STATE INTERVENTION IN UNDERPERFORMING SCHOOLS:  
THE ROLE OF THE ASSIST COACH

By

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL POLICY STUDIES AND PRACTICE
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
WITH A MAJOR IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP
In the Graduate College
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

2011
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my advisor, Dr. J. Robert Hendricks, whose leadership over the past twenty years altered the direction and trajectory of my life. His guidance created life-changing opportunities extending beyond the completion of this program. The leadership of Dr. John Pedicone has had an equal impact; he continues to serve as an exemplar for many working to improve education through their respective leadership role. The expertise of Dr. Jeffery Bennett is also deserving of my gratitude—his expertise over the course of the development and completion of this study raised the quality of this research study by challenging my performance to higher levels of performance.

Completing this program while serving as a district administrator involved a great deal of support from my colleagues and fellow cohort members. To my colleagues, I offer my sincerest appreciation for your spirit of collegiality to accomplish the day-to-day responsibilities of educating Arizona’s children. To my cohort members, know that your friendship provided a fresh perspective on our individual and collective work of educational leadership.

Lastly, the support I received from friends and family in the completion of this program deserves special recognition. The demands of reading and writing for so many hours required their understanding so that my personal connection with each of them could continue. An important quality of life is the relationships the one builds and maintains; the relationship I have with members of my doctoral committee, my professional colleagues, cohort members, friends, and family are valued beyond that which can be expressed in these few words of appreciation.
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ABSTRACT

There has been a trend toward increased in educational accountability for the past fifty years as seen through legislation, policy, and guidance implemented by state education agencies. While states had accountability systems, the federal NCLB Act of 2001 formalized the current system that worked to remediate schools challenged to meet the accountability expectations? Exacerbating these circumstances was a shifting accountability model, AZ LEARNS, that measured school performance from 2007-2009. The Arizona Department of Education formalized processes and structures to address the needs of low-capacity schools through the State System of Support. This research examined the role of the ASSIST Coach in underperforming schools as a measure of state intervention in Arizona. Data revealed at insufficient time, resources, and support were afforded to low-capacity schools by the ASSIST Coach to affect change that resulted in school improvement within the AZ LEARNS model. Additionally, the skills, experience, and background did not align to the needs of low-capacity schools that participated in this study. In the absence of effective state intervention, schools turned to internal capacities to plan for and implement school improvement initiatives that were minimally effective in turning around their respective underperformance. Based on these findings, recommendations for future research were offered to strengthen the support for schools under the State System of Support.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Accountability for student achievement is not new for educators, principals, and district administrators. The era of accountability began developing in the 1960s through research in the field with the concurrent implementation of national school reform models directed by the United States Department of Education (Berends, 2002; Hatch, 2000; Sterbinsky, 2006). Increased accountability was also observed through policy development that continued through the 1980s with the push for educational standards under the Reagan administration known as the Excellence Movement (Kingston, 1988). Efforts to extend these initial accomplishments were observed during the Clinton administration in the 1990s where expectations under the Title I Program held schools accountable for continuous school improvement as part of the Restructuring Movement (DeBray, 2003; DuFour & Eaker, 1998). In our contemporary society, the accountability landscape was achieved through the more recent introduction of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001. As educators moved further into implementing the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, many referred to our current accountability as the New Accountability Movement (O'Day, 2002).

The increased accountability for school improvement, whether through programmatic or policy initiatives, introduced the question of what should be done with schools that were unsuccessful in continuous school improvement outcomes. In this discussion, it is recognized that exercising leadership to implement reform or change in an organization was an incredibly complex task. Embedded in this complexity are other
key questions like when is the best time, what parts—people, policy, or programs—should be involved and to what degree?

These questions have not been answered well by educational leaders in response to calls for increased accountability, and as such, the vast majority tinkered through the complex change process since the 1960s (Fullan, 2003). Furthermore, Fullan (2003) stated our expectations turned out to be so far removed from the realities of implementation that educational leaders found themselves implementing fragmented reform while trying to navigate concurrent increased accountability and interventions by state education agencies (Fullan, 1993).

**Background of the Study**

Amidst this fifty-year history of increasing educational accountability has been persistent expectations of continuous school improvement at each level—the local school, local district (LEA), state education agency (SEA), and the United States Department of Education (USDOE). One key component built into this expectation has been questions about what to do with schools that are unable or unsuccessful in their improvement efforts. Under NCLB, state education agencies developed accountability systems which included policies and procedures to intervene with schools that fail (Erpenbach & Forte, 2005)

Accountability and Results Notification System of 2002, more commonly known as AZ LEARNS (2002), established the multi-pronged State System of Support (System) that integrates the Arizona School Improvement Plan (ASIP), site visits and recommendations by a Solutions Teams, and the Arizona School Site Improvement Support Team, or ASSIST Coach (coach) (Arizona school site improvement support team (ASSIST), 2005; “AZ LEARNS,” 2002). In January 2008, Huberman et al. (2008) at the Southwest Comprehensive Center at WestEd reported results of a three-year study that indicated:

[the coach] process was perceived by a majority of the principals as helping their schools’ improvement efforts. However, about half of the principals also mentioned interacting with more than one [coach] due to coach turnover or reassignment, and commented on the need for more frequent visits, more follow-up and more in-depth work with the [coach].

[The ADE] staff indicated that overall the process is working well with regard to the support the [coach] provided to the schools. Nevertheless, they also acknowledged difficulties with the large caseload of schools (an average of 20) that each [coach] was responsible for and with [coach] recruitment and retention issues.

Huberman et al. (2008) also found that SEA staff reported perceptions that the System transitioned the role of the SEA from one of ensuring compliance to that of active engagement to assist schools in improvement efforts. Still, Huberman et al. (2008) recommended that coaches: (1) accelerate their work with underperforming and failing schools by starting work in the summer rather than the fall; (2) engage in more hands-on
work with assigned schools; (3) assign coaches to underperforming or failing schools based on alignment between the school’s needs and the experience and skills of the coach, (4) gather feedback so as to evaluate the implementation of the System, including the work of the coaches; and (5) implement a more tightly coupled structure whereby coaches interface with the district level to build capacity, participate in the exit process of the Solutions Team, and strengthen coordination of school improvement efforts when multiple coaches are serving the same school.

**Statement of the Problem**

In response to nearly fifty years of increased accountability at the state and federal levels, many schools took part in a national movement to resolve the complex task of improvement by implementing a comprehensive school reform (CSR) model. In practice, as Berends (2002) noted, CSR models attempted to bring alignment and coherency to school programs, structures, and processes in an effort to change and improve classroom learning and student achievement. As researchers, including Berends (2002) and Hatch (2000), investigated their implementation and results, studies demonstrated generally unsatisfactory outcomes. For schools that struggled, Hatch (2000) and others noted that disagreement in a variety of cultural factors (moral purpose, values, beliefs, assumptions, instructional approach, and collaborative practices), with concurrent competition among areas of focus, caused improvement efforts to be fragmented was noted by Berends (2002) and others (Berends, 2002; Ehren, 2008; Hatch, 2000; Kushman & Yap, 1999). These day-to-day working conditions prevented the school from implementing the CSR model with fidelity or at all. Furthermore, and
according to Berends (2002), reform efforts being driven by external facilitators or change agents (e.g., ASSIST Coaches), were reported to have changed significantly under political and fiscal pressures further undermining fidelity to the CSR model.

Implementation of CSR models yielded positive outcomes, and where success has been demonstrated, results from a variety of critical factors working in synergy. Such positive outcomes were cited by O’Day (2002) where values, beliefs, and collaborative structures and processes were established as part of the school culture. For example, Kushman and Yap (1999) and Fullan (1993, 2003) reported that successful conditions for improvement include a common and strong moral purpose regarding student achievement, deep understanding of the needs and how the reform model aligns with them, and adequate resources to support its implementation (Fullan, 1999, 2003, 2008). Ultimately, as reported by Kushman et al. (1999), schools that improved classroom practice produced sustainable school improvement by linking the “how” and “why.”

The Southwest Comprehensive Center’s evaluation of Arizona’s State System of Support (System) was the only formal evaluation of the ADE’s intervention system to date. State education agencies have not typically been the unit of study in educational research (Hamann, 2005). In light of a very limited literature and research base on the multi-pronged System under AZ LEARNS of 2002, and more specifically the role of the state-sponsored coach, knowing the impact of any practice or method across public K-12 education is problematic. For example, annual changes in the formulaic determination of school labels in Arizona compounded the ability of evaluators to effectively assess the impact of any intervention strategy including the work of ASSIST Coaches; labels
(Excelling, Highly Performing, Performing, Underperforming, and Failing) earned by schools have changed from one year to the next simply due to formulaic adjustments approved by the Arizona State Board of Education rather than due to the work of the coach or improvement efforts by the school community as well. These annual changes to the model of state accountability make measurement of its goals or outcomes extremely problematic; with a moving target each year coaches and others that work to support schools in the System found difficulties in knowing how to support low-capacity schools to produce meaningful traction in their turnaround efforts. Low-capacity schools, in particular, may have benefited from a stable accountability system that measured school improvement based in student achievement data. As noted by Berends (2002), Ehren (2008), Kushman and Yap (1999), these schools were challenged by the ability to mine data sources, identify root causes, and tailor improvement solutions to remediate gaps in the learning systems of their schools. A different view may have been to have state leaders implement a stable measurement system of state accountability whereby one measurement system was used by schools.

Amidst this changing landscape of school accountability, outcomes regarding school improvement that resulted from the work of the ASSIST Coach remained unidentified. When ADE developed the coaching role, expectations for this role were based in mission and goal statements that were three-fold:

1. Promote effective planning that incorporates the Solutions Team Statement of Findings with the Arizona School Improvement Plan through the: (a) promotion of the expertise of the principal to model instructional leadership,
guide school reform, use data effectively, and build internal capacity; (b) building of internal capacity and framework systems for compliance with comprehensive professional development and Highly Qualified teachers; and (c) promotion of the alignment of resources and allocation of instructional time to improve teacher quality.

2. Assist in the coordination of all educational resources by (a) supporting the building the internal capacity to analyze and evaluate standards-based curriculum, instructional materials and practices, assessment practices, professional development, and data use; (b) communicate internal and external resources to support school internal capacity; and (c) promote and document technology integration into effective classroom instructional practices.

3. Document school progress and implementation of plans in relation to increasing academic achievement for all students by: (a) supporting the improvement of teacher effectiveness based on national and state standards; (b) promoting the implementation of “best practices” based in a comprehensive curriculum and quality instruction; and (c) promoting assessment practices based in the collection of data of and for learning (outcomes and progress monitoring); and (d) collecting evidence-based artifacts that verify implementation of the Arizona School Improvement Plan.
Furthermore, the job description for this coaching role included a limited number of strategies that were to be implemented in periodic meetings between the coach and the principal. They included:

- Guiding the school improvement and leadership team in the coordination of viable and effective internal and external resources;
- Document the progress of the school’s implementation of the Arizona School Improvement Plan and recommendations from the Solutions Team Statement of Findings.

From this work by the coach, the ADE saw specific benefits being achieved with low-capacity schools. The benefits of the coaching model included:

- Alignment to, and compliance with, the Arizona School Improvement Plan format and the Standards & Rubrics for School Improvement;
- The maintenance of internal accountability through a focus on the Arizona School Improvement Plan, implementation strategies, and the measures of effectiveness by schools and districts;
- The extension of the System beyond the Solutions Teams Statement of Findings to include additional support and assistance to low-capacity schools;
- The development and implementation of plans that were developed in response to the Solutions Team Statement of Findings;
- Assistance with, and access to, internal and external resources; and
- The collection of documentation school improvement efforts.
In light of the job description and expectations for the coaching role, secondary questions pertaining to how ADE defined the capacity of those serving in the role of ASSIST Coach, including the qualifications, experience, and training in effective school reform practices, processes of change, and effective mentoring practices persisted so that improved classroom practice, learning, and student achievement were observed. Lastly, how individuals that served in the coaching role facilitated school improvement work, change, and development of leadership capacity of principals, teacher leaders, and school faculty members continued to exist. Too many educational professionals remained unaware of the purpose of the ASSIST Coach role, expectations placed on it regarding process and outcomes, and how individuals were prepared to do this critical work in low-capacity schools.

Finally, and in response to the coaching role that afforded guidance, support, and the coordination of resources to school principals at low-capacity schools, there existed a nexus between the coaching role and the mentoring capacity of coaches. Questions persisted regarding the preparation of coaches for their mentoring work, such as:

- How are coaches prepared to mentor principals to build leadership capacity?
- What methods do coaches implement to complete the mentoring process?
- Are coaches viewed as mentors by principals at low-capacity schools?

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research study is to investigate the Arizona Department of Education’s role of ASSIST Coach assigned to work with low-capacity schools in
Arizona. While the literature review identified a very limited body of research or literature that described state intervention practices in Arizona, how the ASSIST Coach supported change processes and developed leadership capacity via mentoring practices were not articulated. There exists a limited body of research that described effective practices upon which SEAs can utilize in their efforts to turnaround low-capacity schools. Furthermore, Good et. al (2005) and others shared that the difficulty to attribute gains in student achievement to the work of the ASSIST Coaches directly has been noted and limited the use of quantitative methodology for the purposes of this study (Good, Burross, & McCaslin, 2005; Stephens, 2008). Secretary Duncan emphasized that the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act will include heightened responsibilities of state and local education agencies to support continuous school improvement in low-capacity schools in the coming years (Duncan, 2010). For these reasons, this study was designed to explore the perceptions of ASSIST Coaches, principals, and teacher leaders regarding the work of the coaching role relative to this its impact on continuous school improvement processes and outcomes. Themes were compared and discussed descriptively in light of the Ecology of Change Framework (Wagner & Kegan, 2006). Findings were reported within the constructs of the preparing, envisioning, and enacting phases of the change process.

1. Preparing. Data were used diagnostically to describe student achievement as well as the school’s climate and culture regarding school improvement. Also described are expectations of accountability and how relationships will be developed to move the change process forward.
2. Envisioning. Initial solutions to the school’s performance issues are developed that strategically identify how individuals can contribute to the change process. Members of the school community are held accountable for change; protocols and processes are implemented to progress monitor the change process.

3. Enacting. The change process is implemented with a laser-like focus. Classroom instruction and other indicators of change (e.g., roles, action plans, strategies, and goals) are monitored during the implementation.

**Research Questions**

Constructs within school improvement, change, and the work of the ASSIST Coach framed the research questions for this study. More specifically, the following questions support the identification and alignment of the resources, skills, and experience that the ASSIST Coach makes available to the underperforming or failing school and its district administrators to support change and school improvement:

1. How are resources available to ASSIST Coaches implemented in the school?
2. To what extent are the needs of the underperforming or failing school aligned with the experience and skills of the ASSIST Coach?
3. How are available resources directed by the ASSIST Coach toward school improvement?

**Significance of the Study**

Fullan (1993, 2003) and O’Day (2002) have shown that reform, change, and school improvement occurred when conditions, structures, and processes were a part of the school culture (Fullan, 1993, 1999, 2003; O’Day, 2002). Fullan (2003) and O’Day
(2002) noted that navigating the pathways of this work can be highly complex for some and easily navigated for others; both researchers stated that successful schools effectively understood and processed information through structured individual and interpersonal constructs that supported the system to change. O’Day (2002) extended these comments, stating that low-capacity schools failed to implement reflective and collaborative structures that engaged teachers in sharing information on instructional practices and processes. Fullan (2003) termed these schools as adaptive schools where the interactions moved tacit knowledge, held privately by individual teachers, to explicit knowledge that was understood by grade level teams, department teams, or even the whole school.

Under the new accountability system where the multi-pronged State System of School Support was utilized by the Arizona Department of Education, state intervention practices that involved ASSIST Coaches may have benefited from the development of school-by-school capacity where these constructs of adaptive skills could be formally evaluated. As research on the coaching role indicated,

[t]his model is not itself a type of easily quantified variable often scrutinized when examining student achievement…Rather [the coaching model] is a layer of support, albeit mandated by legislation, which has been attached or appended to school processes. Whether this appendage acts as a supportive influence or a hindrance needs to be investigated (Judson, 2006).

The results of this study served to inform ASSIST Coaches, principals and teachers about the effects of the work done by coaches at underperforming or failing
schools. The results of this study may also be used by Excelling, Highly Performing, and Performing schools to reinforce adaptive school improvement practices as well as provide organizations, principals, and teachers with guidance on adaptive practices, structures, and routines. This includes educational leadership preparation programs at the post-secondary level of education. Teachers and principals may use these results to better understand their role in discovering underlying values, beliefs, and assumptions that drive one’s moral purpose as well as how to effectively engage in the change process through the implementation of collaborative processes that build a collective knowledge base and language, the use of data, accountability structures, and relationships to effectively leverage change and school improvement.

Assumptions

1. It is assumed that the ASSIST Coaches assigned to support underperforming and failing schools had the capacity—defined by their experience, knowledge, skills, and training—to provide the appropriate support to underperforming or failing schools whereby the school exited ADE’s accountability processes within the State System of School Support.

2. It is also assumed that schools labeled as underperforming or failing were actively and explicitly working with the ASSIST Coach to improve their state accountability label. District and school leadership were presumed to have positive intentions about analyzing causes of school underperformance followed by the development and implementation of school improvement plan and change processes.
3. The final assumption was that low-capacity schools were earning unsatisfactory labels because of an absence or misalignment of leadership related to structures, conditions, and processes identified within the New Accountability Movement as opposed to the annual formulaic adjustments recommended by the Arizona Department of Education and approved by the Arizona State Board of Education.

Limitations

1. This study was limited based upon the degree to which study participants were open and accurate in their descriptions of school improvement and change phenomenon during the interview process.

2. This researcher participated in the design and application of the SEA’s multi-pronged State System of School Support. The researcher’s understanding of the multi-pronged system may have introduced bias given the involvement at both the development and application levels.

3. This research study was conducted exclusively with principals and teachers in two elementary schools, which limit the use of the results to make connections to principals and teachers in middle or high school levels.

4. The principals and teachers who participated in this study were all from the same school district. The results from the study may not be generalizable to other school districts because characteristics that influence school improvement and the implementation of change theory in these schools and school district may affect attitudes related to the use of school improvement models and practices.
5. The semi-structured interviews were created by the researcher based on the Ecology of Change Framework (Wagner and Kegan, 2006). The interview questions were not examined by a committee of experts to establish some measure of validity and reliability for the instrument.

6. Elementary teachers and principals may be predisposed to the use of school improvement models and practices.

7. The data collected from the principals and teachers through the semi-structured interview instruments and artifacts asked principals and teachers to recall school improvement work that occurred three years previous to the completion of this study. This may have an impact on the validity of the data.

8. The data collected through the semi-structured interviews were self-reported which may have an impact of the validity of the data.

9. The research study was based on a multiple case study design that included two contrasting cases where school performance was measured relative to the AZ LEARNS state accountability model. One case demonstrated improvement in its school label over two years and the second case did not demonstrate improvement in the school label. The selection of cases may limit the extent to which this study is generalizable to other schools.

10. The background, experience, skills, and training of the ASSIST Coaches may have influenced their performance in the role thereby possibly influencing their participation in this research study.
11. The length of tenure of principal and teacher participants at their respective schools, and in education altogether, may have influenced the data they reported during the semi-structured interviews.

12. Struggling novice principals may have held exaggerated ideas about the role of principal relative to school improvement and the implementation of change theories.

13. Participants, whether principals, teachers or ASSIST Coaches, volunteered for participation in this study. Those who volunteered may not be a representative sample of principals, teachers, or ASSIST Coaches.

14. Teacher participation was limited to teachers that held leadership roles in their respective schools. The fact that they serve in leadership roles may have influenced their perceptions of school improvement practices that were implemented or change theories that were implemented. This limitation could limit the ability to extrapolate the results relative to school improvement and change initiatives.

15. Factors other than perceptions regarding school improvement practices and change efforts, such as district office support for improvement or change practices, can affect teacher and principal perceptions of improvement initiatives. Teachers and principals may provide responses describing perceptions of improvement initiatives that are a result of factors other than the initiatives that were implemented.
Definition of Terms

**ASSIST Coach:** a person assigned by the Arizona Department of Education to work with Underperforming and Failing schools and offers support to, guidance for, and progress monitoring of school improvement efforts through the coordination of viable and effective resources over the course of a school year.

**State System of School Support:** a system of consisting of a standards-based school improvement plan, Solutions Team visits and recommendations, and an ASSIST Coach.

**Multiple-case study:** A research study design that includes two or more cases (replicative or contrasting) that offers “power” to conclusions drawn from findings (Yin, 2009).

**Descriptive case study:** A study in which a case, or bounded system over time, is analyzed and described based upon multiple sources of data such as interviews, documents, reports, observations (Creswell, 2007).

**Analytic generalization:** A process in qualitative research where conclusions that are generated from analyzing cases with multiple data sources provided opportunities to generalize to an individual case, other cases, and ultimately theory as noted by Yin (2009).

**Underperforming school:** An Arizona school that earns profile points based on AIMS testing results under AZ LEARNS to be categorized as Underperforming for one year (Year 1) or two consecutive years (Year 2).
Failing school: A school that earned an Underperforming label for three consecutive years (Year 3) and was determined to be failing based upon a site visit by staff in the School Effectiveness Division of the Arizona Department of Education.

Solutions Team: A team of educators, per state statute (§15-241), that visit underperforming schools for several days for the purpose of writing a Statement of Findings which is a set of recommendations for school improvement.

Low-capacity school: A school that is underperforming or failing.

Overview of the Organization of the Dissertation

This qualitative, descriptive, and multiple case study of state education agency (SEA) intervention in underperforming and failing schools through the role of the ASSIST Coach consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 serves as an introduction and describes the context in which the study took place, the research questions that emerge from the stated problem, the significance of the study, and definition of terms. Given the absence of a research and literature base on the work of ASSIST Coaches serving as external facilitators, Chapter 2 provides an interpretive review of literature that serves as the foundation for this research study. Key sections include a description of the historical contexts of state accountability in Arizona, a description of the historical application of comprehensive school reform models and their outcomes that have been implemented in schools for the past twenty years, mentoring practices that support the development of leadership capacity of school principals, and the implementation of change theory applied in schools. Chapter 2 concludes with a description of the nexus between the work of ASSIST Coaches and the Ecology of Change Framework advanced by Wagner and
Kegan (2006). Chapter 3 describes the research study participants and methodology used to collect and analyze the qualitative data collected through one-on-one interviews and the collection of artifacts that document the work of the ASSIST Coach relative to continuous school improvement. Chapter 4 contains the analysis of and summary of the findings. Chapter 5 centers on the conclusions as well recommendations for future policy, practice, and further research.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Given the presence of very limited research on the topic of external change agents from state education agencies (SEA) assigned to work with low-capacity schools, this literature review utilized an interpretative review as its framework. It includes discussion of the historical background of school accountability, change processes applied to educational settings, comprehensive school reform models and outcomes, and mentoring processes by which external change agents strengthen the leadership capacity of school principals and district administrators.

Interpretive Review

This literature review is grounded in interpretive methods whereby multiple studies were examined for the purpose of demonstrating their relevance to constructing an understanding, meaning, or relationship (Eisenhart, 1998; Hines, 2000). This method utilizes descriptions of social or human activity followed by an interpretation that is filtered through a framework so as to discover the patterns and practical understandings or meanings of human action (Berg, 2004). Eisenhart (1998) stated that the use of interpretivist-oriented reviews reveal alternative ways of making sense of educational issues by describing the perspective, context and circumstances that inform the meaning.

Historical Context

State accountability in Arizona has had multiple iterations. In the early 1990s, state accountability consisted of the Arizona Student Achievement Program (ASAP)
where essential skills were assessed on performance-based measures. Two policy initiatives approved in 2001 and 2002 respectively were connected and ultimately changed the landscape of school accountability within Arizona. The first policy initiative was the voter-approved Proposition 301 which provided a tax increase to fund teacher performance pay and to implement the Student Accountability Information System (SAIS) so as to support for underperforming and failing schools (Garcia, 2004, 2005). The second was Arizona Revised Statute §15-241 enacted by the Arizona Legislature in 2002 which established a new school accountability system, Arizona Leading Education through the Accountability and Results Notification System (AZ LEARNS). Described by Garcia and Aportola (2004, 2005), built into AZ LEARNS was a new state assessment system, the Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) that tested student performance relative to academic content standards in grades 3, 5 and 8.

Additional iterations have provided more minor changes that still had influence on school accountability. Since its original inception, AZ LEARNS has been modified to provide schools with more time to demonstrate improvement. Secondly, in its original design, AZ LEARNS only required the assessment of students in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10. Currently, and in accordance with NCLB, students in grades 3 through 8, as well as grade 10, are now assessed as part of AZ LEARNS.

Our Current Context and the Implementation of AZ LEARNS

For schools to become involved with the ADE under the State System of School Support, a historical record of school underperformance has to be demonstrated. Garcia
and Aportela (2005), with Arizona Education Policy Initiative, have summarized the process extremely well by stating,

> [u]nder AZ LEARNS, the achievement profiles are labels intended to represent the academic standing of individual schools. The achievement profiles are derived according to a formula adopted by the Arizona State Board of Education. The achievement profiles are determined according to a compensatory model, and school performance targets are set according to a sliding scale: Schools with lower baseline test scores are required to make more progress than schools with higher baseline scores. Based on the outcome of the formula, schools are classified into one of the following achievement profiles: Excelling, Highly Performing, [Performing Plus], Performing, Underperforming, and Failing to Meet Academic Standards (Failing). Schools are provided an appeal process to dispute the formula results and the outcome can affect the school’s classification. The Arizona Department of Education (ADE) considers a school with three consecutive years of “Underperforming” designations to be “Failing Pending Review.” If ADE confirms the formula results, the school is classified as “Failing.”

In 2004-2005, ADE confirmed the Failing label for eleven schools. These eleven schools were provided a number of proactive resources in their first two years with an Underperforming profile through a multi-pronged State System of School Support. As Garcia (2004) reported, in each year underperformance, the school was required to
complete the Arizona School Improvement Plan (ASIP). This plan required the school to review student performance data and develop school improvement goals, strategies, action steps, and methods of evaluation. The development of the ASIP was considered the first of three prongs in the State System of School Support. Additionally, and in each year of underperformance, the second prong involved a visit by a Solutions Team to the school labeled Underperforming. The Solution Team was a three to five person team of volunteer educators from the field trained by ADE to assess and evaluate the (1) the extent to which the low-capacity school implemented its ASIP, (2) whether or not the conditions at the school supported the successful implementation of the ASIP, and (3) what recommendations could be offered in the form of a Statement of Findings. Recommendations in the Statement of Findings were based on ADE’s Standards and Rubric for School Improvement that included indicators of (1) School and District Leadership, (2) Curriculum, Instruction, and Professional Development, (3) Classroom and School Assessment, and (4) School Culture Climate and Communication (Standards and rubrics for school improvement, 2010).

The third and final prong of the State System of School Support was the assignment of an ASSIST Coach to the low-capacity school following the Solutions Team site visit. The role of the ASSIST Coach was to provide support, guide, and document the school’s improvements effort relative to the Statement of Findings issued by the Solutions Team. Currently, the ADE has three ASSIST Coaches.

Evaluation of the State’s Intervention System
According to a former Deputy Associate Superintendent for State Intervention, neither ADE nor the State Board of Education had a method to evaluate the implementation of the multi-pronged State System of School support. In the absence of a formal procedure for evaluation on the part of ADE, Garcia and Aportola (2004, 2005) with the Arizona Education Policy Initiative based in the Education Policy Studies Laboratory at Arizona State University, reported statistics that assisted in the evaluation of the SEA’s intervention with underperforming and failing schools; these statistics were simply the number of low-capacity schools that earned Underperforming or Failing labels in 2004 and 2005. Garcia and Aportola (2004, 2005) recognized that this metric was insufficient in reporting a quality measure of effectiveness related to the work of ASSIST Coaches and Solutions Team. This finding was reiterated by others as well (Sabers & Powers, 2005).

In Arizona, the ADE developed the multi-pronged State System of School Support to implement with low-capacity schools that included the use of a state template for the school improvement plan, the site visit by a team of educators known as a Solutions Team to recommend potential areas of school improvement foci, and an ASSIST Coach to guide the school’s efforts in implementing structures and procedures aligned with the Solution Team’s recommendations. Given the absence of formal internal evaluation structures and procedures, two outside studies have informed some layer of evaluation on the this state’s multi-pronged system of support.

The first outside study investigated the internal and external assessment of school conditions within the context of the ADE’s Standards and Rubrics for School
Improvement (Ashby, 2004). Ashby (2004) investigated causes for school underperformance as reported by Solutions Teams hired by ADE to conduct a multiple day site visit with fifty-six underperforming schools; the Solutions Teams indicated a variety of reasons for the struggling conditions. These causes are provided in Table 1. One finding reported by Ashby (2004) relevant to this research study indicated that underperforming and failing schools generally had similar needs around specific instructional practices and organizational conditions.

The second study that evaluated the ADE’s State System of School Support investigated the work of Solutions Teams and the ASSIST Coaches role specifically. Here, Judson (2006) compared underperforming and failing schools with all other schools to determine if ASSIST Coaches acting as external facilitators of change and school improvement were able to achieve any greater success than those schools without access to these two components of the State System of School Support. Here, Judson (2006) was quoted as saying that the role of the ASSIST Coaches operating in this realm were:

agents who recommend how a school can strengthen its own plans for improvement, who assist the school to stay its course and who help a school access expertise appropriate to identified needs. [This] model is not itself a means of school improvement but is rather an ardent advocator and champion for the school’s improvement. (Judson, 2006, p. 6).

Given this definition, and using a non-traditional comparative approach, Judson (2006) investigated the effectiveness of the ASSIST Coach by examining AIMS student assessment results from 2004 to 2006 in
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator Number</th>
<th>Rank Order</th>
<th>Indicator Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Technology is integrated effectively into classroom instruction, and is utilized as a teacher productivity tool.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>There is evidence that all administrators have a growth plan focused on the development of effective leadership skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Students know what is required to meet/exceed the standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Families and the community are active partners in the educational process and work together with the school to promote programs and services for all students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Differentiation (adjustment of concept, level of difficulty, strategy for instruction, amount of work, time allowed, and product to demonstrate learning) makes appropriate instruction available to all students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>The curriculum expectations are communicated to all stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>The school/district outlines specific steps for monitoring and reporting student progress in learning the Arizona Academic Standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>School and/or classroom assessments are aligned to the Arizona Academic Standards and/or performance objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>A variety of scientifically research-based strategies focused on increasing student achievement is used effectively in classroom instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Instructional planning links standards, formative assessments, instruction, practice, summative assessment, and reviewing/re-teaching.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mean scaled scores were converted to normal curve equivalent (NCE) scores in reading and mathematics for two populations of schools, underperforming and failing schools that received support from an ASSIST Coach and schools that did not receive ASSIST Coach support. Judson’s (2006) findings, in Table 2 of this study, indicated that schools that received support from a Solutions Team and ASSIST Coach made greater gains (Judson, 2006, p. 7).

Table 2.

AIMS Test, Mean Normal Curve Equivalent Changes, 2002 to 2004.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level and Content Area</th>
<th>Schools Receiving Solutions Team and ASSIST Coach</th>
<th>Schools not Receiving Solutions Team and ASSIST Coach</th>
<th>Difference in Normal Curve Equivalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>-1.3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>-1.1</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>-1.9</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>-0.3</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>-0.6</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>-1.5</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>-0.7</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>-1.0</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next, Judson (2006) compared underperforming and failing schools in the 2002 school year to underperforming and failing schools in subsequent school years using the same NCE comparison method. Rationale for this comparison is that two of the three
prongs in the State System of School Support (Solutions Teams and ASSIST Coaches) were operationalized after 2002; underperforming and failing schools in 2002 did not have Solutions teams or ASSIST Coaches provided by the ADE. Data from Judson’s (2006) second comparison is presented in Table 3.

Table 3.

AIMS Test, Mean Normal Curve Equivalent Changes from 2004 to 2006.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level and Content Area</th>
<th>Schools Receiving Solutions Team and ASSIST Coach 2004-2006</th>
<th>Schools Receiving Solutions Team and ASSIST Coach 2002-2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>-1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>-1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>-1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>-0.3</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>-0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>-1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>-0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>-1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Judson concluded that, given both sets of data and NCE comparisons over time, schools provided Solutions Teams and ASSIST Coaches improved student AIMS testing results in seven of nine categories and the growth occurred at a faster rate than in schools that did not have access to these two prongs in the State System of School Support (Judson, 2006, p. 8). In concluding his quasi-experimental research, Judson (2006) advanced four conclusions, one of which is relevant to this research study; Judson (2006) stated that the
ADE should establish a thorough evaluation of the effectiveness and perceived efficacy of the ASSIST Coaches. In accordance with this recommendation, the ADE collected perceptual data in the 2009-2010 school year related to the second prong—the Solutions Team—within the State System of School Support. Perceptual data regarding the ASSIST Coach role has yet to be collected and analyzed for program improvement by the ADE.

One final and relevant study that might assist the ADE in constructing an evaluation instrument to assess the effectiveness of ASSIST Coaches stated a variety of conditions that served to improve the effectiveness of work done by ASSIST Coaches at underachieving schools (Chow, 2010).

Chow (2010) stated:

[i]dentifying underachieving schools has become a priority in recent years as federal and state accountability requirements turn the spotlight on poor performers. A growing body of research has illuminated the characteristics of these schools at one end of the spectrum as well as the characteristics of stellar school at the other end, but much less in known about what specific qualities and strategies enable schools to change from low-to high-performing.

Chow (2010) studied the work of WestEd facilitators that worked with over 100 underachieving schools since 1999 and his research indicated that underachieving schools struggle in a variety of areas that are articulated in the following list. Areas of struggle include:
• the need to accept what can be described as the good, the bad and the ugly and the take ownership of these conditions of school improvement.

• the notion that the knowledge in people’s heads often stays there but should rather be made public.

• the absence of close, collaborative, and trusting relationships with external technical assistance providers by individuals at the school or district level that support change and school improvement. These types of partnerships, where those in the system are building capacity by engaging with others outside the system, build the necessary conditions for change and improvement efforts to have traction and endure.

• gaps between classroom instruction and improvement goals. The role of the external facilitator should be to build capacity of the school and district leadership to assess and monitor the alignment between district and school goals with classroom instructional practice. This type of work often means school and district administrators conducting classroom walkthroughs with the follow-up coaching of teachers when alignment is not observed.

• the implementation of change or improvement efforts is often started before the school and district know what the problems are. Chow (2010) likens this to doctors treating symptoms prior to knowing the disease.

• the need to identify school improvement foci based on the analysis of data followed by the progress monitoring of the implementation of that foci
over time. Engaging in a recurring cycle of implementation and intensive self-evaluation is a key to transforming a low-performing school into a high-performing school.

- educators need to be responsive to data rather than relying upon what is comfortable; after all, the data was the voice of the students in the school improvement process.

The role of ASSIST Coaches is one that is supported through research and its existence in the ADE’s State System of School Support is commendable. However, in operationalizing this role, there is a need to carefully attend to and articulate this work early in the process so that indicators of effectiveness can be tracked. The absence of this articulation and evaluation may lead some educational leaders—whether at the school, district, or state level—to call into question the value or worth of this important role.

**Comprehensive School Reform**

Beginning in the early 1990s a movement to remediate lack luster school change and improvement efforts emerged which was supported by the United States Department of Education (USDOE). This movement became known as comprehensive school reform (CSR). The federal government funded grants to support the design, implementation, study of, and scaling up of the CSR efforts. Some of the sponsoring organizations included the New American Schools, ATLAS, and the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program (CSRD). As stated by Berends (2002), because the target of the federal Title I and CSRD funds was primarily high-poverty schools, the schools most
likely to be affected were schools most likely to face very fragmented and conflicting environments.

Berends (2002) defined comprehensive school reform to include the design and implementation of a set of aligned, coherent, focused, and sustained practices and activities targeted to change and improve classroom learning and student achievement outcomes. Sterbinsky (2006) indicated that CSR included efforts to change instruction, school management, classroom management, professional development, parental involvement, and curriculum. Sterbinsky (2006) also included goals and benchmarks for student achievement, as well as high-quality external technical support and assistance from an external facilitator with experience and expertise in school reform and improvement as critical elements. The overall goal was to achieve both quality and equity for all students.

As the federal government’s interest in funding comprehensive school reform programs advanced, quality indicators in which CSR programs were evaluated against included theories of action and theories of learning. Here, theory of learning was defined as the beliefs and assumptions the school administrator and staff members held about how students learn, how teachers delivered instruction, and student performance. Subsequently, Berends (2002) noted that theory of action was articulated as a condition under which the reform was effective. As such, the federal government would not fund CSR program grants without these two underpinnings.

Throughout the 1990s, and up to the writing of this research project, CSR programs continued to be implemented in many schools across the county in light of
research findings that demonstrate CSR programs are ineffective in achieving their intended outcome of raising student achievement. Multiple researchers, including Ehren (2008, p. 225), concluded that schools were asked to change many variables concurrently through the maintenance of competing foci due to the nature of CSR programs. Producing changes in many aspects of schooling at once remained an extremely difficult and problematic task as seen by (Berends, 2002, p. 170; Ehren, 2008, p. 225; Hatch, 2000, p.343; Kushman & Yap, 1999). Berends (2002) also stated that reform efforts designed by external change agents (e.g., ASSIST Coaches) tended to morph significantly, an event caused by pressures within the local context. Research found that improvement was dependent upon a number of factors which needed to be aligned in support of fundamental change. Relying upon staff to implement training sapped the energy and expertise and undermined the capacity and implementation (Hatch, 2000, p. 349). Ehren (2008) found that schools and state coaches were successful in ameliorating simple reforms, but complex changes were more problematic. (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005) termed these first order changes and second order changes respectively. First order change was easy to achieve through technical adjustments while second order change took significantly more tools and work. Fullan (2008) and others, stated that the current challenges to change the educational system—from the classroom, school, and community levels—was a continued mental model (theory of use) that maintained an industrial era educational system and that schools were remarkably difficult institutions to change into adaptive institutions (Senge et al., 2000).
Hatch (2000), as well as Kushman and Yap (1999), reported that approximately half of schools implementing reform initiatives were successful. They attributed these findings to uneven implementation of reform programs and a lack of monitoring of progress by the school, district and state. Where schools did not succeed, Kushman and Yap (1999) indicated that teacher buy-in within and across grade level collaborative teams, was cited as an area of weakness. Further articulated by Kushman and Yap (1999), were early movements away from the reform prescription that was initially selected. Conversely, Kushman and Yap (1999) cited that in successful reform efforts, site leadership teams were reported to act proactively to lead school reform efforts. Where schools were successful, Kushman and Yap (1999) also cited strong moral convictions regarding student achievement, deep understanding of the reform initiatives by principals and district administrators, and resource acquisition to support the reform initiative. Other researchers, Good et. al (2005), studied 24 Arizona schools that implemented CSR programs from 1996 through 2004. The implementation of the CSR program was not found to be the variable correlated to improved rates of student achievement.

Senge et al. (2000) detailed the complexity schools face that may challenge leaders to be successful in reform efforts. Here, he described three nested systems at play—the classroom, school and community. He also stated that a community became effective when its people recognized and worked to strengthen the webs of invisible influence among the nested systems. These descriptive outcomes were also cited by O’Day (2002). As late as 2000, Hatch articulated that few reform designs produced
improvements in all of the key aspects of a school’s operations, addressed all levels of schooling, or reliably demonstrated even incremental improvements on traditional measures of student achievement (Hatch, 2000, p. 346).

Some schools that implemented CSR programs experienced success in raising student achievement (Hatch, 2000, p. 343). O’Day (2002) noted that underperforming and failing schools identified by SEAs were quick to move out of federal and state accountability labels only when preconditions were in place prior to the label being issued. Such preconditions, stated by O’Day (2002), included the following: peer collaboration, teacher-to-teacher trust, and a sense of collective responsibility for student learning. According to O’Day (2002), schools with these three preconditions had a strong internal capacity to be adaptive and implement the needed changes to raise student achievement. Research by Kushman and Yap (1999) found similar results—schools that improved classroom practices subsequently produced improved student learning.

Amidst the design, implementation, and evaluation of CSR programs, the role of state agencies in relation to school reform were multiple, under-scrutinized, and contradictory (Hamann, 2005, p. 2). SEAs were not the unit of study (ethnographic), and as such, there is an absence of research on the effectiveness at this level. In fact, state agencies working under the No Child Left Behind Act, were reported to be better at identifying underperforming and failing schools than fixing them. In most jurisdictions, the list of failing schools did not change significantly from one year to the next despite efforts to improve them. Unfortunately, low-performing schools were extremely hard to transform into high-performing schools because the standards-based and new
accountability system succeeded in revealing short-comings that it was incapable of fixing (Finn, 2004, p. 85).

For these reasons, state inspection of underperforming or failing schools that contributed to school improvement was studied scientifically only incidentally and the findings were inconsistent, as reported by Ehren (2008). Inspections were stated to be the most effective when state coaches reported the exact conditions creating school failure.

**Mentoring: A Pathway to Leadership Development**

The literature base describing the development and implementation of mentoring programs for principals has become quite solid. Over the past 25 years, many efforts have been made to strengthen the leadership capacity of schools for a variety of reasons. Heightened school accountability over this same time period is just one. Throughout the following sections, a variety of issues related to mentoring programs are presented; the literature base provides a balanced presentation of variables or factors of quality mentoring programs. These include how to define mentoring, what recommendations exist for effective development and implementation, and what outcomes—benefits and cautionary considerations—should be expected relative to the development of leadership capacity.

The need for school principals to engage in meaningful professional development has been a need on the educational radar for the past 25 years (Daresh, 2004). One strategy that is frequently proposed in support of the professional growth of principals is mentoring. In fact, between 1985 and 1995, more than 20 states implemented mentoring programs as a requirement for all new principals, a number that had grown to over 35
states by 2004. Given this expansion of mentoring practices, how one defines mentoring becomes critical. Many of the common definitions are provided in Table 4 and were delineated by (Stott & Walker, 1992).

Table 4.

*Common Definitions of Mentoring.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Definition of Mentoring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Fagan and Walter</td>
<td>A mentor is one who befriends and guides a less experienced adult, providing support, advice, and opportunity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Playko</td>
<td>A mentor is someone who is always there for collegial support, but not dependency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Hean and Tin</td>
<td>A mentor is a trusted advisor, one who provides help in one or more ways beyond normal channels or training (Hean, 2004; Hean &amp; Tin, 2004).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Levine</td>
<td>A mentor is one who serves as a wise advisor who manages, nurtures, encourages, and teaches organizational responsibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Daresh</td>
<td>A wise guide, counselor, master at providing opportunities for growth of others.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, Daresh (2004) stated that the function of mentoring was a form of torch passing from the experienced to the less experienced. At the same time, the mentor-mentee relationship should also be mutually enhancing.

Theory supporting the use of mentoring to address the professional development needs of principals quickly focused attention on learning achieved through relevant, significant, and trusting relationships (Hean, 2004). Based upon this focus, the use of
mentoring practices as strategies to increase the capacity for leadership subscribed to the humanist and constructivist philosophical beliefs as well as self-actualization theory.

Often, when mentoring practices were discussed, other important strategies were presented. These include the use of guides and coaches, as reported by Daresh (2004) and others (Costa & Garmston, 2002). These other programs may be similar to mentoring, but there are important distinctions. For example, both may require that a principal be observed, but differences persist with regard to process and product respective to what was observed. Compared to formal coaching processes, mentors generally engage is less formal and more open dialogue about observation details.

A few specific examples provide more clarity. The first is the coaching process known as *Collegial Coaching*, a phrase coined by Robert Garmston (as cited in Barnett, 1990) (Barnett, 1990). This coaching model refers to a non-evaluative observation process whereby strengths and weaknesses are determined by the mentee via self-reflection. The mentor’s role is to serve as guide and never as evaluator. The second model was developed in the early 1980s when researchers and educators noted little attention being directed at peer observation and coaching opportunities for school principals. Barnett (1990), working with the Far West Regional Laboratories, developed the Peer-Assisted Leadership (PAL) framework, which asked principals to engage in a four-phase mentoring process built upon shadowing and reflective interviewing. Through repeated mentoring experiences, as outlined in Table 5, the questions designed for a mentee ask him/her to engage in a cognitive evaluation designed to promote learning.
Table 5.

Four Phase Peer-Assisted Mentoring Model.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Action or Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase I</td>
<td>• Practice of shadowing and reflective interviewing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Build trust and open communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Understanding of one’s work situation, particularly the political environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase II</td>
<td>• Selection of future observations and interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase III</td>
<td>• Analysis and evaluation of whether the process is meeting one’s needs and to determine corrections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase IV</td>
<td>• Final analysis and evaluation of whether the process met one’s needs. Emphasis is on what was learned through the process and how the mentoring process has influenced the mentee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reflection and Transformational Learning.** Thinking rationally as one solves problems has long held a preeminent place with respect to problem-solving methods. However, this level of thinking falls short of engaging higher order thinking skills often associated with reflection. In this higher level, one engages in a personal or organizational theory development about the problems being faced. It is here that the individual or an entire organization (system) often finds it is in a dichotomous state of thinking; they are engaged in holding on to what they know from learning or experience while also engaged in transforming their thinking. In application, this reflective state of thinking has been coined Reflection-in-Action because it moves individuals or organizations away from a state of stability (Schön, 1987; Smith, 2001). It relies upon individuals or organizations recognizing theories of use and espoused theories. Theories of use represent the stable state, those theories that are commonly accessed and assigned to solve particular problems; Schön referred to this as single-loop learning. Espoused theories represent the transformation of thinking because they represent a new or
different state of thinking. Schön referred to this movement as double-loop learning because it caused a change in the organization’s culture, norms, and policies. This changes how individuals and organizations operate and causes learning at the level of second-order change (Leithwood, 1994).

Dewey might say this thinking was an application of the scientific method, a constant testing of leading ideas within new situations and interactions (Dewey, 1938). This process is akin to a testing of the theories in use because this process involved articulating one’s own practice; to engage in this process involved a sense of transformation (Meyers, 1992). Dewey (1938) referred to this process as an experiment—a process whereby one thinks through various solutions to a problem. Because a variety of solutions are available, the recognition of emotions or feelings emerges as a central component to reflection; how individuals or organizations feel about options for change is incredibly important because it influences the outcome—the direction and distance from the stable state. The importance of attaching meaning to the reflective process and options for change was discussed subsequently (Boyd & Fales, 1983). Here, intellectual and affective activities become critical to the experimentation process as new understandings evolve. Fullan (2008) argued that emotions must be tapped in the experimental testing of espoused theories to ensure that change does occur. Throughout this process, the learners—whether the individual or organization—come to see themselves as engaged in a transformation that validates assumptions as well as identifies key questions for growth.
Programmatic Approaches to Mentoring. As SEAs or local districts plan for the implementation of mentoring programs to strengthen the skills of developing principals, the following programmatic elements were recommended for consideration:

1. Mentees should self-select mentors. With this in mind, programs should select mentors who display excellence in communication, listening, questioning, fostering self-directed and continuous learning, a commitment to provide appropriate time to the mentoring process, and an understanding of the political environment in which the mentee finds himself.

2. Mentoring programs should train mentors and mentees on the process.

3. Programs should have goals, exemplar models on which they are based, criteria for effective mentors, and training for mentors.

4. As Daresh (2004) and others noted, programs should engage mentors and mentees in ongoing learning conversations and influence a culture of organizational learning through the linkage of theory and practice and a move beyond the simple transference of knowledge (Clark & Shields, 2006; Malone, 2002). Mentoring relationships shorten the distance between the mentee’s theories of use and his/her espoused theories; the gap between performance and potential should be reduced (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005).

5. Mentoring programs should help principals test ideas, reflect on practice, model effective practices, navigate difficult situations, and affirm quality practices (Making the case for principal mentoring, 2003).
These five programmatic elements point to the need for the mentoring program to be highly purposeful so that a clear outcome is observed (Kiltz, Danzig, & Szecsy, 2002). Kiltz et al. (2002) researched goal-oriented mentoring practices supported by an action plan as well as interactive dialogue between the mentor and mentee. Their findings indicated that the use of self-selected goals (by the mentee) and action plans developed collaboratively with the mentor framed and focused the mentoring process. Furthermore, their research indicated that the action planning further focused the mentoring on specific, observable, measurable, and flexible goals. The implication here is that the mentoring process be data-driven. Finally, and beyond the goal-oriented components, their research indicated that the mentoring process must include structured dialogue so as to make the mentoring process reflective in a critical way. The combination of a goal-driven process wrapped around purposeful dialogue provides the content and context to the learning, the testing of theories of use as stated by Clark and Shields (2006).

Research by Stott and Walker (1992) also indicated that the relationship between the mentor and mentee was the most critical factor in determining the success of a mentoring program. In this line of thinking, what mentors do is more important than the individual qualities the mentor brings to the relationship. As mentors consider the importance of what they do, each should remember that what they do typically occurs in phases similar to Barnett’s (1990) PAL model. Hean and Tin (2004) listed potential phases previously reported by three research studies, the first of which was Phillips-Jones: entry, mutual building of trust, risk taking, teaching of skills, professional standards and dissolution (Phillips-Jones, 1983). The second study presented by Hean
and Tin (2004) reviewed phases resulting from the research of: initiation, cultivation, separation and redefinition (Gray & Gray, 1985). Finally, reading an organization’s political landscape to fully understand the systemic opportunities and constraints can promote a more meaningful mentor-mentee relationship because it defined the degree to which a mentee may change as a result of the mentoring experience. A mentor who can do this well will engage the mentee in reflective thinking in more productive arenas and make better use of each other’s time.

A second implementation recommendation was to have the right people serve as mentors and to utilize care with regard to mentor-mentee placements (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004). As in the case of the AZ LEADS (Arizona Project II), mentors were assigned to mentees; this should be done with consideration of the mentor’s knowledge of the mentee’s school system as well as the mentee’s needs to develop management and/or leadership skills. Harris et al. reported on the work of Daresh and Playko, who indicated that mentors should be selected based upon an individual’s ability to demonstrate leadership skills, good communication, creative thinking, risk-taking behavior, and an understanding of how each mentee should be engaged so as to promote self-evaluation or reflection (Harris, Ballenger, & Leonard, 2004). This process for the mentee is essentially one in which the mentee follows a gap reduction model relative to his/her leadership skills; the principal must cognitively identify two elements: (1) the gap(s) in management or leadership performance and (2) through questioning from the mentor, the necessary action(s) that will take the individual to the next performance level.
The mentoring practices selected by mentors appear to appropriately respond to the needs of aspiring principals and principals in their first three years in the role. In citing research done by Brown et al., it was reported that beginning principals self-report that they learn about how to be an effective principal through on-the-job training (Holloway, 2004). These same principals reported that engaging in dialogue with other principals—the sharing experiences with one another—was a preferred activity. This was also noted in research on beginning principals in Ohio, where under a regional support framework, nearly 70% of the participants noted the strong value of their principal mentor (Chadwick, Howley, & Howley, 2002).

Citing research on participant self-reports from Dukess, Holloway (2004) recommended that mentors should have expertise as instructional leaders, expertise in building and maintaining relationships with staff (interpersonal skills), and excellent organization skills. Research by Harris et al. (2004) further clarified Dukess’ work by indicating that mentors with 11 or more years of principal experience, and who were 46 years of age or older, were more effective mentors because they modeled desired skills more frequently than mentors with 3 or fewer years of experience. Furthermore, female principals were perceived to demonstrate management and leadership skills more often and were viewed as more effective mentors. In addition, principals who worked in urban and suburban settings typically demonstrated leadership skills more often than principals from rural settings. Given these findings, principals from urban and suburban settings were viewed as more effective mentors.
Daresh (2004) indicated that the mentor-mentee relationship should be meaningful. This outcome may seem straightforward, logical, or obvious. However, how mentors accomplish this task is critical. Mentors should be available to describe policy, procedures, and normal practices in a school system. This also means that the mentor should assist the mentee in analyzing the political landscape of the school, community and district. Mentors should skillfully provide feedback regarding the extent to which traditional leadership skills are mastered and exercised by novice principals.

**Benefits of Mentoring.** If the mentor-mentee experience is productive and positive, the benefits are many. The research on mentoring principals as a professional development opportunity described benefits to the individuals, the mentor and mentee, and the organization or system. Collectively, benefits in both areas have the potential to strengthen the capacity of principals in management and leadership.

Numerous studies have outlined the benefits to the individuals. Hean and Tin (2004) began this discussion by indicating that new principals could be more easily and more quickly socialized into a district, that the development of programs could be accomplished more quickly and more comprehensively, and individual strengths and growth needs could be considered as a district plans for leadership succession. Hean and Tin (2004) also noted that through the mentor-mentee relationship, there existed potential for the mentor to stay current with education policy and practice; mentoring practices, both formal and informal, serve to develop networking structures where participants collaborate for mutual learning. Also, principals benefited from mentoring, particularly through learning to build and nurture relationships with staff members via formal and
informal contacts; through these formal and informal contacts, mentees noted that their interests were valued. Lastly, Hean (2004) as well as Stott and Walker (1992), indicated that 65% of participants in mentoring training reported that they practiced relationship skills the most when applying their learning on site. Clearly, the practice of mentoring serves to develop relationship skills with secondary impacts on programs.

Other authors contributed to this initial body of research, such as Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2004) and Stott and Walker (1992) (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Gibble & Lawrence, 1987; Holloway, 2004; Stott & Walker, 1992; Vann, 1991). Their additions included the following:

1. One of the greatest benefits is to have [another principal] to talk with and consult for advice, effectively lessening feelings of isolation, an idea advanced by Gibble and Lawrence (1987).

2. Increased potential for success with concurrent decreased potential for mistakes due to inexperience or ignorance, as stated by Vann (1991).

3. Principals often feel isolated in the role, and as a result, leadership skills are often maintained due to the absence of professional growth. The task is to remove this sense of isolation so that leadership skills could be challenged through mentoring. Gibble and Lawrence (1987) noted that feedback and thinking about the feedback promoted improved leadership skills.

4. Mentees improved their management and leadership skills in problem solving, human relations, motivation, and planning, as seen by Gibble and Lawrence (1987). Along the way, mentees gained confidence.
As discussed earlier, the benefits of mentoring extend beyond the individuals to include the system or organization. Here, Daresh (2004) noted the following important points:

1. Providing a mentee with the resource of a mentor sends the message that the school system cares about the novice administrator, expects him/her to engage in life-long learning activities, and expects the system to benefit from a more capable administrator earlier in his/her role.

2. The novice administrator can understand and promote the culture and climate of the system more quickly; the system benefits from more effective decision making on the part of the new administrator, and attention can be directed to other organizational agendas.

3. Relationships form bonds that promote a sense of community across the system. This in turn provides for principal retention within the system, a key ingredient to maintaining gains in student achievement in the current New Accountability Movement.

**Cautions Throughout Implementation.** The benefits to individuals and organizations are enticing relative to the practice of mentoring for principals, yet there exist an equal number of considerations that require forethought and planning prior to engaging in this capacity-building venture. Issues related to time and resources—as with any new program—demand quality planning, attention to details, and support throughout implementation, particularly in the first steps.
Stott and Walker (1992) began to outline the relevant considerations about which districts must be cautioned prior to implementing a mentoring program. Here, they indicated that time constraints were the most frequently cited barrier to implementing an effective mentor program. It is often observed that the formal mentor-mentee relationship diverges into informal situations. This programmatic bird-walking is a necessary step that must be considered, and additional time must be allocated to account for this seemingly unneeded step. Furthermore, districts must prepare staff for quality implementation with upfront training and systematic support throughout the implementation. If it is worth doing, it is worth doing right.

The second most critical element that must be effectively handled is the choice of mentor. This choice drives the cognitive development with respect to leadership skills of mentees. Citing Dukess, Holloway (2004) noted that mentors need expertise as instructional leaders, strong interpersonal skills, a ready supply of ideas, and good organization skills. Others add to this list by indicating the need to keep sight of the impact of the standards-based movement that has placed serious emphasis on the instructional leadership responsibilities within the principalship (Alvy & Robbins, 2005). According to these researchers, principals must balance the management and leadership responsibilities with expertise. This balancing act surely places pressures on novice principals and causes times of disillusionment very much like that experienced by new teachers (Moir, 2005).

If district planning is done well, as measured by taking into consideration the implementation recommendations, cautions, and other considerations, most mentoring
programs observe benefits that can be very fruitful to a district. Alvy and Robbins (2005) offered an excellent comment in concluding their article—in tying management and leadership responsibilities to involvement in a mentoring program, they noted:

Perhaps our overarching theme is that successful principals are lifelong learners. Effective principals energize the staff, students, and community by providing a personal example of leadership in a learning community. New principals should strive to embody a line from the speech that John F. Kennedy was scheduled to deliver in Dallas, Texas, on November 22, 1963: “Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other” (p. 54)

Kennedy (as cited in Alvy & Robbins, 2005) saw the connection between leadership and learning. Mentoring programs have such potential value to new principals, those mentoring new principals, and the organizations they serve, that the learning that can occur as a result of such programs justifies their implementation in a quality way. How else can districts and principals maneuver through the increasing complexity of state and national accountability plans with any success?

**Implementation of Change Theory**

Wagner argues that our schools, particularly high schools, are obsolete because they have changed very little in the past thirty year (Wagner, 2008). This concern is shared by others giving notice that schools failed to rise to new heights in accountability throughout the Excellence Movement in the 1980s and Standards Movement in the 1990s as stated by DuFour and Eaker (1998). In making this argument, Wagner (2008) also
states that our nation’s public and private education students are losing competitive
ground with students in other countries because not only do they not change, but
American educators—administrators and teachers alike—do not know what to change or
how to go about this critical work. If Wagner’s (2008) arguments have validity, our
nation’s principals and teachers need the knowledge and expertise on how to implement
change and in what areas to engage the change process. Secondarily, the role of the
ASSIST Coaches within the Arizona Department of Education, as implemented in low-
capacity schools across Arizona takes on a heightened level of importance.

In quoting Newman et al., schools need to develop a sense of capacity for change
efforts to be successful in raising the level of student achievement (Fullan, 2001). This
capacity, as stated by Fullan (2001) consists of five components that assist school
administrators, teachers, and state coaches in responding to Wagner’s (2008)
identification of how this critical work should be accomplished: (1) teachers’ knowledge;
(2) professional communities that reduce teacher variance within a school, (3) program
coherence, (4) technical resources, and (5) principal leadership. Fullan (2001) further
articulated that school leadership—whether formally through the principal or informally
through teacher leaders—must create school-wide professional learning communities and
DuFour and Eaker (1998) agreed. Ideally, it is the role of the principal to create or cause
the first four factors to align under common goals with sustained effort over time so that
the work of teacher and students is effective in raising the individual and collective
achievement of the students. Furthermore, a model by which change should occur details
the ecology of change by Wager and Kegan (2006).
According to Fullan (2001), the critical factor upon how this alignment is grounded in the relationships among teachers; Fullan noted that through effective relationships, coherence among programs is achieved with concurrent strengthening of tacit and explicit knowledge of teachers and principals—the asset of knowledge is found in the relationships of the organizations people (Fullan, 2003, p. 44). The importance of interrelationships within the school’s social system has strong influence over individual teacher and principal behavior as seen by Senge et al. (2000). In fact, Fullan stated that successful schools found that teachers could not work alone, but instead developed social relationships in which their individual and collective knowledge was used to adapt or transform classroom practices of teachers (Fullan, 2003, p. 44). To make this transformation or change effective, school staff members learned that their knowledge base needed to include the concept that people have to know why they are doing something new and how the new actions and behaviors intend to raise student achievement.

This new way of working in social relationships is something Fullan (2001) stated is new territory for teachers and principals. Quoting Richard Elmore, Fullan (2003) stated that teachers and principals do not pay attention to how they organize themselves and manage student learning. The organization of the social structure and collaborative relationships has been reported by others as a critical factor in the change process as well as the sense of shared responsibility for student achievement (Lambert, 2003). The needed relationships to achieve a better organization, as quoted by Elmore, must have individuals operate in networks of shared and complementary expertise rather than
hierarchies. This flattened organizational structure brings more accountability to the change process to sustain school improvement.

Fullan (2003) warned that the change process should go beyond a goal of simply raising student test scores to one of a cultural shift regarding how schools implement change for continuous school improvement. Here, he stated that improving student assessment results in and of itself is good, but it falls short of the necessary change needed by schools. School’s rarely get to this transformational level of change without the involvement of district office or SEA assistance. Fullan (2003) stated this is a test of the 21st century—whether districts and state education agencies can create sophisticated and complex systems that work to develop individual schools along this continuum. In this work, local and state education agencies must understand and be accountable for the change process, how to work with resistance, how to develop collaborative cultures, how to find time, allocate resources, structure monitoring of improvement efforts, and thereby develop leadership (Fullan, 2003, p. 53). Fullan (2003) further recognized that district administrator and ASSIST Coaches must see that policies and programs external to the low-capacity schools contribute to overload, fragmentation, and episodic initiatives that come and go—all of these were shown to compete with continuous improvement goals and plans by detracting schools from their focus. Fullan’s (1999) argument for coherent, deep, and systemic change that moves beyond student test scores is captured in Table 6 that defines the relationship between theories of education and theories of change. It also indicated that schools need to know why they are changing and how the change process will proceed in order to realize the fruits of their change efforts.
Table 6.

*Relationship Between Theories of Change and Theories of Education.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theories of Change</th>
<th>Theories of Education</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Drift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Change for the sake of change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Deep change</td>
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It was recommended that district administrators and ASSIST Coaches need to help school staff achieve the understanding of both process and purpose by bringing coherence through the identification of connections across programs or initiatives (Fullan, 1999, p. 27). Fullan (1999) referred to this as guided knowledge creation through strategies that enable tacit knowledge to become explicit knowledge. Through the networks of relationships examples of positive deviance become exposed and shared. Furthermore, as stated by Chow (2010), successful organizations worried about the value of learning inside and outside the organization because they have structures to make that knowledge explicit. Successful organizations were reported by Fullan (1999) to also worry about the degree to which change is structured. According to Fullan (1999), the change process cannot be overly structured or too loosely structured and the situational context should guide the district administration and state ASSIST Coaches in identifying the appropriate degree of structure. This was defined as bounded instability (Fullan, 1993, p. 69). In quoting Elmore, Fullan (2003) stated that there should be accountability mechanisms framed in how the change process occurred (theories of action) that structure accountability for this kind of capacity building.
Fullan (1999) recognized that change is complex, situational, and carries no silver bullet. Additionally, Fullan (2003) stated that change efforts, like CSR models, are “imported” coherence and are doomed to fail. Deep change must start from within—the culture will act on it to make is successful or not. He also stated that at the micro level, change was driven by moral purpose so that all students had an opportunity to achieve. At the macro level, the change process meant making a difference in the development of society and our democracy (Fullan, 1999, p. 1).

Fullan (1999, 2003) recommended that SEAs create policies, strategies, and mechanisms to implement change efforts with low-capacity schools whereby conditions exist that support sustainable large scale reform. Fullan (1993) stated that many governments make matters worse by focusing mainly on structural reform; only focusing on structural reform was reported to undermine the school’s capacity for change by failing to provide attention to improvements in teaching and learning. For example, schools reported to have collaborative planning time were viewed as changing for the sake of changing when teachers failed to discuss changes to instructional practice during time allocated for collaboration. In this example, the structure failed to support the intended outcome of changed classroom practice.

The development of local capacity is therefore the ultimate complex problem because each local situation is reported by Fullan (2003) to be unique and will need to develop differently depending upon the particular configuration and evolution. As Fullan (2003) reported, is the dynamic movement of a complex set of interacting local conditions that must change so that the school is operating on the edge of chaos.
According to Fullan’s (2003) literature, there are no examples of this level of support from state education agencies, including Arizona’s ASSIST Coaches.

**Ecology of Change Model**


**Data.** The quantitative and qualitative data collected that is used in a way to build a sense of urgency for change.

**Accountability.** There two levels described by Wagner and Kegan (2006). The first level of accountability referenced a set of structures (theories of action) that define individual responsibilities for implementing the change. Second level included the individuals to whom those in the first level are accountable, be they grade level or department level colleagues, the principal, or the district office. According to Wagner and Kegan (2006), these two levels formed concurrent vertical and horizontal accountable structures; both were described as required so as to leverage school and district conditions and capacity, as well as the people, to enable the change processes to yield its intended outcome(s). Vertical accountability structures were required because they defined how leaders hold subordinates responsible to actually do the work. Horizontal accountability structures were equally requisite, as defined by Wagner and
Kegan (2006), but they were noted to be more relational due to the shared commitments, sense of purpose, and collegial respect.

**Relationships.** Wagner and Kegan (2006) reported that relationships were defined by the quality of attitudes, feelings, and behaviors of individuals and groups as they engage in the work of continuous school improvement. The definition espoused by Wagner and Kegan (2006) supported the recommendations of Fullan (1993, 1999, and 2003) and Senge et al. (1990, 1999, and 2000), noting that the network of relationships served as one leverage of accountability in the change process. In citing research by Byrk and Schneider, Wagner and Kegan (2006) extended the concept of relationships by further stating that relational trust in schools correlates more highly with improved student achievement than any other single factor. Wagner and Kegan (2006) also stated,

> The levers of data, accountability, and relationships come into play and serve different purposes within each phase [preparing, envisioning, enacting]. For instance, according to our framework, the purview of data collection and interpretation begins with change leadership and then widens to include the larger community. Forms of accountability are initially more vertical but evolve to emphasize horizontal accountability. Trust and respect deepen, strengthening relationships and enabling new forms of communication and professional learning. By the enacting phase, a laser-like focus on improving instruction becomes evident in all three change levers. Finally, as noted by Wagner (2008a, 2008b),
movement through the three phases corresponds with rightward movement on the three continua.

In further articulating the three-phase change model, Wagner and Kegan (2006) identified that school teachers, principals, and district administrators often find it difficult to clearly identify into what phase their change effort fall. This challenge of pinpointing one’s journey through change is challenged by the long-term, cyclical and overlapping nature of change processes in schools. Additionally, Wagner and Kegan (2006) stated another challenge to school and district leaders is that they often start in the enacting phase which will ultimately require a midcourse correction. Here, the concept is for district administrators, principals, and teachers to understand and apply the critical staging and sequencing to yield success. As Wagner and Kegan (2006) stated, the work of reinventing schools and districts is adaptive work that required changes in people’s heads, hearts and actions, actions that signified a purposeful, deliberate, and collaborative focus. And finally, it is work required of district administrators, principals, and teachers to consider initially but with continued considerations as the change process moved forward. The Ecology of Change Framework advanced by Wagner and Kegan (2006) is summarized in Figure 4 in APPENDIX A: ECOLOGY OF CHANGE MODEL.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodology and procedures that will be implemented to investigate the contemporary role of the ASSIST Coach as it is executed in Arizona schools that are determined to be underperforming or failing by the Arizona Department of Education (ADE). Included in this methodology will be procedures that allow the researcher to describe the degree to which ASSIST Coaches mentor school and district administrators so as to strengthen the capacity of the leadership for continuous school improvement.

The methodology and procedures will be articulated through five sub-sections that are outlined below. The five sub-sections that are more fully articulated below were developed and described to include (1) the unit of analysis, or case, (2) the criteria by which underperforming and failing schools are analyzed and selected in the sample population, (3) the data collection and analysis strategies that detail what archival records will be collected for analysis and how the analyses will be conducted, (4) and the informed consent that serves to protect study participants, and (5) the protocol by which this study’s data were analyzed. These sub-sections build a framework for this study’s qualitative approach that relies upon a multi-case and comparative study design where the purpose is to describe why and how the support of ASSIST Coaches in Arizona was successful when the underperforming or failing school was able to re-culture itself and
not just modify current practices, as noted by Creswell (2007) and Fullan (2003) and Yin (2009).

As a qualitative research method, case studies allow researchers to study bounded systems, or cases, over time through in-depth and detailed data collection processes, as described by Creswell (2007) and others (Acker-Hocevar & Touchton, 2001; Creswell, 2007). Within these cases, Acker-Hocevar (2001) et al. and Creswell (2007) advocate for the use of multiple data sources (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, documents, and reports) to describe the meaningful and real-life characteristics of cases in a holistic manner. This study will utilize a multi-case study design whereby the effects of ASSIST Coach support will be described as it was implemented at two low-capacity schools.

**Unit of Analysis**

Yin (2009) stated that researchers utilizing case study methodology face the challenge of clearly articulating the unit of analysis related to the case(s), or bounded system(s), within their studies. For this research study, and stemming from the multi-pronged State System of School Support, the unit of analysis will be one of three ASSIST Coaches working as a representative for the ADE; currently, ADE has three ASSIST Coaches. Two cases will be selected using the same unit of analysis (the same ASSIST Coach) and in accordance with the selection criteria noted in the following section. Here, a sample of convenience was chosen whereby all three SEA ASSIST Coaches will be recruited for participation in the in-depth qualitative interviews and the collection of
artifacts, including public documents maintained by the Arizona Department of Education.

**Selection Criteria for Sample**

Two cases will be selected for participation in this study with the purposeful selection highlighting unique, contrasting, or extreme cases. APPENDIX C: LOW-CAPACITY SCHOOLS AND ASSIST COACHES reports the low-capacity schools in Pima County that earned Underperforming or Failing labels in 2007 and the AZ LEARNS labels they earned in 2008, 2009, and 2010. APPENDIX C: LOW-CAPACITY SCHOOLS AND ASSIST COACHES also reports the ASSIST Coach assigned from the ADE to work with the respective low-capacity schools. Schools selected from this sample for participation will meet the following requirements:

1. The first case, Ash Elementary School, will require that the ASSIST Coach work with a public school in Arizona that earned an Underperforming or Failing AZ LEARNS label in 2007 with continued improvement in 2008 and 2009 as measured by AZ LEARNS labels of Performing, Performing Plus, Highly Performing, or Excelling label in 2008 and 2009.

2. The second case, Birch Elementary School, will require that the ASSIST Coach work with a public school that earned an Underperforming AZ LEARNS label in 2007 with a decline in performance as measured by Underperforming or Failing AZ LEARNS labels in 2008 and 2009.
3. The public K-12 school principals at Ash and Birch Elementary Schools was required to have been the principal in the 2007-2008, 2008-2009, and 2009-2010 school years.

4. The ASSIST Coach at Ash and Birch Elementary Schools was required to have worked with their respective school for the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years.

As told by Duncan (2010), LEAs were faced with the need to implement new guidance from the U.S. Department of Education that called on districts to replace principals of low capacity schools; principals of underperforming and failing schools were no longer be available for participation in this study at some schools. Too, the names of teacher leaders, principals, ASSIST Coaches, and schools were reported using pseudonyms. The two-year required involvement between the ASSIST Coach and the two case schools, as recommended by Yin (2009), provides a historical chain of evidence in the data collected through interviews and artifacts; this historical evidence establishes validity to the data and case study methodology.

**Overview of Methodology**

This research study will adhere to a case study design to investigate the contemporary role of the ASSIST Coach in Arizona. As a qualitative research method, case studies allow researchers to study bounded systems (cases) within its real context and over time through in-depth and detailed data collection processes as described by Creswell (2007) and Yin (2009). Multiple researchers, including Creswell (2007) and Yin (2009), advocate for the use of multiple data sources (e.g., observations, interviews,
audiovisual material, documents, and reports) to describe the meaningful and real-life characteristics of cases in a holistic manner. As such, Yin (2009) stated that case study research allows researchers to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events, including organizational behavior and school performance.

Individual interviews with study participants served as the primary data collection method. Participants for this qualitative study were ASSIST Coaches in Arizona assigned to support underperforming and failing schools in Pima County, Arizona. The researcher attended a meeting with the ASSIST Coaches to share the nature and purpose of the study and to obtain informed consent from the three coaches that service low-performing schools.

The researcher distributed copies of a demographic questionnaire (APPENDIX G: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE SURVEY) designed by the researcher and an unmarked envelope to each ASSIST Coach. This questionnaire assisted the researcher in identifying the skills, experience, and background of the coaches. They were instructed to complete the questionnaire, place it in the envelope and seal the envelope. The coaches not wishing to participate were advised that they could withdraw by simply placing their unmarked questionnaire into the envelope and sealing it. Confidentiality of the participants will be reasonably assured through this process.

The researcher conducted an individual interview with each ASSIST Coach working with the two selected underperforming and failing schools. The purpose of the individual interview was to elicit responses that will inform research questions 1-3. Finally, and to take initial steps at investigating the effectiveness of the coach role in
influencing school-level or district-level capacity for continuous school improvement, the researcher conducted an one-on-one interview with one ASSIST Coach that worked with two dichotomous cases. The first case (Case 1) was a school that improved its state accountability label from Underperforming or Failing to Performing, Performing Plus, Highly Performing, or Excelling. The second case (Case 2) was a school that demonstrated no improvement in the AZ LEARNS label, meaning the school’s label remained Underperforming. Case 2 may also have been a school that demonstrated a decline in AZ LEARNS label by moving from an Underperforming label to a Failing label. To determine schools that meet these criteria, public data from the ADE website for 2007 through 2010 was collected and analyzed to form a sample of convenience—public schools in Pima County, Arizona—to be reported in APPENDIX C: LOW-CAPACITY SCHOOLS AND ASSIST COACHES. Given this sample, the ASSIST Coach assigned to both schools participated in an in-depth one-on-one interview designed to elicit descriptions of the conditions, structures, and process that led to different label determinations given the same variable of the ASSIST Coach knowledge, skills, experience, and background that supports change and reform.

All interviews with participants were transcribed and analyzed inductively using case study methodology advanced by Berg (2004), Creswell (2007), Yin (2009) and others (Berg, 2004; Creswell, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Yin, 2009). This inductive approach afforded the researcher an opportunity to investigate and report findings on the design and implementation of the role of the ASSIST Coach as well as the phenomenon
that occur as a result of change and school reform structures and processes within underperforming and failing schools.

As the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (NCLB) is considered for reauthorization in the near future, Duncan (2010) spoke to outcomes of this research study that can be used to not only inform the work of the Arizona Department of Education but also to inform the application of narrowing federal reform models afforded to schools that are involved with federal accountability processes that include the transformational, turnaround, restart, and closure reform models (Duncan, 2010; *Handbook on effective implementation of school improvement grants, 2009*).

**Data Collection**

Data collected for analysis, according to Yin (2009), represented a variety of sources. First, interviews with ASSIST Coaches (APPENDIX D: ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW WITH ASSIST COACH), principals (APPENDIX E: ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW WITH PRINCIPAL) and teacher leaders to be identified by their principal (APPENDIX F: ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW WITH TEACHER LEADER) were audiotaped and transcribed. Yin (2009) stated that the use of “how” and “why” interview questions provide the researcher opportunity to explain and describe the operational links that should be traced over time. The archival records were collected for analysis included copies of the Arizona School Improvement Plans for 2007 and 2008, the Solution Team’s Statement of Findings from 2007 and 2008, memoranda, emails between the principal and ASSIST Coach, meeting agenda and minutes related to the implementation of school improvement strategies recommended by the ASSIST Coach, and survey information.
collected from the Green Tree District website. Yin (2009) recommended collecting and analyzing as many types of data as possible so that the validity of analytic generalizations was strong; it is through the depth and breadth of data sources in case study research that this validity was created.

**Data Analysis**

Qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews and through artifacts will be analyzed in a manner that leads to what Yin (2009) calls analytic generalization. In this type of analysis, Yin (2009) recommends that cases be judged against a previously developed theory, and in the case of this research study, the previous theory is the Ecology of Change Framework (Framework) referenced by Wagner and Kegan (2006). In the Framework, the qualitative data will be analyzed in light of the three levers of change—data, accountability, and relationships—that occur within each of three phases, preparing, envisioning, and enacting. Here, site visits by the researcher to explain that participants will complete semi-structured qualitative interview will be completed. Follow-up mailings will be sent that include:

- A cover letter outlining the purpose of the study.
- An Informed Consent Form.
- A self-addressed stamped envelope to return the signed consent form to the researcher.

Once interview and artifact data were collected it will be analyzed through coding that provides for descriptive analysis in relation to the Ecology of Change Model proposed by Wagner and Kegan (2006). More specifically, the analysis will allow the
researcher to code the qualitative data into the seven disciplines that incorporate the three phases (preparing, envisioning, and enacting) and in the three levers (data, accountability, and relationships) as articulated in Figure 5 in APPENDIX B: ECOLOGY OF CHANGE MODEL – SEVEN DISCIPLINES). The specific codes to be used include the following:

- Discipline 1: Problem solving, Understanding, and Urgency
- Discipline 2: Shared vision
- Discipline 3: Focus
- Discipline 4: Instructional Focus
- Discipline 5: Frequent supervision, Rigor, Focused supervision
- Discipline 6: Intensity of Professional Development; Nature of Professional Development, and Collaboration
- Discipline 7: Diagnostic use of Data

Collectively, these codes will provide for a comprehensive analysis of the data collected through the semi-structured interviews as well as the artifacts previously described.

**Informed Consent**

Participants will indicate informed consent by completing the document in APPENDIX H: INFORMED CONSENT prior to the initiation of this research study.

**Pilot Case Study**

The interview questions and artifacts were tested in a pilot study. The purpose of the pilot study served to field test the questions in Appendices A-C to ascertain if the participant responses yield data that affirmed the desired construct of each question.
Furthermore, the pacing and length of time for the three interviews will be assessed with thought given to how the allocated time needed to be adjusted for each interview as well as the potential need to adjust, eliminate or add interview questions.

The participants for the pilot study will be recruited from school districts outside Pima County, Arizona. Pilot study participants will include one school that earned an AZ LEARNS label of Underperforming or Failing in 2008 that completed one year of work with an ASSIST Coach. Participants in the pilot study will be informed of the pilot’s purpose prior to interviews and that their data will not be included in this study’s findings and recommendations. Data collected from the pilot study will be destroyed at the conclusion of this study.

Results from the pilot informed the study of Case 1 and Case 2. Interviews in the pilot study took 60-70 minutes and questions in Appendices A-C informed the planning, envisioning, and enacting themes and seven disciplines. Questions framing each semi-structured interview were modified slightly with respect to follow-up questions to that the constructs across themes and disciplines could be coded and analyzed.

**Conceptual Framework**

To examine the role of the ASSIST Coach and its implementation in underperforming and failing schools, this study will utilize a framework for school change developed by Wagner and Kegan (2006) called the Ecology of Change that is outlined in Figure 1. Integral to this framework is a three-phase process of whole-system change that is predicated on three levers of change. The three-phase process incorporates
preparation, envisioning, and enacting. The three levers designed into each phase are the use of data, accountability, and relationships.

Figure 1. *The Ecology of Change Framework.*

From this three-by-three model of change, Wagner and Kegan (2006) have identified seven disciplines, which if implemented strategically across a school system, will lead to improved classroom instruction and continuous school improvement. Where the seven disciplines occur within the three phases and three levers is further described in Figures 3 and 4 (Appendices A and B). Stephens (2008), as well as Wagner and Kegan, state:

[b]y attending to the phases of a change process, leaders can lay the groundwork for movement along the continua toward the greater purpose and focus, engagement, and collaboration that are
vital to successful change efforts. (Stephens, 2008; Wagner & Kegan, 2006, p. 133).

**Research Questions**

The questions used in this study examine the role of the ASSIST Coach and its implementation at the school or district level. The research questions are:

1. How are resources available to ASSIST Coaches implemented in the school?
2. To what extent are the needs of the underperforming or failing school aligned with the experience and skills of the ASSIST Coach?
3. How does an ASSIST Coach engage district administration to support continuous improvement in the underperforming or failing school?

**Qualitative Semi-Structured Interviews**

Semi-structured qualitative interviews that were developed by this researcher provided for a dialogue between the researcher and participants that was directed by the questions designed by the researcher (Berg, 2004; Collins, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c). Noted by Berg (2004) and Yin (2009), interviews had the purpose of collecting the perceptions of events and experiences as well as how the study participants make meaning within the context of the events and experiences.

Given this understanding, participants in the first phase of this study were ASSIST Coaches employed by the Arizona Department of Education. Each was assigned to work with low-capacity schools in Arizona. Coaches were interviewed using the semi-structured qualitative questions listed in APPENDIX A: ECOLOGY OF CHANGE MODEL. Interviews were conducted for 75 minutes.
In the second phase, two principals will be interviewed using a semi-structured interview approach as well using the semi-structured interview in APPENDIX E: ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW WITH PRINCIPAL. The criteria previously described to select the sample—Ash and Birch Elementary Schools—was employed to select principals for the semi-structured interviews that took place for 70 minutes. Also in phase two were interviews with the semi-structured interview in APPENDIX F: ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW WITH TEACHER LEADER with two teacher leaders identified by the principals at Ash and Birch Elementary Schools.

**Organization of the Data**

Data from this qualitative study will be collected through audio recordings during the focus group or individual interviews. Paper copies of each transcription will be maintained by the researcher for analysis.

**Summary**

This research study will occur in two phases. The first phase will involve all three ASSIST Coaches to gather as much data about the role, how individuals serving in the role are prepared to effectively support schools, and how they carry out the day-to-day work of the role. The second part of the study will begin to assess effectiveness of the role through qualitative interviews of one ASSIST Coach, district administrators and principals with which the ASSIST Coach worked during the 2009-2010 school year, and teacher leaders that are familiar with the school improvement practices. The questions asked during each interview will measure the same constructs from the Wagner and
CHAPTER 4
ANALYSIS OF THE DATA AND FINDINGS

Findings

This study was designed to explore the perceptions of Arizona’s ASSIST Coaches (coach), principals, and teacher leaders regarding the work of the coach relative to this role’s impact on school improvement processes and outcomes. This study took place in two phases. In Phase 1, two of three coaches participated in semi-structured interviews; the third coach declined to participate in this study. Artifacts—documentation pertinent to turnaround efforts—were also collected. Similar semi-structured interviews and artifact collection efforts were utilized in Phase 2 where principals and teacher leaders were involved. Data collected was analyzed for constructs within the Ecology of Change Framework developed by Wagner and Kegan (2006) that included coding for three themes—preparing for change, envisioning solutions for change, and enacting solutions to affect change—that were nested in levers of change termed data, accountability, and relationships. Furthermore, Wagner and Kegan (2006) nested a second system of seven disciplines, presented in APPENDIX B: ECOLOGY OF CHANGE MODEL – SEVEN DISCIPLINES, that strengthen teaching and instructional leadership that, in turn, affect school improvement and change (Wagner and Kegan, 2006, p. 27). These authors noted that the phases occur sequentially in the Framework and were articulated in this fashion because:

The levers of data, accountability, and relationships come into play and serve different purposes within each phase. For instance, according to [the
Framework, the purview of data collection and interpretation begins with change leadership and then widens to include the larger community. Forms of accountability are initially more vertical but evolve to emphasize horizontal accountability. [As this transition occurs] trust and respect deepen, strengthening relationships and enabling new forms of communication and professional learning. By the enacting phase, a laser-like focus on improving instruction becomes evident in all three change levers. Finally, movement through the three phases corresponds with…movement [from preparing, to envisioning, to enacting].

Wagner and Kegan (2006) noted that school administrators and teachers that are engaged in systemic change frequently found it difficult to draw distinctions among the phases as they worked on the work of school improvement. However, they also noted that the Framework described a long-term change process that is cyclical in nature where the three phases recur with respect to implementing the change levers of data, accountability, and relationships.

The nested system of seven disciplines was developed by Wagner and Kegan (2006) from research they conducted from 2000-2006 in schools that demonstrated dramatic gains in achievement, even with students in the lowest quartile of performance. They identified consistent school and classroom practices implemented by administrators and teacher leaders; the seven disciplines, therefore, are a system of practices or processes, “…that contribute to the improvement of teaching, instructional leadership, and student achievement.”
As this research study was conducted in light of the Framework, a continued focus on the following research questions was maintained:

- How are resources available to ASSIST Coaches implemented in the school?
- To what extent are the needs of the underperforming or failing school aligned with the experience and skills of the ASSIST Coach?
- To what extent does an ASSIST Coach engage district administration to support continuous improvement in the underperforming or failing school?

**Analysis of the AZ LEARNS Model from 2008-2010**

The model of state accountability between the 2007-2008 and the 2009-2010 school years by which schools were evaluated changed annually and the changes were important in describing the contextual underpinnings to the accountability landscape in the New Accountability Movement in Arizona (Franciosi, 2008a, 2008b, 2009a, 2009b, 2010a, 2010b). Annually, the Arizona Department of Education sought approval by the Arizona State Board of Education to implement changes to various aspects of the AZ LEARNS model. Generally these changes were limited to how profile points were calculated as well as the raw scores students needed to achieve in order to pass the reading, writing, and mathematics AIMS tests. In looking at the school years that were included in the scope of this research study, changes to the grade levels that were included in the AZ LEARNS model also took place. Profile points within AZ LEARNS were based upon the growth (improvement) in AIMS results—percent of students passing aggregated at a school level—and by the status of where students were performing in reading, writing, and mathematics collectively at each grade level. Both changes—
profile points and passing scores—were approved by the Arizona State Board of Education as recommended by ADE for 2007-2008, 2008-2009, and 2009-2010 school years (AIMS Scaled Scores and Performance Levels, 2008-2010; AIMS Summary Results, 2007-2010). Table 7 highlighted the scores needed by students in Grades 3, 4 and 5 to pass the AIMS test in reading, writing, and mathematics as approved by the Arizona State Board of Education.

These changes influenced the extent to which improvement in school labels was determined at Ash Elementary School (Ash) and Birch Elementary School (Birch). For Table 7.

Passing Scores and Percentages for the AIMS Test, 2008-2010.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AIMS Content Area and Grade Level</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Raw Score</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Raw Score</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gr. 3</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gr. 4</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gr. 5</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writing</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gr. 3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gr. 4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gr. 5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mathematics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gr. 3</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gr. 4</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gr. 5</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

S = Test was suspended by ADE

example, if the 2008 AZ LEARNS model had been maintained for 2009 and 2010, if only by preserving the method by which growth points were determined, Ash would have had
earned a Performing label in 2009 followed by an Underperforming label in 2010. Table 8 shows how the AZ LEARNS labels were reported by ADE with annual changes to the models in 2008, 2009, and 2010. It also reports AZ LEARNS labels that Ash and Birch would have earned if the AZ LEARNS model in 2008 had been maintained for 2009 and 2010.

Table 8.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School/School Year</th>
<th>AZ LEARNS Label Using a Changing Model</th>
<th>AZ LEARNS Label Using 2008 Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ash Elementary School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>Performing Plus</td>
<td>Performing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>Performing</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birch Elementary School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>Performing</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>Performing</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and 8 indicated that the school improvement work at Ash and Birch took place in a changing environment of state accountability, an environment that generally made it slightly easier for these schools to demonstrate improvement caused by slightly lower cut scores to pass as well as shifting cut scores by which profile points were determined.

Ash Elementary School demonstrated improvement in its AZ LEARNS label as changes to the model were implemented; its label improved from Underperforming in 2007 to Performing Plus in 2008, and Performing in 2009. Birch Elementary School, on the other hand, demonstrated an initial improvement in school label, moving from
Underperforming in 2007 to Performing in 2008. However, this improvement trend did not continue into 2009 because its label returned to Underperforming status in that year. In commenting on this rollercoaster ride, the Birch principal indicated that the Performing label in 2008 is something that “barely happened by one [profile] point due to the AZELLA testing of [English Language Learners].”

**Analysis of the Quantitative Data**

Data collection with participants began in the initial recruitment meeting. During this meeting, participants completed a survey (APPENDIX G: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE SURVEY) designed by Collins (2011a, 2011b, 2011c) to collect data on their perceptions of improvement efforts. Due to the political climate at Birch Elementary School participants did not include teacher leaders; the principal did not permit the researcher to have access to teacher leaders for this reason.

**Sample Characteristics**

Quantitative data collected throughout this study included characteristics associated with the needs of Ash and Birch Elementary Schools and the data collected through the PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE SURVEY (Appendix G).

**Demographic Survey.** The survey found in Appendix G described the gender, role, ethnic background, and some general information pertaining to the ASSIST Coaches, principals, and teacher leaders. Table 9 provided an overview of the demographic survey data for principals and teacher leaders while Table 10 reported the survey data from the ASSIST Coaches.
Table 9.

*Frequency Distribution of Gender, Ethnic Background, and Experience of Principals and Teachers Leaders.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Background</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian, Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade Levels Taught</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous Years at School – Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous Years at School – Principal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Years of Experience in Education – All Participants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16+</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 10.

**Frequency Distribution of Gender, Ethnic Background, and Experience of ASSIST Coaches**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnic Background</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian, Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Years – Teacher</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Years – Principal</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16+</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of Principal Experience</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary/Middle</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Years - ASSIST Coach</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Questions were developed for the surveys that were aligned to the phases and disciplines previously noted as part of the Framework. Figure 2 summarizes the data collected through the perception survey by teacher leaders and principals; data from this
survey is discussed by survey question by drawing comparisons among teacher leaders and principals at participating schools.

**Question 1.** Data from the survey indicated that perceptions of school improvement tied to capacity building initiatives were rated similarly by teacher leaders and principals at the high end of the Likert scale. Capacity building was seen as a result of professional development, and therefore, was correlated to the Enacting Phase and Discipline 6 in the Framework.

**Question 2.** Perceptions of school improvement that resulted from shared beliefs that produced coherency in programmatic solutions were rated similarly by teacher leaders and principals at the high end of the Likert scale as well. This finding corresponds to the Envisioning Phase where schools select solutions to identified problems. Too, shared beliefs about classroom instructional and assessment practices served as the foundation to selecting and implementing solutions to identified problems, particularly individual learning challenges of students. In the Framework and nested seven disciplines, this data corresponds to both the Envisioning and Enacting Phases and Disciplines 2, 4 and 7.

**Question 3.** Teacher leaders and principals rated their perceptions of school improvement efforts as being data driven slightly differently. Principals’ perceptions, more so than perceptions of teacher leaders, indicated that more decisions regarding school improvement were data driven.

This result may be a reflection of the opportunity to interface with school improvement planning by principals and teacher leaders where the principal often times works with a representative team of teacher leaders rather than the entire staff to develop
improvement plans. In this regard, the number and types of data sources used by principals in their decision making outpaces the involvement of teacher leaders outside a school leadership team. This is a finding that corresponds with Discipline 1 as well as the Preparing Phase where data were used to build a sense of urgency to change.

![Perceptions of School Improvement Efforts by Teacher Leaders and Principals](image)

**Figure 2.** *Perceptions of School Improvement Efforts by Teacher Leaders and Principals.*

**Question 4.** Like Question 3, the day-to-day work of principals most likely influenced the data obtained. With respect to perceptions of roles and responsibilities assigned to school administration and faculty for school improvement efforts, principals rated their perception that roles and responsibilities were assigned to individuals more frequently than teacher leader perceptions on this important leadership construct. With respect to
the Framework, this mirrors the accountability lever described by Wagner and Kegan (2006) that drives change across all three phases (planning, envisioning, and enacting), particularly through the supervision responsibilities assigned to the principal described in Discipline 5. Principals may have considered their leadership responsibilities of delegating action steps within improvement plans, an area of responsibility that teacher leaders typically don’t have assigned unless they are grade level chairs at the elementary level or department heads at the middle and high school levels.

**Questions 5 and 6.** Perceptions rated by teacher leaders and principals in Questions 5 and 6 yielded similar outcomes. In these two questions, principals indicated that reflection was a tool for change and collaborative structures were embedded in work to redesign curriculum and instruction respectively. With regard to Question 5, the higher frequency perceived by principals that reflection is used as a tool for change is an outcome that may be a result of the nature of the principalship and the tasks within its job description that require principals to think through decisions before committing to courses of action as well as resources—such as personnel, time, and funding—to resolve problems or to appropriately plan for improvement. This skill set overlaps with Discipline 1 to highlight the need to utilize data to identify problems and to create a responsive urgency by tapping into the emotional and logical levels with members of the school community. It also correlates to the Preparing and Envisioning Phases where reflective practices are an integral factor in identifying root causes to low performance and designing the direction for school improvement. The skill set from the Framework relative to Question 6 regarding the implementation of collaborative structures and
processes focuses on the redesign of curricular and instructional standards of practice and collective practice to better meet student needs, the core to the Enacting Phase where individuals meet to “work on the work” as well as Disciplines 3, 5, and 7.

This data indicated that teacher leaders and principals at Ash and Birch Elementary Schools shared some perceptions regarding school improvement work. It also indicated that some indicators in the Framework were perceived differently by teacher leaders and principals with regard to the frequency with which they were utilized to leverage improvement goals. Furthermore, reflection and collaborative structures are integral processes by which data, accountability and relationships were built upon.

Analysis of the Qualitative Data

In considering the presentation of the qualitative data, the categorical sections of the Framework were used to organize the data collected from the semi-structured interviews, a variety of artifacts, and their analysis. In this light, artifacts were reviewed to first identify each school’s needs for improvement to be followed by an analysis of semi-structured interviews that were transcribed by the researcher. Once transcribed, the audio-recorded interviews were destroyed. The sections were organized using the three phases—Preparing Phase, Envisioning Phase, and Enacting Phase—to present the qualitative data in relationship to the three change levers: Data, Accountability, and Relationships.

Needs of Ash Elementary School. As an elementary school in Arizona, Ash had an enrollment of approximately 400 students. Nearly, “…80% eighty percent of… students received free or reduced lunches” due to the socio-economic status of their
parent(s)/guardian(s). Ethnically, Ash shifted significantly in the years just prior to it receiving its first Underperforming label in 2001-2002. The principal reported, “…the district’s administration and governing board closed a neighboring elementary school and re-assigned some students to attend Ash that caused a shift in its ethnic composition.” The school moved from, “…60% Caucasian, 27% Hispanic, and 13% African American to 30% Caucasian, 60% Hispanic, and 10% African American.” In making this ethnic evolution between the 2000 and 2005, Ash concurrently transitioned from, “…not being a Title I school to being at Title I school.” In terms of implementing a Title I program, Ash initially implemented from, “…a Targeted Assistance program…” but in 2007-2008 it had moved into a Schoolwide Title I program.

Based upon a review of artifacts, Ash needed “to develop a shared belief that all students could achieve” as reported by Joe W., ASSIST Coach at Ash. Other documents noted that Ash needed teachers to (1) incorporate a shared set of engagement strategies to hold students accountable for learning, (2) implement pedagogical methods reflecting the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol Model (SIOP) to better meet the needs of English Language Learners, and (3) differentiate instruction to better meet the learning needs of all students in reading and mathematics. Each of these needs corresponded to Discipline 2 in the Framework where the Ash principal and teachers needed to develop a shared set of instructional practices that held all students to higher levels of performance, an excellent example of the Accountability Lever in action throughout the Envisioning Phase. Also, semi-structured interviews with Betty S. and Joe W., along with data
retrieved from a school quality survey, indicated that Ash needed to develop a schoolwide discipline plan to be proactive with challenging student behavior.

**Needs of Birch Elementary School.** Residing in the same district, Birch experienced a similar change in the student demographics that caused tension among shared beliefs about how students should experience school. Birch operated under the philosophy of a, “…magnet program and it transitioned from being a K-2 school to a K-6 school where the student enrollment increased from 200 students to 350 students”. In a closer look at its student population, Birch had, “…45% of its students in the district’s Gifted and Talented Education Program in 2006.” as stated by their principal. This student population was further described by Donna G. as one that was high minority with a significant segment being English Language Learners (2010 school improvement results for Birch, 2010; School improvement survey results for Ash, 2008; School improvement survey results for Birch, 2008; School improvement survey results for Birch, 2009).

Additionally, Donna G. indicated that she had to hire additional staff to accommodate an increasing enrollment with a concurrent expansion in diversity presented by its students. Furthermore, Birch was characterized by an absence of, “…shared vision and mission as well as an absence of shared beliefs about classroom instruction [Preparing Phase and Discipline 2]),” student performance benchmarks (Envisioning Phase and Discipline 4), and how, “…diagnostic data should be used to collaboratively respond to situations in which students were not learning (Enacting Phase and Discipline 7).” One could summarize that in the absence of shared beliefs between the principal, teachers, and parent community, political jockeying often resulted in a “battle” with respect to school
improvement initiatives that required a change in behavior. This description of Birch Elementary School truly fits the Political Frame where the selection and implementation of school goals emerged from bargaining, negotiating, and jockeying among competing stakeholders (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Donna G. was new to the role, having been hired as a first year principal for the 2006-2007 school year. In her first three years on the job, every attempt to use data to create urgency for change (Preparing Phase and Discipline 1) resulted in a failed effort to achieve the intended outcome; “...data were used adeptly to identify the problem...” but philosophical differences held by a faction of 4-6 teachers blocked every attempt to build a sense of urgency by Donna. The Solutions Team that came to the school in 2009 noted, “...the absence of shared beliefs in their recommendations that were written into the Statement of Findings...” (Longstrom, Dolasinski, & Martinez, 2009). Similar conclusions were noted in the school’s annual survey of its stakeholder groups regarding perceptions of school quality (2007 school quality survey summaries, 2007; 2008 school quality survey summaries, 2008; 2010 school quality survey summaries, 2010).

The parent community ultimately aligned itself with the principal in the 2009-2010 school year and change efforts began to slowly gain traction. Teachers in the faction that caused so much political discomfort began to leave the school, and in the 2009-2010 school year, the administration and faculty were seen as sharing sets of beliefs around instruction, the use of assessments, and how to attend to the needs of students who were demonstrating learning challenges. Further findings were presented based on
the Framework with regard to the three phases—Preparing, Envisioning, and Enacting—and how the three change levers interacted within each phase.

The needs of both schools extend to support they received from the Arizona Department of Education through the role of the ASSIST Coach. One finding from this study has to be that any change affected by the ASSIST Coach would have been dependent upon the coach’s success in working with the data to identify problems (Discipline 1). If Ash demonstrated any improvement, as seen through the Framework, their respective successful outcomes were partially attributable to the work of ASSIST Coaches, Peter C., as seen through the development of common classroom practices where examples included, but were not limited to, the use of an instructional focus and vocabulary, Habits of Thinking posters, and data folders.

Ash and Birch Elementary Schools reside within the same school district in Arizona, Green Tree Unified School District (GTUSD). In 2007-2008, GTUSD was considered to be large with a student enrollment over 57,000 students that were serviced by nearly 120 schools. On an annual basis, the district had between 10-20 schools that were considered to be low performers as seen through Underperforming or Failing labels under AZ LEARNS. To further describe the context in which Ash and Birch had to navigate, the district approached school improvement, as stated by a district administrator, as an act of compliance. According to the district administrator,

There was nothing systematic at the district level to provide a system of support for the schools over the 2007-2008 to the 2009-2010 school years...pretty much, schools were responsible for
addressing their own needs and putting systems in place with very little support…The superintendent that we had…pretty much dismantled all the central support systems and said schools are on their own.

To ascertain the degree to which the Arizona Department of Education involved district level administrators in the work of the ASSIST Coaches so as to affect change and improvement with low capacity schools, the district level administrator familiar with the state accountability system shared:

When schools were identified as Underperforming, the only thing I received was a document showing how ADE was going to support schools that were Underperforming and I believe that each school that was a [Year 1 school] received an ASSIST Coach…I never had any one-on-one meetings with the ASSIST Coaches unless I invited myself or a principal wasn’t comfortable meeting with the ASSIST Coach and [the principal] invited [me to] attend the meetings. [The ASSIST Coach and principal] met and [the ASSIST Coach] gave [the principal] a protocol of what their role was and the work that would be done between the ASSIST Coach and the principal…we had to reach out and make phone calls to [the ASSIST Coach] and bring them in to talk to them [to share] how they could support us with our initiatives and turning around [the underperforming or failing] school and how they could
support it. But after that there really wasn’t much more follow-up as far as involving the LEA in the relationship with the ASSIST Coach. It was pretty much directly with the school.

Additionally, the district administrator stated:

[Principals working with the ASSIST Coaches] felt that “I don’t need the LEA, I’ve got an ASSIST Coach helping me.” [The LEA] also [felt] that we’ve got so many schools…that were in some form of school improvement, we felt [the underperforming or failing schools] were getting help. I did not see it as being very strategic as far as really trying to identify what real supports that principal[s] needed to implement the plan because what I’ve seen from Ash and Birch, they are still in school improvement or they are real border line every year, being in and out, in and out. Whether [the underperforming or failing schools] received consistent support or, I guess the other thing that I think might have been happening is they weren’t getting strategic support. I think it was more touch base…Hi, how are you? Things are fine? Do you need anything? Okay, I’ll get it to you. [It was] nothing strategic. I did not see that…[principals] were getting all the support they needed. It was a random hit and miss. I’m not even sure if there was a real strong relationship built between the ASSIST Coach and the principal because I know there weren’t frequent visits.
And finally regarding supports to schools and the district levels, the district administrator indicated that:

When I talked to the principal…he did not feel he was getting the support he needed…they were just going under…I’m saying maybe that the ASSIST Coach support wasn’t differentiated based on the needs [of the principal or site]. Maybe that school needed someone there every week. So again, everyone got the same treatment…or some did not get any treatment. But I just felt that this was a really high needs school and I remember I met with [the principal] and he told me he had an ASSIST Coach, but [he saw] him once a month and nothing really [happened].

Prepared for Change - Problem Identification, Urgency and Coordination

According to the Ecology of Change Framework (Framework) by Wagner and Kegan (2006), preparing for school improvement or change involved the collection of data so that it was used to develop the logical and emotional needs that build the case for change with teachers, principals, and the school community. Contemporary authors also noted that change will not occur if leaders fail to attend to both the logical and emotional needs (Heath & Heath, 2010). In their model to tackle change efforts when change will be difficult, Heath and Heath (2010) more explicitly indicated that leaders should plan for the emotional needs (an elephant), the logical needs (the rider of the elephant), and the change process (the pathway down which the rider takes the elephant). The Preparing Phase also incorporated accountability through role assignments where relationships were
initiated in new ways as principals and teachers began to identify the new territory that comes through knowing the status quo is unacceptable. Of the three phases and nested system of seven disciplines that composed a system of improvement processes in the Framework, Discipline 1 interfaced with the Preparing Phase because it relied upon data to identify and understand where students were not performing well as well as the ability of the school leadership to create a sense of urgency for change within the school’s climate and culture. This discipline also asked school and district leaders to know where students and the organization were doing well and where they were not doing well so that leaders could engage people’s sense of moral purpose to improve those areas that allowed students and the organization to perform at higher levels.

**Ash Elementary School**

**Data.** For a school that had faced an Underperforming label on two previous occasions, Ash had become familiar with identifying causes of low performance to ameliorate its AZ LEARNS status. In fact, Betty S., the principal, and many of the staff worked at the school during the previous turnaround efforts. Relative to the 2007-2008 Underperforming label, Krista S. and Alice B., teachers at Ash, indicated that their school was a “learning” school and as a result, they believed their individual and collective performance had improved since earning the Underperforming label. Krista S. indicated that faculty members at the school, prior to the Underperforming label, “…[became] learners and they have noticed how much the dialogue has improved from surface level [issues] to deep level [issues].”
In an effort to use data as a driver of improvement and change, data at Ash was used to create a sense of urgency and to prepare a foundation within the school’s culture for changes in behavior (Discipline 1). The first of three examples showed that “…[teachers] looked at data and tried to make sense of what it [was] telling them. What are the student needs? How can [teachers] change [their] teaching in order to meet those student needs.”

In a second example, and to further extend the urgency and need to do things differently, Krista S. noted that she was coaching teachers too. In this arena, she commented that “…there has been a lot of planning with teachers, sometimes co-teaching lessons, sometimes whisper[ing] in teacher’s ears, think about this or that.” For Krista, the coaching support she provided colleagues specifically addressed what students needed in order to move them forward.

Data, in the third example, were used by the principal in a passive role whereby Betty S. shared AIMS test results at the beginning of the school year and then relied upon teachers to complete the analysis so that root causes of low performance could be identified. Betty S. was quoted as saying:

We look at our test scores and we say where we are weak. We always start the year out having teachers look at data. I’m not a big data person…it is a weakness…but I always make sure teachers see how kids did on the AIMS. We have DIBELS, which is required. We have, in reading…the DRAs and that’s something we do three times per year plus whatever the teachers do in their class. We have in math…the unit test
and Priority Number Skills, which is something we give three times per year. So we have some things in place. In writing, teachers give their own assessments. [So] we look at data in the summer, we look at district initiatives…What does it say? What do individual [students] need? Then, [we] set that up for teachers to start working on that.

**Accountability.** Betty S., principal at Ash, made clear and concise statements during the semi-structured interview that demonstrated a keen knowledge of her role regarding accountability constructs. She described her role as a significant factor in implementing accountability structures across the Ash campus. In her comments, she stated:

> When we are not focused, I can tell. I can tell that we’ve…slipped in things that we’ve implemented in the classroom. Accountability from my part, my being in the classrooms frequently…is very important [because] accountability for implementation of whatever we are supposed to be implementing [relies upon me] just keeping it alive and in front of [teachers]…whatever you don’t keep alive and in front of them goes away.

As a second example, one that was connected to the issue of keeping change initiatives in front of faculty members, the new position of the instructional coach in which Krista S. served between 2007 and 2009 was another pertinent example of how the Ash administration began to identify roles and responsibilities that disrupted the status quo. By introducing the coaching role to the Ash campus, performance related to classroom instruction became a concern and teachers felt more accountability to perform
at higher levels. Krista S. described this outcome by discussing her role as one that, “...help[ed] improve the teaching and learning that was going on at [Ash].” In her role, Krista A. supported the movement to improved classroom instruction by serving as, “…another set of ears and eyes to help teachers look more broadly at their classroom [instruction] but also more specifically at what students [were] needing to move them forward.” Examples of this coaching work included examining student work, reading through student journals, looking at problem solving, and…[identifying] what…students know.”

In the Preparing Phase, the leadership Betty S. provided to maintain a focus on change initiatives, either through her actions and behaviors, or through the instructional coaching role on the Ash campus, was evident.

**Relationships.** In the Preparing Phase, new roles, structures and processes begin to form new relationships. Two examples of this construct came from the semi-structured interview with Krista S. where she commented on the relationships she and her principal developed and maintained with the Ash faculty. Her first comment demonstrated her perception of the relationships she sees that her principal has with the faculty. Krista S. stated:

Everybody, pretty much everybody, has a great relationship with [Betty S.] on a personal level and a professional level. I don’t think you can have the professional without the personal. It certainly aids the professional relationship…There has been some relationships that go back to prior to
being at [Ash]...even though they were at other sites they still knew each other. There have been some long-term relationships with many staff. Her comment about relationships transitioned away from the relationships her principal has with the Ash staff to the relationships she had with the school’s faculty. In fulfilling her role as instructional coach, Krista stated that she was able to:

influence some people [to adopt change initiatives at the classroom level].

I feel like I have because I hear it in the dialogue and I see it in the classrooms. I have not been able to influence everybody, but I keep working at it and I see it in little pieces.

Interview data such as this demonstrated that Krista S. was able to build and maintain trusting relationships with colleagues through her coaching role and work. Perceptions of existing relationships that supported school improvement work were present in the work of the principal and the instructional coach.

Birch Elementary School

Data. From the semi-structured interview with Donna G, principal at Birch, early indicators of the absence of shared beliefs regarding classroom instruction (Discipline 2), assessment systems (Discipline 4), and diagnosing and responding to student learning challenges (Discipline 7) were evident. From her first year, and as she conducted classroom walkthroughs, she noted gaps in the implementation of the magnet philosophy and she attempted to address it with her staff. Donna G. adeptly used data to identify the problems facing her school by relying on the logical reasoning with her faculty.

Accessing the emotional side of the need for change was something that fell short in
nearly every effort for three years. Again, political challenges to her leadership in this arena blocked every attempt to connect emotional processing to the need to change.

Donna G. stated in her semi-structured interview that:

[w]ithin a few weeks [of starting my first year as principal], I realized that some of the teachers [didn’t] know how to interact and implement this magnet philosophy; they were trying to do it the way they were doing it with the [gifted] kids and it [was] a totally different population. I addressed it in a meeting with teachers at the end of the fourth week of school and said we needed to make some changes because some things were going to show that they were not going to work with this population…The scores went down and we went from Highly Performing to Performing Plus…[In my second year as principal], it was the second benchmark data for math, specifically, that showed a concern so I met with [the teachers] in January. Here’s where we are at and here is what the data says. We have struggles with math. You have until AIMS [testing in April] to show improvement; if not, next year will look different. [At the end of my second year], I got the AIMS data together and I told it the way it was, I told the truth about how what we needed to do with our population. I laid it out demographically and said these were your kids in 2006 who took the AIMS. Here are our 3rd graders this year and who they are predicted to be next year…80% free and reduced lunch…I laid it out in terms of ELLs. I laid it out in a letter that I wrote to
them in June that summer and basically phrased the end of it saying,

“Please read this letter thoroughly so that you can make informed
decisions about what to do next year with teaching.” I kind of said, if you
are not on board with these changes that I will implement, find another
place to do what you want to do.

In the face of political challenges, Donna G. made annual attempts to identify
learning challenges with students in ways that could logically articulate a need for
change. However, her attempts were unsuccessful with respect to engaging all staff
members on an emotional level. In the current school year, the principal stated, “…Data
is what drives us now. Before it was something…we looked at once a year when our
AIMS results came back. And now, it decides what teachers are planning to do with
kids.”

Accountability. The unsuccessful efforts to disrupt the status quo at Birch
reflected that shared accountability to solve identified problems did not exist. In fact,
when Donna G. sought guidance from district leadership, she was told to, “…back off.
They said to let this year play out and see where it goes.” The political challenges faced
by her undermined systems of accountability that could have served to disrupt forces that
were keeping the school in a downward trend of student achievement.

Relationships. Like with constructs of accountability, Donna G. was challenged
in her first three years in the principalship to develop trusting and collaborative
relationships in support of change initiatives. This is evidenced by her comment in the
semi-structured interview that indicated, “…[t]here was some groundwork of an
overthrow again of trying to get rid of me because I was trying to get them to do something different and better.” Additional data from the interview showed that Birch had a history of dysfunctional relationships existing between the current faculty and prior principals where, “…distrust and unproductive work governed the professional work day.” For example, Donna G. stated, “…the district leadership wanted to advocate for me and give me a heads up” by telling me background about the school that included situations where teachers and parents were, “…yelling in the parking lot at [the district office]” and how a faction of teachers effectively got rid of a prior principal. District leadership told her to, “…do a lot of observations, do a lot of seeing what needs to be done, but be careful with how you lay that out because we don’t want [to see the faculty turn on you].”

**Envisioning Phase**

The identification of solutions is center stage in the Envisioning Phase. In this regard, Wagner and Kegan (2006) articulated that a deep understanding of the identified problems occurs through two important strategies. First, the need and urgency to change is communicated to a broader audience within the school community to generate more support for the change initiatives. Secondly, data were collected to assess the degree to which school administration and faculty members share practices for classroom instruction and the standards by which “excellence” in those practices will be defined and judged. In light of these constructs in the Envisioning Phase of the Framework, programmatic solutions are identified that include a potential reorganization of structures, a redesign of the school day schedule, the adoption of curricular programs, targeted
professional development opportunities to address growth areas, and the implementation of new programs such as progress monitoring or intervention instruction. Important in this second phase is the identification of roles and measures of accountability so that progress can be measured against expectations for common practice and performance benchmarks. Staff involved in the change efforts should be trained on how their role can impact the change effort. This phase is about planning and communicating the course of action relative to standards of practice and benchmarks of excellence so that change initiatives are successful.

With regard to these constructs in the Envisioning Phase, Ash did not receive significant resource support from its respective ASSIST Coach. Impacting the delivery of resources at low-capacity schools, like Ash, was the absence of mandatory participation in workshops and strong direction, guidance, coaching, or mentoring with principals to affect improvement or change provided by ADE and its ASSIST Coach role. As stated by Peter C.:

[resources we provided] were more of an explanation of here’s your achievement profile, here’s what this data means, make sure you look at this as you write your school improvement plan because it is important. And that was…we’d kind of leave it at that because we were not being directive with it at that point. It was, ‘Make sure you can understand this so you can put it in use.’

Therefore, the skills embedded in Discipline 1 relating to the use of data to identify problems so that courses of action could be planned were partially developed as
Joe W. and Peter C. worked with principals and school faculty members. However, resource support to affect the sense of urgency to change, even out to the broader school community, was developed even less due to expectations that coaches not be directive and to make participation in trainings optional for school administration and teacher leaders. Therefore, the envisioning work that took place was more of a result of the internal capacity at Ash rather than an outcome affected by the school’s ASSIST coach.

**Ash Elementary School**

*Data.* A host of common practices and attached performance standards have become part of the Ash culture as revealed through the semi-structured interviews with the principal and teacher leaders. Pertinent to the Data Lever being utilized in the Envisioning Phase, four school-level examples and one district-level example of this construct were articulated that demonstrate the connection between common practices and definitions of excellence with respect to performance. In this regard, “sameness” was a word used to describe how these examples became to be common practice shared by the administration and instructional staff at Ash, according to the principal. “Sameness” was an outcome she observed anecdotally as a result of conducting classroom walkthroughs and completing the teacher evaluation cycle with staff members rather than through a formal or systematic measurement tool.

Example 1 was offered by Krista S. in the semi-structured interview previously noted. In referencing her principal’s discussion relative to classroom instruction, she commented that the use of data in the Envisioning Phase has led the Ash faculty and administration into becoming more “process oriented.” Additionally, she said:
I think we are looking at what kids are doing and where the holes are that we need to plug in. I think we are more reflective on what kids are doing, and not doing, but need to be doing. I think we are more aware of what our end result is, what our end goals are so that we can move kids along that continuum. I also think we are more in tune of taking kids where they are at so that we are differentiating and looking at readiness of kids rather than just delivering [instruction or content] like I said earlier. It is not easy, it is frustrating at times. I think we are much better at looking at the work than we were used to be too...I think we are more aware of the kinds of things we need to be doing that are good practices for teaching and learning.

As this discussion at Ash about teaching and learning continued to unfold, existing disagreements regarding the capacity of the school administration and faculty to identify common practices and performance expectations moved to the forefront as evidenced by comments from Alice B. She shared concerns that staff members from support programs did not always share the same beliefs about how to provide intervention instruction with highly at-risk students. Alice B. noted that:

- a special education teacher pulled reading groups…and [worked] intensively in small groups with [students]. That was really beneficial. That was the year we came out of being underperforming. I guess having more staff to do those small group interventions and working with [gray area] kids that need extra help…would have been beneficial. Even our
librarian had developed a new Reader’s Corner so the kids and the books were leveled based on the [Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA)]. The kids were getting “just right” books. We used the DRA, the [students got] their [reading] level, and they check[ed out library books] and you [saw] the progress throughout the year as we continued to use those [DRA] tests.

However, Krista S. commented that pull-out support services received by students were implemented by teachers of special programs—English Language Development (ELD) and special education—in ways that were not aligned to instruction provided by regular classroom teachers. She questioned whether or not it was truly supporting the work of regular classroom teachers when she said:

I would say that bringing our resource teachers on board so that they are truly working with [regular classroom] teachers is something we would need also. For those kids that receive their services but just so that there is a meshing of what is done…so that when [students are pulled] out, it is not totally disintegrated with what was done in the [regular] classroom.

Here, the challenge was to get all the staff—regular classroom teachers and teachers in special programs—to understand their respective role and how to best implement change initiatives from a foundation of implementing common practices with the administration and staff understanding the criteria for high quality performance. For Ash, that meant understanding and staying focused on the instructional delivery for a host
of programmatic solutions the school had selected for implementation in addition to the pull-out services provided by special education and ELD programs.

Working to have administration and staff member understand the common practices that are to be worked on and disrupted in a change effort has been a challenge faced by Ash teachers. In response to the Underperforming label at this school, the principal initiated the implementation of professional learning communities and common collaboration time as advanced by DuFour and Eaker (1998). Betty S., Krista S., and Alice B. also noted that professional learning communities structured within teacher collaboration time were developed through the weekly/monthly schedule of early release Wednesdays at Ash. Professional learning communities were considered time to articulate common practices and benchmarks of excellence and Krista noted:

Quite honestly, I think that what moves teachers forward the most is the time to really collaboratively look at what their kids are doing and what they are not doing. There isn’t enough time during the day, even the hour that we get after school [isn’t enough]. It needs to be embedded during the school day to make it really worthwhile.

Betty, in working to supervise and monitor the professional learning communities required each team to submit summary notes in the form of a “Team Log.” She reviewed the summaries and provided feedback as well as responded to questions that came up. Working within this structure and process, and while still a novice teacher at Ash, Alice B. summarized their work in the professional learning communities very distinctly by stating:
Even though we were doing a lot of things that were good for kids, there were a lot of areas we could do things that were better for kids. Once you get in the mentality that it is not you personally [creating the school’s Underperforming label] but it is…what you can do better in your room, and that you need to continue learning…I think that’s when you start to succeed. I think if you keep moving and improving you have to keep changing and finding out what works and what doesn’t work.

One of the agenda items discussed in the context of the professional learning communities included the implementation of data folders. Data folders were to be used to track student progress within and across grade levels and within and across school years. Krista S. shared a concern related to the degree to which common beliefs around the progress monitoring process led to collective practices to track student learning consistently by all teachers. She noted:

We all need to know how we are going to record [data] and how we are going to implement the assessment so there is consistency. We looked at those [data folders] and compared and contrasted in order to look at what we really wanted from everybody to make them more consistent, to make them more readable because we also decided to move them from grade level to grade level. Teachers would receive past [assessment] records. We continue to fine tune because we still don’t have 100% on board with a consistent way of recording [data]. It is a work in progress—it is getting better—but it is still a work in progress.
Furthermore, and the final example discussed from the data, the ASSIST Coaches and district administrator noted a particular but critical issue with how resources were being acquired or recommended to underperforming or failing schools as programmatic solutions started to crystallize into formal plans. Comments from the district administrator include the following:

Even some of the ASSIST Coaches did not even have a true understanding of school improvement because they would say they could do anything with their [federal] funds and I had to say ‘No, you can’t do that.’ The coaches were telling them they could do whatever they wanted with their funds…I remember them saying that they did not have to follow the 10% set aside [for professional development], or you could do any professional development. No, it has to be aligned with why you are not making AYP. So [other ADE staff] came [to the district] at [that] time. There was no collaboration between the ASSIST Coaches and the ADE support people in school improvement; [there was ] no communication even though they were working with Title I schools. It was a huge disconnect right there. So they were telling them to do different things, some of which they could not do. That was huge starting at the state level. Then, that really didn’t build credibility with anybody, the LEA, the state or the ASSIST Coach.

Similar to teacher comments, the district administrator noted that the issue of role accountability as a programmatic solution was applied at the level of the principalship in saying:
[T]here is higher accountability when your boss says I’m going to help you but I want to see results. And they are calling you in every quarter and we are talking about those results. It is a lot different, but everything was dismantled…no [Curriculum and Instruction] department, no [Professional Development] department. Schools [had] to coordinate all of their own [professional development] by themselves.

Ash Elementary School had limited experience with regard to resources afforded by ADE in response to their respective Underperforming labels. Joe W. serviced Ash as their coach, but a comment shared by a coaching colleague demonstrated that absence of support at all Year 1 and Year 2 schools when Peter C. shared:

When the [ASSIST Coach] Program was first developed, it was a person from ADE that would show up, answer questions, and guide them through the process of school improvement, but never giving them much direction in anything. It was just an offering of service, an offering of the Best Practices workshops we would put on. We would pay for two of those for the school and ADE would sponsor those. And then the Leading Change Institute in the summer…we would pay for those schools to bring a group of five people. [But] there was not any obligation for the school to [participate] at that point however. It was still up to them.

As ADE continued their work with Underperforming and Failing schools, Peter C. noted that:
we just became more clear about where we thought they had to move. If [the school] went to Failing status, then all kinds of things took over [and ADE] took control of a lot more stuff for them…appointing new principals, bringing in Turnaround Coaches, all of the things the state did in conjunction with the district to bring the school forward. But [for schools] in Year 1 and Year 2 [of Underperforming status], we went from just kind of…here we are, here’s what we have to offer, let us help look at [the issues of low achievement], maybe we can look at a different way with you [to] these are the things that we really need to see happen if you expect to move your school forward…[like] writing their school improvement plan [to get the action steps and implementation pieces]…down to the classroom level. We were just there to say we can bring these resources to you that won’t cost you anything because you are in school improvement, how can we help you get that process started? We began to work with the LEA at that point.

Betty S. reported that Joe W. provided limited resources to support its third turn-around challenge. According to the principal, three elements of support were afforded to Ash by the Joe W. First, the he attended a faculty meeting where he “played the heavy” by making comments reflecting the seriousness of the school’s situation and called upon staff members to do everything they could to change and improve. The second support provided by Joe W. occurred in that same faculty meeting where “he conducted an inservice on data analysis.” The final support afforded to Ash by Joe W. came through
literature on student engagement provided to the principal. Beyond these three areas of support, she reported that Joe W. was:

always available to me. If I needed to call him, I had his cell phone number and I saw his role not as a support to teachers. He was a support to me…[Joe W.] had much respect for us because I think he saw what we were doing…he met with me about every eight weeks to monitor [our] turnaround efforts in 2007-2008.

Teacher data from the semi-structured interviews reflected a similar limited contact by Joe W. with Ash Elementary School. The teacher interviewees commented that they had:

interaction with [Joe] a few times. He came and introduced himself and kind of told us his role. And then I think he looked over the [Arizona School Improvement Plan] with Betty. He mainly met with [the principal] and worked with her. He provided her a lens of what she need[ed] to be looking for and documenting as she visit[ed] classrooms, whether formal observations or informal observations. I don’t remember having much contact with him beyond that initial visit.

Observations made by Alice B. and Krista S., therefore, indicate that Joe W. provided support to their principal with the assumption that he assisted her in knowing the right things to monitor so as to hold the faculty accountable (Discipline 5). In the
absence of significant support from Joe W. to prepare for school improvement, there is evidence that Ash worked in this area nonetheless.

**Accountability.** Within the Framework, constructs of accountability in the Envisioning Phase center around the ability of school and district leaders to articulate improvement plans that have broad support across the school and its community. Data collected from the semi-structured interview with Alice B. showed that accountability to her meant that:

we have to know the school improvement plan and what’s in it…whether people remember [what] is in our school improvement plan or not, it is just the material that we are supposed to be using. Like we worked with Dr. Bob Wortman for reading and writing; he came in during some of those years and worked with small groups of teachers. I think that we are made accountable because…it is an expectation for [Betty]. She incorporates it into our professional development and then it is just part of what we do normally.

Accountability at the level of the ASSIST Coach added context to this stage in the movement of a school from the Preparing Phase toward the Enacting Phase because it provided background information that was pertinent to the use of accountability as a lever for change. For example, Joe W. stated in the semi-structured interview that:

[the focus of the ASSIST Coach role] was really to meet with the staff to talk about change, how to cultivate that environment of change, [and] what that looked like because, often times, the administrator didn’t
understand organizational change and how that would occur, and what were the next steps he/she should take. So [ADE coaches] spent a lot of time on a myriad of things but it could be how do you get your staff on board and understand the improvement process, how do you encourage and invite them into this process so they understand that this is going to be a neat opportunity for their kids.

Given this platform, supporting principals through efforts to guide or mentor them in the implementation of their school’s improvement plan was limited to the recommendations provided by the Solutions Team in nearly all cases. Therefore, this is one area that was differentiated by coaches as the needs of schools were driven by their individual circumstances.

In further articulating this notion of establishing benchmarks of excellence for common practice, Alice B. added the following relevant comment regarding the use of roles or assignments as accountability measures that were integrated with instructional approaches:

So I don’t feel it is just the teacher knowing their progress of the child; it is the child taking ownership for their learning, understanding where they are, and where they need to be and setting goals for themselves also.

*Relationships.* Quality conversations about nature of the problems, potential programmatic solutions, and role assignments at Ash were demonstrated in a few examples as observed in both semi-structured interviews and artifacts. Betty S., commented that the conversations regarding solutions for problems led to the
development of the school improvement goals for this year and that those goals were not
different from those from previous years. She stated, “We have the goals, we have the
strategies laid out. It is very involved and it lays out everything we do…we just keep
trying to perfect those, or if there are issues, we try to work through that.” She also stated
that the development of the school improvement plan is an “inclusive” process where,
“…when teachers need something, of course we try to put that in…[teachers] trust [me
and Alice] that what we are bringing to them…what we need to be doing, most of [the
teachers].” Krista S. added comments that reinforced those shared by Betty S. by stating:

    We are continuing with what we’ve been working on for five years
    because we can always get better at it. I don’t think we will ever be there,
    in terms of an individual teacher or the whole school, we can always get
    better at what we do. [We just] refine and fine tune.

Alice B. shared a very similar comment by stating:

    I think we’ve just continued to work on the things that we implemented
during our school improvement plan and those have really been a focus
during our professional development. So, we’ve just kept learning and
getting better at those and refining our skills.

    Once the Ash school improvement plan was developed, efforts to communicate it
to the broader school community were evidenced in a summary of the plan drafted in
parent friendly language as well as school newsletters. The October 1 school newsletter
had a section that read:
The School Council and staff are in the process of analyzing data, doing a school needs assessment, and writing academic goals. We are reviewing the [Ash] School Accountability Plan from last year and assessing what we need to keep doing, what needs to be changed, and what needs to be added to the school plan written this year to ensure academic success for all students. Everyone is invited to attend the School Council meetings. The next meetings are October 1 and 8 at 2:30 in the library.

Data collected through the semi-structured interview with the district administrator indicated that the absence of a relationship between the ASSIST Coaches and district administrators prevented the coaches from engaging in this phase of the Framework. ADE recognized that there was a critical need to involve superintendents, assistant superintendents, and federal program directors in the work of identifying programmatic solutions to school problems because they saw situations where change initiatives were unsuccessful where a strong and positive relationship between the school and the district office did not exist. While not impacting the school years directly subsequent to the Underperforming label at Ash, artifact evidence demonstrated that district personnel—superintendents, assistant superintendents, and federal program directors—were invited in the current school year to monthly Leadership Institutes where principals and district administrators received training on topics such as:

- Session 1: Programmatic alignment; positive school climate; using data for school improvement;
• Session 2: Effective instruction; formative assessment (checking for understanding); lesson design; classroom walkthrough protocols;
• Session 3: The Lexile Framework (crosswalk to AIMS scaled scores)
• Session 4: Classroom/School assessments (screening; diagnostic; formative; summative); progress monitoring; instructional talk (student); and data analysis (cohorts)
• Sessions 5: Instructional objectives and Bloom’s Taxonomy
• Sessions 6 and 7: Understanding AIMS student reports and performance reports
• Session 8: Targeting students for intervention; Response to Intervention
• Session 9: Grouping students for Intervention
• Session 10: Grouping students for Intervention;
• Session 11: Developing a school improvement plan

Joe W. and Peter C., the ASSIST Coaches participating in this study, indicated they were a strong resource for underperforming schools as seen in responses to the semi-structured interview (APPENDIX D: ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW WITH ASSIST COACH). Table 10 reported the demographic variables of coaches using the PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE SURVEY (Appendix G). Joe W. stated that “…we went beyond our job description or state role to help schools.” From these two data sources Joe W. and Peter C. indicated their individual and collective experience being school principals, whether in the public or charter school system, prepared them to be a resource to assist low capacity schools and to support low-capacity schools to prepare for school improvement or change. Joe W. stated that:
I had been in education for 20 years, both at the K-12 [level] and in the post-secondary [level]. It gave me breadth and depth…I had worked at both elementary and high schools. I think that background and experience, the fact that I had been a practicing classroom teacher and administrator…were all helpful things.

However, Joe W. also noted that a concern that he saw as problematic, which was:

some of my colleagues…did not have administrative background.

In fact, we had an coach that really had not been a teacher. I always saw that as a bit problematic [because] how will the administrator [of an Underperforming or Failing school] look at you if you are not a credentialed administrator, which most of my colleagues were not in the ASSIST Coach group. Peter C., of course, [was]. In a nut shell, that’s what I thought was the reason why I was more successful as an ASSIST Coach. It lent a lot of credibility because I was a former high school principal.

In the semi-structured interviews, both also noted that the training they received by ADE to fulfill their role was excellent and delivered by national experts. Both noted that they received training in Transformational Coaching, a model of coaching where support for mentees“…transitioned from more direction to less direction as skills were developed by the person being coached.” However, Peter C. also reported in the semi-structured interview that, in the 2007-2008 school year, the needs of schools that had moved into Failing status were attended to only. Joe W., “…rarely had schools in Failing
status” and therefore routinely met with schools in Year 1 or Year 2 of Underperforming status. Additionally, and as observed in interview data, Peter C. and Joe W. further reported that the time they spent at schools was generally limited to once a month during the 2007-2008 school year, but Joe W. met every two weeks if the needs of the school required it.

**Birch Elementary School**

*Data.* Artifact evidence demonstrated that common practices were articulated in written communication from the principal to the Birch faculty from 2008 and again from August of 2010. Examples of common practices included; (1) classroom environments that were in alignment to the magnet philosophy (Discipline 2), (2) daily lesson plans as a minimum expectation for teachers so that the principal could review them on a daily basis (Discipline 2 and 5), (3) the implementation of the magnet program curriculum (Discipline 2), (4) the implementation of remedial math instruction and math vocabulary instruction (Disciplines 4 and 7), (5) the implementation of benchmark testing three to four times per year (Discipline 4), (6) the sharing of assessment results with students, parents, and colleagues (Discipline 1), and (7) the implementation of a Success for Children Individual Plan that identified interventions and assessments that were used to address learning challenges with students (Discipline 7). Definitions of excellence within these practices was not articulated, either in the semi-structured interview or in artifacts collected from Birch.

As described by the principal, every attempt to move the faculty into the Planning Phase or Envisioning Phase was unsuccessful because the political forces generated by a
small fraction of teachers prevented the school from identifying common problems and envisioning solutions to them.

Accountability. From the semi-structured interview with Donna G., there were three data sources that reflected that the school community understood and agreed with the course of action defined by the principal and this was an indication of a deepening commitment or support for her improvement plan. The first example came from the parent community when they chose to get involved on a deeper level by confronting the small group of teachers that had been the cause of disagreement and political unrest. This confrontation occurred through written communication that stated the parent group was, “…not appreciative of how [the teachers] wanted things to happen at the school.”

The group of teachers confronted by parents resisted measures of accountability that were identified by the principal in the semi-structured interview. She noted the following:

[the accountability measures that have become a part of our culture…we make sure that by the end of September every parent is conferenced with ideally during conference week, but if not, we go out to homes to get [the Title I Compact] signed [that has] a list of goals…or also on a SCIP (Success for Children Individual Plan) if the child is below grade level, getting that documented with a signature. But really, it is looking at data and being honest with it.

The third piece of data that demonstrated a deepening support for the principal’s plan was reflected in the choice of teachers to not return to Birch in the year following
the confrontation initiated by the parent group. Donna G. stated that four teachers in the original group that were unsatisfied chose to leave Birch for other work in the district. This shift demonstrated a second wave or level of community support for the principal and the direction she intended to take the school.

As a result, and like Ash, Birch looked to their internal capacity, whether at the school or district level, to affect school improvement and change. In commenting on her ASSIST Coach, Donna G., stated,

“I don’t know if he would have done it, but I didn’t go to him and say that I needed help with this or that from him. Basically, I wanted to make sure he was someone I wanted to stay in compliance with instead of being an extra support system.

The resource support received by Birch was limited to one visit to the school by Peter C. The principal explained that “[Peter] was here to explain that a Solutions Team would visit the school later in the school year. We got no other resources or visits from [him].” This finding was similarly shared by Peter C. when he explained:

schools in Year 1 of Underperforming, [like Birch], did not receive more support. I gave my attention to schools at Year 3 of Underperformance, [those] schools that had moved into Failing status.”

**Relationships.** Evidence of trusting and respectful relationships were not evident at Birch until the current school year. Efforts by teachers to use political forces to oust the principal persisted during her first three
years. When asked about teacher collaboration used to have teachers meet about school improvement work, she stated:

On Wednesdays we don’t do a whole group thing for everyone. Very rarely, every once in a while, once a quarter we will if it is a topic that is relevant for all of them. Instead, every teacher has a specific tailored professional growth plan they’ve developed by themselves with my collaboration. Or in some cases, if it is a teacher we need a lot of improvement with, the consultant and I design that plan for them. That’s what they do on Wednesdays instead of what you might see in another school where everyone is working on the same topic at the same time. It is really differentiated professionally for the adults.

**Enacting Phase**

In the Ecology of Change Framework advanced by Kegan and Wagner (2006), change occurs at the classroom level where the classroom practice of teachers changes in response to new directions established by the school and district. Of the seven disciplines identified in Figure 5 in APPENDIX B: ECOLOGY OF CHANGE MODEL – SEVEN DISCIPLINES, all but the first two were engaged in the Enacting phase of the framework. Meetings were held to monitor the implementation at the classroom level relative to performance and assessment standards. Professional development opportunities targeted the identified growth areas and were on-site, intensive, and collaborative in nature. Finally, data was used diagnostically to assess the degree of implementation and the extent to which improvement goals were being met. In
summary, the Enacting phase was focused on fulfilling one’s areas of responsibility and monitoring progress so that school leaders knew if progress was being achieved.

Data from both ASSIST Coaches that was relevant to both schools is applicable to the envisioning work on school improvement initiatives. As Joe W. and Peter C. have noted with regard to their expertise, skills, and background, the needs of the low-capacity schools really drive their work. Comments from both ASSIST Coaches reflected that there focus in this Enacting Phase was the monitoring of programmatic initiatives and professional development to ascertain the extent to which initiatives were impacting classroom instruction. In this work, both coaches noted that they “wanted to see what the principal saw as he/she walked through [the building].” Often in their follow up dialogue with principals, they asked questions like, “What data did they see regarding effective instructional strategies that occurred?” “Was it primarily direct instruction or lecture? Or, did you see small group to whole group interactions? As ADE has continued their work in this arena, they adjusted the school improvement grant application process to include measures to be implemented by the principal where he/she monitors classroom implementation of initiatives and training at the classroom level. This is a key piece of the grant application in which Underperforming and Failings schools must document and describe.

However, in the 2007-2008 school year when Ash and Birch were deeply involved in envisioning the school improvement processes and details, the limited time ASSIST Coaches afforded them concurrently limited the expertise and resources that were shared by coaches with low-capacity schools such as Ash and Birch. Coaches
indicated their lack of time with low-capacity schools was a function of their case load; Table 11 (APPENDIX C: LOW-CAPACITY SCHOOLS AND ASSIST COACHES) details the case load for one coach for schools in Pima County from 2007-2008, the year Ash and Birch were Underperforming.

Furthermore, comments by the district administrator indicated that the absence of a relationship between the coaches and district administrators prevented the coach from engaging in this phase of the Framework in both case schools.

The Green Tree Unified School District administrator stated that ASSIST Coaches dealt with school principals, and if the district was involved, it happened as a result of an invitation by a principal to attend meetings. No relationship existed between coaches and central office leadership between 2007 and 2010 in relation to the coach work with Underperforming and Failing schools. Additionally, central leadership in the Green Tree district was noted as having “gutted” the support systems for these struggling schools. The central administrator interviewed for this study reflected that situation by stating “there was nothing systematic at the district level to provide a system of support for the [underperforming] schools.” Ash and Birch were essentially left to navigate through school improvement issues and their underperformance on their own—district support and state support were negligible. However, the Green Tree district administrator shared that district support is now in place and that change is in response to ADE’s insistence that district support be put in place before the district’s school improvement grant applications can be funded. So this shift by the district was an act of compliance with ADE, but it is also an act by which the Green Tree district administration fully
recognized its strong support for struggling schools, principals, teachers, and most importantly, students.

Additionally, ASSIST Coaches have begun to work with the LEA to build capacity for school improvement. They recognized, “…[their] job is to build the capacity of the district. In building the capacity of the district, [ASSIST Coaches] want them to build the capacity of the school leadership and the teacher level as well.” So ADE, through the coach role, had begun to work with LEAs through the completion of the school improvement grant application to affect school improvement and change. They are shifting support to schools from state initiatives to federal accountability sources, at least through federal grant applications.

**Ash Elementary School**

**Data.** Moving schools forward through the implementation of resources was of interest to the administrator that was interviewed from the Green Tree Unified School district office. The district administrator was quoted as saying

I think when you are in school improvement you need specific, ongoing principal coaching support in the areas of school improvement, the change process, what really needs to be happening…there needs to be more, I think, more professional learning communities with these school with ongoing training. That was a huge gap. And again, nobody was knocking on the [district’s] door. It was all random stuff walking in and out [at the school level].
Additional examples of these efforts include a variety of initiatives that range from developing shared beliefs about instructional practices (Discipline 2) to acculturating a set of higher expectations for student performance (Discipline 4), both academically and behaviorally. At Ash, Betty Smith, the principal noted that a shared set of instructional practices has finally been achieved at her school. In her excitement, she shared:

[w]e have more procedures that we do that are the same. Everyone writes a focus and vocabulary for each lesson. [We] have a focus for the lesson and what’s new vocabulary kids might use. So we have routines and procedures you might see in all classrooms, especially with the math. That’s a big math thing and not just writing the [instructional] objectives…the state standards on the board; everyone started doing that. You’ll see that’s probably the biggest thing. We also developed charts called Habits of Thinking and we have one for reading, writing, and math and they are key words…let’s say Making Connections is under reading, then there’s a description and these are the words we felt all kids should know by the time they leave 5th grade. It’s a change in practice that we’re really together working together on these things. You’ll see more focused instruction. You’ll see more individual conferencing with kids.

This kind of work exhibits how the Ash faculty took Discipline 2 and owned a process and outcome for coming together to define instructional practices that made sense to
them, in the context of their school, in order to move their students to higher rates of student achievement.

With respect to Discipline 7, Ash Elementary School principal, noted that she does not like data analysis. As a result, she described her school’s approach to responding to low achieving students through the use of diagnostic assessments by stating:

After the initial look [at data], I leave it up to the teachers. I do not do as much from there, teachers do, because it is one of my areas of disdain that I don’t like very well. I don’t do a lot of follow up with that. I know teachers give [diagnostic and formative] assessments; I see them when I am in [classrooms]. I know they look at that. I know they talk about interventions. After our initial look at data, teachers then use it to drive instruction in terms of what the kids need. And they use their unit tests, their teacher made tests, and then what they get from DIBELS and their reading tests. We do a lot of running records to keep tabs on kids’ progress.

While Betty took a passive role in Discipline 7, her teachers took a very active role in designing instruction in response to assessment results and student feedback. Betty recognized that if her school’s test scores are not good, she’s will face accountability measures with her supervisor.

**Accountability.** The construct of accountability was observed in the data collected through the semi-structured interviews and it highlights the work of the principal to supervise that which has been agreed to implement to move the school
forward. Alice, in talking about curriculum and assessment issues said, “It has become more demanding. I think there is a lot more stuff for us to do. A lot of stuff we picked to work on is more time consuming.” More specifically, and related to the reading improvement goal, Alice, stated:

[Betty] holds us accountable for a lot more things too…We have to turn in our DRAs that we do at the beginning, middle, and end of the year. There is not a way to wiggle out of doing those any more. It changed from being something that was good to do to now it is required of us to do.

Krista added:

I think [Betty] when she does her walkthroughs, she is taking notes on the evidence that she is seeing. When I walk into classrooms, I am noting what I am seeing…. [I]t is evident through her observation or my observation and then whatever paperwork is passed on to her or through portfolios.

**Relationships.** The development of relationships at Ash has occurred through two pertinent examples highlighted in the semi-structured interview data. Alice was quoted as saying, “[Krista S.] keeps us going. I know personally, I feel that she pushes me. She pushes me to do more even though I don’t want to sometimes. She pushes me to be a better teacher.” And related to the construct of developing conversation around the nature of Ash’s math performance Alice spoke about the parent nights. She said:
I remember it changing to become more academic events. Now we have family math night and we have math games out that go with the curriculum. The parents can come in and see what the kids are doing.

Related to the math school improvement goal, Krista said:

[the] math leadership team that has developed has been [represented] primarily [by teachers in] Grades 2-5 and we are sorely wanting Grades K-1 to come on board, but they’ve been slower so the relationships have not been ideal.

Birch Elementary School

Data. Change initiatives at Birch Elementary School were blocked by political forces for the first three years of Donna G.’s tenure as principal. With the removal of political obstacles in the 2009-2010 school year, the change initiatives originally proposed by Donna G. began to maintain traction and take hold. The interview with the principal reflected that the primary changes relative to the magnet philosophy that were requested by her reflected the need for teachers to implement, “…simple things that are common in other schools that were not common here…every day they have to have a lesson plan for the instructional day. They have to have a posted schedule.” These change initiatives from the magnet program were implemented effective in 2010-2011 in response to staff attrition where the staff members responsible for the political challenges were no longer at Birch.

Birch Elementary School did not receive resources from Peter C. as reported by principal at Birch to support it in enacting plans for identified problems. The resources
that Donna received to move Birch forward with respect to school improvement, the change process, and meeting its needs of developing a shared vision came through district level initiatives at the Green Tree Unified Schools district office. In this regard, the principal shared that her district office sent her out-of-state in the summer of 2009 to get trained in the magnet program that her school had operated for a number of years. She also noted that the district office supported her request to contract with a consultant to assist with moving from identify the school problems, through data analysis, and into programmatic solutions at the classroom level to be implemented by teachers. Her comments reflected that:

[she] entered this year with the exact same game plan minus the home visits, but the exact same game plan in terms of accountability that had [been] laid out in 2008. But this [year], there was not any push back or objections [from the faculty].

The absence of push back regarding the change initiatives at Birch is an indication that the school may have achieved a shared set of beliefs regarding classroom instructional practices (Discipline 2), a shared set of beliefs about student performance (Discipline 4), and a shared set of beliefs regarding the use of assessments and how teachers will respond to situations in which students are not learning (Discipline 7). As a result of reaching the other side of some very turbulent times, Donna G. expressed that she and her faculty were excited about what they can accomplish with their magnet program.
Accountability. Due to the political forces that effectively blocked the implementation of school improvement work at Birch, monitoring of change efforts at the classroom level, as well as collaborative structures within grade levels was not completed. Data relative to the Accountability Lever in the Framework was not collected.

Relationships. Data collected from Birch Elementary School did not reveal findings related to teacher isolation that is a construct of relationships in the Enacting Phase. Data collected through artifacts does show that standards of practice are beginning to be implemented at Birch in the current school year and the principal is monitoring that through daily classroom walkthroughs. In this light, the principal stated:

Every day I go to every classroom and in the lesson plans, I document what I am finding. I hit the main things in terms of the volume of the classroom (noise level), the level of student engagement, the plans, and the posted schedule. That was something I did not have the authority to take seriously by some teachers. Some were doing it on their own and they were the ones who had kids meeting standards. But it was a new practice…that every day they had to be prepared.

While the implementation of lesson plans and the development and use of a daily schedule, “…are occurring…” according to Donna G., other standards of practice observed in artifacts were occurring as well. They include classroom environments that were in alignment to the magnet philosophy, the implementation of the magnet program curriculum, the implementation of remedial math instruction and math vocabulary
instruction, the implementation of benchmark testing three to four times per year, the sharing of assessment results with students, parents, and colleagues, and the implementation of a Success for Children Individual Plan that identified interventions and assessments that were used to address learning challenges with students.

As a result, Birch schools looked to their internal capacity, whether at the school or district, to affect school improvement and change. Donna G. stated:

“I don’t know if he would have done it, but I didn’t go to him and say that I needed help with this or that from him. Basically, I wanted to make sure he was someone I wanted to stay in compliance with instead of being an extra support system.

And finally, the principal made a comment that represented the growth of relationships as Birch has overcome the political obstacles it faced. The principal stated:

To get to this year now, and for me to stand up and say what I did…now we need to work on this with the district to make sure you have their support too…those are the teachers I took to [meet with my supervisor and] we went through a lot together. I took a lot of bullets for them because they did not want to stand up against the bullies. That increased my clout with them to a higher degree. It was…huge…in terms of relationships. It [was] almost 100% of it.

The qualitative data showed distinctive differences between the case schools. While both schools experienced challenges with a shifting student demographic and
increase in student population, both schools demonstrated different problem solving approaches in their respective work toward student achievement.

Ash Elementary School was one where interview and artifact evidence demonstrated needs to develop shared instructional practices (e.g., SIOP, differentiated instruction, and student engagement). The ASSIST Coach met with the principal and school to provide training on data analysis, and to share literature regarding student engagement. Based on this same evidence the Ash participants noted that teachers in Grades 2-5 were supportive of these efforts and began to implement them in their daily instruction that was monitored by the principal as well as discuss them in grade level collaboration meetings and coaching sessions with the instructional coach. Teachers in Grades K-1 were less supportive and were noted to be slower to change as seen through the same structures and processes. From these outcomes the State System of Support, including the work of the coach at Ash, had a positive impact on the improvements observed at Ash through professional learning communities and the instructional coach generally. Evidence collected did not show the ASSIST Coach worked with the Green Tree Unified School District to raise student achievement and the school’s AZ LEARNS label.

Birch Elementary School had a culture where the leadership of the principal was challenged by a small group of teachers relative to the implementation of the magnet philosophy. Interview and artifact evidence noted that from this critical challenge, the school needed to develop a shared vision for the implementation of the magnet program, and within the vision, the school needed to develop shared beliefs about how assessment
results (e.g., diagnostic, screening, benchmark, formative, and summative) would be used as a basis from which instructional decisions were to be made. In this context, the ASSIST Coach was absent excluding one visit in August or September. Resources afforded by the Arizona Department of Education through the coaching role did not exist at Birch nor did the coach seek to involve the district office administration.

**Summary**

This chapter reported the results of qualitative aspects of a study on the work of ASSIST Coaches afforded to Underperforming and Failing schools as part of the State System of Support designed by the Arizona Department of Education. Qualitative data from coach, district administrator, principal, and teacher participants in the semi-structured interviews were discussed relative to a descriptive case study that relied on a multi-case study design consisting of contrasting cases. Data analysis of documents and artifacts was also conducted. The chapter began with a description of the context of a changing AZ LEARNs state accountability system to articulate a context for school accountability under which schools in Arizona responded from the 2007-2008 to the 2009-2010 school years. The skills, abilities, background, and experiences of those serving in the role of the coach role emerged as a critical aspect of this role’s support to schools facing significant challenges regarding their work with students and their improvement through the facilitation of change processes. Significant themes of phases of change (preparing, envisioning, and enacting) and disciplines of work in the change process were discussed.
Chapter 5 offers conclusions and findings of this data analysis and connects the findings to previous research discussed in the literature review. Recommendations will be made to leaders in education that work within the State System of Support who also work in support of schools labeled as Underperforming or Failing. Suggestions for future research are also included.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

This study focused on three research questions regarding the work of the ASSIST Coach role in schools labeled as Underperforming or Failing by the Arizona Department of Education. The research questions include: (1) How are resources available to ASSIST Coaches implemented in the school?; (2) To what extent are the needs of the underperforming or failing school aligned with the experiences and skills of the ASSIST Coach?; and (3) The what extent does an ASSIST Coach engage district administration to support continuous improvement in the underperforming or failing school? My interest in this topic is a result of a decade of work in the area of school improvement that included experiences as a school administrator that led a turnaround effort at an elementary school, experiences as a district administrator that served as a member of an internal intervention team that worked with schools with a demonstrated need for improvement, and experiences as a independent consultant that worked with the Arizona Department of Education under the State System of Support to complete site visits and an analysis of improvement needs in a variety of schools across the State of Arizona. This study was completed with two schools in Arizona and I did not know the school principals or teachers.

Principals, teachers, and ASSIST Coaches were interviewed for this study using semi-structured interviews. Documents relating to the respective improvement efforts from both schools were analyzed using what Yin (2009) called analytic generalization to
determine alignment with the Ecology of Change Framework (Framework) described by Kegan and Wagner (2006). The qualitative data revealed that the resources provided by ASSIST Coaches and implemented in low-capacity schools, the experience utilized to support improvement of low-capacity schools, and the involvement of district office administrators in turnaround efforts was comparable in some respects and differentiated in others. The quantitative data revealed that seven disciplines nested within the Framework were perceived to be utilized differently by teachers and principals, particularly Disciplines 3, 4 and 5. The differences observed could be attributed to differences in performance responsibilities of principals and teachers, most notably the degree to which principals engage in data-driven decision making relative to improvement initiatives, the commitment of resources for improvement initiatives, and the assignment of supervisorial responsibilities to principals that teachers typically do not have assigned to them.

**Summary of Findings**

This study sought to identify key practices related to the work of the ASSIST Coach afforded to Underperforming and Failing schools. The findings are summarized in relation to the research questions developed for this study.

**Research Question 1 – Resource Implementation.** Resources were described by the ASSIST Coaches to be delivered to schools based on the needs outlined in the Statement of Findings resulting from a Solutions Team visit. According to coaches, ADE had more resources available than what low-capacity schools needed, and again, the resources were offered based the platform of the Solutions Team recommendations. However, both Ash
and Birch received limited contact from their respective coach. One coach held monthly meetings of about an hour with his low-capacity schools and provided a basic set of resources that included an in-service on data analysis, professional literature, and dialogue with the school staff on the urgency to change. The second coach held one hour-long meeting during the 2007-2008 school year and provided no other resources. Case loads were the driver of the frequency with which ASSIST Coaches met with school principals. The limited contact time negatively influenced the resources, guidance, support, and mentoring from the coaches so as to implement them in a way that led to significant improvements. This finding is supported by previous research by Judson (2006) and Huberman (2008) that indicated that high case loads and limited time were factors that impeded the work of the ASSIST Coach. As a result, both schools relied more on internal resources within their respective school and district. While Senge et al. (2000) recognized the importance of nesting school-level efforts to change within the context of the district, Hatch (2000) cautioned schools about relying upon internal capacity of the school and district because this practice often drains faculty members and compromises the turnaround effort. Navigating this balance of relying on oneself, as defined by school or district resources, should be thought of carefully for these reasons. The district administrator that participated indicated that both schools continue to bounce in and out of underperformance, potentially identifying challenges related to their navigation with respect to the work of Senge et al. (2000) and Hatch (2000).

Furthermore, it is difficult to know the extent to which resources were effective in achieving improvement outcomes as evidenced by any significant attempt to evaluate the
role of the ASSIST Coach by ADE and the impact of the role in Underperforming or Failing schools. As indicated in the literature review, Garcia and Aportola (2004, 2005) and Judson (2006) indicated that limited efforts to evaluate the entire State System of Support had existed. As this study revealed, these limited efforts continued with regard to evaluating the ASSIST Coach Program where both ASSIST Coaches indicated that minimal efforts were made by ADE to conduct a program evaluation. The absence of evaluation occurred at the level of the individual coach and at the ASSIST Coach Program level simultaneously.

ASSIST Coach, Joe W., in commenting on the extent to which ADE evaluated the coaching role, noted that “In my three and a half years [as an ASSIST Coach], I never had an evaluation of me on an annual basis.” He went on to comment that coaches were monitored on “…whether or not [we] were following internal procedures and practices. In other words, were [we] scheduling [our] visits? [Were we] making those visits? [W]as there negative feedback from the schools?” Peter C. noted that, on a program level, the work of the coaches was evaluated on “…how many schools got out [of Underperforming or Failing status].” But Joe W. noted that, “…he did not see anyone lose their job or get evaluated based on that. Yeah, they would look at it, but I did not see anything happen as a result of that.”

**Research Question 2 – School Needs Met by ASSIST Coach Skills.** Ash Elementary School and Birch Elementary School experienced different support from the same coaching role in response to their respective Underperforming school labels. Ash Elementary School needed to develop a shared belief that all students can be learners
(Discipline 4) and to engage students in quality instruction from that belief system (Discipline 2). Ash administration and faculty also needed to respond to learner needs through the use of diagnostic and formative assessments (Discipline 7). Work of Joe W. provided some support through the delivery of in-services related to data analysis (Disciplines 1 and 7); copies of professional literature related to student engagement strategies (Disciplines 2 and 6), and support to the principal through the delivery of a strong message that carried the intent of creating a sense of urgency to change (Discipline 1). Monthly visits were then conducted by coaches to monitor and document the school improvement efforts as the year progressed.

These findings were supported by Ashby’s (2004) study of Underperforming and Failing schools because they demonstrated that Ash Elementary School had a need to improve the following standards from the Standards & Rubrics for School Improvement:

1. **Standard 2.3** – The curriculum expectations are communicated to all stakeholders (Discipline 4).
2. **Standard 2.5** – Instructional planning links standards, assessments, instruction, and re-teaching (Disciplines 2, 4, and 7).
3. **Standard 2.8** – Differentiation makes appropriate instruction available to students (Discipline 7).
4. **Standard 3.3** – School/classroom assessments are aligned to state standards (Discipline 4).
5. **Standard 3.6** – The school/district outlines progress monitoring steps that are aligned to state standards (Discipline 7).
Birch needed to develop a shared philosophy about how their magnet program would be implemented, and from this shared philosophy, re-write their school improvement plan to reflect the new and shared direction for improvement in a school culture and climate where people respected each other. Kushman and Yap (1999) indicated this same finding in previous research; they indicated that when low-capacity schools were successful in turnaround efforts, they held strong convictions about student achievement and deep understandings of reform initiatives, something clearly missing at Birch. Sterbinsky (2006) and Berends (2002) extended this thought by indicating that low-capacity schools needed to articulate their shared beliefs about student learning and performance (Discipline 4) and instruction (Discipline 2) as well as the action plan or process to implement them. Furthermore, Birch did not receive support from their coach to leverage improvement from shared beliefs regarding their magnet program because the coach visited the school once as reported by the principal and the coach. The coach was not perceived as resource by the principal as well. The absence of trusting and collaborative relationships between the school and the coach were noted by Chow (2010) as an area in which low-capacity schools often struggle. Furthermore, Senge’s et al. (2000) nested systems—the school, district, and community—were prevented from being articulated in their school improvement work and plan due to the political forces that negatively governed the school climate for a number of years. Clearly, Birch’s challenges were both internal amongst themselves as well as external as seen by an absent ASSIST Coach.
Finn (2004) expressed concerns that state education agencies were ineffective in supporting the transition of low-capacity schools but were better at identifying their shortcomings. In this vein, data in this study revealed that support for school improvement and change through the ASSIST Coach role was comparable in some respects and differentiated in others. Schools that participated in this study saw comparable treatment in the schedule of school visits that was maintained by the coach in the 2008-2009 school year. Offerings to participate in ADE sponsored workshops were extended to both schools. However, the participation in these resources was also comparable in that it was optional for Ash and Birch.

Areas in which support to meet school needs was differentiated were observed in the alignment between the needs of Ash Elementary School and the support it received from Joe W. Birch Elementary School failed to receive support due to no contact by the coach following the initial meeting between the principal and Peter C. Again, this finding was articulated by Chow (2010) as a common challenge faced by low-capacity schools.

Lastly, resource support as seen through the experience, skills, background, and training that the ASSIST Coach was in some cases very beneficial to the school and in other cases not. ASSIST Coaches who brought principal experience to the role provided some credibility to the individual serving in the role. That prior experience meant little to the low-capacity school if the coach did not make frequent visits to guide, support, and mentor the principal. Limited contact meant limited support. Limited support meant limited change affected by the ASSIST Coach role, a finding noted previously by Chow.
(2010) in low-capacity schools. In extending this idea, Chow (2010) also stated that low-capacity schools needed to engage in a cycle of implementation and self-evaluation, something the ASSIST Coach did not support at Ash or Birch Elementary Schools. Additionally, the timing of the support is critical, which has already been noted by Judson (2006) and Huberman (2008). As one example, Donna G. needed the Solutions Team visit earlier in the year to confront the political forces that were challenging her leadership. No effort was made by ADE to elicit needs from schools for timing issues because needs were limited to those identified in the Statement of Findings written by the Solutions Team.

**Research Question 3 – Engagement of the District Office.** Shifting support and contexts, whether at the state, district, or school level, combine to make school improvement a challenge for all schools but those facing issues of underperformance in particular. This study revealed that for nearly a decade, ASSIST Coaches did not formally invite district administrators into their work with low-capacity schools. The district administrator that participated in this study noted that the absence of this involvement created conditions where some school principals challenged district improvement efforts and created conditions where district administration assumed that schools were getting the support they needed from ASSIST Coaches. As Senge et al. (2000) noted in describing the nested system, no change takes place in a vacuum and it was critical for district level leadership to be knowledgeable of the change processes that took place at schools. In this line of thinking, Senge et al. (2000) argued that schools needed to remain cognizant of the three nested levels of the system and the webs that
connect them—school, district, and community—so that work could be done on all three to make the school community effective in implementing improvement or change practices.

In the current school year, the Arizona Department of Education began working with district administrators and this shift occurred simultaneously with a shift away from AZ LEARNS to more detailed work within the context of federal accountability. ASSIST Coaches are now working with district administration in the completion of school improvement grant applications for Tier I, Tier II, and Tier III schools where school improvement resources, guidance and support occur for Persistently Low Achieving Schools (PLA schools). This grant application brings Senge’s et al. (2000) nested system to the forefront and relies heavily on the use of data to identify school improvement challenges and to create urgency for change in the school community (Discipline 1). It also asks districts to plan action steps that will take place at the classroom level where teachers need to respond to learning challenges with students through shared instructional strategies (Discipline 2) as well as shared diagnostic and formative assessment strategies to progress monitor student learning (Disciplines 4 and 7), steps recommended by Kushman and Yap (1999). In support of these new measures, the federal grant application includes the identification of programmatic solutions, the assignment of roles to responsibilities, and professional development (Envisioning Phase and Discipline 6). According to one ASSIST Coach, ADE has learned that, “improvement takes at least two years.” Only through time will the educational field learn whether this new approach, one relying to some degree on Senge’s et al. (2000)
nested system, to have district administration involved will be more effective in supporting the improvement needs of low-capacity schools.

A closer look at Senge’s et al. (2000) nested system provides an excellent perspective on the results of this study that demonstrate that, when examining school performance under the 2008 AZ LEARNS model reported in Table 8, neither Ash nor Birch demonstrated sustainable improvement. Senge et al. (2000) noted that, “change will only make a difference if [change initiatives] take place at all three levels, [the classroom, the school and the community].” He further stated that any success found on one of the three levels can be negated by, “inadequate capabilities [or] resources…” The findings of this study showed that the ASSIST Coach model in the two case schools were inconsistent with the resources provided to Ash and Birch with regard to their identified needs. Using Senge’s et al. (2000) thinking, Ash and Birch did not demonstrate success in their school labels because the efforts to change the classroom, school, and community did not occur where connections among the three levels were the levers of Data, Accountability, and Relationships.

Furthermore, Senge et al. (2000) provided a “learning wheel” in Figure 3 that further explains the results of this study. The wheel describes a double-loop thinking process in which the first loop articulates a reflective cycle on the change initiative and the second loop defines a second level of reflective thinking whereby principals, teacher leaders, and ASSIST Coaches could have learned something about the first level. For this research study, the “observing, reflecting, reconsidering, reconnecting, and reframing” stages correlate to the Preparing and Envisioning Phases in Wagner and
Kegan’s (2006) Ecology of Change Model. Additionally, the “deciding and doing” stages correlate to the Enacting Phase. This double-loop “thinking about the thinking” process affords these stakeholders opportunities to engage in transformational thinking, thinking that changes beliefs and behavior. The absence of any program evaluation efforts by ADE eliminated this second level of reflective thinking, and therefore, ADE never made improvements to the ASSIST Coach role and work. Senge et al. (2000) also stated,

Effective school reform cannot happen until people…recognize the unseen values and attitudes about power, privilege, and knowledge that keep existing structures, regulations, and authority relationships in place. If there are not fundamental shifts in how people think and interact, as well as how they explore and learn, then all the reorganizing, fads, and strategies will not add up to much (Senge et al., 2000, p. 20).

**Recommendations**

Based on the research findings and personal experience, the following recommendations may be useful to state education agencies, school districts, and schools that have a demonstrated need to improve low-capacity schools:

1. Geographic regions and the number of Underperforming and Failing schools that resided within each region were noted to be the driving factors by which coaches were assigned to low-capacity schools. It is recommended that coaches be assigned to low-capacity schools in the future based on the needs of school and
the skills, experience, background, and the effective leadership demonstrated by the ASSIST Coaches while they served in the role of principal.

![Double-loop Reflection](image)

Figure 3. Double-loop Reflection by Senge, Cabron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton, and Kleiner (2000).

2. Emulating from Recommendation #1 is a second but embedded recommendation that asks ADE to recruit and retain ASSIST Coaches that were not only principals but effective principals. The Arizona Department of Education should also mandate that only principals that have a demonstrated track record of improving schools be afforded opportunities to be ASSIST Coaches. Personal knowledge of the challenges associated with leading a school out of difficult circumstances cannot be over stated.

3. A third recommendation is to provide the district—superintendent or assistant superintendent—the authority to select which ASSIST Coach assigned to schools.
Furthermore, once the district-approved the coach, goals and action plans can be drafted that document and frame the mentoring experience. These steps are supported by the research on mentoring programs by Daresh (2004), Clark and Shields (2006), Ferrigno and Muth (2004), Stott and Walker (1992), Gibble and Lawrence (1987), Holloway (2004), and Vann (1991).

4. Given that the two case schools in this study received somewhat different support from their respective ASSIST Coach with regard to how resources were implemented in their schools, it is recommended that ADE build into the annual evaluation process means to track what resources were provided to each low-capacity school, what resources were used, and the extent to which they were used. This will set the stage for ADE staff members to implement Senge’s et al. (2000) double-loop reflecting model to not only evaluate the ASSIST Coach program but to also transform their values, beliefs, and thinking regarding the ASSIST Coach Model.

5. Investigate the State System of Support and how the principal certification programs need to be redesigned so that the responsibility to implement it should be shared by the Arizona Department of Education and the university systems. Post-secondary institutions should develop coursework as part of the principal certification process that provides principal candidates with extensive and practical experience in how to make informed decisions about the operation of schools. This work is being done in the current school year through a multi-agency grant led by the University of Arizona. This grant relies upon research
that addresses the development of assessment literacy skills that are further delineated as, “…data analysis, curriculum, instruction, and strategic planning” 

(Improving teacher quality (ITQ): state-wide, sustainable professional development in principal instructional leadership for Arizona tier III schools in high-poverty LEAs, 2011). This grant affords participants the needed skills of how to collect, interpret and report data so that problems can be identified, urgency for change can be developed, and communication strategies implemented in support of change initiatives (Discipline 1). Some change is simple and what Marzano et. al (2005) call first order change. But other change efforts are difficult—second order change—and principals need the skills to tackle both levels of difficulty with regard to change efforts.

Heath and Heath (2010) articulated this same issue slightly differently but maintained the same concepts. Heath and Heath (2010) described the need for principals to identify the needed change and those who are involved, particularly those resistant to the change effort (the elephant), who is directing the change effort (the rider), and the means by which the change will take place (the pathway).

6. In this study, ASSIST Coaches rarely discussed available resources with the two case schools. For this reason, the Arizona Department of Education should sponsor workshops annually with Underperforming and Failing schools to provide understandings of the state accountability model being implemented from year-to-year. Attendance must be mandatory; principals must know what the
accountability system expects from their leadership as outcomes. They should also be expected to learn the tools to actualize those outcomes. Accordingly, principals of Underperforming and Failing schools should not have the choice to engage with the university system or state education agency to improve. The design of the ASSIST Coach role and other pieces of the State System of Support should be mandated for schools that are low performers. As Peter C. stated in the semi-structured interview, “...part of [ADE’s] responsibility is to put the [school] in position so their kids are performing well.” This recommendation is being made with full knowledge that the financial support from the Arizona Legislature must exist to support its effective implementation.

7. ADE staff working in the State System of Support should develop an understanding of the Ecology of Change Framework and implement the three phases and seven disciplines so as to identify shared understandings of performance standards in Underperforming and Failing schools. Doing so would put them in a better position to provide guidance and resource support as they “mentor” principals. Part of this process should include a self-evaluation to identify the degree to which it will support low-capacity schools out of issues of underperformance and with what resources will that turnaround challenge occur. Schools on the newly identified Persistently Low Achieving Schools list (PLA schools) are receiving some guidance, in particular to data collection, data analysis, and resource support, but schools at Year 1 and Year 2 of Underperforming at not receiving support in this arena. Peter C. noted that in the
absence of state funding, the State System of Support has become, “…a branch of the U.S. Department of Education.” He was referring to a shift in coding staff responsible for school improvement from declining state fiscal resources to federal funding. There has been a concurrent shift to move away from an unfunded State System of Support to compliance with federal guidance related to four turnaround models to be implemented by PLA schools and the new school improvement grant funding stream that is attached to these four models (Kutash, Nico, Gorin, Rahnatullah, & Tallant, 2010). Schools identified as Underperforming (Year 1 and 2) under AZ LEARNS are not benefiting from ASSIST Coach visits and are not being directed to ADE’s Best Practices workshops. Only Failing schools are being contacted by ASSIST Coaches where resources are afforded.

In summation with regard to the recommendations, these issues are important for a variety of reasons that are articulated in the following quotes that were shared during the semi-structured interviews and are highly relevant in concluding this research study. Peter C., one of the ASSIST Coaches noted that, “If there was a real reward, it is when we’d start talking about their practice, looking at data, and being reflective. It is just a way that we have to start functioning in a different capacity.”

And, Alice B., a teacher at Ash Elementary School shared:

That’s when we really started to come around when we realized that we had to change. Even though we were doing a lot of things that were good for kids, there were a lot of areas we could to things
that were better for kids. Once you get in the mentality that it is not you personally but it is like what can you do better in your room and that you need to continue learning. I think that’s when you start to succeed. I think you have to keep moving and improving; you have to keep changing and finding out what works and what doesn’t work.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

- Investigate the effectiveness of the ASSIST Coach role relative to student achievement by correlating variables, practices, and conditions associated with the role of the coach and the degree of effectiveness they produce. The research conducted by Ashby (2004) relative to indicators from the Standards and Rubric for School Improvement are a rich source of data that should be mined more adeptly by coaches for this recommendation.

- Because this study was completed in elementary schools with Grades K-6, an investigation involving middle schools and high schools with Grades 6-12 would be beneficial.

- Moving beyond individual schools, investigate the ability of ASSIST Coaches to effectively turn around Underperforming and Failing schools at a larger scale, at the level of the State of Arizona.

- Investigate the unique factors associated with low-capacity schools that move in and out of Underperforming labels under AZ LEARNS to identify factors of sustainability relative to school improvement.
Investigate the unique factors associated with Failing schools that a track record of underperforming under AZ LEARNS to identify factors of sustainability relative to school improvement.

The research study conducted by Judson (2006) should be repeated to include data from 2007-2010 on the role of the ASSIST Coach so as to provide a current perspective on the role and its effectiveness.

Investigate the relationship that exists between the school and district office that supports school improvement and the facilitation of change processes in schools identified as Underperforming and Failing under AZ LEARNS.

Investigate the feasibility—availability of mentors and financial costs—of implementing a principal mentoring program with principals leading Underperforming and Failing schools.
### APPENDIX A

**ECOLOGY OF CHANGE MODEL**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lever</th>
<th>Description of Lever</th>
<th>Application in the Preparing Phase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data</td>
<td>Quantitative and qualitative data about student learning, achievement, and performance as well as the school’s well-being, its employees, and the context of where it finds itself. Statistics and interviews with students and staff develop the foundation and moral imperative of change so people understand the rationale to change. The use of data was required to change people’s head, heart, and actions.</td>
<td>Data collection begins at the school level and gradually widens to include the school community. Data should be shared to develop the logical and emotional needs for change. Steering committees start and form leadership for the change initiatives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>Mutual understandings are developed that define what people in school and the district are held accountable for and to whom. These understandings are articulated both vertically and horizontally within the organization.</td>
<td>Initially, the accountability is more vertical through lines of supervision. Over time, the accountability is shifted to be more horizontal through mutual expectations that emerge in relationships, shared commitments, and a common sense of purpose. Collective ownership is developed as loci of control are identified and disrupted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Refers to the quality of attitudes, feelings, and behaviors at the individual and group levels that develop support, respectful and trusting relationships, supports risk-taking to change, to learn, share responsibility, and to retain deep commitments to the school community.</td>
<td>Relationships are forged that support new ways of talking and working with one another, perhaps through new committee or governance structures. This work establishes trust, respect, and collaboration. Open and transparent meetings take place where minutes are published. Leaders are responsive to questions.</td>
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*Figure 4. Ecology of Change Model.*
Figure 4. (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lever</th>
<th>Description of Lever</th>
<th>Application in the Envisioning Phase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data</td>
<td>Quantitative and qualitative data about student learning, achievement, and performance as well as the school’s well-being, its employees, and the context of where it finds itself. Statistics and interviews with students and staff develop the foundation and moral imperative of change so people understand the rationale to change. The use of data was required to change people’s head, heart, and actions.</td>
<td>Problem identification and urgency to change are communicated and developed with the broader school community. Data was collected to assess the degree to which shared professional standards (collective practices) exist. Data was also collected regarding how benchmarks of “excellence” are defined.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>Mutual understandings are developed that define what people in school and the district are held accountable for and to whom. These understandings are articulated both vertically and horizontally within the organization.</td>
<td>The community is aware of the improvement plan and supports it—this provide purpose and focus to improvement initiatives. Individuals know how they can contribute on a personal and collective level. Vertical accountability transitions to horizontal accountability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Refers to the quality of attitudes, feelings, and behaviors at the individual and group levels that develop support, respectful and trusting relationships, supports risk-taking to change, to learn, share responsibility, and to retain deep commitments to the school community.</td>
<td>Quality conversations develop about the nature of the problem in terms of how it will be defined within and across roles. Options and disagreements are discussed openly.</td>
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Figure 4. (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lever</th>
<th>Description of Lever</th>
<th>Application in the Enacting Phase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data</td>
<td>Quantitative and qualitative data about student learning, achievement, and performance as well as the school’s well-being, its employees, and the context of where it finds itself. Statistics and interviews with students and staff develop the foundation and moral imperative of change so people understand the rationale to change. The use of data was required to change people’s head, heart, and actions.</td>
<td>Data must be collected at the classroom level regarding the intended outcomes of the change initiatives and the actual outcomes that were achieved. Data that is collected should reveal that which was learned throughout the change process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>Mutual understandings are developed that define what people in school and the district are held accountable for and to whom. These understandings are articulated both vertically and horizontally within the organization.</td>
<td>Implementation of the change initiatives at the classroom level is monitored. Collaborative structures support the collective sense of purpose in areas where horizontal accountability has formed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Refers to the quality of attitudes, feelings, and behaviors at the individual and group levels that develop support, respectful and trusting relationships, supports risk-taking to change, to learn, share responsibility, and to retain deep commitments to the school community.</td>
<td>The change initiatives work to eliminate the isolation of teachers through collaborative structures and processes. Discussion and dialogue in collaborative groups is based on standards of practice important to teaching and learning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**APPENDIX B**

**ECOLOGY OF CHANGE MODEL - SEVEN DISCIPLINES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Preparing Phase</th>
<th>Envisioning Phase</th>
<th>Enacting Phase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Problem Identification, Urgency, and Coordination</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Shared Vision of Good Teaching</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Meetings about the Work</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Performance and assessment standards are well defined</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Supervision is frequent, rigorous, and focused in improvement</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Professional development is on-site, intensive, job-embedded, and collaborative in nature</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Data was used frequently and diagnostically to respond to learning challenges</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5. *Ecology of Change Model and Seven Disciplines*
## APPENDIX C

### LOW-CAPACITY SCHOOLS AND ASSIST COACHES

Table 11.

*Low-Capacity Schools (Pima County) and ASSIST Coach from ADE, 2007-2009.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
<td>Performing</td>
<td>Performing</td>
<td>Coach 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
<td>Performing</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
<td>Coach 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School C</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
<td>Performing Plus</td>
<td>Performing Plus</td>
<td>Coach 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School D</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
<td>Performing</td>
<td>Performing Plus</td>
<td>Coach 1 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School E</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
<td>Failing</td>
<td>Coach 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School F</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
<td>Performing</td>
<td>Performing Plus</td>
<td>Coach 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School G</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
<td>Performing</td>
<td>Performance Plus</td>
<td>Coach 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School H</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
<td>Highly Performing</td>
<td>Highly Performing</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>School I</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
<td>Performing Plus</td>
<td>Performing Plus</td>
<td>Coach 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School J</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
<td>Performing Plus</td>
<td>Performing</td>
<td>Coach 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School K</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
<td>Performing</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
<td>Coach 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School L</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
<td>Performing Plus</td>
<td>Performing</td>
<td>Coach 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School M</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
<td>Performing</td>
<td>Coach 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School N</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
<td>Performing Plus</td>
<td>Performing</td>
<td>Coach 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School O</td>
<td>Failing</td>
<td>Performing</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
<td>Coach 1 1 and 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School P</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
<td>Performing Plus</td>
<td>Performing Plus</td>
<td>Coach 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Q</td>
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<td>Performing Plus</td>
<td>Performing Plus</td>
<td>Coach 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School R</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
<td>Failing</td>
<td>Performing</td>
<td>Coach 1 1 and 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School S</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
<td>Performing Plus</td>
<td>Performing</td>
<td>Coach 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School T</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
<td>Performing Plus</td>
<td>Performing Plus</td>
<td>Coach 1 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School U</td>
<td>Failing</td>
<td>Performing Plus</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
<td>Coach 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School V</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
<td>Performing</td>
<td>Performing</td>
<td>Coach 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School W</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
<td>Performing Plus</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
<td>Coach 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School X</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
<td>Performing Plus</td>
<td>Performing</td>
<td>Coach 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Y</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
<td>Performing</td>
<td>Performing</td>
<td>Coach 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Z</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
<td>Performing</td>
<td>Performing</td>
<td>Coach 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School AA</td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
<td>Performing Plus</td>
<td>Performing</td>
<td>Coach 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX D

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW WITH ASSIST COACH

During the in-depth interview with the ASSIST Coach, I will ask questions about various aspects of school improvement and change processes at the school and district levels. Questions will also be asked regarding the role of the ASSIST Coach related to supporting these processes. Holistically, the questions will be linked to the Ecology of Change Framework where three levers of change (phases) are articulated by Wagner and Kegan (2006).

Phase 1: Preparing

1. Describe what you believe your role is as an ASSIST Coach. How was this role conceived or designed?
2. How have you assisted the school or district leadership in using data to support school improvement or change?
3. How have you assisted the school’s community to understand the need for change?
4. Describe how you have assisted the school community to buy into the improvement or change process.
5. How have you assisted school or district leaders in creating relationships that support the improvement or change processes? (probe for relationships among teachers, associations, parents, community members)
Phase 2: Envisioning Phase

6. Tell me about a time when your work influenced the collection of data concerning the functioning of the school system? [Probe for student achievement indicators, attendance rates, graduation rates, student engagement, teacher evaluation, professional development activities, fiscal expenditures]

7. Describe an instance when your work influenced the expectations for professional practice of administrators and teachers. [Probe for high expectations, common beliefs and understanding about classroom performance]

8. Describe instances in which your work has influenced the degree to which teachers collaborate. [Probe for within site (grade level or department) and between site (school to school) processes or outcomes; feedback loops to monitor collaboration; collect artifacts on the structures used if available (e.g., school schedules and protocols used)].

Phase 3: Enacting Phase

9. How has your work influenced classroom instruction? [Probe for the use of diagnostic data, including formative and summative assessments; intervals of data collection; progress monitoring strategies; how professional development plans are developed in response to data; collect artifacts (e.g., professional development plans, surveys, NSDC Standards Assessment Inventory results,
10. Why is an alignment between the school’s or district’s teacher evaluation system and the areas of focus in the school’s improvement plan important? Describe a time in which your work has influenced this alignment. [Probe for artifacts that articulate this alignment (e.g., memoranda, newsletters)]

11. How has your work assisted schools in developing a definition of effective instructional practice? [Probe for standards of professional practice; use of research-based models; common understanding of how students learn; collect artifacts if available]

12. What influence have you had on the capacity of teachers to improve their individual and collective instructional practice? How was your influence achieved? [Probe for structures/processes that take tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge]

13. To what extent are your skills, experience, and background aligned to the needs of the underperforming or failing schools you service? Why is this alignment important?

14. How has the training you received as an ASSIST Coach enhanced your effectiveness with underperforming and failing schools?

15. How does ADE evaluate the role of the ASSIST Coach? What changes to the role of the ASSIST Coach have been implemented in response these evaluation practices?
16. What is the role of the ASSIST Coach in mentoring principals of underperforming and failing schools and/or their respective district administrator? What do you see as the barriers to this mentoring?
APPENDIX E

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW WITH PRINCIPAL

During the in-depth interview with the principal, I will ask questions about various aspects of school improvement and change processes at the school and district levels. Questions will also be asked regarding the role of the ASSIST Coach related to supporting these processes. Holistically, the questions will be linked to the Ecology of Change Framework where three levers of change (phases) are articulated by Wagner and Kegan (2006).

General Questions:

1. How long have you been the principal at [insert school name]? How would you characterize your tenure at this school?

2. What has been your role in the school’s improvement efforts and in implementing change? What changes have you implemented? What outcomes have been observed?

3. How would you describe the role of the ASSIST Coach assigned to work with your school by the Arizona Department of Education?

4. How has the ASSIST Coach supported your school? What resources have been provided and have they been effective in moving your school forward? What are his/her strengths?

5. What resources have you not received that are important to move your school forward?
Phase 1: Preparing

6. How have you prepared for school improvement to take place this year? How are these plans different from the previous year? What has been successful? Not successful? Why? Why not?

7. In your thinking, what factors are necessary for sustaining quality school improvement? Why are these factors important?

8. Describe how accountability for school improvement is shared at [insert school name].

9. Describe how you have created relationships within your school community that support improvement and change processes. What benefits have these relationships created?

Phase 2: Envisioning Phase

10. How have you used data to support school improvement?

11. Describe the professional development you and your staff have participated in since earning the Underperforming label. How did these opportunities come to your school? Why were they selected?

12. Describe instances in which your work has influenced the degree to which teachers collaborate. [Probe for within site (grade level or department) and between site (school to school) processes or outcomes; feedback loops to monitor collaboration; collect artifacts on the structures used if available (e.g., school schedules and protocols used)].
Phase 3: Enacting Phase

13. How has the practice of classroom teachers changed since your school earned its Underperforming label? [Probe for the use of assessment data (diagnostically, formative, summative) at frequent intervals by teams of teachers to refine school assessments and goals, monitor student progress, and continually improve instruction.]

14. Describe your teacher evaluation system and process. [Probe for alignment between the evaluation system and focus of school improvement efforts.]

15. Why is the use of research-based practice about how students learn important in education? How do research-based practices influence professional practice at [insert school name]? [Probe for a common set of beliefs shared by the principal and teachers.]

16. If you think about your definition of effective classroom practice, how is it the same or different from what teachers at [insert school name] believe is effective classroom practice? Has your definition, or that of the teachers, changed since the school’s Underperforming label? Why? Why not?
APPENDIX F

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW WITH TEACHER LEADER

During the in-depth interview with the principal, I will ask questions about various aspects of school improvement and change processes at the school and district levels. Questions will also be asked regarding the role of the ASSIST Coach related to supporting these processes. Holistically, the questions will be linked to the Ecology of Change Framework where three levers of change (phases) are articulated by Wagner and Kegan (2006).

General Questions:

1. How long have you been at [insert school name]? How would you characterize your tenure at this school?
2. What has been your role in the school’s improvement efforts and in implementing change? What changes have you been a part of implementing? What outcomes have been observed?
3. How would you describe the role of the ASSIST Coach assigned to work with your school by the Arizona Department of Education?
4. How has the ASSIST Coach supported your school? What resources has the ASSIST Coach provided and have they been effective in moving your school forward? What are his/her strengths?
5. What resources have you not received that are important to move your school forward?
Phase 1: Preparing

6. How has your school prepared for school improvement to take place this year? How are these plans different from the previous year? What has been successful? Not successful? Why? Why not?

7. In your thinking, what factors are necessary for sustaining quality school improvement? Why are these factors important?

8. Describe how accountability for school improvement is shared at [insert school name].

9. Describe how relationships within your school community have been created that support improvement and change processes. What benefits have these relationships created?

Phase 2: Envisioning Phase

10. How are you asked to use data to support school improvement as a teacher at [insert school name]?

11. Describe the professional development in which you and other teachers have participated since earning the Underperforming label. How did these opportunities come to your school? Why were they selected?

12. What role does teacher collaboration play at [insert school name]? How are you involved and how often does it occur? What accountability is attached to teacher collaboration meetings? Is it monitored by your principal or district? [Probe for within site (grade level or department) and between site (school to school) processes or outcomes; feedback loops to monitor collaboration;
collect artifacts on the structures used if available (e.g., school schedules and protocols used)].

Phase 3: Enacting Phase

13. How has the practice of classroom teachers changed since your school earned the Underperforming label? [Probe for the use of assessment data (diagnostically, formative, summative) at frequent intervals by teams of teachers to refine school assessments and goals, monitor student progress, and continually improve instruction.]

14. Describe your teacher evaluation system and process. [Probe for alignment between the evaluation system and focus of school improvement efforts.]

15. Why is the use of research-based practice about how students learn important in education? How do research-based practices influence professional practice at [insert school name]? [Probe for a common set of beliefs shared by the principal and teachers.]

16. If you think about your definition of effective classroom practice, how is it the same or different from what other teachers (principal?) at [insert school name] believe about effective classroom practice? Has your definition, or that of the teachers, changed since the school’s Underperforming label? Why? Why not? If so, how and to what degree or extent?
APPENDIX G

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE SURVEY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender:</th>
<th>□ Male</th>
<th>□ Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role:</td>
<td>□ Teacher</td>
<td>□ Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Background:</td>
<td>□ Asian American</td>
<td>□ Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ African American</td>
<td>□ Pacific Islander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Caucasian, Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>□ Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grade Level/Subjects(s) Taught: _____________________________________________

Total number of continuous years working at this school as a teacher: ____________

Total number of continuous years working at this school as the principal: __________

Number of years experience in education, including this year: ______

What goals are identified in your school improvement plan? _____________________
______________________________________________________________________

Who is the ASSIST Coach assigned by the Arizona Department of Education to work with your school this year: ______________________________________

On a scale from one to five, with one being rarely and five being frequently, rate the frequency with which your school utilizes the following efforts to improve your school:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effort</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We build capacity for continuous improvement.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A shared vision results in coherent programs.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decisions and practice are informed by data and information.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broad involvement and collective responsibility are reflected in roles, decisions, and actions.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection is used as a tool to make change.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers have time to collaborate on redesigning instruction and curriculum based on student needs.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX H

INFORMED CONSENT

Project Title: State Intervention in Underperforming and Failing Schools: The Role of the ASSIST Coach

You are being invited to take part in a research study being conducted by The University of Arizona and asked to read this form so that you know about this research study. The information in this form is provided to help you decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this consent form. If you decide you do not want to participate, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefit you normally would have.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?
The purpose of this study is to investigate the role of the ASSIST Coach and to identify how the ASSIST Coach’s experience, skills, background and resources support the underperforming or failing school. The aim of the study is to describe the work of the ASSIST Coach in schools that improve their state accountability label under AZ LEARNS by comparing two schools, one that improved its AZ LEARNS label and one that did not.

WHY AM I BEING ASKED TO BE IN THIS STUDY?
You are being asked to be in this study because you are (1) an ASSIST Coach assigned to work with an Underperforming or Failing school in Arizona, (2) a principal of an Underperforming or Failing school that has been working with an ASSIST Coach, or (3) a teacher leader identified by your principal at a school that has an Underperforming or Failing label under AZ LEARNS.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL BE ASKED TO BE IN THIS STUDY?
Nine people (participants) will be enrolled in this study locally. Overall, a total of nine subjects will be enrolled at three study centers.

WHAT ARE THE ALTERNATIVE TO BEING IN THIS STUDY?
This is not a treatment study. The alternative is to not participate.

WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO IN THIS STUDY?
Your participation in this study will last up to 75 minutes and includes one visit. During this visit, you will be asked to sign the Subject Consent Form and complete a demographic survey. You will then be asked to participate in an in-depth interview discussing your experience with the ASSIST Coach Program.

WILL VIDEO OR AUDIO RECORDINGS BE MADE OF ME DURING THIS STUDY?
Yes, audio recordings of the 75 minute interview will be completed, with your permission. Video recordings will not occur in any portion of this study.

The researchers will make an audio recording during the study only if you give your permission.
to do so. Initial your decision below. If you do not wish to be audio recorded the researcher will take hand notes instead.

__________  I give my permission for audio recordings to be made of me during my participation in this research study.

__________  I do not give my permission for audio recordings to be made of me during my participation in this research study.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?
The things that you will be doing have a little more risk than you would come across in everyday life. The names of participants will be changed to preserve confidentiality, but the risks for you are that your identity may be realized within the educational community within the State of Arizona. This may occur due to the small number of schools with Underperforming or Failing labels under AZ LEARNS. Study participants may experience risks associated with choosing to participate or choosing to not participate—the risk will be political in nature where individuals within organizations may try to directly influence participation as well as responses to interview questions in efforts to preserve the public’s image schools and those that work within them. You do not have to participate in this study if you do not want to.

Although the researchers have tried to avoid risks, you may feel that some questions/procedures that are asked of you will be stressful or upsetting. You do not have to answer anything you do not want to.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO ME?
There is not direct benefit to you by being in this study. What the researchers find out from this study may help other people within state intervention that involves coaching experiences for principals.

WILL THERE BE ANY COSTS TO ME?
Aside from your time, there are no costs for taking part in this study.

WILL I BE PAID TO BE IN THIS STUDY?
You will not be paid for being in this study.

WILL INFORMATION FROM THIS STUDY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?
Information about you will be stored in Room 327 in the College of Education at the University of Arizona. This consent form will be filed in an official area.

Information about you will be kept confidential to the extent permitted or required by law. People who have access to your information include the Principal Investigator and research study personnel. Representatives of regulatory agencies such as the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) or the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and entities such as the University of Arizona Human Subjects Protection Program may access your records to make sure the study is being run correctly and that information is collected properly. However, any

Version Date: 09/21/10                         Page 1 of 3                         Subject’s Initials _____
information that is sent to them will be coded with a number so that they cannot tell who you are. Representative from these entities can see information that has your name on it if they come to the study site to review records. If there are any reports about this study, your name will not be in them.

WHO CAN I CONTACT FOR MORE INFORMATION?
You can call the Principal Investigator to tell him/her about a concern or complaint about this research study. The Principal Investigator, Thomas Collins, M.Ed., can be called at (520) 696-6967. You may also contact the Principal Investigator’s advisor, J. Robert Hendricks, Ed.D., at (520) 621-7313.

For questions about your rights as a research subject; or if you have questions, complaints, or concerns about the research and cannot reach the Principal Investigator or want to talk to someone other than the Investigator, you may call the University of Arizona Human Subjects Protection Program office.

- Local phone number: (520) 626-6721
- Website (this can be anonymous): http://orcr.vpr.arizona.edu/irb/contact

MAY I CHANGE MY MIND ABOUT PARTICIPATING?
You have the choice whether or not to be in this research study. You may decide to not begin or to stop study at any time. If you choose not to be in this study, there will be no effect on your employment, evaluation, etc. You can stop being in this study at any time with no effect on your employment, evaluation, etc. Any new information discovered about the research will be provided to you. This information could affect your willingness to continue your participation.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT
I agree to be in this study and know that I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. The procedures, risks, and benefits have been explained to me, and my questions have been answered. I know that new information about this research study will be provided to me as it is available and that the researcher will tell me if I must be removed from the study. I can ask more questions if I want, and I can still receive medical care if I stop participating in this study. A copy of this entire, signed consent form will be given to me.

_________________________________________  ____________________________
Subject’s Signature                          Date

Version Date: 09/21/10                        Page 1 of 3                        Subject’s Initials _____
REFERENCES


*Handbook on effective implementation of school improvement grants.* (2009). Lincoln, IL: Center on Innovation and Improvement.


