Districts' Experiences Balancing Inclusion, Accountability, and Change: Mixed-methods Case Studies of Implementation in Ontario and New Hampshire

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DISTRICTS' EXPERIENCES BALANCING INCLUSION, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND CHANGE: MIXED-METHODS CASE STUDIES OF IMPLEMENTATION IN ONTARIO AND NEW HAMPSHIRE

Dissertation by

MATTHEW JAMES WELCH

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Abstract
Districts' experiences balancing inclusion, accountability, and change:
Mixed-methods case Studies of implementation in Ontario and New Hampshire
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Most policies and initiatives in education travel the same, well-worn path: they are designed high above the ground by elected leaders or by public officials in departments and ministries of education. These ideas soon become projects for district-level leaders and school-level staff to implement. The process of implementation is often a challenge for local educators. When schools are asked to implement several initiatives concurrently, these difficulties can be compounded. This is especially true when schools try concurrently to include students with special needs and to meet the targets of high-stakes accountability programs (McLaughlin & Thurlow, 2003; Ramanathan, 2008).

This study examined two multi-level and multi-district projects that were unique in their objective and designs. Each fostered complementary restructuring and reculturing of school districts. These two projects—Essential for Some, Good for All (ESGA) in Ontario and NH Responds (NHR) in New Hampshire—sought to facilitate greater participation and achievement for students with special needs as well as to cultivate greater collaboration between general and special educators.

The dissertation is comprised of four mixed-methods case studies across the two jurisdictions, looking at two districts in each country as the units of analysis. Interviews with participants from all three levels—policy and planning, district, and school—were accompanied by effect-size analysis taken from quantitative achievement data to assess achievement gaps before and after each project. Ultimately, the study proposes a workable theory for the field of policy design and implementation that would facilitate simultaneous engagement with multiple, competing policies, in particular balancing the inclusion of students with special educational needs and mechanisms for standards-based accountability.
CHAPTER 1

Problems with Implementation

In *The Predictable Failure of Educational Reform*, the late Seymour Sarason writes that change in schools is difficult because many efforts fail to confront “existing power relationships” and other local cultural conditions as part of their plans (Sarason, 1990, p. 5). More recent work by Honig and Hatch (2004) has argued that attempts to make the process of change more coherent often fail to assist local actors in the “continual process of negotiating the fit between schools' variable external demands and internal circumstances” (p.18). Obstacles to successfully implementing school reforms frequently include issues of structural intractability (Tyack & Tobin, 1994), vague purposes (Fullan, 2006), lack of local capacity (Elmore, 2004), active teacher resistance (Evans, 2001), and insufficient input from teachers (Bailey, 2000). Such complicating factors create common problems for the process of implementation, which occur as reforms work their way down a hierarchical policy chain (Datnow, 2006). The intent of policies and the work of schools are often disconnected, and the manifestations of initiatives in schools are often different from their intentions and in conflict with other concurrent reforms (Coburn, 2001; Little, 2002). Efforts to offer local actors more voice in the process of change often neglects to build the capacity of those educators to utilize the full range of tools at their disposal (Honig & Hatch, 2004).

This disconnect between broader political goals on one hand and the varied priorities of schools on the other is referred to as policy’s “implementation” problem, where the macro intentions of policy planners often exist in tension with the micro desires, needs, and capacities of local educators (M. W. McLaughlin, 1998).
Implementation of new efforts is difficult because school-based educators are often forced to “allocate resources to competing demands” and engage in a process of “reconciliation of past practices and current innovations” (Frank & Zhao, 2005, p. 204).

In most studies of implementation and change, rigid reforms designed far from schools fail to manifest themselves as intended because they do not “anticipate the inherently local personalities, events, and crises” within schools, while schools ignore or abandon imposed changes (M. W. McLaughlin & Berman, 1975, p. 3). The most rigid efforts often fail due their inability to blend the policy’s overarching vision with flexibility and discretion for local actors to employ initiatives in their own contexts (Thompson, 2006). Milbrey McLaughlin’s (1998) later work argues that difficult school-level factors include the uncertain level of enthusiasm from individual teachers for a given reform, as well as the degree to which local conditions and attitudes support or “engender competing pressures and define constraints” for future action (p.72). The problem with implementing most reforms, in short, is the wrong balance of control between the bottom and the top (Fullan, 2006) and too little attention to how new projects will work with existing conditions (McLaughlin, 1998).

More recent policies related to accountability have exacerbated friction between policymakers and local educators. This is especially true in more affluent, industrialized Western contexts like Ontario, Canada and several corners of the United States. In the US, change agents that assume they can push schools to achieve collective responsibility and increased achievement for more students through force have confronted a historical culture of autonomy and a host of local complexities (Elmore, 2004). In Canada, various
educational changes have similarly suffered from a lack of flexibility or appropriate balance between pressure and support (Fullan, 1992).

From the school-level perspective, implementing new reforms can perhaps be summarized as a study of capacity and will, where “will” refers to teachers’ motivation to change their practice to carry out reformers’ recommendations while ‘capacity’ concerns educators’ ability to practice in ways recommended by reformers” (Spillane, 1999, p. 144). Leading impactful and lasting change requires attention to both, especially when policies seek to alter teachers’ community of practice, or the collectively constructed norms and boundaries of a workplace. Lack of capacity or will might each prevent a district, school, or teacher from implementing a proposed change.

More recent efforts in some jurisdictions, such as Ontario, Canada, and New Hampshire, USA, have sought to accompany pressure for performance with capacity-building support and respectful dialogue with local professionals. Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) laud such developments as positive, arguing that simply adding resources without guidance (First Way) or employing pressure without support (Second Way, as currently done in the US) are each flawed strategies. Ontario’s current Third Way strategy, combining pressure and support, marks progress, but leaves much to be desired by way of teacher voice and variety in demonstrating progress. Hargreaves and Shirley remind readers that teachers’ local, collective sense making is an essential factor in successful reform efforts and, therefore, should be taken into account in more advanced reforms. This study will examine two reforms that attempted to address Hargreaves and Shirley’s concerns in the process of reform, but offering support, opportunities for teachers’ input,
and attention to teachers’ capacities and professional cultures.

**A Different Kind of Study for a Different Kind of Project**

This study employed a framework based in studies of implementation. However, the study was different from most in the field and the projects that were objects of study were themselves out of the ordinary. Studies of implementation often focus on a single policy or initiative (Cohen, 1990; Datnow & Castellano, 2000; Gross, Giacquinta, & Bernstein, 1971; Kyle Jr, Bonnstetter, & Gadsden Jr, 1988; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973; Spillane, 1999). Schools, however, are complex environments, where the focal reform must often coexist and, occasionally, compete with other policy and community demands (Bishop, 1930; Coburn, 2001; Coburn & Stein, 2006). Individual reforms often conflict with the realities of everyday teaching and school life, such as schedules and interruptions to the teaching environment (Gross, et al., 1971; Kennedy, 2005; Thompson, 2006). Preexisting reforms constitute only one of the many obstacles that an initiative might encounter, especially when attention and resources have been devoted elsewhere (Louis & Miles, 1990). Simultaneous reforms may also create philosophical contradictions for teachers by promoting competing theories for compliance and student success (M. J. McLaughlin & Thurlow, 2003; Ramanathan, 2008).

This study will examine several districts’ attempts to reconcile two concurrent policy demands: high-stakes accountability based on standardized assessments and the inclusion of students with special educational needs in conventional classrooms with same-age peers. In particular, the study will examine two different jurisdictions and their implementation of two projects meant to help local actors more effectively reconcile
inclusion and accountability policies. These projects attend to both will and capacity, incorporating teacher participation and supporting individual and collective change. The two efforts are unique, in part because they aspire to help local actors reconcile multiple, concurrent demands and in part because they represent new combinations of various policy tools. This study will be unique in two ways: it will consult participants both at the planning and implementation levels and, unlike most studied of implementation, it will examine projects meant to facilitate concurrent implementation.

**Demands of Concurrent and Competing Policies**

Accountability and inclusion each make their own demands on teachers and schools. Some consider these to be competing efforts (Ainscow, 1999; Ramanathan, 2008), since one calls on schools to standardize practice and the other calls on educators to differentiate. This conflict is particularly prevalent in the United States after the passage of both No Child Left Behind (2002) and the most recent reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) since the turn of the century (M. J. McLaughlin, 2010). Margret J. McLaughlin (2010) argues that while standards-based accountability and inclusion efforts both create pressure on schools, these are actually contradictory pressures between standardization and individualization. Ramanathan (2008) argues that the US has exacerbated these tensions by creating conflicting form of leverage: the accountability system punishes individual schools for complex diversity while holding states accountable for accessibility by diverse groups. He further argues that, in each case, teachers have little support and parents have different and confusing means of redress: transfer privileges through American accountability systems, but no
such recourse with inclusion laws that are meant to intensify collaboration with existing schools. Policy makers often have differing conceptions about the relationship between support for capacity building and enforcement of external performance targets as part of implementation (Fullan, 2006). Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) argue that support and capacity building ameliorate pressure by making performance targets more attainable. Simultaneous efforts towards inclusion and accountability thus suffer from a difficult confluence of factors: contradictory demands, uncertain relationships between support and performance targets, and the high-stakes leverage the various reform exert concurrently all make their unified implementation a significant challenge for schools.

**Accountability**

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 is one of the most impactful recent reforms to sweep through the American educational landscape. The law’s accountability-based approach has taken root in other countries as well, now having “a firm grip on education policy in virtually every industrialized democracy” (Elmore, 2008, p. 39). Elmore (2004) points out that the use of testing and pressure “is supposed to create incentives for students and teachers to work harder and for school and district administrators to do a better job of monitoring” (p.236). This theory runs aground, however, when schools do not have “a coherent, explicit set of norms” like common practices or unified responses to performance pressures to build upon and make positive change (Elmore, 2004, p. 206).

In examining the manifestations of these reform efforts in schools, researchers have found the unintended impacts often result in narrowing of practice and making
instruction more conservative and rarely promote change (Condron, 2011; Sunderman, 2006). In McLaughlin and Berman’s (1975) terms, NCLB makes rigid demands on schools and fails to account for local needs and capacities. It asks for a fundamental change in teachers’ conception of their work, but makes no allowance for building capacity to make such a change (Fullan, 2009; Fullan & Pomfret, 1977; Spillane, 1999). These mandates assume that the necessary capacity is already present to meet external performance demands (Firestone, 1989).

**Inclusion**

Recent years have seen the special education approach known as inclusion\(^1\) move from contested philosophical concept to guiding principle and implanted policy (Hehir, 2005). Students identified with special needs have been moved in large numbers to more conventional settings in recent years. Opponents like Kauffman regard inclusion as problematic and argue that it fails to meet the academic needs of all students (Kauffman, Bantz, & McCullough, 2002; Kauffman, Landrum, Mock, Sayeski, & Sayeski, 2005). Others note that inclusion is not a uniform concept and can impact students differently, depending on the severity of their needs (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1998). Most agree, however, that reconciling inclusion and the pressure of standards-based achievement is a challenging process of change for all involved when students never before expected to succeed and schools not meant to serve them are suddenly held accountable for their performance (Black-Hawkins, Florian, & Rouse, 2007; Ramanathan, 2008).

\(^1\) Inclusion, integration, and mainstreaming are defined and disaggregated later in the literature review. In broad terms, I refer to inclusion here as the placement of identified students in so-called regular, or mainstream, classrooms who might otherwise be excluded (see Fuchs & Fuchs, 1998).
A framework grounded in the literature on implementation reveals the inherent tensions between policies’ planners and local actors in the process of implementation. Inclusion in this study is viewed through the issues it creates during implementation, especially since it “requires new role relationships and new ways of seeing oneself in relationship to others and to the job” (M. W. McLaughlin & Berman, 1975, p. 5).

**Tensions in Concurrent Implementation**

Elmore (2004) has argued that accountability requires teachers to re-think their practice and sense of collective responsibility for student performance. Inclusion makes similar demands of its own. In concert, they can create far more professional dissonance than harmony as professionals attempt to balance what some see as competing or divergent demands (Jordan, 2001; M. J. McLaughlin & Thurlow, 2003; Ramanathan, 2008). Examples of this divergence include a shift from legal and procedural accountability to educational and cultural accountability, as well as divergent modes of recourse for parents. As with all implementation, they promote very different roles and role relationships for local educators (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977), and these require support not only for their individual enacting, but also for their interacting.

The accountability policies within NCLB are but one reform in the landscape of policies. A major aspect of teachers’ everyday work is implementing and integrating numerous, interacting reforms (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006). Reconciling these in the implementation process is an aspect of understanding the “lived realities of the educators who must accomplish change” (Evans, 2001, p. 91). Policies make competing demands and significant diversity in student learning needs only complicates these.
Responding to the demands of implementation involves altering the local community of practice in which teachers work. Coburn (2001) has argued that implementations of reading programs can fundamentally change the reforms’ intended structures; they can also alter the ways that teachers work individually and with one another (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977). Elmore (2004) has found that schools and cultures that manage to take collective responsibility for all students and enforce expectations thorough internal accountability tend to respond better to external accountability and performance pressures. There are too few strategies, however, that link these ideas: how and why reforms change practice and what can be done both to design better policies and create more effective teaching practice at scale. The literature “is mostly silent on the matter of how schools develop these productive professional norms and practices” (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006, p.38). The issues surrounding the field of implementation and the interaction between inclusion and accountability are discussed further in Chapter 2.

**Research Questions**

With these issues and tensions in mind, this study explored two projects that proposed to tackle these issues at scale. The research examined these two projects across four different districts in the two jurisdictions implementing them: New Hampshire in the US and Ontario in Canada.

Within each context, I selected two districts (or boards, as they are known in Ontario) of different sizes. Employing case studies allowed me to capture much of the local variation and concurrent demands that are inherent in reform implementation. The
overarching focus was what lessons policy makers can draw from innovative projects trying to help districts reconciling concurrent policy demands by engaging in systemic reform. By comparing multiple cases, the study enhanced the validity of claims about each jurisdiction and captured the complexities of multiple, interacting reforms.

This effort to further understand the relationship between macro policy demands and the micro changes through implementation on the ground was framed by the following four questions:

1. What theories of action drive these two jurisdictions’ policies of inclusion and accountability?

2. How do these inclusion and accountability policies interact with one another and what theories of action, if any, are there for balancing or integrating multiple reform efforts?

3. How do professionals (within a district or board) organize their communities of practice around the dual and often competing issues of inclusive practice and external accountability?

4. How do contextual and political factors influence the implementation of these projects and, ultimately, student achievement? How does each context’s policy environment compare to the other in terms of professional organization?

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the study of implementation and change in two ways: First, from the implementation policy perspective, it builds upon the conventional examination of a single reform in a single context by comparing contexts and studying interaction of concurrent implementations through complex case studies. Second, its use of student outcome data (in the form of achievement gap effects) can confirm or
challenge existing theories of implementation by shifting the focus of the field from fidelity to outcomes.

This study can contribute to the many single-effort, single-context studies by understanding the interaction of initiatives. While acknowledging factors like complexity, variation, and instability, few studies in the field focus on schools’ efforts to deal with multiple, competing reforms. Recent work has called on researchers to assess interactions as part of understanding complex reforms and the way they impact teachers’ work (Spillane, et al., 2009). Research in implementation would benefit from a comparison of these two reform efforts, especially given their significant role in contemporary education policy.

Like all implemented policies, inclusion and accountability can each be subject to changes in their use in schools. In studying teachers’ collective sense making in their work, this study may advance understanding of the ways the two efforts impact each other in teachers’ everyday work cultures. Many authors place great emphasis on collective responsibility for all learners as part of a successful school environment (Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane, 2004; Elmore, 2004; Fullan, 2007; M. J. McLaughlin & Thurlow, 2003; Westheimer, 1999), and this call for collaboration is especially necessary in efforts towards greater inclusion (Singh, 2009). But little is known of the process of change encountered by an entire professional community as schools or districts attempt more inclusion efforts. Inclusion places a demand for change on general education teachers, who are often not participants in special education processes (M. J. McLaughlin & Thurlow, 2003). This study seeks “to understand the schooling process in
the context of policy changes… not in isolation from them” (Hargreaves, 1985, p.43). It is therefore important to understand the interactions these policies have and their impacts on teachers’ communities of practice. Such interactions have not been part of past work in this field.

Case studies helped to capture much of this complexity. Several theories of implementation argue that organizational change in schools is an emergent, evolutionary process, where organizations are in constant flux (rather than the conventional notion where reforms create temporary movement in static entities) and policy resources are locally adapted (Spillane, Gomez, & Mesler, 2009; Thompson, 2006). This process of local adaptation is influenced by the larger policy system at work, of which districts are each a unique local manifestation (Sarason, 1971), but often outside the bounds of implementation studies. Scholars in the field have called for researchers to expand their studies’ boundaries (M. W. McLaughlin, 2006). This study expanded those boundaries by taking a multi-level view of policy, examining those who planed and led implementation, as well as local actors from central offices and schools. Comparing two projects in two contexts further illuminated the virtues and flaws in a given jurisdiction’s change stance, especially the relationship between pressure and support.

Case studies also captured the complexity of other entities involved in the efforts. Both the Ontario and the New Hampshire initiatives involve a third, non-state party: a professional association and a research institute, respectively. As Burch’s (2002) study of professional development providers shows, intermediary organizations are a rarely studied aspect of policy implementation work. The presence of these third party
intermediaries may prove a significant tool in effective local policy implementation through their unique ability to interact with both districts and the state. This study heeds the call to examine the role that additional players can play between the state (or province) and the local district (or board). These roles are important to understand because while districts have the power to create this coherence within and across schools (Chrispeels, Burke, Johnson, & Daly, 2008; Honig, 2008), especially when approached with flexible policies (Honig & Hatch, 2004), not all have the capacity. Educational organizations characterized by coherence that is both pedagogical (Elmore, 1997, 2004) and cultural (e.g. characterized by trust) (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010) eventually achieve better outcomes for more students. Districts need support to achieve this, and this project may provide a model for what this support might require to establish the new structures and cultures that characterize coherent organizations.

Finally, this study will enhance knowledge of implementation in studying district-level reform by examining student achievement data, an often-overlooked aspect of district-level studies (Anderson, 2003; Datnow, 2006; Datnow, Lasky, Stringfield, & Teddlie, 2006). A major shift in policy implementation in recent years, represented by the accountability movement, is a shift from holding localities responsible for efficient or faithful execution to a focus on outcomes and efficacy (Jaafar & Anderson, 2007; Thompson, 2006). Research can follow this trend, and ask not only if projects were implemented, but also if they made a positive impact on students.
Research Design

This study was a comparative policy analysis, employing four mixed-methods case studies across two contexts, Ontario in Canada and New Hampshire in the United States. Districts served as the units of analysis for these case studies. The use of district case studies in the examination of these jurisdictions is an acknowledgement of the many, complex, and interacting facets of implementing change initiatives. Datnow (2006) has argued that districts are important mid-level units in studying policy implementation processes. Others have made a similar case for studying mid-level actors in policy implementation studies as a bridge between macro planners and local, micro actors (Frank & Zhao, 2005; Hargreaves, 1985). Methodologically, case studies encompass all of the “contextual conditions” that shape the way in which a designed policy idea manifests itself on the ground, thus they are “highly pertinent” in understanding the way that policies interact in these locales (R. K. Yin, 2003, p. 13). Understanding the static and shifting values of a community of practice is a study of culture as a complex, dynamic organism; case studies are best for capturing this complexity.

Since these are active policy initiatives in both contexts, I will engage with leaders at the district level as well as with school leaders, special education teachers, and their general curriculum counterparts. Case studies will allow for such a broad “vertical slice” and diversity of perspectives. The research design is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Examining two different policy contexts and distinct approaches offered points of comparison for the relative levels of success that particular initiatives were able to
achieve in addressing achievement gaps between students identified with SEN and those not so identified. It also illuminated the experiences of teachers in relationship to their political and professional contexts. Ontario and New Hampshire represent contrasting attempts to address achievement gaps between students identified with SEN and their non-identified peers. They offered different forms and levels of support for districts and their teachers, employed different notions of pressure, and viewed professional culture as having different roles in the change process. Ontario K-12 education has no influence from the Government of Canada and provides a higher level of support generally for schools in response to accountability and inclusion demands. New Hampshire is impacted by both state and federal policies, and its initiatives provide less support (at least less financial support) in light of its low-tax, highly localized political culture. These two contexts are discussed on greater detail in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, respectively, and are compared in Chapter 6.

**Summary**

Efforts to reform education have long failed to make major changes in schools, especially sustained changes in classroom practice (Fullan, 2007). As Firestone (1989) first observed and Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) have more recently argued, resources or pressure alone each seem inadequate. Fullan (1992) and others have agreed with this observation (Elmore, 2004; Levin, 2007). Change efforts need, at minimum, some combination of top-level guidance, capacity building, and input from those charged with implementation.
When schools and districts face multiple, competing demands, resource allocation, leadership guidance, and local priorities become increasingly muddled. Policy demands are not built upon empty space, but on a foundation of existing mandates and inducements (see Firestone, 1989). These new initiatives often place divergent and competing demands on local educators. Accountability and inclusion are two such reforms whose demands are not always in alignment. Districts and schools need support to fully implement each, respectively, and certainly the two in concert.

New Hampshire and Ontario are each pursuing policies meant to help local educators achieve inclusive environments and enhanced achievement. The two projects at the heart of this dissertation are important manifestations of this new direction. By engaging teachers and studying potential changes in achievement gaps at the district level in each jurisdiction, this study can contribute to the literature on change and school reform. Local variation is a given in reform efforts (Bishop, 1930; Datnow, 2006; Kyle Jr, et al., 1988; M. W. McLaughlin, 1998, 2006). This dissertation can further illustrate what types of local variation might be encouraged and facilitated by policymakers when they seek sustained change and increased achievement for all students.
CHAPTER 2:  
*Literature Review and Theoretical Frameworks*

In this chapter, I use the literature on implementation as a lens to discuss inclusion, accountability, and their interactions. First, I review the relevant theories of implementing reform and change, especially the relationship between local idiosyncrasies and macro change agents. Then, I explore the utility of Communities of Practice for understanding the workspace in which teachers receive and operationalize policy messages. Taken together, these two lines of research are helpful for understanding the experiences of local educators as they make sense of several simultaneous, interacting reform efforts. These strands of scholarship illustrate the structural and relational factors reformers might consider in their efforts. Finally, I provide some historical and theoretical background on inclusion and accountability policies, focusing on their implementation in Canada and the United States. In this way, I preview how the interaction of inclusion and accountability policies in these two jurisdictions may create a tension between designers and implementers of policy reform.

**Tensions in the Process of Implementation**

From one jurisdiction to another, and certainly from one classroom to another, enacted policies can manifest themselves in a variety of ways. Most are conceived far from schools, but all are implemented locally. As a result, classrooms rarely change predictably, and often fail to change in any substantive way at all (Fullan, 2007). Cohen’s (1990) well-known study of one California math teacher’s grappling with instructional reform illustrates the difficulty of changing classrooms. The teacher demonstrated neither the capacity to alter her practice nor the ability to evaluate her own teaching, despite her
willingness to consider the prescribed reforms.

The process of enacting policies in schools and classrooms comprises what has been called education’s implementation challenge. Michael Fullan (2007) defines the change process in three phases: initiation, implementation, and institutionalization. Initiation characterizes the initial problem definition and policy development through “the process that leads up to and includes a decision to adopt or proceed with a change” (p.65). This is the most successful aspect of change, since it is easy to measure and without localized complications. Implementation, or “the first experiences of attempting to put an idea or reform into practice” (p.65), is a complex middle stage and involves a shift in local use of material resources, approaches to teaching, and beliefs about students and colleagues. Fullan argues this is where most change efforts fail: where rigid external demands and local complexities meet. The final stage of institutionalization is where “the change gets built in as an ongoing part of the system or disappears by way of a decision to discard or through attrition” (p.65). This study is focused on implementation, specifically in the simultaneous implementation of accountability and inclusion. As a field of study, implementation has highlighted many of the problems common to educational reform efforts, especially among local actors struggling to make sense of externally imposed demands.

Pressman and Wildavsky’s (1973) book is the foundation of the study of implementation and the tensions that exist between high-level policy makers and local actors. In their study of federal policies, the authors conclude that tensions are due, in part, to the number of levels of actors between policies’ designers and their proposed
beneficiaries. These many levels act as filters between the policy level and those they are most intended to impact, altering reform efforts as a series of lenses might bend and fragment a beam of light.

Similarly, Gross, Giacquinta, and Bernstein’s (1971) early study explored an educational innovation that sought to transform teachers’ conceptions of their instructional roles. Their work found significant local variation and several unexpected obstacles. In particular, the authors argue that implementing change is not only about overcoming initial resistance, but also about anticipating the “barriers that may be encountered by members of organizations in their efforts to carry out innovations” (p.196). In particular, Gross and colleagues cite four common issues in implementation new policies: lack of clarity in purpose and vision, limited teacher skills and knowledge, absence of material resources, and preexisting incompatible organizational arrangements (e.g., schedules). These all serve to thwart strict fidelity, further inhibiting success and sustainability.

In the earliest review of implementation literature, Fullan and Pomfret (1977) argue that implementation work takes one of two views in studying change. The first is the fidelity perspective, wherein researchers seek to understand the extent “to which actual use of the innovation corresponds to the intended or planned use” (p.340). Pressman and Wildavsky’s book as well as Gross and his colleagues’ teacher study are both fidelity stances on implementation research. In contrast, Fullan and Pomfret favor a mutual adaptation perspective, where local complexities, and teacher experiences interact to reshape the reform effort.
This study takes the latter, locally adaptive stance on researching implementation. Fullan and Pomfret (1977) argue this orientation towards research on implementation makes a particular assumption about organizations and research in them; they call it a process approach. Mutual adaptation’s process lens assumes that the focus of research should be on users’ ongoing experiences with policies rather than some new stability that faithful implementation purports to create. The mutual adaptation approach is grounded in the ever-changing nature of schools themselves and the many efforts simultaneously impacting them. Other research in both educational reform and organizational change has furthered this argument that schools should be considered fluid entities, rather than fixed units moving from equilibrium to equilibrium between initiatives (Sarason, 1990; Van de Ven & Huber, 1990; Van de Ven & Poole, 2005). Viewing schools as constantly changing organizations— whose boundaries are permeable and subject to myriad influences and whose change processes are not defined by clear start and end points— renders a fidelity perspective obsolete. Focusing on fidelity to the intentions of policy makers places teachers’ ongoing experiences wrestling with reform demands in a significant blind spot. The mutually adaptive stance is the more effective way to capture the total complexity of the implementation process, especially when local educators must wrangle with multiple initiatives like accountability and inclusion.

**Mutual Adaptation in Studying Change**

A fidelity perspective on implementation is incomplete, placing too much emphasis on adherence to observable teacher behavior and other superficial criteria. Research on implementation has argued that users, or implementers, often change
reforms in practice (Coburn, 2001; Firestone, 1989; M. W. McLaughlin, 1998; Thompson, 2002). In particular, Firestone (1989) has argued that local adaptation of reform does happen and can, at times, have a positive impact. In these cases, reformers and implementers alike must attend to both the local will and capacity needs of local educators, including the technical capabilities to proceed with change and the political leverage to influence local will. Issues like will, power, and culture are crucial elements in reform studies, and often neglected by fidelity-focused work (Fullan, 2003; Sarason, 1990). Cultural reform elements recognize “values, shared meanings, and social relationships,” especially among enactors (p.198). Fidelity studies tend to focus narrowly on technical reform aspects, ignoring the cultural dimension entirely and also certain aspects of the political perspective, such as the need for negotiation, tools for conflict resolution, and incentives to accompany mandates (see also Firestone, 1989). Structural reform elements capture the technical elements that fidelity studies favor. Studies of adaptive principles like Firestone’s “active users” illustrate the importance of local variance, voice, and innovation.

Relational elements to the mutual adaptation field encompass all the elements totally neglected by fidelity studies. In framing this study, I argue that these relational factors must be explicitly addressed in the study implementation. Past implementation in the mutual adaptation camp work has acknowledged cultural impacts, but rarely pursued the full range of relational details as explicitly as some recent work (Coburn & Stein, 2006). Mandating and supporting technical fidelity are necessary, but insufficient. Instead, effective, sustainable change must not only build technical capacity but also
allow for political negotiation in its structural aspects, as envisioned by experienced observers of reform (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). Challenges to cultural values and existing professional norms are not ancillary impacts in implementing policy, but fundamental relational issues that affect the initial success and long-term sustainability of policy implementation (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977; Little, 2002; M. W. McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Examining both structural and relational factors is key to understanding the mutually adaptive implementation literature. This lens on implementation, using a mutually adaptive perspective to explore structural and relational aspects of change, forms the foundation of my study of inclusion, accountability, and their coexistence in local districts.

Berman and McLaughlin’s classic Rand Study of national reforms lays out principles for quality change processes in the mutually adaptive perspective (M. W. McLaughlin, 1998; M. W. McLaughlin & Berman, 1975). The reforms with the most substantive impact at the local level, they claim, successfully address tensions within the process of implementation by addressing four key local issues:

- Implementation (that is, fidelity to design) can dominate efforts rather than outcomes; substantive reforms focus on outcomes.
- “Mutual adaptation” is required of reformer and reformed as well as the reform plan itself to account for local variation.
- Local actors must show “receptivity” to the proposed change.
- Reformers must account for variation in local capacity to make change (M. W. McLaughlin & Berman, 1975, p. 2).
More recent authors have built upon McLaughlin and Berman’s early work. Scholars of implementation have found that changes relying solely on the three Fs—fidelity, force, and fiat—often breed little more than resistance and fail to achieve significant, lasting change (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006; Fullan, 2003; M. W. McLaughlin, 1998). Changes in educational policy have long been centrally designed with the expectation that teachers and schools would faithfully execute the prescribed requirements, change their practice, and achieve the anticipated results (M. W. McLaughlin & Berman, 1975). Policy makers have been frustrated by the apparently stubborn, intractable nature of teachers and schools in the face of innumerable reform efforts (Tyack & Tobin, 1994).

Scholars of policy and implementation have long known that the relationship between policy makers and practitioners is a complex one. Relying exclusively on extreme downward pressure from state agencies rarely achieves instructional influence, making fidelity and control untenable policy stances (Fullan, 2003). This is partly because there is often a self-interested and highly circumscribed relationship (at best) or even an adversarial stance (at worst) between policy and practice, according to Elmore (2009). Policy and instructional practice are “parallel discourses” where those in policy often see educators as “part of the problem,” despite the obvious “irony… that these same professionals [are] those who [are] charged with implementing” proposed reforms (Elmore, 2004, p. 215). When changes are structured to use mandates and force as their theory of action, such external political pressure can press teachers into conflicting roles that leave them discouraged and withdrawn or even actively resistant (Woods, Jeffrey,
Troman, & Boyle, 1997). Similarly, inducements and money bombs rarely see long-term impacts because they fail to address relational issues like will for reform (Firestone, 1989). In the end, externally designed, rigid reforms deposited into schools fail to realize their goals. Such efforts expect, but often fail to achieve, substantive changes at the classroom level (Coburn, 2003; Cohen, 1990; Elmore, 2004; Fullan, 2007) or the local context as a whole (Datnow, 2005; O’Day, 2002; Spillane, 1998). Tensions inevitably arise from “the nature, amount, and pace of change at the local level, [which are] a product of local factors that [are] largely beyond the control of higher-level policy makers” (M. W. McLaughlin, 1998, p. 71).

Like Berman & McLaughlin (1975), Firestone (1989) argued that mandates alone were ineffective, and Datnow’s (1989) more recent work found that other pre-developed, packaged change models like Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) also failed to live on as part of daily school practice (p.124). Common findings among implementation researchers are a lack of local capacity and the influence of unexpected contextual factors on reform efforts (Daly, 2009; Datnow, 2006; Firestone, 1989; Spillane, 1998). Work in this field spans four decades, yet still indicates that the obstacles that Gross and his colleagues (1971) first found—the need for a guiding vision, the building of teacher capacity, the introduction of new resources, and organizational structures that match the proposed change—still very much need to be addressed in contemporary implementation. The lack of uniform implementation in most policy efforts “documents the potentially dysfunctional effects of ‘goal clarity’ and prescribed implementation procedures and shows the benefits of ambiguity that allows positive local adaptation and negotiation
about strategies, indicators, and priorities” (M. W. McLaughlin, 2006, p. 218).

Effective, lasting changes need to address both local educators’ will and capacity (Firestone, 1989; Spillane, 1999). Fullan (2009) has more recently argued that these two factors must be present for changes to impact classroom practice and sustain their impacts: first, *capacity building with a focus on results*, both at the “instructional core” of change and in the “management of change” (e.g., facilitating learning communities, managing distractions), where educators are given the tools to meet policymakers’ demands (p.282-3). Second is *a sense of flexibility and partnership with the field*, where change leaders pursue “sector engagement” and changes are “valued locally” (p.281).

Fullan’s work highlights the need for collaborative relationships between policy makers and frontline educators that address the needs local educators feel are most pressing. Fullan’s earlier work (1992), as well as that of Louis and Miles (1990), argues that substantive change comes from negotiated reform partnerships, where effective strategies place an emphasis on the fluid, ongoing changes in organizations like schools, set a clearly communicated vision as part of this collaborative planning process, and allow for teacher judgment (rather than pure fidelity or adherence to rules). This policy-practitioner partnership shifts the reform emphasis from efficiency and fidelity to valuing effectiveness, adherence to broad principles, and emphasizing student outcomes (Honig, 2006; Louis & Miles, 1990; Spillane, 2000).

In sum, the work that has emerged from studies that take a process-oriented, mutual adaptation perspective on implementation argues that policy initiatives which truly impact classroom practice and are sustained over time account for two broad themes
in the policy design and implementation process. First, change efforts must account for various technical factors (or what some call the structural aspects of change), such as incentives, participation, adaptation, empowerment, and the measurement of outcomes. Fullan’s (1998) work argues that changes installed in schools require ongoing “learning and unlearning” by staff, and thus capacity building in the form of “time, resources, and other supports” is necessary (p.218). The architects of a given change will need both to inspire and to collaborate with the teachers who must enact this work at the ground level. Successful, substantial change will fundamentally alter their individual and collective work, making participation necessary (Fullan, 2007). As McLaughlin (1998) and others (see also Coburn, 2001; Fullan, 1998; McLaughlin & Berman, 1975; Spillane, 1998, 2000) have noted, local variation makes it virtually impossible to uniformly implement a single, rigid reform model. Datnow’s (2006) co-construction model captures this relationship by arguing that “multiple levels of educational systems may constrain or enable implementation and that implementation may affect those broader levels” (p.107). Effectively employing local actors as partners in reform should allow for the kind of two-way negotiation and partnership that has proven successful in the past (Thompson, 2002). Policy changes often require changes in practice and teachers, as the objects of change (in this case of accountability and inclusion), require opportunities for both capacity building and input if significant reform has a chance to blossom and sustain itself.

Second, relational factors (or cultural elements of change), like shared notions of practice, norms, values, and local priorities must be addressed is change efforts are to have meaningful impacts at the classroom level. Fullan (1998) argues that structural
considerations alone are not enough to build and sustain change. The implementation of reforms, he argues, has “implications for changes in roles and role relationships” within schools (p.217). These are the localized, *emergent*, aspects of change. They are the heart of what Fullan and Pomfret (1977) saw as part of a process view of reform: changing relationships among colleagues. Scholars like Coburn and Stein (2006) identify collective values, practices, and interactions as the oft-neglected cultural aspects of change. Fullan (2007) notes this stance implies changes in both individual roles as well as professional relationships (see also Fullan & Pomfret, 1977). Individuals and their immediate colleagues interpret and alter reforms, negotiating them within their current practice and circumstances (Frank & Zhao, 2005). As part of this change process, teachers make changes collectively, as they redefine the nature of their work and initiate new members into their cultures in both explicit and tacit ways (Wenger, 1998). Authors in the implementation field have argued that reforms should be designed for “use” rather than simply faithful “implementation” to allow for this collective, relational sense making (Coburn & Stein, 2006). Scholars in the field of Communities of Practice, who argue that professionals collectively shape and enforce norms of work, capture many of these cultural or relational challenges. Their work has rarely been employed in studies of implementation. Understanding these local professional contexts, values, and relationships is an important facet in studying change (Datnow, 2006).

These two principles—the technical and the cultural— are key framing devices for understanding inclusion and accountability policies and the districts that try to balance and implement them simultaneously. The process of crafting coherence among and
within implementing organizations requires attention to both, as well as the active
participation of entities inside of and external to the districts and schools that are the
targets of change (Honig & Hatch, 2004). Honig and Hatch argue that schools and district
offices must do more than pursue technical solutions such as the creation of additional
structures or distribution of information to aid schools in the process of change.
Achieving coherence, as they define it, among multiple, competing efforts requires an
ongoing process of negotiation of local interactions, something external actors have
limited capacity to control:

Coherence depends on how implementers make sense of policy demands
and on the extent to which external demands fit a particular school's
culture, political interests, aspirations, conceptions of professionalism, and
ongoing operations…In this view, coherence as a state of affairs is…a
social construction produced through continual interactions among
teachers, students, organizational structures, curriculum, and other tools of
schooling (p.18).

Coherence among multiple efforts cannot be achieved exclusively by those within or
those above local educators and implementers. Rather, those involved in change must
engage in a process of crafting coherence over time, with shared authority and attention
to local needs and goals.

**Structural Aids to Implementation: Capacity, Support, and Multi-Level
Collaboration**

Implementation efforts that are effectively structured contain provisions for three
key elements: local negotiation and adaptation, capacity building, and structural change
to meet reform demands. Rather than political fiat, the authors argue that partnership with
local actors and capacity building are the key architectural components of effective
reform. McLaughlin (2006) argues that the interaction of administrative structures and local capacity with policy designs creates unique responses across sites. Consistent with earlier work in implementation studies, she argues that effective policies are characterized by mutual adaptation to account for this variance (M. W. McLaughlin, 1998; M. W. McLaughlin & Berman, 1975). Rather than strictly exercising an iron hand, "states that have significant effects on local education agencies rely more on multiple mechanisms of influence than on direct control" (Fuhrman & Elmore, 1990, p.90, emphasis added). In this model, schools and districts are able to negotiate the particulars of a change effort under broad guiding principles instead of firm mandates. Allowing negotiation and recognizing local, contextual innovation are the sorts of political factors that scholars like McLaughlin envisioned for substantive, lasting change.

Implementation scholars argue that outcomes should be the focus policy efforts, rather than debates over fidelity to the program design—a problem that often befalls policy implementers and designers alike (Honig, 2006; Louis & Miles, 1990). This focus on efficacy, rather than efficiency, allows for local variation while still moving towards common ends. Canadian policy and change expert Ben Levin (2010) argues that implementation “does not mean strict adherence to a predetermined policy but instead is the effort to achieve the intended purpose, including adaptations to suit local conditions and circumstances” (p.263). Spillane (2009) similarly argues that reforms should allow and promote local actors to attend to the functions, or broad fundamental principles, rather than the more tangible but superficial forms of change efforts. Louis and Miles (1990) call such an approach their “adaptive model,” where professionals are held
accountable for performance rather than fidelity, and reforms draw upon teachers’ “best judgment” and not their rote execution of a “predictable technology” (p.24).

In practice, enabling execution of such broad plans is a complex task. Equally challenging is studying their impact. Despite the localized variance inevitably at the center of change in schools, policy issues are often discussed and studied only at the abstract, macro level. Hargreaves (1985), in arguing for an intermediate, or *meso*, level of study, argues that “policy has to be negotiated and implemented through interaction” between schools and their governing authorities, as well as within schools among educators (p.43). Moving both the design and study of policy efforts closer to local actors is important, given that the public is far more trusting of local authorities than distant, state or provincial ones in most educational matters (Tyack, 2002). Policies can and do change as they travel through layers of the educational hierarchy (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973). Spillane (1999) discusses this local alternation of policies as educators’ *enactment zones*, or the space in which “teachers’ capacity, will, and prior practice interacts with incentives and learning opportunities… as well as the incentives and disincentives for change” (p.144).

Several implementation scholars have argued that the unit of change that best captures Hargreaves’s *meso* level is the school district (Anderson, 2003; Datnow, et al., 2006; Elmore, 1993; Spillane, 1998; Tyack, 2002). Districts have a unique role to play in reform efforts. They have the ability to marshal local support for reform efforts, create tighter interactions or networks among clusters of schools, articulate a reform vision, and help to move reform priorities closer to the core of instruction (Anderson, 2003; Elmore,
Elmore further argues that these entities can simultaneously pursue their own interests and those of state policy leaders. Locally, they can seek improvement and additional resources. Simultaneously, states can employ them as tools of reform by using those additional resources as leverage for equality and enhanced quality. An effective use of the *meso* level in implementing reforms, then, would be allowing districts to “create new roles for teachers; alter teaching practice; improve student achievement; and enhance teachers’ pride, sense of competency, and commitment to the profession” (Marsh, 2002, pp. 37-38).

As several authors note, local districts alter reforms to fit existing priorities and meet existing local capacities if coercion is the state’s reform stance or if new programs are being implemented without attention to coherence, capacity, or existing programs (Datnow et al., 2006). In particular, structural concerns like clear outcomes, a negotiated, locally relevant vision, and tools for building physical capital (including resources like time, professional development, as well as funding) are essential to harness the power that districts have as partners and intermediaries in reform efforts (Burch, 2002; Datnow, et al., 2006; Marsh, 2002). Districts can be important *meso* partners in this effort if properly engaged. Through districts, policymakers can exert lasting influence through local involvement, rather than alienation through control (Fullan, 2003). Part of effective reform structures is attention to this *meso* district level, acknowledging local actors’ ability to be allies and key implementers of reform by enlisting their participation in change.

Like districts, other third-party intermediaries can play an important *meso* role in
both implementation of reforms and their evaluation. Burch’s (2002) work highlights an underused and understudied aspect of reform implementation: the employment of non-governmental third parties in change efforts. Burch’s study examined professional development service providers who helped districts to implement reform efforts. These entities enabled local actors not only to implement, but also to make sense of and adapt state reforms. More recent work has called upon scholars who study implementation to examine the roles played by non-government intermediaries like health or venture philanthropy organizations, advocacy groups, research or consulting organizations, and other community service providers like non-profits (M. W. McLaughlin, 2006). Including these third parties in studies is equally important, since their role can be central in translating and enacting reforms at the district level.

Hargreaves (2009) argues that effective strategies for change employ local educators by design, and “build from the bottom, steer from the top” (p. 40). This ties in closely with Datnow’s (2006) argument that the best policy changes are co-constructed by planners and agents to account for both the overall vision and goals of the project as well as the ability of agents to meet those goals. In the past 60 years, governments have attempted innumerable efforts at reform both locally and nationally, with varied success (Tyack & Tobin, 1994). Reform architectures that guide local actors while allowing additional freedom may address this long-standing frustration.

In addition to mutual negotiation and adaptation, building and sustaining change requires resources and capacity. Spillane (1999) classifies such efforts as the capacity-building, or technical, aspect of reform, where knowledge-building and skill development
are employed to help teachers meet demands. Elmore (2004) argues this is an essential part of accountability reforms, for example, given the historic low performance of many groups of students. Just as reform efforts need to account for local negotiations, they must also, in McLaughlin’s view, build local capacity (see also Fullan, 2009). Even the classic fidelity study by Gross and colleagues (1971) recognized that teachers needed additional capacity to meet external demands. Just as meso-level actors may help mutual adaptation to take place, they can similarly act as capacity-builders to meet demands, as well as provide assistance with the local sense-making process, enabling districts to reconcile or integrate multiple reforms and potentially competing demands. In so doing, reformers can enhance relationships and build trust between themselves and teachers by giving them tools to meet demands and find more success with greater numbers of students.

Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) have proposed a theory of change that addresses both the key architectural elements of structure and relationships. Their Fourth Way proposes key principles in the architecture of policy changes, such as building local capacity, offering flexibility, and promoting mutual and democratic involvement in the change process. Aspects of their theory attempt to balance policy-level support with local control as a means to meet broader ends. The Fourth Way change paradigm arises from a chronological analysis of educational and social reform strategies across various national policy contexts. The authors provide a chronological summary of the first three ways of change following World War II, as follows:

- First Way: Classic Liberalism characterized by a focus on inputs, primarily via the “the social safety net of the welfare state” (Hargreaves &
Shirley, 2009). Government was the *primum movens* of the First Way, providing resources to those defined as being in need.

- **Second Way:** Largely sponsored by the political Right, the theory is based on standards, accountability, and, often, market-based competition. The Second Way assumes that the problem, in part, is in the system for being paternalistic and failing to pay attention to outcomes and partly resides in the system’s participants for their failure to be competitive. US accountability policies under NCLB are characteristic of this approach. Inclusion, in some ways, has its roots in this era when the focus for special education students shifted from IEP-based inputs to including them in accountability regimes.

- **Third Way:** Seen as a compromise approach between the Right and Left, Third Way policies still assume that targets are essential, but add that capacity must be built to meet such targets and that neither governments nor markets can handle that burden alone. Ontario’s system of accountability, EQAO, has been modified to adhere more to Third Way principles of results *and* capacity (Fillion, 1983; Fullan, 2009). Inclusion in these systems means that not only are identified students expected to meet standardized performance targets, but also that their teachers will be supported in helping them to meet these goals.

Hargreaves and Shirley argue that First Way attempts at inputs-only approaches to change are flawed relics of the past. However, Second Way approaches that remove or
reduce supports and inputs and replace them with standardization and strict accountability have largely declined in contexts other than the US. In Ontario, for example, educators and the public alike recognized the harm that intense pressure and lack of support wrought on teacher morale and the lives of the most vulnerable students, especially the poor and those with SEN (Fillion, 1983; Gidney, 1999). As Gidney’s history notes, protected funding for students with SEN did little for building general educator capacity and resulted in over-identification for many students whose needs were not met in other areas.

In Third Way contexts like Ontario’s, the continuation and even intensification of standardized testing and target setting mean that capacity building is strictly directed towards meeting government-set performance targets. Hargreaves and Shirley argue that devotion to testing results and the voluminous minutiae of curriculum standards often distract and dishearten educators from the bigger, meaningful purposes that got them into teaching in the first place (p.26, 41). Rather than building teachers’ capacity to help students pass tests, the authors argue that reform should entail developing teachers’ capacity to meet the needs of all learning and to assess that leaning in a variety of ways. Others have similarly argued that a testing focus like the one found in Second and Third Way contexts (even when there is support for meeting demands) often represents a heavy-handed top-down approach rather than a more professionally sustainable one that collaborates with professionals (Darling-Hammond, 2009; Jaafar & Anderson, 2007). Hargreaves and Shirley argue that the US is largely in a Second Way state of policy orientation in the wake of No Child Left Behind [NCLB] and, now, the openly
competitive Race to the Top [RTT]. Meanwhile, although Ontario’s testing arm, the
Education Quality and Accountability Office [EQAO], has made more progress towards
capacity building and helping schools and districts to set their own, localized targets and
design some local curriculum paths, Hargreaves and Shirley (p. 17) argue that externally
designed targets and delivery mechanisms of its Third Way can still stifle authentic
development of local capacity, overemphasize narrow data sets, and inhibit rigorous and
democratic engagement in favor of superficial collegiality and a focus on fidelity rather
than valued goals.

Hargreaves and Shirley’s Fourth Way attempts to build on the strengths and
address the weaknesses of the Third Way, especially arguing for additional input from
school-level agents on defining the goals and problems of change (M. W. McLaughlin,
2006) and the mutual construction of a flexible change process (Datnow, 2006). In
proposing a Fourth Way, the authors seek to capitalize on the centrist strength of the
Third Way while addressing some of its flaws. Their three broad pillars are:

- Compelling purpose, including a moral foundation (see also Fullan, 2003)
  and authentic engagement from key stakeholders. This includes mutual
  setting of meaningful targets.

- Clarified, mutually defined professional identities and collaboration with
  colleagues.

- Coherence among goals and initiatives.

Hargreaves and Shirley’s framework relates to a mutual adaptation view of
implementation issues in that it first notes the power in Third Way thinking: that capacity
building and support are just as important as clearly defined outcomes and goals and indeed should contribute to developing those goals and outcomes rather than merely delivering ones designed by others. Their proposed theory retains the blend of demands for performance with capacity building support that implementation theorists have long championed (Firestone, 1989; Thompson, 2002). They also, however, account for additional factors in the Fourth Way that McLaughlin (1998) sees as equally crucial for change. When Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) call for “authentic engagement” from key stakeholders like teachers and the community or when they call for teacher collaboration in reform efforts, they echo many of the principles that mutually adaptive implementation work has argued are weaknesses in most conventional, top-down reform efforts that emphasized fidelity (Cuban, 2008; Daly, 2009; Thompson, 2002).

In addition to permitting local adaptation and building capacity, the third key structural element in well-implemented reforms is organizational change in districts and schools. Sound reforms need to permit (or force) architectural changes that match policy demands. These can take the form of creating formal structures like reform and implementation teams that collaborate on local design and roll-out (Datnow, et al., 2006; M. W. McLaughlin, 1993) or emergent networks that grow into collaborative entities to build and share local knowledge and professional standards (Condron, 2011; Firestone, 1989; M. W. McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). As Louis and Miles (1990) found, schedules, leadership roles, and resource allocation are all existing structures that can stifle reform. Fullan’s (2007) recent work has argued that many existing structures like ancillary duties,
extraneous paperwork, and ineffective procedures and union arrangements need to be removed in order for change to succeed and be sustained.

The most effective change efforts are those that are sustainable at scale and have a substantive impact at the classroom level. One of the long-standing problems with achieving these impacts, however, is the inability to unite purposes, resources, and collective goals in a way that builds the capacity of front-line people to deliver them. Money, time, space, and professional development are all key resources that must be brought to schools, especially when change demands are placed on them (Datnow et al., 2006; Elmore, 2004). Louis and Miles (1990) found that sustainability was tied to “reallocations of time, people, materials, existing equipment, and assistance” within participating schools (p.33). Beyond money and resources, however, long-term changes begin with policies structured around reshaping schools in conjunction with local leaders. Louis and Miles are among those that argue that effective reform structures push schools to make changes in their own resource allocations and take ownership for reforms, so that capacity building efforts have lasting effects (see also Datnow, 2006). Marsh (2002) refers to this capacity building as physical capital, using time and professional development in ways to help staff grow.

Capacity comes with a caveat. Firestone’s (1989) early work revealed the failures of mandates that make demands without building capacity. It also reveals that financial inducements fail to create innovation too. Guidance is needed, along with networking and freedom to try new ideas (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). This often involves local district partners in developing the will to implement reform.
Relational Considerations: Will, Local Collaboration, and Change

The second major component that initiatives must consider to achieve successful implementation is relational. Even well-structured reforms that address teacher voice, build capacity, and are sufficiently malleable to local conditions can still fall short by failing to address such issues as local professional norms of instruction, conflict resolution, and autonomy. Fullan (2007) has argued that most innovations are “technically simple” but “socially complex,” making relational aspects of change potentially more crucial for successful implementation than structural elements. It also implies that these social, professional, cultural, and partly political aspects of change are the more difficult of the two, given Fullan’s argument that large-scale policy implementation is essentially a process of “planning and coordinating a social process involving thousands of people” (p.84). Implementation of new initiatives can impact the relational nature of teaching by affecting changes to teachers’ roles, relationships, and collective professional practice.

In their classic review of the literature on implementation, Fullan and Pomfret (1977) argue that innovations—particularly those relating to curriculum and instruction—dictate shifts in “roles and role relationships for teachers” (p.337). In particular, they contend that most change efforts ask teachers “to alter their usual ways of thinking about themselves and one another and their characteristic ways of behaving towards one another within the organization” (p.337). The literature taking a mutually adaptive perspective makes two key relational assumptions about change: that new initiatives alter professional identity as well as professional relationships and that these
changes are not linear, but “halting,” “interdependent,” and “incremental” (p.364).

Understanding local culture and its fluid nature can be pivotal to implementation, but these factors are left unexamined by fidelity-based research’s a priori boundaries. Taking the mutual adaptation view can addresses relational issues and mutual adaptation’s key assumptions in two ways. First, it can explain the complexities of how local communities interact with change, especially through the concepts of the communities of practice literature. The literature on communities of practice has addressed professional identities and relationships and how new policies can impact them. In addition, mutual adaptation research can offer lessons on how to use culture as a tool for implementation, rather than viewing it simply as an obstacle. Given the non-linear nature of change, culture as a tool for ongoing roll-out and reinforcement is an asset that fidelity studies cannot assess.

This section has two goals. First, it outlines the impact that relational factors—particularly local professional cultures—can have on the implementation of proposed reforms. As the mutually adaptive branch of implementation work shows, failure to attend to relational factors in the form of professional identities and culture almost always assures failure of the reform. Here, the concept of communities of practice is an important tool in understanding how teacher cultures interact with reform efforts (Coburn & Stein, 2006). Second, this section suggests how reformers might go about harnessing the influence of culture by cultivating new iterations of formal and informal teacher relationships.

Little (1990, 2003) refers to the cultural aspects of reform as questions of autonomy, values, interactions, privacy, and the nature of conflict. These include local
norms around conflict resolution and professional autonomy. Honig and Hatch (2004) found that organizations that can successfully navigate change often have a means for negotiating professional conflict, rather than a culture of constant consensus. Sarason’s (1971) classic work on culture as an obstacle to change argues that structural issues are only part of the reform process, and his notions of power as a change obstacle illustrate how cultural concerns are reform elements distinct from structural ones. Sarason contends that “culture defines the permissible ways” that even well-structured reforms can interact with schools (Sarason, 1971, p.12). Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) define these relational factors of change as teacher professionalism and its attendant networks and communities, and argue that these elements need to be cultivated in schools as part of a successful process of change.

In light of these factors, structure and planning seem insufficient if local cultural factors remain unaddressed. Beyond just building capacity, scholars in taking a mutually adaptive stance on implementation argue that reform efforts need to address teachers’ will to change by helping them to collectively reimagine their professional identities within the context of the local cultures that shape them (Spillane, 1999). School cultures can thwart reform if they are given no attention, but can also adapt and sustain reform if they are harnessed (Elmore, 2004). In particular, initiatives are more likely to take root when colleagues can engage one another on the topic of change rather than remaining professionally isolated (de Lima, 2001; M. W. McLaughlin & Berman, 1975). This is a capacity that must often be built, however, by districts or those external to the initiative. Lortie’s (1975) classic study lamented the teaching profession’s lack of “common
understanding and techniques” for instruction, and “the absence of a common technical vocabulary” (p.73). Successful implementation may often depend on an effort’s ability to build this cultural capacity—including the ability to engage in conflict and the installation of a common professional language—alongside technical elements like training in effective instruction.

Teachers’ responses vary to attempts at cultural change. The literature on communities of practice help to describe how veteran members of a school’s culture collectively define the norms of their work and, therefore, how a faculty might respond to external directives or, in the case of inclusion, to calls to for less privacy and autonomy in favor of more shared responsibility. Wenger’s (1998) work in corporate settings is foundational in this area. The author describes implicit workplace cultures that convey norms of practice to new members, often in contrast to official training guides. School-based professional communities of practice serve as an important translator of policy for teachers (Daly, 2009; New Hampshire Department of Education Statewide Census by Disability, 2011; Spillane, 1999). These informal cultural groups simultaneously shape the individual’s professional identity, the culture, and the group’s collective knowledge of practice. This influence is especially poignant for new members. These influences come in the form of “untold rules of thumb…, embodied understandings, [and] underlying assumptions” (Wenger, 198, p.47). Thus, when “today’s policies demand transformation of the core of teachers’ instructional practices,” this learning process is fundamentally social and interactive (Stein & Coburn, 2008, p. 583). A community of practice is not a deliberate initiative created by policymakers. Rather, it is a socially
constructed reality that creates and enforces professional norms within a group. These local contexts establish “regimes of competence” that signal which practices are acceptable and, therefore, what comprises “competent participant” in the group (Wenger, 1998, p.137).

A second text helpful in understanding communities of practice and how they reconcile formalized training in the field is Orr’s (1996) ethnographic study of photocopier technicians. Orr’s participants were forced to confront complex, new problems in the realm of practice that were often quite different from those outlined by their manuals or their training. The study provides insight into how practitioners grapple with mandates and rigid policies in their complicated, non-standardized work. The technicians must engage in “the interactive construction of an understanding… in the context of a problematic situation” (p.12). Technicians must confront unexpected problems defined by customers and their desired uses, and the needed solutions often defy the manual. The daily work of implementing repairs includes a “narration [that] includes summarizing what is known…, questioning whether what is known is a coherent representation of the situation…, and determining what else needs to be known” (p.119). Like teachers, repairs entail adapting existing directives to a variety of complex situations rather than the routinely applying externally designed protocols.

Little’s (2002) communities of practice constructs, from her study of teacher’s collaborative work, help to operationalize these broad concepts for observers of reform. Little argues that there are three important aspects to teacher interaction in communities of practice:
• **Representations** of practice: The public aspects of work that are available to peers for discussion.

• **Orientation** to the practice of improvement: How the issue of improvement and change is defined in the group; how issues are avoided, difficulties discussed, and changes, solutions, and systems are created, ignored, or torn down.

• **Norms of interaction**: The way the organization allows, promotes, or inhibits interactions and the subjects of those interactions.

Implementation presses individuals to challenge their understandings of their roles and work (Little, 2002; Wenger, 1998). The everyday settings in which these negotiations take place, however, are unique and far more complex than many policies imagine. Teachers must “square institutional demands with the shifting reality of actual situations” (Wenger, 1998, p.46). Like Cohen’s (1990) Ms. Oublier, however, teachers work alone. Altering their roles to fit external demands is challenging, especially given the great variety of students and contexts they encounter. Such privacy and complexity give teacher communities great incentive to resist changes in roles (Kennedy, 2005; Lortie, 1975). Orr’s (1996) participants repair machines used in a variety of contexts and purposes, employing and adapting standardized design and repair procedures to fit client needs. Their work, Orr notes, is unpredictable, and often they “can only react to a situation already defined [by others] as a problem” (p.159). Technicians’ particular experiences help to sustain and convey knowledge, but also can “constrain the application of those claims” by defining and limiting the parameters of diagnosis (Orr,
Like Ms. Oublier, the technicians work separately, and have difficulty making and seeing changes both in colleagues’ practice and their own. Little (2002) argues that since teaching is both “widely familiar and deeply private” (p.934), this familiarity gives them great incentive to resist implementing innovation. Their privacy provides more than ample reason to close their doors and avoid scrutiny of their community of practice.

Studies of implementation often neglect teachers’ “collective construction of a local practice” as they grapple with new reform demands (Wenger, 1998, p. 46). Little’s framework and the work of scholars of communities of practice are instrumental in understanding these localized processes of collective negotiation in the face of reform. In practice, implementing an externally designed reform is a process of gradual diffusion, “since each actor has some autonomy to make her own decision and implement [the innovation], partly in response to the ideas, information, and other social forces to which she is exposed” (Frank & Zhao, 2005, p. 205). Little’s framework offers one way to observe the changes in “roles and role relationships” that Fullan and Pomfret (1977) described. In particular, the mutually adaptive lens and the literature on communities of practice can help observers to understand the new demands made on professional cultures by change and what becomes of these existing professional communities. These changes impact professional interactions that have been called cultural and professional (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). Collectively, they are relational elements. A mutually adaptive stance helps to explore the degree to which a reform’s structure impacts local culture to help it adopt its own internal version of professional standards and cultural

The second contribution the concept of communities of practice makes towards understanding cultural obstacles to implementation concerns teachers’ professional relationships. Little (2002) argues that teacher communities of practice must consider the ways in which teachers interact and are allowed to interact around their work. Teachers, she says, rarely fully open their practice to colleagues or challenge one another. For Wenger (1998), this entails the crossing of boundaries, where a school’s faculty are members of sub-communities that grant colleagues access in some ways and deny it in others (see also de Lima, 2004). The brokering, or boundary-crossing, activities that collective reforms often entail frequently fail to help teachers integrate new reforms and alter their classroom practice. For example, division between general and special educators is not unique, as teacher professional cultures are often characterized by isolated sub-groups, or Balkanized entities (Hargreaves, 1994a). Many inclusion policies provide little support for the brokering needed to alter teacher culture in this way. Orr’s concept of service territory, and the “delicate social equilibrium” around designated responsibilities (p.63), is similar in that respecting borders often takes precedence over the commitment to adopting new initiatives. Privacy, autonomy, and conservatism often win the day (Kennedy, 2005; Lortie, 1975). When efforts towards implementation fail to address these long-held cultural norms, they face dim prospects of success. Innovations can become isolated in just a few individuals and fail to receive wider adaptation or even become extinguished, as colleagues are discouraged from disturbing professional norms.
New reforms must do something to address the local cultures charged with bringing change to fruition.

**Confronting Cultures and Communities of Practice**

In addition to structuring reform efforts to allow for building capacity and reform adaptation, the literature suggests ways that more successful efforts deliberately consider relational aspects of reform. In particular, lessons from past efforts at implementation reveal that attention to both deliberate and emergent cultural entities can aid reform. Formal arrangements that impact culture include deliberately constructed collaborative networks and professional learning communities in the form of formal, collaborative meetings for teachers. Coburn and Stein (2006) recount how the appointment of key monitors in New York’s District 2 created a formal network that aided implementation. These monitors served as key hubs of information, crossing formal boundaries like schools and departments to connect teachers and share information.

Professional learning communities [PLCs] are another formal effort that policymakers can employ to impact teachers’ culture. These groups promote teacher collaboration and learning, often centered around discussions of teacher practice, student work, and other localized issues (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006; Stoll & Louis, 2007). Resources like time, space, data, and, often, an experienced facilitator make these groups possible and can promote positive, ongoing changes in professional culture. PLCs can also provide new initiatives a valuable entry point into school communities of practice (M. W. McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). If these PLCs are
not allowed the same locally adaptive leeway required by other efforts, however, they can collapse under the weight of dictated agendas and protocols (DuFour, 2005).

Emergent entities must be harnessed in implementation efforts as well. Firestone (1989) found that local coalitions play a critical role in fostering or inhibiting reform, especially when those coalitions reached a critical mass of adherents. Forming and finding allies in such coalitions can be important in the life of a reform effort. These coalitions and the larger professional communities of the school can play a critical role in whether or not a given district takes full ownership of a reform effort and fully adopts it internally (Levin, 2009; Marsh, 2002; Thompson, 2006). Leaders can maximize opportunities for change when they employ coalitions of respected teachers with significant cultural capital in rolling out reform efforts. Once adopted, local professional cultures can play a crucial role in a district’s or a school’s ability to grow and sustain that effort, provided they are cultivated as communities that welcome and promote ongoing learning and professional dialogue (Condron, 2011; Firestone, 1989).

Marsh’s (2002) work in particular makes the case for reformers to pay greater attention to human and social capital in reform efforts. In her review of districts’ roles in reform, she contends that districts that cultivated both a “personal commitment” from teachers, as well as that built knowledge collectives (a sort of informal network) that spanned school boundaries were stronger adapters and sustainers of reform (p.29). Earlier work by Louis and Miles (1990) bolsters these findings, contending that building formal and informal teams enables reform implementation and survival. The best teams sacrifice some personal autonomy for the sake of “collective problem solving” (p.24). Distributing
authority enhances buy-in, and potentially sustains efforts over time (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006).

Marsh (2002) further argues in his review of districts that leaders must play the lead role in marshaling this support at the local (especially school) level by building these coalitions and consensus for support around new efforts. These local, cultural functions help transition new ideas from policy into everyday practice (Fullan, 1992). Local, district-based leaders are better positioned than outsiders to take on the role of creating the kind of productive cultural conflict that challenges the static aspects of local communities (de Lima, 2001; Elmore, 2004; Little, 2002, 2003). These cultural changes allow for the collective sensemaking (Spillane, 2000) and the building of local coalitions (Louis & Miles, 1990; Marsh, 2002) advocated by other authors. Local coalitions and teams empower teachers to take on leadership roles, feel collective ownership, and make use of newly available resources.

**Build Structure, Cultivate Culture**

Educators are typically expected to implement various types of changes. Most often, these initiatives are externally designed, and when their agendas are strict and standardized, they can be debilitating to internal momentum and morale (Firestone, 1989). Teachers are expected to alter their outlook or practice in the service of improving outcomes for students. Changes in policy and the efforts meant to implement them have the potential to focus energies, target resources, and exert positive pressure through motivation, explicit expectations, assistance (Fullan, 2007). Such efforts can also include challenges for teachers and their local leaders. These challenges might be structural
obstacles, presenting competing demands, unwelcome changes, or taxes on capacity. The hurdles may also be relational in nature, creating conflicts with existing professional culture and practice without considering teachers’ needs for learning and growth. Past research in implementation has shown that there are available solutions to these issues. As teachers and their local leaders grapple with change, each has a role to play in balancing demands with support and individual autonomy with professional collaboration. A mutually adaptive perspective on implementation reveals this is a complex process, but one whose goals can be attained if both structural and relational issues are addressed.

**Inclusion and Accountability: Issues of Implementation**

Efforts towards reform most often attempt to impact classroom practice, but this level of change is rarely achieved in a substantive, sustainable way (Cohen, 1990; Fullan, 2007). As the literature on implementation indicates, classroom-level impacts happen only when initiatives allow local adaptation, have clear guiding principles, build local capacity, and attend to local elements of professional culture (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Louis & Miles, 1990). These steps can be complex and time-consuming, and are often neglected in contemporary initiatives. Inclusion and accountability are two recent examples of reforms that expect teachers to learn new practices and increase achievement. Student progress is generally measured by standardized tests (Gallucci, 2008), a narrow measurement on which teachers have no input (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009).

This study will explore inclusion and accountability and the competing
expectations that these reforms place on teachers and schools. In defining these initiatives, I argue they are policy stances that teachers and their local leaders must not only implement, but also reconcile within their existing structures and communities of practice. Individually, each certainly represents a challenge to teachers’ roles and professional relationships (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977). Enacting them simultaneously presents a host of new implementation challenges rarely studied in the change literature. In mandating these changes in roles and relationships, teachers often want for support, guiding vision, as well as organizational and cultural structures to help them succeed.

**Accountability**

Accountability policies in Canada and the United States have ambitious goals. For the purpose of this study, accountability consists of the combined system of content standards and the uniform assessments used to measure students against standards-based performance targets. Standard-based accountability’s theory of action is, on the surface, a simple one: “being explicit about standards for student performance and measuring student progress toward them, coupled with sanctions and incentives, will leverage the improvement of student learning” (Haertel & Herman, 2005, p. 21). But Haertel and Herman further contend that accountability systems like those employed in the US and much of Canada are also intended to serve “motivational and symbolic purposes,” in the sense that the system “establishes the target for reform efforts, communicates to educators, administrators, and parents what is expected, and provides incentives and/or sanctions…, thereby stimulating all levels of the education system to focus on achieving” (p.21). O’Day (2002) has similarly pointed out how alignment and focus are foundational
to accountability’s theory of action. Measurement, in a sense, is supposed to produce this alignment of curriculum and professional culture.

Spencer (2004) characterizes this as an economic bureaucratic stance towards change, where reformers demand results of practitioners with little dialogue, shared accountability, or mutual adaptation. Teachers are not treated as collaborating professionals and no collective responsibility is sought, as in a more ethical-professional approach (as cited in Jaafar & Anderson, 2007; see also Darling-Hammond, 2009; Elmore, 2004; Rowan, 1990). Second Way regimes like the US make no allowance for building teacher capacity to meet targets and Third Way contexts like Ontario build capacity only for meeting narrow performance targets. Past work in implementation suggests that the latter, professional, approach is the more effective at altering achievement at scale. As authors on policy and reform have noted, internal accountability among professionals is more likely to raise collective achievement than external sanctions (Elmore, 2004; Fullan, 2007; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). The US, however, subscribes only to methods of bureaucratic accountability and Ontario has only recently begun to build local coalitions and networks. These Third Way efforts in Canada are still moves towards relatively narrow ends.

Despite its flaws, accountability has noble goals. Honig (2006) notes that the objective of the American approach to accountability policy is to “help all students achieve to high-performance standards” (p.10). By disaggregating data by subgroups, the American accountability system aims to force both educators and the public to examine the achievement of historically underperforming groups, such as low-income students,
persons of color, and students with SEN. This disaggregated data is assumed to be useful in helping schools and districts craft responses to underperforming students and groups, augmenting whatever special services are already provided (Haertel & Herman, 2005). Former President George W. Bush (1999), a key architect of the US Federal policy, argued during his first campaign that strict accountability policy was necessary to counter what he termed the “the soft bigotry of low expectations,” calling it “discrimination to require anything less” than equal results for all children. Many special education advocates have lauded the American accountability approach, arguing that it represents an important civil rights step by codifying common expectations for all students (Ramanathan, 2008). Canadian observers have also noted that Provincially mandated, standardized curricula have equity goals for students with SEN (Jaafar & Anderson, 2007). Such reforms seek to alter the fundamental ways teachers think about their work with students and colleagues (Levin, 2009). As studies of implementation have shown, changing roles and role relationships can be a difficult enterprise, especially when there are few capacity building resources or explicit visions attached to reforms (Cohen, 1990; Firestone, 1989; Fullan, 2007; Fullan & Pomfret, 1977).

**Recent history of accountability.** While many trace the genesis of the current, standardized accountability movement in the US to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2002 and in Ontario to the founding of the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) in 1995, the concept is not new. Historian David Tyack (1974) reminds observers that many large, urban American systems sought accountability and efficiency via the corporate model as early as the turn as the Twentieth Century. In the 1970s, this
effort was rekindled as part of a wave of reforms around performance and compensation that again saw teachers in the role of implementers, with the tacit “power to veto or sabotage proposals for reform” (p.289). Like their counterparts 50 years before, reformers again sought to pressure teachers into higher performance, though without much attention to local capacity building (Haertel & Herman, 2005). American schools in the decade before NCLB saw standardized reforms crush local innovations such as integrated periods and diverse assessment efforts like portfolios (Condron, 2011; Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006). Similarly, benchmark testing and common curricula in Ontario first appeared at least two decades before EQAO came on the scene (Gidney, 1999).

What is relatively new in both contexts is the emphasis on a system of accountability pieces attempting to work together, like pistons in an engine: standards, testing, publicized results, and interventions for failing schools. As currently constituted in most American States and Ontario, accountability policy is marked by making schools the primary units of analysis; those units are held accountable for student performance (in the form of test results), and the tests, standards, rewards, and punishments are all managed by external actors (Apple, 2008; Elmore, 2004). Beyond testing, the policy known as NCLB set out “to improve achievement for all students, to enhance equity, and to ensure more qualified teachers” (Krulak, 1999 January, p. 162). While many states were effectively moving towards standards and tests even before NCLB, the new Federal law did more than require all states to establish those content frameworks and annual assessments. It established a set of clear, escalating sanctions for schools and districts failing to demonstrate progress. These corrective actions include allowing students to
transfer, restricting funds, and ultimately reconstituting schools by removing staff. Few, if any, additional resources accompanied this mandate, making it a classic Second Way move (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009).

In the decade before NCLB was born in the US, Ontario was engaged in its own Second Way efforts. Ontario’s use of province-wide curriculum, standardized report cards, and common assessments largely reflects the current, American view of accountability (Gidney, 1999). The notable exception, however, is the capacity building element added by the current, Third Way McGuinty government (Jaafar & Anderson, 2007). In particular, the Ontario Ministry has recently worked to add collaborative and capacity building elements to the pressure of accountability. Winter and McEachern (2001) wrote that, under this most recent Government, Ontario has made a commitment to “collegiality, teamwork, and partnerships” by working to build teachers’ capacity to meet demands while simultaneously maintaining pressure for results (p.686). Similarly, Hargreaves’s work has shown that, while not wholly adequate, the beginning of Ontario’s McGuinty government saw at least some increase in professional development support to accompany performance targets—a clear Third Way approach (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Hargreaves, 2003). Fullan (2007) describes this combination of removing ancillary school duties, offering support, and setting clear, universal expectations for outcomes as part of a larger strategy to raise achievement, eliminate excuses, and increase public confidence (p.61). American scholars note that such additional resources are sorely lacking in the American system (Hargreaves, 2003; O’Day, 2002). Comparisons between American and Canadian accountability systems are summarized in Table 1, using
Hargreaves and Shirley’s Fourth Way as a framework.

Firestone’s (1989) early work in implementation predates accountability in both contexts, but his distinction between change efforts as either mandates or inducements is instructive. Mandates create pressure, but offer little support. Inducements provide resources, but fail to cultivate a local will to change. In Ontario, current accountability policies recognize Firestone’s finding that mandates, while efficient motivators, fail to build capacity. The Ontario ministry has, accordingly, taken steps to offer funding and professional development in a Third Way approach that blends mandates and incentives (Fullan, 2007). Such a strategy hopes to spur change both from above as well as from within.

Not only do American accountability systems lack support, but the law also represents an unmanageable confusion of mandates and inducements. NCLB is the latest iteration of the recurring 1960s inducement known as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The ESEA has traditionally used Federal funds to supplement state and local resources in high-poverty districts. Beyond funding, however, the Federal Government has limited authority in education matters. Combined with the lack of additional capacity building funds to accompany the pressure from testing, such a mandate seems a poor addition to an existing inducement, and thus doomed to fail. Teachers’ will to make substantive professional changes and their technical capacity to do so would seem essential with a law like this one (Firestone, 1989; Spillane, 1999). Both are poorly addressed by NCLB (Elmore, 2004; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). In contrast, Fullan (2007) notes that Ontario’s EQAO, a precursor to NCLB, has
implemented strategies that combine communication among levels, teacher input, and additional capacity building.

**Table 1. Comparing Accountability Policy in the US and Ontario**

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<tr>
<th>Second Way</th>
<th>United States</th>
<th>Ontario</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Currently characterized by standards and performance targets, as well as sanctions and market mechanisms. No support for capacity building.</td>
<td>Pre-2003 Ontario, where resources were withdrawn and boards’ authority consolidated in favor of universal tests and published results.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Third Way</th>
<th>United States</th>
<th>Ontario</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Current discussions encourage common standards and support for adopting them; some districts are establishing collaborative communities around data, improvement, and special education.</td>
<td>Performance targets were matched by an increase in staff, capacity building to use data, and increased networking.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Fourth Way Potential</th>
<th>United States</th>
<th>Ontario</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N / A</td>
<td>A potential shift, through CODE or other projects, to allow for more local goal setting and planning, more meaningful use of data, and principal role shifts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: In both the US and Canada, educational systems and their accountability mechanisms are managed by states and provinces, respectively. Unlike Canada, however, American States’ systems of accountability operate under mandates and guidelines from the Federal Government through the law known as NCLB.*

Tests and standards-based accountability are prime examples of rigid external policy changes that face both structural and cultural obstacles in schools. Accountability impacts both the roles and role relationships of teachers, and is meant to fundamentally
alter the work of teachers and their leadership. Under accountability regimes, teachers’ assumptions about what they must account for and to whom are deeply shaken. When accountability does not seek to build capacity or allow for local adaptation, it creates adaptation issues for local educators. For example, general curriculum teachers require support in both meeting identified students’ special educational needs while also accommodating their exceptionalities (Wanker & Christie, 2005), Yet most forms of external pressure ask schools to find internal solutions without support (O’Day, 2002).

Datnow (2006) has found that tests and standards do indeed fundamentally change teachers’ work and priorities, though often at the expense of other school efforts. She argues that few substantive, classroom-level improvements take place, and those that do are either extensions of existing efforts or innovations confined to a willing few. These limited impacts are not surprising, given that such the American bureaucratic approach to accountability assumes that teachers’ will and capacity are already present, and that pressure and punishment are all that are needed to get sufficiently standardized students to achieve at designated levels of performance (Darling-Hammond, 2009). Hargreaves (2003) contends that the American accountability system actually encourages more narrow curricula and lower standards for all, in part because it sets common, arbitrary performance bars for large groups. The law especially encourages states to abandon “assessments that measure critical thinking and performance, just as the labor market increasingly demands these skills” (p.162). It does so by failing to allow local adaptation and rewarding high pass rates, not high standards and high achievement, per se. Finally, bureaucratic accountability further punishes local adaptation by encouraging
uniform, conservative practices rather than experimentation to meet broad performance targets. Louis and Miles (1990) argue that effective implementation means creating an environment where initiative and risk-taking are rewarded, “to reinforce the belief that change and achievement…are possible” (p.31). Strict accountability discourages that, narrowing the curriculum and creating a more conservative set of approaches to instruction—a common reaction to uncertain environments.

Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) remind readers that this outcome should be expected of Second Way approaches that drain participation and resources from teachers and install draconian performance targets. The standardized accountability movement makes teachers the objects of reform, rather than participants in it, thus failing to account for the organizational change and individual learning it requires (Coburn & Stein, 2006; Elmore, 2004). Kornhaber (2008) has argued that NCLB’s current application in the US does not allow the accountability system to perform one of its basic functions: enabling educators to improve. Elmore (2004) has echoed this structural flaw, arguing that demands for performance must be accompanied by capacity to meet those demands. Accommodating student and district variance is simply exacerbated by attempts at tight control, standardization, and strict monitoring, especially when schools face competing priorities, testing exclusions, state and local policy conflicts (Fullan, 2007; Ramanathan, 2008; Thornton, Hill, & Usinger, 2006; Wanker & Christie, 2005). Fourth Way advocates Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) remind observers that inflexible change plans can fail when encountering natural variation.

Rigid accountability pressures face structural challenges as well. Woods and his
colleagues argue that, in the UK, bureaucratic forms of change are an imposition that many teachers feel has distorted their work and pulled them in competing directions (Woods, et al., 1997). Accountability that does not build coalitions across districts and levels or pay attention to local communities of practice will inevitably face challenges (Fullan, 2003). This is especially true in schools characterized by historical trends towards teacher autonomy and privacy (Little, 1990). Jaafar & Anderson (2007) note that schools are characterized by a variety of agendas and emphases, making coalescing around a single purpose difficult. Gidney (1999) argues that the EQAO in Ontario, meant as part of a package of reforms to reinvigorate the teaching force, had the opposite effect, and teachers expressed outright “discontent and frustration” or simply “sat on their hands” in the face of such reforms, often due to lack of support (p.233). Sunderman, Kim, and Orfield (2005) found in large-scale surveys that trying to implement the accountability reforms of NCLB in various local contexts across states left teachers feeling frustrated and undervalued.

Most often, accountability in Canada and the US means individual teachers are trying to improve in isolation while policies make schools and districts the primary units of accountability (Thornton, et al., 2006). Even in Ontario, where some improvements have been made in support and networking in recent years, many teachers still feel intense, technocratic pressure (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). Bureaucratic pressure alone cannot spur growth the way local, professional accountability can (Elmore, 2004; Fullan, 2007; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). Standardized, bureaucratic accountability is similar to other efforts towards change that implementation scholars have studied in the past.
Such efforts need capacity-building efforts to play an essential part of reform.

As Fullan (2003) has argued, systems of accountability do not, in themselves build capacity for change. What is needed, he argues, are partnerships within and across all three levels of the educational system: policy makers, districts, and schools. These relationships can build knowledge to respond to pressure and create meaningful change through both technical adjustments and growth in teachers’ communities of practice.

Elmore (2004) has made similar points about the American system, specifically that local leaders must establish a vision, a coalition, and local accountability. Accountability with broad, guiding principles and more mutual adaptation must rule the day rather than narrow targets.

**Inclusion’s Contested Meanings**

Like accountability, the principles of inclusion can also be difficult to implement in practice. Also like accountability, inclusion is difficult when externally designed and locally implemented. Historians like Tyack (1974) argue that systems have long faced obstacles when trying to address diversity in uniform ways. Inclusion, or the practice of educating students considered exceptional in conventional, mainstream classrooms, began as a contested theory in special education long before becoming a policy mandate. Like standardized accountability, when inclusion is implemented as a rigid, static policy, it asks teachers to significantly alter their practice, often without consideration for developing the local capacity and will to do so.

Inclusion is a complex concept fraught with disagreement in the fields of policy and special education (Kavale & Forness, 2000; Winzer, 2000). In the literature, the
concept has several definitions (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1998). In particular, Fuchs and Fuchs note key debates around inclusion’s scope and purpose. In terms of scope, the authors note that policy makers disagree about which students identified with which special needs should be included in mainstream classrooms. They note many authors’ concerns that broadening access to all students may threaten other efforts, such as the administration of common learning standards and high-stakes assessments to students who some argue are not capable. Some authors feel that some disabilities are so severe as to warrant exclusion and specialized support, partly for the benefit of identified students (Kauffman, et al., 2002; Kauffman, et al., 2005) and partly to avoid distracting their non-identified peers (Wood, 2007). Fuchs and Fuchs also remind readers that inclusion’s purpose is debated, with some seeing its value in teaching tolerance and promoting diversity (Kavale & Mostert, 2003). Others value inclusion’s civil rights potential, including its ability to grant otherwise excluded groups access to mainstream curricula and tests (Pullin, 2005).

Some authors situate inclusion in the social benefits realm, arguing for its use for all students, all of the time, regardless of disability status (Janney & Snell, 2006). This is what Fuchs and Fuchs (1998) define as full inclusion, or that which entails the complete, full-time placement of all persons, including those with the most severe disabilities, in conventional settings. This approach currently cannot fully coexist with similar standards and tests for all. As Fuchs and Fuchs argue, the inclusion of students with high incidence disabilities like reading problems, intellectual delays, severe behavior issues, deafness or blindness, and severe cognitive impairments might necessitate changes to otherwise standardized classroom practice, pacing, and assessment. They further contend that total
inclusion must necessarily result in “a fundamental change in the nature of conventional schooling” and a “de-emphasis, if not outright rejection, of standard curricula” (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1998, np). For inclusion-as-social benefit theorists, inclusion “sets out to deal with new social demands on education,” using integration as a way to promote diversity, including “cultural, social, linguistic, racial, gender, mental, and physical differences” (Winzer, 2000, p.8). Much of this movement has its roots in two areas: scholars who contend that scant evidence supports claims for separate placements (Gartner & Lipsky, 1987), and those who have connected the disability rights movement with the larger, anti-segregation Civil Rights Movement (Kavale & Forness, 2000). An aspect of this agenda is challenging cultural biases and existing attitudes that limit persons with disabilities (in fact, many authors of this view challenge the very notion of “disability” or “exceptionality”) (e.g., Hitchcock, Meyer, Rose, & Jackson, 2005). Such a view places an undue burden on teachers to change the larger social systems that shape schools (Sarason, 1971).

A final camp comprises opponents of inclusion, who argue that students’ social needs are not the essential purpose of school and that the academic needs of students with SEN cannot be satisfied in the general education classroom. Kauffman and colleagues have argued that inclusion (and related policies like RTI) as a policy is ideological and political, not grounded in research, and fails to meet the needs of students with special needs (Kauffman, et al., 2002; Kauffman, et al., 2005). He and his collaborators have argued that inclusion settings are, in fact, less effective for many students, who would otherwise benefit from particular services in environments distinctly separate from their
peers. Several other authors have also objected to claims made by advocates of inclusion and its social benefits, also arguing their goals for diversity and integration are largely ideologically motivated, rather than grounded in bodies of empirical evidence (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1998; Kavale & Forness, 2000; Kavale & Mostert, 2003).

The debate around inclusion represents one attempt to reconcile the principles of access, progress, and participation that approaches like integration and mainstreaming only addressed in part (Hitchcock, et al., 2005). That is, it shifts many identified students into conventional classrooms and uses individualized instruction to help them gain access to the conventional curriculum. Singh (2009) defines inclusion at the classroom level, and argues against a universal description of its implementation. He eschews much of the controversy over definitions, and argues that inclusive practice should be focused on “providing specifically designed supports for diverse student populations” (p.15). In this inclusive vision, the whole environment adapts in the way many early inclusion theorists envisioned (Gartner & Lipsky, 1987). Winzer (2000) distinguishes inclusion from the focus of mainstreaming on changing physical location only. The author argues that, with true inclusion, not only is “every student who is exceptional” receiving an education “alongside normally developing peers,” but lessons are designed to meet a spectrum of needs (p.6). The paradigm shift from mainstreaming to fully participatory inclusion comes when the changes are asked first of the classroom learning environment, rather than the student.

Because this is a comparative policy analysis, I will employ Hunt and McDonnell’s (2007) broad, policy-based definition when investigating implementation
efforts. They define inclusion as the practice wherein “students with disabilities attend their home schools and receive educational services through full-time placement in chronologically age-appropriate general education classes within the context of the core curriculum and general class activities and in integrated community settings” (p.270). This definition represents a more meso, policy-oriented stance towards inclusion, rather than more localized definitions that are only concerned with individual teachers’ responses to, or concerns with, inclusion. This is the most appropriate lens for a comparative policy study primarily interested in comparing implementation experiences of local educators. In practice, Hunt and McDonnell’s view carries two important implications for general education teachers and their schools. First, that the physical location of some students—students with identified needs who might previously have been excluded—would shift from distinctly separate settings to a presumed mainstream location as their primary or exclusive site of learning. In most cases, only those students presumed to benefit from such a move are included. Second, that some access would be provided to the general education curriculum once they were in these mainstream settings.

Questioning which students will participate in mainstream settings and curriculum, to what extent, and how often is one source of the controversy when implementing inclusion. The other is what impact this practice could or should have on the education of non-identified, general education students (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1998; Kavale & Forness, 2000) and their teachers, who may or may not be prepared to support them (Mayrowetz, 2009). These definitions presume that the burden for integrating should
primarily be upon special education students and their teachers primarily. Most implemented versions of inclusion seek to avoid disruptions for non-identified students in the general curriculum. More fervent inclusion advocates have argued that general curriculum teachers must also contribute to an environmental paradigm shift concerning the nature of disabilities and their relationship to instruction (e.g., Gartner & Lipsky, 1987). Inclusion, however, can suffer from the same cultural implementation challenges as other efforts, including moments when teachers are asked to alter their roles and role relationships.

Winzer (2000) points out that while inclusion, integration, and mainstreaming are often used simultaneously, they represent divergent approaches to accommodating different needs. Integration most often refers to a change in the pupil’s physical setting, though it may not include a substantive change in instruction. Mainstreaming generally refers to “providing every student who is exceptional, regardless of type and severity of disability, with an appropriate education, as much as possible, alongside normally developing peers” (Winzer, 2000, p. 6). This approach represents a form of standardization for students with special educational needs (SEN), and historically represented the first attempt at assuring participation for included students. Kavale and Forness (2000) argue that this standardization process began in the 1960s and 1970s, when anti-segregation arguments took root in several areas of social thinking. These authors argue that “advocacy thus shifted from the child to the program” as a way to consistently ensure access for students with SEN (p.281). Integration and mainstreaming, then, are two approaches that seem to represent the tensions that British authors have
observed in UK schools: “some education for all,” “more education for some,” and “different education for others” (Black-Hawkins, et al., 2007, p. 4), since mainstreaming never fully answered the question of which students would be included and to what extent their exceptionalities would be addressed.

Teachers in the participatory inclusion model can serve as facilitators and constructivist-style instructors. Ainscow (1999) argues this model of placement and teaching should call on schools to avoid deficit perspectives (viewing SEN identification similarly to a medical, pathological diagnosis), and instead employ constructivist teaching. This mode of instruction entails access to “real experiences,” similar to those designed for non-identified peers and facilitates “personal reflection” on the part of teachers (p.116). Even those who advocate for such open, participatory classrooms acknowledge the challenge this presents for teachers, who must “assume new roles, develop new competencies,” and make new and different use of resources and colleagues (Jackson, Harper, & Jackson, 2005, p. 129). These descriptions of the struggles of implementing inclusion again call to mind the mutual adaptation challenges to roles and role relationships identified by Fullan and Pomfret (1977). Such change is especially difficult when teachers are asked to alter their practice and support new learning needs, often in isolation and without support. Inclusion, like other efforts, needs leaders with a guiding vision and capacity building support for teachers if it is to be implemented at the classroom level at scale.
Inclusion: From Academic Discourse to Implemented Policy

Well before current inclusion debates surfaced, “the idea of selecting and grouping children on the basis of their perceived academic potential” was “well established;” it was considered a “charitable” enterprise to educate the disabled and “feeble minded” (Ainscow, 1999, p.101). This endeavor was largely undertaken in separate settings, until places like Canada and the United States began to shift the placement and responsibility of special education to conventional schools (Gidney, 1999; Scalon, 2004). Schools were faced with the task of educating a group of students with educational needs they had not seen before, an implementation task often at odds with the local capacities and past goals of schools (M. J. McLaughlin & Thurlow, 2003; M. W. McLaughlin, 2006). Special education began the long journey of grappling with the host of implementation issues that other policy efforts confront. Mayrowetz’s (2009) recent observations in inclusion mathematics classrooms are a recent example. The author assessed instructional modifications to inclusive settings and found little evidence of either differentiated instruction principles or non-routine tasks. Mayrowetz concludes that, in special education as in other reform areas:

successful policy implementation depends on a variety of factors, including the will and capacity of implementers, the tractability of the problem that the policy was meant to address, the elements of the policy’s statute, and the context in which implementation occurred. (p.557)

Special educators and their inclusive efforts are in the throes of the same efforts as other policy work, with local variation often considered the enemy of success. As authors studying implementation have found in other instances, variation is a common occurrence. Local educators need capacity building and the opportunity to adapt polices
to local needs (Louis, Marks, & Sharon, 1996; Louis, Thomas, & Anderson, 2010; Spillane, 1998). Jurisdictions vary in how they account for capacity building and mutual adaption. For a summary of US-Ontario contrasts, see Table 2.
### Table 2. Special Education Inclusion Policies in the US and Ontario

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>United States*</th>
<th>Ontario</th>
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<td><strong>Second Way</strong></td>
<td>Like accountability, special education policies are mandated (see IDEA) with little professional capacity building. Stance towards SEN characterized by legislation, limited allocation, and punitive measures.</td>
<td>Emphasis in early years on diagnosis (not identification), placement, and services. Limited resource allocation, and more standardization.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Third Way</strong></td>
<td>The IEP process employs parent input and includes extra funds. Recently, trends show increasing movements towards team discussions of data-driven improvement.</td>
<td>Education for All employed a panel of experts and called for collective responsibility and diversified instruction to benefit all students. Professional development is a key component in recent reforms. Ministry promotes collective responsibility with a specific focus on scores “Raise the bar, narrow the gap.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fourth Way Potential</strong></td>
<td>The team IEP process is an untapped resource in American schools, potentially serving as a tool for collaboration and collective responsibility among teachers and parents for all students’ benefit.</td>
<td>In practice some schools have developed conversations that represent collective responsibility. There is more emphasis on the tiered intervention model in Ontario, rather than placing emphasis on diagnosis and categorization. This allows for more tailored approaches to instruction.</td>
</tr>
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*Note: As is the case with policies around accountability, Canadian provinces and American states operate their own education systems and have their own special education guidelines. In the US, however, the IDEA is a federal policy that mandates certain provisions regarding the education of persons with special educational needs.
Shortly after inclusion became common policy, several English-speaking countries installed the standards and accountability systems characteristic of the Second Way. As noted in the previous section, these were meant to foster universal achievement of some minimum standard (and often resulted in a greater standardization of instructional practice). Identified students were more frequently moved from their separate settings into mainstream ones in the hopes they might achieve in a manner similar to their non-identified peers. This shift in physical location was meant to symbolize a shift in responsibility as well (Will, 1986). Changes in professional relationships, however, make significant demands on teachers and have yet to fully materialize in many schools (Hitchcock, et al., 2005; Jackson, et al., 2005). Like other implementation efforts, mandating change and moving students is simply insufficient.

Both inclusion advocates and critics have noted a difference between inclusion as a placement (or integration) and inclusion as a shift in practice (or participation). Those calling for full participation argue for “a move away from an orientation which tends not to challenge or alter the organization, curriculum, or forms of teaching” but a truly inclusive one that “is conceptualized not as how to assimilate individual pupils seen as having special needs into existing arrangements but, instead, as to how schools can be transformed in order to respond positively to all pupils as individuals” (Ainscow, 1999, p.116). In promoting inclusion, special educators have “co-opted the voice of general school reform” by using terms like “revolution” and “paradigm shift” (Winzer, 2000, p.8) and see special education as “trying to redefine itself within the broader education context” (p.9). They have, as part of reform, “collapsed the special education conundrum
into the general mission of school improvement” (Winzer, 2000, p.9; see also Slee 1997).
Similarly, Black-Hawkins, Florian, and Rouse (2007) note that physical inclusion alone is not enough (in the sense that Ainscow argued against mere integration or Winzer opposed mainstreaming). Advocates of inclusion as participation contend that access to the standard curriculum should be accompanied by individualized student supports (Black-Hawkins, et al., 2007; Hunt & McDonnell, 2007; M. J. McLaughlin, 2010; Singh, 2009; Winzer, 2000).

**Inclusion and Accountability: A Difficult Coexistence**

In contemporary schools, the inclusion of students with diverse needs is happening simultaneously with the growth of accountability. The uniform, high-stakes exams of the curriculum standards movement make it difficult to accommodate varied, individual learning needs (Pullin, 2005; Ramanathan, 2008). As Pullin and Ramanathan both argue, many proponents of inclusion welcome the coexistence of inclusion and standards-based accountability, likening it to a call for equal expectations and civil rights. But as O’Day (2002) found, an essential challenge in Second Way accountability frames is the tension between external pressure and the requirement that schools find internal solutions, often without support for capacity building. Moreover, Datnow and her colleagues (2006) found accountability pressures curtailed educators’ ability to respond to other, competing demands. Ainscow (1999) argues that inclusive practices challenge organizations’ basic roles and role relationships. Accountability represents a set of additional, simultaneous challenges that do not peacefully coexist with those that inclusion can demand. Both Ainscow and McLaughlin (2010) argue that these challenges
pull schools in competing directions: uniform pedagogy in the service of testing or
differentiated instruction, assessment, and pacing (see also Ramanathan, 2008).

The tensions between inclusion and accountability policies in general, and laws
like IDEA and NCLB in particular, are best synthesized by Ramanathan (2008), who
argues that the uniform, systemic approach of accountability policy is nearly impossible
to reconcile with the universal, flexible approach implied by inclusive policies:

From a special education advocacy perspective, IDEA benefits the
disadvantaged by forcing states to address their needs. For some [SEN]
advocates, NCLB harms the disadvantaged by unjustly forcing them to take
standardized tests for which they are unprepared; failing to provide their
school systems with enough funding to improve the quality of education;
and sanctioning them for failing to make enough progress. (p.295)

With both inclusion and accountability, teachers are called on to transform instructional
environments, in some cases without support (see Tables 1 and 2). These transformations
are divergent, however, and nearly impossible to reconcile. This perhaps explains why
many districts pursue inclusion rather than full inclusion (as defined by Fuchs & Fuchs,
1998), allowing standards and accountability systems to survive. Whatever benefits
special education students achieve from inclusion in conventional classrooms and
accountability systems are already under fire. Districts have frequently negotiated for
exclusions and exceptions for portions of their identified populations (Sunderman, 2006).

In earlier work on implementation, Firestone (1989) argued that approaches to
change are generally either mandates backed by force or inducements accompanied by
incentives. The former does little to build capacity, the later little to instill the will for
change in unwilling local actors. As noted in the previous section, IDEA is a mandate for
equality and access; NCLB is an inducement masquerading as a mandate, calling for standardized instruction and achievement while employing Title I finding as a lever (Ramanathan, 2008). These two policies do little to structure schools to allow for local adaption and capacity building. They also fail to support teachers’ cultural reconstitution of their roles and role relationships.

Mayrowetz’s (2009) study of the implementation of a standardized math curriculum found teachers experienced inclusion and accountability as oppositional policies. Mayrowetz’s participants felt they were unable to commit energy to both and had to choose between the two. In these cases, teachers and schools are faced with a tension between calls for individualization and support on one hand, and standardization (including uniform tests and test administration procedures, and common expectations for when students should be prepared for such exams) on the other.

Milbrey McLaughlin and Berman’s earliest work on policy implementation notes that initiatives need flexibility, a knowledge of local will, and some capacity building measure to be effective (M. W. McLaughlin & Berman, 1975). Contemporary accountability measures exert pressure for implementation and outcomes, often without flexibility. Inclusion can only intensify this pressure to find solutions, since authentically differentiating instruction is a challenge of capacity. The relationship between these two policies is made increasingly difficult in an environment that assumes that all students are identical and that they can demonstrate their proficiency at precisely the same time and in precisely the same manner on standardized exams (M. J. McLaughlin, 2010). In the US, special education policy scholar Thomas Hehir (2005) has argued for a combination of
monitoring, additional support, and potential punitive measures. Hehir clearly values the civil rights foundations of IDEA, but also acknowledges the capacity building measures that are needed to bring this to fruition.

McLaughlin and Thurlow (2003) argue that trying to reconcile accountability and inclusion begins with reconciling the “ideological shift from legal to educational accountability” (p. 435), or what Canadian observers have called a stance of more professional accountability (Jaafar & Anderson, 2007). Some have argued this relationship exacerbates an existing tension between teachers’ ability to address individual or collective needs with limited resources (Thornton, et al., 2006). In some contexts, this shift is further complicated by the lack of support and the complex intertwining of accountability with the existing IEP process, a process that has long had its own means for collaboratively developing student outcomes with parents and teaching teams. When teachers are asked to integrate inclusion and accountability demands by accommodating instructional procedures, modifying the nature of the assessments, or other substantive changes to their instruction, such changes confront the elemental implementation problems of capacity and will (M. W. McLaughlin, 2006; Spillane, 1999). Integrating inclusion and accountability, then, confronts structural problems of capacity and adaptation like other efforts.

Inclusion also requires teachers to consider changes in practice and shifts in working relationships with one another, especially in the form of collaboration between special and general educators (Black-Hawkins, et al., 2007; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1998; Hunt & McDonnell, 2007; Singh, 2009). Authors advocating inclusion in this reform climate
argue that the primary obstacles to greater collaboration are a lack of leadership, the need for clearly defined roles, and resource allocation (both in the form of professional development and time for collaboration) (Hunt & McDonnell, 2007; Singh, 2009). In their study of inclusive classrooms, Black-Hawkins and colleagues (2007) noted that teachers often felt inadequate to the challenge of meeting diverse student needs, tasks were rarely modified, and often substitute tasks were used instead, or they were excused from their work altogether, failing the participation standard outlined by the authors. Other authors have similarly noted that full participation and inclusion require teachers to modify instructional tasks to allow for multiple points of access, a demanding expectation for teachers (Janney & Snell, 2006). A meta-analysis of survey data in American schools found that general and special educators, however, have quite different understandings of what inclusion is and of its overall value to students with SEN (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). In particular, Scruggs and Mastropieri’s analysis found that, while teachers felt “some degree” of access to mainstream curriculum would be beneficial to students with special needs, very few teachers saw full time inclusion (especially for students with multiple and severe needs) as having benefits (p.65). Reconciling these intense demands asks teachers to teach and to collaborate like never before (Jackson, et al., 2005), including in ways that may be counter to their preferred practice. Such changes in individual pedagogy and teacher culture do not come without access to both support and guidance (Fullan, 1992; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009).

Thus, inclusion can confront the cultural issues common to other implementation efforts. In particular, new relationships between general and special educators are a
challenging shift. Elmore (2004) has found that the most effective schools are those with
some sense of collective responsibility, but achieving this culture is challenging. This
new sense of cooperation among teachers to adapt classroom practices to help all students
meet performance goals is an ambitious one that appears to be a foundational principle of
inclusive practice (Smith & Leonard, 2005). General curriculum teachers, though, have
expressed some apprehension about shifting to inclusive classrooms without adequate
support (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). The present state of inclusionary practice and the
present forms of accountability in Canada and the United States, then, could potentially
create conflict in a great number of schools and districts. Recent survey data
demonstrates that many parents and general curriculum teachers still have lower overall
expectations for the achievement of students with SEN (Whitley, Lupart, & Beran, 2007)
and are concerned about their impact on so-called mainstream teachers and instruction
(Fuchs & Fuchs, 1998; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). Before inclusion can become fully
realized policy, local educators must have a common understanding of its meaning and
their role in implementing it. A change in teachers’ community of practice must be
negotiated.

Conclusion
The interaction of accountability systems and inclusive special education policy is
complex. While both, on some level, have important civil rights and participation
mandates, they simultaneously create incentives and issue mandates that are often
difficult to reconcile. In the US, for example, NCLB and IDEA have changed the
expectations for students with disabilities and pushed districts to more fully include them
in annual tests (Ramanathan, 2008). These placement decisions have broader implications, however. Teachers must reconcile shifts in expectations for students, individual teacher roles, and professional relationships. The obstacles that make these two issues difficult to reconcile in practice are common among implementation efforts: lack of flexible and capacity building structures and too little attention to relation issues like autonomy and power.

Haertel & Herman (2005) point out that NCLB promotes standardization for all students, including the assumption that all students can be ready for the same tests, at the same time, and demonstrate knowledge in a uniform way. Pullin (2005) argues that the uniform nature of assessments often conflicts with the individualized accommodations afforded identified students. Further, NCLB’s exclusion allowances permit the law to fail its own universal expectations for participation in high stakes tests (Thornton, et al., 2006). When students do participate in standards-based assessments, they are often forced to participate in the same manner as non-identified peers (i.e., with time limits, small print, and in written form). These modes of testing may not only prevent their access to the general curriculum, but also cloud the assessment of their true abilities (Hitchcock, et al., 2005). In short, as these two complex and rigid policies interact, they fail to meet their own goals and often interfere with one another.

What the literature on implementation reveals is the value of an adaptive perspective to reform and implementation. Policy makers demand change and improvement from schools, calling on educators to serve all students better and to cultivate a new collective sense of professional responsibility (Elmore, 2004; Fullan,
2007; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). Research should strive to help teachers and policy makers better understand how this process unfolds and what obstacles remain. Research on implementation has found limitations to the fidelity approach and subsequently argued for new approaches. These include the need for leaders to cultivate coalitions to alter communities of practice, for reformers to allocate additional resources, including time and space, and offer flexibility in execution, and for districts and other intermediaries to play new supporting roles. These proposed solutions remain largely unexplored. This study’s examination of districts’ attempts to balance multiple initiatives can contribute to this body of literature by exploring these theoretical arguments in practice.
CHAPTER 3:  
Methods

Questions and Overview
This project examined two jurisdictions and their attempts to achieve both increased achievement on standardized measures and enhanced inclusion for students with special needs. This chapter describes the study’s methods and their conceptual and theoretical bases. Here, I remind the reader of the key research questions the study will investigate, describe the research design, discuss the methods used for data collection, describe analytical procedures, and close with an examination of reliability and validity.

The overarching objective of the study was to understand these two projects from the perspective of district-level actors, using a largely “bottom-up” perspective to understand the impact of design principles and political contexts on the implementation of policies. Gathering the perspective of local implementers helps this study contribute to the literature on theories of change, particularly recent scholarship that explores the intersection of pressure, support, fidelity, and local flexibility in educational policy.

There were four research questions for this study.

The first and second questions examine the intended architecture of the particular reform efforts and their theoretical relationships to one another. Fullan and Pomfret (1977) call these the characteristics and strategies of change. The third question, centered more in the relational aspects of implementation and change and, in particular, Little’s (2002) framework for analyzing communities of practice, explored professional culture in four districts of the two jurisdictions and their processes of negotiating inclusion and accountability demands as a product of policy. The final question asked how these
districts were influenced by their political and cultural contexts, assuming their actions are manifestations of (even if not indicative of) these environments (Sarason, 1971). Fullan and Pomfret also argue for the importance of studying the macro, sociopolitical factors around efforts towards implementation. This view influenced the analysis of data under the fourth question.

The study’s four research questions were as follows:

1. **What theories of action drive these two jurisdictions’ policies of inclusion and accountability?**

2. **How do these inclusion and accountability policies interact with one another and what theories of action, if any, are there for balancing or integrating multiple reform efforts?**

3. **How do professionals (within a district or board) organize their communities of practice around the dual and often competing issues of inclusive practice and external accountability?**

4. **How do contextual and political factors influence the implementation of these projects and, ultimately, student achievement? How does each context’s policy environment compare to the other in terms of professional organization?**

**Design and Rationale**

This study focused on two projects with innovative approaches to the process of implementation and the pursuit of coherence, one in Ontario, Canada, and the other in New Hampshire, USA. One purpose was to contribute to the fields of implementation and change. To achieve this, I completed a comparative policy analysis between Ontario’s and New Hampshire’s different strategies aimed at achieving similar objectives: supporting teachers in closing achievement gaps between students with special education needs (SEN) and their non-identified peers while also creating an
improved and unified approach to instruction for all students. In each jurisdiction, these were intended to be systemic reforms, or those that impacted all levels and actors in a district. This study hoped to illuminate what makes for effective, systemic reform in the quest to improve instruction, collaboration, and coherence in local authorities.

Ontario and New Hampshire provided interesting points of comparison and contrast: Third and Second Way, progressive and conservative, provincial control and local control with ample state and federal involvement. Both, however, pursued similar objectives and employed an intermediary organization between the Ministry of / Department of Education level and the local district. I conducted case studies of two units in each jurisdiction, created a coherent picture of the experiences of local actors in implementing these projects, and, finally, compared the two policy contexts and their respective efforts. In particular, this study of implementation explored the level of flexibility each jurisdiction’s approach afforded individual districts (Condron, 2011; Greenfield, et al., 2010; M. W. McLaughlin, 2006), the amount of capacity building each provided local educators (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Hargreaves, 2003), and the degree to which local actors were able to negotiate changes to reforms during implementation (Coburn, 2001; Little, 2002).

Comparing two jurisdictions means first understanding local complexities and what change means when implemented in their districts. I attempted to capture this through qualitative studies of teachers’ individual and collective experiences, a crucial but underutilized voice in understanding the implementation of policy (Desimone, 2006). Honig (2006) argues that failure to understand the complex local “conditions under which
certain interventions work” misses an important research opportunity, preventing policy makers from understanding whether failures “stemmed from their choice of curriculum [for example], or poor conditions for implementation” (p.3). Recognizing these voices revealed local complexities and variations that strict fidelity studies would have missed. For example, studying change in this way means paying attention not only to which additional resources are allocated to local actors but also the ways these resources change communities of practice (or alter organizing). It also can reveal contrasts between actual and intended resource use as well as expected and unexpected impacts (e.g., Orr, 1996). Focusing on the practical use of resources emphasizes what authors have called their local, performative nature (Spillane, et al., 2009). Exploring such local manifestations is important in understanding the ways that local actors take ownership of reforms and directives to reshape them to fit local contexts (Coburn, 2001; Wenger, 1998). Coburn (2003) argues that studying local actors illuminates the reforms’ capacity for impact at scale by examining the degree to which they change culture and shift from external to internal ownership by districts and schools. Localized studies of reform impacts also help to understand these reforms’ potential for growth by helping to disentangle the many, complex factors that lead to successful implementation and outcomes for students (Fullan, 2007).

This study employed mixed method case studies of four districts across the two jurisdictions. Case studies are a method well-suited for capturing the local context and rich intricacies surrounding these districts’ attempts to implement these efforts coherently, largely because case studies are able to explain and illustrate many interacting
factors that are “too complex” for other methods (Yin, 2003, p.15). These cases are complex snapshots. I use this term deliberately to indicate the temporal boundaries around my examination of a longitudinal process (see Nespor, 1997; Fullan & Pomfret, 1977). These studies all took place near the conclusion of the intensive implementation phase of each effort.

Districts served as the unit of analysis because these mid-level, or meso, actors are important intermediaries in the implementation of policies and because they are underutilized levels of comparison and analysis (Datnow, 2006). Such local leadership groups are the “social location where meanings are negotiated, actions are undertaken and interpreted, and implementation unfolds” (Coburn & Stein, 2006, p. 43). The localized interactions of teachers groups and sub-groups are important units of analysis because they help to account both for structural and relational influences in policy implementation (Spillane, et al., 2009). Districts are an important step between policy and school levels (Frank & Zhao, 2005; Fullan, 2003). These are the locations where reforms emerge from their policy cocoons and are transformed in practice.

Comparing four cases across two different policy contexts required replicating design and methods across two board cases in Ontario implementing one initiative and two district cases in New Hampshire participating in a different effort with similar traits. Yin (2003) refers to this design approach as a theoretical replication, or one that studies multiple cases under similar circumstances but “predicts contrasting results…for predictable reasons” (p.47). In this case, differing political contexts contributed to different local interactions among implementing professionals. Theoretical replication
across jurisdictions accentuates the common elements of these two projects and, therefore, helps to highlight their impact on local actors.

Within each jurisdiction, studying “multiple cases augment[ed] external validity and help guard against observer biases” (Leonard-Barton, 1990, p. 250). This study’s use of multiple cases from two different policy contexts was based on Yin’s replication logic for case study designs. A pair of cases within each context provided literal replication and a clearer understanding of that jurisdiction, helping to buttress validity of the study (Yin, 2003). The replication here highlighted the characteristics of each initiative through comparisons within contexts. Local variation is a common facet in the adoption and implementation of externally designed reform efforts (Coburn, 2001; Daly, 2009; Fullan, 2003; M. W. McLaughlin, 2006). This design allowed for comparisons between two distinct approaches by accounting for this local reality. Replication of case designs within jurisdictions particularly emphasized the role that flexibility can play in successful implementation as well as the roles played by each initiative’s participating intermediary party, the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) in Ontario and the Institute on Disabilities (IOD) in New Hampshire.

The use of multiple, mixed-method case study design was particularly crucial to responding to the third and fourth questions on how professionals organized their work around each effort’s cultural issues and how these jurisdictions’ political contexts influenced teachers’ interactions. In particular, understanding implementation means examining the multitude of interacting initiatives, the complexities of district life (Fullan, 2007), and the varied ways that resources are employed (Spillane, et al., 2009). Case
study methods brought to light the particular contexts in which these policies were carried out, the complexities of local professionals’ interactions, as well as the interactions these projects inevitably faced with other initiatives (Louis & Miles, 1990; Spillane, 1998; Spillane, et al., 2009). This is especially true in this study given the prevalence of accountability and standards movement and its inevitable interaction with all other efforts (M. J. McLaughlin & Thurlow, 2003; Ramanathan, 2008).

**Mixed Methods**

Each of the four case studies employed a blend of qualitative and quantitative research methods. Mixed methods approaches are appropriate in this instance for several key reasons, most notably articulated in the mixed method framework by Greene, Caracelli, and Graham (1989). Greene and colleagues argue that mixed methods can help by *triangulating* findings with multiple means of exploration and support, allow for *complementary* elaboration, and *initiate* a new perspective on an existing change framework (i.e., how the use of a third party intermediary can offer a new perspective on Fullan’s tri-level change theory). Most notably, my dissertation’s approach serves both *triangulation* and *complementary* purposes that deepen understanding of the phenomena of interest. This is similar to the mixed methods purpose proposed by others like Desimone (Desimone, 2009b). Second, the constructs being explored here were part of an evaluation of concepts applied in policy initiatives and their impacts on teacher practice and interaction, and therefore a *pragmatic* approach is called for (Rallis & Rossman, 2003).
In Desimone’s (2009) terms, complementary mixed methods research is that where both qualitative and quantitative methods are employed to capture “overlapping but different facets of a phenomenon” (p.166). In her terms, multiple case study designs might be used to “offer insights to explain effects… and illustrate how effects and implementation might differ” (p.166). For example, many advocates of inclusion hold that collaboration is an essential component in meeting diverse student needs (Jorgensen, McSheehan, & Sonnenmeier, 2010; Singh, 2009). Complementary methods allowed for qualitative explorations of changes in communities of practice and their local leaders while quantitative data were used to determine if those changes impact annual tests, one measure of student learning. Similarly, mixed methods case studies permitted evaluation of the efficacy of these projects, but in two different ways. Qualitative work helped to explore the ability of these flexible designs to influence changes in local structures and cultures while also maintaining fidelity to the designer’s goals. In another sense, quantitative data revealed which districts made the most progress on student achievement, further highlighting the districts whose implementation was not only the most faithful and engaging for teachers, but also most impactful for students.

Research in implementation often does not explore outcomes for students, choosing instead to focus on fidelity to policy makers’ intent. This study challenged that paradigm by arguing that a) student outcomes can be an important touchstone for initiatives that generated enthusiasm from participants; and b) test scores are the key outcome of accountability mechanisms, they are ubiquitous signs of success, and a study of reconciliation between accountability and other efforts should include these measures
of progress. Quantitative data, in the form of standardized test data representing achievement gaps, were used to confirm or challenge the theories that advocated these models of change. Multiple cases within the same jurisdiction were a way to examine several related sub-contexts within a given authority’s sphere of influence. This mix of complementary methods, then, can helped “to assess the plausibility of identified threats to validity, or to enhance the interpretability of assessments of a single phenomenon” (Greene, et al., 1989, p. 257).

The second reason for employing a mixed methods design was that this study sought to understand two implemented policies and, therefore, is best served by a pragmatic framework. This approach acknowledges that this study entails “compromises based on logistics, feasibility, stakeholder interests, the value stance of the evaluator, time, and other resources” (Rallis & Rossman, 2003, p. 492). Further, given that my questions acknowledged the reality of multiple, interacting reforms, employing mixed methods cases accounted for this localized complexity and the impact of interviewing samples largely of volunteers and those persons referred by district contacts (Datnow, et al., 2006). The use of these combined methods allowed me, initially, to describe the circumstances of the change efforts within cases and contexts, and then to compare across contexts; finally, the study’s concluding chapter attempts to predict and challenge predictions for success based on existing theories of change using student achievement data as one outcome of policy (Rallis & Rossman, 2003). Given that each case only included a fraction of the schools in a given district, interviewed a small portion of district and school staff about their experiences, and that both schools and staff who
participated were largely chosen by a district leader or other study liaison, it was imperative to find some way to validate and expand on my qualitative findings to test each jurisdiction’s theory of change.

The use of quantitative student achievement data—and the use of achievement gap data in particular—helped enhance the description within the pragmatic parameters and limitations of my study, better enabling me to compare each context’s theory of change to its relative success or failure at closing achievement gaps. By using student outcomes, I was better able inform my response to prevailing theories of change by accounting for some impacts on achievement and, in particular, the achievement gap. Given that prevailing theories of change are past initial theorizing and are in an intermediate stage of development, or one where authors are engaged in exploring new relationships between new and existing constructs and one that may offer a provisional theory about these new relationships, a mixed methods approach was appropriate, inclusion some consideration of impacts and outcomes (Edmondson & McManus, 2007).

This study was not an experiment or a quasi-experiment, but a form of descriptive policy analysis. Its results and argument thus rely on mixed data in order to understand “the complexities and interactions and contextual influences of policy implementation” (Desimone, 2009a, p. 164). In this case, qualitative data collection came first, allowing the study to explore how each jurisdiction adhered to various theories of implementation and change and the impact of these theories on local educators. The use of qualitative data to study such a large-scale policy effort is important since it revealed “unintended consequences… as well as relationships and links that might not have been originally
hypothesized by the policy designers or implementers” (Desimone, 2009, p.169).

Quantitative data, in the form of student achievement results, were then used to assess each context’s theory of reform in light of the achievement results these approaches help to produce. Though it is somewhat subservient to the qualitative data, the quantitative data’s confirmatory and complementary role provides a valuable comparison across jurisdictions.

Sample and Context

This section discusses the selection of the two projects and the study’s participants. The dissertation sought to explore each project’s impact on districts’ attempts to reconcile what some see as demands that contradict one another or compete for similar resources (Ainscow, 1999; M. J. McLaughlin, 2010). The two host jurisdictions, the Province of Ontario in Canada and the State of New Hampshire in the United States, each have their own unique history with educational change and these two reform efforts in particular. In the section that follows, I describe the general contexts of each country, state or province, and, finally, the particular supporting policy change initiative that each jurisdiction is undertaking. These histories and the particular initiatives are discussed in greater detail in chapters four and five, respectively.

Context and project selection. Selecting contexts for study meant finding jurisdictions that were taking some efforts to achieve both increased achievement and more inclusive classroom practices. Ontario and New Hampshire were each selected, in part, due to their history of policies related to inclusion and accountability, and in part due to sample convenience. Data from Ontario were collected as part of a larger
evaluation project of *Essential for Some, Good for All* (ESGA). This evaluation was commissioned by the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) to investigate the use of public funds to alter instructional environments for all students, especially those identified with special needs. This exploratory study, led by Andy Hargreaves and Henry Braun at Boston College, explored the implementation of ESGA by studying ten of the province’s 71 boards who accepted funds from CODE. A portion of these data are used in this study, with two of the ten districts that participated in this study included in this dissertation. Ontario, in addition, represents a quintessential Third Way context (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009), and therefore an important case study in one manifestation of blending pressure and support in the service of balancing inclusion and accountability.

Ontario, through its recent Third Way shifts under the McGuinty Government and the publication of guiding documents like *Education for All*, is attempting to employ a balance between top-down and bottom-up control for the good of all students (Fullan, 2007). ESGA represents an innovative approach to reconciling multiple, competing demands like inclusion and accountability in a jurisdiction that already displayed an advanced set of policies aimed at supporting local actors towards increasing achievement.

New Hampshire presented an interesting comparison context to Ontario. The state’s more localized funding structure, additional federal involvement, and more conservative political tenor provided a compelling contrast to Ontario’s provincial funding and more progressive political circumstances. This largely rural state has two seemingly contradictory traditions that made it an setting for case studies: its twin histories as both a leader in inclusive practice and LRE placement for identified students...
as well as its identity as a low-tax, conservative, Second Way context favoring local funding and control (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; McDermott, 1999). These characteristics make for interesting comparisons with the often-Progressive nature of Ontario’s educational policies.

New Hampshire was also selected because of its accessibility for research and because its current, state-wide project, NH Responds (NHR), shared several characteristics with ESGA. These elements included opportunities for mutually adaptive implementation, the use of districts as the key partners in implementation, and a focus on whole-school reforms that had unique benefits for students with SEN. Similarly, both initiatives sought to reconcile inclusion and accountability and both employed a third, non-state intermediary party to assist with implementation (the university-based Institute on Disabilities in New Hampshire and CODE in Ontario. These two intermediary organizations played different support and monitoring roles for local districts and boards. As a point of contrast, participation in NHR was competitive, and just five districts were selected to participate. Ontario invited all boards to apply for and receive funding.

The similarities and differences within these two projects and their respective political and cultural contexts help to highlight their unique characteristics. These projects were selected because they were innovative for their respective contexts. Various efforts in both the US and Canada have attempted to address these efforts with various permutations of pressure and support. In terms of implementing change, providing both guiding principles and support is superior to providing one or the other alone (e.g., Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). Examining the ways that inventive projects impact
educators and their students is always a helpful endeavor for observers of policy and implementation. Doing so across two jurisdictions with contrasting histories helps to emphasize the aspects of the project that are most useful to observers in other locales.

**Participant Recruitment and Selection.** Examining districts and the policy organizations that guide them is an important aspect of understanding reform. Burch (2002) notes the important role that intermediary (non-district) organizations can play in reform efforts, and more recent work in implementation has called on scholars to include them and other intermediaries in their study of adaptive implementation (M. W. McLaughlin, 2006). The district is a crucial intermediary organization in its own right, and long a key unit of change in policy efforts (Anderson, 2003; Datnow, et al., 2006; Firestone, 1989; Fullan, 2003; Jaafar & Anderson, 2007; Tyack, 2002). Districts are important to include in studies of policy change, as they are often in the role of receiving and redistributing resources, writing local implementation plans, and assessing fidelity of implementation and local outcomes. Districts can act as mid-level filters and evolvers of reform, so their selection is an appropriate unit of analysis in an implantation study. This is especially important given this study’s assumption that policies change between conception and execution (Elmore, 1993; Hargreaves, 1985; Tyack, 2002).

By design, these two initiatives involved participants from the three key levels of educational change: planning, district, and school. Engaging participants from all three of these levels was important to the substance of each reform in order to pursue both “concentrated and systemic government action” as well as the “visible involvement of teachers” in change (Fullan, 2003, p. 85). Unique to both ESGA and NHR was that two
intermediary organizations took the place of the state in leading the implementation and monitoring of each effort, altering Fullan’s tri-level model of change.

In light of the design of both projects, the qualitative sample drew participants from three levels within each jurisdiction: the policy level, the district/board office, and the school. Policy level participants were those from the intermediary organizations (the IOD in NH and CODE in ON) who helped to shape the guiding principles and to lead the implementation for each project. These organizations were an important mediating factor between regional government and the local authorities (Burch, 2002). Key leadership staff from these organizations were included in the interview sample to understand their vision of each project’s objectives and guiding principles. Samples were smallest at this level, and all available leaders were recruited.

Selecting districts involved the selection of data of two cases from the larger, existing sample in Ontario as well as the recruitment of two districts in New Hampshire. More than 70 boards participated in the Canadian initiative, with 10 volunteering to be part of in-depth case studies for the larger project led by Boston College; I served as a member on this project’s research team. Two cases were drawn from this pool of data. Criteria for selection included my participation in the site visit and interviews and the board’s being public (rather than Catholic) entities. I personally participated in four of these site visits, conducting interviews and other qualitative data collection at each site as part of a three-person team; I have selected two of these cases for this study. Data analysis followed both primary and secondary procedures, and include interviews I personally conducted or co-conducted with other project staff as well as those conducted
by colleagues during these same site visits. From the Canadian sample, I selected one rural board and one based in a slightly larger former manufacturing town; both are public, secular boards.

Five whole districts participated in NHR, with other demonstration sites (i.e., individual schools) involved as well. The selection of the two NH districts relied on superintendents volunteering their districts based on referrals from the leadership participants at the IOD. These referrals and personal contacts to several of the participating districts yielded two volunteers. One was a small, rural district (approximately 2,000 students in grades K-12) in Northern New Hampshire. The other was a larger district, centered in a town in the more densely populated Southeastern, coastal corner of the state, with greater population density than its rural counterpart in the study.

New Hampshire districts are generally consolidated, regional entities known as School Administrative Units (SAUs). This means that a district’s central office is often shared with other districts. Districts-level actors in New Hampshire were often overseeing both participating and non-participating schools.

Recruiting principals and teachers relied on the assistance of central office staff to help make contacts in schools, akin to snowball sampling within the districts. Two schools were recruited from each participating district. All schools were elementary schools, given the differing responses that elementary and high schools have to reform efforts (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977; Louis & Miles, 1990) and the fact that elementary schools were the more common participants in both the American and Canadian efforts.
Teachers were selected in conjunction with principals and, in some cases, district leaders. When possible, interviews took place in participants’ offices or schools, though a handful of interviews took place by phone for participants who were not available during site visits in New Hampshire.

School-level samples included at least one administrator, multiple general and special education teachers, and any specialists with knowledge of the initiatives. The procedures in New Hampshire were similar to those previously completed in Ontario, where stratified, representative samples were used, but not randomly selected; local project coordinators took the lead in participant selection in both contexts. This likely limited the amount of conflict, struggle, and resistance—common in reform efforts—represented in the data (Jaafar & Anderson, 2007; Sarason, 1990). Selecting from all three levels provided some assurance of diversity in perspectives. In principle, the study sought to represent various views by finding participants in the following roles:

- **Intermediary Organizations as Policy or State Level**
  - Representatives from each of the third party organizations, CODE in Ontario and the IOD in New Hampshire.

- **District or Board Central Office Level**
  - District superintendent / Board director
  - Special education director, often a key liaison for the project
  - Curriculum director (this position was combined with in one smaller districts)

- **School Level**
• Participating principals, to discuss possible role changes and their role in implementing the changes
• Special education teachers (SERTs in Ontario), to discuss changes in their work with students and colleagues
• General education teachers, to understand the impact, if any, on general curriculum students and instruction, as well as their relationships with special education colleagues
• Any other project liaisons or consultants directly involved in supporting project efforts.

Total recruitment efforts through the two project’s coordinating agencies and each local authority’s central office yielded 69 total participants in the qualitative sample. Table 3 summarizes the distribution of these participants. Each cell indicates a number of participants, with the number of staff specializing in special education in parentheses. In Chapters 4, 5, and 6, all qualitative data from these participants are identified using endnotes. Interviews are numbered according to the key in Appendix 1.
Table 3. Summary of Participant Distribution in Ontario and New Hampshire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Totals</th>
<th>Planning Level (Coordinating Orgs)</th>
<th>District / Board*</th>
<th>District Level</th>
<th>Total Principals</th>
<th>Total Teachers</th>
<th>District Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ON: 43</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Harwich</td>
<td>7 (3 SE^)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8 (4 SE)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Maple Lake</td>
<td>8 (4 SE)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9 (3 SE)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NH: 26</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Norton</td>
<td>2 (1 SE)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6 (3 SE)**</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Springdale</td>
<td>3 (2 SE)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9 (4 SE)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Note: All district names are pseudonyms.
** Note: In Norton, NH, the 6 participating teachers come from one school.
^ Note: SE = Special education staff N

In summary, the study entailed recruiting a representative, stratified sample at all three levels of the system: policy, district or board, and school. Participants included both general and special educators. Leonard-Barton (1990) argues, “in order to understand all the interacting factors… it was necessary that the research methodology slice vertically through the organization, obtaining data from multiple levels and perspectives” (p.249). This use of “vertical” slice data captured each community’s characteristics as a whole. This sample was and attempts to assemble a purposive sample from various levels of each project in an effort to strengthen the external validity of the design (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002).

**Ethical Discussion**

The study relied on each project’s leaders and liaisons to solicit participants in each of the four districts. This was necessary to ensure representatives from each of the three key levels of the study (planning, district office, and school), as well as to ensure the participation of both general classroom and special educators. These district leaders are invariably members of these communities under study, and often figures with
authority. This raised the possibility that some participants may have felt coerced by district leaders to participate. The interview protocol and the informed consent procedure emphasized the voluntary nature of the project, including each person’s right to decline to answer all or part of any questions. I also offered to allow their level of participation to remain confidential. Group and individual interview settings were all offered. None of the participants declined to be interviewed, and all answered the entire battery of questions.

Participant confidentiality (e.g., by not identifying the names of districts, schools, or participants) was assured to the greatest degree possible. In some cases, participants elected to be interviewed in pairs due to scheduling conflicts and limited substitute teachers. In these cases, I reiterated that not all participants needed to answer all questions and that participants could elect to respond to part of any question or no part at all. They were also reminded that they could make comments off the record, take breaks from recording, or withdraw at any time without my reporting that to their leadership. I reminded all participants that the study was ultimately interested in changes to whole communities of practice and, therefore, that individual responses were less important than looking for trends.

No students were interviewed or identified. Quantitative achievement data from boards in Ontario were reported as lists of scores, with students identified by identification numbers. The quantitative data from New Hampshire was provided by the state’s Office of Curriculum and Assessment. These data included only summary statistics for districts and sub-groups within districts. No students’ names were identified in either jurisdiction.
The project’s potential benefits to participants lay in the value of an outside observer reporting findings from a multi-year project. Given the high volume of change efforts often coexisting in a given district and the hectic schedules and lives of teachers (to which inclusion and accountability efforts can contribute) (Kennedy, 2005), a case study can be a valuable tool in helping local educators to understand their own work and their communities’ various responses to reform demands. Participants in both Ontario and New Hampshire have expressed an interest in the opportunity to hear these data presented and to discuss the study’s findings. Further, the initial case reports, will be available to district leaders to serve as tools for discussion to address internal issues, such as coherence and collaboration. For those at the planning and implementation level, these findings may offer clues to each project’s sustainability.

**Conclusions on Design Rationale**

Ultimately, this design was intended to allow for a “grand comparison rather than to increase understanding of individual cases” (Stake, 2006, p. 83), and the theory that emerged from this comparison is discussed in the final chapter. This dissertation’s design contributes to the theory of implementation by using these cases to inform a single theory of managing concurrent reforms, with balancing inclusion and accountability as one example of this phenomenon. Studying these two different policy contexts and their respective approaches to elements of policy making like pressure, support, and flexibility serve as key comparison variables to constructing this grand comparison. Teachers’ experiences and students’ achievement gaps important intermediate and long-term data that can confirm or challenge these cases as exemplars. I assume that replicating this
design within and across jurisdictions can also help to enhance the internal validity of the study by exploring multiple explanations for any findings and multiple iterations of the same political principles in multiple districts (R. K. Yin, 2003). I also ground this decision in Sarason’s (1971) assumption that schools and districts are products of the larger societies and political systems around them.

**Data Collection Procedures**

As noted earlier, each of the four cases consisted of two key components, one qualitative and one quantitative. The qualitative data explore teachers’ professional and cultural experiences with the given change initiatives, while the quantitative data complete the case by representing some of the impacts on students. The procedures for collecting these data were intended to make the process minimally disruptive to participants’ professional environments while remaining consistent across the four districts.

All qualitative data collection took place in the context of educators’ work— their offices and schools— during a single, multi-day visit to offices and schools. This location was a deliberate choice, given the assumption inherent in the communities of practice literature that “actions, or practice, must be understood with reference to the situation of their doing” (Orr, 1996, p.11). Single visits were more feasible, given the distance between the four districts. These case studies strove to explore the range of interacting initiatives, cultural elements, and instructional systems simultaneously at work in these contexts. Confronting this complex web of local factors allowed the researcher to
understand both the interaction of inclusion and accountability as well as the influence of the overarching policy architecture on teachers and students.

Like those authors in Fullan and Pomfret’s (1977) mutual adaptation camp, I assumed in this work that an organization is a fluid set of interactions and processes (Van de Ven & Poole, 2005). This study captured those processes through on-site, open-ended interviews with participants. District-level personnel were interviewed individually, as were school-level leaders. Teachers were interviewed both individually and in small groups, with scheduling being the most influential factor. All interviews, except for two that took place over the phone, were taped and transcribed by a third party for analysis. Transcribing open-ended interviews is the most effective and efficient way to gather data that can be reliably analyzed to “determine the nature and forms of implementation” (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977, p.366). All participants were assured confidentiality and offered the opportunity to decline questions in part or in their entirety.

Interviews followed an open-ended schedule rather than follow a strict protocol. This approach was intended to explore major implementation themes and their local manifestations. Following Fullan and Pomfret’s (1977) mutual adaptation perspective, interview questions centered on four broad areas: characteristics of the innovation (demands on whom and for what), strategies (i.e., training, resources, modes for feedback), characteristics of the adopting units (local process, climate, support, and demographics factors), and characteristics of macro sociopolitical units (larger political factors, pressures, and incentives, such as those described by Hargreaves and Shirley) (p.367-8). Interviews with principals, district leaders, and policy makers focused on
characteristics of the innovation and strategies for implementation, while teacher and principal interviews included questions about school characteristics and strategies like support. All participants were also asked to discuss their perspectives on the larger systemic and contextual factors that fostered or inhibited changes in roles and role relationships. An interview protocol is included in the appendix.

Open-ended interviews allowed participants to focus on their individual areas of expertise and to elaborate on stories and particular events or examples they felt encapsulated their particular experiences. These open-ended interviews asked participants to reflect on their experiences with inclusion and accountability efforts, revealing elements of their local professional culture through stories of “specific consequence that [are] at the same time a language of general coherence” (Geertz, 1983, p.175). These stories were used to construct this local language for each locale and, subsequently, to compare locales.

Following interviews, I collected student achievement data for participating districts and boards. Scores were taken for all students in grade 3 at all elementary schools (participating actively or not) at two time points: the year prior to the district’s first participation in the respective project and the most recent year available as of 2011. These data were collected from two sources. The two Ontario boards provided the data directly to me. In New Hampshire, the data were obtained from the State, with each district superintendent’s consent.

Achievement data were analyzed to determine if recent efforts have made any impact on achievement gaps between identified and non-identified students. These
analyses included summary statistics as well as standardized effect size estimates as a proxy for achievement gaps (the analysis section will elaborate on this procedure). Ontario’s EQAO creates its own annual standardized exam, administered each spring. New Hampshire participates in the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) each Fall, along with Maine, Rhode Island, and Vermont. Since Ontario and New Hampshire do not take a common assessment, each district’s present performance (including achievement gaps and median scores for both identified and non-identified students) was compared to its own previous performance. However, the use of these effect sizes did permit some comparisons across jurisdictions. This was done in order to validate or challenge participants’ reflections on their projects and whether their efforts were beneficial to students or not, helping to highlight some characteristics of the districts who were more successful in reducing inequities. This analysis was limited by the lack of causal attribution as well as the limited scope of each project’s impact. Analysis of achievement data is further discussed in the following section.

**Analysis**

Eisenhardt (1989) has cautioned case study researchers that, while building theory from across case studies is possible, it can be difficult due to researchers’ tendency to reach “premature” and “false conclusions” with “limited data” (p.540). In terms of integrating and comparing case studies, McPhee (1990) argues that “calibration-making” is crucial, especially making “sure that cases with different values for the model's general variables or categories really do belong on the same dimension” (p.396). In assembling a qualitative sample and in writing case studies, this dissertation used similar structures in
both jurisdictions: sampling from all three levels of the project (planning, central office, and school), asking the same four questions, and drawing preliminary conclusions before drawing meta-conclusions from both jurisdictions. Data analysis followed similar procedures. Qualitative analysis employed some *a priori* categories and codes, therefore the study adheres to a *confirmatory* analysis framework, or one where similar themes are explored in each case, and then compared to one another through the use of the categories and matrices (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003). The use of Fullan and Pomfret’s (1977) interview categories allowed clearer comparisons between these different contexts. Finally, the use of the qualitative software ATLAS.ti was helpful in not only ensuring consistent use of coding procedures, but also in grouping and re-grouping responses by district, jurisdiction, role, and other categories to make further comparisons.

In cross-case comparisons, this confirmatory approach utilized Yin’s (2003) multiple level comparison concepts. These allowed not only for making large-scale comparisons between contexts, but also for exploring patterns *within* jurisdictions. Qualitative data analysis compared both similar levels to one another (i.e., principals to principals) as well as common themes (i.e., district leadership approaches, principal conceptions of key constructs) in an effort to illuminate patterns and validate claims about each jurisdiction. This use of common, *a priori* principles in a confirmatory analysis can therefore satisfy Eisenhardt’s and McPhee’s concerns about premature conclusions or comparison of disparate elements in each district’s experiences. In this study, the concepts and codes came from the literature on mutually adaptive perspectives in implementation, especially those cited in chapter two. These include Fullan and

The use of the qualitative coding software, ATLAS.ti, aided in this process of coding, sorting, and organizing data based on similar categories in each district case.

**Qualitative Analysis**

The qualitative emphasis in this study was concerned with two matters. First, it was “concerned with describing and explaining the temporal sequence of events that unfold as an organizational change occur[ed]” (Van de Ven & Huber, 1990, p. 213). Second, it sought to use confirmatory comparisons to examine the strengths of each jurisdiction’s plans for policy implementation. These case studies asked participants to tell the story of their particular experiences attempting to reconcile accountability demands with principles of inclusion, including how the initiatives might have altered their work and professional relationships. Subsequently, these experiences were compared across districts and jurisdictions in order to assess the principles driving these two unique initiatives.

First, I explored each district’s interview and focus-group data using mapping and matrices to categorize data according to my existing constructs (Anfara, et al., 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994). I coded these common, confirmatory themes in all four qualitative cases, using ATLAS.ti software to categorize data into broad structural and cultural categories and into more specific sub-categories, subsequently. In particular, ATLAS.ti allowed for the formation of “families” of codes as they related to the four research questions driving the study. These categories included those noted previously that come out of the communities of practice literature, Little’s (2002) framework, Fullan and Pomfret’s (1977) themes from literature on mutual adaptation in implementation, as
well as work on implementation and professional culture more generally. These included each participant’s district, level (i.e., teacher, principal, policy maker), and affiliation with mainstream or special education.

There were a number of important differences in the policy contexts that will shape the district cases. These include the lack of federal education laws in Canada and their prevalence in the US; mandatory participation in Ontario and optional participation in New Hampshire; and the different expectations among participating third parties and districts. These differences were partly accounted for by Hargreaves and Shirley’s (2009) comparison among Second, Third, and Fourth Way change models: they include terminology for type of change and broad principles for managing, forcing, or permitting change. Further, in both jurisdictions there existed similar, broad principles of inclusion as well as the existence of accountability frameworks, but with unique mechanisms for enforcing those policies. To respect these inherent structural and cultural differences, each case was first written as a stand-alone, largely descriptive entity, so that the “unique patterns of each case [could] emerge” before attempting to “generalize across cases” (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 540). Conclusions were then drawn first for individual cases, then for each jurisdiction, and finally for the process of change more generally, with the latter being presented in the final chapter.

**Quantitative**

In the quantitative portion of data analysis, achievement data were used in a confirmatory role. Teachers and theorists describe certain stances towards implementing change as effective, but these arguments often do not include outcomes for students. In this study, achievement data further supported which approaches to policy and
implementation might be considered most effective. A confirmatory structure meant that data were analyzed to assess critically or to confirm existing theories, such as the change theories guiding these two settings’ initiatives (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003). Examination of trends in students’ achievement gaps was an important step in either supporting or challenging the theories of change outlined in chapter two.

The specific form quantitative analysis used in this study was calculating effect sizes from standardized test scores in order to examine changes in achievement gaps over the course of each project. Employing standardized gap analysis as part of my analysis can contribute to understanding change by comparing theories of change and participants’ level of enthusiasm about each project on one hand and students’ outcomes on the other. This was also a complementary use of mixed methods as defined by Desimone (2009), because the quantitative data explained some aspects of the students’ experiences resulting from each project while the qualitative data highlighted educators’ experiences. This design was pragmatic in that it acknowledged the ends teachers were expected to achieve in the current system of accountability (see Fullan, 2007). The use of achievement data was important in this particular comparative policy analysis because these data receive significant attention in contemporary policy debates, especially for students with SEN (Ramanathan, 2008). Since district-level implementation studies often fail to consider achievement data in describing local manifestations of change efforts (Datnow, et al., 2006), these results were important touchstones for each district’s experience with these generally well-received projects.
For each district case, I calculated the achievement gap in the form of a standardized effect size estimate (Cohen’s $d$). I determined achievement gaps individually for each district case at two time points. The gap for each district represents the difference between students in special education and non-identified students in the most recent year ($T_2$) and the year prior to the project’s introduction ($T_1$). This allowed the study to compare each jurisdiction’s progress on achievement gaps during the period of implementation under study. The analysis used a pooled standard deviation for the entire population of students at participating schools. Using this standardized measure alleviated some of the obstacles surrounding cross-national comparisons.

Table 4 summarizes this procedure for a single district; it was repeated for all four district cases. For each cell, the equation represents the calculation of an achievement gap in the form of an effect size estimate (Cohen’s $d$), where the mean difference is between the mean scaled score for students in special education ($\bar{X}_S$) and the mean scaled score for their non-identified peers ($\bar{X}_N$). This difference was divided by a pooled standard deviation. Essentially, this initial calculation was used to examine the achievement gap in each district before the project ($T_1$) and at the conclusion of the project ($T_2$). Using effect sizes with pooled standard deviations (Cohen’s $d$) allows for comparisons across jurisdictions that administer different assessments. Thompson’s (Thompson, 2006, 2007) argument about pooling standard deviations applies here: including students with special needs in mainstream classrooms and the fact that all students are taking the same standards-based assessments both justify the use of a single, pooled standard deviation. Effect sizes have been used in similar fashion in past research to understand overall
policy impacts as well as to compare achievement gaps across jurisdictions with different assessments (Bloom, et al., 2008; Konstantopoulos & Hedges, 2008). Here, I used effect size estimates to describe achievement gaps before and after each initiative in schools participating in both the initiative and this study.

### Table 4. Summary of Inter-District Achievement Data Comparisons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Time 1</th>
<th>Time 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Districts’ Effect Sizes</strong></td>
<td>$\frac{X_N^1 - X_S^1}{\sqrt{\frac{s_N^2 + s_S^2}{2}}}$</td>
<td>$\frac{X_N^2 - X_S^2}{\sqrt{\frac{s_N^2 + s_S^2}{2}}}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Districts’ Confidence Intervals</strong></td>
<td>$\left[ X_N^1 - X_S^1 \right] \pm [SE_{diff} \times t]$</td>
<td>$\left[ X_N^2 - X_S^2 \right] \pm [SE_{diff} \times t]$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This dissertation included qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data were analyzed for common, established themes from the literature, including the impact of each project on communities of practice and teachers’ individual pedagogy. Quantitative data were used to calculate achievement gaps between students identified with special educational needs and those not so identified. Analysis for both forms of data was intended to shape full case studies that told the story of each district during the course of the two projects, ESGA in Ontario and NHR in New Hampshire.

**Reliability and Validity**

This dissertation was a complex, multi-case, multi-national study. This complexity posed potential threats to reliability and validity of the findings, and attempts to address these issues are discussed in this section. First, the issue faced by comparing
several, independent cases is discussed. Second, I address potential threats associated with my mixed methods design, especially the use of standardized test scores from two different jurisdictions. Third, I discuss potential pitfalls with the use of standardized effect size estimates from high-stakes tests in comparing different jurisdictions. Finally, I address the use of multiple cases in each context as an asset to validity.

Yin (2003) has described the various forms of validity to be considered in multiple case designs. His concepts were instrumental in ensuring that each case compared common elements and that each project was compared based on similar traits. In this study, replication within and across contexts was intended to establish “external validity” by relying on “analytical generalization,” or the use of a key theory through which each instance of change is viewed (p.31). In this study, the literature on implementation of reforms provided that theoretical lens, allowing the observer to compare each case and each jurisdiction’s response to these two initiatives using common themes. In particular, the frameworks outlined in the previous chapter, which described the interplay between structural and relational elements in the implementation of policies, were the primary categories that allowed for common comparisons within and across jurisdictions. The selection of these two particular projects in Ontario and New Hampshire was meant to ensure construct validity as Yin (2003) defines it: they represent particular approaches to this type of change, including their use of third party intermediary organizations, capacity-building efforts for teachers, tri-level designs, and the use of standards-based assessments as one measure of success. Similarly, my design followed Yin’s notion of external validity by focusing on replicating these cases within
contexts as well as across contexts, thus ensuring validity of the findings about each jurisdiction. This form of replication also confined my analysis to particular aspects of theories of implementing policies, namely those that drive ESGA and NHR, the two projects at the center of the study. Cases can capture a great deal of complexity. By confining the comparison to a finite set of factors, and by examining multiple instances of those factors, there was less threat to validity.

Second, employing mixed methods presented several potential pitfalls. This mixed-methods design included test scores, but did not attribute direct causality to these policy efforts. This limitation is discussed in greater detail in the next section. In general, the use of students’ achievement data presents validity issues that must be specifically addressed. The design relies on standardized assessments. The small sample sizes in these districts and the volatility associated with high-stakes tests are notable problems (Vacha-Haase & Thompson, 2004). In addition, work in comparing US states has noted that even standardized measures can suffer validity issues when comparing high-stakes test results (Yin, Schmidt, & Besag, 2006). Comparing achievement gaps within districts was one attempt to confront these limitations, assuming that sampling errors would at least be relatively consistent over time. Yin and his colleagues (2006) argue that employing each district as its own comparison is one way to address any potential history of score inflation, measurement error, or instrument adjustment. This is particularly true, the authors argue, when the goal is the comparison of schools and districts and not the measurement of individual student learning. Such internal comparisons were made in this study.
Finally, as noted earlier in this chapter, the use of multiple cases in each state or province was an effort to enhance the validity of inferences about each jurisdiction. Part of the argument in favor of this form of replication is Sarason’s argument (1971, 1996) that these districts’ experiences implementing these policies were products of the larger social and political contexts around them. As cases, they have limited generalizability; there are not necessarily representative of the two contexts. They were, however, products of each context at these points in time, according to Sarason’s assumption. In addition, gathering data within a jurisdiction using the same interview protocols and instruments enhanced comparability (Robert K. Yin & Heald, 1975). In effect, employing multiple cases in these instances essentially widened the sample of educators working under the same initiative. Conducting multiple cases yielded some commonalities to make inferences about the impacts of each jurisdiction’s respective policy stance on local educators that contributed to a larger, unified argument about an effective strategy for making sustainable change.

**Limitations**

The major limitation to this mixed-methods design is the relationship between the two forms of data in the study. Clearly, no direct causal link can be definitively drawn here between initiatives and outcomes, especially given the complexity this design acknowledges by employing a tri-level case study design. Contextual factors like poverty, special education status and assignment, teacher quality, other concurrent policies, and test instability have significant impacts on achievement results (Haertel & Herman, 2005; Pullin, 2005). Of particular concern in reading the results of the quantitative analysis is
the process of special education assignment. The composition of these groups is highly variable. Without consistency in what constitutes membership, comparisons for anything other than complementary purposes are not warranted within the bounds of this student.

Finally, my design employed data from the each district as a whole, but not all schools in a given district were participating in the studied initiatives. Defining a participating school, moreover, varies between the two jurisdictions and their initiatives (for example, one district in New Hampshire is replicating the training internally for schools who did not attend the IDO training). As such, I did not make firm causal attributions, but used the achievement gap data as a compounding factor in constructing each case. Given these caveats, these data can play only a minor confirmatory and complementary role in analysis. These other factors make comparing districts to their own prior results more prudent than simply comparing current rates of proficiency across jurisdictions.

**Conclusion**

Successful implementation of educational policies is an extraordinarily difficult and complex task, especially when those policies are designed far from schools. Local implementation varies, as do local needs, priorities, will, and capacity (Firestone, 1989; Spillane, 1999). Divergence is a given in research on the implementation of policies. But this work often focuses in single initiatives. How schools reconcile multiple and varied policy initiatives demands further study. So does the impact of exciting projects on students’ learning. This study’s mixed design was especially important, given the concurrence of multiple policies in contemporary districts. Change makes technical demands on teachers’ capacity and cultural demands on teachers’ collective and individual will (Spillane, 1999). Successful changes address structure and culture at the
same time, in order to ensure widespread change at the classroom level as well as sustainability of that change (Biancarosa, Bryk, & Dexter, 2010; Saunders, Goldenberg, & Gallimore, 2009).

The two projects studied in this dissertation, ESGA in Ontario and NHR in New Hampshire, attempted to address these many issues of will and capacity, of pressure and support, and of culture and structure. In an effort to understand these efforts better, and to help use them to contribute to the larger conversation on implementing change, mixed methods were necessary. Qualitative data were needed to draw out the experiences of staff at all levels, and from both general and special education. Quantitative data were necessary to hold educator’s impressions up against the experience of students, to see if well-received, engaging, and supportive policies led to gains for students. These methods are not intended to draw causal links, but instead to help draw more complete pictures of four districts, two each in Ontario and New Hampshire. The study ultimately made recommendations for implementing change by drawing evidence from these full pictures of two jurisdictions working with innovative projects,
CHAPTER 4: ONTARIO

Essential for Some, Good for All in Maple Lake and Harwich

The launch of *Essential for Some, Good for All* (ESGA) in 2006 epitomized a new stance towards implementation in Ontario. After years of intense pressure, strict standardization, and escalating tensions between school-level staff and those steering change (Gidney, 1999; Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006), the ESGA project was part of an extended period from 2003 where the Ontario Ministry of Education (MoE, the Ministry) and elected political leaders began to offer additional support, a sense of partnership, a commitment to supporting local actors, and a willingness to permit local adaptation in implementation.

The Canadian education system is highly decentralized; each province or territory governs independently. In Ontario, schools are overwhelmingly funded at the provincial level with modest support from local revenues (Ungerleider & Levin, 2007). This tradition of provincial control has been historically consistent, but within Ontario, several significant eras have come and gone in the last 30 years (see Table 5), culminating in the decade or so directly addressed by this dissertation.

The dissertation particularly concerns the relationship between government policies that enforce accountability for performance and those that seek to include and integrate students with special educational needs in mainstream classrooms. Since the mid-1990s, curriculum standards and corresponding high-stakes assessments have coexisted with laws that promote unique protections and inclusionary policies for students with special education needs (SEN). These laws were codified in 1980, then
followed by the federally ratified Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (CCRF), which mandated equal treatment for all persons. Thus, while inclusion and accountability are not novel policies in Ontario, only recently has the Ministry offered clear support for meeting the goals that each policy sets out. ESGA represents one of the first efforts to reconcile the tensions between inclusion and accountability by trying to implement both simultaneously.

**History of Implementation: Ontario**

Like many other Western (and especially Anglo-American) societies, Ontario has a high-stakes educational accountability structure (Elmore, 2008). The establishment of policies enforcing educational accountability in Ontario began in the 1970s with growing dismay over students’ achievement and the prior history of progressive educational policies (e.g., child-centered instruction, open classrooms) (Gidney, 1999). Hargreaves and Goodson’s research (2006) has shown that many teachers recall fondly the era preceding this period of tighter control, lamenting the loss of autonomy and local innovation.

During the 1980s, economic ends became the new focus of schooling. Legislators began to discuss standards and assessments to match these new standards. In 1981, the Secondary Education Review Project (SERP) called for students to have a “useful, basic education,” where “curriculum is more prescriptive,” schools have “stricter discipline,” and there is far more “coherence and practicality” in the education system (Ministry of Education, 1981, p. 3). Hargreaves and Goodson (2006) have called this a period of complexity and contradiction - one that began a long march towards “eroding
teacher autonomy, narrowing the curriculum, and undermining the idea of teaching as a broader social mission” through the establishment of strictly-controlled reforms (p.31).

Fiscal pressures also played an important role in this era of change. Concerns over funding pushed provinces to consolidate boards and authority, giving provincial ministries greater economic and logistical control to implement tighter standards over fewer entities (Ungerleider & Levin, 2007). As a result, over the subsequent twenty-year period, Ontario reduced its number of school boards (both public and Catholic) from 166 to 72. By the time the provincial Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) was established to oversee “test construction, administration, and reporting” in 1995, Ontario had developed a province-wide curriculum “accompanied by sets of standards for all core subjects” (Gidney, 1999, p. 232). Like similar systems arising at the same time in the US, universal achievement was an explicitly stated goal for this system. Unlike American systems after 2001, however, results are not reported by sub-groups (except for gender). Overall, the mechanisms of accountability resulted in more focus on achievement and learning standards, but also in less local control over curriculum and discretionary funding for local actors. The era of standardization and marketization had arrived (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006).
Table 5. Eras of Educational Policy in Ontario

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Era</th>
<th>Inclusion</th>
<th>Accountability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970s and Early 1980s: Early Contradictions between Local and Managed Control</td>
<td>Early stages of mainstreaming, epitomized by CCRF and <em>Bill 82</em> (local responsibility for special education).</td>
<td>Tighter control in response to open curricula, especially through a standardized curriculum. Emphasis on the economic ends of schooling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-1980s through 1990s: Tightening of Control: Consolidation and Standardization, without Support</td>
<td>Full participation for identified students, not just mainstream placement.</td>
<td>Creation of EQAO and high-stakes, standards-based assessments. Tension between local actors and Ministry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000s: Restoration of Support and Professionalism</td>
<td>More supportive, ethical-professional stance, including more local discretion and support, epitomized by <em>Education for All.</em></td>
<td>Additional capacity-building measures to help local educators meet proficiency targets.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following the Second Way stances of the late-1990s, more recent Third Way strategies have provided greater support for capacity-building, such as financial and professional support for boards performing poorly, while the demands of standards-based accountability still remain (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006).

The trajectory of policies governing inclusion paralleled those of accountability, moving from an era of external enforcement of placements to more localized and professional discretion over ways to create more participatory environments for all students. The movement towards greater educational inclusion for students with SEN.
began in the 1960s with dissatisfaction about reforms in the general education curriculum. Some special educators began to argue “that most children with exceptionalities were better served when they stayed with their peers in a regular classroom” (Gidney, 1999, pp. 153, italics added). Although there were many advocates for mainstreaming, legislation that called for additional services for students with SEN, such as ‘Bill 82’, was not established until the late 1970s and early 1980s. At this time, “inclusion was defined as a placement, not as the provision of programmes and services within the placement” (Jordan, 2001#68, p.353).

Full inclusion was not implemented until the late-1990s, when the conservative government “changed an essential driver of school policies from input…to output” in the form of standards and high-stakes examinations (p.354). These developments codified the tension between inclusion and accountability. High-stakes accountability promoted equality in the sense that it mandated universal achievement, but it also narrowed curriculum, stripped some professional judgment from local educators, and—in line with other Second Way strategies—it left teachers without the tools to implement and reconcile these two ideas.

Under the current Liberal McGuinty government, Ontario’s policy for educational change shifted from the more conservative Second Way of accountability to a stance emblematic of the Third Way, characterized by support for meeting system targets for student performance. Both high-stakes accountability in the form of standardized exams and achievement targets, and individual education plans (IEPs), have been retained. The new element in this current era is an interest in building teachers’ capacity to close
provincial achievement gaps and more fully integrate all students into the mainstream classroom. Jaafar and Anderson (2007) describe how the province has moved from an entirely economic-bureaucratic stance of markets and standardization to one that blends that stance with an ethical-professional one, where teachers enjoy additional opportunities to collaborate, experience professional development, and exercise some professional discretion. Teachers continue to have similar professional obligations for increasing achievement for all students under this new approach, but they also are afforded more opportunities to employ professional judgment or enforce performance expectations through internal professional accountability as opposed to replying on provincial political pressure (Elmore, 2004; Fullan, 2007; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009).

The recent history of special education projects in the province manifests this shift in implementation and change. In 2005, the Ontario Ministry of Education convened an expert panel to formulate guiding principles for more fully educating and incorporating students with identified special needs. The resulting document, *Education for All (EFA)*, argued that educators should pursue universal achievement of provincial standards, shared responsibility for all students, and differentiated instruction and assessment. The Ministry hoped this document’s principles would be a first step not only towards setting higher expectations for performance of students with SEN and narrowing achievement gaps, but also towards offering greater support and professional discretion in the implementation of these goals. The document set broad guidelines for teachers and administrators to meet the needs of all students. Its seven guiding principles are outlined in Table 6.
Table 6. Foundational Principles of Education for All

Education for All’s Seven Foundational Beliefs

1. All students can succeed.
2. Universal design and differentiated instruction are effective and interconnected means of meeting the learning or productivity needs of any group of students.
3. Successful instructional practices are founded on evidence-based research, tempered by experience.
4. Classroom teachers are the key educators for a student’s literacy and numeracy development.
5. Each child has his or her own unique patterns of learning.
6. Classroom teachers need the support of the larger community to create a learning environment that supports students with special education needs.
7. Fairness is not sameness.


EFA’s authors argued that achieving these ends would entail the “reorganization” of the school into a “flexible, collaborative organization” by advocating “collegiality and cooperation” among teachers in the service of meeting all students’ needs (p.56). In the EFA vision, curriculum and instruction are made accessible to more students through the transformation of mainstream teachers and classrooms, rather than reliance on separate placements. Teachers are encouraged to cultivate inclusive placements by adhering to universal design principles, differentiating instruction, and utilizing student data.

EFA is a unique policy document because of its approach to implementing its ideas: simply, it does not have one. Released as a white paper, EFA would rely on a later
initiative, called *Essential for Some, Good for All* (ESGA), to implement its approaches in ways that accommodated local will, capacity, and circumstances. Permitting boards to have such ample leeway in adopting the broad, guiding principles *EFA* is emblematic of McLaughlin’s notion of *mutual adaptation* (M. W. McLaughlin, 1998, 2006). Taking such an *ethical-professional* stance with such heavy reliance on local professional judgment would have been unimaginable just 10 years prior, given the emphasis at that time on standardization.

McLaughlin’s concept for adaptive implementation imagined a reformed relationship between local actors and the state. This view is similar to Fullan’s (2003), in which policy makers set goals and a vision, while district-level actors implement in unique ways. ESGA added a unique dimension to this relationship, enlisting a third party, a province-wide professional association called the Council for Ontario Directors of Education (CODE), to oversee boards’ diverse individual proposals and lead their implementation. This approach allowed the Ministry to capitalize on CODE’s expertise and credibility to create a dual role for this modified version of Fullan’s tri-level reform: conducting various forms of surveillance and supporting local actors in meeting provincial demands. In the era of high-stakes accountability, permitting an adaptive stance and employing the judgment of professionals—both those in CODE and those in local boards—was unique and something that authors have called for in observing other instances of change (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009).

This chapter is organized into three sections. First, it describes the ESGA project from the standpoint of planning and leadership level. In this case, CODE plays much of
the role assumed solely by the state in Fullan’s (2003) tri-level vision of reform. Second, it describes two districts’ experiences of implementing ESGA, a unique mutually adaptive project designed to help all students succeed and to provide assistance to those with identified special needs. The third and final section examines some conclusions drawn from the larger story of implementing ESGA.

The qualitative data on the experiences of various actors with ESGA represent 43 participants, including five from the project’s planning and policy level (the CODE organization) and 38 district level staff: superintendents, central office staff, principals, and general curriculum and special education teachers. Two school boards, Maple Lake and Harwich\(^2\), each provided 19 participants in the qualitative data sample. These data were collected as part of a larger study of ESGA involving a team of researchers, as described in Chapter 3.

**New Implementation: CODE and Essential for Some, Good for All**

*EFA* set a new tone for the Ministry’s relationship with school districts. This new stance came after a period of intense pressure and limited resources in educational reform. Traditionally, new policies are envisioned, written, and implemented. The process that led *EFA* to become ESGA was different. Rather than having the government lead this process, the Ministry enlisted a third party, CODE, to supervise the implementation of the work. ESGA offered a new approach to change for all levels of Ontario’s educational system by permitting management by a non-governmental entity, undertaking a unique amalgamation of centralized priorities, making allowances for local adaptation, and offering ongoing support.

\(^2\) Both boards are referred to using pseudonyms.
Planning-Level Perspectives on ESGA

*Essential for Some, Good for All* was funded by the Ministry but managed by the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE), a professional association charged with helping to implement the principles in *EFA* throughout the province. CODE assumed an intermediary leadership role that was exercised between provincial policy makers and district actors, modifying a conventional tri-level vision of reform (Fullan, 2003) in which steering and leadership are roles played solely by the Ministry. CODE assumed some of the roles appropriated by the state in Fullan’s tri-level model, including articulating “a public value statement,” facilitating teachers’ learning opportunities to “create disciplined collective action,” and providing the resources while monitoring the quality of reform (p.87). Recent work has found that non-state intermediaries can use more effective strategies for influencing local change than those of tri-level reform, especially mutually adaptive ones that fit local circumstances (Honig, 2009). For example, organizations like CODE can employ professional expertise not always held by state actors, possess greater credibility with participants, and maintain a stronger focus on a given effort than entities like the Ministry.

CODE acted as both fiscal agent and political intermediary between the Ministry and local boards. It evaluated proposals, distributed funds, and monitored progress that boards were making towards implementing the special education principles outlined in *EFA*. The monies received from the Ministry were largely free of restrictions, except that funds had to assist students with SEN, support the principles of *EFA*, attempt a sustained and localized vision of professional development, and measure outcomes in some way.¹
Local actors could propose to CODE their own means for using public funds to meet *EFA’s* goals. This approach—employing an intermediary and permitting flexibility—was intended to alleviate some of the historical tension between local actors and the Ministry, particularly after years of little support. A less active role for the Ministry was meant to provoke less resistance and help boards take advantage of the project’s flexibility.

Data from five interview participants from CODE help elucidate the planning and implementation of ESGA. Using Fullan’s (2003) tri-level framework, CODE’s part in ESGA substitutes for and supplants the role traditionally played by actors like the Ministry who represent the state. CODE set priorities and monitor compliance with guiding principles. The five interview participants whose perspective on the project are represented here included CODE’s executive director, the two co-chairs of the project, the organization’s project administrator, and a special liaison to French-speaking boards. The two co-chairs worked with the special liaison to provide key points of contact to the three groups in Ontario education who consistently seek representation: public, Catholic, and Francophone boards. In Ontario, these sectors are important stakeholders in the process of reform. Each has a unique form of local authority and relationship with the Ministry. In any reform effort, each of these three groups seeks representation, and CODE took care to ensure each was represented on the planning committee. The three liaisons for the project, one from each sector, were vital in soliciting the voluntary participation of 71 of Ontario’s 72 boards of education and then stewarding that relationship during the three years of ESGA.
Design of the project. This section describes the principles guiding the design of ESGA according to the perspectives of the five key planning-level participants. Guiding principles were interpreted from themes and responses common across multiple participants. Each participant was asked to recall the story of ESGA’s design and implementation. The section describes two operating principles that guided the project and lays out the criteria that the project’s leaders felt comprised a quality proposal. These two guiding principles and five proposal criteria were the elements the leadership of ESGA expressed as being instrumental to the pursuit of the project’s objectives.

ESGA introduced several elements that were unusual in an environment accustomed to Third Way policies. In recent memory, the Ministry only deployed additional resources such as funding and staff to support progress towards discrete performance targets. CODE, however, received their initial funding through an unrestricted grant from the Ministry. The broad directive was to design and implement a new project aimed at improving the learning outcomes of students with SEN to fulfill the promise of EFA. The leaders of CODE fashioned a project with a mutually adaptive perspective on change, promising support for locally designed and implemented projects, coherence among concurrent efforts, and wide professional latitude. CODE’s leadership team designed the project to be implemented differently in each participating board, depending on local needs.

Impacting classroom practice in a substantive way is always a challenge, especially across several schools and local authorities (Elmore, 2004; Fullan, 2009). ESGA used support and flexibility as ways to generate both enthusiasm among local
implementers and coherence among concurrent efforts to promote widespread change at the classroom level and to ensure sustainability. Such a design acknowledges the limitations in previously held views on implementation that were both linear and exclusively technical (Hall & McGinty, 1997). ESGA’s designers from CODE instead adopted from the outset an approach characterized by a spirit of “co-construction” (Datnow, 2006). The goal of ESGA was not only to achieve successful implementation of the principles of EFA, but to do so in a way that fit local contexts, harnessed district leadership, and achieved what participants called “alignment” with other efforts. Rather than the strictly technical notion of alignment as compliance with all various statutes, ESGA was designed to achieve what Honig and Hatch (2004) call coherence. Coherence is defined by Honig and Hatch as an “ongoing process whereby schools and school district central offices work together to help schools manage external demands,” primarily through local goal-setting, collaboration with external entities, and offers of strategies and support from central offices (p. 26). CODE’s leaders designed ESGA to help bring about coherence (or what some participants called alignment) both within and across boards by employing three operational principles:

- Adopting a welcoming a supportive stance towards change, encouraging all boards to participate and offering support for local priorities in the process.
- Offering significant flexibility to local boards in the development of their proposals.
- Attempting to create coherence among multiple, concurrent demands
within participating boards through support and a marshaling of central office resources and expertise.

The first operational principle that drove the early formation of the ESGA project was a welcoming and supportive stance towards change. All 72 boards were invited to participate in the project, despite this heavily diluting the pool of funds. Participation in the project was optional, but only one board declined. The promise of support in the form of coaching and funding seemed to engender some of this enthusiasm for the project.³ Another element that influenced participation was the representative nature of the planning team.⁴ Experienced leaders with backgrounds in public, Catholic, and French-speaking boards were all invited and appointed. The CODE planning team utilized well-known representatives from each of the three mains sectors to support participating boards through the process of proposing plans, helping them to refine proposals, forming leadership teams, and coaching leaders through the implementation process. This diversity of the planning and implementation team made it easier for local boards to welcome the support they were offered.

Second, the project was to be marked by flexibility in designing projects for local circumstances. While the guiding principles of EFA were important, participants from CODE acknowledged that each board would present its own needs and challenges in implementing the project. Proposals came forward with “all of their uniqueness”⁵ and CODE was able to permit and support these efforts due to its separation from the Ministry.⁶ By permitting each board to design and propose its own methods of enacting
and sustaining the principles guiding the project, CODE was expressing respect for local priorities and co-adapting the project to navigate local obstacles.

The third operational principle in the early planning of ESGA was attempting to achieve coherence among concurrent projects. Planners hoped to have Ministry, CODE, board, and school staff implement the principles underpinning EFA in ways that complemented their other work to increase cooperation between levels and also among units at each level. One CODE staff member described this as a “tri-level approach,” marked by a regular “process of reflection” and collaboration among The Ministry, CODE, board offices, and schools intended to help “people share information back and forth.”

The planners of ESGA noted that striving for coherence among districts’ concurrent priorities shaped the formation of their province-wide design team. (It similarly shaped the recommendations they made regarding local leadership teams.) Strategies for doing this included increasing collaboration between special education and curriculum departments. Leaders also encouraged both special education staff and representatives from the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (LNS) to become members of the CODE planning team. One CODE leadership member recalled how the team “wanted to make sure that we were aligning our work with what was happening at the LNS and with the other initiatives that were going on in curriculum in the Ministry.” At the local level, CODE leaders felt that encouraging diversity in local leadership teams and flexibility in the implementation of the guiding principles would permit greater alignment and cohesive coexistence among various efforts. One policy-level coordinator
recalled that, at the board level, she specifically encouraged “teams within a board that crossed over the silos within boards, [combining] curriculum and special education.”

Local teams were important not only in the planning and proposal processes, but also for sustaining alignment. Professional development [PD] was framed as a collective process rather than a course of individual study. As one of the project’s liaisons put it, “teams of teachers [should be] learning together” during the professional development and implementation process “and there’s a better chance of sustainability [with group professional development] than when you’ve got that isolated one-shot deal.” At both the planning and local levels, alignment with other efforts was therefore an important aspect of planning ESGA. Local flexibility and deliberate collaboration across departments were essential parts of CODE’s plan to achieve this coherence, especially between ESGA and the demands of EQAO.

CODE’s planning staff sought to promote local flexibility in the planning and implementation of ESGA. Forced reform, especially that which seeks to promote significant change at the instructional level, can and often does meet with school-level resistance (Elmore, 2004; Fullan, 2003). Policy-level staff of ESGA felt that local flexibility and adaptation would be effective in cultivating engagement with the project and promoting more effective pursuit of the guiding principles. A central planner on the CODE staff recalled how, in the project’s early planning stages, he argued that CODE should “empower” local actors to “go experiment with something.” A colleague commented on how the project’s parameters had been intentionally broad, calling on boards to follow only “four [or] five guidelines that would benefit their kids.”
senior staff member referred to the initial process as “very wide open.” All noted how this flexibility was highly unusual, but very exciting as a means for reform as local actors felt they could have their most pressing local needs addressed. Boards were able to pursue common objectives, but with “their own local flavor.” Planners sought “to allow [board leaders] within certain parameters to challenge themselves according to their first need.”

Proposal requirements. Fullan (2003) has argued that coherent change can be achieved by balancing guiding principles with local flexibility. In order to permit local flexibility and priorities while ensuring adherence to the principles of EFA, CODE staff established several proposal guidelines. These governed the initial review and feedback process, helping to ensure that all boards would eventually receive funding. CODE’s leaders sought to provide an open process, guiding each board to design proposals “in a way that respects and reflects the document, [Education for All], and the district.” The planning staff sought a balance between a process that had “parameters [that] were very wide open” while not being “a blank check.” CODE encouraged all boards to address five areas in the proposals in the service of implementing the principles in EFA. These were:

- **System change and alignment:** Boards were encouraged to demonstrate locally-constructed methods of implementation in their proposals. Designers felt this could create greater local alignment in two ways. First, in relation to a project primarily geared toward improved special education outcomes, boards “had to demonstrate that they had teachers in curriculum and special ed working
Second, boards had to discuss ways they might pursue greater horizontal and vertical alignment. They needed to show an attempt to align horizontally by explaining “how they were going to align that [proposed] program with other work that they were doing,” including concurrent efforts like the LNS. Vertically, proposals needed to lay out a plan for how “the three levels [school, board, and Ministry] could work together.”

- **Measurement**: Recipients of CODE’s Ministry funds were required to demonstrate growth by devising a way to measure progress. The LNS and, by extension, EQAO, were important catalysts for achieving alignment between instruction and the provincial curriculum, but were not the only tools employed. Increased and more effective use of board-level data was also encouraged. Building this kind of capacity in local actors was particularly encouraged by the LNS representative on the planning committee.

- **Leadership**: Boards had to include plans to engage in “leadership development,” to enhance the capacity and modifying the role of local board- and school-level leaders.

- **Professional development**: All proposals had to demonstrate plans to build teachers’ capacity for accommodating diverse learners in the classroom. Both CODE leaders and the Ministry expressed a preference for more innovative, ongoing, school-based, and collaborative professional development opportunities, rather than one-time, impersonal efforts divorced from everyday practice. One designer said a Ministry official advised him against “huge gatherings in halls.”
• **Sustainability**: CODE mandated that boards should develop plans to outlive the grant period, or “institutionalize the new way of doing business.” Participants thought funding might only last one year (it ultimately lasted three). Thus, CODE pressed boards to change their “underlying structure[s]” governing special education, professional collaboration, professional roles, and community relationships. The idea was not to help create projects that would last forever, but to use locally conceived ideas to alter structures and relationships of special education, thus creating a “sustainable approach for change.”

To ensure adherence to these guidelines, CODE’s staff visited a collection of boards, advised local leaders on revisions, and encouraged what they saw as being effective leadership and communication within boards. In particular, they asked liaisons for the boards to articulate strategies for “how they were going to share this project or this activity” with the board at large, district and school staff, parents, and students. Key aspects of this proposed process were engaging, marshaling, and supporting the local board director. CODE’s planning team saw these local leaders as instrumental to creating and communicating the local vision for the ESGA proposal and for guiding the project to fruition. Employing local directors and superintendents as key communicators helped to create a sense of “ownership.” Further, empowering local leaders in these roles meant the project was not only introducing change, but also “empowering the knowledge that already existed” in each board.

**Funding ESGA.** Louis and Miles (1990) argue that effective policy pushes for fundamental change in local protocols and systems. Weak policies, these authors contend,
let funding come and go without lasting change. Policies create lasting change by leveraging temporary support to affect the reallocation of local resources.

In the past, province-wide efforts had been marked by differentiated funding models, often related to the size of participating boards. An important element in the growth of ESGA was the proposal that the “unrestricted grant” that CODE received from the Ministry be divided equally among all participating boards, creating a unique incentive for smaller boards.\(^{31}\) The five key project leaders who participated in this study discussed this as a helpful incentive rather than a rigid restriction, though it would ultimately dilute the impact in some ways by lessening the amount of funding (and potentially commitment) to the project in each board. However, as one CODE planner recalled, diversifying the funding pool—engaging all boards with equal funding—broadened the base of engaged boards and enhanced the visibility of the project. She went on to explain the rationale for the uniform funding model:

> We [were] going to give every board regardless of size the same amount of money because we [were] not trying to fund pupil programs here. We [were] trying to fund opportunities for districts to experiment with new ways of doing business with regard to special education.\(^{32}\)

As such, boards were told from the beginning that the funding prospects were temporary. CODE’s funding model thus sought to alter local priorities in the long term, as well as to alleviate the need for permanent funding.

**Balancing Inclusion and Accountability in ESGA’s Planning Process**

ESGA entered a political and educational landscape already rife with complex existing efforts. Provincial mechanisms governing assessment and accountability remained palpable pressures on local authorities and would inevitably impact any large-
scale project. Far from abandoning the pressures from accountability faced by local actors, ESGA’s designers worked to allow the project to coincide and hopefully align with EQAO assessments. According to the project’s designers, facilitating greater participation for students with special needs in the provincial curriculum required their increased participation in—and increased success on—EQAO. Ontario’s schools were not a blank slate, and these integrative efforts were part of a quest for coherence and sustainability for both new and existing policies.

ESGA attempted to achieve these dual goals—increasing both participation and achievement—in two ways. First, by incorporating LNS staff and principles into the design of ESGA, the test’s emphasis remained firmly in place as a policy-level priority. Second, by encouraging partnerships across departments at the board level, staff from the curriculum department already committed to score-based improvements brought the pressures and priorities of standards-based accountability with them to the project.

In working for special education change, CODE planners noted the importance of aligning their efforts with the existing work of the LNS, including diversifying their planning team and requiring boards to demonstrate alignment plans in their proposals. In many ways, structures like the LNS and EQAO helped create the impetus to attempt whole-school and whole-district change, codifying universal expectations for greater achievement and reduced inequality. One CODE team member argued, “we would not have had the success that we had, had the LNS not been in existence.”

By design, ESGA was intended to work within the framework of provincial accountability, rather
than around or against it. A former superintendent and board leader argued that an intended outcome of the project was data use:

> We were trying to run a project that would ask boards to really dig deep into gathering appropriate [achievement] data to demonstrate that they were using the funds appropriately and that they were really making a change and a difference for students, not just the staff that they were training.  

EQAO assessments became the prominent method for measuring students’ progress, due to both the planning committee’s partnership with LNS staff and to the existing pressure associated with annual EQAO testing results. At times, inclusion and accountability can create tension in the implementation process. However the CODE effort offered the opportunity to improve test results for all students while offering special assistance to those with special needs. Inclusion, from this policy perspective, could serve accountability goals by improving instruction and performance for a greater share of students.

**Pressure and Support in Implementation**

In acting at the behest of the Ministry of Education, CODE and the ESGA leadership committee played several roles in the project. As fiscal agents for a publicly funded project, CODE were accountable for the expenditure of public funds. As the agents initiating a project of instructional improvement and change, they also had the responsibility to build the capacity of local actors who were working to implement the principles of *EFA* and ensure fidelity to those principles. In an effort to generate greater engagement than past efforts and promote sustainability, however, the project’s leaders offered two important ingredients to accompany these calls for accountability and
fidelity. First, CODE offered boards ample flexibility in the writing of proposals, welcoming some pressing local priorities into the work of ESGA. Second, CODE offered relationships with staff who would provide ongoing, onsite coaching in addition to monitoring boards for compliance. The design, then, represented a unique blend of pressure and support, as local actors were required to adhere to key project principles and increase achievement, but could also pursue some local objectives and receive support in their unique experience of change. Regular visits from the project’s liaisons encapsulated this relationship; these staff engaged in guided coaching on behalf of the project. While they monitored boards to ensure adherence to the principles of EFA and their own proposals, these staff also offered consultation services to support progress on local priorities.

One of the project’s central goals was to guide improvement in the implementation of EFA. One of CODE’s key liaisons recalled that the project’s aim was to “build capacity” and “help with DI [differentiated instruction],” or the increased, effective use of DI in Ontario classrooms. Differentiating instruction was seen as one of the cornerstone elements of the CODE guiding principles document, which argued that all students could succeed with some minimal level of intervention. A colleague similarly argued that the CODE funding offered opportunities: “to provide funding for [boards] to initiate [DI] as a practice” and to persuade rather than cajole local leaders, as part of their effort to create engagement. Beyond building capacity for boards who readily volunteered, the project’s “funding allowed [boards] to discover the significance it would have if they moved in that direction.”
This blending of CODE’s functions of supporter and guide was innovative, especially for a non-governmental actor leading the implementation of an important Ministry priority. Such a complex stance required CODE’s leadership to play three roles in order both to guide boards and to support them in their own emergent growth: “monitoring, coaching, [and] cross-pollinating.” This implied that CODE would not only provide capacity-building support directly, but also “make connections between boards,” fostering and scaffolding a network of colleagues. A member of the senior team depicted CODE’s complex balancing act: “We saw our role as the pressure-support team, combination of both.” This is perhaps a necessity for an intermediary, non-governmental agency leading change, as they must act without significant authority. One of the senior leaders recalled the importance of conveying that the project was meant to have a “colleague to colleague” feel, so it was “not a threat to superintendents.”

The various constituencies in Ontario schools—public, Catholic, and Francophone— further complicate this blended role for a non-governmental intermediary organization leading implementation. CODE’s leadership addressed this by employing liaisons to each of these three key constituencies, and by having each of these representatives play a blended pressure-support role through regular site visits, reporting, and networking:

We each had assignments of about ten boards, and we communicated with them regularly, we established relationships with the superintendent or staff person in charge of the project, we had them submit to us three times during the year sort of status report on how they were doing, and we brought them together in clusters at the end of the year so they could share their stories and their excitement about where movement was being made and their frustrations about what were the barriers.
Walking the thin line between monitoring and supporting was often a challenge for the CODE liaisons, and so other resources were marshaled to help in this role.

The resource that was perhaps most emblematic of the balance between pressure and support was the “very experienced people” sent into observe the boards’ projects. The group included “retired superintendents, directors, [and other] people who knew schools well.” The role of this group was both to monitor and to coach. It employed pressure in the form of reporting to the funding agency and provided support by way of regular, on-site guidance. “They were nonthreatening,” one CODE leader said. “They asked questions.” Another senior staff member felt that their assignment was “to help [boards] reflect.”

CODE played a unique and complicated role in the implementation of ESGA and the guiding principles in EFA. As an important third-party leader of implementation, acting between the Ministry and local boards, CODE had the advantage of being a fully representative organization that had little history of tension with local leaders. Without governmental authority, however, the group faced the default task of facilitating change at scale. Using the Ministry’s “unrestricted grant,” CODE leaders were able to gain nearly unanimous participation from Ontario’s boards and then hold the boards accountable using reporting mechanisms attached to the funding. Along with regular visits from monitor-coaches, CODE was therefore able to build a rapport of trust and collaboration.

The tenor of the project’s design further encouraged this mutually adaptive tone, especially in allowing for local priorities and capacities to take precedence in the board’s
proposals. In summary, flexibility, local input, and offers of support were all important elements in the design of Essential for Some, Good for All. In practice, this meant that CODE played an intricate role. Its steering group both led change from the front as well as supported it from underneath. CODE offered flexibility and support for local actors, but also pushed them to adhere to the principles of EFA, promising all the while to monitor their progress. Without formalized authority, funding and monitoring became their levers of change. Boards would be held accountable for their own plans to implement EFA as a condition of funding. The principles guiding the local proposals for the project—systemic change, ongoing measurement of progress, leadership development, professional development, and structures for sustainability—were intentionally broad. Local boards would be permitted to propose their own ways of making progress. CODE’s role would be to support them on that journey and hold them to the promises they made to garner the project’s funding.

**Case Studies in Ontario**

As outlined in Chapter 3, this study assumes that an exploration of how local actors interpret and manage change is key to understanding the process of implementation (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977) and for proposing more generalizable theories that can drive policy (Hargreaves, 1994). The research questions focus on the ways that ESGA’s unique approach to change impacted local actors in pursuing the objectives of EFA. The remainder of this chapter details the experiences of two Ontario boards engaged in this process: Maple Lake, a rural board, and Harwich, a board centered in a small city. These two case studies illustrate how two local authorities grappled with
ESGA’s principles and requirements as outlined by CODE and the Ministry. In particular, they explore how each board planned to use Ministry funds, the degree to which the boards appropriated the mutually adaptive stance of the project, and how well they were able to align the various elements of the project with one another as well as with other concurrent demands. In total, the cases explore how each local authority dealt with the tension between bureaucratic control and professional empowerment in the process of implementation (Darling-Hammond, 2009; Hargreaves, 1994b). These two cases represent contrasting approaches to the use of centralized authority and to alignment of and relative emphases on reculturing and restructuring as strategies of change, despite working under similar guiding principles from CODE.

Each case is organized according to the research questions guiding the study. After establishing the context of the district, each case examines the board’s theory of action in implementing ESGA, its theory of alignment among various concurrent efforts, the project’s impact in communities of practice, and the surrounding contextual factors that likely influenced the project’s implementation. Each case closes with preliminary conclusions. The chapter concludes with principles drawn from Ontario based on these two cases and the perspectives of staff from CODE.

**ESGA in Maple Lake: Taking the Journey with Professional Learning Communities**

The implementation of ESGA in Maple Lake is a unique case of managed change. The Board’s central office exercised relatively tight control over the effort to reculture participating schools and create structures to support this new culture. The priorities of the ESGA project became a form of accountability within the Board, where leaders
monitored and enforced the values underpinning the project with similar weight to efforts they made to implement changes to the technical aspects of teaching practice. The Board’s ESGA project attempted to achieve both a restructuring and a reculturing of the Board that were symbiotic as well as simultaneous. Maple Lake’s project focused on steering and cultivating new or more collaborative relationships between curriculum and special education staff. In turn, designers expected these collegial bonds to enforce higher expectations for the performance of at-risk students within the altered community of practice. Maple Lake’s leaders sought to use the project to align this more collaborative and mutually accountable culture with accompanying structural elements—new models of instruction and professional discourse. Maple Lake’s ESGA project strove to shape the way teachers thought about their practice and the way they worked with one another.

Professional learning communities (PLCs) were the primary tool for helping bring this cultural change about. The project also had technical components, such as PD for helping teachers learn to practice differentiated instruction (DI). Strategies for more effective instruction—including DI and the use of assistive technology—were secondary strategies, subsumed by the larger goal of creating a collaborative culture characterized by high expectations for all students. The project helped cultivate an environment where the technical elements—represented by training for improving instruction—and cultural elements—represented by PLCs cultivating collaborative relationships—worked together in complementary fashion. The leadership in Maple Lake exercised tight control over the growth of this collaborative culture with high expectations for all students.
Maple Lake: Local Context

The Maple Lake Board is a rural community, consisting of a handful of small towns spread over a significant area. Governance in the Board is influenced by its large geographic size, sparse population, and rural character. For example, decisions about meetings, site visits, and collaboration are heavily influenced by distance. Although teleconferencing has proven helpful, the substantial size of the Board requires the Director to maintain multiple offices and some board-level staff have to travel by air to complete school visits.

Maple Lake consists of 19 elementary schools and 5 secondary schools, and spans an enormous area of roughly 75,000 square kilometers. According to the annual report from the 2010-2011 school year, the Board enrolls over 5,000 students, though the overall population has been in decline for the past five years. It employs almost 1,500 personnel, 374 of whom are classroom teachers\(^3\) and 41 of whom are special education resource teachers (SERTs). The student population in the board consists of 40% aboriginals (self-identified), with an expectation that this group will increase to account for 50% of the population by the end of the 2011-2012 school year. Many of these aboriginal students live in rural reserves, only reachable by aircraft or winter ice road. Both the Board’s improvement plan and some staff point out frequent absences and common occurrences of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome as significant problems with the aboriginal student population.\(^4\) In several schools, staff discovered an overlap between

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\(^3\) The term “classroom teachers” refers to those teachers whose primary responsibility is the teaching of grade-level content in mainstream classrooms. Some studies refer to these staff as “regular education teachers” (in contrast to special education teachers. Participants referred to these staff as classroom teachers, but also as curriculum or program teachers.
aboriginal and special need populations. Almost one quarter of all students have an IEP. Just over 17% of all students fall under both designations.  

This case study centers on the largest municipality in the Board, the town of Maple Lake. Emblematic of many of the ongoing changes in other towns within the Board, the landscape of Maple Lake is evolving due to notable economic and demographic shifts. Maple Lake’s name derives from the enormous lake that borders the town, which is a popular summer vacation location. The wealth at the water’s edge belies the economic struggles influencing the town’s year-round population and the local schools. The Board’s leaders described the negative impact of the closing and bulldozing of the local mill, and the subsequent loss of over 200 quality jobs (paying near or above the provincial average). Many nearby homes that were once the property of the mill’s middle class families are now occupied by a combination of low-income white and aboriginal families. These transformed sections of town stand in stark contrast to the larger vacation homes near the lake.

In recent years, the Board has undergone several changes in leadership roles, including several new elementary school principals, superintendents, and the board’s director. In the midst of these professional and demographic changes, however, several common threads connect the different eras of leadership. A managed cultural evolution has taken place that is promoting new connections among the professional staff as well as with the larger community. In the process, the Board’s professionals have sought—and received guidance in—new ways of working together for the benefit of more students. The project’s leadership team actively influenced this process of cultural change as part
of its larger attempt to create alignment among teaching practices, beliefs about students, and developing professional norms within teachers’ community of practice. This process has met with some growing pains, but has also effected palpable structural and cultural changes.

**Maple Lake’s Theories of Change**

The leaders and designers of Maple Lake’s ESGA project saw the proposed instructional changes as inexorably tied to cultural changes in their board. Maple Lake’s project attempted to transform teachers’ beliefs about students and their collective assumptions about collegial relationships in addition to their instructional practice. The project’s overarching theory of action was that if teachers learned to collaborate in their practice, to differentiate their instruction effectively, and to demonstrate higher expectations for all students’ achievement, than scores and other measures of learning would increase. The proposal focused not only on boosting academic skills like writing and literacy, but also on fostering acceptance of students in special education as fully participatory members of all classes. This vision included establishing PLCs, training principals to facilitate these sessions, and providing data and other materials to guide discussions. The purpose of the facilitated professional learning communities was to codify learning about new practices and generate discussions about new beliefs and professional relationships.

The Board’s leadership planned to steer and cultivate new patterns of professional culture in Maple Lake. First, the Board planned to steer professional culture by managing teachers’ roles and role relationships by actively cultivating their community of practice,
especially through the use of trained facilitators. That is, leaders steered culture by conveying explicit expectations and influencing the conduct of PLCs. The Board also cultivated culture by permitting some flexible and emergent growth within school-level communities of practice. In using the concept of cultivation, I am suggesting that leaders created conditions for teachers to grow collaboratively in and across schools. This theory of change is consistent with current arguments linking professional development with changes in teachers’ knowledge and expectations of students (Desimone, 2009b).

Language and literacy were the areas of primary focus within the curriculum. Results from EQAO served as an important driver for these changes. The project’s designers believed that if additional resources like PD in differentiating instruction were coupled with cultivated, collaborative cultures and whole-school changes, than gains in students’ achievement and curricular participation would be natural outcomes. The initial planning of the project focused almost exclusively on writing scores in intermediate grades. Staff quickly realized that disappointing EQAO scores stemmed from more fundamental language issues. The project’s theory of action evolved to encompass all elementary grades. Participating teachers and leaders expanded the project’s goals to include younger students’ oral language development as a foundation for later writing goals, at-risk aboriginal students and their overlapping needs with students with SEN, and the cultivation of a new professional culture of the Board. As staff realized these issues were interrelated, they all became incorporated as goals of the project.

The Board’s initial discussions about students’ progress in writing helped the ESGA project evolve to include other concerns. The planning of ESGA initially only
focused on EQAO results in writing for the intermediate grades. These conversations quickly revealed that students beyond special education and issues beyond writing would also need to be addressed The Director put it like this:

As it unfolded and we began to see more and more connection between early language development as far as oral language development goes, it correlated with reading development, writing development, overall literacy development, [and] all of a sudden oral language became more and more important to us, particularly as that segment of the population that was coming to school without those rich [at-home literacy] experiences continued to grow.49

Some of these issues were familiar to staff before the ESGA project. Others surfaced as part of the collaborative discussions that took place early in the project. The board planned to use CODE’s funds to create new staff positions to help support these more widespread changes in language instruction. These staff were known as Special Assignment Teachers (SATs), and would offer support to several schools at once in collaboration and in differentiating instruction. SATs worked intensively with teachers in classrooms, offering support “at the elbow.”50 These staff would help to build teachers’ capacity to make the desired changes and help the board enforce their desired cultural changes.

Maple Lake’s leadership team expanded its proposal beyond increasing EQAO writing scores and engaging their special education population to encompass the entire population of vulnerable students and the broader professional culture of the Board. They planned to address this in a comprehensive, broad-based way, aligning the technical and cultural aspects of their effort. Interviews will several key leaders revealed several key
strategies that formed the foundation of Maple Lake’s ESGA project. Leaders intended to work towards these blended goals in four ways:

- Establishing and maintaining professional learning communities (PLC), which allowed teachers to plan collaboratively, engage in moderated marking to codify expectations and language, and review and reflect on student data;
- Increasing human and material resources available in the district, such as shifting the role of special education teachers to support more teachers and students, employing in-class instructional coaches, and employing some staff in new, board-wide roles that combined monitoring pressure with relational support;
- Enhancing instructional capacity through professional development, targeting differentiated instruction (DI) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) strategies that could benefit all students;
- Providing additional assistive technology resources, such as writing software, sound projection systems, and other tools.\(^ {51} \)

A number of participants cited EFA’s guiding principles as being instrumental for giving them a language and a framework on which to base their efforts. The data administrator said this shift was very public, and the language of EFA began to appear in newsletters, parent conversations, and even on the red, flashing, electronic message Board outside of one school. This was meant to be a message “that we’re here for everybody. We all take all comers. We will work with anybody that we can.”\(^ {52} \)

The planners of Maple Lake’s project did not feel they were attempting a significant innovation when they embarked on their CODE project. Essentially, they
wanted teachers to work together more often and more effectively as part of increasing achievement, and aimed to set up structures to support them. Board leaders pursued PLCs by articulating to staff the values of the ESGA effort, building capacity to meet those goals, allocating key resources like time, and sustaining and nurturing the seeds of change with ongoing pressure and support. These PLCs presented opportunities for teachers to meet regularly with colleagues and discuss instructional strategies, review students’ progress, and study various forms of data. Important leaders in the implementation of this strategy were SAT teachers assigned to support instructional growth and the principals of each school. Both groups received special training to facilitate PLCs and sharpen connections between general curriculum and special education teachers.

Maple Lake’s leaders created a project designed to have significant impact by aligning capacity-building support with the sort of guidance designed to steer and cultivate cultural growth. Past efforts that featured only structural changes and a fidelity-based perspective had created a level of “reform fatigue” in the board. A senior administrator argued that staff appreciated the opportunity to have a voice in change and welcomed the change for cultural guidance and growth. He felt that ESGA’s flexibility offered an opportunity for alignment and the kind of relational growth that his board needed:

I wouldn’t say this was an initiative. This was a huge effort and a collaborative effort that brought significant different foci together for one common result and that was to improve student achievement in writing and oral language ability for our primary students…. In terms of initiatives, I think you’re going to hear… we are about as initiatived out
the ying-yang and you can possibly get…… Enough! We need to be able to take what we’ve learned and implement [it].

Several participants cited DuFour’s (2005) influential work on professional learning communities as being instrumental in shaping their thinking on the formation and execution of local PLCs. DuFour describes how boards can create “a coordinated strategy to respond when some students [do] not learn,” particularly arguing for strategies that are “systemic” and “schoolwide” (p.85). Additionally, he believes this coordination should center on “collaborative conversations,” which take the form of regular meetings “to analyze and improve [teachers’] classroom practice… in an ongoing cycle of inquiry” (DuFour, 2005).

As its name implies, ESGA intended to benefit all students and students with special needs in particular. While the director indicated the CODE project’s primary focus was special education students, he always felt that it had “tremendous, tremendous potential for all of our students.” In discussing the planning of their local Project, several participants from Maple Lake referenced the difficulties facing aboriginal students who live in the Board’s large catchment area or who choose to attend the Board’s public schools rather than those on the local reserves. The Superintendent for Special Education was quick to point out that Maple Lake is not identified as “an aboriginal board” per se (since the majority of students are non-aboriginal with approximately 40% First Nations). As these aboriginal (mostly First Nations) students enter schools, they present local educators with a host of distinctive needs and challenges. A significant portion of the student population comes from areas with high rates of rural poverty, with attendant issues that present barriers to learning. In some cases, due to a
variety of circumstances, there is minimal parental supervision and interaction in these homes, creating an additional challenge when students arrive at school.

A senior level administrator remarked that for students who are poor and, in most cases, also aboriginal, there are serious consequences for students’ learning. He contended that conventional parent-teacher relationships are difficult to develop with the foster families and social welfare agencies often at the center of these students’ lives, and low-SES students are often highly mobile. One participant described the intense needs presented by some students:

We have kids that grunt. We have kids that can’t walk because they’ve never been shown how to walk. We have kids that are wearing diapers and they’re 7 years old . . . We have kids that have been served as human beings … in a way that is almost criminal . . .

We have young parents of these children who are kids themselves . . . There is no employment in some of these [aboriginal reserve] communities. There’s a lot of substance abuse . . . These children are growing up neglected and in many, many cases they come to us having been removed by child welfare agencies.

The CODE Project offered leaders in Maple Lake an opportunity to address the needs of their overlapping vulnerable populations. Through the local flexibility afforded the Board by ESGA, the Maple Lake project sought to address various issues related to language, literacy, and writing that affected all students, but with special attention to students with special needs and aboriginal students whose language and literacy issues contributed to their underperformance. This was particularly true for a significantly vulnerable sub-set of aboriginal students who, it was argued, often came to school with very few verbal skills (what one superintendent called “a-lingual”56) While ESGA began in Maple Lake as an effort to raise elementary writing test scores, staff in Maple Lake
quickly expanded its focus. Educators in the board realized that significant increases in writing scores in the middle grades would only come with improvements in early literacy and oral language skills.

From the outset, the ESGA project in Maple Lake had ambitious structural and cultural objectives, including an effort to break the “isolation” that had characterized past teacher work and the encouragement of “professional dialogue.” The project’s planners hoped that PLCs would take on a variety of issues, yielding “open and honest discussions” about teaching among the staff by focusing on topics such as DI, the needs of aboriginal students, and candid examinations of various forms of student learning data.

Maple Lake’s leadership hoped to steer the cultural growth of the Board’s staff while making room for some additional participation in the planning process. Leaders sought input from staff in a variety of roles. Staff from both Board and school levels described the project’s planning process as open and participatory. The special education superintendent echoed this, calling it a “grass roots” effort. One former vice principal noted that consultation about planning the project took place with people from all levels. The absence of a special education superintendent during the initial planning stage created additional participatory space for SATs to help craft a proposal. One senior staff member conceded that such broad-based involvement can make a project “messy,” though elementary school teachers valued and appreciated this slower, more participatory approach. These avenues of participation created two innovative attributes of the project. First, school-level participants did some community-building while being
steered by the Board’s leadership. Second, these same participants eventually helped to broaden the project’s focus to other at-risk students, especially aboriginals:

We knew that … we needed to focus on DI and our aboriginal students and our inclusion with spec ed kids. …We knew that we needed to address [those big issues] and we needed to have discussion around what DI looked like in our individual classrooms. But …we needed to build community first. We got there. I would say the second year we …were able to have some discussions around the at-risk kids, talk about what the data is telling us, … we looked quite critically at … EQAO data, the school student achievement data and all those other pieces.  

Maple Lake’s proposal had ambitious goals including raising expectations, increasing achievement for more students, and enhancing participation for students with special needs. The Board’s theory of action was that if the project’s resources were allocated not just for technical supports like professional development, but also for cultural changes like PLCs (which incurred costs through release time for teachers), then teachers’ practices would be enhanced and their expectations for student achievement raised, with positive consequences for student achievement. Over time, the project’s focus widened from a narrow attention on writing scores for students in special education in intermediate grades to whole-school improvement discussions about language and literacy, including support for at-risk aboriginal students. ESGA’s flexibility and Maple Lake’s commitment to cultural growth facilitated this expanding focus. Maple Lake’s version of the ESGA project cultivated and steered a collaborative culture concerned with planning lessons, studying data, and engaging in candid conversations with colleagues from different departments and grade levels. Planners envisioned a slow, deliberate process of cultural change at the school-level with PLCs at its center and beginning with
a focus on bringing the “two branches” of special education and curriculum together. In these respects, the project went beyond restructuring teachers’ responsibilities and teaching new techniques for differentiated instruction. It also strove to reculture participating schools so these new working relationships and expectations for achievement could take hold. PLCs were a key tool, creating a space for important discussions about students’ achievement data and class-work that could help reshape teachers’ relationships, practices, and expectations.

**Reconciling Tensions: ESGA and EQAO**

ESGA in Maple Lake was meant to help bring about changes in professional culture and in teachers’ expectations for historically underperforming students. Although most felt this was a commendable objective, in practice the drive for cultural and pedagogical change resulted in tension between differentiating instruction and assessment on the one hand, and measuring progress with standards-based instruments on the other. The Board attempted to create an environment where both inclusive practice and a striving for accountability were attainable goals, but where ESGA’s expectations for cultural change were paramount. Leaders’ messages were often characterized by urgency and disappointment. These sentiments were accompanied by the Board’s injunctions to produce results and abandon past excuses: “You can’t say it’s demographics. You can’t say it’s… the increased number of aboriginal students coming into the classrooms,” its leaders proclaimed. On the other hand, teachers worked hard to help students who had historically underperformed on the assessments. Meanwhile, the Board’s leaders realized that more and different tactics were needed beyond communicating a sense of sheer
urgency to increase achievement among all students. The Board’s primary strategies to achieve these ends through the project were

- to provide additional data for teachers to discuss and analyze in PLCs,
- to negotiate new and commonly held notions of progress, and
- to offer some flexibility to schools in how they achieved greater coherence between inclusion and accountability.

I will examine these three strategies in turn.

**Data: Pooling and Flooding**

The first approach the Board used to support the coexistence of inclusion and accountability involved increased and more effective use of data. Local leaders provided PLCs with a diverse array of data for discussion and analysis. The Board collected their own benchmark and diagnostic data to complement EQAO assessment reports, hoping to give teachers some additional tools to reflect on their students’ learning. In doing so, however, it ultimately assembled a large, unwieldy, and inaccessible collection of data, resulting in a deluge of data rather than a pool of selected diagnostic assessments. In consequence, while the effort to increase and diversify the student information available to PLCs did provide teachers with tools to discuss students’ learning, it also created a cascade of data that teachers had little capacity to analyze or utilize.

Teachers said that before CODE there had been little data to inform classroom decisions and gauge student progress. The Board responded by investing in standardized interim assessments, creating a data warehouse to store these measures, and providing these and other forms of data to PLCs. These new resources represented a blended
approach to data use in Maple Lake, where sources used in discussions included EQAO, internal assessments from the Board, and classroom-level assessments and assignments. PLCs became a tool for delivering data to teachers (e.g., student work, EQAO results, and interim testing data) and for creating a forum to discuss the data. Increasing amounts of information were collected for this purpose. This emphasis on discussing and analyzing data was an important part of the Board’s strategy for steering and cultivating a new professional culture and enhancing expectations by structuring some elements of teachers’ collaborative discussions and giving greater value to data from standardized assessments.

After several years of work on the project, a few teachers felt some of the additional data were useful and informative:

[Data discussions helped with] pushing people outside of their comfort zone. As difficult as it is…, it is successful because in time we were able to see changes in the content of discussion and the quality of the discussions that were happening around the table. But it took a lot of time.67

The cultural change that ESGA was pushing was explicitly about raising expectations and improving performance. In providing additional data and making a case for the value of EQAO, leadership in Maple Lake hoped to make inclusion and accountability not only coexist, but also coalesce. One elementary principal argued that leaders and teachers needed to embrace what he called “the mantra”: “You need to dig into your data. You need to be passionate about what you’re doing. You need to believe all kids can learn.” This kind of repeated reflection with data, he argued, could push staff “to think about what the big learnings are.”68
The use of blended data in PLCs did change some teachers’ views of accountability. One teacher remarked that discussions were powerful for her own practice, now that she and her colleagues had the opportunity to process results together and formulate action plans: “I personally enjoy having the data back. I now feel it’s more purposeful,” she said. Several teachers expressed similar feelings, including curriculum and special education staff who felt the many PLC meetings to examine data helped show that more students were capable of meeting the provincial standards than had once been believed. Several participants argued that the data provided by the project (and in one case, EQAO in particular) were a valuable part of raising teachers’ expectations for all students and of building their capacity to assist more students in reaching provincial standards. A special educator argued that the approach was intended to enable more teachers to move towards “common understandings so that we can work through that [student support] process together.”

Some classroom teachers, however, felt that the pooling of data had turned into a flood of information that they had trouble using in a practical way. Several of these educators described the Board as being “data rich,” but also “information poor.” One argued that the Board “had tons and tons of information and zero experience at using that information.” The flood of data created technical storage problems and access difficulties for teachers searching for usable streams of student-specific information. A data administrator was proud of having the additional collection, but conceded that “teachers don’t have access to the [electronic] data warehouse yet because [we] don’t have the structures in place to manage that many users.” One Board administrator called
this flood of data “the new stupid,” because there was too much data, too few teachers
with access to it, and too many benchmarks to make a coherent plan for instruction.75

The emphasis on achievement data from EQAO was the biggest strain for
classroom teachers. In part, this friction was generated by the contrast teachers noticed
between their own assessments of students’ abilities and the results of the annual high-
stakes assessment. Several teachers experienced “huge discomfort” during meetings
when significant discrepancies surfaced between report card marks and standardized
achievement results.76 A few teachers walked out of these meetings.77 Another way data
were a source of tension was the annual test’s ubiquitous nature; some teachers found the
constant pressure and practice distracting. SATs and SERTs also expressed concern about
the omnipresent nature of the testing data.78 Others had been concerned about the
emphasis placed on data walls, the color-coded signage in all schools’ meeting rooms that
categorized students according to their EQAO-measured proficiency status. The data
walls served as an additional reminder that the status of EQAO was the bottom line for
the Board, regardless of the other forms of data that were pouring into PLCs and other
staff meetings.

Special educators, however, were more likely to welcome the pressure for
achievement generated by EQAO. Many felt it benefitted their historically marginalized
students.79 One SERT argued that “high expectations weren’t 10 years ago as [they are]
now.”80 Accountability, some special educators argued, combined with the efforts of
ESGA, helped to place additional pressure on classroom teachers to take a greater share
of responsibility for students with special needs.81
Much of this tension and anxiety regarding the emphasis on EQAO came from the heavy reliance the Board’s leadership placed on data from EQAO combined with related, standards-based interim assessments. One elementary principal recalled that it was difficult to convince teachers to see the test as a natural byproduct of their teaching:

> We’ve had a lot of discussion with my new staff around attitudes towards the [EQAO] test. When EQAO first came to us it wasn’t linked to Ontario curriculum very well. So…[for a long time, a bad] attitude was conveyed… So…now, I think it’s directly linked. It is our curriculum. So we also have the challenge of changing the mindset of the teachers to create a real positive attitude towards Grades 3 and 6 testing. … That’s a huge challenge.\(^8\)

The Board’s leadership argued they had been responsive to criticisms about the deluge of data and about overreliance on EQAO test scores. One senior level interviewee said that data had become more targeted in its collection and use. The Board now asks teams to simplify collection and also employ other valuable data like teachers’ assessments. SATs felt that they and the teachers they supported were now more adept at collecting and using data, and had responded well to the increased use of diagnostic assessments. One SAT recalled that while teachers initially viewed assessments as a bureaucratic “data-collecting piece” for the Board, they were now “really seeing the value” of making better use of the information.\(^3\) Primary-level teachers also spoke enthusiastically about how PLCs had become instrumental in helping them to make sense of and to determine how to use the data to improve their instruction.

As in other aspects of bringing about change through the CODE project, the strategy of using data to inform instruction was effective, but also slow, requiring local collaboration to enable teachers to learn the process. Providing additional data alone was
insufficient to spur cultural change, so the board employed PLCs and trained facilitators (often principals) to help teachers learn to appreciate and use data to inform instruction. Unfortunately, the standardized nature of EQAO data clashed with the differentiated modes of instruction promoted by EFA and with the need for focused conversations that characterize effective PLCs. The types and amount of data proved too voluminous, too complex, and too inaccessible for teachers to make effective use of these resources.

**Progress, Proficiency, and Potential**

A second strategy that leaders in Maple Lake employed to reconcile inclusion and accountability was to negotiate new meanings for and measures of progress in the Board. In attempting to reconcile the tension between inclusion and accountability, Maple Lake faced a challenge between pursuing universal proficiency and developing student potential. This conflict could also be described as a friction between the differentiation of instruction on one hand, and the standardization of high-stakes assessment on the other. Some Maple Lake staff felt that EQAO could not measure key elements of student progress achieved during the project. Others worried about striking the right balance between rewarding progress or improvement on one hand and pressing all teachers and students toward a universal target on the other. In addition, the continued practice of withdrawing groups of students to engage in explicit practice for EQAO was in conflict with important tenets of EFA.

Each of these tensions reminds observers that implementing ESGA did not resolve all tensions between inclusion and accountability in Maple Lake. The project’s leadership struggled to clarify who would ultimately take responsibility for students’
progress, how progress would be measured in light of calls for DI, and the most effective ways to achieve progress in relation to including students with disabilities as well as raising scores on EQAO.

Reconciliation of EFA’s call for more universal design with the growing pressure to standardize classroom practice and assessment very much remains a work in progress. One administrator said that teachers generally saw inclusion goals as “the morally right thing to do,” but doubted that “a lot of them really had the capacity or knew what to do.” “There was a very strong fear about very high needs kids,” she said.84 Accountability exacerbates this fear. Accountability systems drive general classroom teachers’ fears that they will be unable to meet the challenges that universal placement can present. These systems feel punitive for teachers, even with some support measures in place. In practice, the result is that environments like Maple Lake practice exclusion in the service of explicit test preparation to accommodate adjustments to this fear. As a result, some of the basic principles of inclusion—like shared responsibility and recognizing diverse forms of achievement—can be altered or lost.

For some special educators, both inclusion and accountability can be powerful forces for shifting responsibility from a few support staff to all teachers in schools and for creating cultural change. Structures of accountability like EQAO can serve as levers to increase expectations for underperforming and marginalized students. Teachers working in special education see accountability as a tool for equalizing expectations. One SAT argued that classroom teachers “need to see [the data] because they actually need to see
that when they use effective teaching strategies then growth for all kids occurs. You can’t argue with what’s on these sheets of paper.”

In this respect, inclusive projects like ESGA can create collective responsibility for helping all students make progress on standard curricula. For example, the initiative’s intensive focus on underperforming students provided an avenue for a special education teacher to marshal support by concentrating intensively on one low-performing, low-SES student for a time and then demonstrating this historically underachieving student’s potential. She recalled seeing the student meet the provincial standard on an EQAO practice assessment:

He leveled a level 3 and… I was freaking out. I went and got [the principal and said,], “You’ve got to see this. It’s not just me. I’m not just in love with this little boy and his big brown eyes …This is real…He can do it.”

Special education staff were especially hopeful that the progress made by such low-performing students would generate a greater sense of collective responsibility among all teachers. Some were also hopeful that witnessing the success and progress of students with SEN might convince classroom teachers of the value for all students of DI and other practices adopted from ESGA. SATs and SERTs made it clear that part of ESGA entailed working with classroom teachers to a much greater extent in the planning of IEPs and other interventions for students with SEN. The Board’s leaders argued that classroom teachers should assume the primary responsibility for students in classrooms, even those with the most significant needs. More shared responsibility for progress was a main goal of the project:
[The project was about] making it very clear that that [separate placements and responsibility passed to assistants] is not the way we work. That’s not what’s going to happen. The non-professional or even paraprofessional… is not going to be expert giving advice at that [IEP planning] table. The professional [classroom teacher] is to be the first person that speaks…. Now that was difficult for a couple of teachers to hear but not difficult for most.90

One SAT stated how she and her colleagues had made inroads in getting classroom teachers to assume this higher level of responsibility for all students’ progress:

[In the past], the IEP got written and the [classroom ] teacher didn’t really have the input… I don’t believe those deep discussions were happening…. [Now after ESGA], I’ve got the teacher right there…. they needed to see that it was their responsibility and I’m not sure they always did.91

The project therefore made some headway in getting teachers to share responsibility for students’ progress. However, many participants remained frustrated with the inability of the EQAO test to measure their students’ progress. Some staff expressed concern that DI and standardized assessment were not compatible. Some teachers noted that local assessments became more standardized—and less meaningful—during ESGA in an effort to provide more data for PLCs.92 Many classroom teachers lamented how the forms of support and diverse paths to understanding and assessment they were encouraged to offer to students were explicitly prohibited during the administration of EQAO.93 One of the coordinators for special education in Maple Lake ESGA project was frustrated that some of the progress made with students with SEN is not represented by EQAO or standardized benchmarks:

We’re limited by the capacity to really show our growth and what we’ve really been able to achieve. …It’s unfortunate because we’re really trying to validate the work that literacy teachers are doing in schools … [The
standardized data] is such superficial data when you’re looking at the complexity of what the impact is in the classroom.\textsuperscript{94}

In other words, despite widespread agreement about the value of practices like differentiating instruction, staff like this special educator remained frustrated with the standardized nature of assessments, which administrators used as the primary tool for validating progress.

In Maple Lake, the conflict between inclusion and accountability is partly between definitions of and emphasis on proficiency and progress. Proficiency refers to a specific standard; progress refers to improvement over time - a relative standard for each student. The project’s leaders were eager to raise expectations for all students, but these expectations occasionally clashed with the rigid measures of EQAO. Teachers felt significant pressure to meet performance targets, and these feelings led to some temporary abandonment of DI practices and to temporary withdrawal or exclusion of students in a Board that sincerely professed to be all-inclusive. In contrast to the diverse modes of measurement that \textit{EFA} advocated, progress came to be defined more narrowly relative to provincial performance levels. Administrators struggled with what sort of progress to honor and what forms of pressure to apply when results were still not up to standard:

I worry that…in my messaging to our people… [when I] speak of unrecognized achievement… I absolutely believe in my heart that what we see in many instances is unrecognized achievement. It’s incredible on the part of those kids and we should be celebrating those kids… I worry that in trying to do that by saying 2.7, 2.9 is incredible, that I sent a message to people that says it’s good enough. (But) it’s not good enough! I always try to say, “this is fabulous, this is incredible achievement, we need more, we need to go further”. But I also worry that in all of that, we expect a
cohort of children to achieve at a level that their classmates are expected to achieve—... it may be unrealistic sometimes.\textsuperscript{95}

This instance captures much of the tension that some staff—especially special education staff—also expressed about the expectations implicit in implementing both inclusion and accountability. EQAO’s structures assume that all students are capable of demonstrating a common minimum standard of learning on a uniform measure. Inclusion, at least as practiced in Maple Lake’s ESGA project, asks teachers to assume that all students can achieve, but also assumes that the demonstration of this learning and the measurement of its progress will vary. In an environment like Ontario, the pressures from high-stakes mechanisms like EQAO often result in some teachers seeing inclusion and accountability as mutually exclusive, leading them to abandon things like DI and engage in explicit test preparation:

[We used to think that] as long as we get good teaching into place, our kids are going to be fine. But it just doesn’t seem to be the reality. I think that our kids really do need that explicit practicing in what that test question is going to be like ... We did a lot of comparison this year in particular about what we do as a board and what other boards do, and that [type of practice] seems to be the big difference in how well prepared the kids are for test-taking in some boards. [We are] still finding that fine line between good quality teaching and preparing those kids for the test because we don’t want it to be about preparing the kids for the test.\textsuperscript{96}

These tensions around measuring and defining progress contributed to what some staff saw as an unsustainable crescendo of pressure. Teachers were struggling with the juxtaposition of new instructional practices and old measurements of their work:

Teachers definitely are feeling that they’re under more scrutiny, more pressure... from senior administration.... Principals regularly are in classrooms. They’re doing walkthroughs. They’re looking for specific
[pedagogical] things. They want to see evidence that guided reading is happening. They want to see … [in practice] all of the initiatives that the board is working on … [T]here is a lot of pressure on teachers to make changes and they certainly are feeling that pressure.97

Teachers actively preparing their students for the test described feeling “terrified” of the exam.98 SERTs and SATs, who were some of the most fervent advocates for students SEN and the push to differentiate instruction and assessment, argued that students with special needs need “more opportunities [with the] test form… so they’re not shocked when they see it [during the annual test administration].”99 Regardless of messaging from leadership, some teachers did not see ESGA and EQAO as compatible efforts.

While inclusion and enhanced participation have certainly increased during Maple Lake’s ESGA project, several students are still excluded from mainstream placement, if at least temporarily. Although withdrawal and exclusion are not the Board’s stated preference, they continue to take place in some instances. While inclusion is the Board’s official policy, staff indicated this approach is not applied as uniformly in schools. On the one hand, claims were made that they “no longer have any withdrawal whatsoever,” that “there are no special education classes,” and that withdrawal does not occur.100 However, the Board’s official special education plan includes plans for distinctly separate settings when students’ needs are particularly profound or deemed exceptionally disruptive. This policy concerned some staff, citing a lack on consensus around its effectiveness.101

This practice of withdrawal appears to have some relationship to provincial accountability and EQAO. SERTs and SATs noted “a lack of clear consensus” on inclusive practice at the school level, and said that some withdrawal literacy support had
been going on for special education students and other students who were low performers. They called this practice “targeted intervention,” identifying the practice as, “a withdrawal model … [where] special needs students [are] withdrawn and having that one to one intervention happening to see if you could improve skills in reading or writing.”

Staff noted that these skills were almost always identified through standardized interim assessments that were practice tools for EQAO. In the struggle between honoring progress and chasing proficiency, the latter appears to have gained ground in a project meant to favor the former.

In Maple Lake, the struggle to reconcile inclusion and accountability plays out as a tension between expecting all students to reach the commonly understood proficiency target on the one hand, and to work towards their own potential on the other (even if that potential does not match the provincial target). Staff felt that taking on shared responsibility for this progress had increased, even if tensions remained concerning how to measure this progress and what means might get all students to these goals. The standardized accountability system creates a bar that some staff are unsure all students can reach while special education staff argued that most students were otherwise capable, and needed only a few unique supports. Caught in between was the special education superintendent, who remains tentative about praising staff for progress while falling short of prescribed targets, fearing such praise might permit teachers to hold lower expectations for their students. In the face of pressure for performance standardized assessments, these diverse perspectives are difficult to reconcile.

**Flexibility to Create Coherence**
Part of the tension caused by the current structure of testing and accountability in Ontario is its rigid and prescriptive nature. As Honig and Hatch (2004) have argued, ongoing dialogue between designers and implementers can help local educators foster greater coherence among concurrent efforts. ESGA offered this opportunity, and the project’s flexibility helped to foster coherence in a way often inhibited by accountability structures (Datnow, 2006). Maple Lake is a board that exercised relatively tight control over the reculturing of staff during ESGA. The Board’s leaders emphasized the importance of inclusive practice. They communicated their expectations explicitly, overseeing and managing the process of change. In its design, however, the project permitted ongoing dialogue between CODE and the Board, and the Board involved key local leaders in ongoing dialogue about the project’s objectives and progress. This openness created an environment of flexibility and mutual adaptation, and these factors (rather than rigid performance targets) helped to foster greater coherence in the Board. Participants frequently used the word alignment to describe this process, as when the superintendent of special education reflected that the larger goals were set elsewhere, but it was “our job to somehow align everything.”

This superintendent interpreted CODE’s project design as implying that alignment of all concurrent efforts was a local responsibility. He noted the Board was granted leeway to consider various strategies that might create both more inclusive environments and increased achievement. He felt this was effective:

We’ve learned that teacher moderation and collaborative marking works. It works in the sense that teachers learn more about assessing student work and aligning their assessment practices by collaborating with each
other….We can attribute that [achievement] gap closure in some significant part to the CODE project.105

The Board’s leaders offered some areas of flexibility to teachers in crafting the day-to-day content of PLCs, just as CODE offered Maple Lake’s leadership flexibility in implementing ESGA. This flexibility allowed for educators to discover, adjust, and broaden the focus of the project. Early in the reflection process of PLCs, staff “discovered that [aboriginal oral language and literacy problems] are not special education issues. In fact, they are not even cognitive issues.”106 These risk factors, common among aboriginal students, are a combination of significant linguistic problems as well as a host of other concerns that include unstable home lives, health problems (especially hearing, according to several staff), and frequent mobility. The project’s mutually adaptive structure gave staff latitude to slowly come to understand the relationship and occasional (but not universal) overlap between specifically special educational needs and the distinctive needs of their aboriginal students.

Schools are making efforts to include all students. In addition to efforts to differentiate instruction, staff have begun several initiatives aimed at being more inclusive of aboriginal students. One example is the character education model the schools are using, based on the Seven Grandfather Teachings of the local aboriginal peoples (truth, humility, honesty, bravery, respect, wisdom, and love). This framework seemed to help the district not only to enforce discipline, but also to engage students in “restorative practices [and] real justice” that emphasized a universal sense of belonging.107 The project’s focus on collaboration, combined with its flexible approach, gave teachers the time and space to discover the need for and to create such efforts.
School-level participants noted that ESGA helped to unite these otherwise distinct efforts—assisting aboriginal students and including those with SEN—into a common cause: improving achievement for all students by improving instruction at scale across all schools in the Board but also by incorporating school-level voices into the process of change. This balance between flexibility and guiding parameters meant that central office supported local actors in dealing with pressure and making progress at an individualized pace:

Everybody’s at a different place, every school is at a different place on the continuum, every teacher was at a different place on the continuum and [senior staff are] allowing that flexibility… [We can say to central office] here’s where we started, here’s how much we’ve grown, be patient and let us continue to move forward. But the pressure that we feel we put on teachers, having that support is critical, absolutely critical. Because I don’t think we would’ve been able to move our teachers forward if we didn’t have that support from senior admin.108

This support came in the form of “guiding hands” from the board, but schools were given a fairly “liberal hand” in negotiating some of the particulars of reconciliation.109 Some PLC meetings had this kind of flexibility, where teachers could discuss issues and plan lessons using their own professional discretion. The Board did introduce data and facilitators to guide many of these sessions, but several were locally planned and offered opportunities for “learning from [their] colleagues.”110

Discovering the needs of aboriginal students and the variation in forms of collaboration among colleagues are two examples of achieving coherence through flexibility rather than tight control. Moments where teachers and schools were offered ample flexibility in their use of available meeting time and resources produced
reculturing in line with the larger goals of the project. These opportunities also gave teachers the opportunity to move towards reconciling concurrent and competing demands. PLCs seemed especially effective in revealing these strategies, offering teachers the opportunity to drive their own discussions in the context of their daily work.

**The Future of Tensions between Inclusion and Accountability**

Maple Lake wanted the ESGA project to raise expectations, improve teaching practices, and bring coherence to professional culture. Flexibility was welcomed by those working in schools. Using data was an important part of this strategy, though overwhelming and less helpful for some teachers. However, tension still exists between EQAO’s rigid, standardized means of measuring students’ progress and the diversified modes of instruction encouraged during ESGA. Teachers were especially wary of an over-reliance on standardized data and an over-emphasis on the importance of the test, especially in the face of a project that encouraged differentiating instruction, but not necessarily differentiated assessment.

The Board’s director felt the process of developing a culture of collaboration and collective responsibility was able to “unfold” in schools without ongoing, excessive interference from the central office. Teachers partly agreed, noting that discussions in PLCs helped First Nations students become part of Maple Lake’s ESGA project’s expanding ripple effect. In other ways, however, administrators acknowledged that high-stakes assessments remained one area where teachers would continue to feel outside interference and pressure. As one board-level administrator put it, “EQAO is definitely a
focus for us and it’s a strong focus for us but we’re still working at how we balance that with the everyday work of teachers.”

Tensions persist in Maple Lake between the objectives of ESGA and the pressures teachers feel from EQAO. This is despite some progress in pursuing the goals of both EFA and EQAO. Teachers feel pressure to increase performance on a standardized measure and also to differentiate their instruction and assessments. ESGA prompted teachers to adopt a more inclusive stance, but the pressures of high-stakes accountability have pushed teachers to withdraw students more often for explicit practice in test-based skills. The Board is attempting to build capacity by providing additional data for PLCs, but many teachers find the deluge of data unusable and resist including data from EQAO in their collaborative discussions. Teachers are being held accountable both for creating more fully participatory environments for historically underachieving students and for increasing achievement for all students. Acknowledging teachers’ progress in one area may threaten momentum in another. Moreover, classroom teachers and special educators are having different experiences with this reconciliation process just as the project is trying to bring them together.

Participants indicated that two areas gave reason for hope in Maple Lake’s attempts to reconcile inclusion and accountability: teachers are sharing more responsibility and areas of flexibility have created some additional alignment between these two forces. Rigid notions of progress and pressure have stalled additional growth. Participants—especially teachers—were clear, however, that professional cultures were different. In particular, teachers noted that there were more strategies for addressing
professional conflicts, receiving support from peers, and sharing responsibility in co-taught classrooms than before the project. Further, teachers lauded areas where they were increasingly free to make important decisions about sustaining the project’s goals. Staff became more involved in planning PLCs and—in addition to having more strategies at their disposal—reported feeling more able to exercise that liberty in their pedagogy.

**The Project’s Impact on Professional Roles and Role Relationships**

While there were certainly tensions between EQAO and the goals of ESGA, the Board’s overarching strategy for deliberately shaping professional culture made notable progress. The Board’s initiative helped to create some coherence between the technical work to reshape instructional practice and their cultural efforts to facilitate collaboration. Leaders in Maple Lake intended to leverage the ESGA project to instigate changes in roles and relationships among staff. These transformations were not supposed to be an ancillary impact, but the substance of the initiative itself. Designers placed a deliberate emphasis on reculturing. Maple Lake drove cultural change in an effort to create a more collaborative and mutually accountable professional environment. The project’s leaders in the Board hoped the transformed community of practice would be one that promoted collective responsibility among all teachers for all students, facilitated collaboration between classroom teachers and special educators, opened up otherwise private spheres of professional practice, and created time and cultural space for challenging conversations about areas where teachers were struggling. Participants indicated that the Board had made progress towards these goals. During ESGA, special education staff took on new roles as in-class support staff and equal collaborators, altering the convention of
teaching as a private affair. New assistive technology transformed teachers’ visions of their practice. The conscientious creation of PLCs created a space for educators to reflect on students’ achievement in ways that that provoked difficult conversations.

The funding the Board received from CODE was initially used for two main purposes: (1) paying for substitute coverage to allow both general and special education teachers to attend PLC meetings, and (2) supporting various efforts in “capacity building.” Central tenets of these efforts were altering staff members’ collective conceptions of effective practice and their approach to professional relationships with one another. Curriculum staff and SERTs began to meet, plan, and teach together. Principals had to become facilitators of professional development, in addition to being logistical managers. Classroom teachers had new tools at their disposal such as SATs and assistive technology, and were expected to incorporate these into their daily practice. Coaches and resource personnel entered once-private classrooms regularly in order to reshape instruction in accordance with the Board’s vision as outlined in the project.

Classroom teachers and special educators did not share the responsibility for creating a more collaborative atmosphere equally. Special education staff felt the onus for initiating collaborative relationships, often having to “push in” to the classrooms of reluctant colleagues. In at least two cases, this meant observing lessons daily until the classroom teacher asked for assistance. One SERT felt it was her responsibility to initiate collaboration by having regular conversations, building relationships, and offering help and assistance while maintaining a non-threatening posture:

[T]here was a lot of resistance,… especially in some of those first years, …Trying to get into a classroom, having a teacher take responsibility for
planning for some of those special needs kids,... that was all new for
them and there were lots of doors shutting, lots of people saying, “No, go
away, it’s your problem, you work it out”. We had some pretty stubborn
resource teachers who would just be persistent.114

The teaching profession has historically has been characterized as private (Little 1990),
conservative, individualistic (Lortie, 1975), and egalitarian (Donaldson et al., 2008).
Fullan (2007) has continued Lortie’s foundational work, arguing that the changes
required to transform these private, conservative, and professionally autonomous
environments and to improve instruction are as much cultural and psychological
processes as they are technical exercises. Maple Lake’s proposal leveraged—rather than
avoided—culture, addressed it directly, and used it as a tool for changing and sustaining
improvements in schools, rather than representing professional relationships as obstacles
to reform. The leaders of Maple Lake’s ESGA project understood the value of teachers’
collective capacity to define their practice (Orr, 1996; Sarason, 1996; Wenger, 1998), and
pursued professional learning communities as a means to harness this power and use it as
a vehicle for change (M. W. McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Stein & Coburn, 2008). In
response, teachers and other school-level staff began to challenge previously held notions
of professional privacy and pedagogical conservatism by moving towards greater
 collaboration, innovation, and commonly held notions of good practice. In Maple Lake,
the ESGA project’s leaders improved practice through professional development and
incorporating new staff into classrooms; the project introduced new technology into
teaching, modifying pedagogy; and PLCs were created, which transformed teachers’
views of their practice and their relationships with colleagues.
Changes in Classroom Practice

Maple Lake deliberately implemented new classroom structures by changing the roles teachers played in classrooms and for whom these teachers took responsibility. The ESGA project in Maple Lake exemplifies this cultural approach to change that Fullan and Pomfret (1977) framed as one of the key challenges of implementation. That is, the Board’s project asked teachers to change not only their core practices, but “to alter their usual ways of thinking about themselves” professionally (p.337). Such fundamental conceptual changes are frequently neglected in both the design and study of implementation (Cohen, 1990; Stein & Coburn, 2008). The changes were mandated in some ways and cultivated in others.

Teachers in Maple Lake were like teachers in many other areas, working alone without a shared notion of quality practice, or a “technical culture” (Lortie, 1975, p.76). Lortie has further argued that teachers often filter input into their practice, “reserving the right to assess any possible addition to their repertoires in strictly personal terms” (p.79). This selective adaptation reflects the autonomous nature of the profession that Lortie found and others have since substantiated (Kennedy, 2005). Maple Lake’s ESGA project leaders made several efforts to address existing norms of teachers’ privacy and autonomy. They began in the classroom by reassigning staff into new roles, especially by asking SERTs to spend more instructional time in general education classes. Principals observed more often, instructional coaches worked at the classroom level in an “at the elbow” model, and SERTs shifted from separate to inclusive placements, just as their students did. Clashing with (or attempting to replace) a standing technical culture creates
tension. Implementation did not always go smoothly. Despite their initial willingness, two teachers used the word “traumatic” to describe their experiences in learning to reconcile the project’s demands for collective accountability and transparent practice with traditions of autonomy. Having so many additional staff in their once-cloistered classrooms was difficult. Other school-level participants described the ESGA project as “pushing people outside of their comfort zone.” The project’s leadership took these deliberate steps not only to modify instruction but also to bring about this new culture of collective responsibility.

This presence of additional staff in classrooms makes teaching practice public in a new and often unusual way (Little, 2002). For some staff, these changes bordered on a form of professional confrontation, actively challenging the most personal and private aspects of teachers’ practice. Indeed, as SERTs entered classrooms, they initiated new relationships with teachers characterized by open and collegial discussions of instruction and by more shared instructional responsibility. For example, general classroom teachers initially struggled with having SERTs in their classrooms and engaging them in difficult conversations after class:

[The process was] very confrontational for one teacher … not in a negative way but they definitely felt that they needed to be able to defend the way that they wanted to mark and grade student work. And [one teacher] walked away from the table understanding that she wasn’t using [clear grading] criteria… That was her peers at the table [challenging her work].… [Eventually], She didn’t go away upset. She went away saying, “I need to rethink this.”

Principals’ observations also pushed discussions of particular aspects of pedagogy in new directions. Collaboration and public practice became forced necessities once the
teacher, the SERT, and the coach entered the same classroom. Through this newly integrated role, one SERT reported how she was now “seeing that light go on for teachers,” where more colleagues felt comfortable collaborating and sharing instructional duties.\textsuperscript{118} Rather than instituting the process of change in out-of-context professional development, Maple Lake’s project changed the norms of teachers’ community of practice by bringing in experienced colleagues who observed and coached them, right in their own classrooms.

Other ways that the Board is attempting to change the culture and practice of teaching is by altering the assignment and placement of adults in classrooms. Educational assistants (EAs) have been woven more fully into the daily life of the school in Maple Lake, taking on additional responsibilities like lunch duty and working with more non-identified students in the classrooms—thus increasing the “shared work” of instruction. More teachers also began to work with a blend of identified and non-identified students in general activities, resulting in a significant change in “classroom teachers taking ownership for all of the kids in the class.”\textsuperscript{119} As one SERT reported, “we are helping [identified students] but we don’t stick [exclusively] to them.”\textsuperscript{120} Finally, “training the trainers” models of professional development were used in an effort to get teachers “to share those … oral language strategies right across the grades” and with all students, building capacity by “developing our teachers and trying to get them to come together… opening their doors and sharing with each other.”\textsuperscript{121}

As a result of this growth in professional collaborative culture, one teacher said how “as professionals, we [now] feel it’s OK to walk into someone else’s room and tell
them you goofed about something… Or ask for help… And in the past you wouldn’t have done that.” A SAT described the schools she served as “so collaborative,” and a teacher interviewee referred to an increase in “comfortability with each other” as part of ESGA. Other teachers said they were more frequently “listening to colleagues and watching what they’re doing,” and described how they were “more willing” to try colleagues’ ideas since they had built “relationships.” The presence of SERTs in classrooms appears to have pulled back the professional curtain, encouraging a professional frankness and collaborative rigor that had been absent when doors were closed. Two teachers argued that while PLCs and data review meetings had become consistently confrontational, this was in a productive and professional way. One reflected how “It’s become okay to not be good at something and get better at something.”

One veteran employee recalled the culture of the past and remarked on how it was beginning to change:

I recall sitting in the staff room and the principal walked into the staff room and said to the grade 8 teacher - he had a very high needs student that was nonverbal that was probably functioning at an SK (Senior Kindergarten) level in his classroom. - “The parent would like you to plan some expectations [to help the child] work alongside the other kids”. The teacher didn’t respond. The principal left the room and he picked up the curriculum documents and threw them on the table and said, ‘that’ll be the day.’

[But now], prior to the student even arriving in the building we have the parent, the agency, whoever is technically responsible for the child, bring the child to the school for a tour. We sit down as a team and we plan for that child. [T]he SERTs meet with the classroom teacher and they would talk about what the needs are for that child.
Teachers at one Maple Lake school cited more frequent and visible use of anchor charts as one example of this enhanced cultural and curricular alignment. Anchor charts are tools for both teachers and students. They convey a set of clear, common objectives across a grade level’s classrooms for each unit or concept. These home-made posters help teachers to achieve two purposes. First, they create what participants called alignment among teachers by reminding them what they and their colleagues have agreed are the principal concepts for a given unit. Second, they help to remind students of the keystone skills they are expected to master during a given unit. They are hung in conspicuous places in more classrooms than in years before the project. Anchor charts represent an effort by teachers to enforce similar language and emphasis on common points within their own community of practice. These charts are often a by-product of discussions of student work in PLCs. They are one of the most tangible signs of increasing cultural alignment in the Board, at least in terms of individual instructional practice. This collective progress in creating a collaborative and commonly held technical culture began with professionals changing the way they work with colleagues and with students in their classrooms:

[Teachers now] think of ways to get [students with SEN] to interact better with the room and be a part of the curriculum... They’ve included them in the parts of [the curriculum] that they can to make it interesting for those students. I think that’s been a huge shift.128

Teachers generally supported the statement made by one of the SATs (and also included in the Board’s Special Education Plan) that the “classroom teacher is ultimately responsible for the program” or plan written for each child with special needs. The Board
practices a continuum, or tiered model, where almost any student can have an IEP written for them to help educators plan for their unique learning needs. Teachers’ roles are described as working with all students, sharing responsibility and instruction. One SERT described her role as working with small groups of students in need of additional assistance, “not just the kids with an IEP.” She felt she could “work with all the kids in the classroom.” Several SERTs and SATs credited their general curriculum colleagues with personifying increased collaboration and responsibility during IEP planning and execution, particularly by demonstrating knowledge of and interest in a student’s IEP goals. Classroom teachers are more familiar with the plans, their contents, and the students they are meant to serve. In Maple Lake, this represents a change in roles and role relationships. One coordinator said the model of special education had evolved to acknowledge that most students, even most of those with IEPs, did not need to be removed from classes:

The vast majority of those special ed kids can just be served in a regular classroom with a classroom teacher working with a special ed teacher making sure that the program is modified to meet their needs. … Then possibly the next tier would be working with a special ed resource teacher on a specialized program either inside the classroom or outside the classroom [part-time].

With this evidence concerning teachers’ historical professional privacy and autonomy in mind, leaders in Maple Lake sought to modify and establish a common instructional practice, install new technologies, and create PLCs. Leaders carefully introduced additional staff into general classrooms and structured respectful but difficult conversations about students’ progress and quality instruction within PLCs. They moved
SERTs from separate workspaces into general curriculum classrooms along with identified students. In addition, instructional coaches spent significant time in classrooms to support the growth of co-teaching and more diversified pedagogical approaches like UDL and DI. This extended, onsite professional development model, known as “at the elbow,” paid particular attention to the cultural and relational dynamics of teachers’ communities of practice. In addition to these measures, classroom teachers are increasingly involved in the planning of IEPs. Anchor charts are another tangible example of this progress in cultural coherence, demonstrating a willingness to codify and adhere to a commonly held technical culture. On the whole, ESGA helped local leaders encourage the development of new pedagogical models and the re-orientation of teachers’ practice from one of privacy to one that was more open for critical discussion (see Little, 2002). By cultivating a common technical culture, or a commonly held set of ideas about effective instruction, they began to alter professional culture at large, challenging traditional structures in the name of inclusive practice.

**Technology: “Everyone has a front seat”**

A second important aspect of the transformation of teachers’ professional identities that impacted individual classrooms and collective teacher cultures was the introduction of assistive instructional technology. This was another way that the Board’s leadership sought to assist learners with special needs while also benefitting all students. Assistive technology is a key example of the way that implementing changes can alter teachers’ conceptions of their roles by changing fundamental elements of their professional practice (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977). Teachers in Maple Lake had to be
persuaded to use technology, to see its value for diversifying instruction, and to learn to employ it in a variety of ways in their existing instructional models. Use of these tools was initially encouraged among early adopters before being promoted among all staff. The “at the elbow” coaching model was implemented in a similar way, and both the coaches and the technology were eventually pushed into all teachers’ classrooms.

The most prevalent technological tools employed by the district were microphone systems, writing and language software, and laptop computers for some students. Much of the funding for technology now comes from sources outside of CODE, though the cultural impetus for change was certainly part of ESGA. The Board has reallocated funding from several areas to meet their larger CODE goals. Teachers said their requests for technology were nearly always honored and that software packages were generally personalized to the students. Several teachers connected the use of technology not only to students with special education needs, but also to aboriginal students. One SAT argued that teachers now viewed these various kinds of technology as “a universal design thing,” that addresses the needs of at-risk students while offering some benefits for everyone.

Sound field systems are the most prevalent example of technology with nearly universal benefit for all students. Almost all teachers have adopted the sound field systems (some teachers refer to them as “the FM systems”). These systems broadcast teachers’ voices throughout the room, and each classroom system consists of a wearable microphone and surround-sound speakers. Not only does this benefit students with hearing difficulties and illnesses, but also supports other students by increasing focus and allowing the teacher to move freely with less concern for clarity and volume. The use of
these microphones does not seem to represent a major pedagogical shift for teachers, who can continue their prior modes of instruction without significant change. In line with other bottom-up efforts in the Board, one senior level participant credited the initial adoption of these systems as “based on the research”. This interviewee said the Board listened to staff and agreed to invest in these technologies in a major way—spending three quarters of a million dollars (non-CODE funds) to install them into all learning environments across the Board.

Most participants described the sound systems as relatively easy to use and unobtrusive in nature. However, some primary teachers did not readily accept this change: “Teachers were very resistant to put those on and use them.” Teachers cited several reasons for this resistance, including lack of comfort with the equipment and a sense of unease about the disruption they might cause. One teacher said it took convincing by a SERT, who framed the technology as a tool for realizing a core value: “everyone having a front seat.” By contrast, another teacher felt the principles of Universal Design (UDL) were persuasive. She came to enjoy discussing with her colleagues the particular needs of certain identified students (such as those with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and other sensory issues) and non-identified ones (such as students with regular fluid or infection issues in winter) students. Finally, teachers cited the high incidence of ear infections, especially among high-needs aboriginal students in winter, as being persuasive. A key point of persuasion, interaction, and adoption was almost always peer-to-peer, with teachers persuading teachers rather than the Board explicitly mandating change.
The strong leadership stance of the Board’s central office and SATs has had some impact on the frequency of use of assistive technology (AT). Leaders felt resistance to technological aids had weakened in recent years. Teachers cited “a stronger emphasis on the training and support for [them]” as having the most impact in the increase in use of AT. In Maple Lake, the increase in support seems to be related to the decline in teachers’ resistance to the implementation of technology. From the schools’ perspective, modeling and capacity building from peers were just as important as pressure from the Board to implement technology. As an effort to change teacher practice and culture, incorporating AT required professional development. An SAT was designated to oversee technology use in inclusive classrooms—making it more widely available and modeling its use. A variety of software is now accessible to students. Rather than reserving its use for identified students, the standard now is simply that “if it helps them, they’re allowed to use it.”

The final area of controversy concerning technology in the professional culture of teaching was the increased use of laptop computers in classrooms. One senior SO recalled that identified students’ use of laptops generated some debate, due to “a perception out there amongst some … classroom teachers that using laptops is cheating” or an “unfair advantage.” This senior participant took a strong stance against this view, saying teachers were “not allowed to have that belief because if they’re going to continue we’re going to make a change” [implying dismissal]. In terms of the core message of the project, Maple Lake’s leadership clearly emphasized technical and cultural changes simultaneously and symbiotically. The Board’s leaders made it clear that a goal of the
項目不僅要為教師提供必要的技術，還要傳達接受多樣化的學習風格和需要的重要性。

將額外的AT整合到教師的教室中是一個技術和文化挑戰。董事長回憶說，董事會基於教師的建議做出了這個重大的投資，並繼續通過來自 CODE 項目的資金來支持它。^{143} 這項更改需要的不僅是資源的分配。教師最初的不適應和早期對AT目的的錯誤認識是證明這是一次非常重要的文化變革的證據。整合新的技術以服務於包容性實踐需要的不僅是資源的獲取和提供，還需要對教師在使用它們方面的培訓，以及推動整個社區接受它們作為某些學生學習的必要工具。Maple Lake的項目前期領導者認識到了這些複雜因素，並且有意識地通過壓力和支撐來應對它，推動守則和提供ほとんどの学年における学習要因を分析するための指導。
implementation, but as “a process.” “The work,” this participant said, “is in the doing.”\textsuperscript{144} One administrator used the term “journey,”\textsuperscript{145} while another called it “messy.”\textsuperscript{146} These statements all point to the complex, developmental nature of the project where progress was slower, but commitment was higher than in forced initiatives. PLCs are not implemented, but cultivated over time, as teachers’ roles and role relationships change. DuFour (2005), who inspired the Board’s work with PLCs, argues that installing such groups is a time-consuming, deliberate process that requires hard work and significant allocations of time. Maple Lake’s professional learning communities were a way to change the professional culture of the Board, and in doing so, alter the way principals lead, classroom teachers teach, and all professionals in schools (especially general program and special education teachers) work together. To do this, the project’s leadership team encouraged local adaptation of this collaborative model within several parameters, including leadership by a trained facilitator (usually a principal), use of data, and some Board input on the composition of each group.

Maple Lake’s plan for creating PLCs incorporated both centrally planned priorities as well as school-level ideas. The ESGA project in Maple Lake sought to shape teachers’ collective norms, and also ultimately their professional values. As part of their management of the growth of professional culture, the Board used several strategies. It trained principals in their vision of how to facilitate PLCs, forming learning groups to help them learn and practice these skills. Structurally, time and space had been allocated for regular collaborative meetings, where teachers reviewed various forms of data, participated in moderated marking, and discussed instruction. Culturally, PLCs became a
tool for transforming communities of practice through activities that cut closer to the heart of the instructional core. School staff played an important role in the conduct and focus of these meetings, shaping some of the content for plans of action based on these discussions. These activities included frank conversations regarding students who were performing below provincial standards.

PLCs have a dual value. They are designed to permit emergent elements like teachers’ new ideas about practice to surface, and they produce change in the Board’s culture by harnessing social relationships and creating a space for teachers to expose more of their private practice to public discussion. This process was initially difficult, requiring new, more involved roles for leaders as facilitators of these challenging conversations. Participants recalled how there had been a need for leaders to “roll up their sleeves,” “be involved in everything” the group was doing, and “get dirty” for the first time. The process was most powerful when PLCs became places where leaders encouraged teachers to push one another respectfully to grow and take the lead in cultural change:

It was actually getting people to see it and talk to each other. And it wasn’t that they didn’t like each other… They had quite a strong social connection with each other … socially. But not in classrooms. The tradition there was just you go in and you do your job.

So there was a lot more self-direction in the PLCs coming from teachers. It was more let’s … make sure we’re focused and make sure we’re doing something and our school energies are all being harnessed and directed in unison rather than us all paddling our own little canoes in different directions.
There were notable obstacles to getting the Board’s professional culture moving in one direction. Teachers’ resisted explicit changes in their professional roles and identity. Those willing to change experienced “growing pains.” The most significant difficulties were building collective momentum to support this redefinition of people’s roles and role relationships by creating an alliance of those who supported change. According to one former administrator, this entailed, “Using the right people, having the right people in the right place that you could make sure that there was that critical mass almost on one side.” It also involved a series of serious negotiations with the local union regarding uses of teachers’ time.

The Maple Lake ESGA project pushed school-level leaders to move from being system managers who took an “operationalist approach” and spent their time reactively “putting out fires” or acting as “cowboys in the halls” managing behavior, to becoming leaders who could develop skills as instructional leaders who focused on classroom pedagogy and leading difficult conversations. Just as teachers were under pressure to make cultural changes in their roles and role relationships, principals were likewise pushed to facilitate this progress in their own buildings and behavior. One principal recalled how this required managing pressure from senior leadership staff and planning a deliberate, slow process of difficult conversations and cultural growth:

There was lots of pressure from senior [administration], of course there was. There were huge expectations … [to] move [our] schools forward. Well it’s not quite that easy…. We had planned out where our PLC evolution was going, what our starting points were, and where we would like to be… [But], it doesn’t happen overnight. We had lots of very difficult conversations through the year.
PLCs became an important vehicle for achieving these many newly defined professional identities by offering local implementers time and space for slow, locally adaptive reconciliations of old and new roles and role relationships. PLCs are a unique change strategy, permitting a great deal of mutual adaptation. DuFour (2005) and McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) have argued that PLCs represent efforts toward emergent transformation of professional cultures as much as they are about implementing policies. These characteristics made PLCs an appropriate strategy for Maple Lake, who sought to manage the growth of a collaborative and mutually accountable culture while acknowledging the need for this to be a slow process that permitted teachers’ input. PLCs take time to take root and sprout change. By allowing this growth to unfold, the Board began to see a new professional culture blossom, that was becoming more collaborative and that was characterized by a higher degree of collective, shared responsibility for all students.

**Conclusion on Culture and Communities of Practice**

In Maple Lake, leaders used the ESGA project to steer the transformation of professional culture throughout the board. In addition, leaders permitted the cultivation of some emergent growth within communities of practice at the school level. The Board’s leadership team hoped ESGA would create new relationships between classroom teachers traditionally responsible for the provincial curriculum and special educators, open up hitherto private spheres of professional practice, and create time and professional space for challenging conversations. Maple Lake’s reculturing process relied on a combination of leadership and vision setting by the Board, facilitation of PLCs by principals, and the
persistence of SERTS in pushing in to classrooms. The Board’s efforts during ESGA focused on redefining the professional roles of many staff and then supporting them in that process of change. Principals were a prime example of this. They were asked to take on a more active role as instructional leaders, and were trained to facilitate PLCs.

Teachers’ communities of practice in Maple Lake have experienced uneven change. Most staff expressed support for the goals of EFA, but their implementation stalled in the face in existing norms within the community of practice. Many teachers are still concerned that they are ill-prepared to meet identified students’ needs in this more inclusive environment. EQAO results have been difficult to predict (given their differences from report card grades), despite great effort to utilize achievement data to guide practice. These results have intensified teachers’ feelings about the pressure placed on them by the test and the need for additional support. SERTs have accepted most of the burden of initiating these professional collaborations, having to push in to the mainstream teachers’ classrooms and, in some cases, initiate pedagogical changes like co-teaching. Many staff have been cautious about accepting colleagues into their classroom to share responsibility. This has been a slow process of cultural change, one where special education staff have played an active and significant role.

Maple Lake shows signs of staff having a sense of shared responsibly for all students, a willingness to have difficult professional conversations, and the ability to grow professional practice and relationships for the benefit of students. The Board achieved this kind of progress through deliberate and difficult effort. The project’s leaders paid acute attention to cultivating collaborative cultures and creating space for
difficult conversations. Teachers viewed the introduction of new technologies as pushing change in teachers’ conceptions of their own practice. PLCs were not just assigned time and space for faculty meetings, but deliberately steered vehicles for cultivating cultures of collaboration. SERTs changed their roles by pushing in to classrooms and, with support from SATs, engaging in difficult conversations around the new instructional models that this inclusive culture would require. One special education administrator said succinctly that the goal was to create a board characterized by “the classroom teacher being the key person in the special ed kids’ lives.” She acknowledged this was an ambitious goal that required deliberate attention to professional culture. Maple Lake’s culture was a deliberately guided one during ESGA, as the central office acknowledged that their ESGA project was not just an infusion of new resources, but a transformation of teachers’ roles and relationships.

**Influence of Contextual and Political Factors**

The implementation of ESGA in Maple Lake confronted a number of ongoing efforts that competed for attention and resources, including the pressures of accountability and preceding traditions of combining pressure and support. The provincial accountability framework including EQAO was perhaps the most influential in shaping the Board’s thinking about how to implement the principles of *EFA*. Board-level leaders noted that EQAO had a prominent an influence on the implementation of the Board’s overall vision of change, especially their vision for differentiated instruction. Some teachers felt pressure to meet annual performance targets, and saw preparation for EQAO and diversified instruction as mutually exclusive. ESGA only intensified these
expectations by placing additional students with SEN in teachers’ classrooms and by stating to teachers explicitly that those students should achieve provincial standards similar to their peers. The Ministry has in its recent history supplemented this pressure for meeting performance targets with various kinds of capacity-building support. OFIP is the clearest example of this assistance, where funds and Ministry staff are provided to help local actors meet Ministry-established targets for performance by engaging in extended, on-site mentoring.

This approach—blending pressure with support to meet various goals— influenced Maple Lake’s execution of ESGA. Under CODE’s leadership, however, the project took on a new character, allowing flexibility in the meeting of externally-designed principles and providing assistance in meeting local goals as well. Maple Lake was the beneficiary of this flexible relationship with CODE, as the adaptability of the project allowed them to serve other at-risk populations besides those with formally identified special needs. In turn, the Board adopted a similar, mutually adaptive stance with their schools. CODE monitored the Board to ensure commitment to with the broad principles of EFA, but these monitors also engaged in regular, on-site support that included assistance with meeting local priorities (i.e., assisting aboriginal students). Maple Lake’s adoption of this mutually adaptive stance is embodied in their creation of the SAT position. These local staff engaged in a similar process of guided coaching, consulting with local actors on their own priorities and goals, while also offering support for meeting externally-designated principles.
Hargreaves and Skelton (2012) argue that coaching as a facet of educational change often devolves into “technologies to deliver mandated changes,” rather than to “build true capacity in terms of helping teachers to help themselves” (p.132). In Maple Lake, however, this form of coaching was meant not only to support local actors in meeting the project’s goals, but these visiting staff also stressed fidelity on the part of local actors to their own goals, as laid out in the proposals they wrote in order to receive the project’s funding as well as to new objectives that emerged during the implementation of the project. Guided coaching was a natural outgrowth of the CODE organization’s stance towards participating boards and the recent political history of educational policy in Ontario.

Despite the added respect for local goals within the guided coaching stance, the pressure of EQAO remained a significant influence for teachers and principals. It continued to influence the implementation of ESGA, leaving at the superintendent of special education uncertain of how to prioritize the test and students’ incremental progress towards the provincial benchmarks. Maple Lake made some progress in reducing achievement gaps during ESGA, and staff noted that the project positively influenced student achievement. As the Board tries to sustain this progress, however, the tension between the flexibility of ESGA and the rigid measures of performance on EQAO maintain a tense co-existence in Maple Lake.

Boards like Maple Lake are frequently under pressure from several concurrent demands. Ontario’s Ministry of Education asks teachers to collaborate, to align with provincial curricula, to complete planning and improvement projects, and to improve
educational outcomes for a variety of historically underperforming groups. What participants in Maple Lake described as being unique about ESGA was the opportunity it offered local actors to take part in creating solutions to reconcile and balance these many projects simultaneously. The director said ESGA’s greatest attribute was “to enable boards in having ground-up solutions that… fit local circumstances.”¹⁵⁴ A SERT echoed this, saying, “the teachers were very appreciative of being able to bring something of their own [to the table].”¹⁵⁵ In Maple Lake, partly by design and in part due to leadership turnover, teachers had some input on both the planning and implementation of ESGA. While the board made several efforts to manage progress in professional reculturing, teachers nonetheless had some voice in schools in determining how the many demands they faced might be reconciled to create a more coherent educational system.

Participants felt that the flexible and democratic processes of ESGA helped the Board to meet multiple, competing demands and to improve students’ achievement. The superintendent for special education argued that the many concurrent demands in the Board became more structurally and culturally cohesive:

I think the CODE project enabled us to intertwine or very nicely weave a lot of the loosely connected work pieces or initiatives out there together—oral language, collaborative marking, teacher moderation, effective use of data and creating a student data system based on student achievement.¹⁵⁶

The flexible aspect of the project’s support system (the “coaching” half of guided coaching) was part of what permitted local actors to achieve this integration of various efforts towards a common goal of universal learning. SATs argued that the mutually adaptive aspects of ESGA “intertwined beautifully” with the existing priorities in the
Board, largely because local means were considered an acceptable route to implementing the principles of *EFA*.  

But this flexibility worked only because it was accompanied by external voices driving the Board towards particular goals. The Board responded, in kind, by pushing schools towards particular structures and goals that might facilitate and sustain these new practices. This is the guided part of guided coaching, asking local actors to fulfill and sustain these commitments with new roles, relationships, structures, and schedules.

Several SATs and SERTs applauded *EFA’s* ability to give teachers a common language, and an overarching moral agenda to drive forward the professional culture of schools. They appreciated the vision of changing professional culture from one where special education students are separated, to a more collaborative culture, characterized by internal accountability and collective responsibility. SATs said that CODE helped to “move these existing priorities along” through support and release time.  

While the collaborative and supportive structures of ESGA that supported these cultural changes might not have been the conceptions of local actors, they defined clear boundaries to the field, within which educators had significant flexibility.

EQAO’s pressure and singular form of measuring progress may ultimately frustrate those engaged in this process of trying to balance external demands with local goals and local notions of progress. In light of these narrow measures and intense pressure, some staff and observers questioned whether ESGA’s focus on other outcomes was sufficiently flexible:

> It’s unfortunate because we’re really trying to validate the work that literacy teachers are doing in schools right now too. That would be critical
information, [but] all we have right now is what’s been impact on EQAO. …We’re trying to build public confidence here and we’re trying to build policy frameworks around something substantive. [We want to say,] “Here is a success. Here is something that we’ve done.” …We’re still struggling with those pieces and again I don’t know when we get to some sort of solution or how we get to that kind of solution.159

The introduction of differentiated instruction has hastened calls for differentiated assessments that might recognize gains or progress in learning. While the Board’s community of practice has begun to develop a common language around instruction, assessment lags behind. The intense pressure of accountability has created an incentive to retain or revert to conservative practices and assessments, even among SERTs. As Maple Lake tries to reshape both its professional culture and its achievement results, teachers face pressure not only from within the board, but also from the Ministry and the public. Results from EQAO are important and unavoidable variables in this process of cultural growth.

Changes in Achievement Gaps on Standards-based Measures during ESGA

During the years Maple Lake participated in the CODE project, teachers continued to feel pressure to increase achievement on annual EQAO assessments. Maple Lake demonstrated the smallest pre-initiative achievement gaps out of the four local authorities included in this study. However, when comparing two cohorts of grade three students from before and after ESGA, students with special needs made only modest progress.

The examination of achievement gaps in Maple Lake is similar to the other three districts in this study: the analysis compared two cohorts of students in grade three, those in third grade in the first year of the project and a second cohort in grade three in the final
years of ESGA. A summary of these changes in achievement gaps is presented in Table 7. Achievement gaps in the table are represented by standardized effect size estimates (SESE) in the manner described in Chapter 3 and in accordance with current arguments for presenting effect size estimates accompanied by confidence intervals (CIs) (Thompson, 2002, 2006). The table also includes means for both students with and without SEN in both the year the project began and at its conclusion. The CIs presented around the SESEs are quite large, especially in math. These large CIs indicate that these results should be interpreted with caution when examining changes in achievement gaps in Maple Lake during ESGA.

Population decreases and participation changes from the 2005-2006 school year (SY06) to the 2009-2010 school year (SY10) help to tell the story of changes in scores in Maple Lake. While overall population figures fell, the participation rates for students with IEPs increased on EQAO. From SY06 to SY10, both the overall population of students in grade three and the segment of grade three students participating in EQAO decreased. The population of students in grade three who participated in the annual administration of EQAO fell from 343 in SY06 to 261 in SY10. A smaller decrease took place in the overall population of grade three students, falling from 380 students in SY06 to 288 students in SY10. These differences reflect a smaller percentage of students with IEPs who were excluded from the mainstream administration of the test, with the exclusion percentage falling from 10% to 5% of students with IEPs from SY06 to SY10. The increase in rates of participation among previously excluded students should be
considered when examining these achievement results, which show that means for all students improved, but that achievement gaps did not close substantially.

The mean score in math for students with IEPs was higher in SY10 than in SY06. The project’s primary focus, however, was literacy and writing. The mean scores for both students with SEN and those without, as well as the grand means for the population as a whole decreased from the beginning of the project to the end when comparing the grade three cohorts in SY06 to the grade three cohort in SY10. This shows a lack of progress in the project’s initial area of focus.

### Table 7. Analysis of Achievement Gaps in Maple Lake, ON for Grade 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>SY06</th>
<th>SY10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>N (SEN, Non-SEN)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>3.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SESE</td>
<td>-0.36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.95 CI</td>
<td>-0.93</td>
<td>-0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>N (SEN, Non-SEN)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>3.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SESE</td>
<td>-0.51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.95 CI</td>
<td>-1.12</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Scores represent two different cohorts of students, those in grade three in SY06 and those in grade three during SY10. SESE represents the Standardized Effect Size Estimate (Cohen’s d) for reading and math for both years. Confidence intervals are around SESEs.*

Maple Lake made slight progress in closing the achievement gap in math between students on IEPs and those not on IEPs (an increase of less than one percent) when comparing SY06 to SY10. It appears the board lost ground in reading, seeing a growth in the achievement gap during the years it participated in ESGA and declines in means for
both groups. These statistics should be interpreted, however, in light of the significant increase in the percentage of students with identified special needs who were now participating in the mainstream assessment as part of the board’s growth during ESGA. The fairly wide confidence intervals around each SESE also indicate these should be interpreted with some caution, and in light of changes in exclusion rates.

The Board’s superintendents felt that EQAO was an important indicator of progress in Maple Lake’s ESGA efforts. The results described in Table 7 indicate a mixed record of progress for the Board during the course of the project. Considering the enthusiasm of most participants for the structural and cultural changes the Board pursued, the results are disappointing. An effect size (Cohen’s $d$) of .5 or greater is considered moderately large, and indicates that there is still a pronounced disadvantage for students with IEPs (Konstantopoulos & Hedges, 2008). The table also raises an important caveat to assessing the Board’s progress, however. The large CIs around the SESEs are a reminder to interpret the Board’s progress, as measured by achievement gaps on EQAO, with some caution. The larger point, however, is a reminder of the volatility of standardized assessment results. This should particularly be considered in light of the large numbers of students with special needs who are new participants in this assessment. For many of these students, their primary challenge is not aptitude, but the need to find alternate means of demonstrating that ability. Considering these somewhat cloudy results presented in Table 7, the objectives of ESGA, and the ambiguous and stressful messaging from the Board to its staff presented in this case, it begs the question whether a
standardized assessment like EQAO should be the only (or primary) measure of proficiency in the province.

**Preliminary Conclusions from Maple Lake**

The implementation of ESGA in Maple Lake constitutes a case where the Board exercised tight control over a process that included restructuring and reculturing. Their project under ESGA was one that focused especially on cultural changes, attempting to cultivate a community of practice where teachers became more collaborative and took responsibility for all students. The Board’s theory of action was that these modified school cultures would, in turn, produce better instruction and increased achievement for students. To achieve these goals, the Board’s stance towards schools utilized an innovative blend of pressure and support that I term guided coaching, in which local educators are not only supported in the implementation of externally designed objectives (guidance), but are also helped to pursue local goals and self-sustaining capacities (Hargreaves, 2003; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). Mirroring CODE’s approach to participating boards, this stance pushes boards to comply with some external principles and monitors their progress, while also supporting them in the pursuit of both externally-designated objectives and their own goals. For example, The Board mandated PLCs and the use of data for reflection, but also allowed time for key participants to experience an “evolutionary process” or “journey” of changes in beliefs and practices, so that professional relationships could develop. Hargreaves (1994 #156) has called this an allowance for “structured opportunities to make improvements of their own” (p.51), representing a balance between change as bureaucratic control and as a form of
professional empowerment. Strictly speaking, this was not an emergent process, but a
case of administrators working diligently and deliberately to create a new professional
culture and to align that culture with the technical, structural, and pedagogical initiatives
of the project. Unique in this case was the voice afforded teachers in the planning process
and the ample freedoms that teachers were granted in the ongoing maintenance and
sustaining of PLCs. Leaders hoped to guide this slow, “messy” cultural process of
mutually adaptive change in the hopes that school-level communities of practice might
carry it forward.

As part of this cultural management, inclusion in Maple Lake was itself a form of
accountability. Teachers were expected to come to their own understandings of how to
follow a mandate: to incorporate students with SEN more effectively into mainstream
classrooms. Maple Lake’s project was meant to make each school a collaborative
community of practice where staff felt mutually accountable to one another for students’
learning. Staff were generally enthusiastic about the project and optimistic about its
prospects for the future. ESGA, particularly in Maple Lake, was an innovative approach
to implementing change, and adhered to many of the principles for effective results
championed by authors in the field (Fullan, 2003, 2007; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009;
Louis & Miles, 1990). While being an effective example of how to implement important
principles outlined in policy, two confounding facts about the relationship of ESGA to
the existing structure of EQAO remain. First, the Board did not make substantial progress
on closing achievement gaps. Further, significant tensions remain between the rigid
structure and pressure of accountability on one hand and the flexible and diverse modes of instruction and assessment promoted by inclusive practices and ESGA.

Maple Lake’s experience with ESGA is summarized in Table 8. The table is organized by the study’s four research questions. Each row represents a question, and includes two columns, one describing participants’ recollections of the project and the other including interpretations of those responses. As noted in the Table, the Board pursued PLCs, in-class coaching (or “at the elbow” support), and increased data use as strategies to enhance inclusion and help it coexist with accountability. Staff lauded EFA and its aspirational language for being strong guiding factors in the success of the project. A special education coordinator cited the document’s seven foundational beliefs (summarized in Table 6) as a starting point for policy proposals and interpersonal conversations at the local level, especially in providing language and strategies for inclusion and collaboration.

Rather than a particular project or change event, the special education superintendent saw CODE “more as a prolonged series of smaller events” to alter fundamental assumptions and practices in the Board. The proposed changes of Maple Lake’s ESGA project were not just changes in meeting agendas or in the physical placement of certain students. They were changes in professional interactions, professional culture, and the most private aspects of teachers’ practice. Artifacts like data walls and anchor charts are the project’s more visible signs of progress on professional culture. They are proxies for more frequent discussion and more meaningful collaboration among teachers. Lesson planning, discussions of data, and curricular
alignment are all deeper signs of shifts in the community of practice. The project’s objectives are partly about the more visible symbols, but largely about using data and other tools to “convince teachers that every kid can learn.” Teachers described how there was a new sense of distributed, collective responsibility for all children. One said “they’re our children now” and cited examples of ways she had diversified her instruction to support more students in her classroom. More classroom teachers are more familiar with IEPs than they were before the project, and those plans are more frequently connected to provincial standards. Another teacher described how she had created various “entrance levels” to her assignments, permitting many ways for all of her students to engage with the provincial material, rather than substituting watered-down alternatives for students with IEPs.
Table 8. Summary of ESGA in Maple Lake

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case summary:</th>
<th>Maple Lake is a case of inclusion as a form of accountability.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guiding Question</td>
<td>Participant Recollections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory of Change:</td>
<td>• Create PLCs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Re-allocate resources and staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sponsor PD in DI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Promote assistive technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconciliation Strategy for Inclusion and Accountability</td>
<td>• Add additional data to discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Use flexibility to create coherence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Raise performance expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on Community of Practice</td>
<td>• Structured PLCs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Push SERTs and SATs in for coaching “at the elbow”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Manage culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement Gap Impact, as Effect Size Analysis</td>
<td>• Decreased gap in math, increased in reading.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The project’s core effort -, PLCs - is more than a forum for conveying technical points about instruction. They are a cultural space for cultivating common language, tenets of pedagogy, and ground rules for addressing professional conflict. Technically, PLCs represent and require an important allocation of time, space, and other resources (i.e., substitute teachers, which allow staff to attend meetings when no common free time is available). Culturally, they are an opportunity for teachers to shape how they will
demonstrate collaboration and mutual accountability. The Board discovered throughout ESGA that effective implantation of PLCs requires skillful facilitation, targeted and meaningful data, and more frequent meetings so discussions can continue and relationships can grow. One teacher argued that she and her peers were able to challenge one another, offer suggestions, and ask colleagues for help on instructional matters. Years ago at her school, “doors used to be closed. You did not feel comfortable teaching in front of colleagues. Colleagues were not invited to come in for the most part.”

Similarly, one coordinator said that Board-wide meetings were now places where people were more willing to support each other and ask for help, especially in their work with students with special needs. A SERT felt that part of the PLC growth process was relieving teachers of the feeling they had to “save face.” CODE offered an opportunity for teachers to have “that experience of falling down and learning from our mistakes,” prompting teachers to take a “quantum leap forward.” Research in collaborative cultures argues that this professional trust is a fundamental shift towards cultivating more effective PLCs, when the once private work of teaching is now up for public discussion (Little, 1990; 2002). To create this growth in professional culture, Maple Lake’s leaders had to create structures to support difficult conversations, the breaking of professional silos, and the allocation of staff to support this process in schools.

In considering these components and consequences of reculturing, this case study highlights several important facets of ESGA. These include:

- The importance of deliberate attention to cultural factors, including collaboration, and the idea that technical solutions like allocating
resources cannot produce change by themselves. Professional culture matters and it can be managed; it does not need to be left as a strictly emergent entity.

- The value of pooling data, but also the danger in flooding teachers with too much. Too much data and assessments that are too rigid were less helpful for teachers in Maple Lake.

- While teachers reported plenty of differentiated instruction, they described little differentiation of assessment. Highly standardized measures frustrated teachers by not measuring enough kinds of progress and by offering too few opportunities for success.

- The use of flexibility in policy to create coherence among concurrent efforts. The mutually adaptive nature of ESGA allowed the Board to address the needs of more at-risk students, whose needs often—but not always—overlap with students identified with SEN. Maple Lake’s school were able to adapt their practices and their project to suit all students who were at risk by raising expectations and offering latitude in meeting those goals.

- The appropriate role that pressure can play in promoting growth, provided it is accompanied by supports to meet these new demands and space for local priorities in the form of guided coaching. In Maple Lake, this most manifested itself in pressure in the form of monitoring and reporting to
create transparency and support in the form of school-based coaching and facilitation to bring about cultural and instructional change.

The attempt to reconcile inclusion and accountability in Maple Lake is still ongoing. By explicitly managing the local professional culture, the Board’s leaders have raised expectations for all teachers to assume responsibility for all students while working to meet provincial accountability targets. Maple Lake is therefore a case of inclusion as a form of accountability. Inclusion, collective responsibility, and mutual accountability became outcomes valued just as much as EQAO. The capacity-building support and flexibility offered to boards like Maple Lake through ESGA the opportunity to pursue inclusion, taking the technical and cultural journey toward progress, and over time come closer to meeting goals of accountability.

Collective responsibility and universal access were at the heart of EFA. Both of these traits are showing signs of life in Maple Lake, but work remains to include more students and enhance their achievement. One SERT’s comments about the composition of withdrawal groups encapsulates both the Board’s recent progress and the changes in structures and roles. On the one hand, she noted that there were more students identified with special needs in full-time, in-class groups and fewer students being referred for evaluation. At the same time, she conceded that withdrawal groups still existed, but argued that they contained more non-identified students and were more explicitly tied to remediation for key EQAO concepts. While there is still work to do to create true shared responsibility, the Board has taken an important and difficult leap towards these goals of having a mutually accountable culture, both structurally and culturally. As one
primary teacher said, the schools have moved beyond assumptions of separate placement and responsibility, “They’re our children now.”

Change in education often consists of additional resources that are requested by or foisted upon recipients, occasionally making structural changes, and then fading into obscurity when funding dries up. Past research has argued that more sustainable efforts push local authorities to reallocate local resources and priorities to maintain the momentum over time (Louis & Miles, 1990). Maple Lake attempted to make these local changes by altering internal uses of funding and staff and by managing the growth of a new professional culture to develop and sustain new practices and relationships. This effort was not equally shared by all staff, since a disproportionate share of the burden for initiating cultural change lay with SERTs. Nonetheless, cultural progress is evident in the presence of additional cultural collaboration. EQAO’s rigid structure remains in tension with the goals of inclusion, however, despite efforts to raise expectations and enhance practices. Achievement gaps analysis indicates there is still significant work to be done in the pursuit of equal outcomes. In an environment that is slowly coming to accept a diverse array of instructional approaches, some teachers hope that more diverse assessments will similarly become more acceptable to leaders at the Ministry.

**ESGA in Harwich: Pressure and Support Tools for Changing Schools**

Harwich is the second district whose work during ESGA is presented in this chapter. Harwich represents a case of implementation where the Board’s local leaders exercised relatively loose control over how participating schools implemented the facets of their local project. The Board’s experience with the initiative was also characterized by
tensions between the technical and cultural elements of their work under ESGA. The cultural-technical conflict in Harwich resulted primarily from the lack of a singular, centralized concept to drive the Board’s participation in ESGA. An unwillingness to challenge peers, rooted in a desire to maintain collegial relations and professional autonomy, also contributed to this tension. Finally, uncertainty around the annual renewal of the project’s funding, combined with the Board’s desire to permit wide latitude at the school level, fostered a sense of ambiguity around the central purpose of the effort. The lack of a unifying vision exacerbated the friction between the technical and cultural changes that took place in Harwich during ESGA. The project’s leaders knew they wanted to improve instruction in order to increase achievement on EQAO, but were uncertain about how to create a singular project focused on this goal. It took much of the initiative’s three-year lifespan for Harwich’s efforts at implementing the principles of EFA to coalesce around three broad elements: differentiated instruction in collaborative classrooms, increased use of data, and sustained professional development conducted in schools.

During ESGA, leaders in Harwich focused their work on teachers in kindergarten and intermediate grades (grades seven and eight). Pressure from high-takes accountability structures helped to fuel the project’s momentum. Improving scores was an explicitly stated goal for some leaders, despite the absence of annually administered high-stakes tests in kindergarten or the two targeted intermediate grades. Commitment to adopting differentiated instruction was uneven among those interviewed, and some teachers expressed reluctance towards devoting significant energy to a project aimed at improving
performance on a standardized measure like EQAO. Ultimately, progress was mixed in closing achievement gaps on the annual high-stakes assessment. In reading, mean scores for students with and without SEN were higher and the achievement gap smaller at the end of the project. Progress in math, however, was more mixed. The achievement gap in mathematics was larger at the end of the project and there was no increase in the mean math score for students with SEN.

Despite these mixed results with regard to students’ achievement, a portion of the participants from both the central office and the schools expressed a sense of satisfaction with the cultural progress of ESGA. Some participants’ responses indicated pockets of reculturing in Harwich, including increased alignment between the cultural and technical efforts to improve teachers’ practice and students’ achievement. These points of impact included relationships between some special and general educators, the opening of a few once-private classrooms through the increased use of walkthroughs, and the reconstitution of important committees and meetings to codify language and practice across schools and specialties. Two newly created structures show promise for promoting and sustaining cultural change—and perhaps improvement in achievement—going forward. The practice of school-based professional development and the creation of positions for experienced staff to provide long-term support in classrooms are potential tools for solidifying the more recent progress made in Harwich and continuing it into the future.
Harwich: Local Factors Impacting Implementation

Harwich is a moderately sized town of 60,000 residents. It sits on a river in Southern Ontario, surrounded by a combination of farmland and automotive industries. The town serves as the center of the larger, regional school board, which contains more than 60 elementary and secondary schools. With approximately 25,000 students, Harwich is one of average enrollment compared to others in the province. It is the most populous of the four cases in this study. After the 1990s amalgamation of school boards throughout Ontario, Harwich came to encompass a significant geographic area. One administrator said this increase in size presents a significant obstacle in terms of meetings, travel for supervisory officers (SOs), and supervision.  

In recent years, the town of Harwich has seen social and economic changes that have impacted the school system. Harwich’s Director described several factors that have influenced these changes, including the “fall of rural Ontario” and economic downturns in the industries that have primarily supported the cities and towns of the region: the closing of mills and of manufacturers of automotive parts. The Board’s Director said there were several educational consequences of these economic changes and the subsequent population shifts. “The majority” of her Board’s schools were now “needy schools,” she said, filled with “those needy kids, needy families, [from both] rural and town.” The demands of this new population include additional family crisis support, transience and instability at home, lower attendance at parent conferences, and often the need for additional meals (provided by local community groups). Within Harwich itself, some schools are identified as “core” schools that experience problems similar to those in
other Canadian inner cities. One senior administrator called these core parts of town “tough,” exhibiting “low socioeconomic [status], high divorce, high teen pregnancy.” School populations were also impacted by decreasing populations in the community. Of the Board’s 68 schools, the director said most were relatively small and getting smaller. One school participating in this study was operating at approximately two-thirds of its capacity.

One reason for the Harwich Board’s initial interest in ESGA was leaders’ dissatisfaction with recent results from EQAO, especially for students identified with SEN. The Director cited her “disappointment” from the year before the project began (she did not agree with a colleague who called that experience “hitting rock bottom”), noting that she and her colleagues had been “working really hard” and were determined to show improvement on this measure they valued. In addition, compared to other boards of similar size, Harwich has a relatively high level of special needs identification. With 14% of their 26,000 students on IEPs (and other 3% currently being assessed), the Board was well above the provincial average of 9%. The administrator reporting these figures noted this high rate had drawn scrutiny from the Ministry. When this desire to improve students’ scores, high rate of placement of students on IEPs, and the impacts of increasing poverty were combined, the Board felt compelled to act as well as to communicate important messages of hope to its students and staff.

One administrator said that it was unacceptable for “people [to] hide behind the demographic” factors in their Board. “Poverty is not destiny,” he argued. “[Students] can
still learn.\textsuperscript{182} Similarly, in line with \textit{EFA}, several staff described a “real push” for increased inclusion and better instruction.\textsuperscript{183} To one intermediate teacher: “the whole idea is inclusion and success for every student.”\textsuperscript{184}

The climate in Harwich appeared receptive to such a project such as ESGA, being described as “progressive” and “fairly leading edge” by one superintendent.\textsuperscript{185} The Board’s ESGA leadership team would play an important role in the Board’s effort to help more students succeed through improving instruction and shifting notions of responsibility. One district-wide mentor, whose position was created for the project, recalled that “one of the beliefs [driving ESGA] is the classroom teacher is key instructor, but [also that] the classroom teacher needs a community to support them.”\textsuperscript{186} As Harwich worked to build teachers’ capacity to employ the principles of DI and UDL in its classrooms, it offered teachers various kinds of support for growth.

\textbf{Harwich’s Theories of Change}

Unlike Maple Lake and some of the other boards implementing of ESGA, Harwich did not undertake a single, targeted intervention. Over a three-year period, leaders in Harwich pursued several related efforts that were all funded by CODE and that were intended to improve students’ achievement, especially on the EQAO test. These efforts were generally connected to three principles: differentiating instruction in increasingly diverse and professionally collaborative classrooms, making increased use of data to influence instructional decisions, and engaging in ongoing professional development within school sites.
One of the Board’s key project leaders described the Board’s efforts during ESGA in broad terms: “We’re trying to develop our human capital… and working to improve teacher practice.” This noble, but undefined, objective encapsulates both the widespread desire within the Board to improve learning and achievement as well as the lack of a clear theoretical model for doing so. Harwich’s leaders used ESGA as an opportunity to promote several strategies that were intended to bring about this instructional development:

- The project’s leaders in Harwich made changes in the key curricular and instructional elements of kindergarten classes, including infusing more academic content and raising expectations for measured achievement.

- The Board tried to foster more collaborative interaction between program and special educators using strategies like altering the composition of certain key committees.

- Consultants engaged in school-based professional development, also known in the Board as Job-Embedded Professional Learning (JEPL), promoting DI and UDL. Much of this training focused on teachers in grades seven and eight. These sessions were partly technical efforts to improve instruction, but also had cultural goals like enhancing expectations for students and collaboration among staff.

- Finally, to sustain this professional development, several special education teachers were moved into new, board-wide positions called Area Resource Mentors (ARMs). These staff offered coaching and support to teachers and
monitored compliance with the project’s objectives in order to report back to the project’s leadership.

Two senior staff members from the central office wrote the initial ESGA proposal, designing a project they described as “very open-ended and vague.” These designers hoped to use the project’s “dollars to educate as many people as we could” in what they called “a broad stroke” in an attempt to “touch everybody.” The project sought to communicate a new vision for instruction of all grades, but focused initially only on groups of teachers perceived as being most receptive, including kindergarten and middle grades instructors. These two grade levels do not participate in annual EQAO testing, and therefore had experienced little professional development in recent years. The ESGA project’s leadership also selected schools they felt would be receptive, targeting 12 “needy” or “rough” schools in the core of the city, hoping to capitalize on a desire for resources and improvement.

Leaders from the Board’s central office employed an approach to implementing ESGA that incorporated a blend of pressure and support, mirroring the stance CODE took with participating boards. Just as CODE offered boards flexibility in implementing the principles of EFA, Harwich wanted to offer individual schools liberty in adopting practices and values consistent with those promoted by the project. Schools were offered support, but “really owned the content and the outcomes” of their work. Such autonomy was a longstanding tradition in Harwich since its creation from two independent boards and because of its diffuse geography. The superintendent of special education reflected that it was only over the life of the project that Harwich’s
central office and individual schools made “an effort to align practices” and make both instruction and expectations more consistent throughout the Board, so that efforts in schools were “centrally driven, centrally supported but with strong buy in from the schools.” As a result, he said, the efforts of individual schools have coalesced to a greater degree around common practices, expectations, and uses of EQAO data:

What we’ve come to realize is that we can expect more of the kids than maybe what we used to. There are a greater number of ways for us to meet their needs. There are a greater number of ways for us to determine more specifically what those needs are, and it’s only really by talking and sharing practices and the results of trying different strategies that we arrive at better answers and better approaches for the kids. So the expectations have been greatly increased. We not only want to look after the kids and make sure they’re happy. We want to make sure that they’re learning…. In the early years of EQAO I think we were more standoffish about it than we were embracing it as a tool to inform our instructional practices. So really we know so much more now about how kids learn and how to help them learn than we did then that the natural outcome of that is that there are higher expectations for all of the kids.193

Over the three-year life of ESGA, a Board focused on local autonomy came to discover a more nuanced relationship that permitted local authority on some matters, but within a promoted framework of common values and pedagogical philosophies. It was only through a gradual process of focusing their efforts and defining their project that the Board could alleviate tensions between a culture that valued autonomy and a new project that promoted differentiated instruction and related practices.

Changing Practice and Expectations

Several projects under ESGA attempted to raise teachers’ expectations for all their students and to enhance teachers’ practice. In Harwich, a “more academic focus in
kindergarten” became a key place where the Board sought to achieve these goals. Its project helped to introduce new screening tools, provide teachers with additional data and training in their use, offer training to improve instruction, and add assistants to some classes.

The focus of previous policies like EQAO and the LNS prompted a desire to introduce additional academic content at this earlier level to ensure students were more prepared by Grade 3. Given the existence of EQAO and province-wide learning standards in higher grades, one Board member felt it was important to give young children a “running start on the curriculum.” This new emphasis for young children was a direct response to provincial pressure to increase performance. According to one senior staff member, kindergarten instruction in the past contained a “focus on the affect … and making kids feel good.” The Board’s ESGA project, he said, hoped to help teachers “get into teaching and learning.”

ESGA would allow Harwich’s leadership team to offer some additional support to accompany this new academic pressure in the early childhood grades. Little professional development had been offered to kindergarten faculty in past years, making them “forgotten sisters.” Potentially, they would be a receptive group for the project’s efforts, thereby offering, “more bang for our buck” in the work of “changing practice” though increased use of data and technology.

The ESGA project pushed early childhood teachers to work harder and differently than ever before. The Board’s HR director recalled a moment in the early portion of the project where a 31-year kindergarten teacher wept in their end-of-year meeting.
Examining her students’ diagnostic data had revealed to her that she had spent her entire career allotting three or more days for a concept that many students grasped almost immediately. This administrator recalled that these reflective sessions and their focus on “diagnostic work” were an important part of the process of pedagogical change. As changes swept through the early grades, an existing program of separate placements for identified students was dismantled and its students were moved into more mainstream classrooms. A holdover from a merger with a neighboring board that had employed much more exclusion and withdrawal, this program reinforced older notions of exclusion and “a mantra that you could best serve kids in these special classrooms.”

The dismantling of this withdrawal program intimidated some teachers, not just because of the change in students’ physical location, but also because of their own expected level of increased participation. This meant a change to teachers’ classroom practice and to their relationships with colleagues who collaborated with them. The ESGA project changed the role that many educational assistants (EAs) played in the early grades, placing them in more prominent classroom roles. This challenged teachers’ autonomy and traditions of privacy. The project pushed instructional changes as well. Teachers said the project made instruction for experienced colleagues more of a “gradual release” model of teaching that included a larger role for EAs and more “modeled, shared, guided, and independent practice.” Altering roles and role relationships is common when implementing new projects (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977). While these things are always difficult to learn, kindergarten teachers who are typically untouched by reforms faced an additional learning curve.
A group of elementary teachers described the students who moved into mainstream classes as “mids,” or students who presented some mild cognitive delay and IQs below average (e.g., those who were in the “middle” of a spectrum of needs). These staff recalled how expectations had often not changed for identified students when they moved into mainstream classrooms, in part because their IEPs reinforced academic goals that were often below grade level standards. A SERT described this challenge as being especially pronounced in the intermediate grades (e.g., seventh and eighth), where students are about to enter distinct high school pathways and have highly divergent ability-levels, according to diagnostic data. Participants used words like “scary” and “challenging” to describe this process of learning to accept new students, arguing that it required professional development and other kinds of support for teachers.

The changing of practices and expectations in Harwich was slated to begin with kindergarten and the middle grades (seventh and eighth). The Board saw kindergarten as an opportunity for early screening and support for students. The middle grades were a chance to offer individualized support for students before they left for high school and its tracks. One principal felt these two grade levels were important targets for improving teachers’ expectations, in part because they had been neglected areas of change in the past:

I think we used to just view Grades 7 and 8 instruction as getting them ready for high school as opposed to working with them as individuals….The CODE money gave early years’ teachers a common understanding about what assessment at that age can look like and then how to apply that assessment to instruction. It also helped the early identification [of needs] …We’ve learned that the information we get from
those early screens— if we pay attention to it— can totally be connected with Grade 3 reading and writing success.

Making changes in curricular expectations and data use is more than just a matter of meetings, spreadsheets, or of integrating new students into teachers’ classes. It is a personal and cultural adjustment for teachers. It requires professionals to reconsider their practice and their relationships to students and colleagues. Combined with the increase in the inclusion of students with IEPs and identified special needs, the CODE project in Harwich represented a raising and shifting of these expectations and understandings for participating teachers. An ARM cited the creation of an instructional guide for teachers as an example of the Board guiding changes in instruction and culture simultaneously. The central office created instructional strategies for classroom teachers to use that would support academic engagement and reduce behavior issues. Rather than distribute this at a conventional PD session, they presented it as a “framework” to SERTs, and encouraged these special educators to present it to colleagues as “a self-reflective tool … to share at a staff meeting.” This approach cultivates collaborative culture and collective improvement rather than just promoting individual learning.

As part of these changes in expectations, one teacher recalled that students themselves began to push teachers to develop more ambitious plans for student achievement. She noted that, as Harwich’s ESGA project unfolded, identified students began to press for similar assignments as their peers and asked for the same textbook. Another of her students had been able to complete similar assignments with the help of assistive technology, free from the stigma that once surrounded its use. A colleague of this teacher recalled how an identified student whose expectations had changed had said...
her, “I don’t want you to take me in the back of the room and teach me something different. I’m in this class now, so make sure I’m in this class.”

**Fostering Collaboration, Building Connections**

Learning new roles and role relationships is one of the most complex aspects of implementation (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977). Harwich’s leaders sought to facilitate new collaborative connections among staff, especially between special education resource teachers and classroom teachers. The pressures to learn these new roles and role relationships are intensified in environments of strict accountability.

The current superintendent for special education noted how the existence of multiple, simultaneous initiatives, such as EQAO, Student Success, and schools participating in OFIP, along with Harwich’s smaller “lean and mean” central staff, had inspired him to push for more integrated efforts than ESGA elsewhere, rather than to make special separate initiatives. Having a smaller staff, he argued, meant that SOs held several responsibilities. This fostered an unintentional collaboration, helping him to realize that integrated efforts, rather than separate initiatives with separate personnel, made broader and more substantive impacts. Drawing on his CODE experience, he argued that the most effective way to create meaningful collaboration across silos was to unite all efforts under the Board’s work in programming, or in the delivery of the standard curriculum and instruction:

The best way to deliver [an] initiative is to embed it in daily practice… You’re talking program… I can’t be doing character development over here and [colleagues are] over here doing program and never the twain shall meet or it’s not going to be successful. And Aboriginal education is all about program (or mainstream curriculum and instruction). … There’s some differentiation in terms of “the what” …and “the how” … but at the
end of the day it’s about programming appropriately for kids…. And spec ed to me is program. It’s all program.  

In addition, this SO noted that committees and other teams had been integrated to help foster cultural change through increased collaboration:

We’ve just started to cross pollinate so there are spec ed staff sitting on program committees and there are program staff sitting on spec ed committees so that the different perspectives are shared in the discussions…. I think we’re making better decisions because there’s the broader based representation that ought to be there.

The unification of the professional culture took several forms in Harwich. Professional development became an opportunity for collective learning as well as individual enrichment. Examples of this include the Board sending groups of SERTs, rather than solely individual teachers, to professional development efforts and meetings and program consultants conducting coaching sessions with teachers both individually and in co-teaching pairs. The project began collaboratively when, after encouragement by leadership, staff “came up with (their) own model” for implementing the principles in EFA. School Improvement Teams (SITs) that had been created to formulate plans to address general underperformance, were afforded the opportunity to collaborate on school-level implementation of the Board’s CODE effort. The Board employed professional learning communities (PLCs) and moderated marking sessions, along with DI coaches, to continue to help teachers coalesce expectations and practices. These learning communities were carefully constructed to promote collaboration between special education and curriculum staff.
Harwich’s theory of action to overcome teachers’ resistance to imposed changes to instruction was that peers could teach, learn from each other, and sustain new practices. Coburn’s (2006) research has found that the process of implementation can counteract resistance to change through the “joint negotiation of meaning and coordination of perspectives across communities, leading to greater alignment between policy and practice” (p.31). A senior SO argued that this participatory strategy was a key part of the Board’s work during ESGA: “some of our best, sustainable outcomes for PD have come when it’s been peer to peer…It’s not top-down…. There’s more buy in and it’s more sustainable.”\textsuperscript{210}

A key element of the Board leadership’s effort to foster greater collaboration was the program for dismantling separate placements for students with IEPs and SERTs. The larger goal, a special education coordinator said, was to help SERTs “push in to these new environments” to “develop those skills…[for] a coaching [or] team-teaching model.”\textsuperscript{211} As the separate placements were dismantled, staff were required to meet in grade-level and school-level teams to plan for new modes of instruction. One elementary teacher recalled how, “We collaborated as a team on how to approach our level and how to teach these children in a regular classroom… And now we do it all the time.”\textsuperscript{212} From the Board’s perspective, leaders held joint professional development and lesson planning sessions in an effort to cultivate a sense of collective professional responsibility and help SERTs and the special education department who hadn’t always been included in program initiatives” stop seeing themselves as a “separate entity.”\textsuperscript{213} For the superintendent in charge of student programming, fostering this collaboration was vital
for building the collective capacity to conduct diagnostic assessments of all students in ways that would inform instruction.

Committees, leadership teams, joint professional development, as well as consultants and ARMs all played a role in changing not only the structure of Harwich’s leadership, but also the relationships among staff and programs. Board leaders sought to promote collaboration and unite disparate efforts by assigning and utilizing people and resources in ways that fostered integration and united efforts to improve students’ learning. As well as building capacity for collaboration, they hoped to change the way staff worked and also worked together.

**Building Capacity in Schools: JEPL and ARMs**

While there was no single, overarching strategy for change in Harwich, an important focus of the ESGA project was making a significant investment in professional development. Professional development was situated, as often as possible, in teachers’ schools and, in some cases, within their classrooms. Building professional capacity and locating PD in schools was tied to leaders’ larger concerns about sustainability—ones they shared with the CODE project’s designers and the Ministry. Sustainability meant forging new collaborative and pedagogical structures to outlast the temporary funding. Harwich’s leadership attempted this in a variety of ways. Collectively, these strategies would likely be lauded by Louis and Miles (1990), who argue for the importance of using new resources in ways that build capacity and not dependence on the (often temporary) resources themselves. Harwich accomplished this adaptation without dependence by
moving existing personnel into new, growth-supporting roles and sponsoring training
designed to have effects that would outlast the CODE project’s funds.

The Board’s HR director labeled most Ministry of Education implementation
efforts as “money bombs” whose impact quickly dissipated.\textsuperscript{214} He worried this would be
especially true for the annually funded CODE project, since \textit{EFA} did not “have teeth or
can’t force teachers to do anything.” Yet he appreciated CODE’s unique strategy in
preventing the money bomb effect:

\begin{quote}
You were to use the money to build capacity within your staff so that you
don’t need the money any more… So if we give you dollars you go out and
teach people how to become better teachers or how to implement strategies.\textsuperscript{215}
\end{quote}

To that end, job-embedded professional learning (JEPL) was meant to build
capacity in an effective and sustainable way. In other initiatives, teachers frequently
experienced reform fatigue when they had repeatedly returned from external workshops
with too little “time to practice and reflect” as they rushed back to their teaching.\textsuperscript{216} By
contrast, CODE held much of the professional development in DI at schools and even in
teachers’ classrooms, connecting their work more directly to their practice and,
subsequently, their students. Literacy coaches offered in-class instructional support to
help teachers develop their practice in the context of their classrooms, and program
consultants pointed to the importance of collaborating with, rather than explicitly
instructing, teachers and principals on issues of implementation. Harwich’s special
education superintendent noted that many of these support roles were created to mentor
principals and teachers alike through this change process. The role of coaches and other
support staff was to be “embedded… in the classroom” to help teachers move forward
instructionally by trying new practices with their newly included SERT colleagues and identified students. Teachers responded well. One remarked that the JEPL experience was “the first time ever that instead of people telling [him] what to do someone came in and showed [him] what to do.”

As separate placements were being dissolved, the teachers who led these special education classes were moved into new positions. These new, board-wide roles supported the project’s objectives of improving instruction and enhancing collaboration, as well as conducting much of the JEPL that teachers needed. These new positions, termed area resource mentors (ARMs), were important for monitoring fidelity to the goals of the project and for supporting teachers in learning to improve their instruction and to collaborate with one another:

We recognized (that) job-embedded support to teachers …was probably our best bang for our buck. With dissolving our [separate] classes, …that sort of rolled into four ARM positions. [Their first job job was] to build the capacity… of resource teachers. We wanted to see effective use of resource teacher time in the classroom and we wanted to see effective development and implementation of modified programs with clear IEP and report card connections.

These new staff members helped to coach school leaders and teachers in differentiating instruction and implementing the CODE Project’s objectives. They also networked and connected various efforts within schools among teachers. Together with other professionals who were moved into consultant roles, Harwich’s leadership team comprised a capacity-building layer between the school and central office leaders. These capacity-builders were instrumental in helping teachers to incorporate the demands and new policies into their practice by, for example, making “sure that they …were
comfortable with” [DI and using data]; and making “sure they have a global image of the whole” [CODE project]. They also offered support to principals--helping them re-think their role as instructional leaders.

At the classroom level, the project’s consultants provided important, ongoing, classroom-level support for teachers as part of a larger JEPL strategy. School-level staff referred to this work as “at the elbow” support. One special education superintendent felt that an important facet of the consultants’ success was establishing credibility as “someone who’s going to collaborate and work with you” rather than someone establishing a relationship based on pressure or hierarchy. A school-level administrator remarked that consultants played similar roles for principals, “showing them all the skills that they needed to have to help their teachers.” Harwich’s ESGA effort was welcomed by teachers as an approach to professional development that was ongoing and connected directly to their contexts of practice. Teachers’ response to this form of support was “very positive because it… embedded somebody in the classroom, helped them moved one step forward, [and] try a couple of new things through that process.” Teachers “really felt it took them into account and took them where they were with their practice.”

Just as more individualized, differentiated instruction was a significant part of Harwich’s pedagogical goals; it also was an important component of the Board’s approach to faculty.

As Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) have noted, many school systems seeking increased performance blend pressure and support in an approach they call the Third Way. Programs like OFIP for schools whose students perform poorly on EQAO are an
example of this combination. Harwich mirrored this strategy in the creation of ARMs, who can monitor commitment to with the project’s goals, but also support teachers in working more effectively with students as well as with each other.

Harwich now has several structures in place to push teachers to improve while also providing them with the support they need to do so. Many of these are changes to people’s roles at the central office. The positions created for ARMs help to monitor schools on behalf of the Board and also help to coach and to build capacity. The SOs, each of whom have a portfolio of schools to monitor, also serve a capacity-building role, especially for principals. They also offer networking opportunities, facilitating connections between schools. Like ARMs, they can help connect school leaders to new resources and ideas in other schools. Other staff, like literacy coaches, help teachers formulate and pursue SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely goals) as well as enabling principals to monitor teachers’ progress by working with teachers the principal had volunteered. These positions enable the Board to publicize positive practices and offer support to those requesting help by utilizing existing positions and resources.

ESGA was not a project that built capacity by pouring resources into schools. CODE offered support for meeting broad goals, largely in the form of human capital development. The project’s leadership in Harwich accompanied this support with pressure, using board-wide support staff to both monitor progress and also build school-level capacity. Monitoring can cause some uneasiness at first, as several elementary school staff noted, but school-level practitioners acknowledged that it was helpful and,
perhaps, necessary. This dual role of offering support and accompanying it with pressure is an outgrowth of The Ministry’s recent approach to change in general. Programs like OFIP offer support to buttress districts against the pressure of EQAO. Harwich’s guided coaching model, epitomized by ARMs, innovated upon this foundation by engaging in ongoing, school-level capacity building while incorporating local goals. In Harwich—as in the project as a whole—the dual role played by ARMs in the context of teachers’ schools strengthened and widened the impact of ESGA.

**Conclusions on Harwich’s Theories of Action**

Scholars who favor a mutual adaptation perspective towards implementation (e.g., Coburn, 2001; Datnow, 2006; M. W. McLaughlin, 1998) suggest that initiatives that allow flexible implementation also benefit from monitoring, support, and clear guiding principles. Harwich’s approach to ESGA permitted significant flexibility on the part of school leaders in creating inclusive environments in their buildings. The Board’s superintendent for special education felt that some variety and disagreement around aspects of implementation was appropriate, as long as the philosophical focus initially sought was still present:

> We don’t differ philosophically in terms of the direction we’re going and what our desired outcomes … There are differences of philosophy sometimes in terms of how we ought to get there or how we frame it for consumption by a particular audience.²²⁵

Part of the motivation for this differentiated strategy was to allow for the same variation in learning experiences that the Board was trying to create for students. This level of flexibility inspired the Board to mimic the Ministry’s and CODE’s use of representatives. Harwich used staff who both pressured and supported boards. For
example, the Board included some degree of monitoring to accompany their flexible approach to implementation. Participants spoke of monitoring as a dual effort to build capacity and exert pressure for performance have surfaced in Harwich during the CODE era. For example, SOs conducted regular walkthroughs with principals and the accompanying expectation that principals conduct similar walkthroughs weekly in every classroom. Such monitoring is part of an increasing emphasis on efficacy and outcomes, rather than efficiency and process (Jaafar & Anderson, 2007; Louis & Miles, 1990).

Harwich did not pursue a single, unified strategy during ESGA. The Board preferred, instead, to take the same flexible stance towards change that CODE offered to them. One common thread that united the Board’s efforts was the common investment in human capital development. The project helped Harwich to create new board-wide positions called ARMs, who helped to lead a new model of contextualized support that local leaders called Job-Embedded Professional Learning. Leaders of the project sought to have a particular impact on kindergarten and intermediate grades, offering these teachers professional development and additional technology. Harwich’s efforts under ESGA were therefore not a single project, but they demonstrated several common elements that involved supporting teachers through a process of instructional change and monitoring progress, fidelity, and continued commitment.

**Reconciling Tensions: ESGA and EQAO**

For most of the lifespan of ESGA in Harwich, a tension drove staff back and forth between committing to fully participatory inclusion and pursuing improvement only through high-stakes accountability. Several factors contributed to this tension.
Unsatisfactory performance on the annual measure was an important motivator for change in the early years of the initiative. In ratcheting up pressure to improve, however, the latitude and professional autonomy afforded schools and individual teachers sapped the energy and capacity of staff to achieve this growth. The implementation of ESGA began as a series of smaller, more disparate efforts rather than a single project with a unified focus. Given this lack of a unified vision and leadership for a discrete and systemic ESGA project, EQAO assumed a disproportionate share of authority as a force for influencing change and as a measure of the project’s success. While instruction became more universally accessible in some classrooms, assessment did not follow. Further, demands of the annual exam and uncertainty about the project’s funding and focus left EQAO as one of the few consistent pressures driving improvement.

From year to year, projects shifted focus, from technology, to tiered interventions, and finally to screening tools in year three. Improvement was “random” and difficult to connect to a single effort. EQAO emerged as the strongest unifying thread to measure progress, despite some animosity towards it from teachers and principals. As a result, practices based in inclusion and ESGA were at the mercy of the higher stakes and more intense pressure of external accountability. Inclusion in Harwich existed for accountability. Inclusion was not implemented on its own terms. This tension between accountability and the disparate efforts of the project was intensified by the absence of a single, overarching strategy for implementing ESGA.

The project did support creation of new positions for ARMs and sponsorship of JEPL to support teachers in improving and differentiating their instruction. These efforts
made some progress, but not in a way that was widespread and consistent. As a result, while some of *EFA*’s inclusive principles—like new roles for SERTs in mainstream classrooms—were retained, others—such as more diverse forms of measurement—were lost in favor of discussions about accountability targets. Since leaders are planning to retain these two structures in the future, some potential remains for continuing the growth that the Board started to experience towards the end of the project’s lifespan.

Participants in Harwich never explicitly articulated a theory for balancing inclusion and accountability. They did not generally see these two ideas as being mutually exclusive, but came to see the pedagogical principles associated with the former as a means for meeting the goals of the latter. EQAO played a prominent role in the Board’s work towards measuring students’ progress and creating more fully participatory classrooms. In many cases it served as both the driver of change and the key tool for measuring its success. The pressure of Ontario’s accountability system—and its role as a guiding light for Harwich’s leadership— is clearly prevalent in aspects of Harwich’s implementation of their ESGA project.

Accountability is a lens through which Harwich viewed inclusive practice and its efforts to improve student achievement overall. In that sense, inclusion became one of several tools for meeting proficiency targets. One senior administrator defined Harwich’s ESGA project in terms of Ontario’s “Drive for 75,” or the pressure on districts to have three-quarters of their students demonstrate proficiency. He argued, “If you want to get to 75%— and it’s a provincial target— … pretty quickly you realize that the road for that runs right through special education.”

Students’ learning and improvement were
discussed in terms of provincial proficiency levels. Even in kindergarten, the additional academic standards and software that was used to guide instructional decisions were all founded in improving students’ learning of the standard curriculum and improving their performance on the annual high-stakes measure.

The Board’s director cited several, concurrent reasons for a general shift in expectations that she attributed partly to EQAO and in part to the general participatory inclusion movement associated with EFA. The internal change came, she argued, “because of the [CODE] project and the provincial thrust and our board thrust,” prompting Harwich’s leadership to feel the need “to raise the bar for all kids and not leave them in that class where loving them is enough.” Together, the pressure of provincial testing, the framework of EFA, and the capacity-building support of ESGA brought about a change in Harwich’s expectations for all students, especially those identified with special needs.

The primary theory of interaction between inclusion and accountability in Harwich centered on using EQAO and the provincial accountability system as part of the Board’s impetus for change, rather than as a separate entity from its measures of success. The Board’s disappointing EQAO test results in the years preceding CODE served as both a catalyst for change in ESGA as well as a key tool for measuring professional learning and student growth. In Harwich, reconciling inclusion and accountability meant that leaders had to frame these two goals as being complementary, rather than contradictory. Harwich’s CODE Project is situated firmly within this accountability framework. That is, EQAO and the pressure it is designed to place on teachers and
schools were key pieces in the Board’s theory of action, where test results were seen as the impetus for change, by providing clear evidence that many students were not doing well.

**Impetus for Change: “Rock Bottom”**

Feelings of failure are often the most important drivers of change (Fullan, 2007). Successful organizations can be the most resistant to forced and external change (Elmore, 2004). In Harwich, several board-level staff recalled that “rock bottom” EQAO results (or scores “coming off the rails”) were an important driver in creating the early impetus for reform. The Board’s director described what she saw as “complacency,” evident in what she called “relative satisfaction” among parents and teachers with students’ grades and social events, despite the fact that these students “weren’t scoring at a provincial level or, if they were, they were right at the provincial level.” She referred to past outcomes as clearly “disappointing” because “we worked really hard and we had expectations of doing better.” One of the project’s key leaders argued that this period of poor performance was the catalyst for the “key structural alignments and changes” that took place immediately afterward.

The Ministry program known as OFIP was a chief driver of changes in the pre-CODE years. OFIP is a province-wide intervention that targets resources and assistance to low-performing districts. Like the more punitive provisions in the USA’s No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), OFIP identifies boards that perform poorly and fail to improve on standardized assessments. But unlike NCLB, The Ministry of Education of Ontario provides additional support, monitoring, and capacity building for local actors. Consistent
with recent Third Way efforts in the province, OFIP uses teams of monitors and visitors to assist board staff, teachers, and principals with growth, as measured by EQAO.

However, the presence of OFIP teams was not universally welcomed in Harwich. Seen by many as a sign of failure, one senior staff member gave the program an obscene nickname. A principal described an encounter with a Ministry staffer who told her entire administrative team that “what you’re doing is not good enough and you have to take action.” Although the experience was initially “very devastating”, over time she said that she and her teaching staff came to see this intervention as an opportunity for growth. While the failing designation initially caused a real rift between the administrative team and the teacher team, “…we worked through it.” Ultimately, this school was able to grow by experiencing not just pressure and a failing label but by receiving support as well.

Eventually, the principal said, OFIP left them stronger:

[We said], “Let’s get rid of all our excuses. What can we do to make sure that these kids get what they need?” Because they weren’t getting what they needed from me as an administrator because I was not being the curriculum leader that I should have been. When I got into administration it was not curriculum leader, I was manager. [Over time], we became more of a learning group together.

The presence of Ontario’s accountability mechanisms was a powerful catalyst for change in Harwich. The director noted that, prior to the OFIP designation, the Board “did not have high enough expectations for our special ed kids… [The] goal was much more life skills, social skills, and not high expectations.” Seen this way, the relationship between inclusion and accountability became natural for Harwich. Accountability became a means to measure the expectations teachers held for all students, but especially
those students with special needs. ESGA and its form of participatory inclusion became an avenue to pursue these new expectations, and enforce them culturally. EQAO would be the tool to measure any changes. The Harwich Board director argued, “we see now with the CODE project being a piece of [overall improvement], EQAO being a piece of it, we’re seeing that students with learning needs can be very successful- so the bar has been raised.”

Another board-level leader called the initial fears about using EQAO as a learning tool unfounded. He described the improvement it has inspired as “unquestionable” and argued that the pressure from the test “has focused attention on teaching… We’re now having a conversation around teaching.”

Another administrator saw “a commonality that wasn’t there before” among staff that helped inclusion efforts and accountability work together. Thus, in Harwich, the change promoted by ESGA became a cultural phenomenon. Disappointment with results on EQAO was both an impetus to initiate that change in expectations as well as a measure of teachers’ progress in creating more ambitious academic targets for students.

**Measuring Progress**

Student achievement data from EQAO continues to be a key source of data for reflection during the change process, and the main measuring stick of the project’s success or failure. Although improving test scores was not the sole purpose of Harwich’s ESGA project, this annual accountability measure promoted greater use of data as a tool for reflection and measuring progress, and as part of a larger tapestry of gauging learning. For example, data collected from internal standardized assessments like the DRA reading assessment and interim benchmark evaluation became important tools for bringing
teachers together and helping them to classify, instruct, and assess students. This represented a kind of growth for leaders in Harwich. EQAO had been a dominating, singular force in the Board. It was now an important motivator as part of an array of tools to measure growth.

This changing relationship with EQAO was a complex one. Participants made statements that represented both the old mindset, where the assessment was a looming priority, and the newer stance of assessments being part of an array of tools for growth. When asked about the overall progress of the ESGA project in Harwich, one superintendent cited “evidence in our EQAO results of our special ed kids doing better and better over time,” indicating the annual assessment as the project’s main goal. Concurrently, he noted that the Board was attempting to send fewer students for formal identification, partly to comply with a Ministry limit on screenings and partly to push teachers to address students’ needs through improved pedagogical practices, increased collaboration, and reflection on several data points:

In the early years of EQAO I think we were more standoffish about it than we were embracing it as a tool to inform our instructional practices. So really we know so much more now about how kids learn and how to help them learn than we did then. The natural outcome of that is that there are higher expectations for all of the kids and for all of us in our work with them… [Before ESGA] there was good teaching going on by skilled educators and the kids were making progress but I’m not sure there was an alignment [of expectations and practices]… [Working with at-risk or underperforming students] was kind of a self-contained practice. Now it’s anything but self-contained…. I think most specifically when the differentiated instruction project came forward and that we really identified… students who were not strong enough academically to meet the expectations of a regular program. [In addition to students who would
have been placed in a segregated program, DI] was for a broader range of kids at that level who weren’t engaging with the curriculum.\textsuperscript{240}

By using data as a reflection and measurement tool and eschewing special needs assessment as the path of last resort, the Harwich Board is working to raise expectations for all students, arguing effectively that all students can succeed on the conventional curriculum and its assessments and that the teachers’ role is to help students achieve rather than to exclude them.

Getting teachers to collect and use data was an important early step, and the Board applied pressure to promote this practice. At the classroom level, teachers were pressured and incentivized to monitor students in new ways, collecting data like never before. One member of the Board’s CODE leadership team, the data administrator, recalled how this was a lynchpin to get teachers involved initially. He said that there were “strings attached” to money, and that teachers had to learn a great deal about students to receive the funds:

To get the resources you had to first complete an interest survey of students and start building other types of profiles—not just [students’] DRA profiles, [but also] an interest profile so we can start matching interest with need. So if we know that they are reading at a lower level and we have these types of books that would … potentially be interesting to those students. We started to talk about things like class profiles based on interest as well.\textsuperscript{241}

Firestone (1989) has argued that mandates or inducements alone fail to promote substantive change. Harwich attempted to blend these strategies, offering some resources, but also conditions for their release. In the Harwich case, the inducement of funds was helpful in pressing schools to begin collecting more types of data about students.
Raising expectations for students and faculty, changing teachers’ relationships with data and measurement, and altering the process of referring underachieving students are all cultural changes that require slow, localized efforts. They entail shifts in assumptions about students, practice, and professional identity. Reconciling inclusion and accountability is a time-consuming process that needs to allow significant opportunity for localized, mutual adaptation. In Harwich, there was a disconnect between the holistic strategy promoted by the central office and the pressure, hastiness, and instability felt by school-level educators. Board-level leaders found it easy to articulate the new strategy, but SERTs responsible for implementation lamented the occurrence of more “paperwork” and “accountability” than in previous years. A classroom teacher noted that, while she did not object to the practices of differentiated instruction and more holistic reflection with data, she hoped for more “time to try them out.” A third colleague thought time for adaptation and experimentation might allow teachers to “to get them embedded in our practice.” Another worried that leadership might not be willing to “let us go,” and would instead pile on new initiatives in the coming years. The leadership from CODE intended ESGA to be a form of whole-school change that connected to and enhanced performance on EQAO, but was not driven by the test. It was also not supposed to feel like another transient initiative, but a substantive process of change. For some staff in Harwich, however, this felt like another effort that would be soon forgotten, especially in the face of pressures like EQAO.

**Promoting Collaboration and Higher Expectations**
EQAO remained a significant presence in Harwich. In addition to pressuring teachers and monitoring implementation, promoting collaboration and higher expectations among faculty was a third strategy to help the annual assessment and the pressures of accountability coexist with inclusive practices. The learning communities the Board has established are one mechanism for responding to teachers’ concerns, as well as a means of balancing pressure for change with support and patience for teachers to adapt their practice in the context of their classrooms. These collaborative structures were intended to serve as conduits for greater collaboration between general and special educators and as a way to foster and enforce higher expectations of students with SEN. The new roles created for ARMs and consultants are another, allowing classroom teachers and SERTs to learn new roles, adapt new practices, and assume new expectations in the context of their schools and students. By making the practice and the products mutually adaptive and mutually constructed products of change, new relationships and expectations are more likely to impact the classroom level (Fullan, 2009) and be sustainable (M. W. McLaughlin, 1998, 2006).

Leaders in Harwich wanted to ensure that local ESGA efforts did not focus exclusively on students with SEN and that an outcome of the project would be higher expectations for all students. Board leaders worked to unite curriculum and special education personnel structurally through co-teaching and collaborative meetings. They attempted to unite them culturally as well, by communicating messages of common, higher, expectations for all students and their potential achievement. One of the
superintendents for special education remarked that the Board’s plan was to cultivate cohesion in both practices and expectations:

[Before ESGA there] wasn’t an alignment [in efforts for students with SEN] with broader goals and broader shared expectations. We did individualized programming …That was certainly going on then. But there weren’t the links that exist now between the program that was being delivered at the school and common assessment practices and common curriculum expectations.  

The Harwich Board’s data administrator recalled that ESGA helped to initiate a period of “precise discussion” to foster practices that were “good for all students, not just special ed students.”

Linking classroom teachers and special education staff meant utilizing SERTs in ways that supported identified students and larger EQAO goals at the same time. Board-level special education staff recalled efforts to alter the composition of teacher learning groups and to deliver more special education services in mainstream classrooms, where students and special education staff alike (SERTs, education assistants, and staff from a former separate program) would be exposed to common curriculum expectations more often; “helping teachers to adjust and accommodate and modify for those students within the context of the classroom.” In this way, raising staff expectations included working “not only with classroom teachers but with our resource teachers to get them to see their role differently.” One DI coach and consultant described this as a delicate, cultural, process, wherein she was careful “not to upset the apple cart,” or “tell them how to teach,” but instead worked at “building that collaborative trust” for several “student-centered conversations.” Consultants and ARMs described the effort required to help
classroom teachers to take full responsibility for students on IEPs and their achievement on EQAO. One ARM said the project sought to make clear that the “classroom teacher is [the key instructor]” responsible for students’ learning, but stipulated that each “classroom teacher needs a community to support them.”

Using special education personnel differently was another part of this effort to increase the number of students’ who could participate in the provincial curriculum. Leaders used the ESGA project to reconstitute the smaller support groups that SERTs and EAs facilitated. These groups encompassed “target” students who required some form of additional, individualized support or remediation, in addition to those without IEPs or identified special needs, while some identified students remained in classrooms. Such “blended” groups were a vital component of restructuring that helped to distribute responsibility for student learning. One SERT described a drop-in center she ran for intermediate students. She worked with both identified and non-identified students, and EQAO writing scores were a primary tool for determining who would be sent to her for extra assistance:

I work with the targeted students for writing… [T]hese are the students that have been at [proficiency level] two and are hopefully getting to [level] three [of a possible four], so that group of students changes all the time. … I have a group of students, [and] when they move onto the next form of writing…, then I will take the students who had either one or two on their [diagnostic] cold piece (or writing assignment completed without time to prepare) for the next type of writing.

In some cases, special education staff struggled with these changes in responsibilities as much as their classroom teacher colleagues. Some SERTs “didn’t want to give up those
kids back to the classroom teacher. They saw [students with SEN] as their responsibility.”

Harwich’s level of special needs identification is high when compared to the provincial average. Compared to the provincial average of 9% for formal identification, 14% of Harwich’s students are formally identified (that is, they have an IEP and have had a disability diagnosis through formal screening and therefore receive modified curriculum and assessments, working one or two grade levels below their peers). Special education staff at one school recalled that 19% of their 400 students had individual education plans (IEPs) written for them, with almost one-third of those students identified with significant special needs. Another staff member described a third grade that had more than half of its students on IEPs. In the past, EQAO officials have been concerned about the high number of accommodations and modifications in the Board.

The existing practice of placing increasing numbers of students with IEPs in mainstream classrooms coupled with the growing pressure to increase performance on standardized exams meant that the CODE inclusion project and the EQAO accountability structure would inevitably interact. Harwich’s teachers and leadership had to simultaneously achieve enhanced participation in Ontario’s curriculum and assessment as well as increased achievement on provincial exams. Though there was not universal agreement about the value of the annual standard-based test as a driver of change or the key measure of progress, it remains the primary source of pressure in Ontario and, therefore, the dominant implemented project. Teachers in Maple Lake experienced
similar pressures. Inclusion, and ESGA in particular, were implemented in Harwich to serve several larger goals, with accountability prominent among them.

Over time, inclusion and inclusive practice became a means for SERTs to convince their colleagues that students with SEN were inexorably connected to the provincial curriculum and the high-stakes exams that assess it. Making this shift entails “conversations with schools and with classrooms” about the need to keep more students in mainstream classes and about the importance of working towards common goals for all students. ESGA became a vehicle for promoting the “mind shift” that the project’s leaders said was required to raise expectations for all students. It helped to cultivate internal accountability (Elmore, 2004) in relation to technical aspects of instructional practice and cultural elements such as expectations for students and willingness to operate open and collaborative classrooms. As one ARM put it, “accommodation is really just a change in a teaching strategy that’s not affecting the grade level of the curriculum expectation.” Achieving this in practice, however, has meant changing report cards, learning community memberships, teaching assignments, IEPs, and other areas to all reflect a singular set of expectations. All of these elements must move in a common direction to enable inclusion and accountability to work together. One administrator called this amalgamated stance “students, structures, and strategies.” He recalled how the initial stance of voluntary participation had been important in “opening up the classroom door” and seeing what each group of students in receiving is terms of instruction.

Harwich’s leadership attempted to enhance collaborative relationships among staff, especially between classroom teachers and special educators. These cultural and
structural efforts offered time and space for collaboration and consultants to support the process, cultivating a new community of practice that helped to embed higher expectations for all students’ achievement. These were challenging efforts, however, as they conflicted with long-established professional norms and identities, including teacher privacy and autonomy (Little, 1990). In Harwich, reconciling this tension has been a gradual process, colored by locally-discovered solutions and paths to change.

**Attempting Reconciliation**

Harwich’s implementation of ESGA viewed inclusive practice as one of several means to meet the larger goals of increasing students’ performance on standardized measures. Yet there were also some tacit efforts to diversify the data available to teachers and disperse pressure related to performance. EQAO was not a fleeting part of the province’s overall strategy for improvement and remained an important motivator for Harwich’s efforts to implement ESGA. Instead, it became an ever-present reminder of the pressure to find local solutions to help historically low-performing students.

While there were few deliberate efforts to balance inclusion and accountability in Harwich, leaders of the project did attempt to convince all staff of the value of both diversified instruction and also common expectations for measurement. This was a matter of impacting the structures of support and measurement, and also a cultural issue of addressing teachers’ expectations and priorities. Inclusion and accountability can pull educators in competing directions. Harwich began to address this tension near the end of the implementation of the CODE project. The Board was engaged in a myriad of initiatives that key leaders said were all directed towards increasing achievement.
Retaining a focus on EQAO was an important milestone in their progress towards these goals. By implementing an inclusive effort within rather than alongside the accountability mechanisms of the province, Harwich’s staff sought to achieve greater outcomes for more students and to build the capacity of their teachers to respond to the constant demands for achievement.

The Project’s Impact on Professional Roles and Role Relationships

While Harwich’s effort was ostensibly tied to EFA’s call for common values related to inclusion and diversity, its project during ESGA permitted significant latitude for schools and did not initially convey a common moral or cultural framework. This contrast between a document meant to offer a common language and a Board committed to school-level autonomy caused some of the tension between the project’s technical and cultural elements. Over time, culture became a more important component of the work in Harwich as the Board placed greater emphasis on collaboration, support, and professional integration between classroom and special educators to accompany the integration of students with SEN. As this happened, the project began to focus on common objectives. Schools and the Board became increasingly collaborative, and the tension between cultural and technical elements abated.

The era of ESGA began by promoting changes in the technical components of teachers’ practice—such as differentiating instruction or using data to make instructional decisions—while paying far less attention to addressing cultural factors—including communicating common values, developing a more focused concept of instructional practice, and establishing common expectations for professional collaboration and
responsibility. As the Director put it, we “didn’t identify a relationship problem” because they were focused on changing “the student achievement agenda.” She and her colleagues quickly realized, however, that “we had to change the culture to change [achievement].” The initial cultural impacts were sporadic and slow, and staff were largely content to maintain positive personal relationships while respecting each other’s professional autonomy. As students with SEN moved more and more into mainstream classrooms, the lack of focus on collaborative practice initially restrained the Board’s growth.

After several years of effort, Harwich’s work under ESGA can claim some deliberate as well as some emergent and incidental cultural impacts in Harwich. ESGA did eventually have the cumulative impact of initiating some reculturing of professional relationships within the Board. Participating schools show evidence of being more collaborative and more trusting over the course of the project. Opportunities to collect and reflect on data, capacity-building efforts led by board-wide consultants, and reassignment of special education personnel to more frequent mainstream assignments and wider responsibilities within the student body were aspects of Harwich’s ESGA project that served as catalysts for reculturing.

**Deliberate Cultural Elements: Leadership and Collaboration**

Measuring the implementation of a project’s objectives means observing changes not only in instructional practice, but also in educators’ perceptions of their roles with students, relationships to colleagues, and descriptions of interactions around their work (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977; M. W. McLaughlin, 1998). Professionals’ roles and role
relationships are decidedly cultural, rather than structural. To initiate cultural change, Harwich’s project leadership team needed to do more than execute a scripted process of reform. They deliberately challenged existing norms of privacy and autonomy through the use of observations, instructional coaches, and collaborative sessions to discuss data. These efforts never totally abandoned an egalitarian tone, but rather gently strove to promote collaboration and shared responsibility for all students.

Leaders in Harwich sought to develop new competencies and capacities in staff, but also to cultivate new perceptions of professional practice and conceive new collegial roles and working relationships. A document like EFA, while unusual in its lack of policy enforcement mechanisms, was important for laying the conceptual foundation of this process of change. This meant going beyond what one ESGA project leader called a “delivering mode,” and working towards impacting “principles and beliefs” on a board-wide scale. The “next step,” he argued, was achieving “greater alignment right down to the classroom level” by impacting practices and beliefs, or what he called a “mind shift.”

Fullan (2009) has argued that impacting classroom level instruction and professional culture at a great scale is a difficult prospect. Harwich sought to achieve this impact by capitalizing on existing momentum surrounding disappointment with EQAO scores and uniting teachers in new professional relationships. In changing the professional culture, Harwich actively employed leadership staff from various levels. These board- and school-level leaders were instrumental in helping to realize the changes in culture and instruction envisioned by the project’s planners. Area superintendents were
encouraged to spend more time in schools; principals were pushed to complete more “walkthroughs” in teachers’ classrooms. The project’s leaders encouraged retired staff to assist in coaching principals, employing a “peers coaching peers” model in lieu of pressure alone.\textsuperscript{263} One superintendent argued that this was important in light of the fact that, in the past, principals and schools were isolated and “quite independent of anything else that was going on in the district…. [principals] never talked to any other principals who might have been dealing with similar things.” In Harwich, he argued, ESGA was “very much an effort to align practices… centrally driven, centrally supported, but with strong buy in from the schools.”\textsuperscript{264} By deliberately pushing cultural change in partnership with school-level leaders, Harwich was able to see progress in the expectations that teachers had of students and of one another.

At the school level, use of instructional coaches (often the ARMs, sometimes outside consultants) helped to spur the cultural shift from being schools of separate departments to becoming more unified cultures characterized by collaboration and collective responsibility. These staff represented an important element in the Board’s process of cultural change. The coaches specialized in differentiated instruction and spent blocks of time in teachers’ classrooms supporting their pedagogical growth. This united classroom and special educational teaching staff in a single instructional environment, offering support as they learned to work more closely together. It also represented a de-privatizing of the instructional environment, allowing outside professionals into a space that was often closed to colleagues. This effort to “break that ice”\textsuperscript{265} was especially important in the planning team’s vision of professional growth for the board. One coach
initially took volunteer teachers only and gradually turned the focus of observations from students to teaching practices over time.\textsuperscript{266} A member of the leadership team described the importance the project’s leadership placed on recasting Harwich’s classrooms as “something that everyone’s able to walk into and observe.” He recalled how the introduction of these DI coaches—what he termed “welcoming somebody in”—was a crucial first step in the cultural change process.\textsuperscript{267}

Teachers and superintendents alike remarked that these efforts at improving instruction in the context of classrooms were important in initiating staff collaboration and promoting more openness in classrooms, as they “caused [teachers] to talk together and plan together.” Historically, this has been a difficult task in schools, where teacher privacy and egalitarianism have been common professional norms (Kennedy, 2005; Lortie, 1975). Little’s (2002) work with teachers’ communities of practice found that open discussions among faculty about classroom practice are rare. Such frankness and trust are signs of professional growth. They indicate a willingness to invite others into one’s professional domain. This is especially true when teachers’ conversations take on a tone of assessment. Both ESGA project leaders and an instructional coach were clear that non-evaluative parameters were important initial principles that teachers insisted on as part of having coaches and colleagues in the classrooms.\textsuperscript{268} A board-level leader recalled that teachers were adamant that the role of coaches would be construed as “not being evaluative but being supportive.” He characterized these as “bottom-up non-negotiables” that board leaders heard from faculty:

Numerous feedback forms we received …said the only reason we agreed to do this was because certain names were attached to it … I had to go out
and have conversations with folks that assured me that no superintendents would ever arrive in the classroom.\textsuperscript{269}

Another superintendent noted that part of the Board’s approach was to recruit coaches with standing, especially those staff members who had recent and lengthy classroom experience. As people from “the trenches,” they had credibility with their colleagues, and could capitalize on this as a tool for change. Initial demand for these coaches was high, and more than 30 schools requested coaches, necessitating a “block” model, where classrooms received intensive regular support for periods of up to six weeks.\textsuperscript{270} It was only through this experiential learning, she argued, that teachers were convinced by evidence of students’ improvement, a theory of cultural and identity change for teachers that is supported by the work of Guskey (1986). A coach said that teachers were most impacted by “that trust that you can build when [teachers] see [their] students being successful… It’s that job embedded process you work through together.”\textsuperscript{271}

Harwich’s professional culture showed evidence of some change due to this theory of job-embedded and initially voluntary cultural support. Embedding coaches in intermediate grades and placing additional educational assistants and technology in kindergarten classrooms did not only offer technical support, but sowed seeds of cultural change. Several teachers commented that their experience in PLCs was the beginning of personal and professional growth for them. Discussing data from the DRA and conducting moderated marking appear to have been important, foundational activities that predated Harwich’s more difficult conversations. A school-level administrator attributed much of this cultural shift to early capacity building and to leaders pressing participants to engage one another. The impact of this, he argued, was that “the talk
changes” in schools, staff become more collaborative, and “the nay-sayers… begin to isolate themselves.”

Harwich created a space for collaboration that was voluntary. While limited in the percentage of schools it impacted, this approach did have a deep cultural impact in certain participating pockets. One superintendent remarked that the project had been important in creating opportunities to collaborate:

We set ourselves up so that the teachers could talk to each other about how the kids were doing and what strategies worked …But teachers needed an opportunity to share what they’ve learned about their kids… There’s a real focus around what’s working for the kids and exchanging ideas. [There are both] formal structures, and then informally teachers are just taking it and running with it.

As a consequence, teachers describe how there is a greater sense of collective responsibility for instructing all students. SERTs feel they are “staying in the [mainstream] room more often” and working with “just anybody” who needs assistance, as opposed to only assisting students who are identified with special needs in withdrawal settings. One SERT in particular felt that the stigma of having to use technology and need extra support had been reduced among classroom teachers—a sentiment echoed by the technology administrator. While not always part of a unified strategy coordinated by the central office, there were consistent cultural changes across the Board. These appear to have been driven largely by teachers’ voluntary participation and by the committed and consistent efforts of a few project leaders, ARMs, and consultants.

**Emergent Cultural Growth**
Within the teachers’ community of practice in Harwich, several aspects of professional culture have undergone notable change. Participants in leadership roles observed more consistent practice across classrooms and schools, including a more uniform effort towards implementing differentiated instruction and employing common pedagogical and professional language. An aspect of ESGA that seemed to have the most significant cultural impact was professional development supporting differentiated instruction and the placing of coaches and special education personnel into so-called mainstream classrooms. These structural changes helped to spur some growth in professional culture by bringing teachers together in new ways.

Harwich’s ESGA project also cultivated some additional sense of collective responsibility and greater collaboration among colleagues regarding students’ progress. Classroom teachers, SERTs noted, play much more active roles in the construction of students’ IEPs, and the SERT role consists much more of supporting mainstream instruction than removing students who otherwise disrupt teachers’ momentum with the rest of their class (see Kennedy, 2005). One SERT called this a “big change,” where special education staff were now able to say to mainstream classroom teachers, “it’s not our student any more, it’s your student, so what do you want to do?” The onus of responsibility has shifted along with the nature of instruction.

The growth of teachers’ capacity for differentiating instruction was an important aspect of this change in professional relationships. As one classroom teacher noted, the process of learning about multiple intelligences, learning styles, and the principles of universal design did more than provide teachers with “some extra ideas.” It also
offered the opportunity “to observe [their] students while they were being taught,” as they worked with SERTs and DI coaches. These coaches helped create learning profiles, set SMART goals, and refine lesson plans in a manner that felt collaborative and not evaluative. These observations of students in mainstream environments along with extended discussions about students’ work allowed teachers to gain a more complete understanding of their students. Teachers felt that DI made an important impact on their work: “[Our] culture has changed a lot over the last two years and part of that is DI getting to know your students very well… All of all our staff is all on board.”

Kennedy (2005) notes that classroom teachers are under significant pressure to move groups of students in similar ways to common mastery of knowledge and skills, and that they therefore also feel under pressure to use similar methods and therefore end up eschewing diversity in the classroom. Harwich’s project under ESGA attempts to find a way out of these difficult confines: by building teachers’ knowledge of students as complete learners, cultivating their skills to diversify instruction, and supporting them in collaborative processes that not only give them knowledge but also encourage cultures of collaboration where privacy is overcome and asking for help is respected. Together, these steps have a cultural impact that fundamentally alters a pedagogical paradigm, hopefully obviating practices that unintentionally exclude some learners.

Replicating this cultural growth will not be easy for Harwich’s leadership. As special education staff were especially wont to note, this growth has placed a disproportionate share of the burden for cultural change on their shoulders. One school, for example, hoped to support a full co-teaching model in all classrooms with identified
students. With only 1.5 special education resource positions allocated, however, staff were stretched thin and often unable to spend time in the classrooms of newly willing teachers. Others have noted new stresses that are part of the Board’s professional culture, including the limited time that collaborating special educators and classroom teachers have to meet and plan.\textsuperscript{282}

As responsibility for continuing the ESGA project has shifted to schools, Board-level leaders are cautiously hopeful about the long-term prospects for cultural change. Sustaining cultural change is possible, in part, because the project sought not only to provide resources, but also to achieve a “mind shift” in local staff. Some school-level participants felt this mind shift had taken place, in terms of becoming more mutually accountable to one another for all students’ learning, in line with the goals of \textit{EFA}. The deployment of coaches and changes to SERTs’ roles played important parts in helping to create a more collaborative and open community of practice. While there was no single cultural agenda in Harwich as there was in Maple Lake, the Board’s leaders did express a desire to see the cultural goals of \textit{EFA} realized. Some of this progress is being realized through coaches working with volunteer teachers and through slow, deliberate efforts in the classrooms that form the everyday context of teachers’ work.

From a technical standpoint, ESGA in Harwich sought to improve instruction. ESGA was effective, however, once leaders turned attention to breaking silos between general and special educators, to creating communities of practice that were more collaborative and less private, and to communicating the principles and beliefs that guided the ESGA project’s work. Collectively, these outcomes reveal a process of
reculturing in Harwich, even though its progress was sporadic and uneven. Nonetheless, some staff clearly felt that this progress was noteworthy—if piecemeal—and that it showed great potential for impacting practice across the Board.

**Influence of Contextual and Political Factors**

The political environment surrounding Harwich was highly influential in the Board’s conceiving and implementing their local iteration of ESGA. The pressures of high-stakes accountability mechanisms were especially potent catalysts. The Board’s disappointment with their results on EQAO in the years preceding the project provided many staff members with the initial motivation to initiate change. The pressure related to the annual assessment remains a major force to this day, driving several efforts in Harwich. But Ontario’s political environment has for some time also included forms of support for local actors. Teachers and principals recalled that the designation of and assistance from OFIP in the years preceding the project were important motivators that, in some ways, set the stage for ESGA by initiating difficult conversations and pushing teachers to reflect on student data. Harwich, in turn, established their own version of this amalgamated approach during ESGA. In this way, the Ministry’s approach to accountability—one that blended pressure and support (see Barber & Fullan, 2005; Campbell & Levin, 2008)—was an important precursor to ESGA. Boards like Harwich made a unique contribution to this concept by incorporating more school-level flexibility. While there was some focus on compliance (once there was a clear vision with which to comply), Harwich demonstrated the power of blending pressure from external commitment with capacity-building for both local and larger goals.
Despite these innovations in the pressure-support relationship, the goals of standardized accountability will continue to dominate the educational horizon well into the future. In Harwich, inclusion has in many ways been appropriated by the larger movement to meet provincial performance targets. The influence of EQAO and its pressure for increased standardization was a major source of the tension between the technical and cultural elements of ESGA. The calls for individualization and diversification found in EFA clashed with demands for standardization—especially in assessment—coming from EQAO. This confusing of objectives combined with the lack of a single, unifying strategy may have influenced the mixed progress that the Board has made in closing achievement gaps between students with and without IEPs.

In calling ESGA a general success in Harwich, Board-level leaders noted that part of this success was the unique stance towards the allocation and use of resources that had been permitted by the Ministry through CODE. The Ministry’s and CODE’s desire to avoid one-time, large-scale professional development clearly influenced Harwich’s interest in ongoing, long-term, JEPL and not what one project leader called the traditional “money-bomb” approach, whose influence is widespread, superficial, and brief. He went on to argue that this new use of resources explained the project’s more substantive, classroom-level impact:

I think the reason [the project] worked is we put resources into the school rather than the first year we brought [teachers] all out [of school] to workshops. [In the past they] brought in big-time guest speakers from the States … This time …we put the dollars into the school. And we said, “We’re going to come to your room. Give you an EA. Work with your kids. Teach you how to do a diagnostic and based on that make some real-time decisions …and reform your practice.”

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In doing so, Harwich’s relationship to schools reflected the stance affected by The Ministry and by CODE: blending support with pressure in the form of guided coaching. These staff engaged in monitoring and channeling efforts to a externally determined end, but also supported unique school-level needs and objectives. Entering classrooms in this manner would once have been considered a significant professional intrusion. In Harwich, the project’s liaisons “opened the door” to once-private classrooms. While they monitored pedagogical behavior and growth, these staff (especially ARMs) also offered long-term support in the forms of PD and job-embedded support, coaching, and collaborative meetings.

The Board’s director and other senior staff pointed to Harwich’s OFIP designation as one of the first moments when they experienced this amalgamated stance from the Ministry. Such a program sends a dual message that results are mandatory and that support is available to help meet those goals. This blended stance has been effective, but daunting in the face of a multitude of socioeconomic changes that are creating additional challenges for the Board. While these shifts in expectations constitute a form of external pressure, they are not equivalent to the “name and shame” approach common to American accountability systems (Ravitch, 2010). Instead, blending pressure with support in the form of guided coaching is a managed, ongoing relationship for improvement. The Director noted this blended approach was not always welcome, as “at first principals… were a little intimidated by it.” Over time, however, “principals were saying how can I get OFIPed?, because they saw the supports that came.” At the local level, pressure from entities like EQAO can be welcomed if they are connected with
support and an understanding of the challenges local educators face. A current ARM and former special education coordinator called the Ministry’s stance “a collaborative, problem-solving approach” rather than a fixed implementation model. The ARM argued that the environment offered targets to reach and what she felt local educators needed most: “the time to sit down and digest it and really determine what’s working and what are the next steps.”\textsuperscript{288} Another senior project leader argued that the project and the Ministry both encouraged this internal, professional growth, partly through funding, but also through facilitating a “conversation” among different groups and across silos of educators.\textsuperscript{289} Teachers were especially appreciative when this support was located in their schools and classrooms. One called the collaborative coaching and JEPL “powerful.”\textsuperscript{290} A principal described the arrival of OFIP as daunting, but also said that the visiting support personnel helped to create a “learning group” out of her staff.\textsuperscript{291}

This evidence demonstrates the value of blending pressure and support in the process of change. It also, points to the prominence of EQAO and its equivalents in any process of change. ESGA was viewed in Harwich as another example of support for enhancing tested achievement, rather than as an inclusionary effort with its own unique properties. Ontario is a province that places pressure on boards, schools, and teachers to increase achievement measured in this standardized way. This pressure is accompanied by support in various ways, with ESGA being only one manifestation of this balanced approach. These investments of resources are difficult to assess, but they follow an assumed model of transitive progress and the adoption of a professional stance towards improving students’ achievement, rather than a strictly bureaucratic one (Spencer, 2004).
Such an approach assumes local and mutual adaptation as a starting point, as professionals grapple with guiding principles, but also with unique local needs and uses of resources. This mutually adaptive approach may need to extend to the way progress is measured if the goals of EFA are to be pursued on their own terms rather than as tools to suit the work of EQAO. Until then, inclusion in Harwich may continue to work for accountability, rather than for its own ends.

**Changes in Achievement Gaps on Standards-based Measures during ESGA**

Harwich was actively engaged in implementing ESGA for three years. Given the largely positive experiences staff expressed regarding the implementation of the project, it is pertinent to examine these perceptions in relation to students’ achievement on EQAO. This annual exam is the measure most valued by both the Ministry and some leaders in Harwich. To make this comparison between years, this study used standardized effect size estimates (SESE) as a proxy for achievement gaps in the manner described in Chapter 3 (Konstantopoulos & Hedges, 2008), and in accordance with current arguments to present confidence intervals to accompany effect size estimates (Thompson, 2002, 2006).

Achievement gaps were calculated in both reading and math for the year prior to the board’s involvement with ESGA, school year 2005-2006 (SY06), and for the final year of the project, 2009-2010 (SY10). This analysis compares two groups of students, those in grade three at the beginning of the project in SY06 and those in grade three at its conclusion, SY10. Achievement gaps for both reading and math were calculated and are represented in Table 9.
The use of SESEs to assess the project’s progress tells just one portion of the story of ESGA in Harwich. Though not the same cohort of students, it is notable that in grade three the proportion of students with an IEP who participated in EQAO increased from SY06 to SY10. From SY06 to SY10, overall enrollment declined. Grade three enrollment fell from 1,531 to 1,363. At the same time, the percentage of students with IEPs rose from 6% to 13% (from 90 to 196). Similarly, while 15% of 1,746 sixth graders had IEPs in SY06, 22% of sixth graders had IEPs in SY10, though there were now only 1,630. It is possible that these students would otherwise have been excluded from the assessment in past years and were now more fully participating in mainstream curriculum and EQAO.

Table 9. Analysis of Achievement Gaps in Harwich, ON for Grade 3 (SESE)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>SY06</th>
<th>SY10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N (SEN, Non-SEN)</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>1528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>3.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SESE</td>
<td>-0.74</td>
<td>-0.56</td>
<td>-1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.95 CI</td>
<td>-0.42</td>
<td>-0.24</td>
<td>-1.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * Scores represent two different cohorts of students, those in grade three in SY06 and those in grade three during SY10. SESE represents the Standardized Effect Size Estimate (Cohen’s d) for reading and math for both years. Confidence intervals are around SESEs.
Given the uneven nature of the project’s implementation, the number of non-participating schools and teachers, and the significant flexibility afforded schools, it should be noted that this analysis includes some students likely not to have been directly impacted by ESGA (all third graders in Harwich are in this sample, N=1621 in SY06 and N=1559 in SY10).

As shown in the table, there was a decrease in the achievement gap in reading between students with IEPs from the project’s beginning to the end. There was a notable increase in the achievement gap in math achievement between students with IEPs and those without plans for special needs during the three full years Harwich was engaged in ESGA. While the grand mean and the two group means (those with IEPs and those without) increased in reading, the mean score for math was lower in SY10 for students with IEPs.

Looking at the project’s impact another way, one can compare the results of the grade three EQAO scores in SY06 to those of students in grade six in SY10. Again, while not the same cohort of students, these results might help to capture more of the cumulative effects of ESGA since these students would have been in grade two when the project began. Students in grade six in SY10, more than 22% of whom were working under IEPs, displayed very large negative achievement gaps. Identified students showed a negative effect of -.91 in reading and -.79 in math in this more recent year. Standard deviations for identified students increased during this period, along with rates of participation for students with IEPs.
Achievement, at least as measured by EQAO, is increasing in Harwich in the sense that means for both students with IEPs and those without all increased in reading from SY06 to SY10. The rising tide appears, in this sense, to be lifting all boats. However, the gap between students with IEPs and those without is not closing, and appears to be growing in math, even as participation is increasing among students who would have been excluded in the past. Students on IEPs, it should be noted, are not a static group. All indications are that many more students presently have IEPs than in previous years and that this number may be growing concurrent with these newly collaborative and inclusive efforts. It is possible that these increases, combined with stagnant gaps in the face of rising means, are indicators that more students are participating in assessments who might otherwise have been excluded. In the future, the board would be wise to examine achievement gaps in light of any new participants who might have been excluded prior to ESGA.

**Preliminary Conclusions from Harwich**

Participants from Harwich generally agreed that their ESGA project was ultimately beneficial, leading to professional growth in instructional capacity as well as a collaborative culture, and thus held promise for future increases in student achievement. This progress, however, took time, as the Board’s key participants searched for unity of purpose over the project’s three-year lifespan. During ESGA, Harwich’s leaders planned to support teachers in differentiating instruction, encourage increased use of data in the pursuit of higher expectations for all students, and provide job-embedded professional development. The impetus for these improvements was, in part, poor past performance on
EQAO, which in turn was used to gauge progress of the project. Harwich represents a case of inclusion for accountability. The project was initially conceived as a tool for increasing achievement through improved instruction. Over time, however, the Board’s leaders were able to establish and clearly communicate common cultural values and technical objectives. Further, like their colleagues in Maple Lake, they were able to disseminate these ideas through the use of ARMs, or staff who engaged in a form of guided coaching by promoting professional collaboration, the Board’s vision of differentiated instruction, and assistance for local needs. Harwich’s experience implementing ESGA is summarized in Table 10.

Harwich’s ESGA project did not have a single, clearly defined objective. However, the Board made some progress towards creating a common, collaborative culture of shared responsibility. These changes in culture and “human capital” provide perhaps the greatest promise for sustaining the progress Harwich has made under ESGA. The Board’s new ARMs are the structure best equipped to sustain cultural progress by coaching new and existing participants while also opening private classrooms to foster collaboration. The focus on school-level discretion and the pursuit of new objectives in each of the project’s three years came at the expense of large-scale pedagogical coherence. A more unified set of guiding principles likely would have been necessary to achieve a unified, more coherent community of practice. In particular, a more clearly communicated and coherent effort might have helped to raise the priorities of EFA to the level of prominence attained by EQAO.
Table 10. Summary of ESGA in Harwich

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case summary:</th>
<th>Harwich is a case of inclusion used for accountability.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guiding Question</td>
<td>Participant Recollections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory of Change:</td>
<td>• Academics in kindergarten.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ARMs and instructional coaches.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Contextualized PD efforts (JEPL).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Collaborative meetings to examine data and raise expectations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reconciliation Strategy for Inclusion and Accountability</td>
<td>• EQAO was a major driver of change. Measured success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Tried to facilitate collaboration, raise expectations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on Community of Practice</td>
<td>• Coaches and ARMs “broke the ice” by entering classrooms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement Gap Impact, as Effect Size Analysis</td>
<td>• Blend of pressure and support by Ministry was mimicked by project and Harwich.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The Board’s leaders were able to begin a larger process of cultural and structural change by capitalizing on the recent disappointing EQAO results as an impetus for improvement. Relying on the ongoing pressure of EQAO to maintain momentum, Harwich has been able to move the professional culture forward in a way that has fundamentally changed the roles and role relationships assumed by Board-level staff, special educators, and curriculum colleagues. Some staff, however, resent the prominent
and pressurized role that these annual assessments are playing in their professional life, and these feelings create tension between the vision of differentiated instruction espoused by ESGA and the types of explicit and standardized practice demanded by EQAO. One elementary school administrator exemplified this tension:

I won’t do things just for EQAO. But will I work with good instruction for these individual kids? Absolutely. And did it happen in fact on EQAO achievement? For sure it did, but that’s not why we did it… And then they compare us to the school up the road. Well the school up the road is one of the most affluent schools in our district.

These factors make Harwich a case of implementation where loose district-level control is exercised and, partly as a result, no significant coordination is achieved between the project’s cultural and structural elements. Ironically, the focus on EQAO did not result in progress in closing achievement gaps.

In general, the board’s approach to implementing ESGA was marked by several important characteristics:

- Locating change in schools was an important focus. JEPL became a powerful force for change, and entailed significant cultural change. ARMs and SERTs exemplified this change through their “at the elbow” support and through pushing into classrooms. Situating PD in teachers’ classrooms and pushing cultural changes appeared to make a significant impact.

- The project lacked a tightly coordinated centralized plan. Efforts to enter private classrooms for coaching and support still took a non-evaluative, egalitarian tone that left some change to the process of chance. The impact on schools was uneven. In the face of this loosely coordinated effort, students in Harwich made
only modest progress on EQAO. Towards the end of the project, however, the central office’s messaging and project focus became clearer and their process of instructional change more coherent. As the role of ARMs became more defined, they were able to support common uses of formative assessment data like DRA, common language (e.g., “so what does a struggling reader mean?”), and instructional and assessment expectations that were more coherent. This took time to develop and showed its clearest progress when there was a unified message for systemic improvement.

- One clear outcome from ESGA in Harwich was the new and innovative use of some special education staff. By creating ARMs, the board has created a stronger tool for change. These staff remain in the board, conduct ongoing professional development, and play an important dual role: monitoring progress and fidelity while also offering staff ongoing support. These internal roles help to ensure substantial change in classrooms and the sustainability of the ESGA effort. This “block model” of support offered teachers extended opportunities to learn new roles and role relationships in the context of their own classrooms and with their own students.

EQAO results that were quite poor several years prior to the project helped to create this impetus for change. These data were framed by the project’s leadership team as important benchmarks of success. School-level staff often saw the principles of EFA and the drive for increased achievement on EQAO as oppositional forces. Staff generally welcomed the support the project offered, especially kindergarten and intermediate staff.
who were rarely beneficiaries of special projects. Rather than resisting change as an intrusion, most staff welcomed the support, as many teachers do who have seen few additional resources (Guidney, 1999; Sarason, 1996). As expectations increase for more students, they are also changing for staff. The Board’s long-standing egalitarian professional culture is gradually showing signs of a more unified thrust towards improvement and achievement.

**Lessons from ESGA and Ontario**

*Essential for Some, Good for All* was a unique project. The initiative combined clear guidelines, support, and mutual adaptation with a novel attention to local priorities. These innovations inspired and engaged many participants at the district level in new ways. The blend of pressure and support on the part of leaders from the Ministry was not a new strategy, nor was the ample provision of data (Campbell & Levin, 2009). ESGA was a departure from past policies that used districts as tools for implementing policies that were “forcefully executed, closely aligned, and intensively applied” (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006, p.5). In a new way, local boards were allowed to engage in an ongoing dialogue with the Ministry (via CODE) on how to achieve not only technical alignment among their attentions to various policies, but also cultural coherence between structures and professional communities of practice. Support was not only offered in order to achieve compliance, but also extended to consult and coach local actors in the execution of pursuit of local priorities. EQAO is still a significant presence that exerts notable pressure. At least after ESGA, local actors have some support for helping more students
to achieve, the opportunity for intra- and inter-district collaboration, and a clear message from the Ministry that local priorities are important as well.

These two cases in Maple Lake and Harwich, in light of the designs and desires of CODE’s planning team, offer several important lessons for observers of large-scale change. ESGA was a departure from Ontario’s existing political climate—characterized by guided support and top-down pressure—in several ways. First, this effort engaged district-level participants in new ways, especially in incorporating local goals and priorities while still attempting to promote coherence among boards. Second, ESGA addressed reculturing and restructuring in complementary ways, attempting to impact the technical aspects of instruction and the relationships between special education and general classroom teachers at the same time. Finally, the project produced at least some positive results for students without strict control from the Ministry or forced lock-step implementation. Gradual, mutual adaptation over time helped to align practices with one another.

These outcomes offer lessons for observers of large-scale change, especially in jurisdictions that privilege high-stakes accountability targets. In particular, scholars and planners of policies like this project should note three important themes:

- The project’s blending of pressure, support, and flexibility both to achieve compliance with demands and to offer coaching to help meet local objectives, and the unique role that a non-state, political third party like CODE can play in that process.
Professional development that was sustained, contextualized, and often individualized.

The importance of pairing local reculturing with technical restructuring as part of achieving coherence among concurrent efforts within districts.

**Unique Reform Stance: Guided Coaching from Third Parties**

Increasing the practice of differentiated classroom instruction was a clearly-stated target of ESGA. But pedagogical reform is a difficult task to achieve at scale (Elmore, 2004; Fullan, 2003, 2009). These two cases of change in Ontario demonstrate that districts can be effective conduits for implementing pedagogical changes at scale when granted the right blend of guiding principles, support, and local flexibility that values their unique priorities. This last element makes ESGA novel among recent instances of change in Ontario. Capacity-building was part of the Ministry’s stance towards boards before ESGA (Fullan, 2003, 2007; Levin, 2009). This support, exemplified by OFIP, was often a tool for meeting demands of accountability, was highly critical of attention to other efforts, and created pressure that was not accompanied by recognition of local contexts. A principal from Maple Lake exemplifies the tensions that remain in this prior system of support:

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OFIP came to… have a look and see what are some areas of strength and areas of growth…. There were some pretty important messages for us to hear… It was not so much an imposition but it was that feeling of, there are people coming in, they’re looking at me, they’re watching what I’m doing and … that feeling of a critical eye, even if it wasn’t intended to be critical.295
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In providing support for local actors, CODE was able to support the implementation of the principles of *EFA* in ways that also supported local needs. In Maple Lake, this meant the opportunity to devote attention to the needs of aboriginal students as well as the many academic areas that influence students’ writing achievement. In Harwich, CODE’s support for a flexible, mutually adaptive stance provided that board’s leaders with the chance to discover a structure for their work over time, one that helped them work towards improvement in EQAO but also reculture their board in a manner that was locally appropriate. While CODE pressured boards to comply with broad tenets of *EFA*, they also offered coaching and consulting support for local goals that past efforts in Ontario had not.

CODE’s monitor-coaches embodied this unique role of guided coaching by blending more conventional pressure/support relationships with the opportunity for board’s to pursue local ends. As a non-state actor comprised of members with connections to local boards, CODE was able to situate the locus of pressure and support much closer to the intended units of change. These monitor-coaches played complex amalgamated roles, applying pressure by monitoring progress while offering support for local leaders grappling with change. Maple Lake’s Director captured the way these staff, often retired directors and superintendents, not only blended pressure, support, and local priorities, but also possessed a credibility that OFIP staff did not:

First of all the visitors were… folks who had come from similar [professional] backgrounds to what I was living in at the time. …They were retired, they had this wealth of knowledge that they were more than willing to share and I think has helped to shape sort of my thinking about
special education. …Those visitors and those relationships have been very important.

For the system, I think the fact that somebody was, and I don’t want to use the word, looking over our shoulder but somebody was monitoring what was going on. [That] sends a very important message to an organization,… that this is important and it has value and we expect it to be implemented. The greatest challenge that we face with any initiative that we bring in is absolutely consistent implementation, nothing else. It’s never about the resources. It’s never about the time. It’s never, ever, ever about having enough of those things. It is about effective, consistent implementation across the system. 

In past initiatives, staff in these roles were successful in impacting teachers’ communities of practice in New York City (Coburn & Stein, 2006). ESGA demonstrates they can play dual roles, not only monitoring on behalf of authorities, but can also supporting teachers as coaches and developers of new practice. The project further shows that third party actors that have the credibility of expertise can engage local actors in ways that representatives from the state cannot.

The flexible support offered by ESGA helped to encourage the unique use of local staff that mirrored the roles played by CODE’s guidance coaches. Both boards studied here used this opportunity to create new positions within their boards. These staff, the area resource mentors (ARMs) and special assignment teachers (SATs), took on an important, dual role in both settings. They were a source of pressure in the sense that they performed a monitoring role on behalf of the board. They also provided a constant source of support for teachers and principals grappling with new roles and role relationships.

Fullan (2003) has argued for the importance of employing the district as an important local intermediary, close to both the origin of change and its antecedent. ESGA
demonstrates that an additional layer may actually enhance these efforts, rather than muddying the waters. As Harwich’s director argued, Boards certainly needed required pressure to persist in their efforts to improve achievement and include more students. Ontario has also found that support makes a difference in realizing change. ESGA demonstrates that this support must not only build capacity for compliance, but also support local strategies and priorities that play a part in the education process for students. Third-party actors like CODE may be uniquely positioned to play this role, having the ability to monitor districts, but also the credibility and expertise to help them realize these changes in light of local needs.

**On-Site, Ongoing Professional Development**

Professional development is a part of many efforts to implement educational change. It often fails, however, because it is temporary and disconnected from teachers’ practice. The experiences of participants in these two cases suggests that to impact communities of practice in a substantive way, professional learning of this kind should be sustained, social, and situated in teachers’ context of practice (Coburn, 2001; Coburn & Stein, 2006; Elmore, 2004; Little, 2003). This kind of ongoing learning was a stated goal of the project, and well-received by local-level participants. Locating learning in teachers’ classrooms offers a higher level of engagement, allowing teachers to explore new practices and concepts in the context of their work. It also offers multiple opportunities over time to practice implementing the new skills and guiding principles advocated in new initiatives. Finally, professional learning should be social (Wenger,
Locating professional development in schools permits more opportunities for collaboration, an especially important component in efforts to foster inclusion.

Leaders of change have learned to recognize the need to build capacity in teachers of whom significant changes are expected. Both Harwich and Maple Lake inserted personnel (including ARMs and SATs) into classrooms for extended blocks of time. These coaches and other support staff are able to support individual groups of teachers in substantial growth, and still be deployed efficiently over entire schools and districts. They also serve an important function by reporting these levels of change to board offices, thus enabling more effective deployment than other professional development efforts that happen far less frequently, and far from the site of teachers’ everyday work.

**Reculturing and Restructuring for Coherence**

ESGA was a project that promoted both the implementation of new ideas as well as attempts to achieve coherence between new and existing demands on schools. Both boards in this study demonstrate the important interplay between structural and cultural concerns when attempting to create and sustain coherence in the process of change. Staff took on new roles and relationships, adopted new practices, and were asked to view their practice differently. These experiences show that promoting collaboration and collective responsibility are valuable, but that professionals also need structures that can facilitate and sustain new roles and relationships. Professional development like PLCs requires data and skilled facilitation, but also the building of trust to enable difficult conversations. JEPL not only means creating a staff position to conduct these sessions, but also opening up classrooms that were previously closed to outside observers and
colleagues. Reforms have often failed because they have relied too much on brute force or ignored local relationships and communities of practice (Hargreaves, 1994b; Sarason, 1990). ESGA offers lessons in the value of pursuing change that views restructuring and reculturing as complementary tools. By engaging in an ongoing dialogue between local actors and the project’s leaders (Honig & Hatch, 2004), incorporating reculturing into a process of restructuring can help achieve coherence among multiple, concurrent priorities.

At its heart, *EFA* is an aspirational and moral document. It can seem ineffectual for a political entity to issue a white paper as a lever for change, like a shout into the wind. In this case, however, the document received positive feedback initially. The Ministry responded by enlisting CODE to help local authorities enact this policy in the context of daily practice. Local board-level leaders, principals, and special education and classroom teachers alike were asked to assume certain moral principles and act on those principles in their individual practice as well as their relationships with colleagues. Communicating these principles—raising expectations for students with SEN, increasing collaboration among staff—was just as important as PD for differentiated instruction of systems for disseminating data. Both boards demonstrate the importance of attending to and cultivating coherence between structure and culture. In Maple Lake, schedules were permanently rearranged to accommodate PLCs. In Harwich, committees and duties were formally integrated to facilitate collaboration. Both boards reassigned staff to help build capacity and sustain changes in practice. As a school in Maple Lake discovered when it
saw a principal depart, embedding values in a culture and giving them credence can sustain efforts, even in the face of inevitable leadership turnover.

Other research in implementation has argued that these kinds of local changes take great time, need to be subject to local adaptation, and require teacher input to be accepted (Honig, 2006; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Maple Lake illustrates that some initial pressure and tension may not prohibit future, authentic collaboration (see Guskey, 1986). Collaboration that begins with noticeable pressure and supporting structure may not be the unavoidable enemy of collective responsibility, as once thought (Hargreaves, 1994; Wood, 2007). In fact, the contrast offered by Harwich further substantiates that local authorities can—and perhaps should—take an active role in steering culture as part of this unified approach to changing structure and culture together. That board’s disparate efforts in the early stages of the ESGA project demonstrate that valuable time, effort, and money can be wasted in trying to discover a purpose and focus for the work of change. While Maple Lake permitted staff to take a journey of change, that journey has a clear cultural and technical compass from the Board. These cases would seem to illustrate that these kinds of fundamental changes in the community of practice can be managed and cultivated. Further, management of professional culture may even be desired, as it may enhance technical changes and structural additions.

Conclusion

These two cases demonstrate different abilities to manage inclusion and accountability simultaneously. In Maple Lake, leadership approached inclusion as accountability. ESGA in this smaller, rural board made cultural change and collective
responsibility a priority equal to test-based accountability. The Board’s strategy created a form of internal, professional accountability (Elmore, 2004), where staff established particular values of inclusive practice. In Harwich, inclusion was part of a larger plan to increase achievement. EQAO initially provided the only unifying force across schools with ample freedom and loosely connected projects. ESGA was a tool for increasing measured achievement, and coherence and cultural change were slower to develop and less centrally coordinated. The priorities of both boards’ efforts received similar messaging from leadership. Higher expectations were combined with a space for teachers’ voices and for unified capacity-building opportunities. While Harwich’s ARMs are a form of innovation in combining monitoring with support like those in Maple Lake, their work did not achieve the widespread cultural impact or the coherent community of practice that SATs did. Maple Lake’s students with SEN were higher performers both before and after the project than their peers in Harwich. While each board increased its proportion of students participating in the assessments, Maple Lake’s management of the cultural growth during the project yielded deeper cultural impacts within schools and a more coherent impact across the board. Maple Lake’s more coherent cultural approach is also reflected in smaller achievement gaps.

ESGA was an opportunity for local actors to have a voice in the process of change, to express and address their own most pressing concerns, to receive support for doing so, and then to help see those efforts followed through to fruition. In this sense, it is an innovative project that engaged local actors, and an important case of change that allows observers to go beyond “misery research” in studying implementation (M. W.
McLaughlin, 2006). Immediate impacts for students, however, were mixed. The pressure for achievement on EQAO did not vanish with the advent of ESGA. The project did incorporate local leaders’ ideas for achieving more inclusive classrooms and higher achievement, but changes in the composition of classrooms and the sample of students taking the provincial assessment may mean that participants’ satisfaction is an intermediate outcome, and that a larger impact on achievement gaps is a long-term objective.

These two cases support the argument that local authorities like districts are well-suited to lead that kind of change, provided they are put in a position to build local capacity and take a mutually adaptive stance to authorities of the state. An examination of their impacts in achievement gaps, however, reminds policymakers that improvement on standardized measures will not come quickly. According to some teachers, it may not come at all, and a more diverse pool of assessments may be needed to demonstrate proficiency, matching the differentiated instructional techniques that strive to give all students access to the provincial curriculum.

Local authorities often co-construct and alter implemented reforms, whether by design or by happenstance (Datnow, 2006). In this project, the leadership team from CODE recognized and acknowledged this role and invited districts to create projects that fit broad, externally-designed parameters, but still met pressing needs locally. With this element in the design, the ESGA projects in Maple Lake and Harwich reached broader audiences and met significant local needs at the same time. Maple Lake’s leaders were able to address the needs of underperforming aboriginal students. Harwich’s team was
able to start the project with teachers who most needed and wanted support. As districts can change reforms in any case, ESGA’s designers at CODE encouraged this experimentation and adaptation. By doing so, they demonstrated that coherence can come from a combination of flexibility and attention to cultural, as well as technical, factors.
CHAPTER 5: NEW HAMPSHIRE:

NH Responds in Norton and Springdale

New Hampshire’s educational history is one of tension between a tradition of
democratic localism and periodic pushes for direction from state and federal educational
authorities. This tension means that externally-designed policies promoting inclusion and
mandating high-stakes accountability are each an independent challenge. When taken
together, in a context that eschews increased and unnecessary public expenditure, they
become especially problematic for districts and schools accustomed to an environment
that privileges local control.

New Hampshire’s educational environment has been characterized by high
pressure from mechanisms of accountability and little support, especially of a financial
nature. The advent of projects like NH Responds represents the early stages of a shift in
this political stance to one that includes capacity-building efforts from the State’s
Department of Education as well as other, non-state actors like universities. While these
projects and policies are often standardized and offer few opportunities for mutual
adaptation, they represent some progress towards a more supportive stance for meeting
political demands for performance and change. Local authority is still highly prized,
especially in New Hampshire’s rural communities, but projects like NH Responds are
attempting to offer support for political demands while respecting traditions of
democratic localism. Historical trends in New Hampshire’s educational policy are
summarized in Table 11.
Table 11. *Eras of Educational Policy in the US and New Hampshire*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Era</th>
<th>Inclusion or Equity</th>
<th>Accountability</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970s</td>
<td><strong>EHCA</strong>: First federal law establishing comprehensive education for students with SEN.</td>
<td><strong>ESEA</strong>: First federal law equalizing funding, introducing federal authority, and equitable resources.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>Federal Director Will calls for “shared responsibility” between general and special educators.</td>
<td>Publication of <em>A Nation at Risk</em> calls for standards and tests, and less emphasis on funding</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>In NH, inclusion law and Supreme Court’s ruling in Claremont Case call for full participation and equitable funding.</td>
<td>NH establishes state-wide standards, tests, and accountability system.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000s</td>
<td><strong>IDEA</strong>: Reauthorization of federal law mandating equitable access and participation. Now promotes scientific approaches to inclusion like RTI.</td>
<td><strong>NCLB</strong>: Political descendent of <em>ESEA</em> mandates standards and testing for all states, but also creates system of penalties and consequences.</td>
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**New Hampshire’s Political Context**

While each town in New Hampshire has been required by state law to have and maintain a school since 1647, equality in schooling has been difficult to achieve. The lack of consistent progress is due to several factors, including resistance to taxation in support of educational aims, opposition to the State’s educational mandates, and “the ideal… that
qualified and patriotic parents should teach their own children” (State Board of Education, 1924, p. 44). Educational policy in New Hampshire reflects an emphasis on local funding and control common to many New England states (McDermott, 1999), epitomized by the preponderance of town-based school systems. According to McDermott, this stance in favor of local control creates a tension with other objectives, particularly equity for all students. More recent work has explored the tension that some policymakers perceive between the press for standardized measures administered under uniform conditions and the call for diversified instruction and assessment (Condron, 2011).

In New Hampshire, the tension between striving for equity and maintaining local control was particularly acute in the nineteenth century, when education was largely provided by private academies, funding was sparse, many students did not attend, and citizens often demonstrated a “general apathy” towards publicly funded goods like town-level public education (Fillion, 1983, p. 30). In recent decades, new funding policies have attempted to buttress support for initiatives promoting equity while still maintaining local autonomy and minimal public expenditure. This has been a challenge in some areas since, McDermott (1999) argues, mandated and managed equity is often at loggerheads with local control.

The political structures of New Hampshire are designed to preserve, to the greatest degree possible, the will and intent of the individual citizen. It is a state characterized by town meetings and traditions of self-governance and local control. New Hampshire’s state legislature is the nation’s largest, despite its ranking among the 10
smallest states in population. The state’s ten counties contain approximately 1.3 million people (roughly the population of San Diego, CA), but this modest number is divided into more than 200 towns and over 160 school districts. Further epitomizing the desire for local control of public funds are the 14 towns that maintain school districts but do not operate any schools (and often have no children of school age); some towns without schools still elect school boards and pass public budgets. This is certainly a context where equity and local control are sometimes in conflict. Countering this strong emphasis on local control, as well as New Hampshire’s history of uneven funding, and inconsistent commitment to equitable public education (Fillion, 1983), several Twentieth Century efforts have sought to create a constructive balance between equity and local control.

*NH Responds* is one project that seeks more equitable funding and educational outcomes while acknowledging the state’s history of democratic localism. The State has a high percentage of students with identified special needs (SEN) in mainstream classrooms (New Hampshire Department of Education, 2011). A related concern is the performance of those students on standards-based achievement measures. The state spent several years before and after No Child Left Behind considering ways to include more identified students and increase their achievement. As such, New Hampshire is a unique and interesting case in that it has attempted to hold two very different ideas in balance for some time: favoring local control and low expenditure on the one hand, and having a long track record of inclusion for students with special needs on the other. Changes in both state and federal policy have shaped the current context and the manner in which NHR
seeks to support higher achievement for more students, greater collaboration among educators, and collective responsibility for all learners.

**History of Implementation: Federal Policy on Inclusion and Accountability**

Unlike Canada, American school districts have both state and federal laws that govern not only the general rights of citizens (including laws pertaining to persons with particular disabilities), but also several aspects of education. Equity has not always been a priority in American districts. Scanlon (2004) has argued that, like many other countries, education for persons with disabilities in the US was distinctly separate in conception and initiated for a “charitable purpose” rather than an “educational one” (p.7). Policies in special education over the last 40 years have gradually moved from an inputs-only, First Way perspective to strict requirements for increasing measured performance, characteristic of the Second Way (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). Only recently have projects like NHR offered the first foray into Third Way methods like building local capacity and fostering more participatory placements for students with SEN.

The Federal Government first played an active role in the arena of special education during the Ford Administration, when Congress passed The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHCA). Passed in 1975, this law “declared for the first time that there would be comprehensive nationwide special education” (Scanlon, 2004, p. 8). Included in this legislation were important provisions that, for the first time, mandated a “free and appropriate public education” (FAPE) for all children, the placement of students in their “least restrictive environment” (LRE), and a voice for parents in the planning and execution of their children’s education. This law, now known as the
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), spells out particular provisions for its implementation in all American school districts. Despite this complex array of laws, Scanlon argues that “a physical segregation and an academic segregation” have in practice been more common than inclusion programs (p. 11). Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) argue that this paternalistic hindering and ignorance of student outcomes due to a focus on inputs (i.e., services provided) is a characteristic flaw of First Way approaches.

In a departure from the First Way approach, two documents created in the 1980s led to more standardization in special education law in the US, thus beginning the march towards the Second Way policies that characterize NCLB. First, the US Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services authored *Educating Children with Learning Problems: A Shared Responsibility*, a document that claimed that the EHCA and contemporary special education policies were segregating children and failing to “cure” them of the conditions that caused their placement in the first place (Scanlon, 2004, p. 12). Led by then-Director Will, this document argued that special education programs were inherently limited. Instead, Will and her colleagues argued that greater, more equitable achievement required a shift in placement, the growth of collective professional responsibility, and an increase in resources and capacity building (Will, 1986). Second, the 1983 publication of the report, *A Nation at Risk*, with its alarmist language and call for a new focus on standards and outcomes, marked the dawn of the Second Way shift in American education. The report argued that inputs such as time prescriptions for support services in IEPs were no longer sufficient; outcome targets needed to be set, measured,
and met. In these ways, the paths for both inclusion and the measurement of outcomes for all children were laid in the US.

When the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law was enacted in early 2002, it solidified this significant shift in American educational policy: it was the furthest the Federal Government had ever reached into the arena of public education. It mandated that states create standards, assess their students on those standards, publicize the results, and punish the failing schools with restrictions on funds and exposure to market pressures. In the same political breath, EHCA was renewed in its 2004 iteration, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act followed NCLB’s lead in the spirit of the Second Way. It mandated compliance with the provision of LRE for all students, required performance targets for students with SEN as well as approved tools for meeting them, and provided mechanisms for both the Federal Government to recoup funding and for parents of identified students to seek legal recourse. Both NCLB and IDEA placed strict conditions on states to align their assessment and special education priorities with those of the Federal Government. While these two new iterations of old policies for students with special needs were clear in expectations, they remained murky in terms of implementation. For example, NCLB was explicit in mandating that the performance of exceptional students be measured, that the results be collectively and separately publicized, and that schools ensure that these students collectively improve. Less clear in the language of NCLB were the means by which schools were to get all students to these prescribed targets.
As the US special education system entered the realm of accountability and prescription, a tension arose between accountability for outcomes and the full inclusion of exceptional students (Donovan & Cross, 2002). Hehir (2005) argues that standards-based reform has been important in opening up additional opportunities for students with disabilities, such as challenging the assumption that special education students are incapable (p. 147). Ramanathan (Ramanathan) notes that many special educators welcomed the call for common expectations, but that local authorities were often baffled by conflicting enforcement mechanisms and little capacity to implement either policy. This shift in measurement and placement is one that brought with it a major need for change in teacher expectations, individual practice, and collective professional culture.

The final and most recent national policy trend impacting New Hampshire is the Obama Administration’s competitive Race to the Top (RTT) program. The Federal program called for innovative proposals from states that promoted a number of Third Way principles, including additional resources but also competitive performance targets. New Hampshire’s proposal similarly promoted Third Way reforms: employing district networks (like those in ESGA); implementing additional performance targets; mentoring, induction, monitoring, and networking to improve teaching; and altering high school curricula to enhance economic competitiveness. The proposal emphasized the tradition of local control and sought to achieve compliance through new funding criteria and “by putting in place a non-negotiable requirement to focus on implementation of practices with the strongest evidence base” (Department of Education, p. 4). Consistent with their tradition of local control, many districts refused to participate in the State’s application.
for RTT funding. This and other factors likely contributed to the denial of New Hampshire’s application for additional federal funds in the summer of 2010. Local control and the Second Way had ruled the day.

**History of Implementation: New Hampshire**

As federal policy changed to mandate both higher achievement and increased inclusion for students with SEN, it often did so by citing principles of equity and fairness (Ramanathan, 2008). In New Hampshire, this desire for equity has often conflicted with traditions of local control, with the political pendulum between the two swinging back and forth for more than 150 years.

**Funding and local control**

Longstanding debates over educational funding and taxation are one example of the equity-localism tension that has played out in the state. In light of widespread inequity and uneven commitment to education, New Hampshire first permitted towns to collaborate and form regional high schools in 1845 and to unite and form a single school district in 1854 (Fillion, 1983). This era also saw the establishment and almost immediate removal of a state-level educational office.

Finally, in 1895, the ancestor of the modern organizational unit for local authorities was created. Called a “supervisory district,” it permitted the unification of towns for the purposes of equalizing funding and opportunity. A foundational principle of the law was the recognition of “the duty of the richer and more fortunate portion of the state to assist…in securing educational opportunity to the children of poorer districts” (Bishop, 1930, p. 80). In 1919, New Hampshire firmly established a State Board of
Education and centralized supervisory authority over local schools, tax rates, and supplemental state funding. For the first time, arguments for firm public commitment and equitable funding were supported by the state’s actions (Bishop, 1930).

With no sales or income taxes, New Hampshire’s schools still rely heavily on local property taxes and fees, which are highly variable across the state. In 1993, a major court case altered the relationship between the State and local SAUs by equalized funding. In a series of decisions (1993-1998) known collectively as the Claremont Case, the New Hampshire Supreme Court mandated State responsibility for equitable funding for all districts, regardless of enrollment size and local property values. In 1993’s Claremont I, the Court wrote that the State Constitution, “imposes a duty on the State to provide a constitutionally adequate education to every educable child and to guarantee adequate funding.” This decision was a watershed in a state characterized by a high level of local control over decisions and funding. It was the culmination of more than 100 years of conflict within the state between those advocating for a larger number of discrete educational units with separate, if unequal, funding structures and those favoring a greater level of intervention and more equitable expenditure.

Today, the effort to achieve equity and quality in harmony with local control and limited public expenditure has resulted in the creation of the school administrative unit (SAU). Many smaller districts elect to unite and form SAUs to pool funding and efforts for educational purposes. These amalgamated authorities allow districts to maintain control of local budgets while sharing costs, especially in the maintenance of central offices and the creation of regional high schools. For example, an SAU might consist of a
single, town-based district with its own elementary, middle, and high schools. Most contain several districts, with each participating district usually offering elementary education and sending students to other middle or high schools within the SAU. In a few cases, districts have too few students to justify the maintenance of any school, and elect to join an SAU while retaining control of their own budget and sending voting representatives to an amalgamated school board. This is a localized, voluntary process, with districts joining and leaving SAUs at will. These arrangements have resulted in the creation of over 80 SAUs and many more tuition-based enrollment agreements where students often cross district, SAU, and even state lines to attend regional middle and secondary schools. In some cases, students with SEN are sent to neighboring SAUs or states to attend special schools and programs when students’ needs are deemed beyond the capacity of the local authority.

**Equity and inclusion**

In New Hampshire, changes in the decade preceding IDEA and NCLB mirrored the federal shift towards greater equity and stronger accountability. The first statewide assessments were administered in 1994, preceding the federal accountability mandate by eight years. The 1993 law establishing this first assessment system noted that its purpose was to ensure accountability to the public and guide improvement for all students, in all schools, at all levels (Title XV, Section 193-C:3). In 2005, New Hampshire created a new system of accountability in partnership with other states. As a smaller state with fewer financial and other resources (NH is the 9th smallest state in terms of population), the NH Department of Education joined with other New England states (i.e., Rhode Island and
Vermont) to establish a common set of grade-level expectations (GLEs) and a shared system of assessment—the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP). Maine joined this consortium in 2009, testing its elementary and middle school grades.

Movements towards greater equity and inclusion in New Hampshire were also manifested in the mid-1990s. Just as funding was being equalized and pressure for increasing test-based achievement was building, the state called for changes in the education of students with special needs. These policies not only called for adjusting students’ placements, but also providing additional personnel and other capacity-building measures to support the inclusion and greater participation of students with SEN (Cheney & Harvey, 1994). As these requirements outstripped the capacities of schools, some districts adjusted the composition of SAUs or sent students to other local authorities under tuition-based arrangements.

**New Implementation: NH Responds**

As part of the larger shift towards greater equity and achievement in schools, New Hampshire’s special educators are advancing approaches that seek to benefit many groups of students, rely on evidence or data, and permit local flexibility. Efforts like Response to Intervention (RTI) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) both encourage teachers’ discretion and a variety of approaches to students having difficulty.

More than just enhancing the classification process, RTI provides all students with the chance for tiered intervention, an approach that keeps more students in mainstream classrooms for core instructional time, uses data to track their progress and diagnose needs, and assumes that more students can succeed with minimal intervention.
(Berkeley, Bender, Peaster, & Saunders, 2009). As its name implies, UDL is meant to design instruction for all to succeed, and to do so from the outset by providing multiple entry points and means of expressing learning (Hitchcock, et al., 2005). In these approaches, authors like Vaughn and Fuchs (2003) argue that learning difficulties should be framed as poor responses to instruction rather than individual student deficits that may or may not be overcome. They call for flexible approaches that urge teachers to employ flexible planning to permit more students to access common standards in a greater variety of ways.

Berkeley and her colleagues (2009) describe RTI as an approach that allows teachers to account for context and individual student (rather than just categorical) needs in helping them to succeed (p. 89). Jorgensen, McSheehan, and Sonnenmeier’s (2010) research on inclusionary classrooms in New Hampshire demonstrates that collaboration and the building of teachers’ capacity are effective strategies for managing inclusive, fully participatory classrooms and cultivating collective professional responsibility. What remains to be seen is if these approaches can survive in an accountability context that threatens their accepted use (Burch, 2002; Datnow et al, 2006).

This chapter describes the experiences of two districts implementing an RTI project, NH Responds, in this changing context. The qualitative data include 26 participants, including two from the planning and policy level and two dozen superintendents, coordinators, principals, and teachers from two districts, Springdale and Norton\(^4\). While New Hampshire’s history more closely resembles the high-pressure and

\(^4\) The two districts are referred to using pseudonyms.
low-support environment of the Second Way, the state’s recent history—including
projects supporting inclusion, RTI, and various forms of support—shows signs of a turn
towards principles of the Third Way.

**NHR Directors’ Views of the Project**

Several New Hampshire agencies worked together to launch the capacity-building
effort employing RTI called *NH Responds* (NHR), in part to help teachers more
effectively address the diversity of needs in their classrooms. The effort was co-
sponsored by the New Hampshire Department of Education, the US Department of
Education’s Office of Special Education Programs (using Federal funding in the form of
a State Personnel Development Grant), the Institute on Disabilities (IOD) at the
University of New Hampshire, and other agencies. NHR provides professional
development using a particular model of RTI training to help teachers meet the needs of
all their students and better identify those with special educational needs. This section
describes the project, relying primarily on data from interviews with two of the project’s
key planners and directors. Data from local-level participants is used to triangulate
impressions and project descriptors deduced or inferred from interview data.

NHR was a multi-year effort whose grant, at the time of this study, was entering
its fifth and final year of implementation in five districts throughout the state. The
project’s leaders from the IOD were experienced educational leaders in the state, having
coordinated statewide projects before NHR, including The Beyond Access (BA) project,
which promoted collaborative, team-based approaches to inclusion and to the crafting
special education plans. Like BA, NHR was a systemic project, meaning that it was
designed to involve district-level actors as well as all faculty and staff in schools. NHR was meant to promote cohesive implementation of RTI, or a uniform approach to instruction and intervention utilized by all teachers.

**Key Design Principles of NHR**

Given New Hampshire’s history of tensions between equity and localism in policy and reform, the design of NHR was in some ways traditionally bureaucratic and in other ways innovative and unique. The project’s designers from the sponsoring agency, the Institute on Disabilities (IOD), played the guiding and monitoring role of state-level policy makers in Fullan’s (2003) tri-level vision of reform. They emphasized implementation of the project in a systematic fashion across all participating schools and the use of standardized assessment data to drive instruction. The five participating districts were chosen through a competitive admissions process.

NHR was also unique for this context, offering an approach to systemic improvement that attempted to balance attention to equity and local control. The project was used to foster collaboration; it paid attention to change for all teachers and students; and it encouraged local buy-in by requiring faculties to vote to participate in the project. Districts were intended to be active participants in NHR, helping to alter structures and the allocation of certain resources to help promote sustainability. Cultural change, though not typically a goal of such projects in New Hampshire, was a novel aspect of this reform effort. Finally, while there was a mandate to comply with certain elements of RTI, there was also ongoing support. Together, these components of NHR that promoted
democracy, equity, and capacity represented a step forward from the conventional, Second Way approaches to which educators in the state were accustomed.

The project’s leaders outlined two guiding theoretical pillars in their discussion of the project:

- That the project should seek to benefit all teachers and all students; and
- That the effort should focus on classroom-level interventions, with a focus on both academic and behavioral issues.

First, NHR was an effort that sought to assist all teachers and all students. One of the two design-level participants insisted, “We did not target special education,” further arguing that the students who might benefit from RTI or need more intensive interventions “could be special ed, but they may not be.” Multiple participants at every level echoed this sentiment, arguing that NHR, while perhaps providing unique supports for students with SEN, was not designed to provide identified students with unique benefits. New Hampshire’s “long and strong history around inclusive education” played some role in this design principle, since long before the project “high percentages of kids with any variety of disabilities [were already] spending very high percentages of their day in the general classrooms.” This universal support model allowed for more effective instruction for more students and, when students were referred, those identifications would be fewer and more accurate. One director argued that “the beauty of RTI… [is] to create a system so that students get supports that they need regardless of categorical eligibility.” In this way, NHR sought to raise expectations and achievement for all students in part by building collective responsibility within the context of the general
curriculum classroom and in part by changing the perspectives and abilities of classroom teachers. At the level of state policy, leaders hoped that the project could use the lessons from implementation to make a set of recommendations for how teachers are certified in New Hampshire.

A second theoretical pillar of the project’s professional development effort was its focus on pedagogical factors at the classroom level, including instruction and attention to both academic and behavioral factors. NHR sought to promote improved instruction, including greater attention to core instruction for more students by establishing “protected time” for all students and prohibiting withdrawal during these blocks of literacy and math. In this way, the project envisioned more complete curricular participation for students who might otherwise be excluded for remediation or provision of special education services. As one of the project’s directors put it, “all students need the tier one core instruction and all students get it regardless of disability label.” In particular, this instructional time was supposed to focus on mainstream literacy and math. Accomplishing these ends involved the pursuit of what several project-level and local participants called a “blended model,” where teachers considered “academics plus behavior” in planning for students’ needs. The project’s leaders were clear about the need to create a single “proactive system” of instruction for all students, and argued that a common vision of RTI was the most effective path to this system. The two planning-level participants from the IOD referred to the importance of promoting commonly-accepted
The project’s seven guiding principles for RTI, taken from what participants called the “Iowa principles,” are summarized in Table 12.

Table 12. Seven Principles Guiding RTI in New Hampshire

NHR’s Guiding Framework, Often Called the “Seven Iowa Principles”

1. All students are part of ONE proactive educational system.
2. Scientific, research-based/evidence-based instruction is used.
3. Instructionally relevant, valid and reliable assessments serve different purposes.
4. A systematic, collaborative method is used to base decisions on a continuum of student needs.
5. Data guide instructional decisions.
6. Staff receive professional development, follow-up modeling, and coaching to ensure effectiveness and fidelity at all levels of instruction.
7. Leadership is vital.


Together, these two theoretical pillars served as a foundation for the implementation of the entire project. In particular, they influenced four factors that drove the application and formative stages of the implementation of NHR and the roles the project’s leaders outlined for themselves and district-level actors: the role of district offices, the use of team-based leadership, the need for data to guide decisions, and the importance of blending pressure by monitoring and support through coaching.

5 One project leader from the IOD called these the “Seven Iowa Principles.” They appear both in documents created by the NHR team as well as those published by the state Department of Education to guide the implementation of RTI.
Application Process

Influenced by a focus on all students (and not just those with SEN) and a desire to effect change in universal instructional practice, the project sought applications from across the state and selected five districts from five different SAUs (some districts share an SAU’s administrative office with non-participating districts while others are single-district SAUs). As part of the application and initial implementation process, the NHR leadership team emphasized four important factors that districts had to attend to as part of their applications:

- Districts as key implementers: In considering applications from interested districts, the NHR leadership team sought districts they thought would be strong partners. In particular, though districts selected a focus area (i.e., literacy or behavior) for their RTI teams, they had to demonstrate a willingness to blend attention to both behavioral and academic needs, taking a more holistic view of students. In addition, local authorities had to demonstrate some capacity to building consensus within their districts, beginning with gaining three-fourths votes of approval from participating schools. One key leader called the initial process “a competitive selection process for districts and schools,” implying a search for partners that demonstrated not only a willingness to participate but also the capacity to be successful with the project. Districts had to marshal support from all educational levels, from early childhood through high school. Finally, the districts needed to show some experience with building and executing collaborative endeavors. For example, several participating local authorities had
experience with Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)—another project that, like NHR, employed a systematic approach, collaborative teams, and common language. Some local construction and flexibility was needed, but the project also had clear “north stars,” including inclusive education (e.g., all students were part of a single “proactive educational system” where they all received instruction in core curriculum), a tiered system, ongoing professional development, and visible support from district leadership. While building infrastructure for sustainability, districts also had to be willing to implement the RTI model with fidelity and welcome visitors to monitor and coach participants.

- **Role of teams:** Collaborative teams were another essential component of NHR. Each participating district had to form two types of teams, at the district and school levels. Each participating school created a group of administrators, general curriculum educators, special educators, and other support staff (e.g., Title I staff, school nurse, or paraprofessionals). This team met regularly to address students’ needs, tier them, and review data on their progress. School-level teams often sent a portion of their membership to district-level teams, who worked on supporting and systematizing the implementation of the model to ensure consistency.

- **Data:** Using data to monitor students’ progress is an essential component of RTI (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). As part of their application to NHR, all participating districts had to demonstrate willingness to review and select appropriate monitoring and screening instruments and commit time to their regular administration. Teams had to engage in “data-based decision making,” which
designers felt would “clear up a lot of the subjectivity” about addressing students who were performing poorly. The use of data was intended to support a more thorough and accurate response to students who were performing poorly. Referrals for special education services, it was argued, should be substantiated by the presence of demonstrated needs, manifested in a review of these data. Standardized test scores from NECAP were an important form of data for review and all students’ improvement on this measure was an explicitly stated objective, though some school-level staff disagreed with this principle.

• **Training, coaching, and monitoring:** Districts had to demonstrate capacity and willingness to pursue professional development, both through NHR’s staff and from other sources. The districts themselves had to demonstrate willingness to engage in much of this development internally. They were expected to help to “design, implement, and monitor” the project, and to pay special attention to the fidelity of a particular conceptual model RTI, in order to “stabilize the model within the district.” Representatives from the IOD played dual roles as monitors and coaches by visiting districts, schools, and team meetings to offer facilitation, support implementation, and monitor the fidelity of local actors’ implementation of RTI. For example, checklists were used by monitors to assess fidelity to their model of RTI. In addition, however, these representatives from NHR were expected to maintain regular relationships with local educators, offering technical guidance and support for the growth of collaboration, monitoring fidelity to the project’s design, and supporting implementers in integrating pre-existing policies
with the wholesale change that RTI represented. This dual role—of pressurized monitoring coupled with coaching and support—is discussed in more detail in the following section.

**Role of Designers and Support Staff**

After selecting districts to participate, representatives of the IOD established ongoing relationships with the five participating local authorities. The project’s leaders recruited experienced members of past projects to act as their key liaisons to the participating districts. Through these key liaisons, the project’s sponsoring organization played an important dual role similar to the *guided coaching* that was part of ESGA: the project coupled pressuring districts to comply with a particular vision of change with supporting them through their unique experiences with the process. First, the IOD’s liaisons made regular visits to schools, applying mild pressure by monitoring districts’ fidelity to the project’s model and reporting back to NHR’s planning staff. These staff also played an important supportive role by coaching leaders and teachers in the instructional principles of RTI as well as facilitating cultural growth in the form of new group norms and activities. Along with its vision-setting function, this blended pressure-support model was a key part of the way that NHR’s leadership assumed the responsibilities often undertaken by formal policymakers in large-scale projects. By taking this mutually adaptive approach, however, the project blended the role of conventional compliance officers with that of coaches who support highly individualized growth to create a unique role similar to that employed by CODE in Ontario. Is the US, and especially in New Hampshire, it is rare for staff to play these roles as part of a large-
scale project.

The employment of both pressure for change and support for local improvement and sustainability were equally important, according to one of the project’s designers:

You absolutely have to have both pieces. I think if it were 100% push from the outside with no local buy-in it’d be guaranteed failure. …I think the local buy-in is necessary for getting started with the work and beginning the work. I think having external support and accountability and check-in is key for the sustainability of that work.\textsuperscript{306}

The project’s leaders pursued the establishment of a difficult balance in supporting the work of guidance coaches. Some elements of the project were clearly articulated by NHR’s leadership, such as the need for collaborative teams, the guiding principles of RTI, and the importance of local leaders encouraging and achieving local buy-in among staff. Alternately, the project allowed local authorities to define aspects of their NHR experience, such as “their philosophy of learning within the academic areas, particularly in the literacy area.”\textsuperscript{307} Visits to schools and district offices were intended to be regular and to facilitate consistent, ongoing relationships. Those employing this guided coaching model often employed checklists and other consistency and fidelity measures, they also occasionally engaged in conversations around solving local problems like making tailored action plans in response to students’ achievement data.

The formation of the district leadership teams is a key example of this balancing act between pressure and support. Each participating district established a leadership team. For these newly-formed groups, the project’s guidance coaches initially played important roles as facilitators. The coaches set agendas and helped establish group norms. These norms were often locally derived to permit groups to function smoothly, and
agendas were written internally. In addition, however, coaches were present in order “to establish a system-wide RTI approach within the district across all the buildings so there is a common framework for how they do business.” The project’s coaches, in their facilitation roles, helped these teams develop common instructional models for local districts, especially in the area of literacy. Both across and within districts, “consistency in the content” was an important part of this approach. One designer felt it was important to press districts to “come up with their definitions and to describe their philosophy of learning” across content areas, especially in literacy.  

This dual structure of applying pressure and supplying support was difficult for district-level actors to accept at first, and many struggled in the initial stages of implementation. In part, the project’s leaders felt these difficulties in initiating implementation were due to districts’ expecting an outside agency to “do the work,” or to direct instructional improvements and cultural changes at the school level. District-level actors were historically accustomed to either being left on their own or to receiving strict mandates from policy makers. NHR, in a sense, asked them both to adhere to an externally-designed model and to adapt its implementation to their local circumstances and most pressing needs. While NHR provided some professional development and training, it was, for the local participants, also an “opportunity to restructure business in their schools,” including priorities and relationships among faculty and staff. Such external pressure to find internal solutions was novel and challenging.

This innovative design presented some challenges for planners at the IOD as well. They found it difficult to design a project that had clear frameworks but could also be
flexible in its execution. Interview participants from districts and schools recalled that the delineation between which aspects of NHR were part of the fixed model and which were open for interpretation was not always clear. The project’s designers conceded this as well: “I think we would have been in better position to define the thing upfront very clearly, and then go forward with it. Because people have continued to wonder.”

For example, participating districts were permitted to be both top-down and bottom-up in their defining of local roles within the project. While this created some uncertainty for participants, NHR’s directors felt this honored a tradition of local decision-making:

At the end of the day, we’re very careful to say ‘What are you locally adopting and how can we support you to continue to improve and use your student outcome data to evaluate whether or not that program is getting you where you want to go?’ So I would say that curriculum philosophy has to be local.

While there was some frustrating uncertainty, at least one principal at a participating school appreciated the balance of flexibility and prescription, alongside pressure and support. She recalled that a lack of local voice had led leaders in her area to decline government funding in the past, but was appreciative of the unique, mutually adaptive stance taken in this case:

There was a previous federal project that we said, “No, thank you,” because we weren’t going to fit in their mold. [NH Responds] gave us some rules that we had to apply… however, within that we’ve had a lot of flexibility… There were some things that just had to be in place.

The project’s professional development efforts were intended to walk this fine line between support for local goals and pressure to adhere to external mandates. Building capacity in the effective use of data was also an important component of NHR’s
vision of RTI. Districts were required to select screening tools to monitor progress of students’ and tier students appropriately, but could select the tools themselves. Team meetings at schools became opportunities to review significant amounts of student data, but the project’s designers also realized that these meetings could be bewildering experiences for some staff. They therefore worked to “help teams evaluate what is an evidence-based practice.” The use of regularly collected data from standardized screening tools is an important component of RTI, and it is intended to facilitate placement of students on a continuum of learning, shape how students receive extra assistance, and form the basis for referrals to special education services. External pressure to use standardized test score data in order to enhance achievement on NECAP was an ever-present issue in schools, despite some local flexibility in selecting tools to collect this data.

Beyond the more technical challenge of raising achievement scores, pressure to implement cultural changes like collaborative teams and classrooms with multiple adults was prevalent. Regular visits by NHR’s liaisons sought to monitor fidelity to the project’s goals for professional culture. The most tangible manifestation of this monitoring was the series of instruments used by visitors from the project to ensure adherence to key principles of the RTI model. In particular, NHR assessed fidelity of implementation in terms of involvement of staff from a diverse array of departments and levels, clear goals and processes, and efforts to ensure greater pedagogical consistency.

Because they engaged in roles that called on them to apply pressure and offer support, the project’s liaisons to local actors took a stance rooted in guided coaching,
supporting some local priorities while also ensuring adherence to the project’s goals. Loose definitions of the RTI model and a tradition of local control were just two factors that made it a challenge to maintain this stance over time. NHR was not a project designed to focus exclusively on students with special needs, their low-income peers receiving Title I services, or any other subgroup. One of the project’s two key coordinators was adamant that NHR was intended to have a “whole school focus,” describing their RTI model “as a school improvement model not an add-on initiative. We’ve been very clear. This is a school improvement model, this should be the biggest umbrella under which you organize everything else.” With regard to students with special needs, his colleague noted the project’s leaders had high hopes of “raising expectations” for more students, a sentiment that the project’s leaders felt was in line with policy trends toward greater educational equity.

**Intended Role of the District**

The project sought districts whose character and recent history made them willing and able partners in reform. This requirement had both structural and cultural implications for participating local authorities. NHR’s leadership and application materials clearly stated that participating districts had to commit to structural change, like allocating substantial meeting time and effort towards collecting and analyzing various forms of data. Districts also had to demonstrate willingness to change culture. Application had to demonstrate “a willingness to address and alter adult behavior and environmental factors” as part of a systemic, district-wide approach. While essentially
a project implemented at the school level, NHR’s leaders and designers felt the
involvement of the central office was essential:

District-level support is necessary for sustainability. … [T]he district
approves professional development activities, approves expenditures, sets
policy, and creates initiatives that can often compete with RTI
implementation if the district has not bought in. Also, district-level
policies can contradict what we are trying to do if RTI is not a district
level priority.  

In this way, NHR’s designers hoped to find partners in implementation whose priorities
and leadership would help to create a cohesive system and a unified set of professional
and cultural priorities. One district-level special education coordinator called this an
important part of being “in the umbrella,” and “the most intricate part of the…initial
implementation.”

Once accepted, the project outlined roles for local authorities to play in the
implementation of the work. Overall, it was important for authorities in each district to
demonstrate support for the project and subsequently ensure systematic implementation
of RTI by having “a complete unified model within the system” for instruction and
RTI.

The project was intended to focus on the whole district. Each participating local
authority had to form a whole-district team, involve representatives from all levels, and
establish “a common framework for how [to] do business.” Unlike implicit cultural
change? processes of the past, NHR wanted leadership teams to go through “a very
formal process” that asked them to “build consensus within their schools” and then
“[confirm] the consensus through very formal rating approaches” like voting. This
approach to harnessing local commitment was designed to honor local authority while also trying to promote greater equity. By design, the process would help staff make progress in two areas. First, “teachers, feel… like they have say in the process” of change. Second, the work promoted universal achievement and all students’ potential, targeting teachers’ “belief barriers.”

Participation in NHR required local leaders, special educators, and general curriculum teachers to make the same collective commitment to raising achievement for all students. Each district’s leaders had to form and become members of teams themselves, as well as “participate in training, free up their staff, and participate in the coaching and facilitation.” Asking local authorities to commit their own resources (both time and money) was part of the plan to ensure alignment, full implementation, and sustainability.

Although they committed to the principles of NHR, participating districts were clearly also under other pressures, including expectations for universal achievement of learning standards and accountability on high-stakes, standards-based assessments. Leaders from NHR felt that the RTI initiative was an important opportunity to increase learning and achievement for all students. Rather than viewing inclusive practice and more effective instruction as being in tension with accountability mechanisms like NECAP, they saw this project as a tool for creating whole-school coherence:

Our state just moved to [special education learning standards that are] very academic and very strongly aligned with the general education standards [and] a statewide accountability assessment for kids with the most significant cognitive disabilities. Our statewide alternate assessment now is probably one of the most academic in the country and that’s been rolling
out this year. And, so now there’s a very consistent message from the accountability bureau [and] from the special ed bureau at the state department that says all kids with disabilities… are expected to learn academics.\textsuperscript{326}

NHR leadership hoped that as the project unfolded, adoption of RTI methods would yield high achievement for more students, and that this change would be accompanied by changes in individual and collective practice and professional culture.

**Case Studies of NHR Implementation: Springdale and Norton**

After the project’s conception and solicitation of application in late 2007, five districts were selected to participate in NHR in the summer of 2008. The first cohort of schools in these five districts began work that fall, with a second cohort beginning work early in 2009. Two of these districts, Springdale and Norton, agreed to participate in this study. Each district had multiple schools from several educational levels participating in NHR, including early childhood centers and elementary schools. This diverse involvement was an aspect of the application criteria. Both Springdale and Norton had two elementary schools and also implemented NHR at their local high school. The inclusion of high schools is notable because not all selected districts attempted to implement NHR at the secondary level, and both districts’ high schools also enroll students from non-participating schools in other, nearby districts.

This study’s research questions center on the ways that two projects with unique approaches to change impacted local actors. The remainder of this chapter details the experiences of two districts in New Hampshire as they implemented one of these efforts, NHR. Springdale is located in the more populous southern portion of the state, while Norton is a more rural district located in the state’s “North Country.” These two cases
illustrate the experiences that some local authorities had with implementing NHR, including their perceptions of the project’s attempts to balance pressure and support, the complicated role of the district office, and whether the project helped them to pursue inclusion and full participation of all students alongside demands for increased achievement on the state’s annual assessment, the NECAP. As was the case in Chapter 4, each case is organized according to the four research questions that guided this study. After describing the context of the district, each case examines the board’s theory of action in implementing NHR, its theory of alignment among various concurrent efforts, the project’s impact in communities of practice, and the surrounding contextual factors that likely influenced the project’s implementation. Each case closes with preliminary conclusions. The chapter ends with conclusions drawn from New Hampshire as a whole based on these two cases and the perspectives of staff during the implementation of NHR.

**Springdale’s Implementation of NH Responds**

Springdale is a case of a district where the central office exercised relatively strong authority during the implementation of the project. Together with the systemic nature of the project, this firm stance appeared to foster greater coherence between the district’s changing collaborative and pedagogical structures and their newly complementary professional culture. The primary aim of Springdale’s implementation of NHR, as stated by several key participants, was to create an approach to instruction within the district that was both systematic and systemic, grounded in RTI. The project was to be systematic in that it would employ a similar approach to instruction across all participating entities. It would be systemic is that all entities would participate.
Springdale’s goals under NHR echoed the objectives of existing efforts, which tried to install more uniform and collaborative approaches to other aspects of schools, such as behavioral management. Included in this growth of a newly systemic pedagogical model were new roles for special educators and other support staff and new relationships between these specialists and their mainstream classroom colleagues. Several structures—both those embedded in the project and those created locally—helped not only to build individuals’ capacity to adapt RTI, but also to begin the long process of transforming their professional culture into a community of practice characterized by greater collaboration and shared responsibility. In addition, the district was pursuing other educational efforts, including the ongoing implementation of a project with several similar principles of systemic reform related to behavior management, the pursuit of enhanced achievement in response to accountability pressures, and the construction of a new school whose opening would shift attendance and staffing assignments. Most staff embraced the principles and work of NHR, but noted that doing so meant significant effort in the midst of several other priorities that competed for limited time, energy, and funding.

Local Factors Influencing NHR

The City of Springdale is a small former mill community in New Hampshire’s more populous southeastern coast. It is a modest sized city, with just under 12,000 residents and four schools. These two elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school serve almost 1,800 students. The district employs 128 teachers and almost 30 support staff and specialists. This case study relied on participation from 14 staff from the
central office and two elementary schools, including two principals and nine teachers. As NHR began its implementation in this district, several important local factors also influenced staff. Most notably, the local economy—like other economies across the US in late 2010 and early 2011—was in the midst of a significant downturn.

The City of Springdale has had its own, self-contained SAU for many years. Just prior to the time of this study, a second town elected to enroll its students in Springdale’s middle and high schools, since they had just one elementary school of only 200 students. In New Hampshire, such tuition-paying cross-enrollments are common. As is also common, Springdale and its neighbor each retained their own elected school board and locally controlled budget, but shared a central office, superintendent, and administrative team. This neighboring town paid a portion of its local taxes to Springdale as tuition for its middle and high school students, and these neighbors were engaged in discussions with other districts as potential high school partners in future years. Though partnering in the same SAU, this neighboring district was not considered a participant in NHR. Such arrangements highlight the tradition of local control common in the state.

Springdale’s partnership with the neighboring town was particularly relevant given the changes in the town’s economic stability. While the economic crisis of 2010-11 was felt across the country, it significantly impacted NHR’s potential for sustainability in Springdale due to a sudden, sharp emphasis in local political priorities for minimizing taxes and public expenditures. In recent years, many school staff members received Reduction in Force (RIF) notices, a practice that teachers in Springdale referred to as being “pink slipped” or “RIFed.” The RIF announcement notified a staff member that
their position would likely be eliminated due to budget constraints, leaving them to wait until the beginning of the following year to learn their fate. Town meetings presenting school budgets had become contentious, and efforts to engage both teachers and the community were often colored by a bifurcated political mood and the stress of economic tensions. One participant, who was a parent volunteer, a former teacher, and a member of one elementary school’s leadership team, stated that relations between the community and the school were strained:

We’re in such a challenging economic environment right now and this city is a pretty economically depressed place. Parents aren’t necessarily around and a lot of children have caregivers that are not their parents. ... So it has been very hard to get that parental involvement. I’ve been part of the PTA board for my whole time here … and it’s like pulling teeth trying to get parents to be involved.  

As the district’s leadership sought to pilot several different efforts towards improvement, economic woes were an ever-present backdrop that influenced these efforts. One elementary school’s leadership team lamented that student mobility had increased significantly in recent years, with almost one-third of all students moving during the year. Furthermore, the team identified that just over three-fourths of their students were receiving free or reduced-price lunches, and that “90% of them have separate [divorced] families so they’re struggling all the time.”

These difficult economic times had an impact on efforts the district attempted to implement, especially among teachers who feared they were likely to lose their jobs. At the time of this study, the local teachers’ union was working without a contract, further straining relations between teachers and the central office as leaders sought to implement
various projects aimed at improving academic outcomes. One central office administrator said that since “everybody was pinkslipped … and now they have no contract…they’re not staying after school.” In the eyes of some, such “work to rule” attitudes limited the additional resources that projects could draw upon for implementation. One principal, for example, described how recent practices connected to the RIF efforts meant that schools were “losing staff... That’s hard. So that’s affected our ability to do [different new projects] as well.” This era of strained resources and effort made cultivating additional, collective responsibility for more students a challenging prospect for the district’s leadership.

Amidst these budget issues, the district was in the process of constructing a new elementary school. With one elementary school under-enrolled and in significant disrepair, this additional expenditure was welcomed by staff. However, this project taxed the precious little time available for collaboration and professional development, as the community anticipated major shifts in catchment areas and staffing assignments. Teachers and students from both elementary schools and the middle school were expected to fill the new building. Preparations for this effort siphoned off some of the time and energy that might otherwise have been demoted to NHR or other collaborative efforts. Continuity was a major concern among teachers.

While some existing dynamics in Springdale worked against the implementation of NHR, others laid some helpful groundwork for its success. Prior to NHR, the district had implemented PBIS—a collaborative behavior plan. This program, discussed later in the chapter, helped till the soil of the district’s professional culture by promoting
collaboration, collective responsibility, and standardization of behavior practices throughout the district. In the midst of other elements that were clearly a distraction for teachers, this initiative symbolized a significant recent commitment by Springdale to standardize certain practices at all levels of the system. It is important to note that NHR was not the only policy making demands of staff in the district. Springdale was simultaneously struggling with economic, transitional, and other factors, while working diligently to codify certain behavioral and professional practices.

**Springdale’s Theories of Change**

To create the kind of change they hoped for, the project’s leaders in Springdale sought to systematize the district’s approach to instruction using RTI. By building on work they completed using PBIS, their project that was meant to systematize behavioral interventions, the district’s leadership hoped to use the project to establish a consistent model of more effective instruction that would create a more collaborative professional culture and build the capacities of teachers to more effectively instruct all students, including those with special educational needs.

As a district, Springdale pursued participation in NHR. Several participants recalled that the initial movement for participation came from school-level staff and the district’s central office staff largely concurred with this notion. This kind of consensus was something that directors from the IOD wanted from participating districts. One superintendent recalled that he “saw it as a great opportunity to look at how we were going on our instructional practices.”

The district chose to emphasize the literacy
strand of NHR, but still practiced a blended model of RTI that focused on behavior as well, due to their significant past experience with PBIS.

In their local implementation of NHR and RTI, the district leadership team in Springdale followed three guiding principles to address both structural and cultural concerns, ensure consistency, and promote sustainable change. These principles are discerned from interviews with principals and staff from the central office in describing their work with NHR. These were:

- A unified, systemic model for literacy instruction and RTI;
- Improved achievement for all students, including reduced referrals for special education; and
- A more collaborative model for professional development, and a mutually accountable professional culture.

These three principles strongly influenced Springdale’s leadership team and its work with school-level teams.

**A Unified, Systemic Model for Literacy Instruction and RTI**

While the district was permitted a certain level of flexibility by the design of NHR, Springdale sought a fairly consistent implementation of the project within its participating schools. In particular, the district wanted their involvement in the project to result in increased core instruction time, or time for all students to get exposure to common learning expectations and instruction in mainstream classrooms. Springdale’s leadership team was also concerned that their use of RTI be data-driven, collaborative, systematic (i.e., consistent), and systemic (i.e., implemented by all staff). This latter
point, referring to the project’s need to be consistent and uniform, was articulated by participants from the central office, principals, and school-level staff, as well as special educators and general curriculum teachers. One principal wanted all staff on the “same page,” teaching a single “comprehensive literacy instructional model.” Another coordinator from the central office hoped the project would construct a “more systemic approach” to instruction, and a colleague hoped the approach would be “system-based.” A member of one school’s leadership team said:

[Local leaders] felt that we needed… a way to implement RTI in something that was slightly more seamless… not in a way that kind of chopped things but… made it cohesive and seamless… I think one of the things that New Hampshire Responds did really well at the beginning was bring us together as a school and put us all on the same page about… what is RTI, what are the expectations, how do we move forward,… building consensus and looking at the implementation stages.

While local leaders in Springdale had intended for NHR to bring some coherence to the district’s approach to literacy instruction, it can also be seen as an effort to create greater pedagogical uniformity in instruction more generally. This seems particularly evident given the recent implementation of PBIS and the drive towards more consistently applied behavior standards and interventions.

**Improve Achievement for all Students; Reduce Referrals for Special Education**

While leaders in Springdale saw NHR as an important part of making instruction more systemic and consistent, they also hoped it would increase instructional effectiveness for a greater number of students. NHR’s leaders believed that such improvements would not only raise achievement (broadly defined), but also potentially reduce referrals to special education for underachievement rather than for specific
potential for disability. One special education teacher hoped the project would ultimately “strengthen [teachers’] expectations of what needs to be going on in the core classrooms.”

A fundamental tenet of RTI is to employ a diverse, evidence-based blend of instructional practices and tiered interventions in order to address all students’ needs. One district-level leader argued that it was important to grab onto “the very essence of the teaching level” or “nothing is going to happen.” Fullan (2009) has argued that impacting instructional practice is crucial, but difficult to scale and sustain. RTI is individualized to each student, identifying needs separately for different subjects and even for distinct concepts within subjects. It relies on teachers’ professional judgment, as they make informed decisions in consultation with colleagues based on regular assessments (Berkley et al., 2009). An important step in this process is the monitoring of students’ progress, or what one elementary leadership team called learning “to use data to drive instruction.” As a teacher from another school noted, it was important that data become an important factor in leading improvement, “instead of just your gut.” The purpose of this data-driven approach was to help teachers and principals “look at [students] before they need [supports like special education].”

Both district-level and school-level staff said that reducing inappropriate referrals to special education was an important outcome of this work. One superintendent argued that “we have an over identification of learning disabled kids because of reading needs.” It was hoped that the promotion of quality instruction in Springdale would lead to increased achievement for all students and reduce reliance on special education
services as a support mechanism for students performing poorly. While raising achievement was considered important by all participants, there was a variety of responses as to whether or not improvement on NECAP was, or should be, an explicit improvement goal of the project or simply a potential ancillary benefit.

**Build a collaborative, mutually accountable professional culture**

The process of implementing NHR was deliberate, patient, and collaborative. As part of the professional development plan, groups attended cultural planning sessions and consultants were invited to schools for multiple, sustained visits to work with leadership teams. Many staff members in the district saw this as a unique professional development model, distinctly different from past efforts that provided funding that also came with guidelines for spending. NHR, in contrast to previous models, offered ongoing support that not only sought to improve instruction, but also to change the working relationships of the staff. Springdale’s leadership team hoped that the use of teams, periods of reflection, and group-based professional development might engender a new culture of collective responsibility and professional collaboration.

Structurally, using professional development to build a new collaborative culture meant allocating time and other resources to facilitate increased collective professional growth. One superintendent argued for the importance of having “administrators… on board… if you’re going to have sustainability.”

Staff and the principal from one elementary school recalled that their building’s commitment to NHR came in the form of several sustained efforts to transform the schedule to create meeting time for grade-level teams to plan together. These team meetings often included a facilitator “working with
grade levels monthly” as part of what another principal called “sustained professional development.” In recent years, this effort included both general curriculum and special education staff, further reinforcing the message that all students are targets of Tier 1 core instruction and may benefit from various interventions.

Springdale’s leadership also attempted to find cultural solutions aimed at cultivating collective professional responsibility. Two principals recalled the project’s support of their efforts to create opportunities for staff to “make decisions, reach consensus” as well as gather “input from the staff” on important decisions. True to the project’s design, Springdale’s participating schools were from all grades and took school-level votes on the decision to participate. This first step was part of building consensus towards participation. One principal noted that this move towards distributed, consensus-driven leadership was difficult and time-consuming, including taking “a few different meetings to come up with even just our mission statement.” Leaders hoped the district’s participation in NHR might permit greater staff buy-in and enthusiasm for this cultural work by giving voice, sharing in leadership, and making changes in their practice as well.

**Reconciling Tensions between NHR and NECAP**

Participants in Springdale described NHR as a tool to improve instruction and to create a greater sense of shared responsibility and collegiate relations in schools. The district hoped to achieve these objectives by encouraging an approach to instruction that incorporated all students and was implemented system-wide. Most staff argued that NECAP scores would improve as general learning improved, but improving scores on
that the annual high-stakes assessment was not an explicit goal. Other forms of improvement were defined as being equally important. Senior staff also hoped NHR would reduce referrals to special education by improving instructional quality in classrooms. The project’s leadership team hoped to accomplish these more generalized improvement goals by building on their past experience implementing two other efforts—known as PBIS and BA—that involved systemic approaches to change as they characterized by unified, uniform, and collaborative efforts. Like in past efforts (especially with PBIS) a district-wide leadership team was supposed to unify NHR’s various components, participating staff members, and varied goals. This team’s role, however, was never clearly defined, making sustainability without a continued level of significant effort on the part of the central office.

In Springdale, inclusion existed alongside accountability. That is, projects like NHR were part of a portfolio of tools to improve instruction and, subsequently, students’ learning. Accountability was in some ways a separate endeavor, providing pressure and measuring progress towards learning in a way that some staff felt was separate and narrow. Staff disagreed about the relative value of NECAP as a measure of progress for NHR and student learning more generally, and there was thus a divergence among them over the amount of effort that should be devoted to preparation for NECAP. Both NHR and preparation for NECAP were generally seen as different aspects of the district’s overall efforts to improve instruction and learning. Each sought to effect changes that might bring about greater shared responsibility for all students: one by building capacity and one by putting pressure on teachers to achieve results. In practice, NHR helped to
unite teachers and numerous concurrent efforts under the larger umbrella of improving instruction and achievement.

**Blended Efforts, Similar Principles**

NHR was a new effort, but it shared principles with the district’s previous work. Two efforts in the years preceding NHR made its implementation less strenuous: *Beyond Access* (BA) and *Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports* (PBIS). Common traits included cultivating collective responsibility and systematizing practices across the district, so that all staff approached similar issues in a similar manner. RTI, like BA and especially like PBIS, required cultural change, whole-school commitment, collaborative teaming, tiering of students, and common practices. As a result of past experiences with cultural change, widespread changes in the district’s community of practice were less problematic during NHR that it might otherwise have been. It also helped that the entire state had been working with both inclusion and accountability on standardized assessments since the early 1990s.

Springdale had experience forming collaborative teams to address special education cases. Implementing NHR was implemented with significant disruption in part because it was part of a coherent, longitudinal strategy in the district. BA is a collaborative model of supporting students identified with SEN, developed and promoted by some of the same staff currently directing NHR. Its core principles include forming collaborative teams that cut across disciplines and areas of responsibility, fostering greater collective responsibility and developing a model for collaboration. It had concluded by the time NHR began, but with the same leadership and many of the same
participants, teachers were receptive both to the mode of collaboration and the particular leaders assisting them with implementation. One special education teacher called her school’s previous work with BA “the foundation of how we were able to change our school and our thinking.” She contended that, although inclusion was not a new concept, the expectations and benefits of it became clear during the district’s BA work:

Students with special needs… benefit from doing everything that’s going on in the classroom and … the rest of the students in the classroom can benefit. [H]aving high expectations of all of the students, you’re going to have better outcomes.\(^{351}\)

Her principal argued that the school’s work with BA had not only shaped perceptions about identified students, but also provided various tools and protocols that framed all teachers’ interactions. For example, she recalled that many of her school’s staff meetings were run using similar protocols and collaborative ground rules learned during BA.\(^{352}\)

The advent of NHR, then, was a less significant cultural transition, as meeting protocols and collaborative teams were often already in place.

PBIS is also a systemic program, focused on shaping students’ conduct through the implementation of behaviorist theories that rely on immediate punishments and rewards. For five years before applying for participation in NHR, Springdale had been implementing this project, which stresses the formation of collaborative leadership teams, common rules and expectations, and systemic, school-wide (or district-wide) implementation. This systematic, unifying behavioral effort is working concurrently with NHR, promoting similar principles like unified approaches to problems, and commonly-held high expectations of all students. One special education coordinator said it was
designed to “change the culture of [a] school and the culture of [the] teams.” It promoted “a big level of dialogue that never happened before,” particularly in the use of specific checklists and observation instruments that noted fidelity to guiding principles. Like RTI, PBIS used a tiered system for classifying students and all staff were expected to participate in one way or another. One teacher said “I’m required to help maintain the system… everybody has to be on board.”

Springdale’s history of implementation prior to NHR included systemic approaches, collaborative teams, fidelity checks, and cultural transformation. Their participation in PBIS and BA are the two most prominent examples of these efforts. PBIS, the previous effort most prominently mentioned by participants, was described as being especially helpful in preparing the district for RTI, given its emphasis on “early intervention” and “common language.” These other systematic, collaborative efforts also meant significant PD in differentiating instruction and universal design, important principles in the implementation of RTI.

Throughout these previous efforts, accountability for increasing NECAP results remained a significant influence on the district’s priorities. The pressure for improvement and universal achievement had been present for many years, making ample performance data available to districts. The designation that the district and several schools received, of being “in need of improvement,” were further reminders of the pressure to enhance performance for more students. The district’s leaders felt compelled to focus attention on this all-important measure, but also hoped to protect teachers from inundation flood of reforms, projects, and programs that were often temporary or unsustainable efforts.
They tried to frame NHR as part of a long-term trajectory of improvement, rather than a new direction. Selecting and implementing NHR was one of Springdale’s primary ways to further existing goals of codifying professional practice and enhancing achievement. In particular, NHR helped reconcile existing efforts through its focus on data and reflection, its use of protected teaching time, and its integration into larger school improvement planning.357

NHR asked schools and teachers not only to practice a form of inclusion, but to significantly change the level of participation for all students, especially in their exposure to core instruction, or common state curricula in mainstream classrooms. Both school-level and district-level staff defined NHR as a project meant to “supplement not supplant” for all students, especially those identified with exceptional needs who might otherwise be excluded.358 Schools in Springdale established “protected time,” during which students were not to be withdrawn from classes for additional support.359 Those who needed additional help, generally in tiers two and three, were temporarily withdrawn outside of these core instruction blocks. Furthermore, these groups could be composed of any students who needed assistance with a particular concept, rather than students pre-identified for withdrawal due to learning issues. For students in special education, this meant that NHR helped local schools to “work out that relationship between the core instruction, RTI, and the additional services to make them more cohesive.”360 This aspect of the project distributed responsibility for students’ learning by diversifying the groups of students who remained and those who were temporarily withdrawn for support. Both students with and without identified SEN could be chosen to receive additional support or
to remain in the classroom. The membership of these groups changed as classes moved on to new discrete concepts.

The project’s use of data was also important for helping to focus teachers’ energy on a unified improvement objective, rather than on improvement for NECAP alone. Schools had been flooded with data for many years, especially since the advent of NCLB. A foundational aspect of RTI is effective use of specific and recent data. While the annual publication of performance data and the labels applied to districts and schools by accountability structures intensified pressure to improve, one superintendent noted that NHR helped provide more regular, meaningful information and promoted reflection:

We can’t stand back and not look at the mirror anymore because we’re forced into it. So if we’re going to be forced to look in the mirror then we might as well do something to comb our hair better, so to speak.361

This self-improvement came in the form of collective reflection on a focused array of student data (not just the NECAP) and assistance with data-based action plans. One principal recalled that, despite being flooded with data, she and her staff had “come together to make very solid recommendations and … subsequently planned to increase student achievement … [For example], we’ve put in place very involved reading strategies.”362 A variety of data sources were used for this purpose, with NECAP prominent among them. Several other standardized instruments, such as DIBELS literacy assessments, were also used as key tools for reflection and improvement.363

The model of RTI promoted by NHR held several principles in common with other efforts that Springdale had implemented in recent years, including team-based implementation, systematic focus, and encouraging a more collaborative, mutually
accountable culture. Accountability remained a significant priority for these schools, especially given the District in Need of Improvement (DINI) and School in Need of Improvement (SINI) designations that local actors had received from state and federal monitors. NHR and RTI were, in part, efforts to meet improvement goals defined by standardized assessments. For example, NHR staff worked with principals and district leaders on mandated improvement plans. Further, RTI is an approach recommended by the federal government through IDEA for addressing learning issues and poor performance in general (Ramanathan, 2008). Staff disagreed sharply over whether or not improvement on NECAP (for anyone) was an explicit goal of NHR. More generally, NECAP appeared to be one of several threads that staff in the district were trying to weave together as part of their overall quest to improve. NHR and previous efforts like BA and PBIS were all projects aimed at encouraging collaboration and shared responsibly for improvement. These efforts were all amalgamated efforts to improve their daily work, staff said. The pressure of NECAP was a measure to attend to, but not something generally seen as a driver of their professional practice.

**Singular, School-Wide Focus**

Improving students’ learning became a central focus of all efforts, including professional development, NHR, and the behavioral system, PBIS. A group of teachers from a leadership team noted, “you have to maintain a single focus even if you have 100 things going on… [O]ur focus has been literacy and … everything has fallen under literacy, even behavior as it affects literacy.” NCLB and IDEA, two major pieces of federal legislation, have distinctly different areas of focus and levers of enforcement, yet
schools and districts must succeed according to the standards of both in order to remain in good standing and continue to receive federal funds (Ramanathan, 2008). A special education teacher noted that schools were still “consistently struggling with making AYP,” making accountability s driving concern, despite trying to practice inclusion and differentiated instruction at the same time with the help of efforts like RTI.367

In Springdale, district leaders took advantage of NHR’s design to use RTI, as well as teachers’ experiences with similar efforts like PBIS, to focus on building a comprehensive model for literacy instruction. In this way, NHR was a tool to help unite several efforts that might otherwise pull schools in competing directions, as inclusion and accountability often do (M. J. McLaughlin & Thurlow, 2003; Ramanathan, 2008). In its implementation, however, NHR became a tool for staff to build a coherent model of literacy instruction that would help all students achieve.

The project helped to bring about greater coherence among several efforts by creating structures of collaboration, including time and space for meetings and protocols to push staff to discuss various efforts and their vision for uniting them. One senior staff member argued that the project brought a common language and the opportunity to craft a shared understanding of their collective work:

[NHR] has made the district much more cohesive, and from a systemic approach …I think it’s allowed people to come to the table and have conversations and/or protocols: protocols to running a meeting, understanding where people come from, and understanding of the experiences that they bring to the table. [It also helped in providing] some common knowledge and definitions.368

By bringing staff to the table and facilitating discussions, NHR helped to reconcile accountability and inclusion by framing them each as components to the same plan
leading to a common goal. While the pressure of annual high-stakes tests caused NECAP to dominate some discussions, it also often could be seen as part of a broader plan for improvement.

This focus helped NHR serve as a unifying effort rather than another task to be completed:

We have wanted to increase student achievement and …that’s what this project has all been about, bringing the behavioral piece and the reading piece, the literacy piece together and we really wanted to see student achievement increase. So … when we got the AYP results several weeks ago we were really excited because our students had made huge gains.369

As noted earlier, the project’s designers saw NHR as an initiative that could shape literacy and behavior in a blended fashion and, as a result, increase achievement on NECAP and other measures of learning. Springdale’s local actors generally used the project in this way, despite some disagreement regarding the role of state assessments as an important measuring tool. Literacy remained their focus, particularly in the work of improving the classroom environment. To accomplish these goals, principals pointed to major changes like “a complete reorganization of schedules” and monitoring of teachers for fidelity to the project’s various elements.370

Within this whole-school focus, students’ learning became the main priority. NHR and other projects became part of a variety of tools to help teachers meet the broader goal of increasing student achievement. All efforts were subsumed under this larger goal of improving instructional environments. Members of one school’s leadership team pointed to Title I tutors and services as one example of this, calling the use of the two programs “complementary,” and noting that tutors tried to “work with the classroom
teacher to work on similar skills so that they’re not fracturing the [instructional] program.\textsuperscript{371} Local flexibility and the use of collaborative teams permitted this adaptation, allowing these various efforts to be united for a broader, singular purpose.

Nevertheless, many of these same participants who hesitated to name improving NECAP scores as a primary goal mentioned the powerful influence the AYP measure had on their vision of their schools and their relationships with other schools. One principal was quick to note that her school had achieved AYP in one subject several years ago.\textsuperscript{372} A fellow principal at another school argued that her “goal was to have more kids learn to read at grade level,” and it just happened that “right now we live in a time when our ability to do that is assessed by NECAPs.”\textsuperscript{373} This principal’s elementary school had achieved the AYP mark in the most recent testing year, a fact that was mentioned by several participants from all levels of the district. The principal was “really excited” about this achievement.\textsuperscript{374} One teacher argued that, before making AYP this most recent year, “everyone [was] working so hard to look at the data and make changes and be responsive,” and felt some sense of accomplishment with this designation.\textsuperscript{375}

It may be that the NECAP assessments, while making many staff uncomfortable, provided some impetus for change. Special educators were more likely to welcome this pressure as a form of inclusive higher expectations. While a group of classroom teachers sharply denounced the one-day exam as a substantive goal, saying “NECAP has nothing to do with anything.”\textsuperscript{376} Two special education staffers—one from the central office and one school-level teacher—disagreed, hoping that progress in instruction would demonstrate achievement on NECAP.\textsuperscript{377} Despite this disagreement, the pressure
remained. In some ways, the implementation of NHR in conjunction with NECAP makes this a case of acquiescent implementation, or the installation of a program whose resource and momentum are ultimately coopted in the service of another initiative, leaving the larger goals of the subservient project only partially intact.

RTI built teachers’ capacity to be more effective instructors, but this and other efforts were all seen to be drivers for increasing students’ achievement. Learning to make use of data and write and utilize effective action plans with those data—even on an assessment that makes many staff uncomfortable—is an important capacity-building step that NHR helped to provide. NHR, unlike other efforts, helped to focus the attention and otherwise disparate energies of some staff, bending all other initiatives to a singular purpose. As members of one school’s leadership team said: “We’ve done AYP plans every year for 10 years … We got them written, put them on the shelf. You can’t put them on the shelf working with New Hampshire Responds.” As the project forced teachers to reflect on data, the district seemed able to force the project to help it in areas it wanted and needed most: literacy instruction in the service of enhanced learning.

**Support and Guidance from Leadership**

Local leaders were instrumental in focusing concurrent efforts on a single goal. In implementing NHR, district leadership teams and school-level leaders sought to offer guidance and monitor implementation, while also bringing a variety of stakeholders to the table to offer varied and diverse perspectives and create enthusiasm for the project.

Several district-level and school leaders described guidance and monitoring as important elements of their local implementation of the project. Specifically, staff from
NHR had played important support and monitoring roles during regular coaching and mentoring visits. Walkthroughs were a commonly cited strategy, with principals using “checklists” and other tools to ensure fidelity to the school’s RTI goals and procedures. Teachers wished that principals had more time to serve this function (one principal did as well), craving additional feedback in this environment of mutual improvement. This helped create cohesion by ensuring fidelity to agreed-upon principles that designers felt would enable greater achievement.

Leaders also helped multiple efforts to work together by offering numerous opportunities for teachers’ voices to be heard. One superintendent argued that “the trick is that people are engaged …. Multiple people are invested and have a similar level of investment.” Achieving this level of engagement meant bringing a variety of stakeholders to the table to plan and implement the project. The teams formed at districts and schools were important avenues for this kind of diverse participation. One principal felt that her school’s SINI plans “have not been top-down” and involved multiple staff. Other school-level and central office staff described how informational and substantive planning meetings were frequently held before the project and regularly involved a representative sample of the staff. Schools had the flexibility to adapt elements of the project to fit “whatever the building want[ed] to define as important to them,” including adding additional local goals, selecting assessments, and forming leadership teams.

To help achieve some measure of coherence among concurrent efforts, leaders used NHR as an opportunity to create teacher engagement through empowering school
staff, particularly through developing school-level norms and encouraging democratic decision-making. One of the project’s key leaders from the central office noted that “New Hampshire Responds was not about fiscal resources but human resources.” Leadership of NHR placed great importance on the development and guidance of these human resources, seeing capacity and coherence as complementary aims. One of the project leaders stated that achieving this coherence—by allowing teachers’ voices to be heard and permitting some flexibility to meet certain school-level priorities—was an important aspect of engaging teachers and ensuring quality implementation of the project: “It’s really important [to] try to integrate [any new project] and make it seem similar—or a part of—what people are already doing rather than another added thing.”

The biggest impediment leaders cited in creating a coherent model of inclusive practice and shared responsibility was the set of regulations related to the allocation of special education services and funds. Ironically, these regulations were designed to level the playing field by ensuring that additional resources went to students with formally identified SEN (and, therefore, that public monies allocated for them were spent appropriately). These laws and funding rules created tensions with the sense of shared responsibility and inclusive practice the district was trying to foster. Some policies meant to protect vulnerable populations prevented collaboration and integration of those populations into the larger educational structure. In at least one case, teachers cited an instance where Title I funding and regulations resulted in the dissolution of an RTI group and in a re-segregation of certain students who would have otherwise been included:

We took our kids from both classes to make RTI groups… We had the kids that were in tier one, just staying in our room and doing some...
independent work …It was a masterpiece—until we found out our Title I regulations weren’t in sync with what we were doing. But [it] was best for kids that need to learn.\textsuperscript{387}

The law’s requirement that funding and staff supported by the law almost exclusively benefit students identified with SEN prevented some of the collaboration that RTI—a practice recommended by IDEA—was meant to inspire. The work of Ramanathan (2008) and others (see McLaughlin & Thurlow, 2003) has pointed out the stark contradictions between laws and policies that were intended to assist disadvantaged students and those with special needs on the one hand, and those trying to enforce accountability mechanisms on the other. These policies had the unintentional consequence of segregating students and staff to satisfy requirements for particular commitments of time and effort.\textsuperscript{388} Observers have called the policies related to special education resources especially rigid, making inclusion difficult on its own, and the pursuit of achievement on high-stakes measures especially problematic (Junge & Krvaric, 2011).

An important manifestation of the efforts from NHR’s leadership to balance flexibility and prescription while ensuring sustainability was the creation of firm guidelines for RTI in Springdale. After several years of work, the district developed an RTI manual that defined “gold standard” and “acceptable” practices along with “acceptable variations” of mandatory principles from the project.\textsuperscript{389} These definitions were an important part of aligning the district’s efforts in an attempt to create greater coherence, by clarifying areas where freedom and adaptation were permitted. In some areas, teachers and principals had the opportunity to shape the district’s RTI model, helping to ensure engagement and adherence to this newly-aligned pedagogical model.
Ironically, one of leaders’ greatest obstacles to uniting these other efforts were many of the federal policies designed to create more equitable opportunities for students with SEN. Staff emphasized the “supplement, no supplant” aspects of these regulations and attempted to diversify responsibilities—and therefore cultivate more distributed responsibility—as much as possible.  

Conclusions

Overall, there were clear indications of successful attempts to unite efforts towards inclusion and the attention paid to accountability under a single umbrella of improving students’ achievement. Inclusion functioned alongside accountability, where both served a larger purpose of creating a systemic, coherent approach to instruction and improving achievement. The district’s previous experiences with BA and PBIS—initiatives that promoted collaboration, distributed responsibility, and systematic practice—laid the groundwork for a more coherent approach to instructional improvement for the sake in increased achievement. While pressures and regulations remain as obstacles for the kind the collaborative and coherent approach the district’s leadership would prefer, they nonetheless have made some progress in getting staff moving in a more unified direction under NHR.  

Becoming a district characterized by shared, collective responsibility for all students was an explicit goal for Springdale’s participation in NHR. While teachers voted on participation and held collaborative discussions around data, the district’s leadership team monitored and shaped this growth. One superintendent captured this perspective on balancing change, arguing that schools should be able to choose and implement some
priorities, but also that “it’s critical to put in a component that has to do with the supervision of it… So that the principal can walk into the classroom during literacy time and see [particular practices].”\textsuperscript{391} In managing the district’s growth this way, the leadership team hoped to engage in whole-school changes that could re-shape instruction and culture to increase achievement for all students.

Structural changes aligned with these cultural goals. Core time kept more students in mainstream classrooms working with state standards and curriculum teachers. Meetings to discuss data collection were held regularly, and schools’ schedules were altered to accommodate these. The project sent facilitators to establish protocols for the continuation of these meetings into the future. Staff differed on whether or not NECAP and standards-based assessments should be the key measures of this progress.\textsuperscript{392} Most participants agreed, however, that the district needed a collective structural and cultural push to improve instruction for more students.

Most participants saw NHR and the addition of RTI as complementary to the district’s existing priorities. The project’s priorities—systematized implementation, team-based practice, and data-based decision making—all needed to coexist with other efforts, mandates, and projects, with accountability looming largest. In particular, the district was trying to respond to pressures for increased achievement that accompanied its “in need of improvement” status under NCLB. Members of one elementary school’s leadership argued that “RTI is not a separate entity. RTI drives instruction throughout the day” and helps to create “more of a cohesive unit” within schools.\textsuperscript{393} One superintendent tried to frame the district’s new outlook on students underperforming on state exams as
“instruction vs. child,” where instruction should be adjusted to fit the students’ needs. RTI was selected as a path to achieving this goal. Reconciling NHR with the demands of accountability and other recent projects was not seen as an insurmountable challenge, in part because of its focus on whole schools and all students.

Several facets of NHR and Springdale’s implementation of RTI seemed to facilitate this alignment of existing efforts and pressures with the project’s goals. First, the project’s collaborative goals, inclusive practices, and systematic structure enabled Springdale to incorporate RTI into a broader portfolio meant to spur collaboration, shared responsibility, and systemic practices. Second, NHR did not redefine the work of the district, but became subsumed under a broad, singular focus on instructional improvement for increasing learning, where all effort pointed towards increased collaboration and greater achievement for all students. Finally, leaders from both the project and the district offered an important blend of guidance in the systemic approach with the incorporation of teachers’ voices in implementing the work of NHR.

The Project’s Impact on Professional Roles and Role Relationships
Cultivating a collaborative professional culture in schools was an important piece in Springdale’s push to create a more systemic and coherent approach to education. As part of their effort to bring about this coherent system of and culture of instruction, Springdale attempted to form an atmosphere of mutual trust, increased collaboration, and shared responsibility for all students. Regular discussions around data, on-site coaching, and ongoing, site-based professional development were important strategies the district pursued to try to manage, shape, and ultimately sustain this growth. As a result, a more
collaborative and trusting environment has emerged in Springdale, one that complements the structural efforts towards creating a systemic and coherent educational environment. The pressures of accountability remain strong, but the progress towards a trusting, collaborative environment is nonetheless evident.

NHR’s liaisons, using guided coaching, helped to establish a firm cultural foundation for the project that led to greater trust and collaboration. In response to a question about lessons learned from NHR, one elementary principal remarked that an important aspect of implementation was attention to various structures, routines, and policies that enabled them to begin to cultivate a common culture:

I think we wanted to move quicker than they, the project, wanted us to move…. The project helped us to slow down and take a deeper look within ourselves… [T]here were structures that had to be put in place and there were pieces that were critical to build… consensus throughout the building.\textsuperscript{395}

The structures this principal referred to included protocols for meetings and collaboration, leadership teams, and relationships with external facilitators. The ways that local actors negotiated these structures had an ongoing and important impact on the community of professional practice of the district. They were the infrastructure that is often essential to supporting and sustaining cultural change (Biancarosa, et al., 2010; Saunders, et al., 2009). Consequently, the project helped to spur the de-privatization of instructional practice and the establishment of a more trusting and cooperative culture among colleagues, especially between general and special educators; to promote greater consensus-building and inclusion of more voices in decision-making; and to cultivate the
growth internal responsibility and accountability for sustaining the work begun with NHR.

**Privacy, Collective Responsibility, and Trust**

Implementing NHR changed the professional culture in Springdale, as it became more open, trusting, and characterized by a greater sense of shared responsibility. Classrooms became less professionally private as special educators and NHR staff became frequent visitors. Staff described how the project had helped to diversify all teachers’ responsibilities, bringing them into contact with more students. Finally, several staff argued that the project had led them to feel a greater sense of trust with colleagues and to feel trusted professionally by superiors. Springdale’s professional culture evolved during NHR, demonstrating a greater degree of internal accountability (Elmore, 2004) and relational trust (Bryk, et al., 2010) that characterize improving or successful educational organizations.

RTI, by design, changes the instructional model of a school or district. While change is one difficult aspect of this process, the imposition of any instructional model presents a host of challenges. Classrooms are historically private places (Little, 1990; Lortie, 1975) and schools are often noted for having little in the way of a consistent model of practice (Weick, 1976). NHR’s introduction of a codified, standardized instructional model was a new and different concept for many staff, though it sought to build upon previous efforts at standardizing practices in schools and throughout the district. The project impacted the “roles” played by individuals in their instructional practice, including perceptions about privacy and their own practice.
The notion of “protected time” was designed to expose more students to a greater amount of the mainstream curriculum in literacy and math and to alter the instruction that general curriculum teachers were using to deliver it. Many students (particularly low-SES Title I students and those identified with special needs) who had been withdrawn for additional support in the past were now remaining in the classroom to receive instruction. Including these students more often meant not only additional instructional challenges for teachers, but cultural ones as well. The presence of colleagues in classrooms broke a longstanding cultural barrier, and modified roles for special education and Title I staff proved challenging because of the introduction of new students and responsibilities. These interactions often conflicted with traditional professional privacy, especially in elementary schools with self-contained classrooms. For special educators, this often meant working in new ways with teachers and students. One special education teacher remarked that she felt she was spending more time in general curriculum classrooms than before, and that groups withdrawn for support were more diverse:

> I do have the flexibility because I’m not specifically mandated that I can’t work with other students so if there are other students that are struggling with a certain skill that my student is struggling with then I can pull them into a group and we can work together.

These new areas of responsibility were part-and-parcel of the district’s strategy during NHR. Staff from the central office referred to guiding principles like “supplementing not supplanting” and putting more “focus on core instruction” rather than adding responsibilities to classroom teachers. In response, principals and teachers noted the need to work “really hard to train teachers, general ed [and] special ed, in an inclusive
model." This often included professional development, but collaborative planning and coaching time also allowed teachers to grow into new roles that involved new staffing patterns and the presence of additional colleagues in classrooms. A process of development was needed to help classroom teachers meet the cultural and instructional demands for competency in their new roles:

I had a realization that my special educators—and this is not to their fault—but… they’ve had maybe one reading course and this was 20 years ago…. So they don’t know how to teach reading—and it’s not a value judgment. They don’t know it. They haven’t been taught how to do that. So for me to expect for them to engage kids in comprehensive literacy model…and get them away from just being a glorified paraprofessional and providing homework assistance and things like that, I needed to get them professional development around specific reading intervention. So that’s how I’ve integrated it with the special ed because ultimately my goal is they’re not going to be …helping kids complete their homework. That’s not their focus. They’re going to work on specific reading strategies.

The realization that new roles and demands required additional capacity and support had important and beneficial cultural consequences, planting the seeds of collaboration and trust among teachers. One principal noted that her school had begun creating “opportunities for peer observation” and “peer discussion” in a setting that is “risk-free [and] that is not part of any evaluation process,” where a colleague can “put something out there as a teacher and say, ‘this is my weakness.’” These meetings, which often looked at student data, were an important first step in opening professional culture to larger discussions on improvement. A superintendent felt the project had helped to demonstrate “an enormous level of support and trust in me… I can think outside the box. I can be a professional educator.” A group of teachers from one
school’s leadership team noted that, though it took time, NHR took the important, initial step of building trust among the staff and between schools and the project.  

With the development of professional trust came progress in other areas of the professional culture that held promise for improved instruction and student learning. Most prominent were early developments in staff collaboration within classrooms. One teacher described how she had “definitely ask[ed] for support [from staff offering Title I and special education services] to come in.” These colleagues helped run centers in which all students were participating. One principal recalled that special educators and speech therapists were often collaborating with Tier Two and Tier Three support groups, both in and out of classrooms. Co-teaching was in the early stages of growth in Springdale. Despite some early challenges, there was progress in teachers making adjustments to relationships and instructional practice. It is unclear if these more tangible changes of practice are the effects or antecedents of changes in trust among staff, but for participants they were clearly related.

The district’s leaders hoped that a sense of collective responsibility would be a natural outgrowth of their participation in NHR. A greater sense of trust and a desire for collaboration were certainly outcomes of this effort, perhaps predicting future internal accountability for all students. A superintendent made it clear that the district’s message, exemplified by the project, was “we’re all in this together.” He felt it was important to establish this collaboration not only within schools, but across all levels of the district:

High school graduation doesn’t just reflect the four years the kids spend in high school. It reflects what starts in elementary school into the middle school…. I think that there is a piece of it that people do understand,
that… no one is going to finger-point anymore. We’re not going to finger point at the lower grade level, high school to middle school, middle school to elementary school, elementary school to parents… Everybody is sitting at the table saying “we’ve all got to get the kids ready for everybody”…It’s no longer “close my door, forget about what’s happening next door”… Everybody is in this together to make everybody more successful, all the children more successful.\textsuperscript{407}

One of the elementary principals agreed that this sense of collective responsibility was an important part of the district’s cultural growth, noting that RTI helped unite the culture of otherwise disparate programs:

I think a lot of this has come in place with the Response to Intervention model. \textup{[P]eople have looked at students as “our students” and not “their students.”} …I think they have become much more aware of all students … and it’s not become special ed versus regular and reading versus Title I, it’s become how we can all approach this together.\textsuperscript{408}

As an environment of collective responsibility and trust grows, there is increasing likelihood that efforts like special education and Title I will be more closely tied to mainstream instruction. Further, the growth of this trust means that effective, professional, collaborative solutions are more likely to emerge in response to high-pressure environments created by systems of accountability (Daly, 2009).

Progress in building trust and collective responsibility was not universal across the district. Special educators felt they had received less support than their colleagues. Some of these resource staff felt that there was a group of teachers who still struggled with inclusion and key RTI concepts like universal instruction:

Some \textup{[curriculum teachers]} are really receptive to having us in there… co-teaching or running groups. Some of them continue to struggle with us being in there and special ed students not doing something different…Because they feel like … the students can’t follow along or it’s
too hard, the topic that they’re working on.\textsuperscript{409}

Springdale’s teachers and staff reported more frequent co-planning, observations, and other examples of greater collaboration and trust tied to NHR. Though this growth was not uniform, there was clear messaging from principals and the district’s leadership: staff needed to develop a greater sense of collective responsibility and the need for increased openness, or what Little (2002) calls a more collaborative orientation to their pedagogy. That is, their practice was gradually becoming less private and more open to discussion and feedback instead of scrutiny. As a result, more teachers welcomed support and feedback, even if the guidance was highly specific:

Everything is very directed. I feel good about the materials I’m using. I’m feeling I can reach the kids and I feel like I really know kids. This is our purpose and you have to achieve this purpose and I really like that because …I like to know that they are learning what they’re supposed to be learning.\textsuperscript{410}

**Communities, Coalescence, and Consensus**

Impacting teachers’ individual practice was an important goal of NHR. While this work certainly had a cultural impact that was largely emergent (i.e., not deliberately managed), the project was structured in order to foster teachers’ “role relationships” in addition to their individual practice. The project took professional culture into account in its design, and installed several structures to stimulate collaboration and build cultural consensus. This consensus would hopefully serve both to disseminate the RTI model as well as sustain it once the project ended and funding and direct supervision were lost. These mechanisms included the formation of coalitions to lead change, staff requirements to vote on participation in the project, and protocols to shape meetings and interactions.
As a result, the project encouraged a broader base of participation than previous efforts and helped to unify several initiatives concurrently being implemented in the district.

By design, elements of NHR helped to build consensus and momentum for the project by cultivating new norms within teachers’ communities of practice. The goal was to create a sense of collective engagement and ownership for the principles of RTI in hopes of ensuring sustainability and a deeper, more widely dispersed impact on instruction and professional norms. Districts were required to have interested schools vote and approve participation with at least a three-fourths majority. Springdale formed teams at both the district and school levels, and varied their composition to include specialists from different departments, schools, and levels within the district. These diverse teams were part of an effort to build collaboration and unite several efforts under one umbrella. One principal remarked that, “one overriding goal… is the further establishment of collaborative teams. …Those collaborative teams will include all of [it]: the literacy piece, math, [and the] behavioral piece.”

Both PBIS and BA had required staff to form collaborative teams to create action plans to tackle particular problems. These existing teams and systematic approaches to collaboration formed an important foundation for collaboration during NHR. These earlier efforts were what one special education teacher called “the foundation of how we were able to change our school and our thinking.”

Unique to this project were the particular ways that teams and local input were used to create what participants referred to as local “ownership” or “buy-in” around the project. Several participants recalled that the initial implementation and roll-out of NHR
in Springdale was a slower process than they anticipated. One principal said, however, that despite being “slower… [this process is] more effective because there’s buy-in.” In particular, NHR’s leadership team pushed participants in Springdale to co-create the district’s local adaptation of the project:

We just wanted [leaders from NHR] to tell us, just tell us what we should use, … just tell us what we should do for RTI and they very deliberately did not. Forcing us to go through that process of evaluating these tools and even trying to decide what data we really want to make decisions from I think that was a very wise decision from them.

The group of teachers who discussed this slow, early process cited initial difficulty. One teacher called it “frustrating,” another “painful.” But the group quickly followed that these early difficulties in their discussions were valuable because “that’s partly how you get buy-in. … [I]t’s those conversations that bring out what the real issues are and, … [as a result] we can kind of take credit for our own solutions.”

Springdale’s leadership teams were, in a sense, designated by the project to be co-designers of their own locally adapted version of RTI. This design produced several effects on participants and their professional culture, including growth in the value of consensus for decisions like this, and the inclusion of a diverse array of voices at the table. Participants from both schools and the central office emphasized the importance of representing diversity in voices and opinions, for stimulating engagement. One member of Springdale’s leadership team, a coordinator from the district office, noted that by encouraging local leaders to shape the project, have frank and difficult discussions around planning, and lead local implementation of RTI, NHR “gave the ownership to …
that broad leadership team to start taking people together, educat[ing] them… By it being an equal voice, all take a piece of it and really truly own it."^417

These cultural impacts were the result of the district-level structure that drove NHR’s implementation. At the school level, several instruments and approaches also served to shape collaboration among staff, as a sort of scaffolding or guide. These elements of NHR impacted professional culture by bracing it, as a nursery might use stakes to brace a tree to shape its growth. The IOD employed facilitators, meeting protocols, and other guides in the early stages of the project in order to press local leadership teams and schools to create and shape norms of conversation and interaction in their meetings. Although some research on teachers’ collaborative groups has cautioned against this type of management and heavy protocol use (Hargreaves, 1994a; Wood, 2007), teachers in Springdale described these forms of guidance as supportive and formational for their growth. Teachers argued that it was important that they have ownership of decisions and growth, but that they needed someone external to serve as a sort of professional flint to ignite their group and to offer pointed, objective observations on their progress:

I think their role has been very important because they’re an outside entity coming in and facilitating a process. This is a process we were already undergoing, but having someone from the outside there to hold us accountable that’s really I think what makes it work. ^418

Two colleagues followed this statement by saying, “that’s why Weight Watchers works… because you’re going to meetings” and “because somebody is looking at your progress.”^419 Clearly, this group was aided by the facilitator in getting beyond the
superficial interactions that can characterize managed collaboration and begin to build trust that shaped practice (Little, 2003).

As part of the structured collaboration, participants utilized checklists and protocols to govern team meetings. One elementary principal described how the school’s protocol was focused on the meeting’s preparation, roles of the group’s membership, presence and content of the agenda, and norms of conversation. This effort to standardize meetings was in line with other aspects of Springdale’s participation in NHR. Staff noted that many aspects of instruction, intervention for struggling students, and staff collaboration (e.g., team meetings, moderated marking) were becoming increasingly governed by protocols of various kinds. Another principal called these guidelines “conversation protocols” that give “a structure to the conversations.” These methods to structure professional development allowed teachers and principals to explicitly lay out the objectives and workings of their collaborative practice. While these had emergent elements, or aspects that could be developed locally by participating staff, they also encouraged staff members to follow common processes and explicitly define aspects of communities of practice that are otherwise often unspoken and assumed.

Participants were generally receptive to the use of these structured instruments. One teacher from her school’s leadership team recalled that the protocols that guided their meetings were instrumental in “helping us with the foundations of consensus and…the structure of meetings.” A principal at another school felt the staff had “really worked at collaboration and the norms of collaboration and how we speak to one another, how we listen to judge… [We] worked a lot on that kind of climate and culture.” This
principal noted that she might not have pursued this type of collaboration without the
guidance provided by the project’s leadership team. One special education teacher said
that the project had involved a process of “very much learning to be collaborative teams,
learning how to effectively run meetings and utilize our time wisely,” indicating that
these structured protocols supported growth. Another principal stated that, while some
teachers were uncomfortable with the imposed structure, communication significantly
improved:

I think the conversations are much more focused. As we move into our last
year with New Hampshire Responds… we have one overriding goal which
is the further establishment of collaborative teams…. and those
collaborative teams will include all of the literacy piece, math, behavioral
piece… that’s what this project has all been about, bringing the behavioral
piece and the reading piece, the literacy piece together.424

This last idea— that the new collaborative teams would unite various other efforts
under a single leadership team— was an important structural and cultural consequence of
Springdale’s participation in NHR. Leadership teams leading the implementation of RTI
helped to cultivate additional coherence in the district’s schools. As the principal above
argued, NHR’s structural flexibility in encouraging locally constructed school-level
teams and group norms served as a catalyst for further unification of various local efforts.
For example, schools took the teams and committees that were guiding various projects
and combined them under a single leadership umbrella. Principals at two schools
described this was a sign of greater alignment. One superintendent cited the high “level
of conversation that [the district is] experiencing… and the collaboration that’s
happening now.”425 He noted the “blended approach” that he saw happening in
elementary schools as well as the increasing level of “vertical conversation” among high school, middle school, and elementary school staff, referring to more coherent efforts to create systemic approaches to academic and behavioral issues.

According to participants, NHR facilitated the unification of these efforts by promoting structured collaboration and by encouraging flexibility within its parameters. In this way, the project moved beyond just changing the composition of leadership teams—a clearly technical move—towards a structured collaboration that began, in the eyes of one principal, to cultivate a shift in mindset:

In my prior school, one of our kids … was always getting written up whenever there was a sub for one teacher. …Looking into it took us a while. This particular [substitute] teacher puts all her lesson plans on the white board. The sub comes in and says, “do what’s on the board.” Kid can’t read. It was very simple. He’s not going to raise his hand in front of all his classmates and say, “I can’t read.” … but that’s why he was a behavior problem. But it was really a literacy problem. So that’s why New Hampshire Responds is having a push to do blended [approaches], makes total sense. But that’s a shift in people’s thoughts, that they’re not separate. Not that everyone, everyone’s always know one affects the other but to have the team be all together looking at it for once. …So that’s the shift. … What New Hampshire Responds is trying to say is let’s look at them before. …Whereas before we waited until they made the bad choices.426

NHR was intended to impact both roles and role relationships of teachers in Springdale. Staff generally agreed that by structuring the nature of this collaboration and encouraging the formation of particular types of groups and conversations, that effective reculturing was happening. This progress was deliberately slow. Participants generally agreed, however, that staff were becoming more collaborative and that the community of practice was coming together around important project beliefs.
Transfer of Responsibility

In cultural terms, the sustainability of NHR in Springdale rested on the successful transfer of responsibility to local leadership teams. By design, the project’s facilitators and leaders had been gradually transferring responsibility in the months prior to this study, largely by attending fewer meetings, leading sessions by video conference, and offering local actors more opportunities to guide discussions. Staff from NHR were hoping to encourage more local long-term ownership of new practices. In particular, the project’s facilitators, who had been the most visible and involved support mechanisms for schools, were beginning to reduce their presence in participating districts. Overall, the project’s liaisons to the districts had not made consistent connections and relationships. While the gradual transfer of responsibility strategy was clear, these relational inconsistencies made this transition difficult and not entirely shared and authentic. Staff reported that the cultural growth was not complete, and all participants agreed there were signs of progress worth sustaining.

Facilitators were an important component of the concept behind the implementation of NHR. As representatives from the project, these facilitators regularly attended team meetings and guided the collaborative process of implementing RTI. Principals and teachers participating in this study all argued for the importance of facilitators in this process, especially skilled group leaders who were not part of the local professional culture. One principal argued for the importance of having “an external facilitator” to “keep [us] focused” during meetings. Another elementary principal valued her facilitators, because she saw that her school “needed someone outside to come
in and… direct us.” Like her colleague, she felt her staff were initially “too close” to their work on the project to serve in the facilitation role.428

Teachers also expressed appreciation for support staff who were from outside the district, though they were far more concerned than principals or central office staff about the upcoming departure of the NHR facilitators. The facilitators’ roles were seen as being very important “because they’re an outside entity coming in and facilitating a process, someone from the outside … to hold us accountable.”429 One superintendent and one of the project’s key leaders argued that NHR was “not just a project, but… [a] form of support.”430 This support had been regarded as “really strong and hopeful” in the early stages of implementing the project:

I think they laid a good strong foundation that first year that we were doing it, and we didn’t feel like we were floundering. I just felt like we had a lot of strong guidelines on where to begin because it was kind of an ominous process of knowing where to begin.431

Far from eschewing outside support, school-level staff in Springdale seemed to welcome external facilitators and value the structure and guidance that they brought to the early meetings. Although when:

You have someone coming in from the outside saying, we’re here to fix your school, the shields go up immediately. Especially if you feel like you’re doing a really good job in your classroom. So … you have to be very careful when you make that first introduction to a school, you have to show that you have the credentials to be helping but that you’re here… to facilitate the staff finding their own answers, and I think New Hampshire Responds did a pretty good job of that.432

Staff received help in working towards local solutions and creating local collaborative cultures in addition to implementing directives from the project.
While staff were generally appreciative of the role these project facilitators played, they expressed frustration at the instability of the position. A common complaint among staff about the implementation and future prospects of NHR was inconsistency and the instability of the facilitators, noting that their visitors were not always the same people. Educators in Springdale felt this made relationship-building difficult and that it impeded the sustainability of the project by failing to help them codify their new culture. One school had several different facilitators over the course of the project. Another had departed prematurely. In these conditions, transformation and local ownership of their professional culture did not fully take place. One school’s literacy and behavior efforts were never fully integrated but remained in transition, because colleagues “kind of floundered” and felt “like the rug got pulled out” when one facilitator departed. After another school’s facilitator left, teachers “were supposed to pick up where (they) left off and I don’t think we are doing that.”

Loss of a facilitator could mean loss of a local connection to the project:

> It was [the facilitator’s] presence here that really I think kept us on track, and he helped bring the vision here. It’s like we don’t have the vision anymore. It’s up in Concord somewhere and hasn’t come down here in a long time.

Such leadership would have been vital for Springdale. As not all schools were included in the initial implementation, local ownership would have helped to sustain the project in existing schools and incorporate new buildings into the effort. The elementary schools did not enter the project at that same time, and the town’s middle school, several staff pointed out, was noticeably absent from this process, but could be a potential
beneficiary of the work. Some staff at the elementary school that joined the project later felt there was less of a consensus-building project with their group and that they were under more pressure to follow their peer school’s template. The inconsistency in relationships with the external project facilitators exacerbated these feelings at the second elementary school, hampered the prospects of sustainability at the first, and largely excluded the middle school from future participation altogether. Further, greater consistency in this facilitation relationship—and the local sense of transformation and ownership it would have created—are more important in Springdale, as these faculties are shuffled about and reconstituted in a new school set to open next year.

**Conclusions on Culture**

The project’s initial vision of slow cultural change with ample local participation led to clearly perceptible changes in teachers’ perceptions of their roles, their practice, and their relationships to other staff. NHR fostered this cultural progress over a long period of time, pushing local leadership teams to make important decisions, deliberately design adaptations, and begin to plan for transition. As a result of this highly structured process, teachers expressed a greater sense of trust and sense of collaboration with their colleagues that can be essential precursors to increased academic achievement (Bryk, et al., 2010).

The designers and leaders of NHR recognized that a project promoting change at the level that NHR proposed needed to address both technical and cultural aspects. Sarason (1971) has argued that “culture defines the permissible ways” that projects can interact with teachers and their cultures (p. 12). Consistent with this understanding, NHR
sought to co-develop collective responsibility and build commitment as the key cultural elements of their strategy. By acknowledging the cultural and relational elements implicated in their model of change, the designers of NHR gave their project additional chances to succeed and be sustained over time. Locally, Springdale’s leaders facilitated this cultural growth by encouraging an environment of trust and collaboration. A central-office leader argued that his cultural efforts meant encouraging greater risk-taking: “If it fails, I’m not going to hammer [teachers] over the head because I failed just as much as [they] failed.”

What Springdale’s particular experience with NHR demonstrates is the value of alignment among various structural and cultural pieces of change. Teachers and leaders alike appreciated that NHR felt like a continuation of past work and a validation of the concurrent efforts like PBIS. In addition, Springdale demonstrates that trust and managed collaboration groups are not mutually exclusive. This district demonstrated some growth in trust and respect between general and special educators. This growth was managed on some level by external facilitators and the district’s leadership team. Springdale demonstrates these developments need not strictly be emergent entities, but can be managed as well as part of a broader strategy of structural alignment.

**Influence of Contextual and Political Factors**

As Springdale grappled with the technical and cultural implications of implementing NHR, staff also wrestled with a number of other local and external political factors surrounding the project and the district. These policies, priorities, and events obstructed or complicated the implementation of NHR and the reconciliation of
accountability demands with inclusive practices. These and other concurrent factors impacting the implementation of NHR fell into two major categories: economic and bureaucratic.

Previous projects like PBIS—which promoted greater communication and collaboration—and NHR’s mutually adaptive stance enabled staff in Springdale to achieve some reconciliation between inclusion and accountability. While the accountability structure itself prevented further reconciliation between these two goals, other changes competed for attention, time, and other resources. Difficult economic times, contract disputes, and the construction of the new elementary school were all factors that either competed for attention with the project or sapped some of its otherwise palpable positive energy. Bureaucratically, the accountability structure as well as regulations related to special education and the use of federal funding inhibited some of the structural and cultural changes that the district hoped to implement.

**Economic Factors**

At the time the project began in Springdale, the local and national economies were both in significant turmoil. This had a withering influence in Springdale, where these economic factors created budgetary turmoil that narrowed and de-stabilized educators’ work. Educators working with otherwise marginalized students were more likely than their colleagues to cite economic issues as significant factors in the implementation of NHR. Projects like NHR’s leadership teams and some of its associated professional development efforts became difficult propositions for teachers without a contract.
The economic decline was also a major issue in teachers work with students more generally, and in implementing a project like RTI in particular. A data-driven perspective like RTI assumes that teachers will follow students over time, gradually collecting information about their progress, and coming to know their learning strengths and needs. Yet, as the town had become a “pretty economically depressed place” in recent years, transience had greatly increased, making long-term student-teacher relationships difficult to maintain or even to establish. One principal remarked that, by the end of a given year, more than one-quarter of her students would have transferred to different schools.

Educational and other service budgets were also casualties of the economy. One special education coordinator pointed out that significant cuts in out-of-school programs like mental health and juvenile services meant that “everything is coming down to public education.” Educators felt a greater burden to utilize scant resources in schools to address the needs of students who were not being successful. As one principal argued, the difficult economy meant that the gulf between her staff’s pedagogical ideal and the reality they could afford—even with RTI—was widening:

There’s a gold standard. …If we could have a case manager in every classroom we wouldn’t need paras (paraprofessionals). We could have two teachers co-teaching and they could work on a relationship together and move forward, but that would be a different economical [or] financial climate.

Staff were generally worried that continued budget cuts and economic pressures, especially those to cut programs and staff, would undermine the immediate implementation and success of the project and, ultimately, its sustainability.
In the midst of budget cuts and economic turbulence, Springdale was also in the midst of constructing a new elementary school. The staff and students for this new school would be composed of the entire staff and student body from one of the district’s two existing elementary schools, a portion of the staff and student body from the other elementary school, and a portion of the staff and students from the middle school. The promise of the new building was welcomed, but also led to limited time and effort for teachers to engage in collaborative activities. One teacher commented that opportunities for investment in cultural growth were limited and might be a waste of time, given the reconstitution of staff next year: “There’s less time… to be collaborative… [and we will be] trying to build up the capacity to be collaborative next year.” One elementary principal stated that, while NHR would help create some consistency among new staff, devoting time to meetings and other related commitments had been a challenge:

That need to provide consistency and as we open a new elementary school is critical. So that the staff that are coming together in the new elementary school… they weren’t all on the same page and to provide that consistency is critical.

A teacher at another school who was slated to move felt that the attention to the move and budget cuts interfered with some of the time needed to realize NHR’s cultural goals: “there’s been less professional development time this year dedicated to literacy and improving literacy than last year, because half of our time has been preparing for [the new elementary school].”

In the midst of implementing NHR and attempting to achieve or maintain progress in NECAP, there were several economic issues that conflicted with the project.
Budget cuts, tense labor relations, as well as the time, effort, and money devoted to preparing for the new school to open all prevented staff in Springdale from giving their full attention to NHR. These economic factors had primarily cultural impacts, inhibiting staff’s opportunities for growth in the collaborative nature of their community of practice.

**Bureaucratic Challenges**

The implementation of NHR inevitably intersected with several bureaucratic structures that inhibited the project’s implementation. In this sense, bureaucratic implies that these were structural or regulatory obstacles that most often originated outside of the district. The state’s accountability system was a major bureaucratic factor, with such systems becoming major obstacles to change in other locales (Datnow, et al., 2006). In Springdale, the constant attention demanded by NECAP sapped energy from NHR’s implantation. In addition, several regulations related to special education and Title I funding inhibited the kind of structural changes and shared responsibility that the project hoped to engender. As staff positions were threatened, special educators were forced to work more exclusively with students with identified SEN to justify their positions. This meant less mainstream time for students with SEN and less support for struggling students identified by RTI. Frustration with these federal regulations is not new, and authors have argued that they are especially problematic to comprehensive programs like NHR (Junge & Krvaric, 2011).

The participants’ perceptions of the value of NECAP, its data, and the pressures the system created were far from consistent in Springdale. One principal argued that scores and AYP were the key measure of her performance\textsuperscript{445} and another central office
staffer felt raising NECAP scores was a focus of the project. However, others objected. One teacher argued the test “isn’t a true measure of how hard our teachers are working.” Another said that “NECAP has nothing to do with anything,” implying that it was not only disconnected from RTI, but also from the more general work that teachers were pursuing with students on common curriculum and expectations. Despite the fact that both of Springdale’s elementary schools had made some form of AYP in recent years, one principal worried that accountability efforts risked promoting more competition than cooperation between schools:

The challenge between having two elementary schools serving the same grade levels is always going to be comparisons and you don’t want that. There’s a good education in both schools. Do they do things exactly the same? No. So you don’t… want people thinking one school is better than the other.

A leader from another elementary school felt that accomplishments on NECAP might be the only way to assure staff that all of their efforts were “going to be worthwhile.” Staff in Springdale were clearly struggling with the role that standardized assessment played in their work. These perceptions of pressure and tension skewed the implementation of NHR, including definitions of what appropriate measures of students’ progress should be and what the ultimate goals of education were.

At the school level, many teachers were uncomfortable with the comparisons and competition they felt high-stakes assessments provoked. In particular, RTI employed a standardized rating system, placing students in tiers that were color-coded in local schools. These placements are made and periodically adjusted based on regular assessments. While the district was quite open about their attempts to systematize
practice in the district, some teachers eschewed the notion of standardized rankings in favor of individualized notions of progress:

They’re not red kids, it’s levels of support and that’s how *New Hampshire Responds* is trying to do it. It’s not levels of kids, it’s levels of support. And we also talked quite a bit one day about how a kid may not ever move color, that doesn’t mean they’re not making progress, … that may be the level of support that they will always need in order to keep making progress. So it’s kind of a better way to look at it than to say that they’re stuck in that level— that this is a kid who… may always need more support.\(^{451}\)

A special education colleague was adamant that the district have “high expectations of all the students,” arguing that this would lead to higher outcomes.\(^{452}\) She wavered, however, on whether or not a standardized system was the best way to measure those outcomes, noting “a lot of times [the test is] too far above where they are.” The notion that accountability systems’ means of classifying students are somehow inadequate is common here, and staff struggled with how to both have high expectations and to argue for appropriate measures of learning for students with SEN.

In addition to accountability and NCLB, Springdale’s educators are also required to adhere to federal policies protecting two particular at-risk groups: low-SES students and those with special needs protected under IDEA. Title I and laws regulating special education are meant to protect particular groups of vulnerable students. Critics have argued more generally that providing funds alone can lead to lowered expectations and a lack of sufficient attention to outcomes (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). This argument may apply to Title I funding and its unintended segregation of some students. NHR’s designers did not “want to limit” the project due to limitations on “what a Title I provider
In Springdale’s work with NHR, however, these laws may actually be interfering with the implementation of RTI and, consequently, with its aims of raising expectations for some students’ learning outcomes. In particular, these statutes appear to inhibit the integration of students with unique vulnerabilities and the staff assigned to assist them into mainstream settings. The laws provide unique support, but also create isolation.

In Springdale, limitations on the roles that Title I staff were allowed to play by law clashed with the more flexible support roles promoted by RTI. Teachers from one leadership team ironically described a “masterpiece” of placement and scheduling, where Title I staff were collaborating with a classroom teacher on low-risk (tier one) Title I students, in part by including them more often in their same-age classroom. One teacher recalled, however, that “we found out our Title I regulations weren’t in sync with that we were doing.” The teachers were disappointed, arguing that their approach “was best for kids that needed to learn.” At another school, the principal felt that her special education support staff were limited in the in-class collaboration they could perform, since “the special ed laws say that they need to work with their group [of identified students].” In an environment that was trying to reduce identifications and separate placements, these First Way laws, whose intent was to offer unique support, may be excluding students and limiting the implementation of collaborative practices.

Equity and higher expectations are goals that motivated both the formation of accountability systems and the creation of unique funding laws like Title I or IDEA (Junge & Krvaric, 2011; Ramanathan, 2008; Scalon, 2004). In Springdale, however,
these mechanisms—both in Concord and Washington, D.C., respectively—felt distant and obtrusive. NHR was a project that called for reculturing and restructuring. Like economic factors surrounding the district, there were several external, bureaucratic entities that prevented NHR getting the attention and energy it required. As a result, structures, like cultures, remained not entirely changed.

**Achievement Results from Springdale**

Despite the attention that NECAP garnered in the district, progress was modest over the course of NHR. Districts were under continuing pressure from state and federal policies to demonstrate increases in students’ learning, as measured by NECAP tests. A significant portion of study participants in Springdale noted that increasing their students’ NECAP scores was not a primary objective of the project, though many anticipated this would be an ancillary benefit of more effective instruction. Nevertheless, the project’s directors hoped that students would make progress on this all-important annual measure. While one school was celebrating a recent victory by achieving AYP, overall scores did not increase in a manner that would relieve the pressure felt by many staff.

Progress on NECAP was mixed over the course of Springdale’s participation in NHR. Achievement gaps in math did appear to decrease when comparing two cohorts of grade three students from Springdale. This may indicate some positive impact of RTI on students with special needs, though these gains were due, in part, to a stagnating of mean scores among non-identified students in math. These results must be interpreted through the lens of rather modest sample sizes, totaling 137 students in SY08 and 119 students in SY11. The rather wide confidence intervals—related to these modest sample sizes—are
also give pause to any attempts to over-interpret effect size estimates. These results are displayed in Table 13. The table displays standardized effect size estimates (SESE) quantifying the achievement gaps between students with SEN and those without. It also displays confidence intervals for these SESEs, which are quite wide both before and after the project.

Unlike many other states, New Hampshire’s annual standards-based assessments are administered in October each year. These SESEs are calculated from scaled NECAP scores in reading and math for the first year of the project, the 2007-2008 school year (SY08), and the final year of the project, the 2010-2011 school year (SY11). These achievement gaps were calculated in the same manner as those in Chapter 4. Using SESEs to represent achievement gaps and presenting them with confidence intervals is in line with prevailing arguments in the field and the methods described in Chapter 3 (Konstantopoulos & Hedges, 2008; Thompson, 2006, 2007).

Several results emerged from an analysis of this NECAP data:

- The district did see some increase in the means of scaled math scores when comparing third grade students’ math scores at the beginning of the project to the cohort of students in grade three in the project’s final year. The mean math score for students with special needs is slightly lower in SY11 than that of third graders in SY08.

- There was no notable change in the percentage of third graders taking NECAP who were identified as SEN. Approximately 19% of the test-taking population had an IEP in both the fall of 2007 and the fall of 2010.
• Achievement gaps increased over time in both reading and math scaled score means for the cohort of students in grade three in SY08 who were in grade six in SY11. This was determined by calculating SESEs from this cohort’s sixth grade NECAP scores from SY11 (not displayed in table).

Table 13. Analysis of Achievement Gaps in Springdale, NH for Grade 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>SY08</th>
<th>SY11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N (SEN, Non-SEN)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>346.2</td>
<td>338.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SESE</td>
<td>-0.81</td>
<td>-0.84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.95 CI</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
<td>-1.46</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N (SEN, Non-SEN)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>338.6</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>337.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SESE</td>
<td>-0.81</td>
<td>-0.65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.95 CI</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>-1.46</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * All NECAP assessments in New Hampshire are administered in October of the school year identified (e.g., SY08 refers to results from the test administered to students in the Fall of 2007). SESE represents the Standardized Effect Size Estimate (Cohen’s d) for reading and math for both years. Confidence intervals are around SESEs.

In considering the economic and bureaucratic pressures present in the political environment surrounding Springdale’s iteration of NHR, these results are important. Staff were generally enthusiastic about the district’s prospects for growth, and all participants reported at least some positive experiences with NHR. Examining the district’s achievement outcomes, however, reveals little in the way of positive impacts that might be correlated with the project (though there does not appear to be a negative impact,
either). This finding is particularly important in light of Springdale’s attempts to implement inclusion *alongside* accountability, or that views progress measured by increases in NECAP scores as only one possible positive outcome. The priorities of RTI, a method for identifying students’ learning needs while keeping them in mainstream classrooms, had to bend to existing principles and priorities established for systems of accountability and provision for students with SEN. As part of assessing the implementation of NHR in Springdale, these competing structures and priorities must be taken into account.

**Preliminary Conclusions from Springdale**

Springdale attempted a systematic approach to changing instruction and collegial relationships. Although faced with several economic and bureaucratic challenges—as well as more conventional inertia within teachers’ community of practice—the district managed to achieve at least some complementary relationship between the restructuring of instructional environments and it’s the reculturing of communities of practice. Employing RTI through NHR has prompted more accessible instruction as well as greater trust and shared responsibility among colleagues. In accordance with the design of NHR, key actors in Springdale formed leadership teams at both school and district levels, enacted protocols to shape collaboration among staff, collected and employed significant amounts of data, monitored progress, and attempted to integrate RTI with their other efforts. In the interest of consistency for the regional middle and high schools, these efforts were systemically managed across schools. These structural elements of the
project were meant to forge a new model of instruction in the district and create alignment in a transformed community of practice.

While teachers and other participants have reported some progress in the quality of instruction, this study of Springdale’s work under NHR has also uncovered several areas of remaining tension. Despite attempts by some participants to cast NECAP as an unimportant primary objective, accountability still heavily influenced NHR’s implementation. The current mechanisms governing accountability will continue to limit the scope of NHR’s cultural impact and its potential for sustainability. Further, some regulations related to use of Title I and special education resources have inhibited cultural collaboration, as Junge and Krvaric (2011) have argued is true elsewhere. Springdale’s work during NHR is summarized in Table 14.
Table 14. Summary of NHR in Springdale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Summary:</th>
<th>Springdale is a case of inclusion alongside accountability.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guiding Question</td>
<td>Participant Recollections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory of Change</td>
<td>• A unified, systemic model for literacy instruction and RTI;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reduced referrals for special education; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A more collaborative model for professional development and instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconciliation Strategy for Inclusion and Accountability</td>
<td>• Continued efforts towards systemic and systematic implementation of practices (e.g., where all staff follow similar procedures); and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Support for these efforts from the central office with monitoring and rearranging of schedules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on Community of Practice</td>
<td>• Growth of collective responsibility and trust.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Project pushed participants to collaborate and set norms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement Gap Impact, as Effect Size Analysis</td>
<td>• Modest progress in math achievement gaps.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Higher means in reading.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The district did achieve progress in terms of collegial culture and building trust: an important precursor to increasing achievement (Bryk, et al., 2010). It is possible that a
longitudinal observation of this district, especially given their history of systemic interventions, would observe greater improvement. Some additional effort is required to build a community that shares instructional responsibility in a more universal way, however. The district’s efforts under NHR have placed a disproportionate share of the burden on special education staff for managing the proposed pedagogical and cultural changes. The experience of one special educator epitomizes this imbalance. She recalled that many teachers are excited to invite her into classrooms, collaborate, and meet to discuss strategies for supporting students. Others are not. This special educator recalled that much responsibility fell to her and her special education colleagues when classroom teachers were reticent to collaborate or uncomfortable with having various students in their classes working on different activities.457
Another area for additional growth is clarifying and strengthening the role of the district. Many staff were not prepared for their new roles, with some general curriculum teachers not welcoming the changes and several special educators needing additional training. The central office hoped to drive a systemic reform during this process, but it may require either significant additional clarity or authority to sustain these efforts in the future, especially in the midst of changes in the budget and school assignment.

The results from Springdale (particularly those in Table 13) suggest that there may be additional steps beyond systematizing practice in the pursuit of universal achievement. Staff in the district may need to consider a more diverse set of ways to demonstrate learning if assessments like NECAP are not universally valued by staff.

In light of these conclusions, there are four preliminary lessons to draw from the Springdale case:

- *Unequal demands*: Implementing multiple, demanding initiatives meant that one had to take precedence or serve as a roadmap for the other. In this case, some staff saw RTI as a tool for raising achievement and meeting AYP. The presence of the annual high-stakes test looms large enough to eclipse some of the other goals of NHR, including some of the other forms of data used to assess students’ progress and classroom teachers’ willingness to diversify instruction and assessment. Daly (2009) has argued that such pedagogical paralysis is common in high-pressure political contexts and Datnow (2006) has argued that accountability consumes the majority of professional bandwidth in most contemporary jurisdictions. As a result, some staff will demote any priority not related to raising achievement. This
can result in *acquiescent implementation*, or the partial adoption of new projects and policies in a manner that acquires new resources to serve existing, high-stakes priorities, and ignores other aspects that do not serve these objectives. Springdale’s implementation of NHR was, for some participants, an example of this kind of selective adoption of policies.

- **Structured collaboration**: Collaborative practice in Springdale was not an entirely emergent entity. Instead, it was heavily scaffolded in the form of protocols, checklists, and other instruments meant to insure fidelity. While there were emergent practices and ideas, the basic structure of teams and the norms of their meetings were heavily guided by these externally developed protocols. Contrary to some past research in this area (Hargreaves, 1994b; Wood, 2007), staff saw these highly-structured and externally-managed protocols as a positive initial step towards a more collaborative practice and trust was an important outcome of this work.

- **Conflict between local and external authorities**: As special education staff noted, federal regulations and funding restrictions made implementing the full range of collaborative practice difficult to achieve. These conflicts were especially prevalent in conjunction with federal policies. These regulations inhibited collaborating and the sharing of responsibility. These limitations have implications for both general and special education models, since one of the project’s goals locally was to reduce referrals to special education and “to help kids learn how to read so that they’ll be less disabled.” Doing so, however, would
likely reduce the funding that supports RTI and the diversified supports the district is currently developing.

- *Deliberate Attention to Slow, Cultural Change:* While there were challenges in implementation, coordination, and clarity, staff in Springdale became more collaborative and more trusting than before the project. Structures had been installed to facilitate this cultural change and help foster alignment. The district’s stance on change, that it should be systematic and consistent throughout the district’s schools, was not introduced by NHR. The project was part of a longer trajectory of shaping culture to be mutually accountable and systematic in practice. The resulting experience of implementing this collaborative model of RTI left participants enthusiastic and displaying increased evidence of trust and willingness for shared responsibility. Staff felt that their collaborative progress was a notable and key aspect of the project’s success and anticipated sustainability.

**Conclusion**

One superintendent noted that the “level of conversation that [staff are] experiencing and that dialogue and that collaboration that’s happening now, I know will help out, whatever happens down the road.” Similarly, a special education teacher felt that her working relationships had changed for the better:

> To have the time to work with [the NHR coach and facilitator] to collaborate on all the units of study that we’re doing and to make sure that our vocabulary is being consistent throughout the school so that the kids learn things the same way or learn the same words has been very helpful and I’m actually really excited to see how that’s going to work next year.
However, the departure of NHR’s staff and supports also may leave many local educators unprepared for their new roles and it has disproportionately asked special educators to bear the burden of sustained reculturing change. Inclusion, through RTI, is now implemented within the framework of accountability, with bureaucratic rules slowing the collaborative process and the project’s positive outcomes not yet touching their achievement results. As much cultural progress as the project has made, staff were generally fearful about their ability to sustain the work of NHR after the project had ended and when no additional coaching or other support would be coming to the school.

The project has changed over time, but so have the participants and their practice. At the time of this study, the goals of systemic instructional change and common language were beginning to bear fruit in schools and classrooms. Evidence for this included the similar structure of teams, common language, and artifacts from PBIS such as common behavior expectations posted in all classrooms. Springdale’s approach to NHR was much like its experience with PBIS—systematic in its use of a unified approach for all staff, and systemic in its desire to impact all schools and grades. While the central office’s role was not clear to all participants, leadership staff were adamant about taking an active role in guiding a restructuring and a reculturing of the district that would be more unified in its approach to learning for all students.

_NH Responds in Norton_

Norton’s experience of implementing NHR represents a case of loose control on the part of the district, in line with this rural area’s strong tradition of school-level control. The local strategy for implementing NHR was characterized by growing
coherence between the technical and cultural elements of the project, largely due to collaboration between schools and the project’s facilitators, strong attention to developing a collaborative and mutually accountable professional culture, and empowered principals. Implementing RTI became a pathway for whole-school change in Norton. District-level control has always been limited in this jurisdiction, but participants generally appreciated the cultural guidance and protocols structuring collaborative sessions that were offered by facilitators and coaches. The central office is using NHR as one lever for increasing its influence and coordination within its schools and, potentially, across the other districts in the SAU.

While the authority exercised by the district office was relatively loose, the two participating principals felt confident that their work was sufficiently aligned at the elementary level. Results from standards-based assessments may confirm these hunches. Norton’s mixture of school-level control and principals’ quest for coherence coincided with commendable results for students. Norton was the only one of the four districts in this study to make this kind of progress in both reading and math. These results point to the importance of making complementary efforts towards restructuring and reculturing and reveal that emphasis on central authority may not yield the most promising results. This argument is explored in greater detail in the final chapter.

Local Factors Impacting NHR

The Town of Norton is in more rural northern half of the State of New Hampshire, just a short drive from several ski resorts, state parks, and a national forest. The town of just over 9,000 residents feels much smaller with inhabitants spread sparsely
over a large area at the foot of the mountains. Deep in what locals call “the Northcountry,” residents are far removed from the busy streets of Manchester or the capital in Concord. Shopping and tourism have been major drivers in the local economy, though Norton has seen many of the same economic struggles as other parts of New Hampshire and the US. The district’s experience of implementing NHR was characterized by significant attention to reculturing and the creation of systemic alignment, particularly in instructional content, practices, and relationships among colleagues. The district-level leadership allowed ample school-level freedom, though they had made several efforts in recent years to exert some additional authority in the name of systemic coherence. The district’s unusual organization and financial troubles are threatening this cultural and structural progress.

As the district began its work with NHR in 2008, it faced many of the same economic difficulties as other districts. In addition, however, it also confronted the historically difficult challenge of trying to get its various schools to work in a unified, systematic fashion. It is important to note that the SAU located in Norton attempted to implement the project only in Norton and not the other five districts that were operating schools under its umbrella.

The Norton School District includes more than 2,000 students in grades K-12, 800 of whom are enrolled in the regional high school. Within Norton, there are fewer than 1,200 students in the town’s three elementary schools and one quasi-regional middle school. The district employs 169 teachers and almost 30 support staff and specialists. This case study relied on participation from nine staff members, including two principals.
from two different elementary schools and six teachers from a single elementary school (the second principal did not grant access to teachers for interviews, only to a team meeting, which was cancelled due to inclement weather and not rescheduled). The two elementary schools whose staff are represented here were the only two elementary schools in the SAU who participated in NHR.

**Budget Issues**

As was true in many areas of the country, 2010 and 2011 were difficult fiscal years for Norton. One round of significant cuts to educational budgets took place in January of 2011, when more than 65 teachers out of a total instructional staff of almost 200 were dismissed. In the months that followed, the local paper ran regular articles about the town’s budget negotiations, including descriptions of contentious meetings discussing the cutting of specific programs, line items, and staff, as well as incendiary statements from a local selectman. One district-level staff member described Norton as being in “a very precarious position” as the 2010-2011 school year drew to a close.460 This staff member continued to say that these economic issues significantly impacted teachers and students alike, and made the new focus on NHR difficult:

> The economic culture and climate right now is just so shaky here, whether it be teachers are not being sure they’re going to have positions the coming year or students not being sure if they’re going to have homes or meals the next day… It’s really hard to keep up momentum when you don’t know what’s going to happen around the next corner and it’s been pretty nasty up here.461

In conjunction with significant budgetary cuts to special education programs and other support systems and the growth in student instability that effected things like staff
worries about their positions or resources to provide individual supports.\textsuperscript{462} One principal reminded the interviewer that the district’s teaching force had still not resolved an ongoing budget and contract issue with its teachers. This two-year period of instability left teachers feeling “conflicted,” about after-school and other duties. In the midst of this conflict, cuts were hampering staff’s ability to meet various demands:

The frustration is … you need the resources to be able to do [projects like NHR]. …[But] while we’re adding things that need resources and supports— and you see it works— when you have it all in place, districts…are slashing, slashing, slashing at the resources and budgets.\textsuperscript{463}

\textbf{Local Control and Coordination}

While Norton was part of a single SAU, a central-office leader pointed out that the SAU was made of “seven distinct, unique districts” and that, although there was a single board composed of two representatives from each district, “each one of those areas has their own separate budget and school board.”\textsuperscript{464} This complex blend of central and localized authority was indicative of the democratic localism that drives much of rural New Hampshire’s educational administrative issues and limited the role of the district office in Norton. The superintendent’s desire to build consensus and inability to enforce change slowed in the implementation of NHR across schools, but also built consensus that promoted building-level engagement.

Norton’s school district is a member of a regional SAU that covers a substantial, sparsely populated geographic area. Norton is the largest town and school district in the SAU; it contains the central office, superintendent, and lone high school in the region. Some of the districts in Norton’s SAU have no students at all, while others maintain elementary and middle schools and use the regional high school in Norton. Norton’s SAU
also accepts students at the high school level from a handful of neighboring districts who make up their own entirely separate SAU. This emphasis on local authority—even at the expense of efficiency—is an important aspect of managing a school district in this part of the state. Such democratic localism also had a palpable impact on the implementation of NHR in the district.

A superintendent recalled his early years in the SAU and his attempts to get the various districts in his SAU to use the same math program:

We have some very unique schools with our own little flavor and traditions and all those things. My job is to encourage that uniqueness while also encouraging consistency because ultimately all of those kids end up in our high school…. When I first started here and [was] trying to get a handle on curriculum, I went to the elementary school and posed to them what I thought I was a very simple question: “What math program do you use?” …Within one elementary school I found three or four different programs—not supplemental stuff, complete programs at different grade levels. And it was that way throughout different buildings too.

So one of the first things I did was to try to bring everybody together and come up with one math program. So we settled on Everyday Math, K-6. …[S]o that came together pretty quickly. But I collaborated with everybody and then after the collaboration pulled a little bit of a dictator and said, this is the way we’re going, we’re getting it done, budget it in—and drove it through that way. So some of the decisions, there’s a collaboration and then all of a sudden it reaches a point where, all right, this is where we’re going.465

These characteristics of independence and local control manifested themselves within the district, among schools, and even within schools, as demonstrated by this central office leader’s example. Within Norton, one central office staff member stated that “each of our schools really do work as their own separate entities.”466
The splintered nature of the district was partly a cultural issue and partly a structural one. While the state had a strong tradition of independence and local autonomy, the highly dispersed, rural character of the SAU of which Norton is a member amplified this tradition. As a result, one central office administrator said, there is a need for some local flexibility:

We’ve got a high school with 900 kids in it and then we’ve got a school district [in this SAU] with four kids. I mean, they have their annual meeting and they have 27 voting adults in their town. …[H]ow do the people sitting in Washington or in Concord, how do they understand [those differences]?467

As a dispersed, rural school authority, several issues were present before the advent of NHR that would have made the implementation of any systematic program an exercise in authoritative persuasion, similar to the adoption of a common math program. This would be especially true for programs like PBIS and NHR that advocate common language and uniform approaches to managing student behavior and instruction. In the midst of a financial crisis, these issues of autonomy were further exacerbated, as resources available for meeting demands were scarce and trust within the community was fractured. While budgetary issues and democratic localism are present in many contemporary schools districts, their presence was particularly acute in Norton. The consensus-building model in the district that sprang from this sense of democratic localism meshed well with NHR at the building level, but hampered the pace of change. This slower growth may make the district susceptible to backsliding as momentum and finding recede.

**Norton’s Theories of Change**
Norton’s experience implementing NHR was characterized by how the project and participants in the district achieved greater alignment between local professional structures and the desired collaboration within the community of practice. Technically, Norton hoped to build teachers’ capacity in a more unified model of effective instruction, using professional development and additional screening data from RTI assessments. Culturally, Norton planned to use NHR to foster collaboration and use discussion groups to help shape this growth and assist teachers in making use of this new data in their classrooms. In this process, the central office did not exercise significant control over schools. Its level of authority in the district is growing, but historically weak. Leaders felt the district’s role was weakened in part by NHR’s loosely defined role for the central office and in part by the political and cultural history of the local authority. Norton’s SAU is a confederation of seven highly independent districts. The SAU’s leaders, based in Norton, felt that NHR could be an important opportunity to bolster their role in schools and achieve a more unified, coherent system of education.

In attempting to create some initial level of coherence, Norton’s strategy of implementing the project had three important facets:

- Whole-school, systemic change;
- Increased and enhanced use of data; and
- Capacity-building support for teachers and staff.

Norton’s push to participate in NHR was rooted in the historical tradition of autonomy in the district and local SAU. That is, leaders hoped to use the project to create a more coherent system, but also to harness the authority of strong principals to lead this
change. Implementing this RTI effort was attractive to many school-level staff because it provided tools to meet the many demands of their everyday practice. At the district level, however, RTI was also attractive as a tool for creating greater consistency in pedagogy and providing tools for raising achievement within a framework that acknowledged local authority. In a district like Norton, where there was a significant level of localized, school-level authority, a project like NHR—that combined site-level voice and ongoing capacity-building support—was of special interest.

One district-level leader recalled that the greater consistency and the systematic approaches to instruction embedded in the professional development made the NHR project attractive to Norton’s leadership:

The summer prior to New Hampshire Responds coming in, one of the topics at our admin retreat was interventions. We were doing a lot of work on interventions and each district and each building kind of was doing their own thing. We knew we wanted to move forward, but we [also] wanted consistency.⁴⁶⁸

This same senior-level participant noted that this desire for consistency was slightly different from the intended theory of implementation held by the project’s directors at the IOD. The two central office staff both felt that Norton was less cohesive as a district than NHR’s leadership would have preferred. Local leaders saw the district as being in a much more nascent stage in the development of common practice:

In their mind, [the NHR leadership]… were focusing on building-level teams, building-level direction, RTI, interventions and everything. We were telling them, “wait a minute, back up, we’re doing good things in our buildings. We think we’re headed in the right direction there. What we don’t have is consensus in the SAU.” And at first they couldn’t understand that.⁴⁶⁹
Norton’s character and location made it a unique case of implementation of NHR. Its particular structural and cultural history underscore the importance of NHR’s flexible model.

**Whole-School Change**

Local leaders saw NHR as a tool to impact all teachers and all students in order to achieve greater consistency. Several staff articulated a similar version of the project’s “main message”: “all kids can learn, total inclusion, and make sure that you have a strong core program.” Transforming schools to meet all of these elements meant empowering an entire leadership team, reculturing building-level leadership, and incorporating a new model of professional development. The project pressed principals to change schedules, consolidate teams, and align existing efforts.

NHR was meant to transform educational opportunities for all students and all teachers within their schools, creating greater consistency and systemic practice. For example, staff members from all levels in Norton were adamant that the project was not a special education project. Instead, most saw NHR, as “something the whole school is doing.” This was partly because Norton’s schools “don’t really separate” students, and partly because of RTI’s universal focus. Holistic change in Norton meant that more teachers and support staff would be aware of common expectations and practices along the “continuum” of needs. It also meant building up leaders to cultivate these whole-school changes and help create more consistent practice across the district and, potentially, the SAU. As one principal recalled, “the philosophy here [driving practice] has not changed that much;” the project’s main benefit was “to systematize [that practice]
and have a framework. 474 Another principal felt that the project’s protocols “forced us to be less casual” about the school’s stance on inclusion and quality instruction for all students. Furthermore, this administrator described NHR as establishing a “framework for sustainability” that promoted consistent practice and fidelity to the model. 475

Teachers and district-level staff alike described a desire to create more cohesive schools (and, to a lesser extent, a more cohesive district) as the root of their desire to participate in NHR. According to one Norton central office staff member, the impetus for change began with “a collaborative discussion between the central office and [one local elementary school’s] staff and administration.” 476 Several teachers and the principal at that school stated that the desire for change came from them, but gained momentum after discussions with the district office. One senior level participant recalled that the majority of changes that come to his attention were discussed collaboratively with principals, a common occurrence since the advent of NHR. 477 RTI, in this case, was a path to an end similar to the superintendent’s math program project: to get teachers to adopt similar pedagogical stances and to foster greater systemic coherence within schools.

Like other districts participating in NHR, the project asked Norton and its participating schools to create leadership teams to help implement the project. Through these teams, the project’s first objective was “focused on creating that positive climate” for taking on the collective responsibility of implementing RTI. One participating school was able to build on its existing leadership team from previous work with PBIS. These teams were meant to lead the local, school-level development of a unique iteration of NHR and RTI.
Use of Data

The more frequent and effective use of data to shape instruction was a second part of Norton’s implementation of NHR. In particular, staff hoped for data that would be more accessible and immediately relevant than annual, high-stakes achievement data. Several school-level staff expressed disappointment with the prevalence of intuitive, or “gut,” instructional decisions in prior years. In line with the design of NHR, staff were generally pleased with the idea that increased data-based reflection and discussion would help to inform their practice going forward. One special education teacher noted how this had improved her practice and her work relationships with colleagues:

A lot of the pieces from New Hampshire Responds have been through data… they’re taking away that gut feeling that so many times people use… [Before] you would get answers like, my gut is telling me or I just know what this child needs… [or] like I know they should be doing better. And now with RTI we’re telling teachers, show me the data, show me the data. Every decision is data driven. I know that when I’m writing IEPs or writing goals and objectives that’s been easier because there’s less gut… I’ve got the documentation.478

The use of student data, especially that which came from screening tools chosen by each school’s staff, became an important part of school-level practice under NHR. Progress monitoring, the regular use of this data, was an essential component of RTI. What made it unique in Norton was that data was not only more abundant, but also more useful in the classroom. The idea, according to one district-level participant, was that major decisions would be “driven by data.”479 While school-level judgment was still an important part of the project’s implementation, the district’s leaders wanted data-based discussions to be an important guiding light in local pedagogical decisions. Professional
learning community meetings, often led by NHR facilitators, began to include “data
days,” or sessions built around extended examination and analysis of instructional
impacts on students’ learning.480 These discussions were a key part of establishing more
consistent practice in the district, and the incorporation of common planning time helped
to translate impressions gained from these discussions into action.

Collaborative, School-based Support

Offering capacity-building support within schools and the district was the final
operational principle in Norton’s implementation of NHR. One facet of the project that
staff in Norton found particularly attractive was the portion of professional development
that was conducted within the district and, often, within their schools. The tradition of
democratic localism combined with the district’s remote location helped to fuel
enthusiasm for on-site learning and development:

The big reason we jumped into [NHR was] because everything was on
site, the majority of work was to be on site. Since we’re [several] hours to
Boston or Concord, it just made more sense for us instead of moving staff
we were going to have staff working with trainers [and] coaches here in
the classroom with the students … so it would make an impact right
away.481

NHR coaches and consultants were regular visitors to schools, especially in the
early years of implementation. They frequently led group meetings and PLCs, and were
an important manifestation of what one principal called the “high-quality, team-based
professional development” of the project. One senior-level staff member did express
some frustration with the percentage of professional development sessions that were held
in more distant locations, but was especially appreciative of the later work that was both
local and collaborative: “especially in the past year we’ve had a bunch of work done on site… Our teams meet weekly and New Hampshire Responds membership comes up monthly in almost every school. So … that’s been a huge help.” Viewing professional learning as an ongoing process, and one that should take place at school sites, was an engaging element of NHR that was similar to ESGA in Ontario. These regular opportunities for staff to meet and collaborate allowed for a balance between the project outcomes that designers desired and the needs of school-level participants.

The district’s leadership sought to build the capacity of all teachers. This included refocusing the work of all staff towards improving instruction and offering teachers the tools to enable them to meet the academic needs of all students. This plan included general education teachers, special educators, and even behavioral specialists, who were all asked to alter their roles to be more tightly focused on differentiated academic support:

I work with them behaviorally. … [Through NHR], I’m learning more about the academic screenings and things like that so I’m getting a chance to work more with the other people in the building… in a new way for me. That’s been fantastic. As far as with the students, I would say [NHR] has opened up that academic piece for me for understanding better what it is that they’re being asked to do… I would say that it has increased how I work with students in a more positive way.

One identified weakness in this effort was the inconsistency in relationships between consultants and schools, perhaps due to turnover within the project’s central staff. One principal remarked that these relationships were extremely valuable, in part because staff did not have the opportunity to plan to run meetings, but that her school’s relationship with facilitators lacked “that consistency of somebody taking it from the
Several teachers and this principal noted that these frequent changes made it difficult to sustain the project’s momentum. Participants wished for more consistent relationships with these important NHR support staff. They felt this would have fostered relationships among staff that were stronger, cultures that were tighter and more geared toward sustainability, and clearer plans for surmounting local obstacles to implementation.

**Issues with Theory of Implementation**

More systematic, whole-school practice, increased use of data, and collaborative, site-based professional development were three components that defined Norton’s theory of action in implementing NHR. Within this process, however, there were two issues that several staff felt were weaknesses in this effort and made the implementation of the project difficult. Some staff in Norton felt that the guiding vision of the project was not clearly defined or disseminated to staff, and participants from both the district and school levels argued that the role of the district office was not clearly defined.

**Project Vision.** An important element of implementing NHR in all districts was the insistence that local actors not merely work from a “fixed menu,” but develop a local vision for enacting RTI throughout the district. A veteran teacher appreciated that the project’s staff “made us work hard.” She went on to note, however, that the staff lacked sufficient capacity and direction to create a fully functioning vision of RTI: “They kept asking us to try to work at this problem. We weren’t exactly sure what the problem was and we didn’t know how to work at it.” A principal reflected that, “it would’ve been helpful for us to understand better… their vision of the project.” A senior-level
participant from the central office said the project’s vision was not as clearly defined as it needed to be early on:

My impression of New Hampshire Responds, is that there were times when we were looking for them for guidance when it almost seemed like they were still waiting on rules and determinations and things from where they were getting their funding from. And to be honest in education that’s not uncommon right now. … I equate it to running a marathon, when they line you up at the start line and they say, “All right, go!” And you say, “Well where we are running to?” And they say, “Don’t worry about it, just go and we’ll let you know.”

School-level staff perceived some unevenness in the implementation of the project, including the levels of engagement within their building. Teachers expressed an appreciation for the principles of the project, but also a sense that the district’s overall vision for RTI and general instruction was never fully articulated: “we were asked to do a lot of work and… [I]t wasn’t really explained to us exactly what it entailed or what it was supposed to look like.” While both central office staff and at least one principal offered descriptions of the slow, deliberate, “process” focus in the early planning stages of the project, they also expressed frustration with the lack of a guiding vision either from NHR or the district.

**District Role.** While the project was intended to create a greater level of consistency and consensus in participating districts, some participants felt it was unable to do so in Norton. Participants attributed that in part to a vaguely defined role for the district office in implementing the project and in part to the strong tradition of site-level autonomy. One central office staff member felt that there were many good things happening in Norton, but “they’re all different things.” This participant worried that
the role the project envisioned for districts was not a good fit for his district’s unique circumstances: “[what] we needed their assistance with is to pull all of the good things together so at least we could have some consistency.”

Within the district, staff stated that there were significant differences among schools, with principals all having significant authority to make choices and changes. One central office staff member described the district’s history of having “very strong building principals,” while another central office staff member called the local schools “fiefdoms” and “very separate communities.” As a result, the loosely defined district role clashed with this tradition of site-level autonomy.

This sense of loose authority was epitomized by the staggered implementation of the project, with the participating schools joining NHR in different years. One senior-level participant noted that one of the more significant obstacles in reconciling the schools’ varied implementations of the project was this range of start dates. With two elementary schools starting their participation in NHR a year apart, and another local school not participating at all, district leadership called it a “challenge” to have “consistency and have it valuable to each building” given schools’ being “at different speeds.” Just as in Springdale, principals agreed that this was an issue, hampering their ability to network across schools. This lack of coordination is surprising in a district as small as Norton.

According to one principal, the project’s implementation in Norton lacked the “coordinated district thrust” that many felt it needed. This administrator continued, saying that much of the coordination that happened at the elementary school level had
been due to “chance” and ground-level effort. Norton’s leaders communicated the importance of and principles behind the project while leaving wide latitude for mutually adaptive implementation and a modest role for the central office. In doing so, however, their significant latitude created some ambiguity for school-level actors.

Reconciling Tensions: Multiple Efforts and Pressures of Accountability

Norton represents a case of inclusion working parallel to accountability. Staff from all levels—district office, principals, and teachers—all noted that NHR and RTI had in some way contributed to greater coherence among the various activities and demands in their schools. While RTI is a pedagogical stance, NHR implemented it as a mode of collective professional discourse that not only shaped instruction, but also led to shared responsibility for all students. As a theory of interaction, NHR allowed professionals in Norton to build instructional capacity through use and discussion of data, professional development, and the promotion of collaboration. These efforts helped staff in Norton to realize notable progress in their annual achievement results, though tensions around accountability remained. For many participants, RTI as a tool to support diverse learning needs and progress as measured by accountability were separate objectives, that were often mutually exclusive. Time, some participants argued, could not be spent on both objectives equally. Inclusion and accountability had separate goals, and while they occasionally intersected, some staff saw NHR and NECAP as distinct policies, one flowing from intrinsic motivation and the other from imposed pressure.

As Norton worked to implement its local iteration of NHR, teachers and leaders were simultaneously grappling with other demands. These existing projects, policies, and
structures inevitably influenced Norton’s work with the project. One obvious existing set of demands was the punitive structure surrounding standardized accountability, as manifested in the annual NECAP exam. In addition, staff in at least one school were already working with the behavior project, PBIS, and all schools grappled with various stipulations regarding Title I and special education funding. Locally, budget cuts, scheduling conflicts, and staggered implantation of the project all provided a knot of tensions for local leadership teams to reconcile as they pursued the goals of NHR. In describing the additional demands of her job, one veteran teacher said the work of teachers had come to include a daunting list of requirements. Teachers, she quipped, were asked to help students learn to “read, write, and do math and be nice and make them become good citizens and score well on tests.” She seemed to feel these objectives were too many and too diverse for most schools.

General curriculum educators and special educators both acknowledged that they were required to be quite familiar with each other’s job requirements and the general curriculum. Most of this pressure seemed to be felt by special educators, who were compelled not only to become more aware of GLE demands for all students, but also help “align” the spheres of general and special education to achieve the “same common core values and philosophies.” With mounting pressure and an uncertain role of the district, this coherent vision was difficult to achieve, despite the progress that the district made in both areas.

**Uniting Efforts Under RTI**

Norton’s theory of professional interaction was taken largely from the guidance
provided by the project’s facilitators. The district’s individual schools attempted to consolidate various teams and efforts under the larger goal of improving collaboration and instruction. These efforts included leadership teams, collaborative groups to discuss data, several behavioral teams, and various instructional committees. By framing it as a mutually adaptable mode of discourse, NHR’s school-based facilitators were able to use the collaborative, flexible, and data-based nature of their model of RTI to help coalesce several efforts into a united vision. At the school level, this primarily happened under the guidance of skilled facilitators and principals leading coalitions of willing teachers to not only implement RTI, but also to collaborate on focusing their efforts:

[In early meetings, the facilitator] was really getting us to look at how the school functioned as whole. I remember one of the meetings, I had one of those ah-ha moments. We had to list all the committees, all the meetings, that we go to every week. … There was like 14 different things, and he was like, “Do you really need 14 meetings every two weeks?” That sort of thing that really helped push some change.498

In describing RTI’s interaction with other efforts, one principal said she used a vision presentation at an early meeting to frame RTI as a way of doing rather than as something else to do:

We made an airplane, it had wings and we said, put all the initiatives in the wings. … And then the body was RTI. … [T]his is something that will bring this all together. It’s not an additional. And I think they’re seeing that, for instance, PLC’s give you a vehicle to talk about and look at [data and the various efforts]… We are struggling right now and we’ll get there eventually.499

At this elementary school, these discussions likewise included an examination of the various teams, committees, and projects that staff were engaged in, as well as strategy
building for how to consolidate these efforts and make them work together.

Staff at the one elementary school who had experience with PBIS described RTI and its collaborative iteration in NHR as a natural solution for them, given their previous experience establishing teams to examine common behavior strategies and expectations. Staff at this school recalled how there had been difficult communication issues surrounding the formation of several teams under PBIS, with one being assigned to each tier. Principals and teachers alike appreciated NHR’s use of a single leadership team to represent all departments and levels, discuss strategies for aligning efforts towards inclusion, and promote quality core instruction that served all students. Previous teams from PBIS “didn’t really have the substance of the staff and the ability to oversee the entire school.” She was enthusiastic about the potential of the new structure, adding, “if not for New Hampshire Responds, we would not have had that leadership team.” Teachers appreciated the function that this team served as a tool for aligning major decisions in the school. These teams promoted both participatory, distributed leadership opportunities as well as coherence in culture and operations.

As these teams consolidated membership, they also promoted the consolidation of their functions. Teachers noted how their collective instructional model was more effective for having had the opportunity to use their NHR teams to hold collective discussions around behavioral support and academic issues. One school noted that they worked with the same consultant for both NHR and BA, helping them to bridge the gap. One special education teacher was not only enthusiastic about the teams working on similar issues, but also about the flexibility she and her colleagues had been granted to
make use of collective, locally understood conceptions of unified practice instead of
“canned” models:

We worked very hard to make positive behavioral supports … and change the climate … [We are] in the process of being a positive place for kids who are supported academically and behaviorally. So when New Hampshire Responds came around we were interested in jumping right in there … and merging with New Hampshire Responds … [The new team] is not just based academics. It’s not just based on behavior. I think that we’re building within our school anyway a fairly good pool of resources [that] aren’t just academic, and they aren’t just canned academic programs.502

One of this teacher’s veteran colleagues concurred, arguing that her school’s staff “quickly figured out that you can’t separate behavior and academics…One causes the other. One creates the other. One helps the other.”503

A senior-level participant echoed these sentiments, reflecting that “[NHR] seemed to really fit in moving forward with RTI and bringing all of these [different] interventions together.” This alignment also gave the central office the opportunity to use the district-wide leadership team as a vehicle for addressing issues of consistency and consensus in the district:

[In practice, the district has seen] each building doing their own thing with RTI and then coming back to a centralized location… and talking about what we’re doing. It’s been up to me to kind of have activities and retreats and discussions that would tie all of that work together.504

As district-level leadership worked to unite disparate efforts, local leaders received credit for using the project’s flexibility to meet multiple demands through united teams. The local adaptability of the project and historical site-based authority of schools’ principals aided in these efforts to reconcile multiple concurrent objectives. One central
office leader remarked that “our principals and leadership team at each school have been very creative in being able to make it work so they can increase their scores and include more” students with special needs in mainstream classrooms.\textsuperscript{505}

Both teachers and staff from the central office felt that the leadership teams’ promotion of a collaborative, coherent approach to behavior and academic issues had built their capacity to work with more students more effectively. Two groups of teachers noted that discussions of students at significant risk often included a significant number of resources and a diverse array of perspectives (e.g., special educators, speech therapists, nurses).\textsuperscript{506} While these discussions did not always lead to immediate increases in achievement, teachers expressed enthusiasm about their prospects. Structures were put in place to accommodate this kind of collaboration, establishing what teachers and principals called “T-Time.”\textsuperscript{507} In the same way that core instructional time was set aside as an important priority for all students, T-Time became a scheduled block of time when all teachers and specialists were available to collaborate on behalf of students in need of additional support. Technology staff supported these meetings by helping to provide recent screening and achievement data. These collaborative structures enabled staff in at least one elementary school to unite several departments and efforts in the service of students’ learning and support.

\textbf{Tensions Stemming from Accountability}

While a number of participants were optimistic about unifying efforts through RTI, the most pronounced and disruptive tensions with NHR centered on the annual high-stakes test in New Hampshire, the NECAP. Despite the designers’ arguments about
enhanced achievement being one of the project’s primary outcomes, no participants from Norton argued that increasing achievement on NECAP was a primary objective. One teacher specifically noted that the data collected through RTI’s progress monitoring were not particularly helpful to her preparation for the annual exam since NECAP was administered in the fall and results were returned in April. Instead, NHR and the pressures of NECAP were acknowledged as parallel entities that had difficulty coexisting.

In particular, some staff noted that the common, everyday practice of RTI was something that was beneficial, but had to be temporarily set aside when time came to engage in explicit preparation for NECAP tests. One principal noted that the “pressure is enormous” around testing and standards-based accountability, and teachers and other staff across group interview sessions agreed. Inclusion in some ways was helpful, this administrator noted, because it afforded students previously excluded from the curriculum “more time at the piano” to practice the skills needed to succeed on the exam. During this practice time, RTI as commonly practiced was heavily modified to accommodate preparation drills. At times, this school leader felt the need to “shift away” from some of the priorities of NHR and revert to more particular prep for NECAP assessments. Teachers at another school recalled that, “for the first six weeks of school before the [October administration of] NECAPs, we were really pushed to practice teaching to the test.”

Some of the tension between NECAP preparations and NHR stemmed from a lack of consensus in staff members’ views of the accountability system. Many felt the test was
over-emphasized as a measure of students’ learning. One district-level member of the
special education staff was adamant that high-stakes testing was an obstacle and not an
objective:

There is that pressure [around NECAP testing]. I won’t accept it. I’ll
support my staff in any way. Anything that they ask for that they need to
get their job done on site, I’ll support. But I do not pressure staff to teach
to the test or alter their curriculum in order to ensure that we have specific
grades points on standardized test measures.513

In describing the relationship among inclusion, accountability, and efforts like NHR, this
staff member was adamant that high-stakes testing should not drive work with any
students, including those with special needs: “I can’t stand standardized testing… I think
[it] really just makes us look at numbers and not at the students.”514 A school-level
special educator echoed this sentiment, cautioning that, “there are still people who feel
that the whole RTI initiative is just trying to get kids to move up on their NECAP
scores.”515

Several staff were equally adamant that raising NECAP achievement was not a
focus of NHR, though a few conceded that increased achievement might be an ancillary
benefit of robust implementation of RTI. Two teachers in particular seemed to resent the
pressure associated with the NECAP. One principal said that examining a broader array
of data, including NECAP, was slowly becoming a valued practice, “but we’re not there
yet.”516 Special educators were on the cutting edge of accepting this practice, welcoming
screening and interim assessment data as complements to NECAP, arguing that “people
don’t like to base [instructional] decisions on one thing.”517

A senior-level participant and one of the project’s leaders epitomized some of the
conflict about the role that standardized testing should play in NHR and, ultimately, the
everyday practice of staff in Norton. This senior administrator was similarly reticent to
attribute the status of prime motivator to the NECAP tests. In addition, however, the
participant was equally certain of the pressure surrounding the tests, the appropriate
weight attached to the common curriculum they measured, and the need for all students
to meet those expectations:

I don’t think that [NECAP] drives our decisions but it is certainly an
important variable because there are a lot of hoops and a very big hammer
associated with the NECAPs. So to say that we don’t pay any attention to
them, that would be a lie. We certainly do everything we can that we feel
is educationally sound for kids to improve our NECAP scores… But I’m
not sure that is the driver of what we do….

If you’ve got state competencies and everybody understands that those…
are the important skills for students to master, and those are the skills that
are going to be measured on the test, then I don’t understand when
somebody says, “I’m not teaching to the test.” Well what does that mean?
The test is made up of the core competencies that you need to teach in
your classroom…. [I]f these are the core competencies, [and] everybody
agrees that these [tests] are the outcomes, that’s where we need to get. 518

These reactions to the relative value of the NECAP reveal a significant tension between
the views of staff from the central office and those of teachers in schools. Many staff
agree that they would like to see achievement increase, but several teachers do not value
the most widely accepted measure of that achievement. Further, many participants did not
define an alternative measure for students’ learning.

Within schools and within the district, this tension between RTI and the state’s
system of accountability remained an obstacle to fulfilling the thorough implementation
and integration of NHR and its goals. RTI was meant to spur improvement, but teachers
and administrators differed on the value of the state’s key measure of that improvement. For teachers, the value of the data collected from regular progress monitoring in RTI was in part its utility; it was immediately available and useful for supporting growth. In contrast, NECAP and its attached pressures, combined with its infrequency and distance from the classroom, was less useful to them. For administrators, and most clearly for the superintendent, the annual high-stakes test was a natural outgrowth of the state’s learning standards. These inconsistencies may threaten the stability of the district’s otherwise promising growth over time, or undermine its ability to pursue these goals at scale throughout the SAU.

The Project’s Impact on Professional Roles and Role Relationships

While NHR’s efforts were in some tension with the structures of accountability, participants felt the project had a positive impact on professional culture within schools. The project’s technical elements (e.g., leadership teams, diversifying each teachers’ areas of responsibility, facilitating discussions of data) were well-aligned with its cultural goals. Participants felt and demonstrated that these goals were in the process of being realized, including fostering collective responsibility among staff for all students and creating greater trust and collaboration between general and special educators.

NH Responds implemented several important structural elements in Norton, but the project’s leaders also saw cultural objectives as key to having a thorough impact and sustaining the effort. From its inception, the project’s designers realized that NHR’s external support and funding would eventually wind down and that it would be necessary to promote the sustainability of RTI over the long term. From the outset, NHR paid
particular attention to professional culture, addressing roles and role relationships by encouraging staff to increase and diversify the groups of students with whom they worked and by facilitating conversations on expectations and students’ needs.

Participants generally noted that schools retained a great deal of autonomy. Collaboration and cultural consensus—pursued through what two participants called the “process” approach\(^\text{519}\) were powerful elements of the culture-building process that helped to cultivate this greater sense of collective responsibility among staff for all students.

**Change through Process**

In the initial stages of implementation in Norton, the leadership of NHR focused on shaping collective expectations and plans for the project and for staff. This experience with *guided coaching* formed a vital cultural foundation for their later work. This initial stage included discussions of roles and expectations for the project’s impact on students, instructional practice, and the role of support staff like special education resource teachers and Title I staff. It also included slow, deliberate discussions within school-based teams to establish purposes, norms, and local guiding principles. The staff from NHR who facilitated this work called it a “process” approach, referring to the need for teachers to be explicit about the means by which they would pursue change. While this was a longer, more arduous cultural process than initially frustrated teachers and principals, staff came to appreciate the important cultural foundations the project helped build in their professional community.

Two staff members—a district-level leader and a principal—recalled feeling held back by the project’s attention to “too much process” in the early stages of
implementation, but eventually grateful for this deliberate cultural work. 520 Both recalled feeling initially frustrated at too much preparation for cultural growth and too little immediate action in classrooms. Each made sharp distinctions between the extensive discussions that characterized the early stages of NHR’s implementation in Norton and what they saw later as a more active approach to enact the project. Each, however, came to see these early stages as foundational to later action. The principal noted that he later came to see the importance of the slow, cultural development of norms of collaboration and other cultural structures as a “framework for sustainability.” 521 Similarly, a special education teacher felt that an important part of this kind of slow, deliberate support was valuable for “really getting us to look at how the school functioned as a whole.” This included noting that the number of meetings and committees in which people participated in was reduced as part of this process. 522

Teachers also felt that the facilitators that NHR brought to Norton’s schools to conduct this guided coached reflected an important commitment to offering support for local conditions while using external pressure to push for change. This combination of pressure and support was unique in New Hampshire, given the historical distance that external authorities have maintained from local schools. These external staff made an effort to “push some change,” and “push [staff] out of the nest,” serving as both an “irritant” and a catalyst for change. 523 This blended role was quite similar to the form of guided coaching that was present in Ontario during ESGA. In both Ontario and New Hampshire, external pressure and some steering of local cultural growth were seen as important aspects of implementation, though some local variation and accounting for
local conditions was permitted. By asking participants in Norton to go through this “process” early on instead of jumping directly into the implementation of the project, participating schools were able to establish moral purposes and modes of discourse to shape their work that were both clear and locally-derived.

**New Collaborative Efforts**

Fostering greater collaboration became a central focus of NHR in Norton, especially between general and special educators. While staff were adamant that NHR was not intended to be a special education project, nor one that was meant to have a discrete impact on identified students or special education resource teachers, the cultural changes associated with NHR did have distinct impacts on the working relationships between general and special educators. All staff experienced opportunities for increased collaboration. While the roles and role relationships of all teachers were impacted by Norton’s participation in NHR, these impacts transformed the work of special education staff in a unique way.

Participants indicated that opportunities for collaboration in Norton were on the rise, in part because of NHR’s actions from the outside and in part because teachers were now taking on the role of facilitating future collaboration. One veteran teacher noted that, more than student impacts, the first three years of the project “more affected how I work with other adults.” She said that this happened through a combination of deliberate and emergent events that re-shaped the way that local communities of practice were organized. One senior-level participant recalled that cultural change came about in part
through pairing teachers with differing views of the new data sources, one of many ways Norton’s leaders attempted to disseminate the values of the project over a wider field:

Leadership teams have evolved … they’ve become a membership that includes people who are very data-driven and …then also the teacher who is just driven to get in the classroom, follow curriculum and teach and not pay attention to the numbers and scores. I think that combination has really been embraced and honored … [We’ve tried to] take [these] two characteristics and put them together and be able to answer the needs of everybody.525

A principal echoed these sentiments, arguing that “the culture has changed” in team meetings and PLCs, where data collection became more diversified and its use became more accepted among staff.526

Both participating principals and several teachers noted instances of increased collaboration, initially attained through what one principal called “push and shove” with the project, and later perpetuated through teachers’ own initiative.527 Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) argue that the work cultivating these kinds of collaborative cultures has elements that are both “informal” and contain some “deliberate arrangements” such as “teams, structures, and protocols” (p.127). While ultimately taken over by principals and teachers, Norton’s work under NHR actively promoted cultural growth using the project’s facilitators. Structurally, district leaders and principals allocated time and space to bring these teachers together, with facilitators steering the early stages of setting norms and planning a course of action. Culturally, NHR’s facilitators promoted collaboration and regular discussions of data taken from progress monitoring. These cultures became internally-driven and self-sustaining, but began with initial, delicate pushing (requiring) and pulling (incentivizing) on the part of NHR’s facilitators (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).
Signs of Collective Responsibility

The most significant cultural impact of NHR was the growth of collective responsibility in the district. During Norton’s experience with NHR, general curriculum teachers began to assume a more active role in supporting students with SEN, most often in the context of mainstream classrooms. Similarly, the district tried to diversify the groups of students assigned to special educators for additional intervention, including more non-identified students in these pull-out groups. Collaboration became a means to establish a community of practice that utilized diverse expertise to support students. One principal argued that “the goal is to have [it so that] kids really don’t need to be coded to be serviced.”

Instead, Norton’s work during NHR was meant to target students struggling with individual sub-topics in various subjects and bring a diverse group of professionals to bear on their need, including temporally pulling groups of identified and non-identified students out for additional support.

As staff broadened their professional horizons, their experiences of working more closely with colleagues created a greater cohesion and mutual respect that was expected to benefit students over time. Near the end of the project, the district had shown notable progress in creating this shared responsibility for instruction. The burden for initiating this change, however, fell disproportionately on special education staff.

An important step in dissolving the atomized professional culture in Norton was the changing relationship between mainstream curriculum teachers and other support staff. Staff became more collaborative, professionally trusting, and willing to open their practice to support. A special educator noted that students in need of additional support
were better off because of the extensive amount of data now available to resource staff, and the greater number of staff who knew those children’s strengths and needs:

[The RTI process] makes you more confident. When … [the student was referred, they] had worked… with the reading specialist, worked with the Title I teacher, worked with the special educator, worked with the regular educator… That’s pretty solid evidence that something’s up.  

One senior-level participant noted that general curriculum teachers increasingly came to support meetings for struggling students with a more thorough knowledge of the students’ needs and past experiences. This shift was evident, she said, in increases in teachers’ all taking a more active role in supporting students and collaborating with colleagues in this process:

People are much more open now than even two years ago. [For example, before an intervention] I said, “Have you talked to the special ed case manager yet, have you talked to the guidance counselor about the 504 plan yet?” Usually the answer now is, “Yes, of course that person’s been involved.” … There’s more respect, I think, among the staff.

These increased contacts are not just evidence of greater collaboration, but enhanced trust and mutual respect. A principal cited evidence of increased “trust between the special educator and classroom teachers.” Instructional aides now played an enhanced role as instructional colleagues. Once used only as observers and isolated support specialists, aides began to “have more of a role independently teaching,” resulting in an increase in “total confidence in their ability” to help make sure students’ needs were being met.

Enhanced professional trust and respect manifested themselves in the increasing numbers of staff who were centrally involved in and collaborating on educational issues.
Some of the foundations for this growth in collective responsibility lay in one school’s history with systemic interventions. PBIS is a system-wide behavioral intervention, designed to encourage unified approaches to making and enforcing school rules. An important principle is that all staff would hold high, common expectations for all students and address issues using unified terminology and consequences. Given this foundation, implementing NHR as a form of sharing responsibility for all students’ learning was not a revolutionary change. One teacher cited an example of the school’s custodian helping children who were apprehensive about technology by assisting them in booting up computers at the start of the day.\(^{533}\)

Other examples of efforts to transform culture included the dissolution of a pull-out program for students with special educational needs (SEN), or those whom local staff called “coded.”\(^{534}\) Though the project’s leaders hoped to diversify their responsibilities, Title I staff and special education staff were still required by federal funding regulations to maintain their primary responsibilities. After all students received core instruction in mainstream curriculum, they were divided based on their needs for support with the particular concept being covered. Just as more non-coded students were included in higher-tier pull out and support groups, efforts continued to diversify the groups of students across tiers. Special educators noted that “it’s important for the classroom teacher to work with the kids who are needier, too.”\(^{535}\) A colleague echoed this, saying that mainstream teachers “need to see the struggles instead of the older model which is: they’re coded, they’re yours.”\(^{536}\) After NHR, these support groups rotated every six weeks, and co-teaching and in-class support from special educators was on the rise.
All of these efforts built “momentum towards the increase in collaborative teaching.” Although this cultural burden fell disproportionately on special educators at times, all teachers gradually began to participate in a new pedagogical model. One school-level administrator relayed a story told to her by a colleague who had taken NHR as an opportunity to push a local, cultural shift:

[The special educator] was tired of sitting in the back of the classroom… like an aide instead of a teacher just kind of waiting for the regular ed teacher to say she needed help … After being involved with some on site coaching, [she] said to the teacher, “why don’t you let me teach this week and you can teach next week.” And they have started this great collaborative teaching relationship. 537

A variety of factors were helpful in encouraging the district move towards this model, where collaboration, inclusion, and collective support went hand-in-hand. External facilitators helped to push early conversations and conduct some in-class instructional “modeling” to promote a cultural shift. The district was also working to sustain the project by replicating it internally, using participating schools as a model for peers. One senior-level participant noted that principals had been encouraged (but not mandated) to use data meetings as an opportunity to “invite people from other schools to come and sit in.” 538 Ultimately, however, cultural change took root as teachers and principals reorganized the collective work of instruction and their own community of practice.

Teachers and leadership staff made powerful statements about their shared responsibility for all students. A veteran special educator said that, while her primary responsibility lay with students coded with SEN, she came to “work with all students”
through NHR. Another behavior specialist argued that the project “opened up the academic piece for me,” and helped her make a stronger connection to the total academic experiences of all students and the work of her colleagues. Another special educator described how she, too, would “work with anyone else that the staff asks” her to. These new cultural alignments within the local community of practice made it easier to “presume confidence” in colleagues as well as students. Norton’s experience of the project was clearly correlated with a growth in professional relationships, as indicated by terms like “trust,” “respect,” “confidence,” and “collaboration.” In part through their experiences with NHR, staff in this district were beginning to share more responsibility for more students. As one teacher observed, staff as a whole seemed “much clearer [on] what’s expected.”

While increased collaboration had enhanced collective responsibility, there were clear signs that special educators had carried a disproportionate share of the burden for initiating this cultural change. In speaking about students most at risk for failure, those students placed in tier three, one principal argued “your special ed people are best trained to work with that group,” further arguing that Title I staff are best equipped (and therefore most likely) to support other at-risk students. In addition to being prepared to lead interventions, however, one special educator felt that her “responsibility as a special educator is to know the curriculum.” This left specialists with two distinct sets of pedagogical knowledge to master. Further, special educators were the only group to describe a reduction in referrals and preemptive support as important objectives of NHR. One special education teacher said she and her colleagues were “trying to keep those
[identified] kids in there as much as we possibly can,” and that NHR had been “really positive” in this regard. She wondered, however, if this perception was unique to those in special education:

Let’s not let any kid fail. Let’s help them now before they fail. Let’s help them catch up. Maybe I just buy into it more than some other people because I get what it does for special ed. By the time you get to referral we have so much documentation it’s fantastic. It’s not the gut feeling … I think that’s part of the reason why New Hampshire Responds… [or] RTI came into being, is because special ed’s too expensive and there’s too many kids being referred.549

As more students were spending more instructional time in conventional classrooms, it is important to note that more teachers were sharing responsibility for their instruction. It also appears, however, that in Norton a greater share of this cultural effort fell to special educators to initiate and sustain this change. They did so by taking on additional responsibilities and professional knowledge as well as “pushing in” to colleagues’ classrooms. One superintendent noted that “our special ed teachers have been more empowered to take risks, start to collaborate.”550 This important cultural development was placed largely in the hands of special educators to manage. While this was effective, the district may risk burnout among these resource staff if this burden is not shared more evenly.

**Sustainability and Conclusions on Culture**

As the project’s support staff prepared to fully withdraw from Norton, there were several cultural barriers that remained to be addressed if Norton was to continue on its path to progress. These included the allocation of time, the full commitment of all staff to the project’s values, and the potential unifying role the district office could play in the
local culture. As the participants looked to the future, they noted that continuing to devote the same amount of time and level of energy to the work of collaboration would be a challenge, especially without the presence of an external facilitator to push for change and to support local ideas.

RTI is a systemic approach. To succeed, it requires not only cultural changes like collaboration and collective responsibility, but also structures to support these cultural changes. All teachers need to have similar expectations and understanding about how to address students’ initial difficulties in the classroom. Culturally, there is evidence of progress of this kind of cultural growth in Norton. Teachers are demonstrating increased collaboration, respect, and collective responsibility. A senior administrator called these “baby steps,” and noted that staff are “still really looking for that collaborative piece” from some staff.551

Several structural elements of the project were integral in scaffolding these cultural developments. These included providing a substantial amount of additional data and time and space for collaborative meetings to discuss those data; regular visits from coaches and facilitators; and meetings with colleagues—about behavior, student performance data, and students at various tiers or levels of need. The district’s ability to continue committing resources to these “deliberate arrangements” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012) would be integral to continuing this trajectory of growth.

Participants expressed uncertainty about the possibility of continuing these efforts. One principal noted that, “when we have time to do things the right way I think we have some good conversations.”552 However, this same school leader also argued that
“we have very little time.” Even though schedules were changed, some participants reported that scheduling still “runs [teachers’] lives” and “we need to run the schedule” more effectively. As the project carefully prescribed time for core instruction and tiered support, staff in the district will need to continue carefully to allocate additional time to meet in PLCs and leadership teams.

The district plans to replicate internally the professional development provided by NHR in an effort to secure a more complete cultural commitment from the remaining recalcitrant staff. These additional, locally constructed structures will be necessary for maintaining the cultural and structural alignment that the project has helped to cultivate. To accomplish this, the district office may need to assume a stronger, more defined role in its relationships with schools. Principals’ concerns over schedules and the withdrawal of facilitators are evidence of this. As the project’s oversight and momentum recedes, the district may need to assume a stronger coordinating role to replace that of the project and to support schools in their efforts to continue this progress. Such a role is historically unprecedented for the central office in Norton’s SAU, but could contribute to allocating time and effort, allowing cultural growth to continue.

**Influence of Contextual and Political Factors**

The tension between RTI and accountability in Norton is but one example of the ways that contextual factors are interfering with the growth and sustainability of NHR’s model. Reductions in the budget, which in turn reduced support staff, hampered efforts at more complete inclusion and participation by eliminating staff positions for those who would support students identified by screenings. Ironically, in trying to move students out
of separate placements and help curriculum teachers become less reliant on specialists and withdrawal, schools were increasing their risk of losing valuable support staff due to financial reductions. These reductions, coupled with the restrictions that came with federal funding, threaten to re-segregate schools that have worked hard to be inclusive environments. This perception—that fewer specialists were needed—along with the district’s tradition of school-level autonomy, threatened the sustainability of the project within schools and its opportunity for growth across the district.

Staff working in several different roles in Norton—teachers, principals, and central office staff—were committed to the principles guiding NHR, but several other projects, initiatives, demands, and political factors competed for their time, focus, and direction. Fiscal struggles, traditions of political autonomy and democratic localism, and the influence of the state accountability system together made for rough seas during the project’s implementation.

**Budgetary Constraints**

The NHR project made notable progress in transforming the district’s professional culture and staff reported becoming more collaborative and sharing greater responsibility for more students. However, like other school districts and public agencies in 2010-2011, budget cuts hampered the implementation of NHR in Norton and its prospects for sustainability. In the face of budget pressures the district’s cultural and collaborative progress was threatened, especially when staff were laid off and the remaining teachers’ responsibilities increased. As one district-level participant explained, cuts in budgets and personnel meant that the few remaining special education staff needed to move their
focus almost exclusively back to identified students in order to justify the expenditure on their positions:

> There was momentum towards the increase in collaborative teaching… over the past year and a half, and then once our budgetary issues came to light we’ve had to pull back… [and] to shift on our staffing. When I went to do that I found that service delivery people and special ed teacher schedules were created around Response to Intervention services first, not special ed first [as a result of the project]. So I had to make that switch at each school [back to assignments based on special education status]. And each of our schools *really do* work as their own separate entities. So that was a really tough call for me to come in and say to principals and staff, “We can’t do it this way anymore, it has to be special ed and 504 first, then *if* there’s time, you can use your time for RTI.”

An elementary principal argued that the progress made by NHR and RTI created professional vulnerability for some staff. The greater sense of shared responsibility had mistakenly convinced members of the school board that support staff were now expendable. As fewer students were being referred for special education services and formal identification, local school boards interpreted these developments as a need for fewer special education and support staff. This principal lamented the ironic development that the project’s success might ultimately provide justification for the subsequent cuts that would be its undoing:

> They’re slashing, slashing, slashing and saying you don’t need three case managers or two case managers because you only have this many coded kids. But we don’t code kids [for special education as often after RTI]. … To me, there should be no coded kids, period. … [T]here’s this discrepancy now between RTI, … [and] the way Title I is looked at …— and the same with special ed. Because the reason we’ve been able to make progress is because we’ve had this help. So [special education staff] put themselves out of a job. It makes no sense.
As Norton grappled with its own localized version of the financial crisis, participants reported concerns about the fates of personnel who provide Title I and special education services and the complex regulations attached to funding. Economic pressures forced Norton to reconsider the allocation of additional local funds to support NHR, and guidelines attached to federal funding further limited the scope of NHR’s work. This combination of funding restrictions limited collaboration and cut back on the number of special education staff that could participate in the work. One special education teacher expressed significant worry over her RIF notice and the possibility that she would not have a job. Her more senior colleague, whose veteran status meant she would be more likely to retain her position, lamented the cuts and the consequently “increasing workload.”

In addition to affecting staff, budgetary concerns had an impact on the diverse group of students who worked with these support and resource staff. The same district-level staff member who worried about cuts hampering collaboration noted that many special educators and other support staff were supporting other students and teachers, often without formal recognition of these roles:

I had a speech pathologist tell me the other day that she has 13 students she sees at one of the elementary schools… I said, “So why do you need [additional staff] there, because we’re restaffing?” She said, “Oh, there are only 13 special ed but there are 30 other students who I give Response to Intervention services to.” … I really have been pushing to kind of bridge the gap between regular ed and special ed staff and now I feel like I’m creating it again.

As these cuts took place, staff feared they would harm the progress made by the project, putting a strain on what they saw as their most precious and rare commodity:
time. Time for meeting with colleagues, professional development, and providing additional supports to students in tiers two and three was already strained. School-level staff feared that the lack of a contract and subsequent budget and staffing cuts would only impair these efforts further. While NHR was not meant to be a narrow special education effort, several staff from that department noted that a significant share of the burden fell on them, including possessing knowledge about both interventions and the general curriculum and the professional wherewithal the broker new relationships with general curriculum colleagues. In the midst of cuts, principals and staff from schools and the district worried that this burden would grow even more.

Pressures from the budget also created a significant level of anxiety about the unknown future of NHR and the district as a whole. This seemed to be true even among the district’s senior staff members (who oversaw several towns in the single SAU). One senior-level participant remarked that the lack of clarity and direction was frustrating:

  We’re waiting on the governor’s budget … [W]e don’t know what monies we’re going to get. So it constantly feels like, you know, we’re running this race and all along the race every once in a while somebody jumps up and says, “Wait a minute, the turn’s right there!”

The financial stress and uncertainty the district was experiencing is not uncommon, but it did have an adverse impact on NHR’s prospects for more complete implementation and sustainability in Norton. In particular, the potential for significant cuts to staff and the federal mandates restricting the use of funds threatened to harm the collaborative practices and collective responsibility that the project had helped to
cultivate among professional staff. As trust and mutual confidence were growing, the rapidly receding budget threatened to wash away some of that progress.

**District’s Role within a Tradition of Autonomy**

NHR was a project that attempted to install a much more systemic set of practices in the context of inclusive teaching. In Norton, participants consistently reported that this was happening at the school level. There is little evidence from these participants that this technical or cultural coherence was bridging across schools. An important limitation in this regard was the historically weak authority that the central office held in Norton. District-level staff noted that school leaders have often been—and can still be—“territorial with their buildings” and resistant to collaboration or what they see as interference from outside authorities, including local authorities. This tradition, combined with what district leaders felt was an unclear central office role from NHR, does not bode well for the superintendent’s desire for coherence among students entering the same regional high school, despite the relatively tight alignment between the project’s technical and cultural elements at the building level. This lack of coherence is interesting to consider in light of Norton’s progress in achievement gaps. Though the district had the largest pre-project gaps, they also are the only district in this study to make progress in reading and math. This suggests that coherence may be an issue vertically, or in preparing students for the same high school, but does not appear to be a prerequisite for improvement among elementary schools, or horizontally.

Local autonomous traditions and the mixed placement of identified students may ultimately cause conflict with the project. Full inclusion is not practiced with consistency
in Norton, and the central office does not have a history of authoritative relations with schools to enforce this practice in a more uniform way. Districts were the units that applied to participate in NHR, not individual schools or entire SAUs. The district as a unit of change was a logical step for the project’s designers, but difficult to implement in Norton given the historical autonomy enjoyed by local schools and the complex mix of other districts that fed Norton’s regional high school. This tradition of democratic localism was a larger contextual issue that occasionally caused friction with a district-level role in the implementation of NHR. Schools and districts within the SAU enjoyed significant historical autonomy, creating an ambiguous role for the district’s leadership during the project. As a result, NHR in Norton was, in some ways, a school-level project, in contrast to the designers’ vision for the effort.

One of the district’s leadership staff noted that, in contrast to previous appointments in self-contained SAUs, where implementation meant doing “one thing five times,” rolling out the project in Norton often meant “doing five different things five times.” This senior-level participant felt a tension between trying to “allow those five different things to happen five times and still pull them back enough so there’s some consistency.” He continued that the district had made progress in implementing a more consistent vision of RTI since the project began, but also noted that there was work left to do in this area, largely due to the historical autonomy enjoyed by principals and schools.\(^{562}\)

Similarly, other staff at both the school and district level felt that more consistency was needed in their work with RTI, suggesting that a much clearer and
stronger role for the district was vital for sustaining this work in an autonomous setting like Norton. Teachers noted that they felt uncertain about what role the district and combined leadership team were supposed to play in the project. Another district-level leader argued that NHR focused largely on “building-level teams [and] building-level direction,” and did too little to offer direction for consistency in the district or the SAU. One principal felt the project lacked the “district thrust” it needed locally.\textsuperscript{563}

While there were clear signs of progress at the school level, there were clear inconsistencies in Norton’s implementation of NHR. A tradition of strong, building-level leadership and a hands-off approach from the central office will make it difficult to rectify these inconsistencies. The district has achieved greater consistency in the past, with the superintendent unifying the math curriculum, for example. Norton should consider this kind of consensus-building approach in trying to codify these enhanced, collaborative practices as they work to sustain the progress made under NHR. Financial challenges are likely to remain for some time. As positions are consolidated, especially those in special education, tight federal regulations around the use of staff and funding will likely present obstacles similar to those in Springdale. Namely, sharing responsibility will likely continue to be difficult in the near future.

**Changes in Achievement Gaps During NHR**

Of the four districts in this study, Norton showed the greatest improvement in that achievement gaps were reduced both in reading and math. The combined mean for all students increased, while the number and percentage of students with SEN declined.
In examining the progress of achievement gaps in Norton during its participation in NHR, the relatively small size of its student body should be kept in mind. The district is among the smallest in one of the country’s least populous states. Norton had 104 students from grade three take the NECAP assessment during the 2007-2008 school year (SY08). The assessment is administered in the fall term. There were 16 identified students assessed (15%) in SY08. Towards the end of NHR, in the fall of 2010, Norton administered the NECAP assessment to 99 students in grade three, including 13 on IEPs (13%) (SY11).

The trends in overall means were positive. In both the SY08 and SY11 administrations, scaled score means for both groups (those with and without IEPs) improved, with the mean for identified students’ showing greater improvement when comparing before- and after-project means of each group. The scaled score mean in reading increased for both students with (2.9 points) and without IEPs (.3 points), as did the overall mean for all students (from 349.8 to 350.10). Similarly, the overall mean scaled score for math increased from 344.4 to 349.3, with increases in the means of both identified (11.7 points) and non-identified students (3.2 points). The changes in achievement gaps, represented using standardized effect size estimates (SESE, as Cohen’s $d$) are displayed in Table 15. These statistics include confidence intervals, in line with arguments made by Thompson (2006) for the use of SESEs for analyses such as this one.
Table 15. Analysis of Achievement Gaps in Norton, NH for Grade 3 (SESE)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>SY08</th>
<th>SY11</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N (SEN, Non-SEN)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>341.9</td>
<td>349.8</td>
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<td>SESE</td>
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<td>-0.64</td>
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<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N (SEN, Non-SEN)</td>
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<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
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<td>346.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: * All NECAP assessments in New Hampshire are administered in October of the school year identified (e.g., SY08 refers to results from the test administered to students in the Fall of 2007). SESE represents the Standardized Effect Size Estimate (Cohen’s d) for reading and math for both years. Confidence intervals are around SESEs.

The table shows that achievement gaps in SY11 (with administration of the test taking place in October of 2010) were smaller than those in SY08 (administration in October of 2007). The small size of the district’s grade 3 population likely contributes to the large range of the confidence intervals calculated for the four standardized effect size estimates shown in the table. These four effect size values represent achievement gaps for reading and math in each of the years considered. These two effect sizes offer reasonable evidence that Norton’s efforts during these years, including participation in NHR, have had notable positive impact on students with identified special needs. These results should be interpreted with caution, however, in light of the small sample sizes in both years. The relatively wide range of the confidence intervals around these effect sizes are further reason for caution in interpreting these statistics.
Preliminary Conclusions from Norton

NHR helped to effect significant change in Norton at the school level. Obstacles that remain in the district will require unique approaches to consensus-building, given the weak political power of the central office and the tradition of school-level autonomy within the SAU. The district’s unique relationship to its SAU and history of local autonomy were significantly different from what the project’s designers envisioned. Norton is a district that is part of a complex web of local authority. Schools operate with significant autonomy within this confederated SAU, making the implementation of a coherent and systemic model of RTI across the district an even more notable challenge. As a result, Norton is a case of a district whose central office exercised relatively loose authority over the project, in line with its historical stance and in some contrast to the district-level role envisioned by the IOD. With support from the districts, schools worked diligently to form teams and achieve alignment between the technical and cultural efforts of the project. They achieved this alignment, despite obstacles presented by local and federal financial constraints and tensions pertaining to mechanisms of accountability. As a result, the practice of inclusion in Norton was implemented parallel to accountability. Many participants envisioned a system where accountability might eventually work within the constraints of inclusion and RTI as guiding principles, but the feasibility of this vision is questionable in the current political and fiscal climate in New Hampshire.

Norton’s work during NHR is summarized in Table 16.
**Table 16. Summary of NHR in Norton**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Summary:</th>
<th>Norton is a case of inclusion <em>parallel</em> to accountability.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guiding Question</th>
<th>Participant Recollections</th>
<th>Researcher Interpretations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theory of Change</strong></td>
<td>• Whole-school, systemic change;</td>
<td>• School-level authority, lack of unity in the district and SAU.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Increased and enhanced use of data; and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Capacity-building support for teachers and staff.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reconciliation Strategy for Inclusion and Accountability</strong></td>
<td>• Try to unite practices under RTI</td>
<td>• Distinct differences between teachers and administrators on value of test as a measure of success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ignore, on some level, not consider the focus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Explicit practice, or “more time at the piano.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• School-level authority</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Impact on Community of Practice</strong></td>
<td>• Change through process, or guided work in establishing norms and goals.</td>
<td>• Clear growth in collaboration, trust, and shared responsibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Achievement Gap Impact, as Effect Size Analysis</strong></td>
<td>• Budget threat</td>
<td>• Financial instability, history of autonomy are ongoing threats to sustainability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Autonomy threat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Progress in reducing achievement gaps in both reading and math.</td>
<td>• Only one of four cases in this study to reduce gaps in both reading and math, highlighting importance of coherence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nonetheless, participants in Norton expressed enthusiasm about the project’s history (if not its future, given budgetary and political constraints). Given this relatively high satisfaction with the project and the gains made in narrowing achievement gaps, Norton’s case of implementation may offer important support for districts’ exercising limited authority over local actors. McLaughlin (1998) has argued for a stance characterized by mutual adaptation between state and federal policy makers. Norton’s implementation of NHR may support an argument for a mutually adaptive stance at the local level. Offering such a flexible stance to participating schools did not inhibit coordination within the professional culture and coincided with gains for students with SEN.

The project’s mutually adaptive features and the historical tendency to distribute authority in Norton became tools to facilitate change in the district. However, the loosely defined role of the district and the disconnect between school-level RTI practices and policy makers’ visions of special education, budget needs, and value of standards-based accountability were obstacles to more widespread change. These factors may hamper sustainability as well.

While Norton is an imperfect case of a district authority implementing an externally designed project, it offers several valuable lessons for leaders of change. In particular, leaders should take care to attend deliberately to professional culture while finding a balance with local autonomy. Second, offering building-level autonomy is important, but that does not mean that district-level actors should do nothing; districts need a defined role in leading change. Finally, a coherent approach to reform—one that
aligns structures, culture, and regulations—is necessary for achieving and sustaining progress for teachers and students.

- **Attention to professional culture, with supporting infrastructure**: By focusing implementation on professional culture—specifically, teachers’ roles and role relationships with other staff—the project’s designers and local leadership made the work challenging, but also laid the foundation for long term success. Participants from all levels reported progress in professional collaboration and a sense of collective responsibility. NHR was not described by participants in Norton as a narrow script that they were required to implement in lockstep. Instead, they saw it as a flexible and systemic approach to universal instruction for all students. This flexibility placed expectations on teachers, and one principal recalled that teachers often found the necessary cultural work “frustrating,” and wished the project was a simple “guidebook.”

Instead, the project asked teachers to collaborate in new ways (e.g., co-teaching) and examine significant amounts of new data. As a result of this hard work, teachers reported increased senses of trust and respect for colleagues, and their interview responses showed evidence of collective responsibility for all students. Norton now has reduced achievement gaps that have coincided with this cultural growth. This may confirm findings by Bryk and colleagues (2010) that trust and collegial respect are important precursors to improving achievement. Norton also, however, confirms the findings of other studies that have argued that cultural change needs supporting structures to create and sustain it (Biancarosa, et al., 2010; Saunders, et
al., 2009). In Norton, this was done through delicate pressure and ongoing support, avoiding the heavy-handed force that Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) have warned against.

- **Role of district-level authorities:** Participants demonstrated little consensus around the role they believed the district office was supposed to play in implementing NHR, and staff disagreed on the degree to which designers from the project defined this for local leaders. In any case, the district played an underdeveloped role in the project, and one principal noted that any coordination achieved among Norton’s three elementary schools was due largely to chance. The two elementary schools who were primary targets of the effort did not start the project at the same time, but were staggered by a year. This fact frustrated school-level staff and district-level leaders alike. This staggered implementation and hands-off role for the central office both likely contributed to what some saw as insufficient progress toward pedagogical consistency across schools in Norton. This consistency was an important objective of the project (both for district staff and those from the IOD), especially given the use of a single regional high school and quasi-regional middle school for students from all parts of the area.

  A stronger, clearer role for the district’s leadership team might have alleviated some of this pressure by helping to codify practice and establish guidelines for the progress of work in different years and what aspects of the practice should be consistent across schools. While leaders from the SAU clearly see this is desirable, it should be noted that Norton demonstrated the greatest
reduction in achievement gaps of any of the four districts in the study and demonstrated the weakest stance on centralized authority. While these factors cannot be correlated in this study, they are important co-incidental characteristics.

- **Politics and sustainability**: While the objectives of the project were important to all staff who participated in this study, there was an apparent disconnect between the nature of RTI and the perceptions and requirements of teachers’ roles by external actors. At the time of this study, Norton was in the midst of a difficult budget battle, and education was being subjected to cuts of various kinds. These cuts have impacted support and resource staff who were vital to the project’s vision of RTI, including Title I teachers, special educators, and specialists like speech and language support teachers. Their newly collaborative role appeared to be poorly understood by local school boards who interpreted the reduction in formal identification as a sign that fewer special education staff were needed. As more special education teachers become part of the larger, shared responsibility for all students, they remained vital collaborators for their mainstream colleagues, with specialized knowledge and experience to aid in differentiation of instruction and the support of students with unique needs (identified as exceptional or not). Cutting these staff would clearly threaten the sustainability and continued progress of NHR.

**Conclusions**

Norton achieved cultural and academic progress, despite its history of a limited role for the central office and a largely under-utilized role for the office during NHR. The
cultural and pedagogical progress made are important to highlight in light of Norton’s progress in reducing achievement gaps. This case highlights the value of coherence while undermining the exclusive attention that many reformers have paid previously to the “tight-loose dilemma” (Fullan, 2007). That is, this case seems to suggest that coherence at the building level can left to principals (with some external support), and that discussions of the district’s balance of power may be overrated. Norton reveals that attention to a coherent approach to changing culture and culture together are equally as important as—if not more important than—the significant attention that has generally been devoted to finding the right level of authority to use in managing change.

NHR and RTI were challenging professional stances to implement for the district’s staff. The project provided several forms of support for meeting these goals. Principals played vital roles in Norton’s implementation of the project, though the district remained in an ambiguous position about what sort of leadership might be most appropriate for implementation. While teachers’ appreciated the alignment between technical changes and the cultural work that was done to support and sustain these efforts, the project also lacked some of the central authority that may be required in district-wide alignment.

At the school level, much progress was made in the teachers’ communities of practice. Participants reported that new relationships among staff had improved instruction and students’ learning. At the time of the study, several challenges lay ahead for the district: staff faced continued budget and contract disputes, some teachers had been released, and the supports integral to NHR had been slowly pulling away in the past
year. As this change was taking place, pressure from mechanisms like NECAP was only increasing, meaning that inclusive efforts like RTI were forced to exist parallel to accountability. While many staff were working to make inclusive, diversified instruction the major priority in the district, pressures for standardization remained. Norton’s positive progress on standardized measures may provide the necessary political cover for pursuing the kind of pedagogical differentiation and collaborative support promoted by NHR.

Conclusions from New Hampshire and NH Responds

_NH Responds_ was an ambitious effort, but also a pragmatic project for its time and context. In its design and implementation, NHR attempted to account for both state and federal policies around inclusion and accountability, adding Third Way capacity-building and even some local flexibility to a traditionally Second Way context (See Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). Reconciling inclusion and accountability in this environment was a challenging task, as these policies do not always align in a coherent way (Ramanathan, 2008). In addition, the project’s designers attempted to acknowledge the strong traditions of democratic localism that characterize their state, New Hampshire. Their project, NHR, managed to offer support through ongoing relationships, stimulate change through modest external pressure, and still recognize local authority in the course of implementing structural and cultural changes in the participating districts.

Participants were generally satisfied with the project, an unsurprising finding given the requirement that districts and schools elect to apply to participate. Staff appreciated the additional data RTI provided, as well as the on-site facilitation and
professional development. Both districts showed evidence of increased trust and respect among participants. This important cultural development has supported the technical developments in each district, including increasingly diversified instruction and data-based decision making.

In both districts participating in this study, however, there were several factors that may threaten the sustainability of the project’s technical and cultural progress. Participants in both districts complained about inconsistency in their relationships with facilitators and support staff. In addition, there were no staff inside either district playing roles similar to the facilitators to ensure the sustainability of the project. Most notably, however, were the obstacles to both technical and cultural change presented by federal policies meant to promote equity. Regulations based in IDEA were meant to protect a vulnerable population of students. Mechanisms in NCLB were meant to pressure schools and districts into meeting all students’ needs. Each policy, however, inhibited professional collaboration and the growth of collective responsibility in these two districts. They largely did so by isolating staff and narrowing their focus through intensive pressure. As each district grapples with sustaining NHR and RTI beyond the life of the project, these policies may present insurmountable obstacles.

In its design, NHR attempted to help local authorities meet both state and federal demands and it employed both state and federal funding. It was led by a non-state entity connected to a university, building Third Way capacity in a conventionally Second Way context (see Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). The project’s unique structure and its manifestations in the districts that participated in it yielded some interesting lessons from
observers. These include four points that should be considered in the field of educational change, especially when considering large-scale, statewide projects:

- Teachers’ appreciation of coherent structural change and cultural alignment;
- The importance of developing professional trust and collaborative relationships in a community of practice;
- The influence of democratic localism on the intended and actual roles of districts in this effort and the role that intermediary organizations can play; and
- The challenges presented to local authorities by federal policies designed to promote equity.

**Appreciating the Value of Coherent, Systemic Change**

While the two districts studied here differed in their use of authority, they were quite similar in their attempts to align the implementation of the project’s technical and cultural elements and create coherent educational systems. In each case, NHR built upon earlier work to create more consistent practices across the entire system (i.e., PBIS, BA). During NHR, each district created structures that they hoped would facilitate the collaborative, mutually accountable culture they desired. These changes included leadership teams, schedule changes that supported common planning time, and more flexible support groups lead by special education staff (though, as is noted later in this section, these met with some obstacles). Teachers were engaged by the efforts associated
with the project, and appreciated the attempt to create systems that were mutually accountable, collaborative, and devoted to common objectives.

The designers of NHR deliberately included and pursued changes in teachers’ communities of practice, while also trying to create structures to support these changes (i.e., use of facilitators, changes in teachers’ schedules). The project promoted whole-school change by first asking teachers to vote to approve their schools’ participation in the project and then actively addressed teachers’ roles and role relationships through on-site professional development. All of these components permitted some level of flexibility in implementation. More importantly, they helped teachers engage in a process of collective sense making as they transformed their collective instructional model. Common language, common data, and the use of a leadership coalition to implement the work gave teachers time and space to reconcile the project with existing roles.

Consequently, we see that a systemic approach to change can be effective, provided that checks on fidelity are accompanied by attention to professional communities of practice and the everyday contexts of teachers’ work.

Each made progress while pursuing a deliberate relationship between restructuring and reculturing. Their uses of authority are contrasting. This common trait—coherence associated with improvement—may indicate that reformers should spend less energy on debating the right level of authority to employ and more effort considering how to help local educators bring about coherent educational systems with complementary cultures and infrastructure. Recent work on change supports the notion that infrastructures must be created to support and sustain cultural change (Biancarosa, et
al., 2010; Saunders, et al., 2009). More important may be the other work that demonstrates that such coherent change is associated with improvement. Elmore’s (2004) case studies found that internal accountability—or commonly held goals and expectations that are enforced by peers—are associated more with improvement than external pressure alone. Similarly, Bryk and colleagues (2010) found that “a coherent program of improvement” along with “aligning curriculum” helped to distinguish successful urban reform attempts from those less successful working in the same district (p.195). While Norton and Springdale differed in their uses of authority, both pursued coherence at the school level, and both demonstrated some measure of improvement and engagement on the part of teachers.

**Trust and Respect as Outcomes**

Staff from all levels reported that an outcome of NHR was enhanced professional trust among colleagues and the confidence they felt from superiors and peers. An easy criticism of this observation is its lack of immediate utility for students’ achievement. More recent work from Chicago, however, notes that this development within teachers’ professional culture can be an essential precursor to increased academic achievement (Bryk, et al., 2010). Moreover, in their descriptions of professional cultures that develop into fully collaborative learning communities, McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) argue that culture has technical, professional, and organizational components, and that a common technical framework and high-quality collaboration are important ingredients for a successful school.
What these cases from New Hampshire reveal is how a school might achieve these high-functioning professional norms. Just as previous work has shown their value, school leaders need to understand the type of projects and collective work that can help to achieve a professional culture characterized by trust and mutual respect. NHR set out to “desiloize education” by cultivating greater trust and respect among colleagues, especially between general and special educators. The strategies that most likely affected these relational outcomes were the project’s attention to facilitated groups, structured discussions around student data, and increased collaboration across departments and fields of expertise. These regular, facilitated activities helped to lay a foundation of trusting and respectful collaboration. Student achievement can stand firm on such a foundation. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) have argued that there is an appropriate balance to strike when trying to steer and cultivate professional cultures. NHR appears to have avoided the excessive pushing the authors warned against by using facilitators, but also gradually releasing responsibility to local actors.

**Districts, Democratic Localism, and Intermediaries in Reform**

NHR’s design concept—utilizing districts as key units of implementation and change—held great potential. Staff from the IOD felt district were an important partner who could build and sustain momentum for change, help to prioritize the project in the face of other demands, allocate resources to support new efforts, and create coherence within participating districts, reconciling new and existing demands. One superintendent from Springdale called this “shepherding” a project. The central office was ultimately an underutilized aspect of the project. There were two reasons for this. First, the IOD did
not define the role of the central office nor the model of RTI as a district-level project as clearly as local actors would have liked. Second, traditions a democratic localism in Norton left most of the authority for implementation with building-level leaders. While Norton may have some issues with coherence in the future (i.e., among students entering their high school), this study raises questions about the need for strong district authority in increasing students’ performance. It also raises the profile of third-party intermediary organizations who, in contexts like New Hampshire, can perhaps circumvent some of the tension that characterizes reform and bring expertise to the table as well.

Other recent research in the implementation of comprehensive reforms has found that districts play an important role in leading implementation and promoting sustainability of interventions at the school level (Park & Datnow, 2009; Wohlstetter, Datnow, & Park, 2008). District-level staff from both Norton and Springdale noted that the district had a role to play in the project. The divergence of these roles and between the results in both districts suggests that a clearer role for the district—one of support, capacity-building, and networking—might be more effective for students than a stronger hand. Norton’s less intensive use of centralized authority was certainly associated with more positive outcomes for students, though a lack of causal attribution and Norton’s large pre-project gaps should be taken into account when assessing these outcomes.

The project’s designers recognized the important influence that local authorities can play in the process of implementation. They sought to capitalize on New Hampshire’s tradition of democratic localism and use it as a lever for change, rather than an obstacle, by empowering local actors to lead implementation. Districts would lead,
and thus the project might avoid the appearance of being a strictly external effort. The two districts depicted here had some experience with leading systemic projects like PBIS and this likely contributed to more thorough and consistent implementation of RTI. In both Springdale and Norton, however, few staff could articulate a clear and specific vision for the role of district-level authorities in implementing NHR. This project clearly had school-level impacts and a school-level design that was articulated with consistency. Participants often described wanting support in the form of time and funding or at least a lack of interference from senior-level actors. One senior-level participant felt the project never defined the district’s role, while another described it merely as “purse strings.”

Bryk and colleagues (2010) have recently argued the power and potential of this strategy in urban settings. Their work, examining school reforms in Chicago, found that decentralization as part of school reforms in Chicago was associated with “widespread gains in student learning” (p.215). The authors note that these gains took place during a time without high-stakes assessments, which can distort understandings of learning and progress by narrowing instruction and measurement. Nonetheless, projects like NHR may confirm these findings from Chicago, making decentralized reforms that focus on improving instruction and “a renewal of relational trust at the school level” essential aspects to leading improvement (p.217). Both Norton and Springdale built this trust and in schools and improved instruction, though Norton’s more centralized approach was associated with greater reductions in achievement gaps.

If democratic localism made it difficult for central office personnel to influence schools at times, it reveals the significant challenge faced by political authorities like
state and federal departments of education. NHR reveals not only the tensions that exist between some local authorities and centralized oversight roles, but also that intermediaries like the IOD can be effective agents for mitigating that tension. Norton’s superintendent emphasized the “vast differences” among districts in New Hampshire, and the lack of understanding that the Department of Education often demonstrated of these differences.\textsuperscript{568} No participants expressed these views towards the IOD, but instead expressed appreciation for their desire to build capacity to meet various mandates. Staff also generally acknowledged the expertise and experience of the IOD to build that capacity, based on their work in other related efforts. Democratic localism reflects the tendency of local actors to want to maintain local control. Third parties, with checked powers, a more trusting relationship to local actors, and expertise in the focal area of a given reform, are often welcomed as capacity-building partners in implementation, rather than external agitators.

It is notable that the prominence of accountability and the strong stance taken by the project’s leadership team in Springdale have thus far not produced a significant reduction in achievement gaps. A district like Norton, which showed progress despite (or perhaps due to) a relatively uninvolved district office, may be able to achieve greater consistency and positive outcomes with a stronger role as advocate, guide, capacity-builder, and chief networking hub. The tradition of democratic localism could be a valuable tool for projects like NHR where local authority and flexibility are granted to local actors (i.e., to district authorities rather than those form the state). Further, third-party intermediaries like the IOD have the potential to negotiate with this tradition but
offering support along with pressure for change without the same historical animosity held towards formal centralized authorities. CODE held a similar place in ESGA, and was aided by their project following a recent period of tension and distrust. By ceding control to local actors, supporting them, and bringing in non-state experts, implementation stands a better chance of being pursued and leading to improvement.

**Coherence and Federal Policy**

The project sought to help all teachers think about and instruct all students differently, especially students who might otherwise be excluded or whose performance had lagged behind their peers in the past. Implied in this approach were different roles for support staff, including special educators and Title I staff. The project supported these changes by attempting to involved districts and guiding complementary reculturing and restructuring, so that the efforts made under NHR would work together with existing work and be sustained beyond the life of the project. Given these parameters, increased coherence, especially between inclusion and accountability, should have been a perceptible outcome of NHR. Instead, however, existing policies—both originating from the federal level—made achieving this coherence difficult. The experiences of Norton and Springdale with NHR demonstrate that local projects that attempt to break silos and promote a coherent approach to inclusion will face significant obstacles from two federal policies—NCLB and IDEA—that were meant to promote greater equity. Each seems to inhibit collective responsibility and collaboration.

As has been argued in Chapter 3, policies enforcing inclusion and accountability are difficult to reconcile and implement simultaneously (M. J. McLaughlin & Thurlow,
2003; Ramanathan, 2008). In the midst of this difficulty, local actors often must reconcile state and federal policies that do not perfectly align. In New Hampshire, the state has made efforts to more fully include identified students in the accountability framework through increased inclusion, practices like RTI, and a more comprehensive and aligned alternative assessment to achieve what one of the project’s directors called greater “synchronicity”:

I think that there has been 20 years of effort… to raise expectations across the board for student learning… Our state just moved to a very academic— and very strongly aligned with the general education standards— statewide accountability assessment for kids with the most significant cognitive disabilities. Our statewide alternate assessment now is probably one of the most academic in the country … [S]o now there’s a very consistent message from the accountability bureau [and] from the special ed bureau at the state department that says all kids with disabilities… are expected to learn academics.\(^{569}\)

At the state level, policies are attempting to align identified students with the mainstream curriculum.

Staff from both Norton and Springdale, however, said that several First Way style requirements attached to special education and Title I funds made new collaborations and flexible groupings difficult to achieve among staff. The tensions stemming from accountability would be difficult enough. At least one principal in Norton lamented how explicit practice for standardized assessments often took his staff away from practices consistent with RTI. In addition, however, federal policies, while officially encouraging RTI in legislation like IDEA of 2004, interfered with the full structural and cultural implementation of RTI. They prevented staff from being used in new and flexible ways. Policy observers have argued that such regulations, including “supplement not supplant”
rules cited by Springdale’s project liaison interfere with inclusion and are restrictive to the point that they serve an exclusionary function, rather than an inclusive or supportive one (Junge & Krvaric, 2011). Participants in NHR will likely continue to feel that instructional responsibility will not be a fully shared enterprise until there is greater desecration related to this federal funding.

The interference from existing federal policies related to inclusion and accountability makes for much of the contrast between the implementation of ESGA and NHR. First, the Canadian system of accountability was provincial and contained a support mechanism. In Ontario, designers from CODE were able to include staff from the LNS in the planning of their projects. Further, EQAO already had a capacity building component for struggling schools, and was less punitive. Achieving coherence under these conditions was more likely. Nonetheless, the Canadian districts still experienced some tension with the province’s “Drive for 75,” and felt the need to devote some attention to test preparation, causing assessment to be less differentiated.

A second reason for greater coherence in Ontario between inclusion and accountability is the Canadian approach to special education. In contrast to IDEA’s role as a strict mandate, Ontario’s system is a more individualized, support-based continuum model of needs identification. That is, teachers are given more freedom to identify unique needs and make modest accommodations without entering a formal identification process. Local authorities also have greater flexibility in using personnel. In contrast, both Norton and Springdale are examples of the rigid requirements around the use of these additional resources and the issue this can cause in implementing a system of
shared responsibility. Coherence in many American districts will be hard to come by, unless some flexibility and support become more prominent levels in federal educational policy.

**Conclusion**

New Hampshire’s tradition of democratic localism is seen by some outsiders as its sole defining characteristic. Like many contexts, the story is far more complex. The state has a tradition of trying to square liberty and equality, including placing students with special needs in mainstream classrooms. *NH Responds* fits this tradition. It offered districts flexibility of implementation and the local option to participate while trying to ensure more effective instruction for more students. Staff appreciated the project’s goals and its attempt to build their capacity to meet several pressing demands. While many staff would have preferred a more clearly defined role for the central office, the gains made by students would imply that this is a negligible factor, at least in making initial progress. This kind of coordination may be necessary to achieve the long-term substantial closing of the achievement gap that is currently demanded of all districts in schools.

NHR did help each district achieve greater reconciliation of inclusion and accountability in the sense that both sets of participants expressed greater abilities to meet all students’ needs, increased trust and collaboration with colleagues, and demonstrated at least some progress in NECAP results. Their approaches to reconciling these two polices were related, but distinct. In Springdale, accountability was an unrelated construct for some participants. In Norton, the two policies were considered parallel, that is, moving in the same direction towards the same goal, but not necessarily always intersecting. Staff in
New Hampshire generally discussed the NECAP and the relationship between inclusion and accountability differently than staff in Ontario. The Canadian participants generally viewed differentiated instruction as a means to get more students to achieve provincial expectations, even if internal, teacher-designed assessments were not differentiated at the same rate as instructional materials. In New Hampshire, there was more tension and resentment related to the test. This is perhaps due to a confusing and conflicting nature of these polices (Ramanathan, 2008) or their being layered on top of demands from the state. The rigid nature of special needs identification and the strictly punitive character of policies around accountability in the US (in contrast to greater capacity-building in Ontario) means that reconciliation of inclusion and accountability faces a far more difficult set of obstacles than in Ontario.
CHAPTER 6:  
Findings and Implications

This final chapter synthesizes the study’s major lessons from the projects in Ontario and in New Hampshire. First, I report findings and common points across the four cases. Second, I discuss the implications of the study’s findings for the future design and implementation of educational policies. In that section I also propose three principles that should drive policy making and implementation in the future. Finally, I lay out the implications for research on the implementation of educational policies.

Findings from Four Case Studies

Most policies and initiatives in education travel the same well-worn path: they are designed high above the ground by elected leaders or by public officials in departments and ministries of education. These ideas soon become projects for district-level leaders and school-level staff to implement. The process of implementation is always a challenge for local educators, since there are new demands to meet, competencies to learn, relationships to foster, and rules with which to comply (Elmore, 1997; Fullan & Pomfret, 1977; Spillane, et al., 2009). When schools are asked to implement several initiatives concurrently, these challenges can be compounded if they are perceived to be in conflict (M. J. McLaughlin & Thurlow, 2003; Ramanathan, 2008).

This conflict of objectives between concurrent efforts is intensified when policy makers propose simultaneous initiatives that pull local educators in competing directions. Inclusion for students with special needs and standards-based accountability are two such policies. In the age of high-stakes accountability, annual testing programs and their mechanisms of enforcement are powerful forces that consume significant time and
energy for local educators, making attention to other efforts difficult (Datnow, 2006). In the midst of this pressure for universal high achievement, classrooms are becoming more diverse—in part through policies that promote the inclusion of students with special educational needs (SEN). This fosters tension between competing philosophies and expectations. Inclusion asks schools to support diverse learning needs, using strategies like universal design and pedagogical diversification. Students not only are taught using a variety of techniques but also differently assessed, which allows them to demonstrate learning in several ways. Accountability, on the other hand, promotes standardization, asking all students to demonstrate learning in an identical format, at the same point in the year, using uniform instruments, and under timed conditions. No two initiatives offer more crosscutting currents of divergent principles than standards-based accountability (as currently practiced) and the inclusion and enhanced participation of students with SEN. Compounding this tense relationship is the fact that many schools have never held universal expectations for access and achievement among students with SEN.

**Summary of Questions and Methods**

This study examined two multi-level and multi-district projects that were designed to foster systemic change to pedagogy and professional relationships in an effort to reconcile the tension between inclusion and accountability. These two initiatives set out to improve instruction for all students by impacting all teachers, thereby enhancing achievement. These two efforts were *Essential for Some, Good for All* (ESGA) in Ontario and *NH Responds* (NHR) in New Hampshire.
Both ESGA and NHR took approaches to supporting and pressuring change that was innovative for its particular context. They were selected for study because they attempted to create educational environments that were both more universally accessible and more conducive to higher achievement using an unconventional combination of policy tools. ESGA and NHR utilized external pressure, financial incentives, and various means of capacity-building support in combinations that provided more than the technocratic assistance common in Ontario or the *laissez faire* mandates prevalent in New Hampshire. In short, each project tried to bridge the common divide in policy between mandating and inducing change (Firestone, 1989). In doing so, policy makers also permitted some flexibility in implementation, using support, participation, and mutual adaptation to avoid many of the pitfalls that projects mandating strict fidelity often face when working with local authorities (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006).

To study how the design and implementation of these two projects influenced local actors’ reconciliation of inclusion and accountability, the research was guided by four questions:

1. **What theories of action drive these two jurisdictions’ policies of inclusion and accountability?**
2. **How do these inclusion and accountability policies interact with one another and what theories of action, if any, are there for balancing or integrating multiple reform efforts?**
3. **How do professionals (within a district or board) organize their communities of practice around the dual and often competing issues of inclusive practice and external accountability?**
4. **How do contextual and political factors influence the implementation of these projects and, ultimately, student achievement? How does each context’s...**
policy environment compare to the other in terms of professional organization?

This dissertation explored each of these questions in four case studies, in an effort to make similar comparisons across complex cases (Yin, 2003). The first question asked what theories of action drove each jurisdiction’s policies of inclusion and accountability. Ontario and New Hampshire have several similarities, despite some political systemic differences. Both contexts employ annual, high-stakes, standards-based assessments. These create significant pressure on local actors to improve performance on these measures, and often drive teachers’ instructional decisions. In both cases, these systems are designed to spur improvement through pressure and the regular provision of data. In Ontario, the pressure inherent in this system of accountability is accompanied by systems of support, though these are tailored to enhancing performance on their high-stakes exam, EQAO. New Hampshire’s system, though it pre-dates federal mandates, is typical of state-level systems of accountability in the era of NCLB in the US. The standards and exam, the NECAP, are part of a punitive, high-pressure system with little support.

Inclusion can be framed in both locales as part of a larger and longstanding discussion of equity in educational systems in the past. Both contexts have formed policies meant to bring about more equitable outcomes in the past, though their manifestations have been different approaches to funding, consolidation, and levels of authority. ESGA and NHR, however, represent a new, similar approach to raising achievement and achieving equity. Further, New Hampshire’s decisions are complicated by additional, federal guidelines. Both have pursued equity in some similar ways,
including the consolidation of many central offices and local authorities. In New Hampshire especially, this effort was helpful in equalizing funding across neighboring districts, where it varied widely. Both Ontario and New Hampshire have employed inclusion in the past in an effort to achieve more equitable systems. New Hampshire has employed much less pull-out for students with special needs, in part in a desire to maintain lower expenditures. Special education in Ontario, by contrast, has used higher rates of withdrawal in the service of meeting individual needs. Through ESGA and NHR, however, both contexts now have similar approaches to equity: more flexible, permeable systems of service provision where students receive more intermediate and individualized forms of support in an effort to be as inclusive as possible.

The second question explored what theories, if any, were used to pursue positive interaction between inclusion and accountability. Both ESGA and NHR acknowledged the pressures of annual accountability and included members specializing in these policies on their design teams. In practice, this led to increased time in mainstream classrooms for students with SEN, and additional support time on common curricular expectations outside of instructional time. In New Hampshire, this was called “core time” or “protected time.” This attempt to balance these policies also manifested itself in data—lots of interim assessment data provided to teachers for ongoing reflection and discussion so that students’ progress could be monitored and support tailored. Both jurisdictions consolidated leadership teams in an effort to keep concurrent priorities in mind. Most importantly, however, it involved two key components: culture and flexibility. Communicating and creating a culture of higher expectations for all students was an
important step in this process, especially in the form of messages from local leaders. But implementation and reconciliation were also left largely to local authorities to determine. Policy-level actors offering flexibility was an important step in reconciling these tensions.

The third question examined impacts on professional communities of practice. Collaboration was a foundational goal of both ESGA and NHR, as both projects hoped to create more shared responsibility for all students in participating schools. Each effort did this by managing cultural growth through guided coaching. This model steered local communities of practice while permitting some school-level variations and shared control. As a result, schools became more trusting and collaborative, and were marked by more shared responsibility. Special educators, for example, noted that classroom teachers were more involved in and aware of IEPs. Maple Lake’s teachers noted that they felt freer to ask for help and admit frustration. Springdale’s staff expressed improved relationships between general and special educators and between schools and the central office. The communities of practice organized themselves around early adopters and the support that was provided to meet new demands, and are reporting measurable differences in professional culture as a result.

The final question asked what impact contextual factors might have on implementation. Fiscal crises were highly influential, an unsurprising finding given that data were gathered between late 2009 and early 2011. Reducing referrals to special education is partly an outcome of discussions of equity, but it is also an outcome of calls to reduce expenditures. The financial impacts of special education service provision were especially acute in Harwich, Springdale, and Norton, where referrals were seen as
creating excessive expenditures. Concerns about costs and sustainability make the project’s focus on reculturing and restructuring all the more important. Each effort wanted its impact to last beyond the funding window. Doing so meant encouraging local actors to reallocate existing resources and alter relationships to aid sustainability. In response, Norton was replicating the NHR professional development session using local participants who had undergone the IOD’s training modules. Both Maple Lake and Harwich moved existing staff into new positions to continue guided coaching. These decisions were made in part due to financial considerations.

New Hampshire’s political context had two influences that distinguished NHR from ESGA. First, participation was limited and competitive. Limited funding and democratic localism prevented further impacts from scaling up. It is uncertain if these impacts will grow to other districts in the future. Second, federal restrictions related to special education and Title I funding do not allow for permeable group membership and flexible use of special education staff. These issues prevented greater collaboration and shared responsibility from taking hold.

These cases offer not only the experiences of participants at all levels of the project, but also results from annual, standards-based achievement tests that provide a confirmatory backdrop to participants’ perceptions of each effort. First, I collected qualitative data by interviewing 69 participants from all three participating levels of the study: the project’s designers, senior staff from the districts’ central offices, and school-level staff including principals, classroom teachers, and special educators. Representing these three levels of the project was vital to capturing the process of implementing
systemic reforms that were attempting to create intensive new interactions within local districts (Fullan, 2003). The second type of data I collected were students’ scores on annual, standards-based assessments at two points in time: the first and final years of each project in both jurisdictions. These were used to calculate standardized effect size estimates, which served here as a proxy for achievement gaps, in order to assess each project’s impact on inequality. Use of effect sizes to compare achievement gaps is in line with prevailing arguments for making comparisons of scores across contexts with different tests (Konstantopoulos & Hedges, 2008).

**Cross-Case Findings**

The two preceding chapters drew preliminary conclusions from each case and each jurisdiction’s experience with an initiative. This section synthesizes common findings across the four cases.

There were several components of the projects that appeared across all four cases. Each project employed an innovative combination of five characteristics to facilitate and sustain desired changes (improved instruction among all teachers and greater learning for all students):

- Mutual adaptation,
- Intermediary implementers,
- Guided coaching,
- Systemic coherence using districts as the units of change, and
- Job-embedded professional learning.
Each project was deigned to permit some elements of mutual adaptation as defined by McLaughlin (1998). She argues that policies must harness (rather than forcefully change or ignore) local will, build capacity, and permit adjustment for “local realities,” thereby integrating policy in ways best suited to local resources (p.73). Guiding principles, rather than strict management of behavior, characterizes effective mutually adaptive efforts. In both Ontario and New Hampshire, participation was voluntary. Some aspects of the project were determined by local actors, creating some deliberate variation across districts. These included the use and composition of leadership teams and the deployment of support mechanisms for struggling students. Implementing a new policy hinges on the will and capacity of local implementers (M. W. McLaughlin, 1998; Spillane, 1999). Mutually adaptive strategies attempt to use this reality to their advantage, rather than overcome it. Doing so did more than just facilitate engagement and interest by incorporating teachers’ voices. It made reconciliation with existing demands more feasible by helping local actors assemble a coherent approach through ongoing negotiation and adjustment (Honig & Hatch, 2004).

A second characteristic shared by these two efforts was that they were led by intermediary organizations who designed each effort’s implementation process and subsequently led that implementation. Agents of the state set priorities, but were not the projects’ primary drivers or guiding hands. In Fullan’s (2003) tri-level vision of reform, the state often assumes this leadership role, building the capacity of districts, acting as chief “coherence-maker,” and ensuring that actors maintain the intent of the reform (p.65). In these two cases, two non-state third parties took on this top level in policy
making: the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) in Canada and the Institute on Disabilities (IOD) in New Hampshire. These entities, as non-state actors in a time of political tension and pressure, held additional credibility and expertise that official representatives of the government could not, making change a less adversarial process. The role went beyond the provision of goods and services or the seeking of political influence that characterizes some third party, for-profit participation (Honig, 2009). CODE and the IOD engaged in a co-constructed relationship for making change in the service of broad policy goals. Rather than complicating the political dynamic as Honig warns, these relationships alleviated some political tension. This was especially true in light of participants’ feelings of being under recent pressure from state-level actors. In Ontario, the preceding period of high pressure and low support left some lingering tension among local educators. Participants in New Hampshire expressed this opposition to state intervention both in terms of their traditional sense of democratic localism as well as in relation to stress brought on by mechanisms of accountability. Change led by a third party was met with less resistance because they were seen as supportive experts rather than bureaucrats applying pressure.

This is not to say that pressure was entirely absent from these two processes of change. External pressure was needed to move districts beyond their initial inertia, but support was needed to build capacity and help districts adapt the projects to local circumstances and incorporate local priorities. The third component shared by these two projects was a model that blended pressure and support in the form of guided coaching. Earlier work in implementation noted that mandates and financial inducements were
governments’ only two limited tools (Firestone, 1989). More recent polices have added support, but observers have lamented how many of these Third Way systems offer only narrow capacity building for meeting technical performance targets (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). ESGA and NHR not only combined inducements with mandates for change in the service of equity, but also offered a form of support not always seen in large-scale projects. Each effort used liaisons to conduct *guided coaching*, or relationships that pushed local actors to commit to external terms for funding and other policy mandates, but also offered assistance with meeting local goals and adapting policies to local conditions. These staff were crucial in allowing CODE and the IOD to monitor progress and ensure that the broad goals of each policy were being met. But these representatives also maintained engagement, facilitated growth, and ensured sustainability by networking educators with others working on similar issues and engaging in sustained coaching for improvement. The two Canadian districts responded by reallocating their own resources to create similar, internal positions that would outlive ESGA funding.

The fourth element common to ESGA and NHR was the use of districts as the unit of change in order to help create coherence within local educational systems. Educational organizations characterized by coherence that is both pedagogical (Elmore, 1997, 2004) and cultural (e.g. characterized by trust) (Bryk, et al., 2010) eventually achieve better outcomes for students. Crafting this local coherence meant engaging in restructuring and reculturing in complementary ways, and districts hold great potential for crafting this coherence (Honig, 2008). As Elmore found, however, districts are often
excluded in contemporary efforts at reform, particularly under policies of accountability that hold schools accountable for students’ achievement. These two projects worked to reculture and restructure local authorities by utilizing rather than bypassing districts, arguing that central offices have the power to lead sustainable change over time by allocating resources, especially time, attention, and staff. Central offices helped to set local agendas for change and network schools while also permitting some school-level authority in each effort. The projects set out to impact all teachers and all students, and to create both structural and cultural changes like co-taught classes that supported collaboration. Achieving these objectives required districts to help shape implementation and change in a way that would be both systemic (or impacting all teachers and students) and sustained after the projects ended. The projects supported the district offices in this role, building their capacity to restructure and reculture their own local systems in ways that were coherent and sustainable.

The fifth and final element common to both projects was the use of ongoing, site-based professional development, or what Harwich called job-embedded professional learning (JEPL). This was a more varied process in ESGA than in NHR, where the IOD created a more consistent model for all districts to participate in and to recreate in their local contexts. In both cases, however, much of the JEPL took place within teachers’ home districts and on a regular basis. Large-scale changes in practice were the primary goal, though these are often difficult to achieve (Cohen, 1990; Elmore, 2004; Fullan, 2007). In order to realize and, more importantly, to sustain improvements in practice, both ESGA and NHR pursued lasting efforts in close proximity to their students. In some
cases, teachers were even offered support in their own classrooms with their students present in the form of what participants from Ontario called “at the elbow” coaching. Support for improvement has often been found lacking in systems with high-stakes assessments, especially in the US (Hargreaves, 2003; O’Day, 2002). Elmore (2004) has argued that all systems with accountability require capacity-building support to meet their objectives. Similarly, Singh (2009) has argued that inclusion cannot take place without professional development. Given findings from scholars like Fullan (2007), who contend that one-shot professional development is ineffective, both ESGA and NHR set out to engage teachers often and in their schools in an effort to meet the needs both of inclusion and accountability concurrently.

Collectively, these five elements are a far cry from the strict fidelity models studied in the early years of the field of policy implementation (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973). Heeding warnings from past research, contemporary project leaders like those from ESGA and NHR are attending to teachers’ practice (Fullan, 2009), professional culture (Sarason, 1996), capacity to meet demands (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009), and their existing commitments to concurrent policies (Ramanathan, 2008). Both projects kept existing mechanisms of accountability in mind while designing these efforts. ESGA and NHR were ambitious projects, attempting to impact fundamental roles and role relationships for teachers (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977) in the hopes of changing their communities of practice and, hopefully, ensuring greater potential for sustainability.

**The Five Principles as Implemented in the Four Case Studies**
The political and educational contexts in New Hampshire and Ontario have much in common, despite differences in federal laws, funding mechanisms, and current political tenor. Both jurisdictions practice some form of inclusion and work under the demands of standards-based assessment and accountability systems, which have performance targets that pressure local educators. Both projects sought to achieve widespread impact on communities of practice. This improved practice would, at least in principle, increase achievement and enhance curricular participation for all students. Improving test scores and closing gaps was not a universally held goal in either locale, but some participants in all four cases acknowledged the importance of such outcomes.

The four districts in this study had different experiences reconciling inclusion and accountability. These relationships reflect not only different political conditions in each jurisdiction, but also variations that are a natural part of implemented projects, especially those taking a mutually adaptive stance. In Ontario, *Education for All (EFA)* established guiding principles for inclusive practice, but left boards to propose their own plans for implementing them. CODE’s approach to support was different, but support was by 2007 a common facet of policy in Ontario. The EQAO created supportive mechanisms like OFIP to accompany their mechanisms of accountability. In New Hampshire, the state’s tradition of local autonomy blended reasonably well with NHR, as local educators voted to participate and were allowed to monitor progress in ways they saw fit. The additional layer of federal requirements complicated NHR. Federal guidelines mandated inclusion through IDEA, and even advocated RTI, but these policies and funding rules also
restricted collaboration and integration. Similarly, the mechanisms of NCLB placed significant pressure on schools, but offered little support.

Beyond these contextual factors, each local authority’s history, leadership, culture, and political context inevitably impacted its experience with implementation and its ability to co-implement inclusion and accountability. The following relationships resulted in the four districts:

- Maple Lake pursued inclusion as accountability, establishing and enforcing cultural norms and expectations for professional staff.
- Harwich’s experience represents a case of inclusion for accountability, leaving EQAO and other forms of data collection and analysis as the board’s primary objective, eclipsing some of the principles of EFA.
- Springdale committed to the values of NHR and implemented inclusion alongside accountability, viewing each as equally important, but as sequential steps to achieving increased learning.
- Norton’s efforts to implement NHR represented a case of inclusion running parallel to accountability, where there was little district-level intervention that tried to deliberately merge the two.

**Maple Lake.** Maple Lake’s approach to implementing ESGA was to treat inclusion as accountability. The central office established a set of expectations for accepting and working with all students, and subsequently enforced them with pressure that resembled the pressure of the accountability system. While staff were expected to increase achievement, expectations that teachers would be accepting and accommodating
of all students were equally emphasized. Principals received support in guiding this
cultural change and communicating these beliefs through guided professional activities:

[The purpose of professional learning communities, or PLCs] was, “Let’s get together and make sure we’re focused and make sure we’re doing something [in common] and our school energies are all being harnessed and directed in unison, rather than us all paddling our own little canoes in different directions.”… [Now] schools who are definitely moving in the right direction, … thinking in a focused, collaborative way.  

This process of managed cultural change was initially quite difficult for some staff. Two teachers used the word “traumatic” to describe their experiences in learning to reconcile the project’s demands for collective accountability and transparent practice with existing traditions of autonomy.

Eventually, however, teachers came to appreciate that these demands were accompanied by capacity-building support and took ownership of the process. One elementary school’s staff experienced a change in leadership during the project and lobbied the new principal to continue their work begun under ESGA. The Board created the SAT position described in Chapter 4 to secure this sustainability. These staff continued to support collaboration and high expectations of all students, combining monitoring and support in a role modeled after guided coaching. In these ways, the expectations that accompanied EFA became enforceable aspects of the project, just as performance targets would have been.

**Harwich.** Previous years of disappointing results and a project without a coherent focus across ESGA’s three funding years meant that Harwich’s project was often held together by the only, board-wide constant: accountability. Inclusion became a tool for accountability in Harwich, meaning the project was seen as an opportunity to use data to
drive instruction and increase achievement. The staff’s recollection of hitting “rock bottom” in their test scores and having several schools receive OFIP designations served as the impetus for change. This attention to data often became the most prominent unifying message for staff, since the Board did not pursue a single, easily identifiable objective during the three-year funding period. Using the ESGA project in this way did not mean necessarily that all project-related support was devoted to EQAO, but instead to data collection and use in a broader sense. Implementing this project meant engaging in a “cycle of assessments,” where staff were constantly collecting data from a variety of standardized instruments, using those data to drive instruction, and subsequently using those assessments to measure learning. Rather than using the project to change culture, as Maple Lake did, Harwich used the project to conduct assessments and use these assessments to drive learning. Changing culture was a benefit, but was not as explicit an objective as their colleagues in Maple Lake. Instead, ESGA offered Harwich another opportunity to engage in data-gathering more closely related to accountability. Over time, as structures like ARMs and a kindergarten data and professional development project were installed, the project became better defined as a differentiated instruction effort focused more on individualized instruction and growth in achievement.

Springdale. In Springdale, implementing inclusion alongside accountability meant that inclusion and accountability were steps to the same end, with the work of NHR leading to improved achievement and reduced referrals to special education. Each policy was to coexist in the district, but accountability was the overarching outcome, with inclusion a chapter in a larger story of improvement. Collaboration was part of the work
of inclusion, and increased trust was an important intermediate outcome of Springdale’s work under NHR. Inclusion alongside accountability meant that the former would help create a systematic (or uniform) and systemic (or universal) approach to instruction that would impact the latter. One district-level special education coordinator called this a process of ensuring that individuals’ instructional practice as well as their values and professional relationships were “in the umbrella,” arguing that achieving this consistency was “the most intricate part of the…initial implementation.”

Having all staff moving in the same direction was an important goal in Springdale, and NHR was simply a portion of a larger story. The ultimate goal was that this would lead to higher achievement and fewer students referred to special education. Participants made notable cultural progress, though accountability remained an important measure. Several staff touted past success by using the language of testing in framing their progress (e.g., citing AYP and other related benchmarks). The coherence they were seeking, they hoped, would move them closer to success as measured on assessments.

**Norton.** Lastly, Norton’s work under NHR could be described as inclusion working *parallel to* accountability. As part of their more hands-off relationship with schools, the central office applied little pressure for improvement, instead using NHR, grade-level standards, and other previous efforts to build consensus for consistency. The superintendent did emphasize fidelity to the state’s standards for learning, and seemed puzzled why some staff would eschew the exam, but did not give NECAP importance greater to or less than RTI or inclusion. One central office leader described the process of reconciliation and concurrent implementation of inclusion and accountability as equally
important and as a collaborative rather than coercive process: “our principals and leadership team at each school have been very creative in being able to make it work.”

Each initiative had its own requirements and objectives, and these played out independently in each school and from each other rather than due to steered or forced coherence. Like Springdale, staff did express some frustration about limitations with federal funding and use of special education staff in the midst of budget cuts. These contextual and political factors prevented further coherence in both districts from New Hampshire. Norton, however, managed to achieve significant gains without creating a top-down strategy to merge the two policies.

Each district attempted to maintain its pursuit of inclusion as encapsulated in these two projects—including sets of values, practices, and professional relationships—while at the same time pursuing the objectives laid out by the frameworks of accountability in Ontario and New Hampshire. In all four cases, this meant bringing together staff from schools and central offices to lead these efforts at changing instruction, collaboration, collective responsibility, and the structures that would support these elements.

Creating a fully coherent system, where all cultures and structures are built for similar and complementary ends (e.g., schedules that accommodate collaboration, new staff positions to coach PLCs, co-teaching arrangements to promote shared responsibility) was not achieved in any of the four contexts, however. In Ontario, the staff felt the rigid and narrow means for measuring students’ learning on EQAO meant that inclusion and accountability could not work together in the ways that they had
hoped. Some staff, for example, were comfortable differentiating instruction but not assessments, fearing a lack of explicit practice would harm results. Similarly, externally imposed structures inhibited coherence in the two New Hampshire districts. Like Ontario, mechanisms of accountability contributed to staff periodically abandoning the tenets of the project in favor of what one principal called “more time at the piano” to practice for exams. Designers of both ESGA and NHR claimed that increasing achievement on standards-based measures would be at least one outcome of their work, especially for students with SEN who had traditionally under-performed. They may not have expected, however, the degree to which these structures shape instruction and peer relationships, and how difficult it can be to break those habits. Another layer in New Hampshire was federal restrictions around use of special education staff and Title I funding. These rules, exacerbated by local budget cuts, inhibited inclusion and shared responsibility, despite their goals of encouraging equity. Nonetheless, all four districts pursued greater coherence and achieved this at least to some degree with the help of these two projects. They varied in their uses of authority, and the relationship between coherence and authority is discussed in the following section.

**Authority and Coherence**

Districts varied in their use of authority. Some central offices, like Maple Lake and Springdale, sought to manage schools tightly and actively reform their districts as part of project implementation. The other two cases, Norton and Harwich, were examples of less forceful involvement, characterized instead by empowering building-level leaders to take primary responsibility for engaging with the projects’ requirements.
Observers of reform have often discussed and debated the role that authority can play in shaping the successful (that is, faithful) implementation of an initiative (Bryk, et al., 2010; Elmore, 1997). The “tight-loose” dilemma is ever-present in discussions of educational change (Fullan, 2007). What these four cases demonstrate, however, is that coherence is an additional, interacting dimension to this discussion, rather than an outcome of tightly managed change. Honig and Hatch (2004) argue that achieving coherence among concurrent and competing efforts requires an ongoing process of negotiation between local actors and policy makers. Coherence can be pursued using tight authority, loose authority, and can even be ignored in instances of rigid control.

These cases show that a mutually adaptive stance between district offices and schools can be equally beneficial, so long as districts offer a clear vision for change, capacity-building support, a consensus-building approach, and networking opportunities among actors facing similar challenges. Norton and Harwich offer a helpful contrast in this regard. These two districts used a similar, looser approach to authority in managing change. Norton, however, demonstrated a more coherent approach to reform and a more coherent outcome, as well. This was, in part, because NHR established a clear and common framework for professional development and in part because Norton’s central office had a strong track record of building consensus and empowering principals to pursue project objectives. Harwich neither communicated a vision nor created one with school leaders. Each project’s flexibility contributed to some increased coherence. Norton, in mimicking this stance at the local level, achieved coherence with less force than the other districts in this study.
Figure 1 summarizes the relationships between authority and coherence for the four districts participating in this study. Maple Lake, ON, for example exercised strong authority on the part of the central office during ESGA, guiding the progress of the board’s PLCs. These groups were used to align the technical demands of inclusive instruction with a collaborative culture. Similarly, Springdale’s leaders worked to achieve a cohesive implementation of NHR across the district, including using senior administrators from the central office to help run some school-level professional development. While their colleagues in Norton fell back on a strong tradition of site-based autonomy, both districts from New Hampshire demonstrate how NHR, as a more uniformly designed initiative than ESGA, helped to create greater coherence between the technical and cultural demands of implementation by offering a consistent framework for districts to use and adapt, rather than leaving each district to discover one. For example, both districts showed signs of increased trust and collaboration between general and special educators, a cultural development that was not consistent in Ontario. This outcome should support the further participation of students with SEN in mainstream classrooms.
This discussion of coherence in addition to authority is relevant to the field of implementation because attention to these two factors in combination may contribute to teachers’ increased engagement with reform, coherence among concurrent efforts, increased achievement for students, and sustainability of projects’ momentum. From a perspective that privileges coherence, Maple Lake, ON, Springdale, NH, and Norton, NH were the districts most successful in these two jurisdictions. These three local authorities all maintained the core values of their respective projects in practice and participants in these districts seemed much closer to a consistent and coherence approach to practice. As classrooms became more diverse, roles for special educators changed and demands increased for classroom educators to support identified students more effectively. These districts not only built individuals’ capacity to meet these demands, they also cultivated communities of practice that demonstrated these values by collaborating and sharing.
responsibility for more students. Working with school-level actors to craft coherence was more important than paying attention to the right balance between freedom and authority.

Changes in Achievement Gaps Coinciding with Projects

Studies of implementation have often focused too narrowly on fidelity to external designers’ visions of projects and too little on students’ outcomes (Honig, 2006; Louis & Miles, 1990; Spillane, 2000). Considering that schools in both contexts are under significant pressure because of high-stakes, standards-based accountability, it was appropriate to consider progress as measured by these achievement tests. To that end, the study examined students’ scores during the period of time concurrent with the implementation of the project in question. Each context has achievement gaps between students identified with SEN and their non-identified peers. Both projects sought to narrow these gaps and the outcomes of all students in participating schools. This analysis, then, compared achievement gaps before and after the project was implemented in all four cases.

All four districts in this study made some measurable improvement from the beginning to the end of their respective projects (in at least one subject). Norton was the only district to close gaps in both reading and math and to see mean scores increase for students with and without SEN in both reading and math. The changes in achievement gaps, as measured by standardized effect size estimates (Cohen’s $d$), are summarized in Table 17.
Table 17. Summary of Changes in Achievement Gaps, Grade 3 Reading & Math (SESEs)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jurisdiction</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Math</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SY06</td>
<td>SY10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maple Lake</td>
<td>-0.36</td>
<td>-0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harwich</td>
<td>-0.74</td>
<td>-0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norton</td>
<td>-0.96</td>
<td>-0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Springdale</td>
<td>-0.81</td>
<td>-0.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All statistics are standardized effect size estimates (SESE, or Cohen’s d).

As the table shows, three of the four districts had one smaller and one larger achievement gap when comparing each project’s first and last years (Maple Lake’s achievement gap in math was modestly smaller). One district was an exception: Norton, with its loose central office authority but coherent approach at the school level, achieved the most significant gains, closing gaps in both reading and math. Norton also had the largest pre-project achievement gaps, giving them the most room for improvement. Maple Lake employed a much stronger, tighter use of authority, especially in dictating professional culture, in an effort to create a coherent environment. They also had the smallest achievement gaps in both subjects both before and after the project. Leaders in Maple Lake attributed some of these changes in scores to an increase in participation on EQAO among students with SEN.

Comparing the statistics in Table 17 to the interpretation of each case’s characteristics regarding authority and coherence in Figure 1, suggests that debates about levels of authority may need to be deemphasized in favor of focus on coherence. Norton achieved the greatest gains with the most decentralized use of authority. Maple Lake and
Springdale have not seen significant reduction in achievement gaps, but can show clear cultural progress in their developed professional openness and trust. Teachers in Maple Lake can observe and challenge one another’s practice, while staff in Springdale share responsibility and professional collaboration in new ways. Returning to Little’s (2002) framework as outlined in Chapter 2, these three districts demonstrate more open representations of professional practice and more collaborative norms of interaction. According to Little as well as more recent work by Bryk and colleagues (2010), increased trust and collaboration are precursors of improvement at the school level, while decentralization is an effective system-wide strategy that leads to improvement. The particular forms of trust in Maple Lake and Springdale appear to be especially promising, according to Bryk’s work in Chicago: trust between principals and teachers to pursue objectives and trust among colleagues to share responsibility for all students and innovate to improve the school. Together, these cases demonstrate the value of a coherent approach to change that includes cultivating culture and creating complementary structures.

Other jurisdictions may need to help professional cultures grow in concert with proposed structural changes and provide choices within imposed guiding principles (Hargreaves, 1994b) to help professional culture and coalesce around student achievement. Authors from Sarason (1971) to Coburn and Stein (2006) have all touted the importance of culture in the process of implementation, and the need to actively support the growth of a new community of practice. Coburn and Stein also found the use of monitors and similar structures that helped to establish and sustain these new cultures.
Together with more recent findings arguing for structures to build and maintain cultural growth (Biancarosa, et al., 2010; Saunders, et al., 2009), there is ample evidence for making coherence an important intermediate objective in the process of change along the path to improved learning. This study adds two points to this thesis. First, that this coherence between local professional culture and structural attributes is more important than lines of authority. Second, it offers some insight into how a district might pursue this coherence, through the use of tools like guided coaching.

Limitations

Like all studies, the conclusions drawn here must be interpreted in light of the dissertation’s limitations. Two stand out as worthy of note: sampling and causal attribution.

The sample in this case may not have represented all views, given that project liaisons and central office leaders were instrumental in recruiting participants. Further, CODE financially supported the data collection in Canada, and the boards volunteered to be part of a study. These influences on the sampling procedure may have limited exposure to those resisting these cultural changes, an important consideration in light of cultural findings related to trust and shared responsibility. All changes have resisters (Hargreaves, 1994a; Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006), and some who are hesitant to participate have valid reasons, including a sort of reform fatigue. It is likely that not all of these viewpoints were represented in this study. A related point is that case studies, the method employed here, capture complexity but can also create significant noise and fail to signal the variables of greatest import. These methods can, in a sense, over sample by
including too many types of participants and variables. This is especially a problem when conducting research at one moment in projects that stretch over several years (Cohen, 2008).

Change is an ongoing process in schools, which are not fixed entities but collections of evolving interactions and processes (Spillane, et al., 2009). Van de Ven and Poole remind researchers in the field of organizations that the observer’s fixed snapshot and static reporting limit his ability to fully capture the ongoing “emergent flux” that his own assumptions believe to be true (p. 1390). The particular impact of various structures like PLCs or liaisons performing guided coaching is difficult to specifically determine, given the breadth captured by case study methods. In this study, this limitation was compounded by the fact that data were all gathered at a single point in time for the sake of feasibility. As it pertains to sampling, other studies may wish to recruit more participants from fewer levels to isolate impacts of particular components to enhance generalizability of these findings. This assumption may also call for longitudinal contact with these participants.

A second limitation is that causation is not attributable in this case. The qualitative themes may be due to any of several concurrent factors occurring in each district. In addition, students’ achievement data must be interpreted carefully as it relates to themes observed in the qualitative data. As with most standards-based annual assessments, the volatility of annual scores means these achievement gaps could be shifting sands rather than foundations for future action (Vacha-Haase & Thompson, 2004). Changes in achievement gaps during these projects may be coincidental,
accidental, or attributed to other factors. The two years in these four district samples compare different cohorts of students at each point in time, examining only those in grade three at two different points (each project’s first and final year). Most importantly, the relationships between these qualitative and quantitative data cannot be considered causal. The study attempted to mitigate this by collecting data on contextual factors as part of a case study, therefore acknowledging other interacting factors (Honig, 2006; Yin, 2003).

Conclusions on Findings

The four cases illustrate how two projects aimed to improve whole schools and districts in order to enhance and systematize pedagogy, alter communities of practice, and close achievement gaps. They demonstrate the importance of attention to professional culture in implementing policy, of the need for new efforts to coexist with concurrent work, and the value of flexibility to allow local actors to find their own ways of crafting coherence. Staff were almost universally engaged and hopeful, despite the uses of monitoring and some pressure in a historically private profession. All had some progress to show for their efforts, including some closing of achievement gaps and increased participation for students. Most notable, however, was Norton as an example of decentralization combined with coherence (that is, complementary change of structure and cultures); this combination of limited authority and coherence (at the building level) achieved the most promising results for students in the form of narrowing achievement gaps. Prospects of sustainability are different in each district, and cuts in budgets, new projects, and pressures from annual assessments all contributing to a potential loss of momentum.
Both ESGA and NHR were ambitious and difficult to implement and to sustain. Classroom educators have long expressed concerns about the impact of including students with SEN on mainstream curriculum and overall performance (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1998; Hunt & McDonnell, 2007; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). Allocating time and creating structures for collaborating with colleagues, along with ongoing site-based professional development, alleviated some of these concerns. Teachers were generally grateful for an effort that helped them to accommodate outliers, or students whose learning challenges often left them in need of additional supports when compared to most of their peers. Such outlier students are consistently a challenge for many classroom teachers (Kennedy, 2005). These two efforts offered educators in both jurisdictions the opportunity to build their capacity to meet these demands. Senior participants from both New Hampshire and Ontario remarked that an important aspect of each project was the investment made in “human capital.” Changes in people, rather than strictly programmatic structures, are a challenging but effective way to implement change (Coburn & Stein, 2006; Datnow, 2006; Fullan & Pomfret, 1977; Honig, 2006). The structural changes will support this cultural growth into the future, helping to sustain the project beyond the initial finding and momentum. Pressure to demonstrate progress on uniform measures, however, still remains a source of tension with those teachers who have successfully differentiated their instruction for more students.

Hargreaves (1985) has argued that examining several instances of a phenomenon— like several local authorities reconciling accountability and inclusion— is an effective strategy for spanning the gap between bounded empirical work and grand
sociological theory. This study is, in one sense, an “attempt to understand the schooling process in the context of policy changes, economic pressures, and…not in isolation from them” (p.43). Given the similarities between these two projects—combined with the fact that both jurisdictions place significant emphasis on standards-based accountability—several implications for both the formation of policy and research in implementation can be drawn from a collective examination of these four cases.

**Implications for Policy Makers: Flexibility, Capacity, and Adaptability**

These two projects offer important lessons for policy makers to consider for leading coherent changes that maintain attention to guiding principles and sustain initial investment. ESGA and NHR employed flexible designs, provided the means to build capacity in local actors, and helped local districts adapt their professional structures and cultures to meet these new demands and sustain them over time. Such effective uses of flexibility, capacity, and adaptability offer important lessons for authors and drivers of change in schools. That is, new initiatives should offer several paths to success, enhance the abilities of local educators, and make structural and cultural changes that promote to coherence and sustainability. This section defines these three terms and argues for their use as guiding principles in future efforts to design and implement educational policy.

**Flexibility**

The first lesson from ESGA and NHR is that policy makers should design flexible (as opposed to fidelity-based) projects. Implementation, both as a political process and a field of study, has often focused on fidelity. That is, a project and the local educators who implemented it were both judged by the degree to which they remained true to policy
makers’ goals or vision of change. Studies in the field of implementation often asked simply if what was intended to be done was, in fact, carried out. The earliest studies in educational implementation reveal the flaws in this approach to making change, especially in highlighting the inherent tensions between the demands on local actors and the desires of those high above the ground, designing policy (Gross, et al., 1971; M. W. McLaughlin & Berman, 1975; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973). More effective efforts were those that altered local structures and the manner in which they used resources (Louis & Miles, 1990), but also permitted local adaptation (M. W. McLaughlin, 1998). As Fullan’s (2007) more recent work highlights, however, it is difficult to alter the ways that local resources are used and local professional cultures interact. Designing policies that allow local actors to enact policies in such a way that multiple, concurrent demands can be met only heightens this challenge. Creating this unity of function and purpose, or “coherence,” in more successful cases like Norton did not stem from a tightening of control. Instead, the ongoing negotiation that Honig and Hatch (2004) call for was most effectively facilitated through decentralization and dialogue between local actors and policy-level planners, as well as between the central office and participating schools.

ESGA and NHR took several steps towards helping local authorities create more coherent educational systems through flexibility, rather than rigidity. Several elements of the projects characterized this adaptable stance towards implementing new projects. First, while both jurisdictions operated under strict accountability regimes, there was some flexibility granted to local actors in measuring their progress. CODE granted participating boards several ways to demonstrate increased learning, while the IOD offered several
options for the progress monitoring component or RTI. Each project’s planning team also included staff from the respective jurisdiction’s accountability office, helping to keep testing and its attendant pressures and structures consistently in mind.

Second, local conditions and objectives were an important part of implementing each project. ESGA fully allowed local boards to include localized goals in their planning process or develop during the course of the project. Maple Lake, for example, pursued supports for aboriginal students in addition to those with SEN. NHR encouraged leadership teams to add goals and incorporate local goals, such as the Springdale superintendent’s desire to reduce referrals to special education. Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) have called such flexibility an element of their Fourth Way of change, arguing the incorporating local goals and issues is a revolutionary component of the process of educational change that brings about coherence and encourages commitment.

Perhaps the most effective aspect to these projects’ flexible approaches was their use of intermediary organizations in the design and implementation of these efforts. These third-party, non-governmental entities were vital to creating an atmosphere of flexibility and to blending pressure and support that honored local goals in the process of implementation. In Fullan’s (2003) tri-level vision of reform, the state, district, and school each play particular roles in the process of change. In both NHR and ESGA, the state empowered an intermediary between themselves and the local district authorities to implement their objectives. Scholars in the field of implementation have argued that these organizations can be powerful forces for change, given the higher likelihood that they have the expertise to support change, the ability to focus on a single effort, and the skills
to build local capacity (M. W. McLaughlin, 2006). Staff generally saw these organizations as well-equipped to handle this change process, since they had expertise in leading change, differentiating instruction to meet various learning needs, and obviated much of the tension between local actors and conventional policy makers of the state. The two governmental educational authorities were able to focus on broad principles while allowing CODE and the IOD a variety of strategies for carrying out the projects.

This is flexibility on the part of the state in the sense that it requires a relinquishing of control, allowing the intermediary to work with and support local staff as they grapple with the process of change. Policy makers set parameters, rather than prescribe behavior. This approach inspired districts and schools in Ontario and New Hampshire to re-create this flexible approach internally. Scholarly work situated in complexity theory has found that approaches of top-level actors can manifest themselves at multiple levels in a changing system (Davis, Sumara, & D’Amour, 2012). In this case, the local adaptability of the project freed actors at all levels to focus on principles and outcomes, rather than managing particular behaviors. Superintendents and principals placed an emphasis on this kind of political and professional trust to adhere to broad principles, but with professional discretion.

One area where the American districts struggled was in trying to make more flexible, adapted use of special education resources. Regulations related to use of staff and funding, especially in a time of tight budgets, made it difficult to share responsibility for all students. American practices in special education more often rely on formalized medical diagnosis models, where a bifurcated decision is made about support and strict
conditions are placed on resources. Canadian educators in this study were better able to create flexible, permeable groupings for students because of Ontario’s less formalized, continuum-based model of special needs identification. Other, bi-partisan work has argued that such rigidity in special education policies presents problems in multiple contexts (Junge & Krvaric, 2011). Supporting students with SEN could be more effective by subscribing to this principle of flexibility. Helping to build teachers’ capacity to create universally designed and differentiated classrooms (using systems like RTI) could help to provide students with unique supports and individualized goals like in the current system, but also permit flexible group membership and shared responsibility among staff. Using less rigid placements, groupings, and procedures for identifying needs, would allow students to get resources without being excluded from the mainstream curriculum. It might also allow for teachers to share responsibility for more students and to ensure that referrals for special education reflect a more accurate sense of students’ needs.

Rather than tight control, flexibility, or a form of the ongoing dialogue that Honig and Hatch call for, became a path to coherence (that is, an aligned and agreeable culture and use of resources) in districts implementing ESGA and NHR. Local educators were supported in their sense making processes professionally (rather than bureaucratically) by trusted experts who could still serve as reliable agents of the state. As a result, flexibility helped to bring efforts together, not tighter controls.

**Building Capacity**

The second important lesson for policy makers is to build the capacity of those charged with carrying out new initiatives, but to do so in ways that acknowledge local
realities. Elmore (Elmore, 2004, 2009) has argued that an inherent flaw with most systems of accountability is that they demand performance without providing additional units of capacity for achieving that performance. Pressure alone is insufficient, and successful implementation requires capacity-building measures to be embedded in new projects. I use capacity here partly in Spillane’s (Spillane, 1999) sense, meaning actively supporting “educators’ ability to practice in ways recommended by reformers” (p.144).

Some systems have attempted to build capacity, but failed to fundamentally change teaching practice, in part because they do not engage teachers’ preexisting understandings and professional circumstances (Cohen, 1990). Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) cite a further failure in some contemporary systems of accountability like Ontario and the UK that do provide support: that it is narrow and suited only to a few goals designated by the state as educationally appropriate. Such designs, while politically expedient, often ignore the many needs that local educators are attempting to address. The practice of coaching often fails to get beyond the realm of pressurized and technocratic skill-building for external objectives (Hargreaves & Skelton, 2012).

ESGA and NHR demonstrated a new path to providing support. These two projects certainly applied external pressure for change, but they also acknowledged local goals, concurrent demands, and existing understandings in an effort to make large-scale changes to instructional practice and collegial relationships. Both projects used regular staff visits to adopt a stance that I call **guided coaching**, or ongoing collaborative work that uses monitoring and external goals to apply pressure while also offering support for local goals and conditions.
In Ontario, monitor-coaches (both terms were used by planning-level participants from CODE, staff used coaching and mentoring) made regular visits to schools, and these relationships had several dimensions that blended pressure and support in a unique way. These regular visitors served as monitors to ensure commitment to the priorities of *Education for All* as well as each board’s unique proposal. NHR’s liaisons employed checklists to look for fidelity, but also supported extended periods of cultural formation. In both projects, planners used visiting staff to facilitate, monitor, and mentor (all terms used by participants) local-level educators to ensure that they were fully compliant with the objectives and principles of the respective projects that were conditions for receiving the funding. Pressure in the forms of monitoring from policy-level planners is often part of educational change (Fullan, 2003). It is the absence of this kind of support that Hargreaves and Skelton (2012) critique, arguing that capacity-building should also acknowledge and involve local communities of practice.

The addition of a coaching element was what made the blend of pressure and support used in these two projects unique, especially in Ontario. Hargreaves and Skelton (2011) argue that coaching as a facet of educational change often devolves into “technologies to deliver mandated changes,” rather than to “build true capacity in terms of helping teachers to help themselves” (p.14). In Ontario, however, these visiting staff also stressed fidelity on the part of local actors to *their own goals*, as laid out in the proposals they wrote in order to receive the project’s funding. In New Hampshire, the support staff used a variety of protocols and other training methods to assist groups in establishing norms of collaboration, goals, measures of success, and local terminology.
Coaching, in these initiatives, came to represent the kind of relationship that Hargreaves and Skelton advocate, one where the projects are helping to build some “true capacity” in district-level actors. This kind of support is more than a question of local autonomy. It speaks to the ability of the new effort to be implemented alongside concurrent priorities and to the abilities of local actors to sustain the goals of a given project. Guided coaching is designed to build capacity both for short-term and long-term success in implementation.

Staff in Norton initially found this process frustrating, seeing it tied too much to preparation and what some participants there called “process,” rather than action. One of these same participants, a principal, later argued that these early steps formed an important cultural foundation for their later collaboration, forcing staff to become “less casual and more systematic” about their work, thus ensuring a “framework for sustainability.” This participant and a principal colleague in the district welcomed this kind of systematic approach, even in a district characterized by less stringent management. The other principal’s lone complaint was that little of NHR’s work involved consistent relationships with the same coaches or session in their district.

Even contexts that are resistant to external authority welcome these kinds supportive partnerships, so long as they are stable, rigorous, and connected to local goals for students’ learning.

In the local districts and boards that participated in these two projects, several structures developed to mimic this blended approach to pressure and support that I call guided coaching. For example, both Harwich and Maple Lake created new board-wide
support positions to continue instructional support. In Harwich, these new support staff called Area Resource Mentors (ARMs) worked with teachers in six-week blocks in teachers’ rooms and support their instructional growth in conjunction a special education colleague. These extended sessions served as important, extended learning opportunities in the context of teachers’ daily practice and on topics that teachers felt needed the most immediate attention. ARMs modeled various forms of differentiated instruction and supported other staff in taking on roles as coaches and instructional mentors. This model strove to build capacity for transforming instructional practice as well as ensure sustainability. It represents a reallocation of local resources to ensure that capacity building continues after the project’s funding ends.

This kind of support is not the call for compliance that has historically accompanied the implementation of new projects and policies. It incorporates local goals and interests along with its need for adherence to external principles. The flexible stances of NHR and ESGA gave rise to guided coaching, because they both sought to increase teachers’ abilities to transform instructional practice. Staff from the two intermediary organizations monitored staff for adherence with some broad principles, but also supported and guided local actors as they grappled with their own goals and issues that were related to the project. The use of intermediary organizations and this blended capacity-building role are inexorably tied together. CODE and the IOD were free of tension and evaluative responsibility, and therefore freer to provide the kind of support that districts needed. More importantly, however, their expertise made them better suited to build capacity than agents of the state. Instructional practice likely would not have
changed at such a scale if not for the support that both projects’ liaisons offered to local educators through guided coaching.

**Adaptability**

The third component I propose for future policies and their implementation is adaptability, or using new projects to alter structures and cultures to achieve an initiative’s aims and ensure sustainability. Complementary structures and cultures create coherence, with consistent approaches to instruction, shared responsibility for all students, internal accountability, and resources allocated to support these aims.

Change in schools requires attention to both the will and capacity of those on the ground charged with implementing externally-initiated projects (Spillane, 1999). Successful efforts towards change are multifaceted, attending not only to teachers’ technical abilities, but also to the structures that shape their behavior, their conceptions of their professional practice, and the cultures in which they work. Teachers’ communities of practice can serve as obstacles to change, but they can also act as important catalysts for changing and enforcing valued professional norms and lasting reservoirs of new knowledge (Coburn & Stein, 2006; Little, 2002; Orr, 1996).

ESGA and NHR did not just provide funds, but increased their impact and ensured sustainability by attending to both restructuring and resulting of schools and teachers’ communities of practice. Efforts like Maple Lake’s attention to the needs of aboriginal students are part of a process of reculturing (giving teachers space to collaborate and share ideas, communicating messages about students’ potential), but cultural changes also require establishing the professional infrastructure to support such
transformations (Biancarosa, et al., 2010; Saunders, et al., 2009), including scheduling and assignment of responsibilities. Maple Lake’s PLCs are a structure that supports these cultural changes, and will outlast the funding from CODE. Another example of the adaptability encouraged by ESGA were board-wide support staff in Maple Lake, or SATs. This network of former special educators became a lasting structure that reallocated existing personnel in order to encourage and support collaborative changes like co-teaching. Both ESGA and NHR supported schools’ ability to adapt by cultivating approaches to reculturing as well as restructuring in ways that achieved more widespread and sustainable changes by steering local communities of practice and pushing districts to reallocate resources to new uses, both strategies that help ensure that changes have a wider impact and outlive external funding.

In New Hampshire, installing RTI was a similar adaptation for districts. It required the simultaneous pursuit of restructuring and reculturing. NHR’s leadership and application materials clearly stated that participating districts had to commit to allocating substantial meeting time and effort towards collecting and analyzing various forms of data. Districts, with the support of the IOD, restructured schedules and leadership teams to support productive, data-based discussions. They also, however, altered the cultures of these meetings, fostering greater trust among colleagues with the support of facilitators and meeting protocols. As part of this approach to inclusive practice, both American districts established “core time,” or periods of instruction where students with SEN could not be removed from class. They—and other students without identified special needs—could be removed from class at other time for support, but not when key concepts were
being covered by the classroom teacher. As such, core time became a lasting structure that facilitates a cultural goal: shared responsibility for all students. Implementing this means that teachers’ roles change in the sense that they are asked to reconsider their modes of instruction and assessment, as well as to whom they are responsible for delivering these. Their role relationships change in the sense that the groups to which students are assigned for support become more diverse and fluid than ever before. Both structural and cultural adaptations are implied in this process, using both will have a deeper impact on instruction, and both can be sustained using existing resources and without external support.

Adapting a local instructional system is a challenge, and numerous reforms have failed to do so in the past (Tyack & Tobin, 1994). In part, this is because reforms often ignore the culture and power dynamics of schools and districts (Sarason, 1990), and in part because they do not force local actors to make new uses of existing resources (Louis & Miles, 1990). What ESGA and NHR demonstrate is that adaptation in schools and districts requires attention to all aspects of learning, or the changes in roles and role relationships (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977), that implementing new policies often demands. These projects show that substantive changes—those that simultaneously reflect the intentions of the reformers while also addressing local concerns, building implementers’ capacity, and showing promise for sustainability—concurrently address the reculturing and restructuring necessary for adaptation. Doing both leads to coherence, a distinguishing factor in the three districts that were more successful in this study. Local
authorities created new positions, altered schedules, and changed responsibilities in the service of adapting their local educational structures to serve more students.

**Concluding Thoughts on Theory of Change**

Central planners face profound challenges mandating and implementing multiple, concurrent initiatives. Schools and districts, however, demonstrate that through attention to flexibility, capacity, and local adaptability, they are able to do what central authorities cannot: reconcile multiple, competing demands and work towards greater achievement for all students. Policy makers can learn from ESGA and NHR that implementation should permit mutually adaptive implementation using intermediary organizations, apply pressure and offer support using guided coaching, and be designed to adapt participating districts, pursuing coherent and concurrent reculturing and restructuring. More important than the right blend of authority and flexibility is the presence of guiding principles, support, and a decentralized approach that allow schools to pursue improvement in a variety of ways.

**Implications for Research in Implementation**

Beyond the design of policies, this study offers several contributions to future research in the implementation of large-scale projects. In particular, this examination of two initiatives across four districts in two countries reveals several challenges in studying implementation, the diverse contexts implementing them, and their impacts on educators and students. These implications include suggestions for what projects are units of study, the importance of including contextualized interactions rather than isolated experiences
only, and the theoretical conundrum presented by mutual adaptation for capturing participants’ experience and outcomes.

- **Beyond “Misery,” towards “authentic engagement”:** Leaders in the field of implementation have argued that the field must move beyond “misery research,” or work that focusses on the foibles of external actors as they design projects for local educators to implement (M. W. McLaughlin, 2006). Authors have argued for mutually constructed projects (Datnow, 2006), or those that might generate enthusiasm and “authentic engagement” (e.g., democratic participation in decision-making) from implementers in districts and schools (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). Future research in implementation of large-scale projects should consider local educators’ enthusiasm as a criterion for selection and study. Projects that teachers and district-level leaders find engaging, supportive, and effective must more frequently be a topic of study for researchers to see what qualities are more likely to create buy-in.

McLaughlin has noted the persistent tension between designers and implementers. Projects like NHR and ESGA generated less of this tension, according to senior participants, especially in their use of third-party intermediaries and supportive relationships. It is important to understand the components of projects like these to disseminate what local actors consider to be best practices. Fullan’s (2003) argument for tri-level reform is instructive here. His argument for greater interaction
among levels of reform is important, but additional examples are needed to demonstrate how this kind of interaction is accomplished in ways that benefit both educators and students. When projects are selected because they seem to lead to improved outcomes for students or at least engagement from educators, they should be considered worthy subjects for study. Beyond beating a continual drum against failing projects, studies can make additional efforts to examine lauded, large-scale projects and understand what made for their welcomed—if only occasionally effective—implementation.

- **Attention to context and interactions:** A second point for researchers is the importance of understanding the ways that a given project is impacted by other demands like concurrent initiatives or local politics. This is often accomplished through longitudinal observations. As this study demonstrates, no initiative enters a vacuum. As a senior participant from Maple Lake stated, most local authorities are “initiated out the ying-yang” and tired of constant shifts in focus. This is especially true in the age of accountability and performance targets. Future studies in the field of implementation must attend not only to the initiative in question, but the many others that local implementers must grapple with concurrently. These other simultaneous demands are as much a part of the context for instances of implementation as the demographics of the participants or other factors. Studies of enacting
must also become studies of interacting. One characteristic of the age of accountability is the more frequent use of international comparisons in educational research (e.g., Elmore, 2008; Fullan, 2003; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). This study is part of this trend to try and learn from other, similar contexts. In order to learn from other jurisdictions, however, readers must have an appreciation of the political and social realities that confront educators as they implement the efforts in question. Non-state actors—third parties like CODE in Ontario and the IOD in New Hampshire—are important aspects of this theory of interaction and may have their own relationships to local authorities outside of the project. Relationships between local authorities and the state may or may not be strained and complex. Schools may be limited in their ability to adapt in their use of resources, as the American participants discovered in trying to reallocate special education dollars during a budget crisis. Just as initiatives interact, so do implementers. These interacting factors shape the process of implementation, as the relationship between inclusion and accountability in these four cases demonstrates. Since they can alter an initiative, they should be considered for future research.

• *Theoretical conundrums of flexibility and outcomes:* Finally, the changes that can happen to initiatives from design to implementation raise several theoretical issues about studying the impacts of implementing
projects like ESGA and NHR. Knowing that projects change through layers and through being enacted, and that authors like McLaughlin (1998) have argued that projects should be designed for mutual adaptation, raises serious issues about just what is being studied in the fields of policy and implementation and where to attribute results. Recommendations for incorporating flexible principles into the design of an effort have implications not only for implementers, but also for researchers studying these initiatives. This is especially problematic in an effort like ESGA, designed around guiding principles, but intended to be quite flexible across different sites. Complex implementation is a non-linear process (M. W. McLaughlin, 2006). Methods of research must account for this complexity. The naturalist John J. Audubon was a pioneer, drawing thousands of species of birds in their native habitats. In order to paint them accurately, however, he had to shoot the creatures and pose them on wires in natural-looking stances. In order to ensure he captured a complete picture, he had to alter the object of his observations and lost some variation in the process. This same conundrum is present for researchers studying complex processes of implementation, where individual organizations are in constant motion and different organizations may be working on the same project in very different ways. Assessing cultural changes means trying to observe teachers in their own environment, but also disrupting that environment
by observing meetings and PLCs or asking a pair of co-teachers to allocate their planning time for an observation or interview. The difficulty of capturing these complex processes is one argument for including students’ outcomes in studies of implementation. Quantitative outcome data can explain aspects of a project that qualitative data cannot (Desimone, 2009). Another reason to examine student outcomes is the notable absence of outcome data in historical studies of implementation (M. W. McLaughlin, 2006). The limitations of descriptive policy studies and the importance of accountability in the current political context mean that including outcomes as this study has done can make a contribution to solving the complexity problem in the field of implementation. Test scores may also alleviate the Audubon Conundrum, shifting the focus from fidelity in inputs to outcomes and growth.

In researching the implementation of future policies, the lessons from this study are that successful and welcomed efforts are worthy targets of research; that local contexts are an important factor shaping implementation, and should not be ignored solely for the sake of pursuing generalizable results; and that students’ outcomes are a valuable part of research in implementation, but drawing causal attributions between projects and these outcomes is difficult in flexible projects like ESGA and NHR. Research in implementation that focuses on fidelity ignores important realities like deliberate variations, contextual influences like interacting policies, and student
outcomes. The results of this study provide just a few ways that traditional studies of implementation can explore new avenues.

Conclusions

Implementing change is a complex process for many reasons. Local authorities vary in their priorities, capacities, and most pressing needs (Louis & Miles, 1990; M. W. McLaughlin, 1998). Organizations suffer from structural intractability (Tyack & Tobin, 1994), initiatives lack clear purposes (Fullan, 2006), local actors lack capacity (Elmore, 2004), teachers resist (Evans, 2001), and political jurisdictions vary in their valuations of equity or local control (McDermott, 1999). Various initiatives place too much weight on either high-pressure mandates or high-cost inducements (Firestone, 1989). Policymakers attempt to impact structure with too little attention to teachers’ communities of practice (Sarason, 1990). Too few take a balanced, developmental approach.

Those experienced in educational change understand that as policies pass through many layers of implementation, they change a little each time (Coburn, 2001; Datnow & Castellano, 2000; Honig, 2006). Each layer is, in effect, a co-maker of policy (M. W. McLaughlin, 2006). As high-profile priorities in educational change, accountability and inclusion exemplify these tensions, as the policies that drive each often ignore and contradict those of the other. When districts are asked to implement these two policies concurrently, tension between standardization and differentiation is inevitable, especially when there is little support for meeting these competing demands.

Central planners in departments and ministries of education face profound challenges mandating and implementing multiple, concurrent initiatives. Schools and
districts, however, demonstrate that through attention to flexibility, capacity, and local adaptability, they are able to do what central authorities of the state often cannot: reconcile multiple, competing demands and work towards greater achievement for all students. ESGA and NHR were projects that targeted entire systems as co-negotiators of coherence, became more effective for all teachers and students, and thus more equitable. These initiatives sought to reconcile accountability and inclusion and to achieve both policies’ objectives concurrently. These two efforts were innovative in their accounting for mutual adaptation and local capacity while also providing guiding direction and monitoring. They acknowledged from their inception the other major priorities confronting local actors and worked to equip educators with the ability to pursue these demands together in more universally designed structural environments. They co-negotiated new cultures and structures in participating districts to make coherent pedagogical and cultural change. Some evidence from this study suggests that participants feel these projects are more likely to be sustained than efforts with a more narrow focus or less balanced strategy, in part because they make new use of existing resources and in part because they alter cultural components like expectations for students’ achievement.

In designing for flexibility, policy makers should clearly define objectives and guiding principles, while allowing local adaptation of methods and measures of success. This can include altering Fullan’s (2003) tri-level vision of reform, where an intermediary third-party organization can assume the role of the state in the process of implementation. These organizations often have knowledge and credibility that the state
does not (M. W. McLaughlin, 2006). When there are multiple, concurrent efforts to consider, especially those that pull teachers in competing directions, the principle of ongoing negotiation and dialogue becomes even more important to achieve organizational coherence (Honig & Hatch, 2004).

In attending to capacity, those playing the role of project designers and lead implementers (in this case, CODE and the IOD), should consider ways to build up the abilities of local actors to meet new demands while helping educators continue to meet existing objectives. Learning should be ongoing and take place in the context of teachers’ and principals’ work. It should follow the model of guided coaching, where local actors are shown how to meet external demands but pushed to continue this learning through monitoring.

Finally, these two projects reveal the importance of helping local actors adapt in the process of implementation. In promoting adaptability, ESGA and NHR helped participating districts through concurrent and coherent processes of reculturing and restructuring. These two elements were equally important for helping to create unified, systemic approaches to improving students’ learning. Local leaders expressed visions for cultural change, and then received assistance in creating structures to effect and sustain that change. Pursuing both of these elements in a complementary way was crucial to making progress in closing achievement gaps and in adapting schools to meet the needs of more students.

Coherence can be achieved without force, but instead through pursuing consensus and decentralization. Districts achieved the most success when they distributed
professional responsibility for all students, fostered collaboration among staff, and
allowed for some school-level adaptation of the project’s goals. This study’s findings
reveal that attention to power and authority has perhaps been over-emphasized in past
studies of change, at the expense of coherence, which contrasting cases like Maple Lake
and Norton show is attainable in a variety of ways. The districts that attended to
achieving coherence between their cultural and technical changes were the most
successful. In Norton, the focus on time and space for teams to collaborate, on-site
coaching, and shared responsibility for all students were all important aspects that
participants said contributed to their improvement.

Equity and inclusion on one hand, and local control and accountability of the
Second Way on the other need not be oppositional forces. The moral and instructional
aims of each of these projects—increased mainstream participation, closing of
achievement gaps, tiered intervention, and more universally designed instruction—are
similar. But each had to pursue a different change agenda given its own political climate
and stance towards local professional cultures. Both projects pursued equity and
permitted some local autonomy, by employing a mutually adaptive stance that
encouraged variation for the sake of student learning. These cases demonstrate that there
is no single correct path to change, but there are several unproductive ones. Time will tell
which strategies in these locales lead to greater long-term achievement for more students.
References


New Hampshire Department of Education Statewide Census by Disability. (2011). Concord, NH: New Hampshire Division of Instruction, Department of Special Education.


Appendix 1: Interview Key

I. **Ontario**

A. **Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE, Policy Level)**
   1. CODE Co-Chair, Liaison: Catholic Boards
   2. CODE: Executive Director
   3. CODE Co-Chair, Public Board Liaison
   4. CODE: Special Project Administrator
   5. CODE Liaison: Francophone Boards

B. **Maple Lake (19 Participants)**
   6. Superintendent of Special Education
   7. Board Director
   8. Elementary School 1 Group (5 administrators and teachers)
   9. Elementary School 2 Group (4 administrators and teachers)
   10. Special Assignment Teachers Group (3 SATs)
   11. Data Administrator and Special Education Administrator (2)
   12. SERT Focus Group (3 teachers)

C. **Harwich (19 Participants)**
   13. Superintendent of Special Education
   14. Board Director
   15. Area Resource Mentor
   16. Differentiated Instruction Program Consultant
   17. Elementary School 1 Group (6 teachers and administrators)
   18. Program Consultant for Assessment and Evaluation
   19. System Coordinator for Special Education
   20. Elementary School 2 Group (4 teachers)
   21. Human Resources Administrator (former)
   22. Elementary School 2 Administrators (2 staff)

II. **New Hampshire**

A. **Institute on Disabilities (IOD, Policy Level)**
   23. Project Directors (2 staff)

B. **Norton (10 Participants)**
24. Superintendent for Curriculum and Special Education  
25. Assistant Superintendent  
26. Principal of Elementary School 2  
27. Principal of Elementary School 1  
28. Elementary Teachers from School 1 (2 teachers)  
29. Elementary Teachers from School 1 (2 teachers)  
30. Special Education Teachers from School 1 (2 teachers)  

C. Springdale (14 Participants)  
31. Superintendent for Special Education  
32. Special Education Liaison  
33. Assistant Superintendent  
34. Special Education Teacher, School 1  
35. Principal of Elementary School 1  
36. Elementary School 1 Group (3 teachers)  
37. Principal of Elementary School 2  
38. Elementary School 2 Leadership Team (5 teachers)  


Boston College, Lynch School of Education  
Informed Consent for Dissertation Research Participation  
Matthew J Welch, Principal Investigator

You are being asked to participate in a research study as part of a doctoral dissertation at the Lynch School of Education, Boston College. The invitation to participate in this study is based on your work in a school participating in recent educational policy effort, New Hampshire Responds (the reform).

The Study’s purpose is to understand how teachers experience different policy, reform, and professional development efforts, in particular how they experience efforts aimed at supporting special education students in mainstream classrooms and policies around standardized testing. The study ultimately hopes to compare how teachers in different jurisdictions experience different reforms with similar goals. That information should be helpful to educators undertaking reform initiatives in the future.

You are being asked to participate in an interview, which should last approximately 45 minutes. The questions will focus on your professional background, experiences with the reform, work with colleagues, and professional outlook going forward. This will include the reform’s impacts on your view of your professional practice, as well as your relationships with students and colleagues. All participants will be asked to answer similar questions; teachers and principals will be asked about school-level experiences and district office personnel about district-wide experiences. A copy of the interview questions will be provided to you.

Your participation is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, it will not affect your current or future relations with Boston College, the researcher, your employers, or colleagues. You are free to withdraw at any time, for whatever reason. There is no penalty or loss of benefits for not taking part or for stopping your participation. There is no cost to you to participate in this study.

The study may include risks that are unknown at this time. Participation in this study is believed to carry minimal risks. It is possible that recalling past events or current interactions with reforms may be uncomfortable for some participants. Your district has approved this study, though all responses will remain anonymous and no identifying information will be attached to any responses. All names of persons, schools, and districts will be concealed and analysis will look for trends in responses across participants. We will make every effort to keep your research records confidential, but it cannot be assured. Records that identify you and the consent form signed by you, may be looked at by the Boston College IRB or Federal Agencies overseeing human subject research.

If you choose to participate, the interview will be recorded and transcribed for analysis. You may, at any time, elect to pause or discontinue recording or the interview. The interview will be conducted in a private space at your place of work. You may at any time request an alternate location or withdraw from the study. These data will be stored in a secure facility for no more than two years. All paper records will be stored in a locked office and electronic files in a password-protected file. They will then be destroyed. During storage, the researcher and dissertation committee will have access to the data. This dissertation may result in future publications or conference presentations.
There are several potential benefits to participation. First, educators may enjoy the opportunity to reflect on their experiences, roles, relationships, and beliefs. The demanding profession of education does not always permit such reflective time. Second, participating districts will have the opportunity to hear and reflect upon district-wide findings and themes at a later time. Finally, participation may give teachers a heretofore unavailable opportunity to provide anonymous feedback on a reform experience that could inform future efforts.

Your participation in this research is voluntary, and in no way a requirement of your current position. No compensation is provided for participation. At any time you may elect to decline to answer any question, a portion of a question, or to discontinue your participation altogether. Withdrawal from this study will not result in denial of entitled benefits and can remain confidential at your request. The principal investigator may withdraw your participation should it appear to be in your best interest, you do not meet participation criteria, you fail to comply with research procedures, or the study comes to an end or is ended by the sponsor.

As a research participant, you have certain rights available to you. Should you, at any time, have questions or concerns, such as about confidentiality or research-related injury, the conduct of the researcher, or your participation, you may contact the researcher, Matthew Welch, at welchmh@bc.edu. Decisions regarding care and compensation for any other research related injury will be made on a case-by-case basis. In the case of research-related injury, you may contact the dissertation advisor or the Office of Research Protections at Boston College:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dr. Andy Hargreaves</th>
<th>Office for Research Protections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>617.552.0680</td>
<td>617.552.4778</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:hargrean@bc.edu">hargrean@bc.edu</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:irb@bc.edu">irb@bc.edu</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Your participation is sincerely appreciated.

Matthew J. Welch  
Doctoral Candidate, Boston

______________________________  __________
Signature of participant  Date

I have read this paper about the study or it was read to me. I understand the possible risks and benefits of this study. I know that being in this study is voluntary and I can stop at any time. I choose to be in this study. I will get a copy of this consent form.

______________________________  __________
Witness (Auditor)    Date
Interview Protocol
Districts’ Experiences Balancing Inclusion, Accountability, and Change (M. J. Welch)
Dissertation Research

D:  N / S
Role in District (Sp Ed license?):
Gender:
Time in District (Time in Role):

Thank you for agreeing to this interview. I am pleased that you have agreed to participate in this study. I will start the interview by asking you some background questions. Then I’ll ask you about [project name] guiding principles and its implementation in your context. The last group of questions are about accountability, concurrent reform efforts, and their interaction with [project name].

With your permission, this interview will be recorded and transcribed for analysis and used in a doctoral dissertation studying inclusion and accountability. All individuals, schools, and districts will be referred to using pseudonyms. You have the right to decline to answer any question, comment off the record, or terminate participation at any time.

1. Can you describe your role in the school / district?

2. Who was primarily responsible for your district’s involvement in NHR*? What is the typical process for initiating new efforts here?

3. What is/was your role in NHR?

4. Do you see the principles of RTI and NHR as applicable to your teaching / work with teachers / work with principals?

5. What forms of support are there for implementing the ideas behind NHR?

6. In theory, does NHR support the goal of having all students demonstrate proficiency on NECAP?

7. Do you feel this initiative has or will enhance achievement for
   - Students with SEN?
   - Students not identified with SEN?

8. Has NHR positively impacted your teaching and your students (in ways beyond standardized achievement)? Can you mention an anecdote or example of the initiative’s impact?
   a. For non-teachers: Has NHR positively impacted your work with colleagues?
9. What, in your view, are NHR’s strengths and weaknesses as a PD effort? If you were redesigning this initiative, what might you do differently?

10. Has your work with NHR impacted the work of other staff who are not directly involved?

11. What has been the impact of NHR on school and district leadership’s roles?

12. How did NHR impact the way teachers work with
   - students?
   - other colleagues and staff?

13. What has been the general response to the principles of inclusion and tiered intervention in this district?

14. To what degree does this district demonstrate collective responsibility and internal accountability? Can you give examples of how this idea plays out in your work, such as discussing student work or planning lessons together?

15. Can you describe the manner in which this district / school creates inclusive environments? What is inclusion here?

16. What kinds of efforts are most effective in closing NECAP achievement gaps between SEN-identified students and those not identified?

17. What are the most pressing demands you feel are placed on you by state and district policies?
   a. What resources are present to help you reach these goals? Which are lacking?
   b. Are these demands manageable, reconcilable, in conflict, in overload?

18. What other initiatives are currently ongoing that impact your work in some way? Do these efforts complement each other or compete for resources and attention?

19. Anything else to add on inclusion, NECAP, or NHR? School reform or professional development in general?
Endnotes for Qualitative Interview Codes

1 Interviews 1, 3.
2 Interview 6.
3 Interview 1.
4 Interviews 1, 5.
5 Interview 1.
6 Interview 3.
7 Interview 3.
8 Interview 3.
9 Interview 1.
10 Interview 4.
11 Interview 1.
12 Interview 2.
13 Interview 3.
14 Interview 5.
15 Interview 1.
16 Interview 3.
17 Interview 3.
18 Interview 4.
19 Interview 2 (see also Interview 3).
20 Interview 5.
21 Interview 4.
22 Interview 3.
23 Interview 4.
24 Interviews 1, 3, and 5.
25 Interview 2.
26 Interview 3.
27 Interview 1.
28 Interview 1.
29 Interview 2.
30 Interview 1.
31 Interview 2.
32 Interview 3.
33 Interview 3.
34 Interview 4.
35 Interview 5.
36 Interview 1.
37 Interview 1.
38 Interview 3.
39 Interview 2 (also interview 3).
40 Interview 4.
41 Interview 1.
42 Interview 4.
43 Interview 2.
44 Interview 3.
45 Interview 2.
46 Interview 11.
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