CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

PILOT SCHOOL LEADERS' EXPERIENCES IN INNOVATION

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by

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Acknowledgement Page

Completing this dissertation encapsulates several years of work and learning about pilot schools in Los Angeles, including helping launch the pilot school at which I teach. My work with pilot schools would not be possible without the tirelessness of the educators in LAUSD, whose work to improve conditions for students has contributed to changing the fabric of the district and union.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

PILOT SCHOOL LEADERS' EXPERIENCES IN INNOVATION

by

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The proliferation of charter schools since their inception in 1991 attests to the widespread belief that deregulation ought to spur innovations in teaching and learning that will improve student achievement. However, charter schools' gains in student achievement have been meager and they have generally been inconsistent use of their autonomies. Pilot schools began in Boston in 1994 under the same deregulation theory, yet with one critical difference: Pilot schools are district schools and teachers remain unionized and work under a modified contract. This study examines the experiences of pilot school leaders as they attempt to use their autonomies to improve conditions for teaching and learning in their schools. Through semi-structured interviews with pilot school leaders in Los Angeles, CA, this institutional ethnography captures these leaders' experiences working with the district, union, and third-party non-profits to make use of their autonomy. Findings include teachers' uses of their autonomies; the challenges and supports these leaders have faced; and the overall impact of these autonomies, which included creating a mission-driven culture and distributing leadership throughout the schools.

CHAPTER I
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Pilot schools fill a unique niche between traditional public schools and charter schools: They operate as district schools, yet receive many of the same autonomies as charter schools; they are deregulated and they are intended to serve as models for urban school reform. Pilot schools began in Boston, MA in 1994 as an agreement between the Boston Teachers' Union and the district, after Massachusetts passed one of the nation's first charter laws (Tung & Ouimette, 2007a). In contrast to charter schools, which are typically managed by small management organizations, pilot schools are by definition launched by teams of teachers, who take on responsibilities beyond the ordinary role of classroom teachers. These expectations are codified in an Election-to-Work Agreement (EWA), which replaces the omitted sections of pilot teachers' condensed contract with local expectations and duties, and is central to hiring and firing decisions (French, 2006).

Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the nation's second-largest school district, adopted the pilot school model in 2007 with an agreement with the local teachers' union, United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA), building the local model on the strengths of the Boston plan (Nesoff, 2007). Following in the footsteps of the charter movement and the Boston pilot schools, LA-based pilot schools' structure and autonomies are rooted in the assumption that by removing the barriers to innovation, teachers and leaders will create schools to better serve their student populations (French, 2006; Lake, 2008). The pilot and charter movements share a common belief—that deregulation ought to spur innovation, which in turn ought to improve student

achievement—yet they differ in one critical aspect: Pilot schools are designed and sustained by teachers and lead-teachers, whose work is critical to the success of these schools. In the LAUSD pilot agreement, the goal of "teacher empowerment" is written into the introductory clause, along with the explicit expectation that improving the learning environment will improve student performance (UTLA, 2009). Unlike the charter school model, pilot schools are inherently a teacher-led reform, with different roles and expectations for teachers and principals. These pilot school leaders assume responsibility for utilizing their schools' autonomies to improve conditions for teaching and learning, interacting with the district, the union, and outside partners as they attempt to make use of their freedoms. This study explores the experiences of pilot school leaders in this work.

Similar to the Boston pilots, the LA-based pilot schools are intended to serve as models for school reform in the district by including teacher leadership in the design and operation of these schools. And, similar to the Boston reform, the union has been inconsistent in its support of the model. Yet teacher interest in the model led to expanding the number of pilot schools from the initial 10 to 32 by 2011, and in December 2011, the teachers' union approved a new contract agreement with LAUSD that opens the door for even more pilots, and for any traditional public school to request specific autonomies from the district. This local initiative process will increase the number and variety of autonomous schools in the district, creating greater opportunities for teacher leadership while further complicating the roles of the union and of the district office in managing these schools.

Problem Statement

Pilot schools are grounded in the same theory as charter schools: that deregulation ought to lead to improvement in public education. The problem for pilot schools is that although they are granted many of the same autonomies as charter schools, they operate as district schools, bound to many of the same district and union expectations as traditional public schools. Pilot school leaders must maintain working relationships with the very same institutions that have served as barriers for them as they seek to utilize their autonomies to improve conditions for teaching and learning in their schools. Pilot school leaders' experiences in attempting innovation and their interactions with the district and union are critical to understanding the future of this reform movement.

Background: The Charter School Movement

In 1991, Minnesota passed the nation's first state law creating charter schools, and by the end of the 1990s, 37 states and the District of Columbia had followed suit with their own laws authorizing the creation of charter schools (Renzulli & Roscigno, 2005). Although each state's charter law varies considerably, the general inclination of the laws is that deregulation ought to spur innovation, particularly around improving the quality of students' education (Lake, 2008).

Defining exactly what is "innovative" is a challenge in and of itself. Various definitions and constructs for what constitute "innovations" in charter schools exist (Lake, 2008): new models for administration and governance; new accountability designs and funding channels; repackaging existing instructional practices and streamlining quality implementation; offering something new to a community or student population; and offering something that responds to families' needs and preferences. Only 17% of

charter schools have outperformed their traditional counterparts on standardized test scores (CREDO, 2009). But despite the unmet performance expectations of charter schools, few reform advocates would deny that deregulation is a path for innovation and improvement in the performance of public schools.

Background: Pilot Schools

Pilot schools were founded on the same premise and hope as charter schools (French, 2006), that deregulation ought to spur innovations that improve conditions for teaching and learning. Given this parallel theory of action, it might seem highly unlikely that pilot schools would fare any better than charter schools have, historically. However, one crucial difference between the pilot movement and the charter movement is the intentional inclusion of teachers in the design and implementation of these innovative small schools: Teachers sign a condensed "thin" contract and an Election-to-Work Agreement (EWA) that specifies workplace expectations and responsibilities beyond the role of traditional classroom teachers, effectively distributing leadership responsibilities among multiple staff members. The role of teachers in pilot schools is fundamentally different from the role of teachers in traditional public schools and many charter schools.

Another difference is that—unlike most charter schools—pilot schools operate as district schools, and the affiliation contributes a new set of problems and challenges. Although the pilot and charter movements share many of the same underlying beliefs and operate under many of the same conditions, they differ in their reliance on the central district office and their union involvement. Pilot schools' ongoing relationships with the district office and union create a unique quandary that only pilot school teacher-leaders witness: In order to fully implement their innovative plans, they often generate ire with

officials in these bureaucracies, while needing support from the very same institutions, administrators, and leaders. The very same institutions that authorize pilot schools' existence—district and union bureaucracies—become partners in managing and utilizing the pilot school autonomies, often putting educators at odds. To further complicate matters, pilot school teachers often work closely with third-party organizations, such as school reform and curriculum reform groups, which often advocate for school reform in conjunction with pilot school leaders and support pilot schools in their development.

Purpose and Significance

The purpose of this study is to contribute to our understanding of the challenges of implementing the pilot school model through the experiences of principals and teacher leaders. The challenges that pilot school leaders face are central to understanding the complexities of implementing this reform model, and should give insights into the complexity of working in autonomous district schools. This study seeks to explore areas of challenges experienced by pilot school leaders, in order to better inform district staff of these challenges, share knowledge and expertise among pilot school leaders, and contribute to understanding how the pilot model might improve conditions for teaching and learning, offering an alternative to the disappointing result of charter schools. Another goal of this study is to inform district, union, and non-profit leaders to be able support pilots more effectively.

Further, with the recent passage of the new teachers' contract in LAUSD, this study significantly informs our understanding of how teacher-led reform might improve conditions for teaching and learning. Under the new contract, teachers in traditional schools may seek the same autonomies that pilot school teachers and leaders experience,

thereby expanding the opportunities for teacher-led reform in LAUSD. Pilot school leaders have the greatest expertise in this arena, and this study reveals some of the challenges and supports they face in implementing their autonomies.

Research Questions

This study focuses on the experiences of school leaders as they design, implement, and sustain pilot schools and asks:

What do LAUSD pilot school leaders experience as they use their autonomies to create innovative small schools?

- *How have pilot school leaders attempted to use their autonomies?*
- *What has supported or hindered their use of the autonomies over the life of their school?*

In this paper, "school leaders" is a term used loosely to describe individuals in the school who have formal and informal leadership roles (Harris & Spillane, 2008), such as principals, lead-teachers, and former design team members. For this study, I am interested in understanding the experiences of individuals in the schools who have taken on leadership responsibilities, regardless of their formal position within the pilot schools.

Five autonomies are officially granted pilot schools: autonomy over governance, autonomy over calendar and schedule, autonomy over curriculum and assessment, autonomy over staffing, and budgetary autonomy. A sixth pseudo-autonomy, professional development, was included in this study, since the pilot structure creates autonomy over professional development, even if it is not explicitly identified. These six autonomies frame the basis for this study, which explored how school leaders have attempted to

6

improve conditions for learning by utilizing these autonomies, and what challenges and supports they have faced in doing so.

Historical and Conceptual Frameworks

This study utilizes multiple lenses to understand the school leaders' challenges in developing innovative pilot schools:

Historical Comparisons

I use the 20-year history of the charter school movement to understand the potential future of pilot schools, because the research body on charters vastly exceeds the sparse research on pilots. Pilot schools and charter schools were grounded on the same basic premises: Relieving schools from onerous, bureaucratic demands should spur innovations, which in turn will improve student achievement. In reality, the results for charter schools have been mixed (CREDO, 2009), with many charter schools underperforming when compared to their traditional public school counterparts. Understanding the history of charter schools provides an understanding of the effects of deregulation on the dynamics of autonomy and innovation, as well as providing context for why the dynamic of pilot school's teacher leadership might matter.

Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership (Harris & Spillane, 2008) offers a frame for understanding the experience of leadership activity among people who are not formally assigned positions of leadership. The unique arrangements and contracts of pilot school teachers create conditions for multiple individuals to take on leadership responsibilities in pilot schools, making distributed leadership an appropriate lens to understand their interactions. Pilot school principals, coordinators, and teachers often share

responsibilities for tasks that would have otherwise been handled by multiple administrators in a traditional high school. Understanding the working conditions of teachers in pilot schools is essential to understanding how these school leaders utilize their autonomy to improve conditions for teaching and learning in their schools, and distributed leadership provides a lens for understanding the mechanisms of that process.

Overview of Methodology

This study draws on institutional ethnographic traditions (Smith, 2007), which take the stance that the individuals in the field are the experts of the institution, due to their interactions with the institution and the ways in which it coordinates their experiences. This ethnographic tradition makes the institution the focus of the study, relying on participants to map the organizational patterns and relationships. The study is a qualitative, multi-site case study, which examined the experiences of school leaders at five pilot high schools. The study is set in Los Angeles Unified School District.

Semi-structured interviews were held with teachers and principals at each of the school sites. Interviews were staggered throughout a 6-month long period, in order to capture participants' experiences at meetings and events with district and union officials. Once data were collected and interviews transcribed, interview responses were coded and organized by topic and theme. From there, trends and themes were identified across the multiple interviews to reveal areas for advocacy and next steps in the pilot movement.

Limitations and Delimitations

Pilot schools currently exist in only two urban districts in the US. Although this study focuses on the needs of teachers and leaders in this unusual school model, this study has broad implications for teacher-leadership, charter school models, pilot schools,

and urban school reform as districts look to increased school autonomy to spur improvement. Schools with similar autonomies and expectations for broad teacher-leadership could find meaning in this study. Pilot schools arose from and exist in districts with strong teachers' unions, and it is unclear the extent to which the existence of powerful teachers' unions is a necessary requirement for the development of pilot schools.

This study does not attempt to answer the question of whether pilot schools positively affect student achievement. Further, this study does not attempt to judge the merits of the innovations implemented by teacher-leaders. Rather, I focus on understanding their experiences as they attempt to implement these innovations.

Organization of the Dissertation

In Chapter 2, I will examine the relevant research literature available to understand pilot schools. I examine some recent literature on charter schools, using the 20-year history of that movement as a proxy for understanding the goals and potential challenges of the pilot movement. Then, I present the handful of studies and research papers available on the Boston pilot schools. Next, I offer examples of the possible roles that districts, unions, and third-party organizations can play in school reform. Finally, I turn to examining the working conditions within pilot schools to better understand what working in a decentralized school might be like, using distributed leadership as framework for understanding.

In Chapter 3, I provide my methodology for conducting this institutional ethnographic case study, and provide a rationale for why this approach is apt for understanding the experiences of school leaders engaged in this work.

In Chapter 4, I analyze and interpret the findings of this study. Findings are organized around answering the two sub-research questions, which collective answer the main research question.

In Chapter 5, I synthesize these findings in order to identify some larger trends, offer implications for policy and practice, and suggest future research suggestions.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The history of the charter movement and its unmet performance expectations suggest that autonomy alone may not lead to improved student achievement. The autonomy granted to charter schools does not always lead to innovation that leads to improved student achievement, despite the widespread belief that it should. Pilot schools are grounded in the same framework of deregulation, and if the pilot movement is to avoid the fate of today's charters, the role of teacher leadership in pilots and the experiences of pilot school leaders within this complicated arrangement of in-district autonomous public schools must be documented and understood. In order to understand the unique challenge pilot school leaders face in opening and operating these autonomous public schools, this chapter provides some history on charter schools, pilot schools, and the importance of distributed leadership in school reform.

Charter Schools: Historical Framework for Understanding Innovation

Early proponents of charter school laws in the United States argued that autonomy ought to spur innovation and that innovation, in turn, would spur student achievement (Lubienski, 2003). In a meta-study of 190 studies on charter schools to date, Lubienski noted that innovation was an explicit policy goal in most states' charter authorization, with the goal of "different and innovative" classroom practices appearing in many states' charters (p. 399). The premise was somewhat consistent with Chubb and Moe's (1988) argument that democratically controlled public schools are inherently inefficient and

unresponsive to local needs, and that decentralization, privatization and free market principles would produce better outcomes. Charter schools have been a popular reform: As of 2009, more than 1.4 million children were enrolled in 4,700 charter schools in 40 states and DC (about 3% of all K-12 students nationwide), with an additional 365,000 student names on waiting lists (CREDO, 2009). But the performance of charter schools is mixed and generally poor, with as few as 17% of charter schools outperforming traditional public schools on state standardized test scores, according to one study (CREDO, 2009).

The history of the charter movement and its limited successes offer a glimpse of what the future of the pilot school movement could look like, based solely on the effects of deregulation. Charter schools, like pilots, are expected to serve as innovative models of reform, and they ought to succeed in improving conditions for teaching and learning.

Charter Schools' Origins and Expansion

Ray Budde, a professor at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst with prior public school teaching experience, is often credited with coining the term "chartering" to describe groups of individuals formulating school plans for school board approval (Lubienski, 2003; Renzulli & Roscigno, 2005). Budde first introduced the idea in a 1970s pamphlet (Budde, 1988; 1996), which received little attention until it was republished in 1988 after *A Nation at Risk* (US DOE, 1983). Al Shanker, then-president of the American Federation of Teachers, pushed the idea of teacher-led charter schools forward in a July 1988 New York Times column (Shanker, 1988). By 1990, Minnesota had enacted the country's first charter law, launching a movement that Budde and Shanker later acknowledged moved beyond their original ideas (Budde, 1996).

Budde's original (1988) ideas for charter schools focused on changing the roles of most stakeholders in public education. Budde argued that teachers ought to have greater autonomy in instructional decisions about curriculum and leadership, even suggesting that a group of lead teachers might run their school. He suggested that reorganized schools might even alter the school calendar, assign teachers professional, non-instructional duties, and give principals greater latitude in school operations. Further, Budde sought to reorganize the school district structure, hoping that local school board overview and approval of charter school designs would re-connect school board leaders with the classroom practices and operations of the schools they oversee.

After the Minnesota law, charter schools proliferated dramatically across the US (Renzulli & Roscigno, 2005). By the end of the decade, 37 states had authorized charter laws and over 2000 schools had been established. Multiple studies (Lake, 2008; Wohlstetter, Wenning, & Briggs, 1995) have examined states' charter authorization laws. One early study (Wohlstetter, Wenning, & Briggs, 1995) examined the first 11 states' laws, noting broad agreement on the premise that relieving schools from the burdens of bureaucracy ought to improve student achievement, though the laws were largely silent on what, precisely, would constitute innovative practices resulting from the autonomies granted to charter schools. Wohlstetter, et al. (1995) found that states' laws differed in the degree to which charter schools were granted autonomy from higher levels of government, and that this extent varied with state political factors.

California, which passed the nation's second charter law in 1992, is often viewed as having one of the most far-reaching and supportive charter laws (Wells, 1998). Charter advocates in California supported the law's allowance for multiple forms of charter

school approval; if a school board declines to grant a charter, the charter school may petition the local county board of education. The law allows for both conversion and start-up schools, and annual caps on the number of new charters were either quickly raised or waived such that by 1998, California enrolled 50,000 out of the nation's 166,000 charter students. (This number had grown to 150,000 of 500,000 by 2003 [Zimmer, Buddin, Chau, & Gill, et al. 2003]). Yet even an early analysis (Wells, 1998) questioned whether charter schools were living up to their proponents' rhetoric of innovation.

Intended to Innovate

Most states' charter laws explicitly state that charter schools ought to serve as models of innovation, and Lubienski (2003) identified four definitions of innovation that appear in the literature when examining charter school implementation: Practices are innovative if they appear as new in a local context, combining or continuing existing, successful practices, often in streamlined model, creating innovations in governance or accountability systems, or simply creating a more diverse array of schools. Writing a few years after the decade that witnessed this flurry of charter authorization, Lake (2008) identified that 72% (29) of states with charters laws included an implicit or explicit intent for charter schools to serve as laboratories for educational innovation. Yet what exactly constitutes "innovation" seems to be largely in the eye of the beholder. Lake offers four broad categories for interpreting the use of "innovation" in understanding charter school concepts:

- "something never before seen or done in public education" (p. 118)
- "something new to a community or student population" (p. 119)

- "something that responds to family needs and preferences" (p. 119)
- "a process of adopting and sustaining existing best practices" (p. 119)

Charter schools have become particularly innovative in governance and administration of their schools and teachers, with new accountability designs and direct funding to schools. Lake also offers one view that some charter schools simply "repackage" or streamline existing instructional strategies, thus creating "innovative" new models based on tried and true practices.

In one large-scale quantitative study of California charter schools, RAND researchers Zimmer and Buddin attempted to isolate the innovations that improved student achievement (2007). Their analysis included 352 charter schools and was limited to school-level features, based on data available from the state. In pooled analyses of student performance, charter schools outperformed their traditional school counterparts by one percentage point in reading, but none performed higher in math. Higher parental involvement in charters positively impacted student achievement at the elementary school level, though the number of instructional days did not. Further, although charter status was linked with improved outcomes, Zimmer and Buddin did not find that autonomy, professional development, teacher credentialing status, or principal background translated into higher test scores directly. Thus, although the study indicated that charter status was related to improved student outcomes, the study did not reveal reasons why. Being charter mattered, but the impact of the innovations that autonomy allowed could not be individually linked to student achievement.

Unmet Performance Expectations

Freed from bureaucracy, charter schools' innovations ought to improve student achievement. Defining exactly what is a "typical" charter school can be problematic, because the variety of charter models is wide (Crane & Edwards, 2007); common models include conversion charters, which existed previously as traditional public schools; new start-ups; traditional, classroom-based charters; and nonclassroom-based charters (where at least 20% of instruction is not delivered in a classroom setting). Further, some charters are run by charter management organizations (CMOs), while others are stand-alone. Because the term "charter" covers a broad range of types of schools, the most helpful studies of charter-school impacts differentiate their findings by charter-school type. Due to the large number of charter schools in California, I examine recent studies that report on charter school performance nationally and in California.

National Studies. In the first large-scale randomized-trial study conducted on a national sample of charter schools, researchers for the U.S. Department of Education followed students who won or lost an admissions lottery to a charter school (Gleason, Clark, Tuttle, & Dwoyer, 2010). With a sample of 2,330 students who had applied to 36 significantly oversubscribed charter middle schools that had held lotteries for admission, researchers followed students for two years after winning or losing the lottery, and then compared their reading and math scores on a standardized scale. The study found that, on average, charter schools did not have a statistically significant impact on student achievement, but there was wide and significant variability of impact among charter schools. Charter schools were more effective in math achievement (but not for reading) for students of poverty and lower-achieving students, but there was no significant

difference for other subgroups, as defined by race, ethnicity, or gender. Charter schools in urban areas, serving more students of poverty, tended to perform better than charter schools in outlying areas, when compared to their traditional counterparts in these settings.

In the "CREDO Study," Stanford University researchers at the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO, 2009) conducted the first national assessment of charter school impacts, and found that only 17% of charter schools outscored their traditional public school counterparts on state standardized tests. Their analysis included 70 percent of charter students enrolled in charter schools in the US, covering 15 states and the District of Columbia. The study employed a model called a "virtual twins study," in which charter schools students are paired with a "twin" found in the pool of public school students; that is, the twin is a student who matches the charter school student in terms of demographics and achievement. The method matched 84% of charter students with similar students, and conducted three levels of analysis: pooled analysis of charter school impacts; state-by-state review of charter school performance; and an analysis of the performance of charters against their local alternatives. About half of charter schools generated standardized test scores on par with traditional public schools, while 37 percent of charter schools showed worse test results than if the students had remained at their local public schools. The study also found tremendous variability in test scores, as great as the variability seen in traditional public schools.

Further, the CREDO study found that charter schools in five states (Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Louisiana, and Missouri) saw significantly better performance than their peers; six states saw worse performance (Arizona, Florida, Minnesota, New Mexico,

Ohio, and Texas); while four states had mixed results (California, DC, Georgia, and North Carolina). From the pooled study, charter school students did slightly worse than their peers, from .01 standard deviations in reading to .03 standard deviations in math. The differences were small, but statistically significant. The strongest performing charter schools were at the elementary and middle school levels, with high schools performing worse than their peers. From the virtual twin studies, Blacks and Hispanics performed worse in charters than in traditional public schools, but English Learners fared better and special education populations fared about the same. Students of poverty tended to perform better in charter schools, however. Thus, it appears that charter schools may decrease the achievement gap for students of poverty, but not for other marginalized groups.

California Studies. Crane and Edwards (2007) examined charter school performance in California, comparing charter schools by type and against traditional public schools on traditional standardized measures. Their quantitative analysis found that charter schools managed by CMO's outperformed other charter schools, and that traditional classroom-based charters outperformed nonclassroom-based charters in math. The study authors used a school characteristics index to control for factors beyond the immediate control of the school, such as student ethnicity, parent education level, language status, school calendar. The data came from a sample drawn from 60% of charters and 79% of non-charters in the state, based on the availability of data.

When student characteristics were taken into account, elementary charter schools performed as well as traditional public schools, and charter middle schools significantly outperformed their peers, performing about 41 points higher on the state API (which was

about .44 standard deviations above expected). At the high school level, charter school results were generally positive, but less consistent. Charter high schools were typically smaller than traditional schools, and their performance on the state API was only slightly higher than for traditional schools. Charter schools run by CMOs (accounting for 24 elementary schools, 14 middle, and 21 high) fared significantly better across multiple measures, with an API 40 points (.40 standard deviations) above expected. The results for start-up and conversion charters were mixed and generally similar to each other. These findings were similar to those from an earlier, large-scale study conducted by RAND researchers (Zimmer, Buddin, Chau, Gill, & Guarino, 2003) which compared the effects of conversions, start-ups, classroom-based, and nonclassroom-based charters against traditional public schools using data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

Collectively, these studies suggest that charter school status alone may not explain differences in student achievement. That is, deregulation in and of itself is not a factor that determines student achievement. The additional factors of CMO management and charter type suggest that greater examination of the inner workings of deregulated schools is necessary to understand the ways in which deregulated schools improve conditions for teaching and learning.

Working Conditions in Charter Schools

Research on charter school teachers' job satisfaction yields somewhat mixed results. In one study, Malloy and Wohlstetter combined a synthesis of research on charter school teachers' working conditions with findings from case studies with 40 charter school teachers in six urban charter elementary schools (2003). Malloy and Wohlstetter

identified several positive aspects of working in deregulated schools, such as autonomy over establishing teachers' working conditions, alternate salary schedules, and competitive starting pay. Teachers in charters were often attracted to them because of the perceived increased freedom, flexibility, empowerment, and alignment with their educational philosophy. However, Ni found that charter school teachers perceive that they had a heavier workload than teachers in traditional public schools (2012). Using a dataset of 43,000 teacher surveys from the 2003-2004 Schools and Staffing Survey, Ni applied a quantitative analysis to compare working conditions between traditional public and charter schools, matching schools by type and location to reduce confounding. The study found that teachers in charter and traditional public schools perceived that their working conditions were similar in other regards, such as principal leadership, professional collaboration, academic freedom, professional development, and basic needs.

Studies examining the job satisfaction of current charter school teachers, however, omit those who already left the teaching force. Charter school teachers have a turnover rate that is twice the rate for teachers in traditional public schools, and Stuit and Smith attempted to discern some of the explanations for this, using the same SASS dataset as Ni (2012). Stuit and Smith found that charter schools attracted younger teachers, who were more likely to leave, but the lack of union affiliation was the most important explanatory variable for the differences in turnover rates. The lack of job security was a more significant explanatory variable than salary and benefits or working conditions. Utilizing a different data set, Stuit and Smith found that many charter school teachers exiting the field exhibited dissatisfaction with their jobs.

In another study comparing versions of deregulated schools in Massachusetts, Moore and Landman (2000) found that perceptions of job security were lowest among charter school teachers. Further, the researchers found that teachers' voice in school decisions was linked to job satisfaction and varied across the schools, noting that, "schools that are free from the external regulation of school districts and unions do not necessarily extend that autonomy to their teachers" (p. 20); that is, policy alone cannot adequately address all of the factors related to attracting and retaining a qualified and talented staff. Deregulation can set the context perhaps, and may be a necessary, but not a sufficient condition, for school reform.

Summary: The Failure of Deregulation Alone

We have little understanding of the mechanisms of how autonomy ought to lead to innovation, or how innovation might lead to improved conditions for teaching and learning. Yet most states have authorized charter schools, and the long wait lists for charter school suggest that state leaders and the public believe in the power of deregulation and autonomy. Charter schools' mixed academic successes are meaningful to the extent that they narrow the achievement gap for marginalized students, and for families looking for improving the quality of education for their children, charters may fill a vital niche in their communities. The charter movement has not demonstrated the expected reform and innovation, despite 20 years of work in nearly every state. It is unclear why or how charters have failed to effectively close the achievement gap (or how they have managed to close the gap, in the instances when they do); many charter schools maintain the same variations in achievements as traditional public schools, and a large number underperform their traditional public school counterparts.

With few lessons or model schools to offer, the charter school movement has largely failed to demonstrate that deregulation in and of itself leads to innovation or increased student achievement. What, exactly, constitutes innovation in charters is not clearly defined, and the mechanisms of innovation are not clearly understood, and are worth examining to better understand how school leaders might best use their autonomy in a deregulated school. The evidence on charter school teacher turnover and lack of job security may explain some of the lack of difference in student achievement between charter schools and traditional public schools. The limited success of charter schools may be at the expense of the teachers who work in them, yet virtually nothing is known about how these teachers attempt to improve conditions for teaching and learning in their deregulated schools.

Pilot schools offer a glimpse into the inner-workings of deregulated schools. Teachers in pilot schools have many of the same autonomies and working conditions as charter school teachers, but with two caveats: they remain members of their union, and have a greater say in the operation of their schools. Those characteristics set pilot schools apart from charter schools. The next section explores the origins of this deregulated school movement in Boston, MA.

Pilot Schools: Teacher-led Deregulated Reform

The first pilots launched in Boston in the mid-1990s, and the reform extended to Los Angeles 10 years later. There is very little extant research on the Boston pilot schools, beyond a few research articles, dissertations, and public reports from the Center for Collaborative Education, a Boston non-profit that supports the pilots with technical assistance, leadership support, and advocacy (Knoester, 2010). The few reports suggest

that Boston pilot schools are innovative in their designs and effective in their operations, are utilizing their autonomies for innovative practices, and have impacted district and state policies as a result of their performance.

History

Pilot schools began in Boston, MA in 1994 as a competitive, in-district alternative to charter schools, in response to the state's authorization of one of the nation's first charter laws (Tung & Ouimette, 2007a). The Boston Teachers' Union (BTU) entered into negotiations with Boston Public Schools (BPS) to create this new model for urban school reform, in which schools accept increased autonomy and increased school-level responsibility. Pilot schools were designed in direct response to the opening of charter schools in the Boston area, which impacted enrollment in traditional public schools—and thus impacted district and union revenues. Freed from most district regulations, pilot schools were expected to outperform their traditional peers, and to offer a valuable choice for families dissatisfied with the traditional public school system.

Pilot schools are district public schools, and while many services remain centralized—such as payroll, benefits, and contracting—school-level operators make decisions within the five designated areas of autonomy: staffing, scheduling, budgeting, governance, and curriculum and instruction. Thus, pilot schools receive many of the same autonomies as charter schools, yet teachers in pilot schools remain unionized, working under a "thin" contract and signing an election-to-work agreement (EWA) that specifies site-based expectations, hours, and conditions. The number of Boston pilots has grown to over 20, enrolling over 11% of the district's student population, with more pilots opening in the coming years (Knoester, 2010).

Working conditions in pilot schools are likely to be different from traditional public schools and charter schools. The critical difference, potentially, is how pilot schools write and apply their Election-to-Work Agreements (EWA), which lay out workplace duties and expectations in pilot schools (French, 2001). Pilot school teachers must sign a school-specific EWA to work in a pilot school. The staff revisit the document annually to ensure shared commitment to the goals of the school; teachers can be dismissed from the school for failing to perform duties outlined in the EWA. Functionally, this process and the documents themselves serve to distribute leadership among all staff members.

Performance

In the most comprehensive study on the performance of the pilot high schools, CCE researchers (Tung & Ouimette, 2007b) used publicly available data for all students in the BPS system from 2001-2005 to assess the impact of the pilot schools on student achievement. Pilot school students outperformed other non-exam Boston Public Schools on every standard measure of engagement and performance, and for every racial, economic, and academic subgroup. Pilot school students had higher standardized test scores, higher attendance rates, and higher promotion rates than other BPS high schools. Graduation rates were 75%, versus a BPS rate of 52%. Although the pilot demographics generally match the larger BPS system in terms of race, income, and mainstream special needs students, the authors noted that pilots enroll fewer English Learners, fewer students with moderate to severe special needs, and fewer students arriving with warning signs of being "at-risk," such as low 8th grade standardized test scores. Further, all Boston high schools have admissions policies and lotteries (whenever a school's potential enrollment

exceeds the actual number of seats available), and the pilots are no exceptions: one performing arts pilot requires auditions for admission; some pilots are popular enough to need to employ lotteries; one pilot school is limited to over-age students; three pilots ask students to complete an application; one is a school that only serves a local neighborhood; one pilot converted to charter status (but is still considered a pilot school), with an application and lottery system. The overall impact appears to be that as the pilots have become more popular over time, fewer students with risk factors have applied to pilot schools, and a correspondingly higher percentage of college-bound students have applied.

In a similarly timed study, using data from 15 of the then 19 pilot schools, the CCE researchers examined data for elementary, middle, and high school pilot schools in Boston (Tung, Ouimette & Rugen, 2006). Evidence of higher performance on standardized test scores was evident in English and in math at the elementary school level and at 10th grade level, the most promising result of which were 84% of students passing the English exams, versus 58% at other BPS schools. Further, the differences between pilot and BPS peers tended to increase over grade levels. Students demonstrated higher college-going rates (79% to BPS 67%), and high attendance and lower suspension rates compared to BPS schools. The researchers note that pilot school successes have led to policy changes in the entire BPS system, such as a new graduation policy, which allows individual schools to propose a unique course sequence and assessment for graduation. The success of the early pilots contributed to the superintendent's decision to convert four large high schools into small schools sharing space and resources, and for a decision to allow all schools more autonomy over their budgets.

Earlier CCE studies examined the demographics and performance of the Boston pilots in relation to the BPS system, using student-level data from 1998-2003 (Tung, Ouimette, & Feldan, 2004). Researchers found that the demographics of pilot schools were representative of the BPS system, though the schools tended to enroll more African American and fewer Asian students. Pilots held higher attendance rates, longest wait lists, lowest transfer out rates, and lowest suspension rates. At that time, standardized test scores were on par with other BPS schools, and some were slightly ahead. Pilots high schools were serving lower percentages of students who qualified for free- or reduced-price lunch (59% of students) compared to the BPS high school average (65%), though more than the exam schools (46%).

Innovations

The CCE has similarly published multiple studies examining aspects of the Boston pilots that may contribute to their success. In one, researchers examined how the pilots utilize their autonomies to change conditions for teachers and students in their schools (CCE, 2001). Utilizing their staffing autonomy, pilots make staffing and scheduling decisions to carry out the missions and visions of their schools, such as through creating smaller class sizes and reducing teachers' student loads, sometimes at the expense of extracurricular activities. As evidence of their organization, some pilots have also been particularly successful at raising outside funding for their schools, ranging from $16,500 to $289,000 in grants per school. Teachers in pilot schools take on multiple roles, often teaching electives outside of their subject area (which reduces the need for additional teachers, thereby allowing increased budgetary and curricular flexibility while maintaining personalized learning environments). Schools plan schedules that are

effective for teachers and students, and make adjustments based on students' and teachers' needs, such as embedding professional development time in the workday and paying teachers for summer professional development time. Some pilots have made intensive efforts to include faculty and stakeholders in collaborative decision-making. As a result, the pilots were described as being adaptive, flexible, and responsive to students' needs, and their reliance on the district shifted to receiving guidance and support.

Multiple other papers and studies have examined other aspects of pilots, including the conversion of a BPS school to pilot status (Tung & Ouimette, 2007c), how pilot schools respond to issues of diversity (Feldman, Tung & Ouimette, 2003), implementation of authentic assessments in pilots (CCE, 2004), and how pilots engage families and communities (Ouimette, Feldman, Tung, Chamblin, & Coyne, 2002; Ouimette, Chamblin, Coyne, Feldman, & Tung, 2002). In the conversion case study (Tung & Ouimette, 2007c), adapting to the election-to-work agreement was found to alter many aspects of school operations, such as extending the workday for teachers and students. Teachers reported an increased sense of empowerment, due in part to the EWA and curricular autonomy, while administrators cited staffing and budgeting as critical autonomies needed for success. Case studies of several of the then-11 pilots examined how they responded proactively to issues of racial and ethnic diversity in their student bodies (Feldman, Tung & Ouimette, 2003). Feldman, et al. found that the schools invested in professional development for teachers and developed thematic curriculum to engage students in addressing topics of concern. CCE researchers conducted observations, interviews, and document review during the 2000-2002 school years to understand how pilot school teachers used authentic assessments in their schools (CCE,

2004), finding that teachers' shared common expectations for student achievement resulted in using assessments to make serious decisions, such as graduation, goals for professional development, and opening avenues for community engagement. And multiple papers (Ouimette, Feldman, Tung, Chamblin, & Coyne, 2002; Ouimette, Chamblin, Coyne, Feldman & Tung, 2002) examined the innovative practices that pilots employ in engaging parents and community members, such as through student exhibitions and student-led computer literacy classes for parents, to create community support for the schools.

Pilot Cautions

A few researchers have been critical of the performance of the Boston pilots. Matthew Knoester (2010), a former pilot teacher and union reformer himself, argued that the call for expanding the number of the pilot schools (beyond the then-21) was unwarranted. Noting a lack of independent research on the performance of pilot schools (CCE's internal research team has produced most of the reports on pilots, and CCE works closely with the pilot schools), Knoester points out that even the teachers' union has backed off from embracing rapid expansion of the network.

Knoester bolsters his argument on several premises: limited research on academic achievement, parent and community engagement, and teacher working conditions. Because pilots are small and have small class sizes, it is difficult to isolate pilot status as the key factor in their success. While some pilots have invested time and resources in democratic, collaborative decision-making processes to include parents, teachers, and community members—Knoester cites his own experience at Mission Hill School, a pilot led by Deborah Meier where Knoester worked for four years—other pilot schools have

been accused of using their autonomies to centralize control. And Knoester argues that the potential abuses of the election-to-work agreement, in which teachers are stripped of some bargaining agreement rights in exchange for increased decision-making power, has kept some teachers from embracing the model.

Researchers have examined the working conditions for teachers and staffs in pilot schools in Boston (CCE, 2001), and found that collaboration was a critical feature of daily interactions. In one study of six schools in Boston, MA, serving similar populations of students, researchers explored the various uses of autonomy and their impact on teachers' working conditions (Moore & Landman, 2000). The study included two pilot schools, two charters, and two school-based management schools, a public school model where a school leadership team exercises some autonomy over hiring and other areas. After conducting interviews with 49 teachers and leaders and multiple site visits, researchers found that control over staff selection and retention was of key importance to pilot and charter leaders. Pilot and charter teachers expressed concerns about the increased scope and definition of job responsibilities, expressed concerns about burnout, noting that staff norms—not contracts—led to a lengthier workday. Teachers at pilots and charters expressed that empowerment was key to their decision to join the school.

In the only evaluation study conducted by a research group not immediately involved with the pilots, a team of Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Duke University researchers compared the performance of Boston's charters, pilots, and traditional schools (Abdulkadiroglu, Angrist, Dynarki, Kane, & Pathak, 2009; Abdulkadiroglu, Angrist, Chodes, Dynarki, Fullerton, Kane, & Pathak, 2009). The study took two approaches: a limited quasi-experimental examination of the

results of the Boston school admissions lottery, and a second observational examination of all students in the BPS system. The research team examined the student achievement of students who applied to oversubscribed pilot and charter middle and high schools, and found that charter school enrollment positively affected students' standardized test scores, by between 0.2 and 0.4 standard deviations in ELA and math scores, respectively. These differences were greatest at the middle school level, and diminished slightly at the high school level. The researchers found negligible and insignificant effects on student achievement for enrollment in pilot high schools. However, only 7 out of 28 Boston charter schools were oversubscribed and included in the study, and these included no elementary schools. The secondary follow-up observational analysis, using the entire pool of BPS student data, yielded similar findings, but did not control for unobserved differences in educational background. Thus, extrapolating these findings beyond oversubscribed middle and high schools may be perilous.

The Challenge of Spreading Pilots Beyond Boston

Various districts throughout the nation, such as New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Clark County, NV, and some Massachusetts districts outside of Boston, have experimented with increasing school-level autonomy (Gewertz, 2007; Manzo, 2006). Some of these districts' models were developed independently and thus they vary in their faithfulness to the Boston pilot model—with some putting performance results as prerequisites for autonomy—but one city in particular conducted a nearly wholesale replication of the model. In summer 2006, union, district, and community leaders in downtown Los Angeles began planning to open ten new pilot schools in the Pico-Union

neighborhood just east of downtown, where new construction would relieve overcrowding at academically struggling Belmont High School (Nesoff, 2007).

At its peak, Belmont enrolled over 5,000 students and bussed nearly as many away each day to outlying areas. The new construction would relieve the campus, and a powerful network of community-based organizations, many of them representing the residents of the primarily Mexican and Central American immigrant neighborhood, lobbied for an alternative choice model for the students of the neighborhood. The district and union agreed to opening a network of 10 pilots as part of a movement for educational equity in an underserved neighborhood, and the network reached out to Boston pilots for support and guidance in the planning process. In fall 2007, the first two LAUSD pilots opened their doors.

In both Boston and in Los Angeles, pilot schools are expected to serve as models of school reform for their districts (Nesoff, 2007)—much like charter schools were authorized to serve as models for public schools. Pilot school leaders are charged with a tall order: Design, launch and run successful small schools; maintain cooperative relationships with the very same institutions from which they are seeking freedom; and serve as models of innovation in the context of urban school districts. Unsurprisingly, there are scant more than a few dozen pilot schools nationwide.

Pilot schools are freed from many of the district policies that are theorized to slow the pace of reform in traditional public schools, and pilot school teachers work under an alternate union contract that specifies local job duties. However, pilot school teachers and leaders must negotiate their autonomies with the district and union. Pilot school leaders walk a careful path, seeking freedom from onerous bureaucratic policies, while

simultaneously maintaining relationships with the very same traditional institutions that oversee their operations. Pilot schools often enlist the support of third-party school reform organizations in this work, making for a complicated field.

The Roles of Districts, Unions, and Third-Party Organizations

In contrast to charter schools, pilot school leaders must interact more often with traditional district office and union staff, who may or may not understand or support the pilot autonomies. Pilot school leaders often utilize the work of third-party organizations, such as local education reform non-profits, to support their work. For purposes of this study, "institutions" of public education are broadly defined as the central office (or district office), the teachers' union, and third-party organizations that work directly with schools and districts, typically around reform initiatives. Each of these entities plays a vital role in reform, as discussed below. The district acts to set the context and direction of school reform initiatives, while frontline district office staff play a vital role in the day-to-day mechanisms of school reform and implementation. Teachers' unions often mediate the process of reform, while third-party organizations typically work directly with teachers, occasionally lobbying the district and union on their behalf. Teachers and school staff often balance and interpret these multiple institutions' messages and goals, and thus implementation may vary from site to site.

District Leadership

Few studies over the last two decades have chronicled the role of the district as an institutional actor in school reform, though a few researchers have attempted to understand the role of the district. Generally, when district leadership does attempt to organize reform efforts, they typically do so in ways that centralize resources, rather than

by deregulating schools. In the few instances in which districts do embark on decentralization as an approach to school improvement, central office staff members who interface directly with school personnel play a critical role in the reform efforts.

District as Institutional Actor. Rorrer, Skrla, and Scheurich (2008) argue that districts are an important unit of analysis in education reform, and have largely been omitted from prior studies that have focused on schools and state and federal policy, ignoring the layers of the system in between. Synthesizing relevant literature on the topic, they propose that districts serve the roles of providing instructional leadership; reorienting the central office in the reform; establishing coherence among the various state, federal, and local policies; and maintaining a focus on equity and achievement. These findings are bolstered by other literature reviews (Anderson, 2006), which find that successful districts focus resources on student achievement and the quality of instruction, adopt district-wide curricula and approaches to instruction, adopt and commit to district-wide performance standards, and use multi-measure accountability systems.

Taking a quantitative approach, McLaughlin and Talbert (2003) examined three urban, reforming districts in California to attempt to address whether district actions have an impact on school reform efforts at the school site level. The four-year case studies included San Diego and two Bay Area districts, and used multi-level survey data to examine the role of the district, exploring the impacts of a "weak" or "strong" central office relationship with schools (defined by the extent of policy and implementation coordination between the office and schools). The findings confronted three myths McLaughlin and Talbert claim exist regarding the role of the district in school reform. First, it is assumed that teachers and principals will resist a strong district role. This study

found something to the opposite: A weak central office actually limits schools' progress, and a strong central office role is effective and welcomed when accompanied by strategic reorganization of the district office. Second, it is widely believed that personnel turnover will undermine the reform in the medium term. However, in two of the three districts studied, turnover in top positions did not result in setting back the reform; rather, effective communication strategies and inclusive planning processes had embedded the district norms and priorities in the culture of the organization. Third, it is widely accepted that local politics will defeat serious changes. Yet the study found that with clear priorities and board support, these districts were able to make significant change over the years. Consistent with Rorrer, et al. (2008) and Anderson (2006), McLaughlin and Talbert found that common priorities in these districts included taking a systems approach, developing a learning community at the central office, maintaining a coherent focus on teaching and learning, developing a stance of supporting professional learning and instructional improvement, and developing a culture of data-based inquiry and accountability. Wong (2011) found similar trends in an analysis of ten cities embarking on local government takeover of their school systems.

Central Office Staff. The day-to-day relationship between districts and schools engaged in reform, however, may be best understood by examining the roles of central office administrators tasked with supporting school site staff in their reform efforts. Honig (2006) applied a neo-institutional framework, which acknowledges that people on the frontlines often make decisions related to policy implementation, even though they are tasked with merely executing policy objectives.

This framework for understanding the institutional decision-making process is particularly apt for understanding the roles of individuals that Honig describes as "boundary spanners": those who work on the front lines of the bureaucracy and interact directly with individuals from other institutions—in this case, the schools themselves. To be successful in these roles, boundary spanners must be able to understand the language of multiple professional communities, and translate information among different groups. These central office staff must be able to manage the inevitable role conflicts that emerge from their position at the margins of the organization—a position that may enable close communication with schools at the cost of a diminished role in the central office. Thus, boundary spanners must manage the multiple priorities of their superiors and the contexts of their work.

To complicate matters, boundary-spanning positions are often low-status positions at the fringe of the organization, and thus attract candidates with short tenures in the central office. Yet, their perceived organizational influence coincides with the length of their tenure and their ability to motivate change in the central office. To describe this concretely, in her case study of central office staff tasked with supporting school reform in Oakland, CA, Honig describes their office location as a series of portable buildings, parked adjacent to the actual district office building.

In case studies of boundary spanning central office staff members in Oakland (2006) and Oakland and Chicago (2009), Honig described the critical role these individuals played in adapting district expectations at the school site level. These individuals were tasked with supporting small-school reform and served as "buffering" and "bridging" entities between the schools and the central office, both facilitating

35

change in the district at the requests of small schools, and helping schools navigate district policies. Bridging activities focused on policy development, advocating to the central office on behalf of schools' needs, communicating and clarifying requirements for schools, and helping to link schools with other central office resources. Buffering activities included school-level assistance, such as coaching, and absorbing potential and actual scrutiny by taking responsibility for school's deviations from central office policies and procedures. The superintendent leadership and the work of external organizations were often vital to the work of these central office administrators, because they were often newcomers to the central office and worked in newly devised positions that operated on the fringe of the organization. Other researchers (Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010) have similarly examined the interactions between central office staff and school site staff, and found that trusting relationships and consistent ideological orientation were essential components of this field.

Successful and coherent district reforms require clear district priorities and top-level organization to support the reform. This message must be communicated throughout the organization if it is to be successful. More importantly, the central office members tasked with implementing and monitoring the reform efforts must be successful and comfortable in their roles at the margins of the organization, interacting directly with school site leaders in their work in the reform effort.

Union Involvement

Teachers' unions are rarely seen as partners in educational reform, and are typically seen as obstacles in districts' efforts to improve schools. In a meeting with governors, former secretary of education Rod Paige famously called the 2.7-million

member National Education Association, the nation's largest teachers' union, a "terrorist organization" (Toppo, 2004). Though Paige quickly recanted his poor choice of words, his expression captured a view that suggested that union involvement was not associated with successful school reform.

Debates over the Value of Unions. Recent researchers have noted that collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) between districts and teachers unions complicate school reform, as these documents are complex and unwieldy and constrain school-site autonomy (Price, 2009). Others have gone further and argued and shown empirically that the presence of CBAs diminishes productivity and wastefully redirects resources away from student learning (Eberts & Stone, 1984) and, worse, negatively impacts minority student achievement (Milkman, 1997). Terry Moe (2009) replaced the typical dummy variables and proxies for union involvement used in prior studies, and instead examined 371 CBAs in California, coded for elements he thought would have an impact on student achievement, such as teachers' rights to keep an assignment in their school, voluntary and involuntary transfer rights, and restrictions on faculty meetings. Thus, Moe attempted to examine the strength of CBAs across the state, and thus measure the association between the level of contract restrictions and student achievement. California is an apt state in which to conduct such a study, because its diversity makes it a good proxy for the nation. Moe found that larger districts tend to have more restrictive contracts, and collective bargaining appears to be strongly negatively associated with student achievement gains. In general, Moe found that the more restrictive the agreement, the poorer the performance of students. Among larger districts in the state, collective bargaining seems to have more negative effects for high-minority schools in particular. Moe argues that this

concentration of effects on large, urban district is especially problematic, given the challenges these districts already face.

In response to Moe's charges, Strunk (2011) rebutted by re-examining the same California achievement data and CBAs and arriving at a more nuanced understanding of the complex role teachers unions and CBAs play in the allocation of district resources. Strunk re-coded the CBAs using revised, research-based criteria (less likely to be biased than Moe's selection) linked to student achievement, and added an analysis of how districts with strong CBAs allocated their fiscal resources. Under Moe's theoretical framework, districts with powerful unions focused undue attention and resources on teachers' needs, at the expense of student learning and resources for students. Yet Strunk found the opposite to be true: Districts with strong CBAs tended to waste few resources on non-instructional items or school board vendettas.

Further, Stunk found that more restrictive contracts were not necessarily associated with higher pay, though unionized teachers tend to make 5-10% more than nonunionized teachers. Districts with strong CBAs tend to waste less, and spend more on instruction-related services like training and professional development. Strunk notes that higher restriction contracts are associated negatively with student achievement in some instances, but it is unclear which way the causal arrow runs; in other words, it is unclear whether strong CBAs are written when grueling teaching conditions demand increased safeguards, or if the onerous restrictions placed on teachers limit their ability to support marginalized student populations.

Union Involvement in Reform. Occasionally unions are involved directly with school reform efforts, but with varying degrees of success. Often these efforts are small

and localized, and thus not typically addressed in the research literature. However, the ten-year saga of the Chicago Teachers Union from 1995 to 2005 captures many of the complexities and challenges of unions' engagement (or intentional disengagement) with school reform. Bruno's case study (2007) describes the challenges of union involvement and offers glimpses of what might happen with engaged union leadership.

In 1995, the mayor of Chicago orchestrated a takeover of the entire Chicago Public Schools (CPS) system, implementing a wide range of reforms, while the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) stood aside. A series of punitive mandates were imposed on teachers, such as "re-engineering" failing schools and involving teachers in identifying low-performing colleagues for removal. The CPS had been criticized for years, and a series of budget shortfalls and legislative reforms compromised the CTU's position at the bargaining table. Calls were made to end teacher tenure and impose merit pay systems, which the union had previously challenged. Six years after the 1995 takeover, a leadership change in the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) promised a new, more representational design that would increase teachers' responsibilities and ability to win back contract rights and professionalize teaching. The new union president in 2001 ran on a platform counter to her predecessor, promising to bring teachers' perspectives to the forefront of school reform in Chicago, and won.

Subsequently, the union leadership worked with a local public relations firm to solicit teachers' input through surveys and to run a series of symposia about their findings. The results revealed that many CPS teachers had left the system for careers in outlying school districts, with as many as 39% of all teachers employed at the start of the change (1995) having left the system within four years. Teachers attributed their short

tenure to behavior and discipline problems with students, lack of genuine administrative support, lack of power to make changes, large class sizes, and the poor condition of facilities. The CTU called for teacher evaluation of principals, an unprecedented and highly controversial step. The new union president was unseated after one term, as a result of teachers' concerns about rising healthcare costs, and their selection of a candidate with a back-to-basics approach to union leadership. The Chicago case study highlights the complexities for unions engaging in school reform efforts directly. Despite clear goals and objectives for the reform and some early successes, external conditions undid much of the union's work. The short timeline of the election cycle further hampers the work, with leadership changes and policy reorientation becoming constant features.

Other union reformers have taken the same stance as the CTU leadership during the short reform years, arguing that teachers' unions ought to be more proactive in setting the policy agenda for school reform. Adam Urbanski, director of the Teacher Union Reform Network (TURN) and former Rochester, NY teacher and union leader, has advocated for teacher union involvement in various teacher compensation and professionalism goals (Urbanski & Erskine, 2000; Urbanski, 2003). TURN includes affiliates of the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association, and argues that quality instruction can be reinforced by new approaches to teacher compensation, especially if teachers are paid a professional rate. The organization argues that teachers should be partners in school reform, and that the culture of labor/management in education community should be shifted from the traditionally polarized roles and adversarial relationships to one of shared responsibility by using "thin" contracts, in which each school might have contractual provisions that are different

from other schools, negotiated to meet the specific needs of each school. This contract

negotiating would function differently from the current win-lose dynamics common in

labor negotiations; teachers' unions and districts would meet in an ongoing fashion,

regularly updating the "living contracts" based on mutually agreed upon goals. Further,

Urbanski advocates for three types of compensation: school performance award

programs, for school-level changes in student achievement, compensation for National

Board for Professional Teaching Standards, and knowledge- and skills-based pay, such as

for masters' and doctoral degrees.

Urbanski cites his own Rochester, NY experience and that of Westerly, RI in

creating "living contracts," but a related, and more common, example are the Boston pilot

school's Elect-to-Work Agreements (EWA), which allows for local amendments to the

contract for each pilot school (Urbansksi does not address EWAs directly in his writing).

In an *EdWeek* editorial (2006), Dan French, director of the Center for Collaborative

Education (CCE) discussed the critical role the EWA plays in helping shape the pilots.

French, a former pilot principal himself, argues that the alternate contract and the EWA

allowed pilot schools to implement various innovations, such as smaller student-loads

and alternate schedules, that would have been difficult to do in larger schools or under a

heavier contract. The school-based innovations have impacted district operations, and

French notes the Superintendent's decision to re-open four large high schools as pilot

complexes.

To be successful in engaging in school reform work, teachers unions must be able

to extend the reform work beyond a single election cycle, as the Chicago case study

demonstrates. Union leadership must have clear goals for the reform and its impact on

teachers, and contracts must be flexible and alterable in order to implement the reform work at the school sites.

Third-Party Organizations

Researchers have paid scant attention to the role of third-party organizations in school reform. One form of involvement has been the diverse provider model of school reform (Wong, 2011), in which non-profit organizations have partnered with urban school districts and assumed management responsibility for clusters of schools. Examples range from converting traditional public schools to charter under a charter management organization (CMO) to non-profits simply providing professional development services and instructional coaches. Some educational management organizations (EMOs) adopt a middle ground, formally assuming operational leadership of some aspects of schools, but maintaining the schools' district and union involvement. The diverse provider model has met with mixed success, and is typically employed in districts seeking to decentralize operational oversight.

The Center for Collaborative Education serves an important, though limited, role as an educational management organization (French, 2001). French discusses the emergence of CCE in response to pilot school leaders' experiences: When pilots launched, no one expected that their staffs would need training in how to set up governing councils, write bylaws, draft EWAs, etc., and, to make matters worse, pilots received many discouraging responses from the central office for their proposed innovations. French characterized the early years of the pilots as "islands of educational innovation, separate from one another and from the larger district" (p. 5). Thus, the CCE was launched and initiated the Boston Pilot Network to advocate, facilitate, coach, and

research and evaluate the pilots as an independent third-party organization. One early effort was to advocate for equitable lump sum per-pupil budgeting, because several pilots were receiving comparatively inequitable budgets. CCE developed a district committee that reviews district policies and removes barriers, small and large, for pilots, effectively serving to both bridge and buffer for the network of pilots.

The CCE provides an important role for pilot school leaders, connecting school leadership with support, and sometimes advocating on behalf of schools and leaders. In the case of the Boston pilot schools, CCE provides a critical role in sustaining a network of pilot schools, supporting the reform (French, 2001). In addition to the district and union, third-party organizations may play a critical role in pilot school development.

Lead-Teachers and Distributed Leadership and Pilot Schools

Pilot schools are fundamentally different from charter schools in the context in which they work and in the way in which teachers formally assume additional responsibilities beyond the usual role of classroom teachers, through the Elect-to-Work Agreement (EWA). Pilot school teachers' leadership roles and the schools' distributed leadership models shape our understanding of the working conditions in these schools; we must understand the operation of the school through the eyes of multiple formal and informal leaders. Pilot school lead-teachers assume a level teacher leadership duties that would be unexpected in a traditional public school, though the experiences of teachers in these roles has received minimal attention.

The concept of distributed leadership encourages studying leaders beyond those in traditional roles of leadership (Spillane, 2009). The framework recognizes that individuals beyond the formal roles of leadership may make leadership and management

decisions, but the focus is not on *who*, but *how* these decisions and actions occur. Pilot school lead-teachers operate as leaders outside of traditional leadership roles, and their role is often to help distribute leadership among the entire organization. Pilot schools may be best understood by understanding the roles of teacher leaders, the distribution of leadership within schools, and how this arrangement may lead to improved student outcomes and increase staff self-efficacy.

Teacher Leadership

Michael Fullan (2003) called for more opportunities for school leadership from within schools in order to sustain teachers throughout their careers and to deal with the challenges of changing school cultures into collaborative professional learning communities. Classroom teachers must be the ones to fill these leadership roles, and this notion of teacher leadership has evolved and developed over last two decade. Pounder (2006) described the waves of teacher leadership over the years, from the first wave of classroom teachers with nominal leadership roles (such as department chairs), to the second wave of teaches with instructional leadership (but whose work was stuck in traditional hierarchical organizations), to the third, and current wave of understanding. The third wave emphasizes teacher leadership as a process rather than a position, and that teacher leaders possess many of the traits of transformational leaders while remaining effective instructors.

Understanding teacher leadership as a process instead of a position is challenging, because it requires examination of a set of behaviors and characteristics, rather than set duties. Some of the traits of teacher leaders have become identified as we move beyond the view of teacher leadership as simply leadership outside of the classroom (Beachum &

44

Dentith, 2004). Angelle and Schmid (2007) identified five traits common in 64

administrators' and teachers' perceptions of the identities of teacher leaders at 11 school

sites (ranging from elementary to high school). They identified the roles of:

- decision-maker (the ones that the principal entrusts),

- educational role model (based on personal characteristics and classroom

  expertise),

- positional designee (liaison between administration and faculty),

- supra-practitioner (committing extra hours and going above and beyond the

  classroom responsibilities), and

- visionary (forward looking, for the entire school).

These teacher leaders in Angelle and Schmid's study were easily identified by all

interviewed staff members, suggesting that the focus on the process of teacher leadership

had some effect on formalizing the position within the school.

Distributing leadership among the school via teacher leadership can contribute to

profound effects on all staff members. In a quantitative analysis of 1522 teacher surveys,

Hulpia, Devos and van Keer (2010) found that cooperative leadership, participative

decision-making, and distribution of leadership had a significant positive impact on

teachers' organizational commitment, contributing to teachers' willingness to take on

additional tasks and responsibilities. Kaniuka (2012) reported similar findings: that

reform models have the potential to impact teachers' beliefs and self-efficacy through

their interactions with colleagues in a distributed leadership environment. However, these

changes require formal leadership changes as well, because the position of the principal

must change from that of lead decision-maker to that of facilitator, organizer, and staff capacity-builder (Harris, 2007).

Forms of Distributed Leadership in the Field

Spillane (2009) defines leadership as a practice of leading and managing, which is fundamentally about interactions. As such, various studies have attempted to understand distributed leadership through different interactions, such as by examining the formal organization of schools, examining teachers' interactions, or understanding teachers' perceptions of the distribution of leadership.

Teacher Collaboration. Researchers have investigated the instances in which distributed leadership can be observed in the dynamics of teachers' collaboration. In a study of two teacher teams in one public school over one semester, Paredes Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, and Myers (2007) found that purpose, autonomy, and patterns of discourse emerged as constructs that might inform our understanding of collaborative leadership. In a summary of current literature on the effects of distributed leadership, some of the same authors offered *reciprocal peer influence* (the effect that colleagues' interactions have on teachers within a group) as a model for understanding the mechanisms of distributing leadership (Watson & Paredes Scribner, 2007), as an attempt to capture the process by which the collective agency of organizational members is transformed into organizational structure.

Another study examined the processes that diffuse leadership within and across schools, and the effect that these processes call on teachers to assume different responsibilities beyond the classroom (Smylie, Mayrowetz, Murphy, & Louis, 2007). The results of this three-year longitudinal comparative case study of six secondary schools in

two east coast states helped develop a theory about the important role trust plays in developing structures for distributed leadership. The resulting changes in work affected not only teachers, but affected how administrators interacted and supported teachers in these new roles. The researchers described a model in which structural and embedded job characteristics were essential to understanding the role of distributed leadership in the workplace. They further theorized about the role that trust might play in developing distributed leadership, because the presence of strong teacher-teacher trust would result in embedding mechanisms for diffusing leadership into the daily practices of teachers, impact teachers' relationships with the work, and affect the outcomes of their work. Effectively, trust mediates the experiences of individuals, ultimately becoming a dynamic and self-reinforcing relationship.

Impact on Student Achievement. While distributed leadership has received much attention in recent years, fewer studies—particularly early on in the flurry of interest—have linked the diffusion of leadership activity to student achievement (Harris, 2004). More recent studies have begun drawing connections. One study examined the importance of professional collaboration and the role of teacher leadership is through the mechanism of peer influence. Teacher-teacher collaboration has been shown to have a greater effect on teachers' instructional decisions and student achievement than does principals' influence (Supovitz, Sirinides, & May, 2010). In a sample of 52 schools (30 elementary, 10 middle, 8 high, and 4 specialty schools, with 58% of students qualifying for free- or reduced-price lunch), Supovitz, Sirinides, and May examined a subset of 11,397 students and 721 teachers at 38 schools for whom they could make a student-teacher link. There, they measured seven areas of school climate and teaching practice

and one related to change in instructional practice and applied multilevel structural modeling to attempt to understand how the climate for teachers might affect student achievement. Peer influence of teachers on teachers was greater than the effect of principals on teachers, as measured by changes in English/Language Arts teaching strategies and student achievement in ELA. They argued that the principals' role was to set the mission and goals, encourage trust and collaboration, and actively support instruction.

In one, four-year study of 192 elementary schools in one state in the US, Hallinger and Heck (2010) examined the latent effects of collaborative leadership on educational outcomes for 3rd through 5th grade students. Structural equation modeling demonstrated that collaborative leadership indirectly improved student achievement by contributing directly to the academic capacity of schools. Researchers surveying 1,680 teachers in elementary and secondary schools in Ontario, Canada found that high levels of teachers' academic optimism were positively and significantly associated with planned approaches to leadership distribution, and conversely, low levels of academic optimism were negatively and significantly associated with unplanned and unaligned approaches to leadership distribution (Mascall, Leithwood, Straus & Sacks, 2008). Distributed leadership can support the development of individual and teachers' collective efficacy (Olivier & Hipp, 2006). In a study examining the reciprocal relationship between leadership capacity and collective efficacy in a K-8 school in the South, researchers examined survey data and student achievement data and found significant positive correlations among measured scales on leadership capacity, collective efficacy, and professional learning community dimensions.

Limits to Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership has become a popular topic in education research lately, but multiple authors offer caution in how the term is used and examined (Mayrowetz, 2008; Gronn, 2008). A distributed leadership perspective recognizes that in organizations, multiple individuals—in both formal and informal positions of leadership—are leaders, and that many leadership activities are shared within the organization (Harris & Spillane, 2008). Although intentionally distributing leadership may be essential to reconfiguring and redesigning systems, the perspective in and of itself may not explain the reorganization, but that "it may be that other systems changes in school are not possible without diffusing leadership throughout the organization" (p. 31). Thus, distributed leadership can serve as an analytical frame for understanding the organization and impact of pilot schools' expectations for staff members and the subsequent impacts that distributing leadership has on all staff members' work.

In a synthesis of current literature of distributed leadership, examining, comparing and summarizing empirical evidence in the field, Harris (2008) cautioned that distributing leadership can have a positive impact on organizational development and change, though diffusing leadership inevitably changes the structure and culture of an organization, and that may actually result in unintended backlash and consequences, such as confusion over roles and additional duties. She notes that focusing work and leadership around tasks, rather than positions, may help foster distributing leadership, but individual schools' cultures, structures, and complexities may thwart efforts for change. She suggests that current leaders must first create cultural changes and opportunities for structural changes prior to implementing a shift toward a flatter, and less hierarchical, leadership structure.

Summary

The 20-year history of charter schools offers a glimpse of what school deregulation can achieve, or fail to achieve. The proliferation of charter schools since the early 1990s is a testament to the desire for innovation in public education, but the limited performance gains of charter schools suggests that deregulation alone is note enough to spur innovation and increase student achievement. While some charter schools make use of their autonomy to innovate and outperform their traditional public school peers, the evidence suggests that most do not do either. Further inquiry into the inner machinations of school reform is needed to fully understand why some deregulated schools improve conditions for teaching and learning while others do not.

Pilot schools potentially offer a powerful alternative to traditional public schools and charter schools. Unshackled from district bureaucracies, pilot schools operate with many of the same freedoms and responsibilities as charter schools, yet remain as local, unionized district schools. The very nature of the teacher-led design of pilot schools develops a distributed leadership model, in which classroom teachers assume responsibilities beyond the roll of traditional teachers. The pilot school reform model began in Boston, MA, and it is unique, spurring innovation by empowering educators to create successful academic programs within the existing public school system. Instead of siphoning off resources and building a parallel academic system as charters do, pilot schools have the potential to breed innovation and reform from within the district, and to serve as models for urban school reform. Multiple districts in the nation have taken notice of this reform, modeling it outright or embedding teacher-led reform in their contracts.

Pilot schools are fundamentally different from charter schools and traditional public schools: Teachers work on an alternate contract and must sign an Election-to-Work Agreement, which lays out expectations and duties for teachers working in these schools. The EWA effectively diffuses leadership responsibilities throughout the organization, creating a flatter hierarchy and empowering teachers with increased school-level responsibilities. This distribution of leadership may create more democratic school structures, and research suggests that these elements may indirectly contribute to improved student achievement outcomes.

Pilot school teacher-leaders are at the cusp of innovative reform in large, urban districts. They walk a fine line, simultaneously working with their district and union officials while seeking freedom from these bureaucracies. In order to understand the potential viability and impact of this reform model, pilot school leaders' voices are central. Their lived experiences are vital to understanding the challenges of this model, as well as understanding how districts, unions, and third-party organizations may support or hinder their work. In the next chapter, I will explain my research methodology to explore these teacher-leaders' experiences.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Introduction

Pilot school leaders' voices are central to understanding how pilot schools function within large, urban school districts. Similar to charter schools, pilot schools are given freedom from bureaucratic regulations, but unlike charters, pilot schools remain as district schools. Tasked with creating and launching innovative small schools, pilot school principals and lead-teachers must manage the complex dynamics of multiple institutions in order to impact conditions for teaching and learning, as well as make decisions to improve conditions for teaching and learning within their schools. This study seeks to understand the complexities of this work through these leaders' experiences.

Research Tradition

This is a qualitative case study that draws on principles from institutional ethnographic studies. As a case study, this research study focuses on an in-depth description and analysis of a particular, bounded system (Merriam, 2009), which, in this instance, are the pilot schools, the district, union, and related outside organizations. At the time of this study, there were fewer than 40 pilot schools in Los Angeles Unified School District, the oldest of which was entering its sixth year. This study is a multi-site, heuristic case study, because it intends to illuminate our understanding of a specific experience of school leaders (Merriam, 2009), in their attempts to innovate using the autonomies of the pilot school model.

This case study draws its design from institutional ethnographies. Ethnographies focus on groups' experiences and processes, and institutional ethnographies shift that focus to understanding institutions via the experiences of the individuals who interact with those institutions (Creswell, 1996). As ethnographer, I examined the language and experiences of the group under study, attempting to remain holistic and to understand pilot school leaders' experiences within the contexts in which they arise. Because institutional ethnographies attempt to understand the experience of working with an institution through the lived experiences of the people whose lives are affected by it, I take the stance of assuming that participants in the study are the knowers, rather than the objects of study (Smith, 2007); that is, institutional ethnographies attempt to understand the experience of working with an institution through the lived experiences of the people whose lives are affected by it.

The goal of an institutional ethnography is to explore the relations that are coordinated through work with the institution, emphasizing social relations. Because this approach explores the experiences of groups of individuals typically marginalized by organizations and social structures, it is historically a feminist one (Smith, 2005). Marginalized groups' voices are often not heard, but their experiences provide insights into the functions and culture of the larger systems. Pilot school lead-teachers are often caught in a challenging niche of creating controversies with their districts and unions. Further, their leadership positions are often informal, making their work even more challenging. Although these leaders are often at the cusp of reform efforts in the district, they are also working at the very margins of the organization as well, making the institutional ethnography an apt choice.

One of the key recognitions of institutional ethnographies is that texts are integral part of human interaction, and often shape our interactions with institutions and one another. Institutional ethnographies often center on workplace texts, as these documents often define peoples' interactions and relations (Smith, 2007). I am concerned with school leaders' experiences with pilot school autonomies, as outlined in the LAUSD/United Teachers Los Angeles Pilot Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and contract. Pilot school leaders' attempts to improve their schools' practices are defined and shaped by the MOU, and the discourse around altering the document suggests institutional recognition of this powerful document. Further, each school drafts an Election-to-Work Agreement (EWA) that specifies local job responsibilities, and this document is central to pilot school operations and culture.

The result of an institutional ethnography is an account of how the institutional processes work, mapping the unseen dynamics of interaction among people and institutions (Smith, 2007). By examining the experience of pilot school leaders as they attempt to improve the conditions for teaching and learning in their schools, the goal is to better understand the dynamics of conducting this work within a large, public education bureaucracy. Because pilot school teachers remain unionized and the schools remains within the district, pilot school autonomies are mediated by the pilot school leaders' work with the institutions that permit their existence. Pilot school leaders' voices are central to understanding the complexities of this work.

Research Setting and Context

This study focused on the experiences of school leaders in five LAUSD pilot schools. The district's student population is primarily Hispanic, with large African

American, Asian American, and Filipino populations. Approximately 70% of students in the district qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, a measure commonly used as a proxy for poverty. The participants' in this study worked at schools that vary in their exact demographics, but generally reflect the diversity of the larger district. All of the schools included in this study are Title 1 schools (meaning that 70% or more of students qualify for free or reduced price lunch). Pilot schools typically enroll between 300 and 500 students each, with staffs of 12 or more teachers, one principal, a counselor, a coordinator (who oversees Title 1 programs, but often serves informally as an assistant administrator), and various aides and clerks. Taken as a whole, the 32 pilots represent about 2 percent of the entire district in terms of enrollment at the time of this study. Their number has tripled in the last few years, and interest in this model continues to grow. Interest exceeded the ten schools permitted by the initial pilot MOU, and in December 2009 the union authorized an expansion to a total of 32 pilots.

Site Selection Strategy

I employed a mixed sampling method in selecting sites for this study, selecting "typical" sites that fit various criteria (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Because pilot schools launched in multiple Local Districts based on geographic boundaries, I sought geographic diversity in my sampling. While the majority of pilots operate in one district, approximately 25% of pilots operate in other Local Districts. I sought sites from multiple Local Districts to test the assumption that the experience of working with district administration from different Local Districts might be important. Most pilots operate on shared campuses with multiple other schools, so I sought pilot schools from these shared campuses to identify common themes. Third, I sought pilots in which members of the

original design team remained on the staff of the school, in order to understand how their experiences in pilot schools differed from their experiences in traditional public schools. Further, I limited this inquiry to high school pilots, because the number of elementary and middle school pilot schools at the time of this study was rather small (24 of the 32 pilots were high schools). Finally, I identified schools in a range of years of operation, to provide insights into any common experiences leaders faced as their school programs developed. These criteria provided the basis for an in-depth examination of these school leaders' experiences with opening and operating pilot schools in the district, and provided enough data to understand the various innovations attempted by these schools. Once I identified potential sites, I sought permission from the principals to conduct research at these school sites, and then began soliciting teacher-leaders from the schools to participate in the research.

In order to gain access to the field, I used my personal relationships and networks to identify and contact individuals who met my criteria at relevant sites. As a teacher deeply involved in this reform work, I have access to a broad network of teachers and individuals involved in union reform and pilot school reform, many of whom I have met or worked with in these endeavors. I have been engaged in union reform work through the union congress, organizing and recruiting teachers to run for office. In my role as a non-profit consultant, I have worked with nine pilot school design teams in their proposal writing processes. I used my contacts to identify appropriate school leaders to interview, employing a snowball or chain sampling strategy (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to identify others.

My access to this network of educators required my careful and deliberate use of my role as a researcher. One long-term outcome of this study may be to inform advocacy efforts around pilot schools, but the immediate goal of this work was to understand the experiences of school leaders as they implement innovative practices in their schools. I had to establish with my contacts that my role is not as an advocate in this research, though their participation in my study might contribute to advocacy in the field. This stance supported my efforts to include participants as the on-the-ground experts of the experience of opening and operating pilot schools, consistent with my institutional ethnographic research tradition and my research questions.

Research Sample and Data Sources

For this study, I interviewed pilot school leaders regarding their experiences; examined relevant work documents closely tied to pilot school development and operations; and interviewed pilot teachers and principals about meetings, activities, and gatherings involving pilot school leaders. Documents such as pilot school proposals, Public School Choice applications, Election-to-Work Agreements, and pilot governance documents offered insight into the complexities of working with the central office in this field of small school reform and served to help generate specific interview questions. More importantly, I interviewed school leaders who work in pilot schools. "School leaders" is loosely defined (Spillane & Healey, 2010) as those individuals in a school whose deliberate actions influence others' actions, regardless of their formal position of leadership. I interviewed teachers and principals of pilot schools, after first receiving permission from the principal to conduct research at the school site.

I used a combination of sampling methods to collect a sample of individuals appropriate for this study: criteria sampling and chain sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994). First, individuals had to meet various criteria, such as (1) holding leadership roles in the school beyond regular teaching duties; (2) teaching experience at both pilot and non-pilot schools, in order to share the differences in experiences between these two models; and preferably (3) experience in the development and early implementation of the pilot school. I intentionally stratified the sample to include classroom teachers and principals. For each school site that I used in this study, I interviewed between one and four individuals, using the initial informant as a contact to interview others at the school. In order to identify these initial informants, I first used my network of contacts to identify individuals at the school sites and conduct brief conversations (via phone or email) to identify potential participants, including, potentially, my initial contacts. (See Appendix A for draft email solicitation.)

Subsequently, I used a chain sampling method to identify other individuals at these sites and others to interview, and asked my contacts to assist in recruiting participants. Being a teacher involved in the pilot reform work in the district, contacting and accessing fellow teachers for this study end up being a straightforward endeavor. This combination of strategies yielded a group of individuals with a range of experiences and knowledge of working with the district in implementing various aspects of their pilot schools. Participants in this study were treated as what Spradley (1979) calls informants; that is, they are engaged to "speak in their own language (p. 25)" so that the researcher can "learn to use the native language in the way informants do." I used informants to identify and contact other leaders to interview, contributing to identifying individuals

with expertise in the field, which is consistent with the institutional ethnographer's stance of treating the participants as the knowers in the field.

As a group, participants in this study were current teachers and principals who had experienced dissatisfaction and disenfranchisement with the district, and sought to employ a new model for improving conditions for teaching and learning. Participants each had several years of prior teaching experience in LAUSD. These individuals had participated in writing application proposals, either for a school in the downtown area or through the Public School Choice process. As such, these leaders had had a variety of experiences and interactions with the district, union, and other aspects of the public educational system.

The final research sample consisted of 17 lead-teachers and principals from eight different school sites. I interviewed multiple individuals at each of five sites, and one individual each at the remaining sites. My initial methodology plan had been to conduct case studies of five target sites, with three to five interviews per site, and to report the findings in the form of cases studies on the five sites. After conducting all interviews at the first two school sites in this fashion, I quickly realized that I was answering my research questions with the first or second interview and that case study details would likely reveal my participants' identities. I altered my methodology mid-stream, adding interviews with principals and lead-teachers at additional sites, and forgoing case studies in reporting the findings.

Because the field of schools and individuals involved in pilot schools is relatively small, avoiding identification was a clear ethical concern in this study. Participants were informed at the outset that one of the aims of this study was to inform practice and to

identify areas for advocacy, and that multiple steps would be taken to hide their individual identities and schools. My role as a pilot school teacher only added to this potential challenge: As an insider, I had exceptional access to information regarding pilot schools and the leaders' experiences, and had to be mindful of how I used this access during participant selection and ongoing field relations to avoid identifying participants.

Participants were informed of the efforts to protect their identities both in the informed consent document and in my explanation of it, which were approved through both the Institutional Review Boards of CSU Northridge and LAUSD. Because the exact experiences of the pilot school leaders would have revealed their identities to some in the field, I undertook several strategies to maintain participants' anonymity. First, I altered names of participants and their colleagues. Second, I removed identifying details about schools, such as the theme of their school and even the number and types of schools sharing a campus. Geographic identifiers, such as the location of a school in the city and participants' references to the direction of the central office from their work site, were removed. The final analysis consisted of themes that emerged from multiple sites and individuals, thus lessening the chance of individual identity revelation in this study. Thus, individuals' identities were be obfuscated in the analysis process, which highlight the shared challenges and supports, rather than the individual experiences of leaders in the pilot reform movement.

Data Collection Instruments

For this study, I relied on semi-structured interviews to gather data. Semi-structured interviews allow for a wide range of participant responses, yet are guided by a few broad questions (Bernard, 1994). Semi-structured interviews are formal interviews,

but allowed my informants to lead and share what experiences mattered most in relation to my research questions. An effective semi-structured interview allows the informant to share information related to the researcher's question, with the researcher probing for specificity and elaboration of relevant concepts. The first questions in the semi-structured interview protocol were intentionally broad, and generally reflective of my research questions. The first interview questions were framed around the pilot school autonomies, in order to gather a sense of how pilot school leaders have attempted to improve conditions for teaching and learning at their sites by using the autonomies, and to understand what challenges and supports they have experienced in these efforts. The six autonomies provided a frame for the research and the interview questions, and I probed on each of these to understand the innovation attempts and the experiences with the institution. The next interview questions more directly inquired about the experiences of working with the district, union, and related organizations, in order to better understand the complexities of attempting innovation within a large bureaucracy. (See Appendix B for interview protocol.)

Data Collection

I conducted 17 individual, audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews with school leaders in the summer and fall of 2012, one interview per participant. Interviews lasted approximately 40 minutes, and were audio recorded and transcribed. Semi-structured interviews aligned with my goal of understanding participants' experiences with the institutions with which they interact. Interviewees' experiences with the institutions elicited a wide range of responses. As a result, interviews generated a variety of experiences and perspectives on common phenomena, and follow-up conversations with

half of the participants helped to fully understand and confirm ideas that emerge in the interviews. These follow-up member checks were typically conversations that occurred in the field in the natural course of my collaboration on pilot school reform work, and helped confirm and clarify topics discussed in interviews. Early interviews identified key events and opportunities for subsequent data collection, and follow-up interviews, emails, and phone calls were used to track leaders' experiences with these events. I extended data collection over several months, allowing for initial interviews to identify observation opportunities and additional interviews and follow-up questions.

Throughout the study period, I examined documents pertaining to pilot schools, such as Election-to-Work Agreements, school plans, and school-based documents (such as bell schedules, course offerings, etc.). As I began my site selection, I gathered these documents and began examining them for data relevant to my research questions, but found that the documents were most useful in establishing a context for the interviews and for developing the probing and follow-up questions I asked in my interviews with school leaders.

Data Analysis

The methods and timeframes described are consistent with the institutional ethnographer's stance of understanding the institution through the lens of the informants. These data collection procedures allowed me to observe and understand the experiences of school leaders of multiple schools over the period of several months, with the goal of catching multiple observations through interviews. Further, these procedures offered multiple opportunities for insight into understanding my research questions, because the

nature of the experiences between school leaders and the school district is dynamic and ongoing. Data analysis procedures helped capture the complexities of these interactions.

Preliminary Data Analysis

Data from this study, in the form of transcribed interviews and field notes from my interactions with pilot school leaders, were coded, analyzed, and interpreted to help answer the research questions. I catalogued documents, such as EWAs and school plans, and consulted these as reference materials, but they were not used directly as data in the study; rather, participants' perception of these documents and their significance, as discussed in interviews, became the basis for the data analysis.

I transcribed early interviews and relied on a transcription service for the remainder. Transcriptions were denaturalized, with unnecessary utterances omitted, in order to focus more on the details of the experiences and not their speech patterns. I re-read the interview transcriptions while listening to audio recordings, in order to add comments and notes not picked up in the transcription and make minor corrections.

I coded transcripts for preliminary themes, which I later used in analysis. Transcripts were loaded into Google spreadsheets, with each line identified by the speaker (the participant or me) and numbered. In a subsequent column, I applied preliminary *a priori* codes, coding for responses that connected to the six pilot school autonomies (budget, governance, staffing, professional development, scheduling, and curriculum and assessment), as well as topics related to distributed leadership. (See Appendix C for a list of interview codes.)

Emergent themes appeared as informants shared perspectives on their pilot school experiences that were somewhat different from what the research suggested, or were

more significant for the informant than I had anticipated. These emergent themes were applied in a subsequent column in the spreadsheet, and the codes were added to a growing list of *a priori* and emergent theme codes. I then revisited earlier transcripts to look for instances of the emergent themes that I might have missed. (An example of this phase of the analysis is in Appendix D.) During this phase of the analysis, informal member checks proved useful, as colleagues in the field had offered valuable insights into the trends and themes in the pilot school reform work.

Coding the data with these initial codes aided in the ongoing data collection process by identifying follow-up questions, as well as allowing for additional emerging concepts, formulating further questions, and summarizing key findings (Glesne, 2011). Throughout this process, I occasionally shared my interpretation of these findings with experts in the field, often through informal discussions. These peer reviews helped to summarize and clarify the key issues and trends I was observing in the preliminary data analysis. This process segued into thematic data analysis, once data collection and preliminary analysis were complete.

Thematic Interpretation

Once I completed data collection and preliminary analysis, I began thematic data analysis and interpretation by sorting the interviewees' comments by theme. To do this, I combined all of the transcripts into one, lengthy spreadsheet "meta-transcript" and then selected related themes to examine. I looked for secondary themes across school sites, synthesizing the original coded interviews to identify trends and patterns that were common or uncommon. Although each school leader's experiences differed, common

themes emerged among leaders and schools. (An example of this phase of the analysis is in Appendix E.)

I pulled relevant quotes and compiling these in separate documents, sorting them and arranging them to capture the informants' stories and draw comparisons among them. I then began creating extensive written descriptions of each preliminary theme, compiling related codes to understand the context and experiences of school leaders. As I completed this analysis, sorting the transcripts by the last and relatively uncommon themes, I began seeing the same quotes repeatedly, indicating that my preliminary coding process had allowed me to capture all of the interview data relevant to answering my research questions. I used these compiled quotes as the basis for Chapter 4, summarizing and linking pilot school leaders' experiences to start answering my research questions.

These lengthy descriptions were an early attempt to contextualize and understand the challenges and supports pilot school leaders have experienced, which I then used to more generally understand the experiences of leaders in the context of pilot school reform. From there, I interpreted the data and looked for significant relationships and experiences, distilling the data to the key findings and trends. This led to re-organizing the content around these key findings and trends, rather than simply reporting the findings by *a priori* topics. This synthesis of the collected data yielded deeper understanding pilot school leaders' experiences, and is reported in Chapter 4.

Timeline

This data collection and analysis process was consistent with the institutional ethnographer's stance of understanding the institution through the lived experience of individuals working with that institution, especially by spending significant time in the

field collecting data. I began preliminary data analysis in late summer 2012, shortly after initiating data collection. Data collection continued over six months, and I completed data analysis in early 2013, and begin thematic data analysis and interpretation at that time.

Roles of the Researcher

I teach in a pilot school, and the experiences of teacher-leaders like me are the very subject of this study. The research setting under study is one in which I am deeply invested as a teacher, educational activist, union reformer, school designer, and researcher. I have advocated for pilot schools as a classroom teacher; as a member of the teachers' union House of Representatives, the union's governing congress; a member of the Pilot School Steering Committee, which oversees new pilot school approvals; and as an author of on multiple pilot school plans. I am deeply involved as a participant in this field, and had to be attentive to the biases I could introduce as a researcher in this context. I am hopeful for the success of this reform movement professionally, and this study seeks to inform that optimism.

My multiple roles as an educator and activist have positioned me to be in an adversarial role at times, in which I defended and lobbied on behalf of teachers and pilots. My biases as a researcher, if left unchecked, have the potential unintentional effect of skewing the design, collection, and even analysis of the data in this study. As an educator, I believe in the power of teacher leadership and collaboration to improve the quality of public schools, and I believe that public school reform must embrace changes at the classroom level, a perspective which potentially limits my sense of what matters in collected data. I am thus inclined to presume positive intentions in teachers' work and assume that the machinations of the bureaucracy of the teachers' union and the central

district office are the sources of the challenges teachers face. While I believe that schools have the opportunity and responsibility to provide a high quality education for our students, I also believe that the effects of poverty often mediate the quality of education students receive. As a result, I am inclined to value and focus on teachers' and schools' attempts to improve the quality of outcomes (both academic and nonacademic) for students, rather than their emphasis on improving measures of academic achievement.

Because my research interests stem from my own experiences, I must be mindful to maintain my role as a researcher, not as an advocate. I must also be mindful of my participants' reactions to this inquiry, because our shared interest in this field complicates the research focus of better understanding the challenges they face. The small number of pilot schools, their small size as schools, and the close-knit nature of people within the reform movement already de-privatizes participants' experiences. The convoluted nature of these networks and relationships allowed me great access as a researcher, but my prior knowledge and experience in the field could lead to my presuppositions regarding participants' responses. My role in this field ought to engender honesty in participants' responses; I do not anticipate participants to shade their comments to shield their comments to please me.

I took multiple measures to safeguard against the biases I may introduce in this study. During the data collection phase, I was mindful of including diverse and varied opinions from my participants, and I included participants beyond my network of colleagues. In data analysis, I employed protocols to validate my coding of interview transcripts, so that I did not simply interpret participants' words through my own subjective lens. Throughout the study, I used informal member checks and peer review

with colleagues in the field, which (a) helped me remain grounded in the work, and (b) balanced my understanding of the results of the inquiry with others' understanding. As a member in the field, it is critical that I took steps to ensure that the research did not negatively affect me, and use of member checks and peer reviews allowed me to clear my head and remain engaged in my own work in the classroom, as well as with my work as a researcher.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

The findings are organized around answering the research questions that framed this study. To restate, the research questions are:

What do LAUSD pilot school leaders experience as they use their autonomies to create innovative small schools?

- *How have pilot school leaders attempted to use their autonomies?*

- *What has supported or hindered their use of the autonomies over the life of their school?*

Findings are organized around answering the sub-questions regarding the use of the pilot school autonomies and then the supports and challenges that pilot school leaders have experienced as they utilized their autonomies. First, findings related to how pilot school leaders have used their autonomies are presented. Each of the six autonomies is described first with examples of how pilot leaders have attempted to utilize these autonomies to improve conditions for teaching and learning. For each autonomy, I attempt to map the spectrum of experiences that participants reported, noting where an experience was unusual or rare. These findings ranged from the basic to the profound, and are compared against participants' prior experiences in the district whenever possible in order to clarify how meaningful these experiences might be to the interviewees.

Second, I present the supports and challenges that pilot school leaders have experienced. These findings are clustered around themes related to the sources of

challenge and support, which were often entities with which pilot leaders had interacted. Some of the larger, emergent themes that cut across multiple autonomies are presented here. In particular, the new roles for lead-teachers and principals emerged as themes that explain the impact of the autonomies on pilot schools leaders' work. This phenomenon of these new leadership roles within pilot schools help shape and explain how pilot school leaders have used their autonomies to improve conditions for teaching.

Staffing Autonomy

Various lead-teachers and principals described the importance of being able to select appropriate people for teaching positions at their schools; the notion of finding people who were a "fit" for the school was a recurring theme. As one principal, Robin, discussed this autonomy, she noted that the hiring autonomy is, "very simplistic," in the sense that, "I think there's very special personalities that are able to work in a pilot because it is so hard and because you can't hide." This question of "fit" recurred in virtually every interview in terms of school staffs' selectivity in the hiring process, the expectation that teachers be committed to the mission and vision of the school, and in the instances when pilot school leaders had let go of staff members. Hiring and firing was deeply tied to creating a mission-drive culture in a reciprocal manner. Although principals have the official capacity to hire and fire teachers, most principals relied on teachers in the process.

Teachers from one school in particular described their selectivity in interviewing potential candidates for their teaching staff. The lead-teacher, Milton, discussed how the decision to hire someone was made by a collective, not by any one individual in the school, starting with the question of, "What kind of person do we want?" and developing

70

a profile of the ideal candidate. This attention to the "fit" of an individual against the desired profile of the ideal candidate was carried through the hiring of administrators at this school, as well. Milton explained how he saw the fact that his team had been through multiple rounds of principal interviews as a positive indicator of their use of their staffing autonomy:

> On the surface the fact that we've been through three rounds now, starting our third round actually, and we don't have a principal, sounds like it's been unsuccessful, but the fact of the matter is I think that's the beauty of the autonomy right there, is not to perpetuate the unfilled position but to be highly selective and to be able to call our own shots.

Interviewees discussed the challenges of "firing," or letting teachers go, as well. The difficulties of letting teachers go stemmed from the personal nature of the interactions in the small school. Elizabeth, a new principal, mentioned this difficulty: "We had to let go of a teacher, and it was very difficult for the person who highly recommended her... She fell short from our expectations." During the difficult decision-making process to let go of this teacher, the attention of the staff focused not only the candidate who demonstrated a poor fit, but on the teacher who had recruited her to the school as well. Ronnie, a lead-teacher at another site, described how the quality of instruction mattered the most when letting a teacher go:

> So we recognize that there were certain individuals who weren't working out. And these were people that had been with us since the beginning and one person in particular was a design team member. And things just weren't working out, the

instruction wasn't there, the relationship with students was souring and we

realized we needed to make a change.

The "we" making the staffing change in Ronnie's description consisted of the principal

and a few lead-teachers. In traditional public schools, teachers' voices are marginalized

when it comes to firing and usually hiring. Although teachers are often aware of their

colleagues' successes and challenges in the classroom, their input is rarely solicited in

hiring and firing decisions. Pilot school teachers' experiences with this autonomy points

out a key difference between the institutions of pilot schools.

Speaking about the "fit" of an individual with the school, other interviewees

described the importance of having a unified group that has a sense of common purpose

in their work. Kevin, a lead-teacher at a newer pilot school, likened this importance of

commitment to the mission of the organization to that of other organizations:

It's just like anything, any organization, if you have a great staff then probably it's

going to work because not only are they good at what they do, and they

understand what they do, they're not just good at their job but they're also good at

interacting with people and getting along and changing. So we picked the people,

and they had to understand what our mission was. And they did. And with very

few exceptions we're really happy with staff and that has made this work.

Robin, a principal at another school site, discussed the importance of the mission-driven

culture described by Kevin, but from the perspective of how the small size of the

organization plays a role in the ability to find people who are a good "fit."

One positive impact of staffing autonomy is the effect that many teachers

described about their staff cultures. They described the importance of having a team of

teachers who were fully committed to the goals of their school. As Jeremy, a lead-teacher put it, "I think, for me, that's unique. [. . .] We have like, there's 100% buy-in. Everyone is into it, everyone works. Everyone participates." Another teacher, Dana, at a different site described how every member of her staff wore multiple hats, often teaching outside of their subject area to offer needed classes when the school needed it. This commitment to the school's goals was reaffirmed by Kevin, a lead-teacher at Jeremy's school, as he described how heartened he felt by being part of a team where everyone clearly understood his or her role:

> Even as hard as we work, and we work way too hard, the thing that all of us come back to is it's just refreshing to work with people that have the same concept about how to teach and how to work in a school and how to organize a school as you, and even when it gets hard, you look around the room and you're like, "OK, they have my back." There's no one here who is a slacker or the weakest link. And when you're working hard every day and you know that everybody else is doing the same thing, you can do it.

According to these interviewees, a pilot school status grants staffing autonomy, but the small scale of the schools allows school staff to be selective and purposeful in the hiring and firing process.

Taken as a whole, teachers and principals certainly viewed staffing autonomy as vital to carrying out the mission and vision of their schools. Every single interviewee commented on the importance of staffing autonomy, even if he or she had not been involved directly in the hiring or firing process. The compromises in staffing autonomy (discussed below under Challenges to the Autonomies) were felt hard by these pilot

leaders, probably due to the deep considerations they had made in selecting staff

members and in the vital role each person plays in small schools.

Governance Autonomy

Although federal and state requirements determine the legal authority of school

decision-making, pilot schools are granted some freedoms in how they structure decision-

making bodies and processes in their schools. Pilot schools have some leniency in

developing committees and structures for more meaningfully engaging stakeholders, and

many pilot school leaders exploited these opportunities to bring in student, parent, and

teacher voices, even though this additional layer of input could complicate matters for

school personnel and lead to decisions that the faculty alone might not have selected.

Additionally, pilot school leaders shared ways in which they had balanced decision-

making power between teachers and the principal, often developing these roles over time.

Teachers shared a few ways in which they had utilized their pilot autonomies to

share decision-making between teachers and principals. Traditionally, teachers have

limited say over school matters, and have even less discretion over the ways in which

difficult decisions are made. The ability to include everyone in the conversation emerged

as an important aspect of small-school decision-making, and teachers shared various

strategies for this. One co-lead teacher, Ronnie, described the informal culture of

decision-making at his school, noting that, "I think it starts with informal conversations

people have with each other. We rely on that a lot, the fact that we all do speak with each

other about different issues." This process of keeping up to date with everyone's concerns

and needs outside of a formal structure was mentioned by several interviewees. Ronnie

went on to explain that these individual concerns were then carried towards formal

decisions by others: "As various people are on the decision-making committee, those concerns are then voiced within that committee and aired there, and then we can make informed decisions."

Marla, a lead-teacher at a different site, described how her school intentionally distributed responsibilities for decision-making. She explained how she and her co-lead teachers had explained to their principal how they envisioned dividing responsibility for their school, using a metaphor of different "plates" of responsibility, one for the principal and one for the staff, and how her school handed off authority for different decisions based on whose plate it landed on. In all of the descriptions, this deliberate delineation of decision-making authority effectively pulled power and authority from the principal, placing it formally and informally in the hands of teachers. This mediated and ongoing establishing of roles and routines was typical for newer pilot schools.

Democratic control appeared as a common value among all interviewed teachers and principals, and many expressed dissatisfaction with their prior level of engagement of parents, students, and teachers in school decision-making at their previous, traditional schools. Complex federal and state requirements had stymied efforts at prior, traditional schools to include individuals unfamiliar with the various policies undergirding public school requirements, and Benjamin, a lead-teacher at a newer school, described this new role for parents:

> I love that we've brought in more parents and they actually feel valued. I know when I was at site council meetings at [my former school] and I could just tell that parents were there and they felt pressured to vote—when they saw the teacher raise their hand, that's when they raised their hands. And here the parents have

been very strong in—when we go to make some kind of decision they've questioned us. And we're like, "You have a great point, let's do something different."

Other teachers found ways to more meaningfully include more people in school decisions. Marilyn, a lead teacher at an established pilot school, described how she realized that improving parents' input in school governing council meetings required rethinking agendas and recruiting parents who were willing to participate in this new role. She recognized that the traditional format of the meetings made participation difficult for many parents, and sought to not only invited engaged parents but also reformat the meetings to make them feel more welcome and their voices heard. To do this, she had to prioritize agenda items that required parents' input, often at the expense of agenda items that were more simply procedural or updates. This had the net effect of creating space for parents' to feel their voices were included and heard, elevating their role from simply approving decisions to helping shape them.

Benjamin's principal, Steven, discussed the specific ways in which they had adjusted the numbers of each stakeholder group in the governing council in order to achieve some parity, which suggests that the team had invested heavily in creating a successful council. Changes such as these, which were described in three interviews across other schools, were intended to increase parental and student involvement in major decision-making. One principal described how a change in the school's start time was nixed by the parent vote, despite teacher and student support for the change. A lead-teacher at a new school mentioned using students' language in drafting school learning goals for accreditation and review processes, noting that the students' language and input

were vital to understanding the impact of her team's work. Interestingly, including students and parents in these ways could actually complicate matters for teachers and principals and ultimately shift power away from them. Interviewees were accepting of challenges of these strategies to more meaningfully include all stakeholders in the decision-making processes at their schools, even when that input led the school in unanticipated directions.

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Calendar and Scheduling Autonomy

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Teachers were generally enthusiastic about calendar and scheduling autonomy, which allowed pilot schools to deviate from the district instructional calendar (and start the school year earlier and/or end later) and to create innovative bell schedules with few restrictions, other than state mandates for the number of minutes of instruction. Interviewees shared few negative experiences with this autonomy, and findings fell into two categories related to the mission-driven nature of their schedules and strategies for maximizing time for teaching and learning.

Mission-Driven Scheduling

Pilot school leaders discussed various ways in which they identified their priorities as staffs, and organized their schedule and calendar around meeting those needs, rather than relying on traditional district schedules. Since all of the interviewees had previously worked in LAUSD schools, unsurprisingly their frames of references were the traditional public schools they had worked in previously. A few teachers commented specifically on how they felt about the standard district schedule, and how they felt it was ineffective at meeting their needs. Benjamin, a lead-teacher and design team member,

discussed his team's motivation for moving away from the district-wide Tuesday

professional development schedule:

> It was bonkers to me, [. . .] the Tuesday PD thing at the district level. But
>
> something as simple as, "Why don't we move that to Friday?" made so much
>
> sense to me. And I know it's a simple thing but it means less disruption to your
>
> week.

Two other interviewees described strategies for modifying the district calendar to better

meet their needs, ranging from starting a day early to allow for a longer break between

semesters to adding a few days to the end of the year to allow for a longer spring break.

In contrast to traditional schedule setting, pilot teachers and leaders described how

their school's mission or core values were critical in making scheduling decisions. As

Milton, a lead-teacher put it, "The response, for most of these decisions, always has to

relate back to the vision and the mission of the school." One lead-teacher, Lauren,

described how her school had organized its schedule around an advisory program

designed to change the culture of her school by creating a lasting sense of community

within the school. The intentional and deliberate focus on embedding an advisory

program in the school schedule had the effect of creating a cohesive group of seniors with

a strong sense of community.

Meeting students' diverse needs with a small staff is inherently challenging, and

lead-teachers discussed ways in which they managed the sometimes-competing needs of

students and teachers, finding compromises that worked. Lauren, the lead-teacher who

found her school's advisory program to be a powerful manifestation of their commitment

to personalization, also described how the student-centered schedule was a source of exhaustion for the faculty:

> Our schedule is based on student need and it really is that, Monday and Friday each class is an hour, and Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday are [90-minute] blocks. The teachers have to sacrifice one day where you have no conference period. And in the early days it was like, "Oh, that's OK." But now that I'm teaching 7 classes and 3 preps... That day that I don't have a conference period is unbelievably stressful for me. And I can't—I just can't keep up.

Alternatively, Ronnie, a co-lead teacher at a different site, described how his team found a compromise between teacher exhaustion and students' academic needs by coming up with a rotating, seven-period day after two years with a different bell schedule. Ronnie also explained how his team had planned minimum days after parent conference evenings in order to sustain teachers' and student's energy levels, to which he added that changing the district grading windows was also a tool for improving morale. These examples are emblematic of the impact of making decisions in small, mission-driven organizations, but also of schools where teachers' voices and experiences are honored and valued in the decision-making processes.

Optimizing Time

One clear area of focus for teachers and principals was to create schedules that allowed for recurring professional development, allowing staffs to extend and embed professional collaboration time in the typical workweek. Kevin described how a visit to another pilot school led him to rethink his own pilot school's schedule. After his visit, he demanded additional professional development time during the week for his staff, noting

that operational challenges had previously hedged out discussions of curriculum and student progress during his existing staff professional development time.

Steven, a principal at a different site, described how his team modified their calendar and schedule to make time to analyze student achievement data collaboratively. The staff had agreed to schedule pupil-free days every 10 weeks to analyze student data, ranging from benchmark assessments, state standardized test scores, grades, attendance, suspension rates, and other internal measures utilized by the teachers. To coordinate all of this, one teacher had a few periods off each day to collect and organize the data. That teacher, Benjamin, described how pilot autonomy was essential to their work: "We spent three and a half hours as a team going over data, benchmark data, testing data, grades, every piece of data we could find. We built that into our calendar and the traditional schools, non-pilot schools can't do that."

Another recurring theme throughout all of the interviews was how pilot schools are flexible in their use of time, reorganizing their schedule to meet needs as they arise. One teacher described a bell schedule his team had opted for that very week, because a group of seniors would be off campus for the day. The ad hoc alignment of the schedule was common in the interviews with pilot school leaders, though its novelty is easily overlooked without a comparison. Kevin, the lead-teacher whose visit to another pilot informed his own school's schedule, described the frustrating process of even attempting to move to a block schedule (with longer classes that meet on alternate days) at his prior traditional school site:

I remember when I was at my last comprehensive high school, we talked about going block, and had meetings on going block for five straight years. And every

80

year, at the beginning someone would start off, "What is block again? Can someone do a PD on that?" And I was like, "This is our fourth PD. We've had people from outside the school come in and give hour-long PDs, like, "What is the deal?" And then there would be a bunch of teachers that never went to the meetings, that would vote against it.

Pilot school teachers, by contrast, were generally much more deliberate in identifying which needs they sought to prioritize and how to make best use of time in their schedule, and they were willing to revisit those priorities and schedules as necessary to improve conditions for teaching and learning.

Curricular Autonomy

Pilot schools have autonomy over curriculum and assessment, which means that teachers have the authority to determine which textbooks to use, how to assess students, and how to organize classes and instruction for interdisciplinary goals, within certain district and state guidelines. Curricular autonomy was of central importance for most schools, and it was a starting point from which some design teams began their pilot schools. One lead-teacher, Kevin, described this centrality:

Curriculum is the place we started. I would say that was the first thing that we really thought about in the RFP was requesting not just a lot about structure and governance but a lot about curriculum. We had a very specific idea what we wanted to do with curriculum. I think that was the place we started and I think that's the place we come back to in our hearts that we care about as teachers more than anything... And so we developed our curriculum, and are still developing our curriculum based on some central ideas.

Kevin was not alone in describing how his school's curriculum was geared toward supporting his school's mission and vision. Benjamin, a lead-teacher from another pilot school, described the importance of gearing curriculum toward embracing students' humanity by connecting academic content to their personal experiences, a method of personalization that required all teachers to collaborate around curriculum development. Though nothing would impede an individual teacher at any school from doing what Benjamin described, organizing a school around supporting these goals laid out in the school's mission and vision and supporting all teachers in implementing lessons consistent with their vision would be difficult in a traditional school environment. The pilot schools' independence from district curricular mandates created opportunities for staff to organize and create powerful opportunities for collaboration.

Some schools had utilized curricular autonomy to add or eliminate certain courses, strengthen graduation requirements, and embed career themes and interdisciplinary curriculum in their schools. Some schools had opted to forgo the LAUSD periodic assessments in favor of their own, self-created exams, though creating assessments was challenging.

Establishing Course and Graduation Requirements

Curricular autonomy extends beyond classroom-level instruction to the entire instructional program, and some teachers discussed ways in which their school had—or had hoped to—go beyond the traditional LAUSD high school requirements. One lead-teacher, Marilyn, at an established pilot school, described how her school required all students to complete the "A-G" requirements necessary for admission to a California state college or university, a policy that LAUSD adopted several years later:

Our graduation requirements are aligned to the A-G requirements, they have been since we became a pilot school. The district is now doing the same thing, good for them, but we've been doing that because the idea for our school is we want everybody to have choices. A lot of students ... assume, "Oh they want all of us to go to a 4-year college," and you know, no, not necessarily. We want all of you to have an option... The harder you work, the more you do, the more you learn, the more choices you're going to have...

For Marilyn, maintaining high graduation requirements for her students meant keeping students engaged in challenging coursework, even if the students did not see a need for it yet. Marilyn's school is co-located on a campus with other, academic options, meaning that students could opt out of her school's expectations by choosing to transfer to another school. Another lead-teacher, Benjamin, expressed his dissatisfaction with the variety of elective courses his school had been able to offer, though he concurred with Marilyn that setting the bar high for seniors kept them engaged and motivated at a time when adolescents often slack off:

I think our core curriculum is amazing... We have some freedoms where we've ditched things like health, which we bring right into our PE class more directly. Or like Life Skills, which the district ditched anyways, but as far as curriculum the only thing I can say I'm really happy with is that we've stopped accepting these minimums, making sure our students are taking rigorous classes throughout their entire four years. That our seniors are not in Social Studies and English and then [being a teacher's aide] for three periods and go home or whatever. We've

been very good at saying, "Our curriculum is this, we're doing rigorous classes, 9-

12, all day, that's just how it is."

A common practice in LAUSD high schools is for seniors to take a light load, often with a free period or two. Maintaining the high expectations set by Benjamin's school's required additional staff, multiple preparations for teachers, and additional supports for struggling students. Benjamin's principal, Steven, described this same situation similarly in a separate interview, though Steven added that he worried that maintaining these high expectations for students could lead to burnout of the staff.

Alternatively, some pilot school leaders described how they have been able to take advantage of the curricular autonomy and integrate a career theme into their core academic program. One lead-teacher, Kevin, described the process of beginning Linked Learning certification, which is a voluntary process schools can undertake to develop the college-preparedness and career-readiness of their curricular programs using certain guidelines (Linked Learning, 2011). (Linked Learning certification is a process of developing and sustaining a career theme in a small school, and is supported by a range of state and national organizations that support these types of schools.) Kevin described how embracing the model required reorienting the staff's professional development time and adding components to their curriculum and co-curricular projects. For one principal, the autonomy granted by pilot school status did not actually alter their program, because their SLC had experienced significant curricular autonomy prior to pilot conversion. Robin's school had received a number of grants to implement a career theme, connecting students' work to nearby occupational centers, and converting from an SLC to a pilot merely cemented this, but, Robin commented, "as far as the curriculum is concerned, I

84

don't think it's anything autonomous other than the fact we do spend a lot of time out at work-based sites." She continued, "We were previously in the large school, we had already been an SLC that was working, doing interdisciplinary projects and curriculum… We've been able to continue this."

Changing the Assessments

Pilot schools are granted autonomy from the district curricular pacing plans and periodic assessments, which for several years had, for LAUSD schools, defined what content would be taught at what time during the school year. Some interviewed teachers had chafed at the restrictions, and were eager to create their schools' own curriculum and assessment structures. This posed considerable challenges, because electing to replace the district periodic assessments with their own equivalents would a laborious and time-consuming endeavor that entailed yearlong curriculum maps, formative, and summative assessments. One principal, Robin, stated that her new pilot school had decided to postpone replacing district periodic assessments with their own during their first year "because we were just so overwhelmed that we thought designing our own testing and rationalizing it to the district, we weren't going to do that," a statement that was reiterated by a lead-teacher at her school, Marsha, who rhetorically asked, "How much can you bite off and chew and digest at one time, you know? We knew there were some things we were going to have to roll into. So as far as testing and stuff with the curriculum, we're holding off on that as an autonomy."

Teachers who had begun to develop their own curriculum described developing lessons and projects over multiple years in an iterative fashion. For Jeremy, whose school

had just finished its first year at the time of the interview, the future for curriculum

development seemed ripe with opportunity:

> I think it's opened the door now, it's established that we're going to do this
>
> Humanitas [interdisciplinary] model, we're going to do the interdisciplinary units,
>
> the PBL project, one for every semester, and it's kind of set us on that. And
>
> everyone's had buy-in.

Ronnie, one of Milton's colleagues, had more curriculum planning experience than

Jeremy and described what would be a laborious process if it occurred over the span of

only a few months. Instead, his team had focused on a unit at a time, devoting time and

energy on a different, manageable segment of their curriculum each year. Ronnie was the

cornerstone of his department's professional development around curricular autonomy,

and described how his English department had eliminated the district-approved course

readers in favor of literature appropriate for the students and the school. He described the

power of being able to select literature to read, and that the autonomy had empowered his

team to develop units around the themes in the literature:

> [We've been] able to craft our year, our interdisciplinary units around the
>
> literature and for me that's been a big thing, being able to do that. And then as a
>
> result, beginning to create common assessments that we as a department feel are
>
> more authentic than a lot of the stuff that's handed to us, typically within our
>
> district anyway... I think it has increased engagement.

This slow, measured pace to curriculum and assessment development described by

Ronnie was the work of several teachers over a few years.

Budgetary Autonomy

Interview questions regarding budgetary autonomy were often met with laughs, given the tight fiscal constraints under which pilot schools operate. However, further elaboration revealed that these schools had made clear, mission-driven budgetary decisions despite these limitations. Most school staffs had used their meager budgets to maximize the number of teaching staff positions, even when this resulted in additional work for those teachers because they had little out-of-classroom support. The limited budgets were a catalyst for transparency, too, because many interviewees reported ways in which they had made their budgets and the budgeting processes more transparent to school stakeholders.

Maximizing Staff

Lead-teachers discussed a few tradeoffs they had made in their staffing budget allocations, and ways in which they maximized their resources to improve the quality or quantity of staff members. Marilyn, a lead-teacher, described her school's goal of creating a personalized learning environment, then remarked, "We really want people to work with these kids. So we have sacrificed other things in the budget and paid to have more staff." This mission-driven rationale for the budgetary and staffing trade-offs was critical for several participants. One lead-teacher, Marsha, described how easy it was to change a clerical designation early in the budgeting process, creating significant saving her new school:

> We were supposed to have a senior clerk, that was on the template. We were able
> to downgrade that to a clerk, saved us a lot of money. So that was a good thing,
> and nobody questioned us. "Is that what you want to do? OK, sure."

Daniel, a teacher at a pilot school on a shared campus, also alluded to the tradeoff between hiring additional teachers by paying fewer out of classroom staff members, noting the deliberateness of the decision: "We made a conscious decision that we're going to opt to not get those other positions so that we can get more teachers."

Transparency in the Budgeting Process

Teachers and principals discussed how their increased awareness of the budget contributed to an increase in transparency and inclusion of stakeholders. This transparency changed the nature of teachers' sense of ownership and obligation over the budget, leading some teachers to include students, parents, and teachers in conversations about the budget.

Teachers who had had no role in budgeting at their prior schools, such as Ronnie, described how they felt more included in making budgetary decisions for their schools: "I've participated in decisions where we've moved money around from one place to another, allocated money for certain positions or certain needs, and that's been good. It's been great in fact." Dana, a teacher at another site, described the meeting at which she and her colleagues were asked to take greater responsibility for their own attendance and its impact on the small school's budget. Dana described how the faculty had been encouraged to report their own absences more accurately, in order to save the school money. The impact of the conversation left Dana with a sense that she had not experienced when part of a larger school:

> You know those are little things, right, but they do affect us and those aren't
> things that we think about when we're part of the bigger LAUSD, … [we think]

88

that they can handle it. But the fact is that now our budget's *our* budget [emphasis original].

This impact of budgetary autonomy appeared to be one of increased ownership over schools' financial resources, a theme that extended to including families and students in their schools. One lead-teacher, Benjamin, described how he and his team attempted to make the budget clearer to families by linking student attendance to the financial impact on the school, because California allocates school budgets based on average daily attendance:

> We tell [the parents], "Here's our senior attendance last year, our seniors were absent 800 days, we're minus one teacher because of that, we're minus a teacher and a half." The transparency in our budget, not only the freedom, but we're forced to be transparent in our budget, and we choose to be transparent.

Benjamin also described the ways in which these same conversations were held with students after they returned from being absent from school, and Benjamin affirmed Dana's notion that the small school contributed to his increased awareness of the budget: "I know in the traditional model you can't really hide a lot either, but they make it sound so complicated and they don't explain to you so that is essentially hidden. The freedom—that one we've used really well." A teacher at another site shared a similar example to Benjamin's, in which she explained how she realized the impacts of student attendance on her school's budget, and how she helped students understand the connections to their school through informal interactions. Increased autonomy over the budget contributed to increased awareness of the budget and its ramifications, and this increased awareness leads to efforts to share that understanding via increased transparency.

Multiple interviewees discussed the processes by which their schools attempted to make the budget development and publishing process open, clear, and inclusive of all stakeholders, consistent with the ways they included parents more meaningfully in making school decisions. Budgets in all schools that receive Title 1 funds are developed and approved by the schools' governing councils, which include teachers, families, and students (all of the pilot schools included in the study are Title 1 schools). Jeremy, a lead-teacher at a newer school, discussed the openness of the budget development process, comparing it to his experiences at a large high school that he had left:

> I finally believe in the process. I always thought it was a joke at [my former high school], you know, "budget meetings, doesn't mean anything." But here I'm involved with governing council, you have the kids, the input, the parent involvement, I wish there was more, but it's actually democratic, which was pleasantly surprising. Like it's true, it's not a showpiece, or BS to shut up critics. The kids that are involved really do believe in the process, we believe in it, we take everyone's opinion.

In varying degrees, other interviewees described the impact of budgetary transparency similarly. Pilot schools' budgetary autonomy can lead to increased involvement and awareness from multiple staff members, which can contribute to a sense of transparency and ownership among multiple stakeholders. However, one teacher described how this transparency was not automatic, and was mitigated by a principal, reverting the process to a closed-door one.

Professional Development Autonomy

Professional development is a de facto sixth autonomy, because pilot schools have the freedom to create additional collaboration time and are freed from district mandates for professional development. Every pilot school studied had deviated from the district professional development calendar, with its bimonthly Tuesday afternoon schedule, to develop their own schedules that better met their staff members' needs. Many school staffs met not only once, but twice each week to discuss school business and work in instructional teams. Importantly, most teachers and principals used the term "PD" as a catch-all for trainings, professional collaboration, staff meetings, and internal operations meetings. The term had a negative connotation for teachers when describing the large-scale trainings and meetings that had constituted PD at their prior sites, but a positive connotation when describing their purposeful collaboration time at their pilot schools. Not surprisingly, teachers' expertise in planning professional development was deeply informed by their prior experiences working with the district and by their desire to make collaborative time more meaningful and effective by replacing one-size-fits-all meetings with small group meetings that addressed school needs.

Rethinking Professional Development

Most participants shared frustrations about their poor professional development experiences at prior school sites, which served as a comparison point for how they had thought about how to improve PD at their pilot schools. At their prior schools, the cause of their frustration stemmed from the challenge of making one-size-fits-all PD relevant for all teachers, especially when those trainings seemed disconnected from their work in the classroom or were facilitated poorly. Benjamin, a lead-teacher at a pilot school that

91

had converted from an SLC on a large campus, described how the size of a school faculty impacted how the PD connected to the school's mission:

> I could imagine running PD at a school with 180 teachers is a nightmare. Because even if you get 90% agreement which is impossible you're still going to have 25 pissed off teachers in the room. Since we have a small group our PD is very focused, it's very connected to our vision and our mission.

One lead-teacher, Marilyn, shared an anecdote about a mandated low-quality, large-scale PD she had attended, which exemplified the role that facilitation played in the quality of professional development and its potential impact:

> I sat through a lot of PDs at [my former high school]. I had a real favorite, one was this daylong PD where this teacher, god bless her, was talking about how the brain—we need to chunk our lessons in 15-minute increments because students need that and that's how the human brain works. But she did that for like 6 hours. With no chunking. And I was just sitting there going, "The irony, you're killing me!"

Multiple participants discussed how being exempt from district-mandated professional development was an asset as a small school, though some of that benefit derived from simply having greater control over the delivery of mandated content, a fact which Marilyn acknowledged. Steven, the principal at Benjamin's school, connected freedom from the mandates with a sense of accomplishment and ownership in the work his team does. Other interviewees discussed that even when they did have to conduct district-mandated PD, simply organizing the time internally improved the quality of the PD. Pilot school leaders did not simply improve the quality of their PD, however; they found new

purposes for their collaborative time together and organized that time to conduct purposeful work to improve their school.

Connected to the Classroom

Teachers described different ways in which they utilized their PD time to develop as a team. In some instances, teachers did not differentiate between the delivery process (e.g., working in collaborative teams) and the content addressed, instead focusing on the collaborative nature of their time spent together as staffs. Multiple teachers mentioned the importance of spending time together as a faculty, using terms such as "family" and "community" to emphasize the need for sharing time as staffs. After sending many new team members to attend conferences during the summer prior to opening, Marsha, a lead-teacher from a new pilot school, described how she had organized several events to bring in new staff members as part of a small school community, such as hosting dinners, picnics, and school decorating events. She commented, "I think you have to get a staff working together, trusting each other. We never really did it to that extent in big schools, it's impossible." Daniel, a co-lead teacher from a different school, described an off-site, overnight retreat held during the summer prior to their second year. For Daniel, the goal of the retreat was as much about bonding as a staff as it was about re-focusing on teaching and learning, commenting that, "I guess it's a good thing if you enjoy your co-workers… I feel like a lot of us do feel like we're a family. A big part of the whole getaway is team-building and is sort of rejuvenating."

Other teachers described using PD time to develop common grading practices. Milton, a lead-teacher, described the ways in which his school's professional development time was organized to focus on collective goals that required individual

teachers to re-examine their grading practices. For instance, he noted that, "We developed some PDs regarding grading policies. We weren't happy with the number of students who were not passing our classes, so we tried to develop a series of PDs regarding grading." Many other lead-teachers described small committees or collaborative groups that defined the exact agendas of PDs. Milton continued, noting that working in a small pilot school required his team and himself to rethink many of their long-standing practices, because these practices had developed over time while the teachers were working in a large comprehensive high school:

> Well because you have to do things differently. Very differently. And I think it kind of makes you look at your practice and even your skills and say, "Do I have the skills to change the way I assess students?" We are trying to look at kids differently, through a different lens and not just give them four days of instruction and take a quiz at the end of the week.

Other interviewees mentioned many of these aspects of PD at their schools, such as revising assessments and improving grading practices, though not with the same specificity as Milton.

Participants described instances in which they had intentionally organized PD time around addressing problems raised by students. Steven, the principal of a pilot school, described how a bullying dynamic among students led to utilizing PD time to address it; one lead-teacher described the casual, day-to-day manner in which her grade-level team identified and resolved student challenges in their weekly PD collaboration time:

94

When my team meets, it's just energizing. We all find, like, "How is so-and-so

doing in your class?" so we're starting to find out [that] this kid needs to be sat

down by all the teachers and counselor, or we need to involve the parents here.

This collaborative approach to identifying problems implies a collaborative approach to

solving them, a dynamic that was repeated in multiple interviews and was unheard of in

the descriptions of prior experiences at large high schools.

Building Collaborative Structures

Frustration at their prior sites contributed to pilot school leaders' attempts to

design more effective professional development plans for their staffs, by focusing on the

structure and delivery of the PD. Several teachers discussed the ways in which they have

used their professional development time differently than they had experienced at their

previous school sites.

Two teachers at the same school briefly described how the lead-teacher organized

teachers' PD requests early in the year, and then planned the year of PD meetings

accordingly in order to maintain a focus on teaching and learning. Milton, the lead-

teacher, described the complexity of this needs assessment, noting that PD time had to be

differentiated, even for a small teaching faculty, and that he often had teachers break up

into smaller groups for various needs. In a separate interview held the same day, Ronnie,

a co-lead teacher at Milton's school, reaffirmed that Milton's needs assessments was

better for the school faculty than their prior PD experiences had been at their former site:

I think PD's been much better [here]. I think it's continuing to improve. I think

it's been—our PD, our lead teacher has been really good at approaching us and

asking us what we think we need, getting the pulse of the school and that's

important. I think that's what's made it really effective.

Ronnie noted that professional development time at his pilot school was, "always

connected to the classroom." This notion of "connected to the classroom" was repeated in

multiple other interviews, as opposed to the one-size-fits-all approach in traditional

schools that usually failed to address teachers' needs.

Teachers also described ways in which they organized PD time very differently,

putting teachers in small groups for various tasks. This collaborative approach to solving

problems led other teachers to take more ownership of the school, according to Marsha.

She described asking members new to the new pilot school to take responsibility for

helping shape the implementation plan for the school's first year, and noted that asking

new staff members to synthesize the school plan had been both purposeful and useful for

everyone on the staff. Marilyn, a lead-teacher at a long-standing pilot school, described

the team structure and committee structure of her school's PD time. Marilyn described

how teachers met regularly in content-area teams, grade-level teams, and in committees

for various tasks. Marilyn continued, describing the weekly rotating nature of her

school's PD committees, which looked at different tasks related to curriculum

development or WASC goals, depending on the year and the focus. Committees usually

met once per month, with each committee meeting on a different week of the month.

Two teachers described the impact of regular collaboration time on the ways in

which teachers interacted. First, Marla, a lead-teacher at a newer pilot school, described

the critical importance of collaboration time in order to help teachers make the transition

into new roles as teachers, within which they might have less individual autonomy over

their classrooms. The result was a challenge for teachers accustomed to the privacy of their classroom domains, or, as Marla put it, "it's hard for teachers who are like the kings of their islands." Ronnie, a co-lead teacher who was not personally responsible for coordinating PD at this school, similarly described how a few years of regular collaboration had led to increased trust and an increased willingness to take risks:

> Because there is this increase in collaboration and transparency between us as colleagues we're much more focused on our craft… When you are at a larger school or when no one's in your room, you do tend to think that you've got certain things down, or that you're doing well with certain things. And if you're honest with yourself, things can improve but because nobody ever comes around or nobody is asking you questions, you get comfortable.

The de-privatization of the teaching practice that Ronnie described could happen in any school, but the deliberate attempts that pilot school leaders made to create this type of environment are probably critical to creating and sustaining these types of collaborative school cultures.

These and the other uses of the pilot autonomies often overlapped with one another, creating synergies, changing the nature of individuals' roles, and reinforcing the schools' missions. Many of these autonomies required additional supports, which are discussed in the next section, and many of these autonomies were also hampered by challenges, which are discussed in the subsequent section.

Supports for the Autonomies

Pilot leaders described a number of supports that were vital to launching their pilot schools and utilizing their autonomies. Many of these findings cut across multiple

97

autonomies, and were related to the changes in school operations and leaders' roles and

needs as a result of the changed structure of working in deregulated schools. Internal to

the school, the roles of principals and lead-teachers were markedly different for the

participants than these roles had been for them in traditional schools. District and union

support was vital for pilot schools, especially in the early years, though much of this

support came in the form of not interfering with the school and/or finding individuals to

help navigate the monolithic bureaucracy. Outside partners were universally lauded for

their support in filling gaps and helping the school staffs achieve their missions and

visions and utilize their autonomies. Many of the roles and relationships created by these

dynamics were challenging to navigate, however, and those challenges are discussed in

the next section.

New Roles for Principals: Buffering and Managing Relationships

Principals and lead-teachers across the pilot school experience spectrum described

a different role for principals of pilot schools as being a factor in supporting the

autonomies. No interviewee had experience as an administrator in traditional public

schools, perhaps explaining the pilot school teachers' interest in finding candidates

willing to re-think the role of the principal (despite a lack of direct knowledge of the

position). Two specific roles emerged in interviews: besides serving as the sole

administrator of a school, pilot principals negotiated the school's unique relationships

with the district and union, as well as upholding their schools' mission and vision.

Several interviewees described ways in which teachers and the principal

interacted to ensure that decisions were guided by the school's mission and vision.

Milton, a lead-teacher on a co-located campus, described how his principal would check

in with the teaching staff to ensure that she was representing the school's values and

vision when working with external parties and making decisions:

> Because we share a campus our administrator meets with the other [schools']
>
> administrators to talk about issues and to figure that whole mess out. But she
>
> wasn't just operating on her own values; she came back to our group and said
>
> these are some of the concerns that are occurring on campus, "How do you want
>
> things to go?" So we had those discussions and we used our shared decision
>
> making power in that respect there. And made those decisions as a group rather
>
> than as a single individual.

This notion of representing the school's vision was reiterated by Robin, a new principal

at a new pilot school. Robin described her role of representing the vision of the design

team (of which she was actually a member, relatively rare occurrence among pilot school

principals). Robin described this role in contrast to a district-assigned principal sent in to

"clean house," whose duty would be to represent the district's vision:

> If the district places somebody there and they have an ulterior motive of, "We
>
> want you to clean this school up," "We want you to do this," "We're not happy
>
> with this, this is our person we're putting in there." That's not necessarily the
>
> person who has the vision of what the teachers and the school is meant to be. It's
>
> the vision of what the district wants the school to be. And those are two different
>
> things. I think in the pilot school's ability to really influence and hire who you
>
> want to be as a leader allows them to choose the person who they think is going to
>
> be best for what the school's vision is, not what the district's vision is.

In every school studied except one for one, lead-teachers and principals discussed in the interviews the ways in which they collaborated with each other to make sure their decisions were mutually supported. In the one school where this was not present, the relationship between the lead-teacher and principal had broken down over the years, and the two had distinctly different visions of the future of the school.

Lead-teachers also described the role of the principal as a "buffer" (Honig, 2009) to the rest of the district, because the principal serves as the lead contact with the district bureaucracy. Some lead-teachers described limiting principals' autonomous decision-making power, while others focused on empowering the principal to carry out the mission, as described above. Robin described her role to help buffer her new school, which is located on campus shared with a comprehensive high school:

> My role is more to buffer the school. We have a lot of leaders on our campus who would be fabulous in my position. And maybe even better than me, I'll be honest. But I think what in my idea what we've tried to do is, tried to make sure we had a leadership who allows really smart people and really active people and really inspired people to do what they think is right for the school and the students and the teachers. And my job as a leader is to allow them the forum to be able to do that without having the district stifle it for certain reasons.

One lead-teacher, Ronnie, whose school has operated for a few more years than Robin's, described how that role of buffering could serve to develop relationships at the district office, which could ultimately be leveraged for better support for the school:

> Our previous principal was very good at making connections with persons that would be able to help us. She was very shrewd in that way. And as a result of

those personal connections she made, people would help us. They would extend

deadlines for us or they'd bend certain rules in order to allow us to continue to

function realizing that our principal and staff were under a lot of pressures from

this undertaking, you know, it's so much work. They realized, you're not doing

this out of laziness. You're being straightforward with me about this, so we can

go ahead and support you in this way.

Marilyn, whose school was the oldest in this study, described both of these roles as she

described her principal. Her tenure had probably allowed her to see how buffering and

managing relationships could ultimately allow a principal to mediate the impact of the

district on the pilot school, protecting it from outside demands:

So the constant question in terms of challenges is, when the district as an animal,

not any one individual person, will try to impose things unknowingly on you...

We have to decide whether we want to do it or not, and if we don't want to do it,

we're going to get a little bit of friction [from the district] for that. And so we

have to fight back and say, "We're not doing it." And so a lot of times, [my

principal] would be in a meeting, we'll ask those questions and we'd say, "Well

you have to tell them that we're not doing that. That's why you get paid a little bit

more than we do." So she was always the one who had to go and say, "Sorry, my

team won't budge on this. We're not doing it."

This role of principal as buffer is critical, because a diminished role of buffering could

result in unintentional loss of autonomy. Principals are often the first in the school to hear

about new initiatives or goals, and their role as buffer is an important one.

Emergence of Lead-Teachers

All of the pilot schools had at least one teacher who was universally identified as a "lead-teacher," a role that had not formally existed for these teachers when working at traditional comprehensive high schools. Typically, schools had one or two lead-teachers and a few additional teachers with degrees of teacher-leadership. These lead-teachers played critical roles in implementing and utilizing the autonomies in their schools, in ways that varied from school to school. The exact role of "lead-teacher" was ill defined by lead-teachers themselves, as were the ways that they ended up as lead-teachers (if they were even formally designated as such by their school) and the ways they might exit the role, if ever. Many lead-teachers had simply adopted the mantle as a de facto result of being a design team member. Or, in the case of one lead-teacher who had described himself as someone who previously "hid in his classroom," Benjamin described how his principal's email request for a lead-teacher created a flurry of emails and yielded several nominations for him. Lauren, a lead-teacher at an established pilot school, described her reluctance to become an administrator and instead decided to remain in a leadership role in the classroom. She and her colleague had debated their roles, noting that they were not thrilled about the job duties of the principal: "We chose not to become administrators because we always felt that we wanted to lead from the classroom. So, there's nothing about the job description that excites me. Even pilot school principals, they work so hard."

Regardless of how they arrived at their position as a lead-teacher, these teachers described their roles of supporting their schools' autonomies in a number of ways. Kevin, a design-team member turned lead-teacher at a newer pilot school, described his role and

those of the other lead-teachers at his school as a buffer between the rest of the teaching staff and his school's administrator, in order to ensure that the teachers' vision was honored:

> I view [the lead-teachers] more as an overseer type of thing where you try to look at the whole picture and try to represent your teachers to administration to a certain extent and meet with administration to form policies. It also means more work but I'd say overall it's just making sure that there's sort of a seamless—there's no divider between staff and administration. And sort of smoothing out that gap so there's not this firm line. I view [the lead teacher role] as sort of like a transition between administration and staff.

One lead-teacher and lead design team member, Marsha, had been the coordinator of her SLC and thus took the de facto path into becoming a lead-teacher. In her view, the job was to maintain the school's mission and vision, likening her role to that of bulldog: "easygoing" and "appreciative" when things go well, "But man oh man you tick off a bulldog and they are going to take you down right? That's me." Marsha described the need for keeping her staff focused on the school's mission, as well as keeping district and co-location challenges from distracting them. Multiple other teachers described this need to uphold the vision of the school or the original plan, regardless of how they wound up in their position of leadership.

With multiple leaders at a school site, all with unclear roles and boundaries, lead-teachers described some of the ways in which they balanced the roles of leaders on their campus. Kevin, a lead-teacher and design team member at a different site, described a formalized leadership team that included himself and a few other design team members,

103

and noted that, "One of the great things about the pilot school is it is not a top-down model and the people who wrote and designed the school are still respected as equals by administration." While Kevin described this balance as simply professional collegiality, Milton described the simple approach that he and his team took: "We wrote into our plan that the principal and lead teacher on a daily basis would be, I don't want to say 'decision makers' because we don't do that, but we would operate the school on the fly, so to speak."

District Support from Individuals but not the Institution

Pilot school leaders tended to share positive experiences about district personnel with whom they were able to develop relationships within the bureaucracy, though this sense of support was often muted and was mediated by the quality of the relationships with these individuals. Interviewees were decidedly less enthusiastic about the district's support for their autonomies when discussing the organization as a monolith. Benjamin, a lead-teacher and design team member, moderated his sense of support by acknowledging the general ignorance of most district staff regarding pilot schools: "As a whole the district has gotten in the way, but on the individual level there's a lot of people who have really helped us." He continued, noting that some of this help had even come in the form of helping navigate the bureaucracy itself:

> There's been times when some of those people have showed us the loopholes, in a sense... [W]hen we deal with an individual person, and I guess it's true in real life too, but when you deal with an individual person and they see who we are and that we're legitimate, and we're trying to bend rules to benefit our students, they go out of their way to help us.

Steven, the principal at Benjamin's school, pushed one step further on this note. He pointed out that his stance and approach to dealing with district bureaucrats has been an important method for leveraging support:

> I really had to shift my paradigm about this one. They're "allies in waiting." They simply don't know how to help me yet. And it's my job to inform them. I think that what's really boded well for our school, that I address these things, like, "let's converse" instead of, "let's go to battle..." [W]e'd get to, "what do you need?" instead of, "Well I can't give you that..." I got a green light on almost everything.

Other interviewees affirmed this need to develop relationships with central office staff members, because these staff members were often unaware of the specifics of working with pilot schools.

Perceptions of Support from the Teachers' Union

When asked about their experiences with the unions, both principals and teachers discussed a range of interactions with their union chapter chairs and with the union leadership. Support for the autonomies from the union tended to be muted and rooted in single episodes that were used to explain the entirety of the teachers' perception of support. Many of the examples cited by interviewees were actually descriptions of instances when the union had simply stepped aside, allowing the pilot school staff to continue on a path or program without interruption.

Teachers discussed the mixed messages with which union leadership had demonstrated support of their efforts to convert or start a school as a pilot. Several teachers had worked and interacted directly with the union president or top officials, and referred to these individuals by first name in interviews. Union leadership support

seemed strongest early on in the history of the pilot movement, according to one teacher, Lauren, "[The union president] was on board, we went to various meetings with him. We even did some of our planning in his office, he would buy us lunch and support us, came to our school site, hooked us up with Dan French from the Center for Collaborative Education." As this teacher team became more focused on their plan to convert their SLC to pilot school status, the teacher's relationship with union leadership became more intense and personal:

> [The president] would call me, I'd be on the cell phone connection, like one foot in the classroom, one foot out the door myself, "OK kids, copy the PowerPoint notes because I need to talk to the union president right now."

This sequence of events transpired during the first MOU, when the number of pilot schools was capped at 10 and the district and union were actively collaborating to support the opening of the first few pilot schools. One other interviewee whose school launched at around the same time confirmed this collaborative sentiment of the early stages of opening pilot schools.

As opposed to the distant, infrequent nature of school-union relations, union chapter chairs are elected by their teaching staff, remain full-time teachers at their school sites, and are likely to be involved in day-to-day situations. (Every school elects its own chapter chair, who serves as both a liaison to the union and represents teachers in local complaints.) When discussing their local union chapter chair, teachers and principals were generally optimistic and positive, though the level of support or interference they faced depended entirely, it seemed, on the personalities and beliefs of the individuals elected to represent their schools. Marla, a teacher-leader, noted that the high satisfaction

in working in a pilot school is tied to the high level of commitment that pilot school teachers bring to their worksite, though the hours might be threatening to the traditional union contract:

> Honestly in a pilot school it sucks and it's not what the union wants to hear, but you've got to put in overtime, metaphorically, literally. There's not people doing things for you. You sit around a table and if something needs to be done, somebody has to step up and do it. There's only so much one administrator can do. So you have to share a vision about what you want for students and yourself, but you also just simply have to be willing to put in the time it takes to do it. And that's like, outside the parameters of what—a union finds acceptable.

Marla's inference that the union found the extra, unpaid hours threatening was unsubstantiated (but not contradicted) in other interviews, but her notion that a common vision builds shared responsibility and thus adds work to teachers' days may be the crux of the dynamic; that is, local union representatives might find the balance between extra, unpaid hours tolerable because they themselves participated in the decision to share responsibilities, while the central union leadership might find the extra work intolerable from a policy perspective. Marilyn, the lead-teacher at one of the oldest pilot schools, shared that her school had experienced few problems with the union due to the nature of the elected union representative:

> The union hasn't been too big of a challenge. We have really good union reps who are on board. I know that... they have had to go and have been yelled at about all the things that we lose when we do a pilot school.

Her distinction of representatives who are "on board" suggests that there is an important distinction to be made between those within the union who support pilot schools and those who do not, despite the union's official support of pilot schools through its signing of the MOU. One principal, Robin, suggested that teachers' high level of satisfaction working in their pilot school might explain why she, too, had experienced few problems from her union chapter chair, arguing that teachers' high morale and willingness to tolerate minor frustrations were generated by the successful personalization of the small school experience. Thus, local union representatives become a powerful ally or threat for a pilot school, since their support or challenge could sustain or jeopardize pilots' schools decisions.

Support from Third-Party Organizations

Every participant mentioned the important role that community partnerships with outside non-profits played in his or her school, both in its development and utilization of the autonomies. A few teachers and principals discussed how partnering with community organizations allowed them to stretch their meager budgets and offer services that they otherwise could not have afforded. A lead teacher, who ran the career component of his school's academic program, discussed how community partners were vital to his school, given the current budgetary gaps they experienced:

> I think pilots cannot exist with the budgetary restraints we have now, without
> third parties. I don't think it would be possible. I see pilots that don't have a lot of
> strong third party support, and they're struggling because there's just not enough
> staff to go around and if you don't have some people supporting you from outside
> and filling some of these gaps it just makes it really difficult to be effective. …

108

And so I think until the budget changes in California, bringing in as many third party partnerships and nonprofits in, is the essence of survival right now.

One principal, Steven, described the paradigm shift of becoming a small, student-centered school and how he approached developing community partnerships, even when they might identify the school's weaknesses:

We can't do everything, and some of these people have deep pockets. They can fill in voids we can't. And that's where the paradigm shift is. If you really are a student-centered school, and lots of people say that [expletive] but very few people actually mean it, but if you actually are a student-centered school, then you're going to do what's best for the student. Sometimes that means bringing in people that make you look a little silly, that point out your shortcomings.

Steven went on to describe a partner who pointed out a specific shortcoming while helping Steven teach an after school film class. Steven explained that although he felt guilty and embarrassed, he appreciated having "more eyes on the students" and used this anecdote to explain how he appreciated the assistance of outside partners to help his school address a variety of challenges. Other teachers and principals explained how the small size of their school, their adaptability, and their distance from the LAUSD bureaucracy allowed them to partner more effectively. Instead of existing as a program within a large school, being a standalone school made building partnerships much easier.

Two LA-based non-profits were mentioned in interview after interview as vital partners for developing pilot school proposals and instructional plans. Los Angeles Education Partnership (LAEP, where I work part time), which runs Humanitas interdisciplinary writing trainings, and LA Small Schools Center (LASSC), which was

involved in the early days of the first round of pilot schools and currently supports schools pursuing Linked Learning certification (a college- and career-readiness inventory), were repeatedly cited as supports for developing instructional and curricular programs. As Kevin, a lead-teacher from one school that had worked with both organizations, described the support:

> And then LAEP and LA Small Schools have supported us both in our inception and through this and their curricular help, their financial help, their PD help, all those things. Our PD last year would not have [happened] without having a person from LA Small Schools in here two or three times a week, in most of our PD meetings, supporting my bringing Linked Learning to this school and pushing it as something that's important for us. And there's no way that would have happened without those people.

Milton, a lead-teacher at another site, described a similar relationship with LAEP, noting that the outside support for developing interdisciplinary units had been important for his school.

The long-standing relationships among teachers connected through these non-profits also contributed to teachers' positive perceptions of the importance of collaborating with LAEP and LASSC. Ronnie, who had worked with LAEP prior to becoming a pilot school teacher, described the collaborative nature of the work with the organization, pointing out that his prior collaboration had spurred LAEP to support Ronnie's team in writing and editing their pilot school proposal. A principal from another school site concurred. Steven, who had worked for several years with LAEP with his prior SLC, described the diffuse nature of the relationship with the organization, noting

that the interactions with other teachers and principals connected to the organization were absolutely vital for him:

> Working with partners like LAEP, just networking so I can meet people such as yourself [the researcher], you and I would have really never come in contact if it wasn't through a central figure, a hub, a tether. And now we're exchanging best practices. I think a lot of us helped each other write our plans. A think tank, almost. I think we're better for it... In the long view, the schools that did collaborate and are working together through places like LAEP.

At least one lead-teacher described the role of working with organizations such as these in order to gather support when dealing with the district or union. Marla, a lead-teacher with Kevin, described working with personnel from LAEP and LASSC for advocacy support:

> Yeah even if you want to go to find somebody in the district or in the union, you usually go through the nonprofit to find that lone voice in the—in this monolith that is the district, to find help. Like they even have to direct you through the bureaucracy. I don't know where we'd be—we couldn't have done it without the nonprofits, without their support.

Much like the role of the Center for Collaborative Education has played in supporting the launch and operations of the Boston pilot schools, LAEP and LASSC have served similar purposes in supporting teacher teams in writing and carrying out their pilot school plans.

Challenges to the Autonomies

Pilot school leaders expressed numerous challenges related to utilizing their autonomies in their pilot schools, challenges that were both internal to the organizations

111

and external. Internally, managing the complex new roles for teachers and principals was challenging for many. Some challenges emerged from the impact on the school from the complications of managing their autonomies, rather than emerging from the use of any autonomy in particular. Externally, navigating conflicting messages and priorities from the district and union proved complicated, especially because competing demands often compromised staffing, budgetary, and scheduling autonomies. All of these were made more difficult by pilot school's small staff size, which meant that the extra work was distributed among fewer people, resulting in time constraints that hampered progress.

Internal Leadership Challenges

Many of the challenges inherent to launching and sustaining pilot schools stemmed from the complexity of the new roles in which teachers and principals found themselves. The roles themselves were challenging, and balancing the interplay of them even more so. In particular, balancing the roles of lead-teachers and principals proved difficult at several sites, as did engaging other teachers in their new roles.

Balancing leadership roles. A few lead-teachers described unsuccessful harmony in balancing the roles of lead-teacher(s) and the principal. Schools, like any organization, are filled with egos and competing personalities, and Lauren, an original design team member and recognized lead-teacher at an established pilot school, described how her principal would not invite her to relevant and important meetings and generally disregarded her leadership:

I'm not acknowledged as a leader in that sense. I am, and my teacher team will acknowledge that I am, but not to the principal. I'm a thorn in [the principal's]

side and I will find a way under, over, or around if it's something that's good for

kids.

Marilyn, also one of the most veteran pilot school teachers in this study, described

generally what had happened at some of the other early pilot schools that formed the

same time as hers:

In fact when we first started going to all of the pilot school meetings, it was all a

bunch of teachers sitting in there. And then we all wrote our proposals. Well, I

think [my coworker] and I are the only two lead teachers left that were the

original lead teachers of the schools. What happened is those teachers either

became the principals of the pilots schools they were helping to form, or when

they hired a principal, they stepped back a little.

She described these teachers "stepping back" as a natural occurrence, but, regardless, the

relationship between lead-teachers and principal had been unsustainable in these

situations. Probably because many of the pilot schools were in their first three years of

operation at the time of this study, there were few occurrences of this trend of lead-

teachers stepping back.

Exiting the role of lead-teacher was described as being even more ambiguous than

entering the role, even for one lead-teacher who was elected to the position. Benjamin,

the lead-teacher whose colleagues nominated him via email, noted that, "I think I'm just

waiting for someone, either I'm going to say, 'I'm done with this,' or someone else is

going to say, 'I want to do it.' I'm happy to hand it off." One veteran lead-teacher,

Marilyn, described how her position as a lead design team member from an original SLC

had segued into a leadership position, which was finally formalized after a few years. She

and her colleague co-led as teachers for the first few years, and she commented that she was, "looking to not be elected again." She explained why she and her colleague hoped to exit their role as lead teachers: "I think partly because it feels to me it would be unhealthy [to stay in this position]. It needs to be someone else now and there are people here who can do this. And unhealthy for me personally but also mostly for the school." Marilyn gave further insight into this dynamic, one that newer lead-teachers probably would not have experienced yet. Marilyn was part of the first round of pilot schools to open under the original MOU, and she noted that, "[My colleague] and I are the only two pilot school original teacher leaders that are still teachers in the classroom." The years of work were piling up:

> We're doing a lot of work. And that's where at some point you go, when they're yanking your teachers out from under you, you go, "Why am I doing this?"
> You're doing it for the kids and you're doing it for the vision of, the students in this neighborhood deserve a good school. But some days, it's very aggravating.

When asked about the other teacher-leaders at the table in the initial planning phase, Marilyn noted, "Yeah, are not doing it. They're certainly not lead-teachers. A lot of them are retired."

New roles for other teachers. As challenging as being a lead-teacher may be, the interface between lead-teachers and the rest of the teaching staff was described as complicated by several lead-teachers, especially those with multiple years of experience. Other teachers who understood their roles at traditional schools often struggled to adapt to the expectations of working in a pilot school, but new teachers who had only worked in a pilot school were similarly unclear about their roles. Marilyn, for example,

114

paraphrased her colleague regarding this dynamic, stating, "One of the complaints he has is, people who got hired here, and have never worked in any other kind of school, don't know." She elaborated elsewhere that they "don't know" how different working in a traditional school can be and how much more voice they have in decisions in a pilot school. Similarly, a veteran lead-teacher from another site confirmed that pilot school working conditions were different for teachers, though for this teacher, Lauren, it was more about the frustration of hiring teachers who later resisted the extra duties. She described teachers who offered to teach classes with supplemental credentials and to take on extra duties, only to complain later about meetings running long and being forced to take on extra work.

Certainly not all teachers fall into the categories described by Marilyn and Lauren, but surely the challenge of including some reluctant non-design team members must be challenging. Other lead-teachers attested to this challenge, as well. Benjamin, whose school was beginning its second year at the time of the interview, described the paradigm shift that other colleagues went through as they became acculturated to the pilot school. Benjamin's description of the involvement expectation was twofold: First, there is an implicit expectation that teachers in his school share their voice in solving problems, and second, that they implement those solutions with or without approval from the principal, if need be. Milton, a lead-teacher at a school with a year more experience that Benjamin's, almost recited Benjamin's paradigm shift verbatim, via a fictitious interplay between a principal and teacher from a traditional school:

> That means that the teachers are going to make some of the decisions at this school and they're not necessarily just going to go to the administrator and say,

"How do you want to do this, Bob?" And Bob is going to say, "This is how we're

going to do it, Joe, and I'll get my teachers on board, don't you worry." Those

conversations have become fewer and far between. That's pilot school. It's

teacher-led reform and I think, it's hard to put into words or to measure how

invested teachers work from day to day. It's really a huge part of the school

culture, when you feel invested you do a different job.

Milton continued, highlighting what this culture looked like in his school:

It plays out in the sense that people don't sit at meetings and talk about how

"they" need to do this "for us." We are they. It comes out a little weird, but "we"

and "they" are the same. So whenever someone comes up with an idea, they're

almost simultaneously saying, I guess I'm going do this. Rather than seeing the

divided, the "Us" and "Them" thing, which is pretty common at the

comprehensive high school.

Though certainly not all teachers new to the school had embraced the responsibilities and

opportunities available to them in the school, Milton's description of the culture of the

school captured the types of shifts in expectations by which these teachers might begin to

take on more leadership. This increased expectation for teachers to help resolve problems

certainly contributes to the types of challenges faced by teachers in their new roles in

pilot schools.

Conflicting Messages and Priorities from the District

Some pilot school teachers and principals found that district support for pilot

schools and their work was often lacking. Elizabeth, a new principal at a new pilot

school, put it simply, "the left hand is not talking to the right hand," in reference to the

116

types of conflicting messages from the district office. Various pilot school leaders

expressed frustration about the lack of clarity of policies regarding their schools. Pilot

schools are exempt from district and school board policies, but not from state education

code or federal law. The lack of differentiation from the district "animal" about the

various source of policies generated ire among some pilot school leaders, such as

Marilyn, who summarized this situation succinctly:

> So the constant question in terms of challenges is, when the district as an
>
> animal—not any one individual person—will try to impose things unknowingly
>
> on you, you have to say, "Who's doing this? Is this the state? Is it the federal
>
> government? Or is it LAUSD?" If it's LAUSD we have to decide whether we
>
> want to do it or not, and if we don't want to do it, we're going to get a little bit of
>
> friction for that.

Although doing so could create "friction" with the district, other teachers affirmed this

need to parse the sources of various district policies in order to determine which part, if

any, they could ignore. Several teachers described conflicting messages in policy

implementation, ranging from ordering books to staffing to implementing periodic

assessments. These conflicts revealed differences that ranged from district administrators'

misinterpretations of policies to priorities that were inconsistent with the pilot schools'

goals and seemed to infringe on their autonomies.

A few teachers shared their frustration about the nature of these

miscommunications by elaborating with extended metaphors that dramatized the

experiences of navigating conflicting district policies and messages from personnel.

Marsha, a lead-teacher who had led a SLC for several years prior to attempting to convert

the SLC to pilot school status, described the exasperation of fighting with the district, in the form of paddling to Catalina Island, off the coast of southern California:

> I could visualize... that I was kayaking and I would just see where I was going, usually to Catalina. And then I would see the barge or the tanker or the military cruiser coming or the Chevron oilrig, and I would have to turn really fast and go the other way so they didn't crush me and I would keep going back. And that's how I got through that. I would keep visualizing the kayak.

Another teacher likened the challenge of working with the district to being asked to successively jump over a higher and higher bar, only with fewer resources each time. This view of the district as a monolithic institutional actor was negative by everyone interviewed, except for Marsha who concluded her kayaking metaphor thusly:

> They want to see how badly you need to get to Catalina and they throw everything at you. And when you keep paddling, they eventually come along with a tow and tow you the rest of the way and then congratulate you and give you a free mooring. And you're like, "Wow! How'd that happen? Just the other day you were trying to crush me with a big boat!"

These metaphors suggest that teachers' felt that impact of these mixed messages was significant, revealing an underlying sense that the district did not fully support the pilot model. This attribution was relatively nonspecific, but was undoubtedly informed by pilot leaders' prior experiences with incompletely supported district reforms and their concern that this pilot reform, too, might not be fully supported.

Conflicted Support from Union Leadership

One major challenge mentioned by several participants was the December 2009 passage of the second pilot MOU, which allowed the expansion of the number of pilot schools from the original 10 to 30. Lifting the cap was critical for many of these schools to exist, and the uncertainty around lifting the cap coincided with the lame-duck era of the union president's final term. Teachers interested in lifting the cap attended multiple union House of Representatives meetings over a period of a few months in an effort to lobby union congress members to vote in favor of lifting the cap, all of which amounted to a sense that teachers had to fight their union to embrace this supposedly union-backed reform. This conflict over expanding the number of pilot schools beyond the original 10 undoubtedly contributed to teachers' negative perceptions of union leadership's support for the pilot school reform model.

Teachers reported their general distrust of union leadership, which in some cases had caused the teachers to distance themselves from the union. Bart, a design team member on a pilot school at a new campus, pointed out that support from individuals in leadership roles in the union was not always reinforced by other individuals in the union, and that he generally felt that the union was inattentive to and generally unaware of pilot schools' unique needs:

> We're just a little wary of the union, much as many of us are wary about the district. There are people within these organizations, that do want to help us and care about what's happening here but we feel there are a lot more people that have not necessarily demonstrated animosity, not like they want us to fail, but we just aren't on their radar for some reason. And we'd like to be. We feel like we'd like

to be heard a little more. And we'd like to see—I feel a little bit of a lack of

support particularly from the union. I think that for me personally that matters

more than the district because the union is supposed to support us as teachers.

Several other teachers confirmed this notion of keeping a safe distance from the union,

even though it contributed to the union's lack of awareness of their need for support.

Other lead-teachers described some actual conflicts with the union, which they

interpreted as resulting from the complex role they played as both union members and

school reformers. One lead-teacher, Harry, whose team went to court to fight the union

for the right to open their co-located school, offered his sense how leadership of the union

seemed was ambivalent about pilot schools: "They saw it as a way for motivated teachers

to essentially reconstitute their own school. And they didn't want that happening in big

schools all over the city."

Harry continued, arguing that he believed that the union's ambivalence stemmed

from fear of the power of teacher-leadership to compromise union protections of staffing

security. This dynamic effectively puts teacher-leaders in a conflicted position of being

powerful enough to challenge well-protected union policies, yet needing the good graces

of the very leaders offended by challenging these policies. Bob, a design team member

and lead teacher from another site, confirmed this notion of the duality of teachers' roles

in pilot schools, describing the impact of the autonomies as creating a "much more

powerful teacher model than anything they [the union] have ever seen before." This

"powerful teacher model" was evident in virtually every interview, as teachers shared

their frustrations and ire with being caught in the middle of union-endorsed reform that

union leaders inconsistently supported.

Lead-teachers' perceptions of lack of support from the union emerged from these well-known anecdotes surrounding the court battle, the reluctant approval of the December 2009 MOU, and the interactions with union leaders. Teachers found themselves in conflicted roles with the union, frustrated by the union's lack of support while simultaneously seeking greater support and awareness from the union for their needs and goals.

Challenges with the Staffing Autonomy

Experiences with one autonomy in particular, staffing, caused pilot leaders to express many challenges and limitations, due to the simultaneous impacts of district and union requirements. Limitations fell into two primary categories: those that were internal to the union and district policies affecting pilot schools and those that were symptomatic of issues beyond the immediate control of schools, the district, and the unions. One lead-teacher, Marilyn, who worked at one of the original pilot schools, described a slow erosion of staffing autonomy over the course of a few years: "It was so nice, when we had it." Marsha, a lead-teacher at a new school, expressed that there were "a lot of caveats to that staffing autonomy."

Internal Restraints. Interviewees shared their frustration with the limitations imposed on staffing autonomy by the union's and the district's policies and requirements, which had the net effect of diminishing their ability to freely select candidates for their schools. Harry, a principal at a pilot school, equivocated on who was at fault—the district or the union—for the narrow parameters of staffing autonomy, but was frustrated nonetheless: "So, do I feel like it was false advertising and I was sold a bill of goods? Yes. Do I understand the district's position? Yeah I kind of do." Having hired, let go of,

and lost multiple teachers over the years, Harry was familiar with the practical limitations to hiring and keeping a teaching staff. Another lead-teacher, Benjamin, described the rude awakening with which he realized the limitations Harry was referring to:

> When we went into this, we went into the pilot model, it was like we were told, "Yeah you can hire whoever you want," and we had people we knew outside the district and we were like, "You're perfect for our school. We would love to bring you in." And it was like the second meeting where they made a comment, like here's the list of people you can hire from, and we were like, "Can't we just hire anybody?" And they—literally, people from the district laughed at us, at this meeting. And we're like, "Wait a second, staffing autonomy, but it's limited by we can only hire within the district and we can only hire?" And they're like, "Well yeah, that's the rules."

The nature of this anecdote reveals some of the challenges of implementing this autonomy, as well as the steep learning curve for design team members.

External Restraints. Several teachers and principals brought up limitations to their staffing autonomy that were external to their school and the pilot agreement. These limitations were sometimes unrelated to their pilot status and due to being small schools, but the presupposition of autonomy juxtaposed with these factors caused the dissonance they described. Robin, the principal of a pilot school co-located with a comprehensive high school and Marsha's colleague, explained how her team felt compelled to offer positions to teachers from the host campus in order to maintain good working relations. However, no amount of autonomy would satisfy Harry, the principal of a pilot school, who found that luring qualified teachers away from other sites was deceptively difficult,

122

because many teachers in traditional schools seek honors and AP classes through the years, courses that his small school would be unlikely to offer. These limitations to hiring discussed by Robin and Harry are emblematic of the way pilot schools have been located and designed, rather than on the pilot agreement itself. Not all principals shared these frustrations in staffing autonomy, so the concerns could be specific to each location.

These external challenges with hiring were accompanied by challenges to sustaining staff members. One lead-teacher, Benjamin, described how the demands of working in his school were too much for one teacher:

> We had to hire an English teacher off the list last year and, we pushed him into retirement. Not us but we just drove him—having to work in our model drove him to retirement. We could have solved that problem by just letting us hire who we need to but, you know, we're being pushed by a bad economy, by a union that has priorities on seniority, not on quality.

Hiring "off the list" meant that the teacher was a displaced teacher whom Benjamin's school was obligated to take, even if he was not a good fit. Even when teachers were a good fit, the impact of district-wide layoffs, known as "Reductions In Force" or "RIF's," hit pilot schools hard, especially due to their small size. In regards to losing teachers to RIF's, one lead-teacher at an original pilot school said, "[Staffing autonomy] makes me want to cry actually. It's the only one that makes me want to cry. Even the budget doesn't make me want to cry." Her frustration was not due to the limitations of staffing, but to the loss of teachers that had been so painstakingly selected for hire by her colleagues:

> Well, the budget is a heartbreaker and it's frustrating as all get-out. But the staffing one is the one that hurts the most. It hurts the kids the most, it hurts the

123

pilot school the most. I think people would probably say that across the board.

One of the main functions of a small school like this is to personalize the

experience of the kids and to help kids be able to see a face that they know is

invested in them and helping them mature as an academic and as a person. And

when that face is just yanked out of their classroom and nobody wants them to go

away, it's not right. It's unjust. And it's painful. And that has been the thing

that—I feel like if our pilot school doesn't make it as a pilot school it will be

because of that. We're not progressing because of that, as a school. We're having

to always restart... Those teachers who have left us of their own accord because

they're getting married, they're moving, it's a transition in life, kids get that. We

get that. That's going to happen. But this sucking out of, this RIF'ing, it's sucked

the life out of a lot of teachers. Those of us who are left here.

The uncontrollable loss of teachers would be significant and potentially damaging for any

school, but for pilot schools this loss is often preceded by a high degree of intentionality

in hiring and intensive support for the teachers let go, all of which is lost effort. Harry, a

principal at another school affected heavily by RIF's, put it simply, "But on the whole, at

the end of the day, it's really hard to build a specialized program, get teachers to like each

other, trust each other and work together, when you lose 25% of them every year." These

limitations on the pilot schools' abilities to sustain staff members, even if they were

granted the staffing autonomy they expected, would make creating and sustaining

successful small schools challenging, at best. These limits are not necessarily specific to

pilot status, but would encumber any small school in the district as well.

Scheduling Autonomy Limited by Co-location

For pilot schools sharing campuses with larger, comprehensive schools, this co-location complicated the full utilization of their scheduling autonomy. Teachers found it difficult to fully exercise their scheduling autonomy, because the needs of the bigger host school limited the range of options available to them. Dana, a teacher at a new pilot that converted from SLC status, described the limitations on schedule imposed by sharing a campus: "We're still at the mercy of the big school," while her colleague, Doris, expanded by saying, "We compromised our bell schedule. We wanted to have our PD on Fridays instead of Mondays but because of the big school [we couldn't]." These challenges imposed by sharing a campus with a bigger school became a preemptive strike on the flexibility afforded pilot schools, due to the complex arrangement of sharing facilities, custodial staff, and security staff, as well as inconveniences such as managing multiple bell schedules, lunch supervision, and athletics participation. These challenges of co-location scheduling were reiterated by an interviewee from another pilot co-located with a comprehensive high school.

Budgetary Limitations and Challenges

In discussing budgetary autonomy, one challenge that emerged appeared to be directly related to the insufficient nature of their school budget. Pilot school budgets are based on student enrollment, and the small school size results in smaller budgets than teachers at traditional schools would be familiar with. Said one principal, Robin, "With the small budget that we have, there's only so much autonomy that we can have anyway." A lead-teacher, Milton, at a new pilot school concurred, "If there isn't a lot of money, there isn't a lot of autonomy, right?" Others commented similarly. Many pilot

schools operate on a modified per-pupil budget, in which the school receives a number of

teaching positions based on enrollment, plus a small discretionary budget. Some of the

larger pilot schools receive a strictly per-pupil budget, and received more funding than

they would if they received a modified per-pupil budget, and thus have a bit more

discretion over how much to spend on positions. Participants complained about all

aspects of these two models, noting that the budgets were simply too meager, particularly

on the modified per-pupil budget. One of Kevin's colleagues, Marla, painted the

budgetary limits in terms of providing services to students, though her concerns were

really about small schools and not particularly about being a pilot school, sharing her

frustration with the limitations inherent in the size of her school's budget: "How the hell

can I even give them six classes a day with this staff, this ratio, this allocation?"

More specific challenges to budgetary autonomy emerged in several interviews as

teachers and principals discussed imposed requirements. Marsha discussed how the

district presented her school team a ready-made staffing budget, with amounts pre-

calculated based on their number of students: "They give you a template and they give

you the money and they show you how to do that. So, I'm not really sure that they give

you a lot of autonomy with the budget." She continued, further questioning the level of

freedom her school might have with the budget, sharing the frustration that she had only

realized the limitations long after her new school had been approved. Frustration over

these constraints were reaffirmed by Harry, a principal who had a few years of pilot

school experience:

> The budget stuff, here's where a bunch of teachers that start a school are naïve
>
> and we think, "Oh it looks really easy on TV—we can do it." But understanding

126

the budgets and how you can spend money and how you can spend money

efficiently, is perplexing and difficult. More difficult than it needs to be. Normal

accounting rules from business and I don't know, the planet Earth, don't apply

when you're using federal monies in different programs and entitlements.

A few others repeated these comments about the restrictions and unclear processes, and

participants tended to discuss the steep learning curve of how to best utilize their limited

resources.

Time Constraints

The operational challenges of opening a new school, coupled with the many

necessary reports and reviews, became a topic challenge for many lead-teachers,

seemingly due to the time commitments involved. The time commitments of these

complexities could be burdensome, especially because the teacher-driven nature of pilot

schools meant that many more teachers were involved in the meetings and planning

sessions related to these tasks. Several teachers discussed how their plans for their

collaboration time had been thwarted, sometimes by organizational difficulties in making

good use of time and other times by operational challenges that consumed their time.

Multiple teachers mentioned the same scenario of the early-years challenges of losing

collaboration time to dealing with operations. Marla, a lead-teacher whose school had just

finished its first year at the time of the interview, described how her team had recognized

and balanced the need for both operations and instructional planning, balancing one

meeting each week for operational issues and another meeting for instructional planning,

noting that there was never enough time. Harry, a principal at an SLC that converted to

pilot status, after discussing some of the challenges his school was facing, suggested that no amount of time in the world could resolve those challenges.

Accreditation weighs heavily on lead-teachers during the early years of a school, so preparing for Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) visits and Public School Choice reviews (which, like WASC, consist of a preview report, a visit, and a follow-up report) were discussed several times as a major time limitation. Though both of these processes are required for any new school, the limited staffs of pilot schools are often overwhelmed by the time commitments necessary. Marla, a lead-teacher from a school that had just completed its first WASC visit and first two PSC reviews that school year, complained that, "You spend more time in the first semester writing about what you're doing than doing it. You have no time to do what you're supposed to be doing because all you're doing is writing about it." Other teachers reiterated her complaint.

Some school leaders experienced difficulty in finding time to interact with outside partners. One principal, Harry, discussed the challenges of attracting partners, noting that a number of factors—such as his school's location in a poor neighborhood or partners' uncertainty about making grants to an LAUSD school—had limited their success. Other teachers shared the challenges of coordinating these partnerships without extra time or personnel. One lead-leader, Milton, described the time-consuming nature of these partnerships. Despite the goodwill of the parties involved, actually setting up these partnerships could be a challenge:

> Well coordinating the whole thing is very time-consuming. That's part of my job, is to get that connected—but [at] times we have people who really want to work with kids but they don't really have the skill set to work with teenagers… Getting

commitments from people who want to work with kids and teachers is difficult.

Time. Just because people want to help, doesn't mean it happens.

This challenge of time was reiterated by one of Milton's colleagues, Ronnie, who said, "We've had a hard time managing this because at the same time while we have all these people who want to help, at the same time while we're fielding all this interest, we're still running a school; we're still teaching."

Summary

Individually, the pilot schools' autonomies are perceived as important gateways for how teachers and principals have improved conditions for teaching and learning. Staffing, governance, and budgetary autonomies create powerful opportunities for pilot school leaders to hire and fire people who are the right "fit," and then set up decision-making structures that empower them to create and sustain a mission-driven culture. The autonomies over curriculum, calendar, and professional development allow school staffs to make effective day-to-day and long-term decision for supporting their teachers and students well. Relationships among the school staff members and with district, union, and non-profit staff helped sustain pilot school staffs through the challenges of implementing these autonomies.

These autonomies were not without their challenges, though. Unclear and conflicting policy mandates were perceived to slow implementation, as did inconsistent union support for the model. Staffing and budgetary autonomy were particularly difficult for pilot school leaders to implement, due in part to the steep learning curves for these, but also due to the complex rules associated with them. Small, mission-driven schools

may be adept at supporting teachers and students well, but the increased workload for the members of these small staffs contributed to fatigue and fear of burnout.

Most significant was the creation of new leadership roles for principals and lead-teachers. These roles were difficult to manage and ultimately affected all members of pilot school staffs, and the new roles cut across all of the autonomies. The roles emerged as a result of having autonomy, rather than the use of any one particular autonomy. Pilot school leaders shared frustration with some the challenges related to their autonomies, but generally remained optimistic. One, Milton, expressed how working in a pilot school had "revived [his] passion for teaching" after 28 years in the classroom, and explained how the collective impact of the autonomies created a shared sense of responsibility in his small school:

> The autonomies we've spoken about truly affect the school culture and create a sense of buy-in and accountability. And for most people, especially those who've worked in comprehensive high schools, when they walk onto this campus every day having remembered what it used to be like to work at [a comprehensive high school], they come into their working environment with a completely different attitude, like, "Yes I can." And I never, like I cleaned graffiti off the bathroom walls [here] where I would have walked past that at [my former school], where I enjoyed teaching, and a lot of that goes along with the autonomies. I feel as though, if I'm going to have the ability to make decisions, then I'm going to feel responsible for what's going on at this school.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter presents a summary of the study, a discussion of the findings and their contribution to the field, the practical implications for policy and practice, and recommendations for future research. The discussion synthesizes the findings from this study, identifying major themes that cut across how pilot school leaders have utilized their autonomies to improve conditions for teaching and learning, and places them in the context of the existing literature on these topics. Recommendations for policy and practice are made based on what has been learned about the supports and challenges experienced by pilot school leaders. Suggestions for the future of this reform effort are offered, as are suggestions for future research.

Summary of the Study

The original premise of charter schools as laboratories for innovation was based on the notion that deregulation ought to spur innovation and ultimately improve student achievement (Lubienski, 2003). Pilot schools were grounded in the same theory of action, with two critical differences: Teachers in the schools remain unionized and take on new roles and responsibilities that are uncommon in traditional public schools, often designing and leading them in various ways (French, 2006). Pilot school leaders' experiences offer a powerful glimpse into the inner workings of deregulated schools as they begin to utilize their new freedoms, and the purpose of this study was to explore these school leaders' experiences and understand the types of innovations, challenges, and supports they

experienced as they attempted to use their autonomies to improve conditions for teaching and learning. The research questions that framed this study are:

What do LAUSD pilot school leaders experience as they use their autonomies to create innovative small schools?

- *How have pilot school leaders attempted to use their autonomies?*
- *What has supported or hindered their use of the autonomies over the life of their school?*

To explore these questions, I conducted interviews with pilot school principals and lead-teachers. This qualitative study was informed by the traditions of institutional ethnographies, in which participants' and informants' responses are used to understand and map their experiences within a particular system or institution (Smith, 2005). In this case, the institution was the pilot school model in Los Angeles, and the semi-structured interviews focused on pilot school leaders' attempts to use their autonomies to improve conditions for teaching and learning and the challenges and supports they experienced internally, from the district, the union, and from third-party non-profits when doing so.

In summary, this study found that pilot school leaders primarily utilized their autonomies to improve conditions for teaching and learning in various ways, and that the result of the autonomies was to create new leadership roles for principals and teachers. Pilot school leaders effectively exercised the autonomies over which they had nearly complete control at the school site: calendar, professional development, governance, and curriculum, using these to create and sustain mission-driven cultures in these schools. However, budget and staffing autonomies were heavily restricted by district and union policies, which hampered pilot school leaders' ability to exercise their autonomies in

these areas. Further, district and union support for the pilot model seemed unclear to most school leaders, with inconsistent messages from various arms of the organizations. Union leadership had supported pilot schools early on, but this support had diminished to simply not halting the reform. Third-party non-profits proved to be powerful supports for pilot schools as the lead-teachers designed their schools and operated them, though the ability of these organizations to lobby for the schools was weak. Pilot school principals and lead-teachers embraced the pilot school thin contract and EWA to create new roles for traditional teachers and administrators in these schools, though these roles were often challenging to negotiate. Given the short track record of the pilot school model in Los Angeles, my conclusion is there is great potential for this form of deregulated school to allow teachers to improve schools from within.

Discussion

Trends, Innovations, and Challenges within Pilot Schools

In contrast with charter schools, which do not necessarily empower teachers to take on additional leadership duties, pilot school leaders in this study redistributed power in ways that empower all teachers, including the lead-teachers. Teacher leadership is inherent in the design of the pilot school model, and pilot school leaders meet this expectation by developing structures and roles that formalized teacher leadership into the fabric of their schools. Governance and staffing decisions in pilot schools have the effect of elevating the role of teachers, giving teachers more power and influence than they would in traditional schools and most charter school settings. Pilot school leaders design democratic decision-making structures, such as committee structures and direct voting

processes. These are common in pilot schools, unlike traditional public schools and most charters, and these new structures place increased power in the hands of teachers.

However, sometimes this is a contentious redistribution of power. The new power leads to additional work for all staff members, though pilot school leaders generally find this work tolerable because it is purposeful. This increased role of teachers in decision-making also has the surprising net effect of shifting principals away from their role in traditional schools as decision-maker, to that of mission-driven torchbearer and buffer or bridge with the district. This trend is suggested by the research on the impact of distributed leadership that has generally suggested that principals' roles ought to change in this new environment, ignoring the mechanisms of how they change (Harris, 2007). In the instances where research has explored the ways in distributed leadership is made operational in schools, the research has focused on administratively-driven, not teacher-led, reform (Smylie, Mayrowetz, Murphy, & Louis, 2007).

The role of a lead-teacher, an innovation of the pilot model, was universally present in all pilot schools studied, though the exact definition of this role, the selection process for it, and lead-teachers' duration in this position varied from site to site. Teacher-leadership has received some attention in research, but the unique, more formalized nature of lead-teachers' roles in pilot schools has not. Lead-teachers are sometimes elected by school staffs; other times they are simply de facto leaders due to their design team experience. Despite the existence of at least one lead-teacher in every pilot school, there was nothing universal about the role of these teachers. The lack of clarity of these roles contributed to lead-teachers' fatigue and frustration, with some lead-teachers abandoning their posts during the first few years. At a few sites, tensions erupted

134

between lead-teachers and principals over the complexities of managing these multiple leadership roles and resulting complex decision-making processes.

A central, if not key, feature of the pilot schools included in this study was the purposeful creation of a mission-driven culture. Pilot school leaders use their autonomies to create and sustain this mission-driven culture, as opposed to what many study informants had experienced in their former, traditional public schools. Pilot school leaders are conscientious about hiring and firing decisions, looking for individuals who were a "fit" for their organizations, even when this led to extended searches for new candidates. School staffs tailor bell schedules and calendars to meet their needs and replace traditional, hierarchical decision-making processes with more democratic ones. Teachers extend and restructure professional development time to make room for collaboration around curriculum, student progress, and, in some cases, improved assessments. School staffs, in short, deliberately allocate resources toward common purposes.

In order to make good use of their autonomies, pilot school leaders have to get creative and leverage maximum use of their meager resources. Small schools receive proportionally smaller budgets and numbers of staff positions than larger traditional schools, and these are often too minimal to fully serve their communities of students well. Pilot school leaders use their budgetary autonomy to maximize the number of teaching positions at the expense of out-of-classroom staff, which has the effect of both reducing class size and adding work for teachers (due to the limited number of out-of-classroom staff). Through governance and decision-making structures, pilot school leaders increase the degree of transparency related to budgetary and programmatic decisions, including

135

other stakeholders, at times directly, in many of these decisions. Interestingly, pilot school leaders tend to maximize professional collaboration time as well as instructional time, creating space during the workweek for teachers to design curriculum and discuss student progress. These resource maximization strategies are in concert with the mission-driven culture described above. Pilot school leaders reinforce their mission by putting multiple resources together to support school-wide goals.

These uses of the autonomies help to distribute leadership across the organization, reorganizing and reconfiguring the organizations to support teachers in these new roles. This is consistent with research on distributed leadership (Harris & Spillane, 2008), which suggests that diffusing leadership across organizations may be a necessary first step in school reform; that is to say, utilizing the autonomies might not be possible until schools distribute leadership. The autonomies have the effect of reinforcing one another, with many school goals overlapping multiple autonomies. These mutually reinforcing characteristics of the workplace are consistent with research (Smylie, Mayrowetz, Murphy, & Louis, 2007) on the importance of embedding leadership responsibilities across multiple staff positions when organizations make concerted efforts to distribute leadership, though prior research had examined the process when initiated by administrators, not by lead-teachers.

Full exercise of the autonomies is often hampered by other challenges. In general, all of the autonomies are difficult to fully exercise due to the time constraints inherent to running schools on small staffs, and several lead-teachers in this study shared their frustration with carrying a workload that would have been distributed among multiple administrators and coordinators in a traditional school. Sometimes autonomies are in

conflict with district and union policies. Staffing autonomy and budgetary autonomy, in particular, generated frustration from pilot school leaders in this study due to the limited control they could actually exhibit over these autonomies. This is partly due to pilot school leaders' steep learning curve about how to use these autonomies, but also due to limitations imposed by a poor fiscal climate and multiple rounds of layoffs. Some of these small schools were hit hard by the Reduction in Force (RIF) notices that had eliminated several thousand teaching jobs district-wide. Pilot school leaders in this study also vented frustration about the limited size of their budgets, which were proportional based on their size but too meager to fully support the schools in the ways the school staffs wanted.

Given the opportunity to re-think the design of their schools and the roles of the educators working in them, pilot school leaders develop innovations beyond simply exercising the autonomies. The uses of the autonomies typically improve conditions for teaching and learning, and some had the effect of more work for teachers. For example, maximizing the number of teaching positions certainly reduces class sizes at pilot schools, which should benefit students and teachers, but came at the expense of out-of-classroom support staff. Most pilot school leaders in this study had eliminated district-mandated, non-college preparatory courses in order to increase students' access to core curriculum and school theme-related elective classes. Every pilot school studied included a career theme to make learning more relevant for students, and teachers often reinforced these with interdisciplinary lessons and project-based learning. Teachers in longer-standing pilot schools had begun replacing district-generated periodic assessments with their own in order to make learning even more relevant and purposeful for students.

These aspects of pilot schools contribute to improving teaching conditions via developing a core curriculum and school theme, all of which contribute to a mission-driven culture. These findings were inconsistent with the research on charter schools' use of autonomy to improve instruction (Lake, 2008), where autonomy did not directly translate to changes in classroom practices. The findings from this study suggest that deregulation alone may not improve conditions for teaching and learning, but that the additional component of teacher-leadership is necessary to create purposeful, mission-driven schools with a high degree of stakeholder involvement. Pilot school leaders use their autonomies to create purposeful learning environments for students through career themes and project-based learning, and pilot school leaders move beyond simply exercising their autonomies to creating mission-driven schools with high expectation for all staff members.

That is to say, deregulation alone may not be sufficient to improve conditions for teaching and learning, but that deregulation coupled with empowered and sustained teacher leadership allows for the development of mission-driven schools, and that individuals within these schools make effective use of their autonomies to improve teaching and learning outcomes. Due to the self-assigning nature of the extra duties teachers place on themselves, the end result is a more balanced approach in which pilot school leaders improve conditions for learning without compromising conditions for teaching.

New and Challenging Roles for Institutional Actors

Research on the roles of institutional actors was generally confirmed in this study, though prior research (Honig, 2009) has examined the role of district administrators from

138

the district office perspective as these administrators worked to implement school autonomy models, leaving out the perspectives of school-level leaders. The complexity pilot school leaders face in navigating the school district bureaucracy required support from mid-level district administrators, whose roles helped connect pilot school leaders to the proper resources in the institution (Honig, 2006). Nonetheless, district and union policies aimed at supporting and directing pilot schools often conflict with one another, leaving pilot school teachers and principals inconsistent messages and mandates to sort out. This study revealed new patterns and trends in this work, as pilot leaders manage to navigate these unclear policy expectations. Union leadership appears to have wavered in their support for the pilot school contract after a few years, while district administrators often seemed unaware of the complexities of pilot school leaders' jobs, and unable to accommodate requests for district assistance or guidance.

Alternatively, pilot school leaders who are able to connect with individual administrators and union officials are able to build bridges and generate support for their work, even against a backdrop of policies and mandates that seem disconnected from their work. While the experiences of the pilot school leaders in dealing with the union and the district were new and often frustrating to them, these experiences of LA-based pilot school principals and teachers are consistent with the early years of the Boston pilot schools. Boston pilot school leaders experienced the inconsistent stances of the union and district leaders, and even came to the realization that different pilot schools were receiving different budget models (CCE, 2001). This act of "history repeating itself" suggests that the complex nature of freeing schools from bureaucratic control might occur similarly in other urban districts, if attempted.

139

The role of third-party non-profits emerged as critical for sustaining the work of pilot school leaders. Non-profits often partnered with pilot schools in their development and implementation phases, offering support and program activities to further the schools' missions. Coordinating these roles was challenging and time-consuming, but ultimately worthwhile for pilot school leaders in terms of supporting student achievement. For some pilot school leaders, their schools' very existences were attributable to the support their designs had received from third-party non-profits in the planning phase. Where pilot school leaders were often wary and mistrustful of district and union leaders, they would often seek advice and support from non-profit leaders with experience in the pilot reform model and history. However, one role of non-profits inconsistent with the Boston pilot model was that of serving as a management organization for the schools. In Boston, the Center for Collaborative Education serves as a fiscal agent for some of the pilots, centralizing resources and advocacy separately from the district office (CCE, 2001). In Los Angeles, district administrators serve this role internally, perhaps diluting the degree of advocacy available to pilot school leaders.

This study, generally, offers glimpses of the challenges and potential for creating autonomous public schools and the experiences of teachers and principals as they develop and sustain these efforts. The findings of this study are highly contextualized, but could be extended to aid in understanding similar small school autonomy models in other large urban districts. The findings of this study could be used to better understand the ways in which small schools distribute leadership among their staffs and how the multiple leaders in these schools manage their roles, as well as informing district and union leaders about how to best support them.

Two distinguishing features of pilot schools make the findings of this study useful in other arenas. First, the pilot school EWA is a unique element of hiring and firing in pilot schools, contributing to shaping the roles and workloads of teachers in pilot schools. The EWA serves as an instrument to distribute leadership formally within a school setting, and could be used to help explain other leadership distribution efforts in other districts and settings. The EWA is critical in framing pilot school teachers' roles, and the findings of this study may or may not be broadly applicable to teachers' roles in other contexts if a similar contract situation is not present. Second, pilot schools are afforded significant autonomies (which they may or may not fully utilize) but they are not afforded autonomies piecemeal. The findings of this study could be used to understand how school leaders might use these autonomies in other settings, but the overlapping nature of pilot school leaders' experiences with these autonomies suggests that the collective impact of having autonomy may be more important than any one standalone autonomy. The result of this is two-fold: First, pilot school leaders tended to create plans that utilized multiple autonomies, meaning that the autonomies were mutually reinforcing and could not be isolated for individual study or implementation. Second, the impact of having autonomy was itself a powerful force, contributing to a shared sense of responsibility among faculty members. Thus, multiple autonomies contribute to an environment of high expectations where school leaders envision reforms that span multiple aspects of a school's design and structure.

Institutional actors might also gather that the experiences of pilot school leaders offer powerful suggestions for how to expand the usage of deregulation to improve teaching and learning conditions. Unlike the charter movement, which has largely

demonstrated that deregulation alone is insufficient to spur lasting reform, pilot school leaders' efforts to create collaborative, mission-driven schools suggest the critical nature of teacher-leadership in the reformation process that follows deregulation. Successful charter schools, by contrast, are often managed by CMOs that determine and manage the school leaders' use of their autonomies. Deregulating schools via the pilot school model requires rethinking local management structures, since pilot school leaders are more likely to seek support, guidance, and advocacy from an intermediary support organization than from the district management structure that had previously confined them. Pilot school management must incorporate the individual nature of pilot schools as well as the role that teacher-leadership plays in these schools' designs and operations.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Pilot schools originated in one local district in LAUSD, and early expansion allowed for a few pilot schools to open in other local districts. At the time of this study, LAUSD had recently reorganized into four geographic districts (down from eight), with a fifth overlay district comprised of all of the pilot schools and other autonomy model schools. The findings of this study generally support this reorganization. Pilot school principals served to not only buffer the school staff from the district but also served as liaisons to district administrators and community partners. The ability of principals to leverage these relationships is critical for schools' success, so combining all of the pilot schools into one district potentially allows for better school-district relations. Principals ought to be able to connect more effectively with a smaller number of district administrators, and these administrators ought to be able to better understand the unique needs of each pilot school. (At the time of the study, this reorganization had recently

taken place, but interviewees only referenced it as a change with likely positive consequences for them.)

More specifically, district administrators and school leaders need to do additional work to improve the clarity of pilot school principals' and lead-teachers' roles. These roles were somewhat ambiguously defined by interviewees themselves, contributing to some of the conflicts between lead-teachers and principals over decision-making authority as they negotiated these complex new roles. Teacher leadership carried over into pilot school teachers who were not identified as lead-teachers, contributing to their frustration and role confusion.

Lead-teachers and principals often collaborated with pilot school colleagues from other schools and campuses, and these networks had the capacity to support teachers and principals in developing in their new roles. Many of these networks and relationships were ad hoc and based on prior working relationships and connections through outside non-profits. Therefore, one recommended role for the district and the union would be to help foster networks across pilot school sites. Further, district administrators, union officials, and non-profit staff who are highly involved in pilot school operations could assist in connecting pilot school leaders across campuses in sharing best practices to solve similar problems. Similarly, a deliberate effort needs to be made to connect pilot school principals and lead-teachers to networks and mentors in order to build their individual and collective capacity as leaders in their schools. This may happen as a result of the fifth overlay district.

Every school in this study (and all but one pilot school in the district, at the time of this study) operated on a co-located campus. Pilot schools share the campus with other

pilot schools, charter schools, and traditional comprehensive high schools. Each campus has its own challenging operational needs, many of which consume principals' time and distract from instructional leadership. District administrators need to clarify how school leaders should share resources and responsibilities on co-located sites, as the process of developing these plans internally led to frustration and wasted time for principals, especially if co-location challenges led to conflicts among school principals, which they often did.

Principals in particular needed support and guidance in navigating their new roles; not only were most principals new to administration, they had few models of leaders in the same role. Pilot school principals work under an alternate administrative contract that limits their ability to accrue seniority in the district, which, when coupled with the extra work hours and responsibilities that come with being the lone administrator of a school, surely contributed to the fact that first wave of successful pilot principals had exited their positions at the time of this study. Many left for administrative positions at traditional schools or for district leadership positions working with pilot schools. This rapid turnover of principals suggests that the position may be too demanding for most people, or that the people in these positions are under-supported. The district and the administrators' union should invest time and support in assisting pilot principals as they navigate their roles and reconsider the seniority rules for pilot school principals.

District support for the autonomies could be bolstered by improving the funding formula for pilot schools. Of the per-pupil amount that LAUSD receives from the state of California, less than half finds its way to schools to be used for payroll and operational expenses. The district encroachments on the pilot per-pupil allocation include district-

144

wide services and supports that may or may not be utilized by pilot schools, and district leaders should re-examine and increase the allocation that pilot schools receive. A clearer, more refined analysis of the district encroachments could resolve and clarify the conflicts between the per-pupil and modified per-pupil funding models for pilot schools.

The number of LAUSD pilots (49 approved or operating at the end of this study) has quickly reached a point where district administrators are probably unable to effectively support and mentor these schools and their leaders. Elsewhere in LAUSD, some traditional schools operate under non-profit educational management organizations that provide instructional and professional development leadership, technical assistance, and help develop partnerships with outside organizations. Third-party non-profit organizations might be better equipped to handle small networks of pilot schools, leaving the district to focus solely on operations challenges while outside support organizations could partner with pilot school leaders to focus on effectively utilizing their autonomies to improve conditions for teaching and learning. However, though this support might be effective in the near term, it is no solution for the long-term challenge of sustaining pilot schools in the district. The diverse nature of these schools will mean that their needs and challenges will become even more complex in future years as their numbers grow, and the district and union are woefully underprepared to deal with that challenge. Further, the structure of hiring and firing at pilot schools only functions with a relatively small number of pilots in a relatively vast district that has the capacity to place dismissed pilot school teachers at other school sites (because "fired" teachers are simply sent back to the district hiring pool, to be reassigned at another school). As the number of pilot schools increases, their impact on other schools could increase. District administration must

create a long-term plan for these autonomous schools by creating effective policies for supporting them and managing their needs.

Charter school leaders and district leaders looking to implement pilot school models in other districts ought to be attentive to the challenges inherent in this model. First, simply freeing school leaders from the bureaucracy is not enough; rather, district and charter planners must think through the supports that these school leaders will need to actually implement their plans, since their needs may be very different from traditional school leaders' needs. Improving conditions for teaching and learning is not simply a matter of removing barriers, but rather replacing systems with innovations and improvements designed by school leaders. In turn, autonomous school leaders' attempts to improve conditions for teaching and learning may challenge existing policies and programs, and district and charter organizational leaders must be prepared for the demands of these empowered school leaders. To put it simply, deregulating schools should lead to challenging the policies and procedures of the very institution that was deregulated, in ways that may or may not have been anticipated.

Recommendations for Future Research

The research questions of this study led interviewees to broach numerous topics that warrant additional research on pilots and pilot school leaders. Numerous studies on the Boston pilot schools have examined student achievement data, yet no studies have similarly examined LA-based pilots. Unlike Boston pilots, many of which operate as schools of choice, pilot schools in Los Angeles serve their neighborhood students, potentially allowing for greater parity in comparing student achievement data between pilots and traditional schools. Pilot schools often improve conditions for teaching and

learning in non-traditional ways, and further studies might examine non-traditional measures of student achievement, perhaps focusing on students' college- and career-readiness when attending pilot schools versus charter or traditional public schools.

Although this study partially examined the experiences of pilot school principals and lead-teachers, no surveys were conducted of other teachers working in these schools. A follow-up study on non-design team members' experiences working in pilot schools could help discern if the attempts to improve conditions for teaching actually pay off for the entire teaching staff, particularly if the study utilized an institutional ethnography methodology to understand the impact of the pilot school structure as an institution. Such a study might help answer the question of viability of expanding the pilot school model beyond Boston and Los Angeles.

The immense challenge and complexity of operating these small autonomous schools certainly led to some of the lead-teacher and principal turnover identified in this study. Working conditions for these pilot school leaders are certainly challenging, and a multi-site case study could examine these roles, particularly in contrast to traditional public schools and charter schools, and include pilot leaders who have left the field.

One autonomy that proved particularly difficult for pilot school leaders to manage was that of staffing, due to the large number of teachers lost to layoffs during the first few years of the pilot model in Los Angeles. The three years prior to this study had been fiscally challenging for the district (and state), and the resulting layoffs had impacted pilot schools excessively. The high degree of intentionality over hiring choices, coupled with the strong professional community that develops in pilot schools led to an intense frustration over losing junior staff members during these rounds of layoffs. Larger

schools might be more able to buffer the loss of teachers, but pilot schools were hit hard when a handful of newer teachers were lost to Reduction in Force notices. Additional studies might consider the impact of these layoffs on staff morale and the staffs' ability to pursue their mission, especially because charter schools—the nearest example of autonomous small schools—do not regularly lay off staff members based on tenure. Future studies, similar to this one, might be conducted during better economic times or simply after pilot school leaders have more years of experience in the model.

One final recommendation for future research concerns the use of institutional ethnography in similar environments. The use of institutional ethnography to understand the experiences of pilot school leaders in Los Angeles provided a useful lens for understanding the complexity of these educators' work and experiences with the district, union, and non-profits. Although this study focused on the institutions that frame these educators' work, disseminating the results of this study yields a potential contradiction in protecting informants' identities while sharing their experiences to help advance policies in the field. Institutional ethnographies are generally intended to better understand the everyday impacts of policies, as well as to help individuals within these institutions to make more informed decisions (Smith, 2005). Institutional ethnography is often used as a methodology in instances where the divide between policy-makers and the people those policies impact is wide, shielding informants with a layer of anonymity. But in cases such as pilot schools, where the division between policy-makers (the district and union administrators) and the policy-implementers (lead-teachers and principals) is so narrow, the potential for revealing informants' identities is high. Future work on this

methodology should investigate ways to successfully investigate institutions where the relationship between leaders and employees is similarly close.

Concluding Statement

Over 20 years after California joined the national charter school movement, the number of these autonomous schools has exploded. Most people would agree that deregulation ought to spur innovation and improve conditions for teaching and learning, yet the charter movement has little to demonstrate for two decades of work. Pilot schools offer a powerful alternative for districts seeking autonomous school models to improve school performance, and an even more powerful model for teachers unions seeking to empower teachers through contract reform. The incredible capacity of the teachers and principals in pilot schools suggest that—20 years after the fact—that the talent needed to innovate and improve conditions for teaching and learning was available in our schools all along.

Pilot schools are complex to manage, run, and work in, as the data in this study would attest, and the needs of pilot school leaders reveal the many unexpected challenges for district and union leaders in supporting this model. The talent and ideas needed to improve conditions for teaching and learning in our schools may already exist, but turning those ideas into reality is challenging work. Empowered teacher leadership, such as through the pilot school reform model, requires careful facilitation and strategic support. The future of the pilot school model hinges on how effectively pilot school leaders make use of their autonomies and consequently push district, union, and third-party non-profits to revise their policies and programs to support these educators in the field. Conversely, district, union, and non-profit leaders should continue to develop

149

methods to share and promote pilot school leaders' efforts. Indeed, these educators'

efforts have contributed to the expansion of the number of pilot schools, and they have

challenged district and union leaders to clarify and change policies to allow them to

improve conditions for teaching and learning. If well supported, this unique intersection

of school-based, grassroots reform coupled with union-level and district-level policy

support has the potential to radically reform public education.

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Appendix A: Draft Email Solicitation to Participants

Email to Principals

Dear _____,

I am a doctoral student at California State University, Northridge where I am studying the experiences and challenges that Pilot school teachers and leaders face in their work. I'm a teacher at Los Angeles River School, one of the Pilots at Sonia Sotomayor Learning Academies. ___*So and so*___ recommended that I contact you for my study, because he/she believes you would have an important perspective on this issue.

In my study, I'm exploring the supports and resources that Pilot school teachers, coordinators and principals face in their first few years of operation. As part of my research, I'm conducting interviews with Pilot school staff members to better understand how they attempt to take advantage of the Pilot autonomies, and what challenges and supports they've faced along the way

I am writing you to ask for your permission to include your school as one of five case studies in my research, and to interview you and a few teachers from your school regarding their experiences. Your responses will be anonymous, thus neither your name nor your school's name will appear in the study. Each interview should be approximately 40 minutes in length, and I'll probably have some few follow-up questions later.

Pilot school teachers' and principals' voices are critical in understanding how to make this innovative school model work, and I hope you will consider this request. If you are willing to participate, please email or call me back and I'll send you some additional information.

Thanks!

- Paul Payne

Email to Participants at Selected Schools

Dear _____,

I am a doctoral student at California State University, Northridge where I am studying the experiences and challenges that Pilot school teachers and leaders face in their work. I'm a teacher at Los Angeles River School, one of the Pilots at Sonia Sotomayor Learning Academies. ___*So and so*___ recommended that I contact you for my study, because he/she believes you would have an important perspective on this issue.

Your principal, _____, has given me permission to include your school in my study, and I would like to set up an interview with you. In my study, I'm exploring the supports and resources that Pilot school teachers, coordinators and principals face in their first few years of operation. As part of my research, I'm conducting interviews with Pilot school staff members to better understand how they attempt to take advantage of the Pilot autonomies, and what challenges and supports they've faced along the way

Your responses will be anonymous, thus neither your name nor your school's name will appear in the study. Each interview should be approximately 40 minutes in length, and I'll probably have some few follow-up questions later.

Pilot school teachers' and principals' voices are critical in understanding how to make this innovative school model work, and I hope you will consider this request. If you are willing to participate, please email or call me back and I'll send you some additional information.

Thanks!

- Paul Payne

Appendix B: Semi-structured Interview Protocol

Pilot School Leaders' Experiences

1. Tell me about your school. What is unique or special about how you've designed it? What role(s) have you played in the design and implementation of this school?

2. Pilot schools have been granted six autonomies (curriculum, budget, governance, calendar, staffing, and PD) – how have you tried to take advantage of these autonomies as a school to improve conditions for teaching and learning?

3. What challenges have you experienced in utilizing the autonomies?

4. What supports have you experienced in utilizing the autonomies?

Appendix C: List of A Priori and Emergent Themes

A priori	**Emergent**
budgetary autonomy	accountability /
curricular autonomy	adaptability /
failure of SLCs	co-location
teacher-leadership	common vision
governance autonomy	conflict with administration /
role of district	difficulty of providing access to all students
staffing autonomy	focus on teaching and learning
role of non-profits	hard work / burnout
challenges of starting a new school	limited resources
not be the administrator	need for outside partnerships and support
role of union	need for professional support
assuming leadership role	networking
scheduling autonomy	original idea /
PD autonomy	prior experience with the district
	still developing
	student voice
	they don't get it
	time for collaboration /
	we don't ask for permission
	losing autonomy /
	role of principal
	barrier between teachers and administration
	shared responsibility
	flexibility
	importance of collaboration
	impact of autonomy
	unique school thematic focus

Appendix D: Sample Preliminary Coding

Line	Speaker	Content	A priori	Emergent
27	Lauren	Yeah, I guess it was provisional because of all of the union ups and downs and ins and outs. It was so confusing. Duffy was on board, we went to various meetings with him. We even did some of our planning in his office, he would buy us lunch and support us, came to our school site, hooked us up with like Dan French from the Center for Collaborative Education. They had teams of people come out and then we finally did meet [name] and she helped us get through a lot of the paperwork and the political snafus that were arising. And the district did not know, they really meant pilot as lowercase, they did not know what pilot schools — the Boston model — was. And so I —	role of union / role of district	
28	Paul	When you say "district" do you mean local district?		
29	Lauren	Local district. And so then we started visiting the various schools – [school names], meeting with some of the leaders, the teachers, the cofounders and founders, and that's how we got the idea to keep on going. And I was introducing the autonomies, cause my colleague was just believing all this — "oh well she's such a researcher, look at all she has," cause I got like all the pilot bibles and all the thick governance books, the leadership books, and so that's how we put it together and we wrote up what our 9th grade year would look like, and we tried to map out 9-12. Of course I'm the visionary so I had ideals, my ideals were all there, if money's not an option, they said money will not be an option, I believed it at the time. I'm like "you don't tell a visionary things like this." I mean I'm realistic too but my partner is definitely, we're a good team because she's the realist, I'm the idealist, and we complemented one another in that way.	role of district	Networking / common vision /
30	Paul	So then I want to ask you a little further, what about early implementation? So when you launched you were co-located on the [school name] campus. Talk me through what was that like, what was your experience with colocation there?		
31	Lauren	Yeah that was a bit of a challenge. At first it was like we would all be good neighbors, and then many of our supporters started leaving. So the principal got a new position. We were in the process of — we had flown our principal position and we were interviewing, and we were able to write the job description and had a hiring committee and we actually, you know because I was sticking to this, so they would challenge every single thing and I was like "No, pilot schools have this autonomy and this autonomy" and they're like "autonomies?"	role of district	losing autonomy / impact of autonomy / conflict with admin / co-location

Appendix E: Sample Thematic Coding

All Interviews, coded

File   Edit   View   Insert   Format   Data   Tools   Help   All changes saved in Drive

Terri

Master Line	Inter Line	Speaker	Content	A Priori	Emergen
32	39		It's good for all of us. And when my two teams meet, it's like, just energizing you know. And then we all find, like "how is so and so doing in your class?" so we're starting to find out, like, this kid needs a parent teacher, or this kid needs to be sat down by all the teachers and counselor. Or we need to involve the parents in here. And we wouldn't have done that, yet, it's been 5 weeks, might not have happened yet. But now we're seeing each other for 15 minutes a week and so now we can get that kid, scoop him up, right? So as far as PD goes, I think we're almost becoming, like even though the PD is going fine we're also adding in these layers of PD we never did before. So we do meet, the grade level teams almost feel like they don't need a PD day, they'd rather meet with departments or about a school topic, because they're on top of things. The huddle.	PD autonomy	time for collaboratio / importance of collaboratio
33	58		Well because you have to do things differently. Very differently. And I think it kinda makes you look at your practice and even your skills and say do I have the skills to change the way I assess students? I even spoke to you about the three P method, we are trying to look at kids differently, through a different lens and not just give them four days of instruction and take a quiz at the end of the week. Not too many people do that. But I don't know, I find that the most difficult thing to do. I think it's looking at instruction and looking at assessments very differently than how most of us are accustomed to doing it. So that's our project.	PD autonomy	focus on teaching and learning
34	33		Well there are certain intangibles of course like the engagement of teachers and the buy-in, that goes without saying. I think what it's done -- I'm stuck on PD a little bit, but because there is this increase in collaboration and transparency between us as colleagues that we're much more focused on our craft, we're much more focused on how things are impacting kids and I think that's been a good thing for me. I've been reflecting about this personally a lot lately. When you are at a larger school or when no one's in your room, you do tend to think that you've got certain things down, or that you're doing well with certain things. And if you're honest with yourself, things can improve but because nobody ever comes around or nobody is asking you questions just out of curiosity, nothing more than that, but you get comfortable. As opposed to being challenged. And I need to be challenged and that's part of why we're here. I think being around each other and realizing, there's this kid I'm having problems with, you're not, what are you doing different, and then you realize -- I need to do what you do. And that's just being honest and being a good colleague. Or even just hearing people saying certain things that you do, and that's validating, but maybe they do it in a different manner and you realize all of a sudden, oh that is what I do, that makes a lot more sense. I think that's been good within our craft.	PD autonomy	time for collaboratio / importance of collaboratio
44	126		And I really, for new pilot schools, I would say to all the teachers, read the RFP, make it your bible and all your instruction and your PD revolves around that RFP. Then you divide your team into the WASK categories. We cut them down to four, we put instruction and curriculum under one category. By doing so you form these committees and it targets not only addressing the WASK, but it allows you to really address the needs that you have all year long.	PD autonomy	
87	36		We do smart goals. It's very funny to me, I found the smart goal form in 2003 the first year I	PD	focus on

Participants' names removed

166