Presentation Focus—Three Main Areas

1. My background as an educator/researcher
   * The methodology of the study
   * Why this study is important
2. Preliminary results and member check
3. What this means for you
Purpose of this Study:

To identify barriers to educational reform/systemic change efforts in Minnesota as identified by district level superintendents.
The impetus of the research comes first from the literature...

• Despite a wealth of literature about the process of educational change (Elmore, 2000; Fullan, 2010; Hall, 1987; Heifetz, 2005; Hord, 1987; Leithwood, 1999; Linsky, 2005; Seashore, 1996; Senge, 1997) reforming education to resolve serious achievement issues continues to appear insurmountable.

• In situating this research study, we drew from research and literature focusing on educational change stemming from federal reform initiatives.

NCLB has been seen as groundbreaking due to its unequaled attention to the nation’s achievement gap and its focus on accountability (Sherman, 2007)
(2002) Secretary of Education Rod Paige in speaking to the nation's state education chiefs stated, “When students beg their teachers to extend deadlines, the choice between discipline and compassion can be difficult. But if states ask me to extend deadlines, they will be asking me to make a choice between kids and the system...when choosing between kids and the system, I choose the kids...

And if someone comes to me to appeal for a waiver from the federal requirement, I hope to be very pleasant as I firmly say, not in this century, not in this country.”

When System Leaders implemented the law, Theory of Administration collided with NCLB Theory of Accountability.

Paul Manna in his book *Collision Course* (2011) states,

Although some exceptions exist, by and large NCLB’s implementation tended to produce practices and decreased academic quality and expectation in the nation’s schools. Further, it expanded bureaucratic rules that often led policy implementers to focus their effort on meeting technical rules. As a result, substantively important outcomes for schools and students suffered (p.17).
With the lens of educational change stemming from federal reform initiatives, this research is striving to understand:

What barriers are preventing superintendents in the state of Minnesota from enacting legislative reforms that are intended to ensure increased student achievement for all students.

• We focused on what superintendents in Minnesota identified as barriers and challenges to educational change and reform efforts.

Research questions guiding the research work...

1. What barriers do superintendents in the state of Minnesota identify as the most significant to implementing reform efforts at a district/system level?
2. What are the successful initiatives implemented at the district/system level that have been identified by superintendents as overcoming education reform/change barriers?
Why Superintendents?
We selected superintendents because of the change that has occurred in their work since the enactment of NCLB.

- Expectations regarding the work of superintendents have shifted (Sherman, 2007).
- Most notably, superintendents must be dedicated to continuous improvement of all schools and diverse populations of students in their districts (Grogan & Sherman 2003).
- Since NCLB, superintendents no longer have the choice of whether or not to name discrepancies in test scores among students (Sherman 2007).

Methodology:
Mixed Methods Case Study Approach

- Surveyed all acting superintendents in Minnesota
- Conducted focus groups
- Conducted individual interviews
- Member checking/informant feedback or respondent validation

Preliminary Results and Member Checking Using Clickers
Your drink of choice

1. Diet Coke
2. Diet Pepsi
3. Coke
4. Mountain Dew
5. Water
6. Coffee
7. Other

I exercise

1. Twice a week
2. Once a week
3. Once a month
4. I consider walking to my car exercise

Preliminary Results and Member Checking Using Clickers
Data sources

Quantitative and qualitative data was collected from 212 of the 350 (60.4%) acting superintendents in the state of Minnesota.

Would you consider your district to be:

1. Rural
2. Suburban
3. Urban

District Size

- Rural: 78%
- Suburban: 20%
- Urban: 2%
My district has ingrained patterns of behavior that are resistant to school reform.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

Superintendents agreed (strongly agreed and agreed were combined) that their district had ingrained patterns of behavior that were resistant to school reform (81%).
My district has the leadership with the skills to enact change.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

Preliminary Results

Superintendents agreed (strongly agreed and agreed were combined) that their district had leadership with the skills to enact change (81%).

Barriers to Reform

Superintendents were posed with nine different barriers:
- Lack of funding
- Mandates
- School boards
- Federal requirements
- Community expectations
- Lack of control over budgets
- Insufficient control over personnel
- School calendar
- Tenure
Mandates
1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

Mandates (93% Agree)

School Boards
1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree
School Boards - Rural

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

School Boards - Urban/Suburban

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

School Boards (56% Disagree)
Tenure

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

Tenure (86% Agree)

School Calendar

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree
Insufficient Control Over Personnel

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

School Calendar (76% Agree)
Theoretical Framework

Public Educational Leadership Project (PELP) Coherence Framework

• According to Childress and his colleagues (2007), the PELP framework has roots in business organizational alignment but incorporates a content knowledge of successful reforms in education.
Environment
Regulations and Statutes – Contracts – Funding – Politics

• Lack of Funding
• Mandates
• Federal Requirements
• State politics
• Tenure

Culture
Norms and behaviors of the organization

• Negative school culture
• Ingrained patterns of behavior that were resistant to school reform
• Passive resistance to change
• Tenure

Do you believe professional learning communities are a key reform strategy in impacting your district’s culture?

1. Yes
2. No
“...systems and structures tend to stay in place long after what they were built for has passed from the scene. As a result, systems and structures do not reinforce each other and often constrain rather than enable high performance.” Childress et al. (2007).

Teacher unions
- Lack of time
- Tenure
- Mandates
- Calendar

Do you believe that RTI is a critical reform effort in changing systems and structures within your district?
1. Yes
2. No
Do you believe that flexible scheduling would impact your ability to change systems and structures in your district?

1. Yes
2. No

Rural Districts
Does your district have a strategic long range plan?

1. Yes
2. No

Urban/Suburban Districts
Does your district have a strategic long range plan?

1. Yes
2. No
System and Structure
Strategic Planning

• Just over half of the superintendents (51.2%) stated that they **did not** have a strategic long range plan to use as a road map for school reform.

Resources
Money – people – technology – data

• Lack of funding/compensation
• Lack of time
• Mandates

Do you agree that technology integration is a critical reform effort in addressing resource allocation?

1. Yes
2. No
Stakeholders
People inside and outside of the organization who have a legitimate interest in the system

- Teachers/Leaders aren’t prepared/qualified
- Lack of stability of families
- Community expectations

What percentage of your teachers would you identify as prepared and highly qualified/effective?

1. 100%
2. 95%
3. 90%
4. 85%
5. 80%
6. <80%

What percentage of your administrators would you identify as prepared and highly qualified/effective?

1. 100%
2. 95%
3. 90%
4. 85%
5. 80%
6. <80%
Do you believe that community expectations impact your ability to implement reform/change?

1. Yes
2. No

Strategy
Set of actions a district deliberately takes

Based on frequency of the thematic coding, the following successful (strategies) reforms were identified by superintendents as most common:

1. Technology integration
2. Professional Learning Communities (PLC)
3. Response to Intervention (RTI)
4. Flexible scheduling
5. Curriculum changes

What does this all mean?

- Ensure that instructional core is directly connected to your strategies for improvement
  - Technology integration
  - Professional Learning Communities (PLC)
  - Response to Intervention (RTI)
  - Flexible scheduling
  - Curriculum changes
Byron High School Named 2011 Intel School of Distinction!

- Intel School of Distinction
  - Technology integration
  - Professional Learning Communities (PLC)
  - Response to Intervention (RTI)
  - Flexible scheduling
  - Curriculum changes

Eden Prairie - Changes in curriculum, schedule, RTI results in increased reading scores

- Redrew the district attendance map
- Changed elementary schools from a K-5 to a K-6 model
- Systemic approach to literacy:
  - Teachers in all of the classrooms have committed to 120 uninterrupted minutes of teaching reading [every day]. The fact that it’s uninterrupted is a factor, and the fact that it’s 120 is a factor.
  - Within that block of time, there’s a period where everybody gets some basic instruction and there’s another period where the teachers move those kids into groups, and they get specialized instruction with other certified adults in the classroom.

MinnPost - In her last week at Eden Prairie, Melissa Krull reflects on her tenure

Melissa Krull, “Over the last three years, our black students have made a 21 percent gain. Our non-English speaking kids made 28 percent gains and our low-income students have made 21 percent gains. Our white students have made a 5 percent gain, so that moved them up into the 91st percentile.”
Melissa Krull, “What I’m learning about these schools that you’re talking about, these “beat the odds” schools, is that there’s great success when the leaders of the school are just really embracing these ideas, and courageously taking on, and making really hard decisions that, in some cases, aren’t even popular.”

Reflection?

- Is your district addressing the elements that can support or hinder effective implementation of your strategies?
- How would others describe the reform efforts in your district?
- Are your strategies being implemented with fidelity?
- Can you measure the impact of your reform efforts/strategies in increased student learning?

“... these “beat the odds” schools, is that there’s great success when the leaders of the school are just really embracing these ideas, and courageously taking on, and making really hard decisions that, in some cases, aren’t even popular.” (2011 Krull)

What does this all mean MASA leadership?

- Use the findings from this study to influence the environmental factors that are impacting superintendents ability to implement meaningful school reform.
Next steps in the research study...

- Analyze the member check data to strengthen findings
- Replicate this study in Montana and Utah
- Finalize the research report for publication
- Provide MASA an executive summary of the findings of this study to support their work in impacting the "environmental" issues that are impeding educational reform.

So what do you think this all means?

Additional thoughts...

Thank you...

to each superintendent in Minnesota — your job is huge and so is your care for Minnesota students.
to MASA for providing me with this opportunity.
for each of you here today for taking time to participate in this session.
Dr. Courtney Stewart co-author of the "Barriers to School Reform" research study.
my colleague Barb Wilson for her help and support in gathering "member check" data.
to my good friend and colleague, Dr. Jerry Robichaux, who said to me... "Candace you need to do this study!"
References


References


Barriers to District Reform
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