tried to have all of the teachers (grade level) have the same plan (time) so that they could collaborate." Due to an increase in requirements for more physical education time, she says this has limited their ability to do this. To alleviate some of the problem, [the principal] says, "Our counselor has tried every other month, or every month, she tries to

keep all of the students so that the 'special teachers' can plan together and the 'other' teachers can plan together. We try to do that at least twice in a semester, so they can do vertical planning." (Interview notes from principal 4.53, 2006)

Of particular interest in this example is the empowerment demonstrated in the administrator's decision making. After one outcome was apparently achieved—teachers planning together, the opportunity structure changed—more physical education requirements. By not accepting the naturalized choice imposed by new rules, this administrator made the rational choice to continue the process of collaborative planning by doing things differently than had been done previously. In doing so, her agency was increased and the interactions among her faculty remained intact.

Another example shows how the asset of local decision-making can lead to more empowered decision-making at some OAS sites. A principal (4.62, 2006) explains:

That's one thing [collaboration] our teachers have worked very hard on. Our resource teachers meet with each grade level and communicate about what is being covered. They post the units that are being covered. Music and P.E. have a harder time collaborating. They are given two release days, one in the fall and one in the spring. I pay for them to have a sub and they meet with each of the grade levels. In the spring, they plan for the fall and in the fall, they find out what the immediate needs are and what is coming up.

That the administrator did not allow the given opportunity structure to eliminate the chance for collaboration among all faculty, including music and physical education, demonstrates how making use of all assets to improve the interaction between agency and opportunity source can lead to desired outcomes. This principal's ability to make a local decision about bringing in and

paying substitute teachers so others can collaborate empowered the desired outcome and allowed all collaborative efforts to remain in place.

The following may be considered an example of less-empowered decision-making present in OAS sites that may be more reform-minded:

> On the difficulties of implementing A+, the principal notes infrastructure. From a scheduling standpoint and a district curriculum standpoint, it is difficult to get a viable schedule in place that can truly support total collaboration of the entire faculty. However, she says it is important even if it is through e-mail to have constant communication/collaboration with the faculty. She mentions that she has a meeting once a month that includes the entire grade level and the media specialist to coordinate curriculum for the month. Following this meeting, they make copies of the grade level plans and disburse them to all of the specialists, so they are all on the same page so to speak and can adapt those plans into their curricular framework. (Interview notes from principal 4.5, 2006)

Evident in this example are some normalized choices that affect the degree of empowerment and, therefore, the outcome. First is the choice that no schedule can be constructed so that all members of the faculty can plan collaboratively. Data show that a number of OAS sites have found solutions to this issue when faculty and administration are willing to make choices that may be very different than what has been made before. A more habitualized choice was made by this administrator when the "specialists" were excluded from the collaborative planning and then given copies of the grade level plans so they could include these grade level outcomes in their plans. This suggests that the knowledge and skills learned in these "special" classes are only to

serve the learning outcomes in the grade level classes. While few administrators would support this position outwardly, some may do so due to lack of empowerment in their decision-making.

There are additional examples demonstrating that some habitual choice is so implicit to an actor's manner of thinking, he or she does not notice its impact constraining decision-making and affecting empowerment. A researcher (4.66, 2007) documented such an account in the field notes:

> On challenges of A+, she [the principal] alludes to her earlier discussion of time limitations. She said, "figuring how to do what they (A+) wants us to do in 50 minutes" is the largest challenge. . . .She continues that they are trying to address this issue at the summer conferences saying "we have been very up front about that" regarding the time limitations. "The (A+ Executive staff) coordinators have been very helpful to try and help us and show us. . . ."

To some outside this situation, it may be evident that the time constraint placed upon A+ implementation in this situation is a construction of the administrator and could likely be easily eliminated. It appears that this habitualized choice of placing a 50-minute time limit on whatever activities are to take place is limiting the degree of empowerment that can be exercised by all actors (teachers and students) involved. Regardless of the assets that support the actor's agencies in this situation, the opportunity structure imposed by the habitual choice made by the administration is limiting the degree of empowerment to lead to a desired outcome.

The emergence of curriculum mapping as a formal opportunity structure among OAS sites is of particular interest in this study. As a primary activity at the A+ Summer Institutes, curriculum mapping may be the most time-engaged activity within initial OAS training. The

impact of this activity on OAS sites is varied and may help indicate a site's level of engagement in A+ implementation.

Among more transform-minded OAS sites, teachers and principals often refer to curriculum mapping as the means through which important information is exchanged:

> I've seen curriculum mapping more than anything. I've seen what kindergarten needs to do to prepare for first grade. I've seen more of that this year than in the past. That's the one thing we've been trying to get together more to discuss those types of things…what really is the basic things they [the students] need to know. (Teacher 4.24, 2007)

> When asked about the role of the A+ program in her school she [the principal] replied that they "utilize the curriculum mapping, with our music and art teacher, both, as a vital part of our building. They meet with our grade level teachers each week and collaborate on developing the curriculum for our building." (Interview notes from principal 4.8, 2006)

This information exchange is often not limited to school personnel, as parents at these sites are also informed as well and invited to participate in the interactions:

> I think it's easy for teachers coming in to be given things like a curriculum map so that they better understand A+. I do think we refer to them. . . .We also send the maps home to parents so that they can see what we're doing. Instead of giving a yearly map now, we give a nine weeks map. The yearly one was a bit overwhelming. Parents know they can send pics to school or come in and share

their experiences when they know what we're doing. Some parents want to come in and show travel pics for certain units. I always tell my parents to think of things they can send to school or share with the class. (Teacher 4.105, 2007)

Evidence shows that using this activity as an opportunity structure has increased the degree of empowerment perceived by most actors within these OAS sites. Teachers feel validated in their decision making as it is part of a collective process, and desired outcomes have been achieved. The impact is often immediate for those that use curriculum mapping in the process of making choices within their school sites:

> This is the first year we have had a curriculum map and it has worked well. We did it over the summer, but it has been revisited during the year for adjustments. The map is important to teachers and as a result of the curriculum mapping the fourth and fifth grade classes had more arts integration. (Teacher 3.71, 2005)

The potential power of curriculum mapping may be most significantly demonstrated through its ability to empower faculty to recognize the habitual choices they have made. When groups of teachers plan in this manner, choices are often called into question and those that cannot be rationally supported may be exposed as less useful or even harmful. During an interview, a principal (4.53, 2006) explained how curriculum mapping uncovered an issue between two groups of teachers and then empowered a solution to the problem:

> On this teamwork, she says the subsequent "curriculum mapping has been wonderful to help draw them [the teachers] together to see what everyone is supposed to teach." She illustrates this point by telling an anecdote about how second grade thought they were supposed to teach cursive and third grade thought

they were supposed to and once they got together they realized the redundancy

and made cursive exclusive to third grade which allowed the second grade

teachers more time to focus on other areas.

Those OAS sites that choose not to engage in curriculum mapping report more instances

of confusion about what is taking place in their school and about A+ implementation as a whole.

A teacher interview (2006) from a site not as engaged in curriculum mapping as those noted

above illustrates this point:

> [Concerning] collaboration, she mentions a faculty meeting that occurs once a
>
> week but does not mention curriculum mapping or collaboration as something
>
> that regularly occurs. I followed up asking who the A+ Coordinator was and she
>
> was unaware of whom that was or if they had one. (Interview notes from teacher
>
> 4.58, 2006)

As s result, actors within these school sites do not act with high degrees of empowerment in their

decision-making and desired outcomes may not be achieved. This is a particularly interesting

phenomenon when one notes that many of the sites are endowed with very similar assets

supporting agency among students, teachers and administrators as those that demonstrate more

empowered decision-making. This suggests that the use of curriculum mapping as an opportunity

source may be important in determining a site's level of engagement.

Analyzing empowerment as a product of agency and opportunity structure reveals that

OAS sites operate with differing levels of empowerment. These ways in which personnel at these

schools make decisions can serve as an indicator of engagement level among OAS sites.

Charting Evidence of A+ Implementation

Table 3, which follows, provides information on all five indicators. It lists the definition

of each indicator and the features that were examined in the data. The remaining three columns

list the evidence at each of the three levels of engagement—transform-minded, reform-minded,

or inform-minded—that was found in the data at OAS sites at each of these levels. From these

lists it may be possible to devise a formative assessment tool to help OAS administration, school

administrators, A+ coordinators, A+ Faculty and Fellows, and/or classroom teachers to

implement the A+ framework in the most complete manner possible within their particular

settings.

Table 3   Indicators of A+ Implementation Levels

RESILIENCY
Resiliency is the overall capacity of a school community to adjust successfully to change.

Features of *Resiliency*
• Organizational interests are considered to a greater extent than self interests.
• There is interest in the details concerning change and why it is being implemented.
• Actors perceive themselves as architects of the change.
• Long-term leadership is present during the change.
• Conflict is expected and resolved effectively.

Evidence from the Data		
Inform-minded	**Reform-minded**	**Transform-minded**
• Focus is on self interests. • Few references to the outcomes of change, only that it is happening • Actors view themselves as victims of change. • Status quo is protected. • Leadership changes are common. • References to lack of collaboration and poor climate	• Certain of the A+ Essentials™ are implemented while others are lacking either through incomplete understanding or partial implementation. • References to multiple intelligences theory and experiential learning are the most common expressions of the A+ Essentials™.	• The A+ Essentials™ are viewed in total as a complete framework. • The A+ Essentials™ are used as a unifying force during conflict brought on by change. • Leadership has been stable. • References refer to *we* and *us* rather than *they* and *them.*

SUSTAINABILITY
Sustainability **is the degree to which practices are fully internalized and part of how the school community does business.**

Features of *Sustainability*
• Development and maintenance of transdisciplinary models of instruction • A distinct but evolving framework to guide problem-solving • Solutions are many and evidence is both theoretical and empirical in nature. • Knowledge is disseminated through, rather than after, process. • Community is dynamic and constantly evolving.

Evidence from the Data		
Inform-minded	**Reform-minded**	**Transform-minded**
• There are references to the Priority Academic Student Skills (PASS objectives) as mandated curriculum that hinders integration. Examples of mass produced curriculum are present with few attempts to integrate. • A+ Essentials™ are not used in any consistent manner to guide problem solving. Other frames present in the school tend to be used more often. • There is little interest in foundations for decision making. Faculty and administration seek ready-made solutions from outside sources. • There is limited evidence of process-based learning of any kind. Most concerns are product-based. • A+ implementation has been targeted to specific areas from the beginning. Application has been compartmentalized either in the use of the A+ Essentials™ or in the inclusion of subject matter. It is not considered whole school reform.	• Integration is present but is contrived at times or incomplete. These sites note a need for improvement. • A+ Essentials™ are used selectively to guide problem solving, but other frames present in the school are used to a similar degree. • Evidence of multiple intelligences and experiential learning are present, but enriched assessment is lacking in theoretical foundations and application. • Experiential learning activities are present but not pervasive in the culture of the entire school. • A+ implementation has not impacted all areas, but progress is evident and forthcoming.	• Integration is two-way, purposeful and seamless. • A+ Essentials™ guide problem solving to the exclusion of most other frames present in the school • Theoretical foundations for decision making are multiple and clearly implemented by administration, faculty, and students. • A culture exists in the school that highly values experiential learning across all subjects. • Administration and faculty understand the evolving nature of A+ implementation and value the opportunity to adapt the process to their school needs.

FLEXIBILITY
Flexibility is the capacity of the school community to adapt to new, different or changing requirements from both external and internal forces.

Features of *Flexibility*
- School responsiveness to parents' wishes and students' needs
- A strong sense of purpose and responsibility among teachers and administrators
- Innovation is apparent in the school environment through the design and delivery of instruction and the use of assessment.
- Schools use their resources effectively.

Evidence from the Data		
Inform-minded	**Reform-minded**	**Transform-minded**
• The environment is rigid and teacher-centered. • Most instruction is teacher-centered and supplantive in nature. • Assessment is primarily test-driven and is most often used in summative fashion.	• Environmental changes appear to be intermittent, often applied for short periods of time and then discarded. • Instruction is occasionally student-centered but is not pervasive in the school. Supplantive strategies are employed within certain subjects or by certain teachers to the exclusion of other approaches. • Some assessments are enriched and used formatively, but there are still a number of summative assessments that measure primarily memorization of facts.	• School environment reflects a many-faceted approach to classroom activities and student learning which is pervasive throughout the school. • Instruction is designed to meet the individual needs of the students, is often student centered, and is generative in nature. • Assessment is authentic and multifaceted. It is ongoing and most often formative. Teachers design ways in which enriched assessment strategies are used on a regular basis.

OWNERSHIP

Ownership is the degree to which decision making reflects both the written and hidden curriculum in a culture that supports all members' creativity, achievement, and accountability.

Features of *Ownership*
- Power rests with the members in the classroom.
- Work is coordinated through shared professional knowledge.
- Control rests extensively on meeting the needs of children.
- Parents and children have a role in coordination of activities.
- Functional units in the school support the needs of teachers.
- Leaders are successful only when they are perceived as serving the teachers and the children.
- The current members have a role in the selection of new members.

Evidence from the Data

Inform-minded	Reform-minded	Transform-minded
• Power structures are more vertical than horizontal with decisions being made from the top. • Curriculum mapping has not been engaged in meaningfully since its initial introduction during training. • Student needs are considered only after other concerns have been addressed. • Parent input is rarely sought. There is no formal mechanism in place for parents to give input to school officials. • A+-provided professional development is rarely used. There appears to be little value placed on these experiences by faculty and/or administration. • Leadership believes there is an approved approach to implementation, and their objectives are to help ensure the teachers and students at their schools learn how to operate in this manner.	• Some student choice is evident, but faculty members make many of the educational choices in the classroom. • Faculty feel supported in most decisions but question level of support when making the "really important ones." • Curriculum mapping is ongoing, but often the "specials" teachers are not engaged in the process at the same level of other teachers. • Teacher concerns or instructional design are considered before student needs in some cases. • There is some recognition that parental input is valuable, but there does not appear to be any mechanism in place for parents to be involved in educational decision making. • Faculty and administration are experimenting with collaborative planning structures but no complete solution has been found. • There is some use of A+ professional development, or faculty and administration cite only limited value from these encounters. • Selection of new members does not usually include an assessment of the prospective teacher's buy-in to the A+ framework.	• Students are given opportunities to make meaningful educational choices. • Teacher decision-making is well supported by leadership. • Faculty are able to share their professional knowledge in what are perceived as meaningful ways. • Curriculum mapping is a living process that continues throughout the school year and includes all subjects. • Teachers and administrators refer to student needs first when talking about the impact of A+ on their school site. • Faculty and administration view parents as equal partners in the process of education and empower them to make decisions that affect both the processes at home and at the school site. • Structures for collaborative planning that address the unique needs of the faculty are implemented and valued by those involved. • Faculty and administration value and make use of professional development from Oklahoma A+ Schools®. • Faculty and administration view leadership success in terms of how well the teachers and students are supported. • Administrators take a proactive approach to selection of new members and address teacher buy-in to A+ implementation during the interview.

EMPOWERMENT
Empowerment is a school's capacity to make effective choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes.

Features of *Empowerment*
- A group's capacity to make effective choices is primarily influenced by two sets of interrelated factors: agency and opportunity structure.
- Agency is a group's ability to make purposeful choices.
- Opportunity structure is determined by the institution's ability to establish social constraints for human interaction and choice.
- Two types of assets impact agency. Those are measured assets—grades, attendance, discipline referrals—and psychological assets that transform actors to agents.
- The degree to which the institution affects agency can impact a group's ability to make "rational choices" over "naturalized or habitualized choices."

Evidence from the Data

Inform-minded	Reform-minded	Transform-minded
- There are generally lower levels of measured assets, although all indicators are not at lowest levels across the Oklahoma A+ Schools® population. - Arts educators and their subjects are viewed differently (not as valued) than the subjects and teachers in the "regular" classroom - Teacher agency appears to wan in a culture that continues to view Oklahoma A+ Schools® implementation as an add-on program. - Students are often not aware of their "smarts" and agency is detrimentally affected. - There is a tendency to operate from normalized choices that most often maintain the status quo. These are often so implicit actors do not know they have other choices.	- Measured assets may be high or low. - Some belief among educators that specific arts knowledge and techniques are not necessary for meaningful art integration - Many value the foundations and approaches that Oklahoma A+ Schools® implementation brings to the school and their students. They note, however, that putting these beliefs into action is difficult. - Teachers often report that they need to make more use of multiple intelligences theory. - Personnel note that professional development is an area in which they could be more engaged. They often cite outside forces—institutional limiters—that impact decisions. - Some normalized choices affect the degree of empowerment and, therefore, the outcome. - Due to limited curriculum mapping, staff members report more instances of confusion about what is taking place in their school and about A+ implementation as a whole.	- High levels of measured assets are often found in the data. - The arts are viewed as essential; arts educators' expertise is valued in addition to that of the regular classroom teacher. - Teachers report high levels of agency with support for creative teaching. They enjoy the freedom in what they do in their classroom. They also report increased self-efficacy in relation to trying new ideas in the classroom. - Teachers often refer to multiple intelligences theory (MIT) as a difference maker in the culture of the school and a contributor to student efficacy. - Students often cite their knowledge of MIT as a source of self-actualization in both academics and in social standing. - Faculty value the ability to choose the topics for professional development at their sites. - Interaction between agency and opportunity source supports a degree of empowerment that leads to desired outcomes. - Teachers and principals often refer to curriculum mapping as the means through which important information is exchanged.

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NOTES

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