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The Little District That Could: The Process of Building District-School Trust

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Purpose: *This article describes how trust emerged as an issue in one school district and the processes by which central office administrators enhanced trust with its school site leaders.*
Method: *This exploratory participant observer case study uses multiple sources of data including surveys, interviews, observations, and documents collected during a 4-year period from central office and school site leaders.*
Findings: *The article illustrates how a university partner can play a critical role in surfacing and bringing forth action on an undiscussable issue—trust between the central office and its schools—and the actions taken by the central office to address specific facets of trust: openness, communication, risk, and integrity. The site administrators' response to these actions revealed that trust can be developed at both the relational and organizational leadership levels.*
Significance to the Field: *The study is significant in illustrating that building trust between the central office and school sites can be an essential step in an underperforming district and can serve as a resource in achieving and sustaining school district reform. It also shows that attending to specific facets of trust can be useful when examining the development of trust between school sites and the district office.*

Keywords: *trust; central office relations; district reform; leadership; school-university collaboration*

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Trust is an important component of school effectiveness and an integral part of positive school leadership (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Daly, 2004; Daly & Chrispeels, 2005; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Louis, 2003). Although the extant scholarship on trust in schools provides insights into effective leadership (Daly, 2004; Sergiovanni, 1992) and within-school site relationships (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, 2003; Geist & Hoy, 2004; Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, 2001), little is known about the processes by which trust is constructed between school sites and the central office.

The purpose of this study is to explore the process through which one district engaged in the development of trust between central office and school site leaders, stimulated by participation in a district-university partnership. First, we discuss the literature on trust that framed the study. Second, we describe the district-university partnership and the district context. Third, we outline the methods of qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. Fourth, we present findings in the form of critical developments in the emergence of trust as an issue in the district, the efforts of the central office to foster trust, and the responses of school leaders to these initiatives. Finally, we discuss the implications of this study for theory and practice.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As Louis (2003) pointed out, "trust has been a subject of philosophical and academic discussion for centuries," but only in the past 20 years has scholarly work been undertaken to understand how it operates as a variable in the school reform process (p. 373). Scholars in other disciplines have also explored how the presence or absence of trust facilitates or impedes organizational development (Coleman, 1990; Deutsch, 1958; Fukuyama, 1995; Jones & George, 1998; Putnam, 2000; Rotter, 1967; Zaheer, McEvily, & Perrone, 1998).

Trust Defined

Although definitions of trust across disciplines vary, almost all include some concept of vulnerability (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Dirks & Ferrin, 2001, 2002; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998). We define trust as one's willingness to participate in a relationship that involves being vulnerable to another person (Daly, 2004; Goddard et al., 2001; Mishra, 1996; Rotter, 1967; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998). As Fullan, Bertani, and Quinn (2004) argue, serious district reform

requires vulnerability that will lead to productive conflict and the creation of demanding cultures. Without high-trust relationships, it is unlikely that central office, school staff, and other school district shareholders can create a compelling vision of reform that others wish to share (Louis, 2003), work through disagreements and conflicts to reach consensus on needed strategic actions, or "take action against persistently uncaring or incompetent teachers" and administrative staff (Fullan et al., 2004, p. 45).

Approaches to Studying Trust

In most research studying trust in schools, relational trust is the primary frame or lens used to examine the phenomenon (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Daly, 2004; Goddard et al., 2001). Relational trust appears to be key to reform because

> embedded in the daily social routines of schools [and we would argue districts] is an interrelated set of mutual dependencies among all key actors: students, teachers, principals and administrators, and parents. These structural dependencies create feelings of vulnerability for the individuals involved. This vulnerability is especially salient in the context of asymmetric power relationships. (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, p. 20)

In this time of high-stakes accountability, principals and district administrators often feel vulnerable. Part of this vulnerability is related to how principals discern the beliefs and behaviors of others, especially their superiors in the central office. Thus, key to the concept of relational trust is the way in which an individual or a group discerns the behavior of another and makes a decision to risk, based often on perceptions of competence or reliability (Bigley & Pearce, 1998). In relational trust, issues of care and consideration are also central (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002, p. 612). As Bryk and Schneider (2002) assert,

> Formally, we posit that a discernment of the intentions of others is a fundamental feature of day-to-day interpersonal exchanges. A complex mix of considerations enters here: instrumental concerns about achieving valued outcomes; hedonic concerns about self-esteems, social status, and institutional identification; and moral-ethnical concerns about advancing the best interests of children. (p. 21)

Relational trust is enhanced or diminished to the degree that the two parties in the relationship perceive the other is acting in a way that is expected and meets the obligations of the party's role; "moreover, fulfillment of obligations entails not only 'doing the right thing,' but also doing it in a respectful way, and for what are perceived to be the right reasons" (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, p. 21).

Similar to other studies of trust in schools (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998), our study draws primarily on the concept of relational trust. We also, however, see relevance in the concept of organizational leadership trust.

> According to this perspective, trust-related concerns about a leader's character are important because the leader may have authority to make decisions that have a significant impact on a follower and the follower's ability to achieve his or her goals (e.g., promotions, pay, work assignments, layoffs). This perspective implies that followers attempt to draw inferences about the leader's characteristics such as integrity, dependability, fairness and ability and that these inferences have consequences for work behavior and attitudes. (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002, p. 612)

This perspective of trust is significant because our study focuses on how trust plays out between central office administrators and school principals, who are embedded in a hierarchical system and yet often have a semiautonomous and loosely coupled relationship (Weick, 1976). In Dirks and Ferrin's (2002) meta-analysis, the authors found that "trust in leadership" was most closely tied to important organizational variables such as a belief in the information and decision commitment of the leadership and affected work attitudes, organizational citizenship behaviors, and job performance (p. 621).

Facets of Trust

Similar to others who have studied trust in schools, we explore the construct as a whole as well as the individual subconstructs of trust. These eight subconstructs, or "facets," are risk, communication, benevolence, reliability, competence, integrity, openness, and respect (Daly, 2004; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998). These facets are essential for cooperative action, the development of shared vision, and the formation of social capital (Louis, 2003). Our assumption is that trust as a whole is critical; however, the facets that are more salient in central office–school relations may differ from the facets identified by Bryk and Schneider (2002) at the school level.

Building Trust

Kochanek (2005) argued that people have a predisposition to trust those socially similar to them, but social similarities (race, religion, etc.) alone cannot create trusting relationships. Repeated social exchanges are potentially more important for building trust, and engaging members in easy, low-risk activities can contribute by establishing moments of success and laying

a foundation for mutual respect (Kochanek, 2005; Paulu, 1989). The structural design of most school districts, however, does not facilitate the opportunities for repeated social exchange and interaction. Principals operate and lead their schools in relative isolation from each other and from the central office. Although schools often operate with considerable autonomy, schools and their leaders are still embedded within hierarchical systems. Thus, the burden to initiate and model trusting behavior falls to those in higher positions of authority (Kochanek, 2005; Tschannen-Moran, 2004; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998; Whitener, Brodt, Korsgaard, & Werner, 1998).

Recognition of vulnerabilities by those in positions of authority, whether in a public or private enterprise, and a commitment to relieve tension within an organization help create conditions necessary for developing trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Whitener et al., 1998). Flexibility, increased interaction between school leaders and the central office, and the recognition of emotional aspects of change are also key elements in the trust-building process (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998). These findings suggest that the central office administrators' actions may be critical in the trust-building process and that given the tension in the current high-stakes testing and accountability environment, building trust is likely to be a daunting task.

Studies of Trust in Schools

A number of studies suggest that trust is an important ingredient for school effectiveness (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, 2003; Daly & Chrispeels, 2005; Hoy & Miskel, 2001; Louis, 2003; Louis & Miles, 1990; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Other researchers have examined within-school faculty trust at both elementary (Geist & Hoy, 2004; Goddard et al., 2001; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000) and secondary levels (Hoy, Sabo, & Barnes, 1996; Hoy, Smith, & Sweetland, 2002; Louis, 2003; Louis & Miles, 1990; Tarter, Bliss, & Hoy, 1989). Perceptions of high trust within a school have been tied to teachers' sense of a collaborative work environment, engagement in organizational citizenship behaviors, and improvement in academic productivity (Tschannen-Moran, 2003, 2004; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998).

Bryk and Schneider (2002) used longitudinal statistical analysis to study school effectiveness in more than 400 Chicago elementary sites during a 10-year period. Controlling for other factors such as race and socioeconomic status, the study found a significant relationship between student achievement and levels of trust in schools. School systems have inherent "structural dependencies" that make all members involved feel vulnerable (Bryk and Schneider, 2002, p. 20). High-trust cultures, as found in some of the schools in the Bryk and Schneider study, maintain a strong sense of collective efficacy and thus are better able to confront challenges adaptively and with

minimal defensiveness. The trust that developed through ongoing, daily social exchanges emerged as a key variable for understanding school achievement in those schools. Goddard et al. (2001) also found, in an analysis of survey data from more than 400 teachers and 2,500 elementary school students, that teacher trust significantly predicted students' reading and math scores. Geist and Hoy (2004) studied teachers' trust in colleagues, the principal, parents, and students. Multiple regression analyses from a sample of 4,000 teachers across 146 elementary school sites suggested that teacher perceptions of enabling school structures predicted trust in the principal. Research from schools and businesses indicates that higher degrees of trust are related to employees' inclination to work harder for organizational goals (Kalleberg, 2002; Konovsky & Pugh, 1994; Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Zaheer et al., 1998). Tschannen-Moran (2003) found that levels of organizational citizenship within schools are correlated with teachers' trust in the principal. Organizational citizenship behaviors refer to teachers' willingness to go above and beyond their job description without compensation (Tschannen-Moran, 2003).

Although trust alone may not be sufficient for systems to respond to current pressures of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the threat it poses for leaders of underperforming schools, the development of trust appears to be an essential part of educational systems as well as a resource for school improvement, and its cultivation is an important aspect of positive school leadership (Daly & Chrispeels, 2005; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Louis, 2003). Furthermore, organizations entrenched in low-trust cultures are more likely to become defensive in the face of challenges, are less likely to pursue new ideas, and lack sufficient capacity to accomplish difficult goals (Fullan et al., 2004).

The scholarship on trust in schools provides insights into some aspects of the trust-building process: the role of effective leadership (Daly, 2004; Sergiovanni, 1992) and within–school site relationships (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, 2003; Geist & Hoy, 2004; Goddard et al., 2001; Tschannen-Moran, 2001). However, few have examined trust as an explicit variable in the district change process. Furthermore, the majority of the research about trust in schools employs survey methods of data collection relying on Likert-type scale questions, and the literature often presents a static view of trust, that either it exists or it does not, and fails to explore the different levels and multiple facets of trust and its growth over time (Kochanek, 2005). Given the paucity of research on trust at the district level, it is unclear which enabling structures may predict trust between the central office and school leaders. The structural differences between district and schools suggest that there are fewer opportunities for district and site leaders to develop trust

through ongoing daily social exchanges than are present at the school site between principals and teachers. Thus, it is important to determine which facets of trust are most likely to capture district-school trust relations.

Trust and District-Wide Reform

The district central office, until recently, was often seen as an impediment to innovation, and the literature on educational reform generally focused on the school site as the most effective unit of change (S. E. Anderson, 2003; Berends, Bodilly, & Kirby, 2002; Bogotch & Brooks, 1994; Bogotch, Brooks, Macphee, & Riedlinger, 1995; Harris & Chrispeels, 2006; Hightower, Knapp, Marsh, & McLaughlin, 2002). However, some studies suggest that the central office can be an active agent for systemic reform (Elmore & Burney, 1998, 1999; Firestone, Mangin, Martinez, & Polovsky, 2005; Libler, 1992; Pajak & Glickman, 1989; Paulu, 1989). Elmore and Burney's (1998, 1999) seminal research on New York City's District Number Two emphasized the central office's role in district reform efforts. S. E. Anderson (2003) noted that these reforms in New York demonstrated "that districts do matter, and that at least some districts 'matter' in powerfully positive ways for student performance" (p. 5). Likewise, McLaughlin and Talbert (2003a, 2003b) studied reforming districts in the San Diego and San Francisco Bay areas and found that strong central office support has the potential to improve students' learning outcomes. Chrispeels and González (2006) observed that improvements in student learning are more likely when there are coherent and coordinated change efforts at all levels of the system simultaneously. On the other hand, a weak central office may limit a school's reform progress (Bryk, Sebring, Kerbow, Rollow, & Easton, 1998; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003b).

A review of the literature reveals four key elements shared by districts that are successful in achieving reform: a districtwide vision and strategy focused on student learning (Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001; Chrispeels, 2002; Chrispeels & González, 2006; Collins & Porras, 1999; Elmore & Burney, 1998; Fullan et al., 2004; Hightower et al., 2002; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003b; Togneri & Anderson, 2003), data-based inquiry and accountability (Feldman, Lucey, Goodrich, & Frazee, 2003; Massell & Goertz, 2002; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003a, 2003b), a commitment to ongoing focused professional development to ensure instructional coherence (Hightower et al., 2002; Massell & Goertz, 2002), and collaboration among and communication between all shareholders that fosters district professionalism and learning communities (Chrispeels, 2002; Chrispeels, Castillo, & Brown, 2000; Chrispeels & González, 2006; Hightower et al., 2002; Louis & Miles,

1990; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). The presence of trust may be inferred from the factors present in effective districts; however, these studies do not address trust as a distinct contributing factor to district efficacy.

A few researchers have explicitly studied the issue of trust between the central office and its schools (Daly, 2004; Louis, 2003; Louis & Miles, 1990). For example, Louis (2003) explored five high schools in which the district had adopted total quality management. In the two districts where teachers reported high levels of trust, total quality management was seen as contributing to school improvement. In the three districts with low-trusting relationships, there was little collaboration at the site, and teachers cynically viewed the total quality management process as top down and ineffective. In fact, Louis illustrated in her study of trust and school improvement that without trust, it is unlikely that a district vision, in this case total quality management, will be effectively communicated and shared.

Daly (2004) examined the levels of trust between schools and their central office administrators in four school districts. A total of 292 school site administrators and central office administrators from four districts completed a survey that measured technical and adaptive leadership behaviors (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003) as well as behaviors identified with each of the eight trust facets (see Table 1 for a definition of each trust facet). Three of the facets, risk, competence, and communication, were significant predictors of stronger technical and adaptive leadership, which research suggests are essential if schools are to improve student learning (Waters et al., 2003). In addition, the presence of trust has also been associated with a central office's ability to mediate high-stakes accountability demands and to work with its schools in a less threat-rigid way (Daly, 2006).

These findings suggest that exploring trust relations between the central office and its schools can be fertile ground for understanding why district reforms may or may not be successfully implemented. Although two recent publications provide practical guidance on how to build trust in schools (Brewster & Railsback, 2003; Kochanek, 2005), few research studies document how trust is developed at the district level, which is the focus of this study. In the remainder of the article, we present the case of how trust became an issue in one school district and describe the activities the central office and its university partner undertook to develop trust between the school sites and the central office.

CONTEXT OF THE UNIVERSITY-DISTRICT PARTNERSHIP

In the summer of 2003, a university center began a 4-year partnership with District Y to assist the district in reform initiatives to close the achievement

TABLE 1
The Eight Facets of Trust and Their Operational Definitions

Facet (Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient)	*Definition*	*Trust Survey Measured How Well Self and Others*
Risk (.80)	Willingness to risk is the degree of confidence one has in a situation of vulnerability	Support risk taking in others, encourage others to continually learn and seek new ideas, acknowledge the vulnerabilities of others, and acknowledge and share vulnerabilities of self
Competence (.85)	Confidence in possession and effective use of skills in fulfilling formal roles and responsibilities	Set high standards for oneself and others and complete tasks with a level of competence
Reliability (.81)	In a situation of interdependence, when something is required from another person or group, the individual can be counted on to supply it	Follow through on tasks, honor agreements, and commit to stated goals
Integrity (.89)	An acceptance of responsibility for one's actions and a consistency between what we say and do	Maintain congruence between words and actions, demonstrate behaviors that are consistent with beliefs, value honesty, take personal responsibility for actions/decisions, and maintain levels of confidentiality
Benevolence (.89)	The confidence that one's well-being or something one cares about will be protected and not harmed by the trusted party	Remain aware of individual needs of staff, demonstrate understanding of others, engage in active listening, and support new staff
Communication (.86)	A process of easy and open exchange between individuals or groups in which a message is perceived as trustworthy	Maintain open and effective lines of communication with staff, make self easily accessible to staff, and establish norms that support respectful communication
Openness (.86)	The extent to which relevant information is not withheld; it is a process by which people make themselves vulnerable to others by sharing personal information with others, a giving of oneself	Encourage a climate safe for difficult situations, adjust for different communication styles, and encourage staff to discuss feelings, worries, and frustrations
Respect (.84)	Exchanges marked by genuinely listening to what each person has to say and by considering those views and recognizing the important role each plays in the system.	Ensure voiced concerns are addressed, reach out to other shareholders in a meaningful way, feel the respect of staff, and incorporate outside views into further action

gap and meet the requirements of NCLB. A premise of this collaborative partnership was that all primary shareholders in a district must engage in the change process for systemic reform to occur (Marks & Printy, 2002; Senge, 1990). Based on this premise and the previous work of the university partner with other districts (e.g., Chrispeels, 2002; Chrispeels & González, 2006), the university provided the District Y central office and shareholder team with coaching, facilitation, professional development, and research for 4 years. The partnership was carried out in four overlapping phases.

Phase 1 (2003-2004). An ethnically diverse district shareholder team was formed that would work with the university partner. The team was composed of the superintendent, school board, central office administrators, school administrators, classified and certified unions, teachers, parents, and community. During this phase, the university researchers conducted the first round of interviews to establish baseline information about the team.

Phase 2 (2003-2005). The shareholder team's capacity was developed through a series of institutes and workshops. The university team facilitated shareholder meetings that were designed to address the normative (value and beliefs), technical (practical reform strategies), and political dimensions of the change process (Oakes, 1992; Oakes, Wells, Jones, & Datnow, 1997). These included a 3-day Fall Institute with Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey focused on gaining insights into underlying values and beliefs blocking reform efforts (October 2003) and a technical capacity-building workshop on English learner and African American student needs (December 2003). The university partner addressed the political dimensions of change by pressing the teams to ensure that all voices were included.

Phase 3 (2004-2005). The university partner brought the normative and technical work to the school level by offering daylong seminars to 6 of the 16 school leadership teams (Chrispeels, 2002; Chrispeels et al., 2000; Chrispeels & González, 2006).

Phase 4 (2005-2007). In this phase, the district spread, deepened, and sustained various trust-building and improvement efforts (Chrispeels & González, 2006; Coburn, 2003) by having all school leadership teams participate in the seminars, organizing a strengths-based leadership team summit in November 2005, and implementing a districtwide strategic planning process in 2006-2007.

Thus, in this case study, the actions of the university partner can be seen as catalysts to events and developments that occurred in the district throughout the partnership, which are summarized in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2
Events and Data Collected, District Y (2003-2007)

Date	*Events and Participants*
September 2003	Individual interviews conducted with 7 district shareholder members. The superintendent, 1 assistant superintendent, 3 principals, and 2 board members are interviewed about their perceptions of district culture and leadership challenges in District Y.
October 2003	University Center initiates its work with four district shareholder teams and conducts a 4-day Fall Institute. Fifteen members from District Y multishareholder team attend. Harvard Professors Kegan and Lahey, authors of *How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work* (2001), facilitate team conversations in exploring what blocks the achievement of district goals. University researchers observe this event.
December 2003	University continues its work with district shareholder teams and conducts 2-day seminar on English learners and standard English learners with Dr. Sharroky Hollie, Center for Culturally Responsive Teaching, and Vanessa Girard, WestEd. Only assistant superintendent and English-language specialists from District Y attend, but they replicate the program for all schools in Spring 2004.
March 2004	University administers a trust survey to 23 site administrators and 15 central office administrators in District Y. This is part of a larger study of trust and leadership involving administrators from four school districts. University meets with all principals to prepare for upcoming workshop by Kegan and Lahey.
April 2004	To begin building a common language and collective commitment, District Y replicates Fall Institute for all school leadership teams, bringing in Drs. Kegan and Lahey for a 2-day summit at the district site. Although conducted independently of the university-district partnership, center observers attend.
July 2004	University conducts a 4-day Summer Forum Learning Lab, and 6 shareholder members from District Y attend. District Y's team includes 1 assistant superintendent, 3 principals, and 2 teachers. All four partnership districts, including District Y, debriefed about trust survey results. Video data and field notes are collected. Trust emerged as an appropriate framework for understanding central office and site relations. District Y team agrees to take explicit steps for improving trust between site and central office leadership.
November 2004	Trust survey data is shared with District Y's site and central office administrators. Central office administrators express surprise by the finding that a trust gap exists among District Y's leadership. Subsequent district administrative meetings focus on improving trust.
Fall 2004	District Y holds a Middle School Summit. This event is attended by all middle schools' leadership teams including administrators, teachers, and parents. Six school leadership teams begin ongoing leadership team training with university partner.

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

Date	*Events and Participants*
May 2005	University conducts individual interviews with 15 members of District Y team to learn views of the impact of the university-district partnership, significant events during the year, and district goals. Participants include the superintendent, assistant superintendents, principals, assistant principals, school board members, union leader, and 1 parent. Although the issue of trust is not part of our interview protocol, members discuss the central office's trust-building efforts and the consequences of its engagement.
June 2005	District Y shareholder team participates in the university's second learning lab. Twelve participants attend, including the superintendent, 1 assistant superintendent, 8 site administrators, and 2 teachers. Video data and observation field notes find that the team engages in discussions primarily centering on leadership, feelings around trust, and barriers to improving trust and effective leadership in District Y.
August to November 2005	University conducts District Y's administrative retreat in August 2005 and leadership summit Unleashing Our Strengths in November 2005.
January to March 2006	Individual interviews are conducted to explore more deeply perceptions of trust-building efforts and the consequences of central office engagement on trust. Two assistant superintendents and 3 principals participate in these interviews. Focus group interviews are carried out with five leadership teams.
Spring 2007	The trust survey is re-administered to 23 site and 9 central office administrators at District Y's administrative retreat. Significant differences were found between the results of the 2004 and 2007 surveys with respect to how site administrators perceived central office trust behaviors.

District Context

District Y is a K-8 district comprising 12 elementary schools, 4 middle schools, an alternative school, and a community day school. The district is located in a rapidly growing area north of Los Angeles. There has been a 20% increase in new residents since 1990, bringing the population to 130,000 people. Until the early 1990s, the district served a majority of White and middle-class students, who composed more than 70% of the total student population (12,500). The district currently serves 16,000 students. Latino (40%), African American (30%), and White (27%) are the three major ethnic groups, and about 66% are classified as low socioeconomic status. More than 15% of students are English learners. District Y has been labeled a Program Improvement district because five subgroups (students with disabilities, African Americans, Latinos, English learners,

and socioeconomically disadvantaged) failed to make the annual yearly progress required by NCLB. Out of the 18 schools, 13 are in Program Improvement, and the state of California is also monitoring two schools that are not achieving their Academic Performance Index growth targets. Thus, principals in this district are under considerable threat because of low performance.

It is clear that District Y did not meet the achievement criteria that would place it with any of the high-performing districts described in the reform literature we have previously discussed. However, as Togneri and Anderson (2003) pointed out, one of the first steps a district must take on the path to improvement is to acknowledge it has a problem. In the summer of 2003, the district did that by sending a team of 2 assistant superintendents, a new director of curriculum, a board member, a union leader, and a principal to the Summer Institute for District Reform sponsored by Stanford University. During this institute, a faculty member from another university, which would eventually partner with the district, was assigned to be the team's on-site coach. When it became known that this faculty member was developing a leadership center at a university nearer to District Y, the team readily agreed to continue the journey begun at Stanford with the leadership center.

STUDY DESIGN AND METHOD

We used an exploratory case study design to examine the development of trust between the central office and school sites in a California school district (District Y), with a strong emphasis on participant observation methodology (Spradley, 1980). A case study approach is most appropriate when the phenomenon of interest has ill-defined boundaries and real-life complexity that requires multiple data sources and methods to gain an in-depth understanding (Yin, 2003). We focused on the perspectives of school site leaders and central office administrators to investigate trust issues and trust building in this district.

Data Collection

Data were collected during a 3-year period from primary and secondary sources including interviews, observation field notes of meetings and events, videotapes of the Summer Learning Labs, documents, and surveys. A summary of the data collected and events held by the university partner is included in Table 2.

Interviews. District and school administrators served as the primary informants and interviewees for this study. Over the course of the partnership, the university researchers carried out three series of semistructured, individual interviews with members of the district shareholder team as well as additional principals to gain access to the participants' emic perspectives of the district's culture and the development and work of the shareholder team in the improvement process (Patton, 1990; Spradley, 1980). The first round of interviews was conducted in September 2003, prior to the initiation of any district-university partnership activities. Seven members of the shareholder team were interviewed individually; 4 of the 7 had attended the Stanford Institute (see Table 3). These participants were asked to share their perspectives on the district's culture, mission, and goals and their first impressions of the district shareholder team. The purpose of these interviews was to provide baseline data before any partnership activities were undertaken. The researchers asked no specific questions about trust.

The second round of interviews occurred in May 2005. We interviewed 15 shareholder team members as a follow-up to the first round of interviews to understand how the team felt about the team's learning and actions since the beginning of the partnership. Because the focus of most district-university partnership activities was on this shareholder team, the team members served as the most appropriate sample for this case. Again, no specific questions about trust were asked; interviewees were asked about the work being undertaken by the central office and shareholder team. Trust emerged as a significant theme in the analysis of the second round of interviews, with all 15 participants discussing the district's focus on trust without being explicitly asked.

Thus, in February 2006, we conducted a third round of individual and focus group interviews to explore participants' perceptions of the actions taken by the central office to build trust. Five individual interviews were conducted with 2 district administrators who were members of the shareholder team and primarily responsible for implementing the trust-building activities and 3 school principals who were not members of the shareholder team. The latter were purposefully selected to learn the perspectives of site administrators who were not intimately involved with the university partnership or shareholder team. Five school leadership teams participating in the school leadership team seminars also agreed to participate in short focus group interviews to share their perspectives on the impact of the seminars in February of 2006. During these interviews, the principals were explicitly asked about the trust-building activities of the central office. Table 3 displays the participants in the three rounds of interviews.

TABLE 3
District Y Members Interviewed Across the University-District Partnership (2003-2006)

Round 1 Interviews *September 2003* (n = *7)*	*Round 2 Interviews* *May 2005* (n = *15)*	*Round 3 Interviews* *February 2006* (n = *10)*
Individual interviews	Individual interviews	Individual interviews
Superintendent	Superintendent	Assistant Superintendent A
Assistant Superintendent A	Assistant Superintendent A	Assistant Superintendent C
Teacher union representative	Assistant Superintendent B	Principal, School I
School board member	Assistant Superintendent C	Principal, School J
District English language development coordinator	Director, special programs	Principal, School K
Principal, School A	Parent representative	Focus group data from principal participants
Principal, School B	School Board Member A	Leadership team, School C
	School Board Member B	Leadership team, School E
	Teachers union representative	Leadership team, School F
	Principal, School A	Leadership team, School G
	Principal, School B	Leadership team, School H
	Principal, School C	
	Principal, School D	
	Principal, School E	
	Assistant Principal, School C	

Observations. Researchers from the university center observed the shareholder team's work, discussions, and behaviors throughout the partnership and at different phases of trust-building activities. This was an advantageous strategy to gain the insider's emic perspective of the team processes under investigation (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). From 2003 to 2006, the university partner's team of researchers observed and videotaped the district shareholder team at the Summer Learning Labs and took field notes during some district team meetings and administrators' retreats. The field notes and video transcriptions were analyzed to explore trust in general and its facets.

Documents. A variety of documents were collected to triangulate the interview and survey data. Documents collected included meeting minutes and agendas, PowerPoint presentations, charts, and the district-generated trust report card. These documents were helpful in providing a more contextualized understanding of the trust-building processes and represented tangible evidence of activities.

Surveys. As part of his doctoral studies, one of the authors asked district and site administrators participating in the partnership to complete a trust survey (Daly, 2004; Daly & Chrispeels, 2008). An 80-item, 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *never*, 5 = *always*) survey was designed to measure participants' perceptions of trust levels within their site and between the central office and schools. Central office administrators were asked to rate their own engagement in the behaviors identified with the trust facets ("self") and rate how they perceive the engagement of site administrators ("other"). Site administrators were also asked to rate themselves ("self") and the central office administrators ("other"). High factor loadings and alpha reliability coefficients for this instrument were established through its use in previous studies on district-school trust (Daly, 2004). A factor analysis of this survey yielded eight facets of trust: openness, reliability, respect, integrity, risk, communication, benevolence, and competence (see description of facets and reliability coefficients in Table 1). The trust survey was administered twice: in spring 2004 and spring 2007.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was part of an ongoing, recursive process by a team of researchers during a 3-year period (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Throughout our qualitative analysis, it was "not the words themselves but their meaning that matters" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 56). Hence, our investigation was

primarily concerned with the general presence and mention of trust and its specific facets.

Qualitative analysis of interviews, video data, and documents. Our early analyses of interview and observation data were inductive, allowing important themes to emerge "out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis" (Patton, 1990, p. 390). For example, as the case study debrief guide (Yin, 2003) was completed after the first Summer Learning Lab in 2004, it was clear to the researchers that trust was identified as an issue in this district. Using a constant comparative analysis strategy (Boeije, 2002; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glesne, 2006; Hewitt-Taylor, 2001), we then reexamined the first set of interviews conducted in the fall of 2003 to see if there were any specific mentions of trust or if its facets were present. Following Miles and Huberman (1994), charts were created to document interview comments in relationship to the facets of trust.

Once the central office decided to address the issue of trust, we began mining field notes, documents, and video data for evidence of trust-related behaviors. We began with content analysis across respondents and data sources and then identified, coded, and categorized emerging patterns of trust in the data (Patton, 1990). Our inductive method was combined with a simultaneous comparison of discussions observed in various events held by the university partner, which allowed us to discover new dimensions and differences in perceptions around trust among respondents (Goertz & LeCompte, 1981).

Again, using a constant comparative analysis method (Boeije, 2002; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glesne, 2006; Hewitt-Taylor, 2001), we grouped answers to common questions and analyzed the different perspectives of our interviewees on central issues that involved trust. We focused on the perceptions of trust reported by the principals and central office administrators and how those evolved over time as the district undertook a number of trust-building activities. This process of constant comparison "stimulates thought that leads to both descriptive and explanatory categories" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 341). We increased the internal trustworthiness of our findings through our constant comparison and reflection on old and new material collected (Boeije, 2002). Member checking further ensured the trustworthiness of our interpretations as we shared emerging themes with the participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Quantitative analysis. The survey data provided another key data set that allowed triangulation with the qualitative data to assess change over time. We first matched each of the respondents from the spring 2004 survey administration with the spring 2007 respondents. Although there were personnel

changes in the district during the 3 years, we were able to successfully match the identification numbers and demographics of 23 site-level administrators and 9 central office administrators. To compare results of this matched set during the past 3 years, a paired samples *t* test was employed. This statistical test is useful in providing a comparison of the same population over time. Once the paired sample was secured, we then ran a series of paired-samples *t* tests comparing the mean scores on trust facets as well as trust as a larger construct.

Limitations of the Study and Role of the Researchers

Typical of qualitative research, the study took place in one district, and therefore, the findings are not generalizable to other settings. The insights may provide assistance in the interpretation of other similar cases and encourage future research in a relatively unexplored area. A single case study approach is not easily open to cross-checking; hence, there is the potential for selective bias. The authors of this study have tried to bound this potential bias by bringing together an insider and outsider research team and by the collection of data from multiple sources (Yin, 2003).

The authors of this study played unique participant observer roles in the case (Spradley, 1980). The three lead authors worked in a more traditional research role as observers of the unfolding process of the district shareholder team's participation at the first Fall Institute and two Summer Learning Lab events and as interviewers. The other two authors filled a range of roles on Spradley's (1980) continuum from full participants as designers and implementers of the university-district partnership to more traditional participant observer researcher roles. Thus, in crafting this study, both outsider and insider perspectives were available to inform the data analysis (G. L. Anderson & Jones, 2000). The inside researchers brought the full history of the case to the table, with insider knowledge of 4 years of interactions with the district shareholder team. The outside research team was valuable because they were able to question assumptions and examine the collected data with new eyes. Collaboratively, we argued and debated the findings and came to agreement on the interpretations presented.

FINDINGS

Emergence of Trust as an Issue

To tell the story of how trust emerged as an issue in District Y's path toward reform, we present our findings as a series of critical developments. Through

analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data, we identified four catalytic developments that seemed to bring trust as an issue forward to a level that led to actions. These developments are (a) enrollment growth and changing demographics, (b) attendance at the university partner's Fall Institute in 2003, (c) participation in the university partner's Summer Learning Lab in 2004, and (d) presentation of the trust survey data to the district administrative team in the fall of 2004.

Critical Development 1: Population growth and shifting demographics. In the first round of interviews, trust was not explicitly a focus, yet it emerged in several of the interviews. One of the reasons for its emergence appeared to be the rapid enrollment growth and changing demographics. Of the participants, 100% ($n = 7$) in the first round of interviews discussed changing community demographics' presenting challenges for District Y's pursuit of improving all students' achievement. As an African American site administrator noted,

> You have to look what is happening, and I don't know if [District Y] really looks at what is happening. And I think it's even a tougher goal because of NCLB. I think even if it's communication and acknowledgment that the demographics have changed, and that they don't know what they're doing to help the kids we have in our district. They went from 70% White to a third, a third, a third, and that's a difficult shift. But it's not a shift that anybody really talks about. I don't know.

The superintendent, however, seemed to be very aware when he stated,

> The people that work in our district stay in our district, so it is kind of interesting in 1985 we had 5,500 Anglo kids in our school district. . . . That is how many we have this year, but we have 16,000 kids. So the other 60% are all new diverse cultural [populations], but the leadership and the people that work in the district have remained fairly similar to 1985. (September 2003)

A White principal confirmed the superintendent's statement and acknowledged this shift when she said that her school was now 30-30-30 (White, Latino, and African American). She further explained what this shift meant for her:

> And to make sure I have representation of all stakeholders and not just one group, you know that come out for everything, but all stakeholders and getting people that have been disenfranchised over the years from the educational community and get them on campus and make sure they have a voice is really important. (September 2003)

Each action the district took to respond to the growth seemed to carry implications for communications and relationships and, thus, trust. First, to

address growth, the district implemented a four-track, year-round school schedule, which led to one quarter of a school's staff and students being off campus at all times. As a principal of a year-round school commented,

> There are two big issues that are a challenge not just for us but also for all organizations. One is trust, so that people feel like they can share something without reprisal or recrimination, and the other is communication. And part of our struggle with communication at the site level and the district is that we're fragmented in terms of that calendar [year-round schedule], and that has created challenges for us. (September 2003)

A second response was to hire more diverse administrators and teachers who would better reflect the new populations represented in the community and its schools. According to a principal, the district was making efforts "through best hiring practices . . . trying to recruit people that are a different ethnicity . . . people that are bilingual" (September 2003). Three African American principals had recently been hired, and a Latina was assuming an administrative post. Nevertheless, the superintendent recognized these were small steps and expressed his concern: "Well, I think one of the biggest challenges is that they [the shareholder team] are not real diverse. . . . We don't really represent our population" (September 2003). He perceived that one of the challenges of the change process was the mismatch in ethnicity between the central office and the student population. His perception was confirmed by the Latina chosen to be on the shareholder team. She reported she was excited to be asked by the superintendent to be on the team because she saw it as an opportunity to talk "about reform for our kids." She also indicated that the first time the group came together, she felt "a little bit uncomfortable, and I will tell you why, because I was the only person of color. And if we're talking about reform, where were the other subgroups?" (Note that an African American principal and parent and a Latino parent joined the shareholder group by the time they attended the Fall Institute in 2003.)

Although efforts were made to increase the diversity among district administrators, this seemed to raise new tensions regarding being a token and having freedom to contribute. One of the administrators indicated,

> I think trust is the overriding [issue]. I guess my issue with it would be trust. Do I trust enough to be able to say what I really think? Because sometimes multiple perspectives aren't easy to take, and I'm not sure that everyone's ready for that. However, in a team setting, when you really are working with one another and trusting one another, you would be free to say that. (September 2003)

This perspective stands in contrast to a view expressed by a White principal who indicated that he was free to express his views to his superiors and

that he was heard (personal interview, September 2003). But he did feel that for the Fall Institute to be successful, the shareholder team would "need to come out with a common vision."

It is interesting to note that when asked to identify the core values that reflected their district, the group agreed on one value: care. When interviewed, this sense of care was echoed by the superintendent, who stated, "The district has grown, and it's always been a very close-knit, family-based community" (September 2003). One of the assistant superintendents characterized the district as having a "family-like feeling. . . . In times of crisis, we pull together and support each other regardless of what constituent group we belong to" (September 2003). The concept of care was recognized by the Latina administrator when she reported, "I was going to keep my mouth shut and not say anything. But for true change to occur . . . it means stating whatever problems I see. I am an important voice, and I'm an important asset" (September 2003). She then added she was willing to take a risk because she also felt that one of the team's strengths was that "they care." These statements indicate that the district prided itself on benevolence, one of the facets of trust. In summary, growth had produced considerable challenges for this district, moving it from a small, "family-like district" of 5,000 students of similar background to an urban-like district. A companion issue was maintaining trust in a district that is experiencing such growth and diversity.

Critical Development 2: Attendance at the university-district partnership Fall Institute. The districts invited to participate in the university partnership were strongly urged to bring a diverse shareholder team to the Fall Institute in 2003. Representatives of key shareholders (except for parents) had taken part in the Stanford Institute, but District Y broadened its team to include the superintendent, another board member, and African American and Latino parent leaders as well as principals and assistant principals, thus more than doubling the size of its team for the Fall Institute.

The university partnership engaged the team in a series of several reflective processes. Particularly salient was the four-column work conducted by Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey of Harvard University (Kegan & Lahey, 2001). This process allowed the team to surface tensions around racial issues, feelings of inclusion and exclusion, and the achievement gap. For example, in the team's four-column document, members identified that "they don't provide staff time for talk and collaboration, there is limited follow-up after professional development workshops, and they don't have a broad, open communication process that creates an environment of trust for the benefit of all children" (field notes, Fall Institute 2003). Time for talk and collaboration had previously been identified in the literature as important moderators of

trust (Jones & George, 1998). Lack of follow-up after professional development workshops has a bearing on the coherence and effectiveness of district reform (Hightower et al., 2002; Togneri & Anderson, 2003) and the trust facet of reliability, which may impinge on perceptions of competence to engage in the new behaviors presented in the professional development. These issues of relationship, the foundation of relational trust, were so central to this shareholder team that they brought Kegan and Lahey to the district for a day-and-a-half institute to engage every school's leadership team to explore aspects of the school culture that were blocking improvement.

Critical Development 3: Summer Learning Lab 2004 and a growing sense that trust may be critical to the district's improvement process. In the summer of 2004, the university held a 3-day summer learning lab for its four partner districts. The purpose was to present diverse, research-based models of change to district shareholder teams and assist them in their reform initiatives. District Y attended, sending a subteam from the larger shareholder team comprising 1 central office administrator, 4 principals, and 1 assistant principal. Two of the members were relatively new to the district and represented the district's efforts to hire and include administrators representative of its student population. Thus, this team could be characterized as representing the new guard of the district.

During this event, the university center summarized the results of the study that had been conducted with District Y and the three other partnership districts in the spring of 2004 (Daly, 2004). That study employed the same trust survey that was re-administered in this case district in 2007. The survey examines respondents' perceptions of trust and leadership between central office and site leaders (see Table 4 for 2004 and 2007 survey results). Findings indicated that there were significant differences in respondents' perceptions of the degree of trust between site and district administrators in all of the partnership districts, including District Y: The respondents, principals, and central office administrators generally perceived themselves acting more trustfully compared to the Other, which was true across all districts in the data set.

Although this disparity in perceptions is not surprising, the evidence of the lack of trust seemed to resonate with District Y's shareholder team more than the other teams at the Summer Learning Lab. According to the video data, a principal argued that lack of trust represented one of "the biggest issues between schools and the district office." The other principals and assistant principal on the team concurred and described feeling unsupported and "isolated" from the district office. Analysis of the video data also suggests that one facet of trust, communication, was perceived as a significant barrier to creating the necessary conditions toward developing a

TABLE 4
Comparison of 2004 and 2007 District Y Trust Surveys

	2004			*2007*			
Trust Facet	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	*Difference Between Ms*
Benevolence							
Schools' view of district	23	3.47	.62	23	3.76	.60	.29
District's view of schools	9	3.40	.55	9	4.51	.47	.11
Communication							
Schools' view of district	23	3.59	.72	23	4.39	.60	.81*
District's view of schools	9	3.41	.40	9	3.69	.36	.28*
Competence							
Schools' view of district	23	3.93	.67	23	4.30	.51	.38*
District's view of schools	9	3.60	.43	9	3.89	.44	.29
Integrity							
Schools' view of district	23	3.64	.65	23	4.05	.48	.41*
District's view of schools	9	3.58	.45	9	3.60	.63	.02
Open							
Schools' view of district	23	3.09	.88	23	3.62	.53	.54*
District's view of schools	9	3.33	.62	9	3.15	.56	–.19
Reliable							
Schools' view of district	23	3.84	.58	23	4.14	.53	.30
District's view of schools	9	3.48	.47	9	3.67	.55	.19
Respect							
Schools' view of district	23	3.37	.67	23	3.62	.57	.25
District's view of schools	9	3.36	.40	9	3.50	.25	.14
Risk							
Schools' view of district	23	3.09	.58	23	3.45	.52	.36*
District's view of schools	9	3.11	.64	9	3.17	.25	.06
Total trust							
Schools' view of district	23	3.49	.57	23	3.84	.44	.35*
District's view of schools	9	3.41	.39	9	3.51	.35	.10

*$p < .05$.

broad sense of trust and increasing student achievement. As an elementary principal explained,

> In every meeting that we've had, whenever we discussed the barriers to student achievement, the idea of communication has come up, or lack of it, or problems with it. Whether that is at the school level or between site and district, whether it be among administrators, that issue of communication has always come up. And then when we fine-tune that and look at it more closely, the trust issue comes up under the communication piece. But we haven't had open, honest communication. (principal, School D, 2005)

Moreover, site administrators believed that they could not be open with central office administrators in asking for help or sharing their thoughts. For a few, fear of reprisal seemed to discourage them from communicating honestly. As a principal explained, "We don't trust each other as much as we should, but we are afraid of retribution if we say something to the wrong person—then maybe we won't get what we need from that department." Similarly, another principal commented during the Learning Lab—and the rest of the team indicated agreement—"Our district prides itself on non-confrontation rather than what is best for our kids." Likewise, an assistant superintendent noted that "if you don't have trust, then people aren't working together collaboratively," which was perceived as potentially affecting student achievement. These comments indicate that the facets of openness (encouraging a climate safe for difficult situations) and risk (supporting risk taking in others, encouraging learning, and acknowledging vulnerability) were encompassed in their perception of poor communication. These open-ended quotes are supported by the survey data presented in Table 4, wherein principals' willingness to engage in risk taking and openness received the lowest mean scores, followed by respect, benevolence, and communication. The central office concurred and also rated risk taking and openness the lowest.

Another perspective expressed by the principal team members was that the central office was frequently "giving tasks but not support" and did not take sufficient responsibility for increasing student achievement at the district level. A site administrator, reflecting the general feeling in the group, shared that the pressures coming from the central office made him feel that "it is my job on the line." These statements express that principals felt particularly vulnerable when interacting with the central office. As these concerns continued to bubble up during the Learning Lab, the central office representative confronted the team by asking, "Are we going to continue butting our heads against the wall or are we going to find a way to climb over the wall?" The team agreed action was needed.

The consultants working with the university partner during the Summer Learning Lab helped the team formulate a plan that could begin to address communication, trust in general, and coherence and support for student achievement. Their plan involved asking the superintendent and assistant superintendents to make regular site visits to foster learning communities through networking and coaching. The team hoped that these regular site visits would enable site administrators to share needs and gain the support of the district office. In presenting the plan to the other teams at the Summer Learning Lab, the central office administrator concluded that site visits would improve communication, strengthen relationships, and build trust, stating,

> So that [district administrators] get involved in the learning process and so that some dialogue could happen. We don't currently have a structure where trust can be expressed. There would be modeling and coaching and professional dialogue between the central office and the school. Superintendents will have better knowledge about the needs of the sites. . . . So we will leave here with a plan to increase communication so that we can raise student achievement through instructional supervision processes that improve trust and coherence. (video data, July 2004)

Thus, the first critical development indicated that growth and shifts in demographics from a White to a diverse district was diminishing the previous sense of family in the district. The second illustrated how the four-column process raised awareness of a lack of communication and collaboration. The third critical development illustrates how the issue of trust moved from awareness to action. This small subteam of the larger shareholder team left the Summer Learning Lab with a plan to put the issue of trust on the district's agenda.

Critical Development 4: Raising the trust issue with all administrators. After returning from the Summer Learning Lab of 2004, the central office administrator took the responsibility of presenting the team's plan to the superintendent and assistant superintendents, who had not been able to attend. Adopting the book title *The Little Engine that Could,* the Summer Learning Lab team also developed a presentation for the district's administrative retreat, held in August 2004, where they presented their plan for the central office to conduct regular site visits as a step toward improving district and school relations. According to principals and central office administrators who were present at the meeting, these top leaders accepted the site visit plan and, as will be shown, began implementation immediately (field notes, September 2004).

The shareholder team asked the university partner to present the trust survey data to all district administrators at the November 2004 fall management meeting. When the data were shared, central office administrators were surprised by the results (see Table 4). Most administrators perceived themselves to be acting in significantly more trustful ways than the survey indicated. An assistant superintendent described his surprise:

> I was sitting with these people day after day, year after year, supporting them as many of the complaints that come out of the schools end up on my lap, and I try to resolve them, and I call them and communicate frequently. How could they not trust me? (Assistant Superintendent A, May 2005)

He believed others in the central office were also unaware of these feelings among district principals and said the staff was "shocked." The site

administrators, on the other hand, seemed less surprised. For example, a principal noted that the survey "validated what a lot of us already felt." Despite these differing perceptions, central office administrators agreed with the shareholder team that the lack of trust in the district was a barrier to reform, and they pledged to address the issue. The central office accepted the shareholder team's plan of more regular school visits and committed itself to the process of formally developing trust in the district.

In summary, these four critical developments seemed to serve as catalysts that brought trust as an issue to the table. The issues and tensions were already present, but the actions of the university partner raised the sense of urgency and provided a safe forum in which these difficult issues could be discussed and acted on.

Trust-Building Steps by the Central Office

In the next section, we describe the trust-building steps the central office and shareholder team developed and implemented. We then summarize the data in Table 5 to document the perceptions of interviewees (principals and central office staff) regarding the challenges and progress. Although there is an overlap, the data are clustered by the primary facet of trust that they address.

The tasks undertaken by the central office were of the central office's own initiative, with the university partner playing a minimal role in design or implementation, except for the Strengths-Based Summit. Strategies for enhancing trust were suggested by site administrators such as the site visit idea presented by the Summer Learning Lab team, but implementation rested largely in the hands of the central office administrators who have both the authority and the hierarchical position to take such action. As suggested by Whitener et al. (1998), "Managerial behavior is an important influence on the development of trust in relationships between managers and employees" (p. 516).

Through analysis of the interview and document data, we identified three major trust-building activities: (a) the content of management meeting activities, (b) central office visits to the school sites, and (c) implementation of districtwide summits.

Management Meetings

Prior to the partnership work, management meetings in District Y, attended by central office administrators, site administrators, and assistant site administrators, were primarily used to disseminate administrative information and explain district policies. Once trust became a focus, all interviewees indicated that in 2005-2006, much more of their time in the weekly

(text continues on p. 34)

TABLE 5
Summary of Interview Data: Site and Central Office Leaders' Perceptions of Key Facets of Trust

Facet and Definition	*Challenge*	*Growth in Trust*
Risk: Willingness to risk is the degree of confidence one has in a situation of vulnerability Openness: The extent to which relevant information is not withheld; it is a process by which people make themselves vulnerable to others by sharing personal information with others, a giving of oneself	"There are assumptions that one takes to the table—hidden assumptions. They're not the ones we really talk about openly but they are the ones that keep us from engaging in change. For example, if I say about the position that all children can lean and if all my children in my classes do not learn, then the focus is on me, my inadequacies as a teacher, and I am afraid to acknowledge that I am inadequate in this position. And then, you probably have some [distrust] at some unconscious, some subconscious level; that's what's keeping you back" (principal, School D, May 2005). "I think we have a number of people who worry about what would happen if they were ever completely honest" (principal, School E, May 2005). "We don't trust each other as much as we should, but we are afraid of retribution if we say something to the wrong person—then maybe we won't get what we need from that department" (principal, Summer Learning Lab video data, June 2004).	"I think there's been a reaching out of some of the district office like the assistant superintendents to try to make us feel as if you know we definitely need to be open and honest" (principal, School A, May 2005). "I think people were very honest, and you know when of the biggest issues was being honest and make sure that communication is honest. 'Don't look at me and say everything is OK.' If it's not, find a professional way of saying, 'I really didn't like it when you did this. Can we talk about it?' rather than harboring that, always having that little thing in the back of your mind about whoever, whether it be the district office, whether it be another principal" (principal, School A, May 2005). "Our management team is again not different from many, there are a healthy percentage of people who say very little in public settings, and then sort of moving the institution along is left to the handful that either are courageous enough to say something or confident enough to say, 'What are they

(continued)

TABLE 5 (continued)

Facet and Definition	*Challenge*	*Growth in Trust*
	"What did trust look like before it became a focus? I think everybody felt there was no trust, and I don't think anybody ever talked about it. We would have meetings where it was brought up, but nothing was ever done to change it. . . . I talked to very few people, my job, and I come to work and I do the best job I can" (principal, School J, February 2006). "You didn't feel like you could go to anybody about anything, for help, because it would get spread around, 'Oh so and so didn't know how to do this, or so and so didn't know how to do that,' and then people were talking about other people, gossip and things going on, and a lot of unkind things sometimes being said about other people or untrue things and so it [trust] was a major issue" (principal, School K, February 2006). I mean by being able to say, 'I don't know what I'm doing.' That is a risk. And the easiest thing to say when you don't know what you're doing is, 'No! Let's not change anything.' In my experience, what I know and how I view things, that I wouldn't say risk taking is good" (assistant principal, School E, May 2005).	going to do to me?' and I think that the district office personnel really invites that kind of dialogue" (principal, School E, May 2005). "When you look around and you see people and the body language tells you there is a sense of indifference, then you're apt to hold back. If the people who are conducting the meeting, such as [Assistant Superintendent A] and [Assistant Superintendent B], and you see that they are giving you some sort of positive acknowledgment, if your peers are giving it, you're apt to be more verbal, more vocal. And I felt that way. I don't feel intimidated by that process [grand conversations]" (principal, School I, February 2006). "I would just say bringing it [trust] to the surface, bringing the problem to the surface instead of just letting it go on and on and on. I think that by digging it out and bringing it to the surface and saying, 'This is a problem and we need to focus on it,' I think that was the biggest part right there, just getting it out there and getting it in the open" (principal, School K, February 2006).

Facet and Definition	*Challenge*	*Growth in Trust*
		"'This is how I'm feeling about it, blankety blank, and I know you aren't totally in agreement on this issue, but boy I respect you as my colleagues because I know what you bring to the table and I know your motives are solid and sincere.' That really means a lot" (principal, School D, May 2005).
Communication: An act of interaction between individuals or groups in which a message is being transmitted	"This is the only district that I've worked in, and I've been in [District Y] for 23 years, and historically our district really has empowered sites to make significant decisions. At one point, in the district, sites were even able to pick their own textbooks. And obviously we don't do that anymore. But we are really struggling as a district with what decisions should be made by individual sites and what decisions and what direction ought to be made at the district level" (principal, School E, May 2005). "We need somebody to talk to us, so you know what's going on. And that was a huge risk for us to take" (principal, School B, May 2005). "In every meeting that we've had, whenever we discussed the barriers to student	"Communication—honest communication—seems like an underlying theme of a lot of things that I've seen. I think that would be valuable for anybody" (principal, School L, February 2006 Focus Groups). "After acknowledging trust as an issue, conversations tended to seem less surface and more sincere" (principal, School C, May 2005). "I am more conscious of the process, and I recognize the importance of process in advancing student achievement. Process being in place, that fosters communication, and when you foster communication, you foster collaboration. You foster trust because you have less and less opportunity to miscommunicate, so that is important to

(continued)

TABLE 5 (continued)

Facet and Definition	*Challenge*	*Growth in Trust*
	achievement, the idea of communication has come up, or lack of it, or problems with it. Whether that is at the school level or between site and district; whether it be among administrators, that issue of communication has always come up. And then when we fine-tune that and look at it more closely, the trust issue comes up under the communication piece. But we haven't had open, honest communication" (principal, Summer Learning Lab video data, June 2004). "They talk at us, not with us [reference grand conversations]. They'll give maybe 2 or 3 minutes to discuss what it is they want you to discuss, but you're not getting a whole lot of relevancy out of it. Specifically, on the trust issue . . . I know I kept my mouth shut" (assistant principal, School E interview, May 2005). "That's [communication is] the biggest issue. We all kind of know what needs to be done, but if we're all sitting in our classrooms, our offices, district offices, and we're not communicating those things and we're not sharing those ideas—that's a problem" (principal, School A, May 2005).	them. Has [District Y] put in place processes that address that? I think more so this year than in the past" (principal, School D, May 2005). "I don't think the language has changed, and again I know this is something hard to quantify, but I just think it's the authenticity that's changed" (principal, School D, May 2005). "If you could sit in on the work that we've done on the trust issue, I think that you'd be extremely proud of us. We've come a long way. We still have a far peak to go, but we have made huge inroads into a very sensitive, kind of secret, protected area in the district. I think that's been powerful. The cooperation has been very meaningful and brought our schools together" (teachers union representative, May 2005).

Facet and Definition	*Challenge*	*Growth in Trust*
Integrity: An acceptance of responsibility for one's actions and a consistency between what we say and do Reliability: In a situation of interdependence, when something is required from another person or group, the individual can be counted on to supply it	"In terms of the district, I'm sure the Middle School Summit that we just had was an outgrowth of the work that we've done with [the university-district partnership]. . . . I think some of the processes are certainly important—we just don't get past a certain level of implementation, and I don't think it's that far to go" (principal, School A, May 2005). "Because true change isn't going to happen unless you have a timeline for it to happen. There's not a timeline in place. There's no point A to point B. And I know it's a lofty goal that all children can learn, but you got to start at point A to reach point B, and it needs to be done by this time. Point B to point C needs to be done by this time. And we haven't had that. It's just been kind of lofty talk and no action" (assistant principal, School E, May 2005).	"The inconsistencies at every site; how are they going to have their hands on the pulse of the inconsistencies unless they're actually there at the site? I think an outgrowth of what happened is that they figured how inconsistent things are and they are trying to deal with that, which is what happened at the Middle School Summit" (assistant principal, School E, May 2005). "I think the district office, when decisions are made, it's unclear who's responsible for articulating that decision. So we've been having discussions about leadership in our management team meetings, about trust and communication. So we're engaging in sort of ongoing norm setting and defining responsibilities" (principal, School E, May 2005). "That's probably the biggest accomplishment—getting from an 'Oh we should' to 'We're actually doing it.' . . . People are actually doing it, and our summer in-service [Summer 2005] that's coming up . . . for the whole management team is kind of a culmination of what we've been doing in

(continued)

TABLE 5 (continued)

Facet and Definition	*Challenge*	*Growth in Trust*
		building the trust and building the honest and open communication. And building the ability to confront and building the ability to go to someone and say, 'I don't know how to do that'" (Assistant Superintendent E, May 2005). "The fact that you know there's more working with accountability, in terms of people at the district level taking on a site, at least one person will then be here once in a while. See what's going on, get to know our leadership team, staff, our culture. I think that's a change that's happened" (principal, School A, May 2005). "The superintendent has made a commitment to come at least once a month—for a superintendent to come by a campus once a month, that's extraordinary. . . . And that's important for the principals, and it's important for the staff. Visual contact I know goes a long ways, and how often have you heard in the past, "Well they just don't care about us; they don't know what's going on at the site?" . . . I don't have to hide my

Facet and Definition	*Challenge*	*Growth in Trust*
		feelings. . . . He doesn't, you know, ignore your concerns. Does that build trust? Yes, it does. Absolutely. Because then it makes it more family oriented, and I like that" (principal, School I, February 2006). "Any time you're dealing with people and trust, I don't know that you'll ever get it resolved quickly. . . . I think the district administration was *really* surprised that people didn't feel as good about things as they wanted them to. I thought they did, and so I think it's good, you know? It's been brought up every year for years, and I think this is the *first* time that they're really following through with trying to get it resolved" (principal, School J, February 2006).

meetings was devoted to some form of trust-building activities whereas memos were used to communicate more routine administrative information. The superintendent described the shift in management meetings this way:

> Every one of our [management meetings,] we focused on dealing with trust and developing trust issues. . . . I mean we do a little bit of business, but every one of them is focused on the trust issue, and we're going to culminate the year at our Summer [2005] Institute. It's got everybody thinking. Well, it influenced us because we decided to spend the whole year focusing on that, as an essential sort of baseline, to really move them forward. . . . It's been good to focus every month on it because [Assistant Superintendent A] and [Assistant Superintendent B] in their discussions have taken it to a newer level. They're really walking the talk kind of thing, and so yeah, it's making people think twice. (May 2005)

A principal confirmed the superintendent's statement that management meetings now involved activities focusing on trust.

> In the last probably 3 or 4 months, we've been doing some activities that have to do with that [trust] and have been very effective. . . . We've been doing these activities at the management meetings, giving the information that we learned and what are priories to our upper administration. Two of the assistant superintendents have taken on the charge of putting together some activities to help build trust amongst the administrative groups. And I think that filters down in 2 years and gives you some chance to think about your leadership role and issues of trust as well—not just trust between administrators. The trust filters down. (principal, School C, May 2005).

When asked in the second and third round of open-ended interviews what the district had done to address the issues of trust, the 25 central office and site administrators interviewed mentioned three changes in the meetings. These activities, later documented through district records, included creating a district trust report card, implementing a process called grand conversations, and giving out kudos awards.

District trust report cards. Building from the trust data that had been shared by the university partner, two assistant superintendents created a district trust report card. Its purpose was to take a "dip stick" assessment of site administrators' perceptions regarding some of the facets of trust and to grade the central office on different aspects. The results were to be used at management meetings to engage in conversations about how to strengthen trust. According to Six and Nooteboom (2004), this action could be categorized as a trust-building effort to accept influence by seeking counsel, accept and value counsel, and receive help in ways that change decisions

(p. 17). When asked about the district report cards, a central office administrator explained,

> When we surveyed our management group, areas that came up as not as strong as they could be in our group, we started doing something about it and have gone proactively to work on what we graded ourselves on the report card. What areas we're strong in and what areas we're weak in. Then we defined those areas so we all had the same vocabulary and then we picked those areas that we were not satisfied with. We've been doing mini in-services with our management group once a month. (May 2005)

One of the participating assistant principals explained the process from the site leaders' perspective.

> We did a district report card about 3 months ago, and that's been the basis for our [management] meetings with principals and management. So it's from that perspective, coming from our assistant superintendents who were putting those together. [Other central office staff] were involved, number one, in order to get a feel for areas of concern, and there are some. We're certainly not perfect, and there are people that feel more disenfranchised than others so that came out. (May 2005)

Three of the lowest grades given were for risk, communication, and openness, similar to the three lowest areas on the original trust/leadership survey (see Table 4); these facets became the focus of subsequent management meetings.

Grand conversations. During the management meetings, district leadership discussed the specific facets of trust in what the district called grand conversations. Interviews of the central office administrators in both May 2005 and February 2006 revealed that at the management meetings, they had discussed the ways in which the district could encourage risk taking and open and honest communication between school sites and the central office, which were the areas the report cards identified as needing work. A central office administrator discussed how those areas were addressed:

> We've broken them down into the critical areas. One was open and honest communication. That was the first one we tackled. So as a group we actually developed norms for how we would deal with each other with open and honest communication. We talked about what it would look like. We brainstormed what it would look like. We wrote that down on a chart, and then together we developed norms for how we would relate to one another.

Table 5 presents both participants' perceptions of challenges that remain and the progress that has been made in the trust facets of communication

and openness. Although it appears progress has been made regarding trust and the ability to have open and honest communication, there is still work to be done, as noted by a principal who said, "The challenge is you can say something at the meeting, and it can be warmly received, but you don't really have the authority to move it forward." This sentiment was shared by some of the other principals on the 2004 Summer Learning Lab team who noted that there was often "lots of talk" but "some of the things just never seem to change." Nevertheless, the data as summarized in Table 5 also suggest that principals recognized and appreciated the central office's efforts to improve and create a safer climate for communication. Video data from Summer Learning Labs held in 2005 and 2006 indicate that the team had deeper conversations, communication was more open and honest, and principals and central office administrators shared their vulnerabilities. A principal's remarks captured this shift in climate, which was verbally and nonverbally supported by other members of the team.

> The better we communicate, the better we are of making sure that information is disseminated appropriately, accurately, and minimizes opportunities for miscommunication. So if we can develop a plan that is trusted by each person who is involved in it, it becomes a sole way of communicating information to one another, it would go a long way to enhancing trust amongst individuals. (video data, Summer Learning Lab 2005)

Research on high-performing districts suggests that effective districtwide communication is critical to improved performance (Agullard & Goughnour, 2006; Hightower et al., 2002), indicating that implementation of the grand conversations most likely was an appropriate first step in the district's improvement process.

Kudos awards. Another change initiated by the central office was to begin each monthly meeting by recognizing the contributions and effectiveness of an individual administrator. A Kudos candy bar was given by one member to another in appreciation of the person's contribution to the district. The recognized administrator was then responsible for passing a Kudos bar on to another individual at the following meeting. The first person recognized by the central office was an African American site administrator who had been instrumental in helping to surface the trust issue in the shareholder team. This choice was significant because it symbolized the central office's commitment to improving trust in the district. It is worth noting that in the spring of 2007 at an administrative management meeting, we observed that the kudos award was still being given, this time

to a classified management employee whose work had often gone unrecognized in the district (field notes, June 2007).

Central Office Site Visits

Another major initiative to change practices was the implementation of site visits. Following the plan recommended by the 2004 Summer Learning Lab team, four central office administrators divided the district's schools into clusters for regular visits to "minimize the disconnect" between central office and schools. A central office administrator reported, "I think one of the real goals is to be far more active in mentoring and working with the principals who in turn will work with their staffs and be visible for the staffs, too" (Assistant Superintendent B, May 2005). During these visits, district administrators and site leaders discussed curricular and logistical issues at their site. The assistant superintendents also observed classrooms, spoke with teachers and other personnel, and modeled staff meetings. A central office administrator visited each school for a minimum of 2 hours a month.

The follow-up interviews in Rounds 2 ($n = 15$) and 3 ($n = 10$) indicated that all respondents expressed positive feelings toward the purpose for and outcomes of the site visits. These visits helped develop more trusting relations between the schools and central office by providing a "bridge" between the two parties. The central office site visits received the greatest support from site administrators who reported they used them to share issues with the central office. A principal described how the site visits have been a positive step for improving the central office's image on her campus:

> I can just tell you the district office . . . made an effort to assign assistant superintendents and directors to site principals. We did that the year before as well, but this year, we've followed through a little better. . . . So having the bridge where the district office, the assistant superintendent, is actually on campus in our leadership team meetings on occasion. Where some of my people are actually calling him by name, you know? That's been huge. And getting lots more of those people here so that my staff and my teachers see them as people doing a job just like they are, rather than as "them over at the district office." (principal, School A, February 2006)

Moreover, site leaders stated that the central office showed concern for their needs during the visits and that this practice indicated respect and support for their positions in the district. Site leaders also took these opportunities to share positive aspects of their school, like innovative teaching practices, as well as problematic conditions at their campuses, such as problems with facilities. A principal shared her thoughts about the central office site visits: "It's worked out well. I think it's important that the teachers know that

the upper administration is interested and wants to know what's going on and have more of a visible role on campus" (principal, School C, May 2005). Another principal echoed these sentiments:

> Coming through and checking on our programs and talking to our staff and giving feedback to what they have viewed. I just love that because I think it's important. You don't want one sector of the district to be so isolated that they don't know what's happening on the campuses. (principal, School B, May 2005)

These findings are consistent with previous research, supporting the conclusion that more frequent contact and proximity between parties help build and sustain trusting relationships in school organizations (Kochanek, 2005; Paulu, 1989).

In spite of the initiation of the site visits, 4 interviewees felt that the central office still played a peripheral role in the functioning of school sites in part because the purpose of the visits were not always clear or focused and there did not always seem to be appropriate follow-up from the visit. A principal shared, "I think that one of the keys to building trust is that when you come and visit, you are very explicit about what your expectation is and what you are looking for." She also acknowledged that both sides have to be explicit and transparent about expectations for the visit, thus recognizing the reciprocal nature of trust. Table 5 further summarizes data on trust, follow-through, openness, communication, risk, and integrity, all facets of trust relevant for successful site visits between central office and school leaders.

District Summits

A unique aspect of District Y's efforts to build trust was districtwide implementation of the professional learning opportunities being afforded to the shareholder team. As shown in Table 2, District Y held three summits. The first one, as discussed previously, was a follow-up to the Fall Institute with Kegan and Lahey held in April 2004. The second was a Middle School Summit in fall 2004, designed to improve communication and provide opportunities for collaboration among the middle schools. The third summit, led by the university partner for all school leadership teams and community members, was held in November 2005. This summit was titled Unleashing Our Strengths and was specifically designed as a trust-building activity.

Without being explicitly asked, all interviewees in May 2005 mentioned the Middle School Summit. The teachers union representative on the shareholder team described the event this way:

> We did it like when we were in the Summer Learning Lab, and we had the discussion leader and we had the note takers and we made sure that everybody was involved, and then we broke into interest groups and it was wonderful.

A principal described her experience:

> And there were teachers involved, and they broke everybody up into teams and assigned people to different rooms, and you didn't choose—it was like a random thing, you know? All these people go to this room and that room. Then we talked about issues that are affecting the students' success in our middle schools. (principal, School E, May 2005)

Another principal focused on how this summit helped to build trust:

> There were people in that room problem solving, working together on, OK, these are the issues we have. How can we support—what are some ideas that you might have? We're actually involving the teachers, and we've never done that before. So that's definitely I think a learning that we've had from this process, that when you engage the stakeholders you actually get better product. I think that's one powerful example of an accomplishment along with the trust issue among management and leadership. (principal, School C, May 2005)

These summits created a forum for district and site administrators and teachers to engage in genuine collaborative work to address districtwide concerns. An assistant principal shared her perspective of what occurred:

> The Middle School Summit is where all of the inconsistencies came out. I think [the central office] knew they were there, but they wanted us to think outside the box on how to fix them, or how to address them. (assistant principal, School E, May 2005)

Another principal believed that shareholders felt "honored" and "respected" by the opportunity and appreciated "that [district members'] input was actually valued" at the summits. A third interviewee, reflecting on the Unleashing Our Strengths summit, commented,

> I think the fact that the district chose the university partner to be here and to focus on the strengths-based approach, which infers that teachers know what to do. It's just a matter of getting together as a leadership team, disseminating information and being better communicators. . . . And their motto is, tell me something good. In fact, the superintendent played the song to us at a principals' meeting about that "Appreciative Inquiry" [exercise], and a lot of times, that trust is synonymous with support. I really feel supported as a principal. (principal, School E, May 2005)

Table 5 is designed to summarize the data and show the shifts in perceptions over time as well as to show that administrators see progress and also have concerns. The data are organized by trust facets. As shown in Table 4 and discussed below, in the re-administration of the trust survey, the same trust

facets had the lowest mean scores in the first administration of the survey and showed significant growth when the survey was re-administered in 2007.

Re-Administration of Trust Survey

The interview data provided a rich description of the actions of the district and subsequent outcomes in terms of building trust between the central office and school sites. To triangulate our qualitative data with the survey data from spring 2004, our team of researchers re-administered the trust survey in spring 2007. Our goal was to determine whether the perceived gap around trust had diminished. We predicted that as trust became the district's main focus, the gap between perceived levels of trust in the district would narrow due to the trust-building initiatives implemented by the central office. As shown in Table 4, a comparative analysis of the survey data collected in 2004 and 2007 confirmed our findings from the qualitative data, indicating significant differences in how site administrators perceived the central office's engagement in behaviors related to specific facets of trust.

Site-level administrators in the matched sample perceived the facets of integrity, competence, open communication, risk, and total trust all significantly increased from the 2004 administration of the survey. These facets and trust as a total factor are those most echoed in the interviews and focus groups and provide additional support to our qualitative findings. Equally important, the survey data also indicated a significant difference in the central office's perceptions of school site leaders' behaviors regarding communication.

The significantly different perception on the part of the central office administrators toward the site administrators in the area of communication is important. This effort at building trust between the district and site was a district-initiated action and at its core was the development of better communication. This matched sample suggests that there has been statistically significant perceptual improvement in communication from both the central office and the site administrator perspective, toward one another. The minimal change in the facet of risk confirms the qualitative data that principals may still feel vulnerable, which in light of NCLB and potentially impending sanctions for a number of schools, is not surprising. A central office administrator discussed why he thinks members tend to be low on risk taking:

> If you are not willing to take a risk, that must mean you are afraid to take a risk. And if you are afraid to take a risk, it means that you don't trust those that are above you to not have repercussions for the risks that you'd be taking, and it came down to that whole issue of trust. (Assistant Superintendent C, May 2005)

However, site leaders view risk taking as a step that would be most appropriately initiated by central office leadership. A principal shared his frustration about risk taking:

> We talk about encouraging risk taking, but I don't believe that's our strength in our district. I think we give lip service to it, but you can't really do anything too risky unless we all decide we're going to take that risk together. Somebody has to orchestrate that. It doesn't have to be the superintendent. It could probably be an assistant superintendent, but it probably has to be somebody at the district office. (principal, School E, May 2005)

These perspectives are supported by other research that indicates that trusting relationships should be initiated from the top down (Kochanek, 2005; Tschannen-Moran, 2004; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998; Whitener et al., 1998).

The survey findings are generally supported by interview and observation data suggesting that District Y's trust activities had some impact on how school and central office leadership perceived one another. As a principal, during the 2005 Summer Learning Lab, summarized,

> We did go back to our district, and we did talk about those issues. We did talk about trust. And we did talk about the importance of establishing an environment amongst administrators where they felt that they could trust one another. So steps have been taken in [District Y] where activities have been done to establish communication among administrators and sort of like bringing to people to the full of people's consciousness, and interacting with others from a place of integrity. . . . Say what you mean, mean what you say. (video data, Summer Learning Lab 2005)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study explored the critical relationship between a central office and its school sites in a time of rapid demographic change and high demands for improved performance, two factors that the data indicate were straining relationships and thus trust. As the district grew in size, the close "family ties" that previously characterized this district were fraying at the edges. The White administrators who had served the district for many years recognized the need to diversify their ranks. Prior to the district-university partnership and district-initiated trust-building activities, there were few structures in place to enable the district to examine its values and beliefs and set new norms for interaction. Furthermore, the NCLB Program Improvement status of the district and many of its schools increased principals' sense of

vulnerability. Given these factors, it is perhaps not surprising that risk and openness ranked the lowest of the trust facets in 2004. It is also an important measure of the efforts of the district's trust-building activities that risk and openness were facets that showed significant changes in 2007.

Several key implications for theory and practice can be drawn from this case study: (a) An external partner can serve as a catalyst to support a district in discussing the "undiscussables"; (b) although trust in general is important, the facets of trust may provide more explicit guidance in the district reform processes; and (c) trust can be developed and fostered by a central office as a way to support district reform.

Role of the Partnership in Surfacing Trust

Findings from this study suggest that trust is often an under-the-surface issue, as revealed in the initial interviews. However, an external partner, such as a university center in this case, appears capable of playing a significant role in surfacing trust. We would argue, however, that the nature of the work with the university partner matters. This university partner chose to help educational systems explore their governing variables (Argyris, 1976; Argyris, Putnam, & Smith, 1985), defensive routines (Argyris, 1999), and other factors that prevent double loop learning (Argyris, 1976; Argyris & Schön, 1974) as the focus of its work. The university accomplished this focus by hosting a series of institutes and summer learning labs that supported shareholder teams by providing a safe haven and teaching processes that facilitated examining the underlying variables blocking professed commitment to improving student achievement.

The case also illustrates the power of feeding back perceptual data that can serve as a mirror reflecting relationships. The trust survey provided a 360-degree perspective (site to district, district to site) and also played a role in framing the issues for site and district administrators in a more objective way. The presentation of the results in an aggregated format to all four shareholder teams at the Summer Learning Lab pushed the issue to the surface for District Y. The learning lab provided a forum for trust to be openly discussed, for feelings to be vented, and for the teams to develop plans of action to address their concerns.

The subsequent presentation of District Y's trust survey data to all site and central office administrators by a neutral third party, the university, allowed the administrators who had not attended the summer session to approach the data more openly, even if some were surprised by the findings. The data indicated an external partner can help to surface a key dimension of organizational life such as trust, which is often undiscussable.

Furthermore, the ensuing discussions seemed to foster change and encouraged double-loop learning (Argyris & Schön, 1974). Fullan et al. (2004) also found that "well placed pressure from external partners, combined with internal energy, can be the stimulus for tackling something that might not otherwise be addressed, and district leaders can use these partners to stir the pot in purposeful directions" (p. 45).

Trust building is possible only when one party is open to influence from another or when there is intervention from a third party with whom both sides are open to influence (Zucker, Darby, Brewer, & Peng, 1996). Through the activities facilitated by the partnership, the university was able to build trusting relationships with both the central office and school site administrators. These relationships supported the university in acting as a bridge between the two parts of the organization. With strong relationships, data, content, and processes, the university partner was able to lead central office administrators and site leaders through self-discovery and reflection to action.

Multifaceted Construct of Trust

Despite the fact that many scholars have defined trust as a multifaceted construct (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2001), few have examined those individual facets and their separate effects, especially in regard to central office–school site relations. This study makes a unique contribution to the research literature in that it examines not only the construct of trust in its totality but also the individual and combined effects of the facets of trust on the development of site and district relationships. In each of the three rounds of interviews of both site and district administrators, the facets of openness, risk, and communication emerged as reoccurring themes. These themes are also supported by the survey data in 2004 as critical areas (i.e., they have lower mean scores). This finding is particularly important for District Y as the facets of openness, risk, and communication can often mediate an organization's "rigid response" to a perceived external threat (Daly, 2006). When an organization responds rigidly, it often restricts the flow of information, closes off boundaries, creates rigid hierarchies, and avoids risk (Shaw & Barrett-Power, 1997; Staw, Sandelands, & Dutton, 1981). For District Y, these rigid responses can be maladaptive and may lead to the eventual weakening and even demise of the system unless mediating conditions are in place.

Both the qualitative and the quantitative data indicate that by initiating trust-building activities focused on openness and communication, the central office leaders were signaling site leaders more clearly of their intentions and expectations (Six & Nooteboom, 2004). These actions were shown to

influence principals' perceptions of the specific facets of trust as well as trust in general. As shown in Table 4, significant differences were found in site administrators' responses in 2007 in four key areas: communication, openness, integrity and risk, and overall trust. From the district's perspective, between 2004 and 2007, there was a significant difference in communication.

As previously discussed, the central office administrators used the 2004 data to focus their trust-building activities in two key areas: changes in management meetings and making visits to school sites. Two of the changes in the management meetings, grand conversations and kudos awards, could be viewed as low-risk exchanges, which are important for promoting "positive discernment of respect and personal regard," which are aspects of trust (Kochanek, 2005, p. 80), and as managing mutual expectations, "which can be seen as a process for monitoring and ensuring present and ongoing mutual dependence and influence" (Six & Nooteboom, 2004, p. 4). Six and Nooteboom (2004) found that trust-building actions that provided relational signals in this area were also correlated with higher trust as perceived by employees.

In contrast, the development and implementation of the trust report card by the district and the decision to conduct site visits reflect that the district is engaging in more high-risk exchanges, which may enhance facets of communication, openness, and risk. The report card and ensuing discussions revealed willingness by the district staff to be open and vulnerable. The site visits offered opportunities for the central office to affirm site leaders' competence but also could reveal vulnerabilities and so entailed risk. This notion of vulnerability (Goddard et al., 2001; Rotter, 1967; Rousseau et al., 1998) is core to most definitions of trust and reflects an expectancy that another's word or promise can be relied on. In the early stages, principals in this study perceived a lack of follow-through, broken promises, and thus increased vulnerability from a perceived lack of communication and openness. Through the site visits, the central office created a context for site and central office leaders to build relationships by engaging in potentially valuable, although risky, interactions. As evidenced in our findings and in other data from schools and business organizations, shared experience is the most significant step toward developing a sense of trustworthiness toward others (Kochanek, 2005; Paulu, 1989; Rousseau et al., 1998). The efforts to improve communication and openness in this study affirm that those in a higher position of authority (e.g., the central office) must take the initiative in building trusting relations (Dirks, 2000; Kochanek, 2005, Tschannen-Moran, 2004; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998; Whitener et al., 1998).

Communication also appears as a critical facet supporting trust building between the central office and site. All participants interviewed recognized the importance of having open lines of communication within the district. Many viewed the focus on trust as a positive step toward improving communication throughout District Y's leadership. As the interview data showed, site administrators who participated in the District Y leadership team are beginning to feel empowered enough to surface concerns and take action to build stronger connections and channels of communication between the central office and the schools. This was particularly true of 2 administrators who were hesitant to communicate openly at the beginning of the study because they represented new and diverse perspectives. However, our data also indicate that the lines of communication between site and central office leadership appear to need further development, especially in light of the year-round calendar. As Agullard and Goughnour (2006) found in their study of three school districts,

> Communication emerges as either the best friend or the worst enemy of efforts to develop and implement coordinated, focused structures for school improvement. Ongoing dialogue and "sense-making" creates and recreates staff focus, allowing it to be consistent yet dynamically respond to changes in the environment. On the other hand, poor communication leads to individual sense-making that over time veers in diverse directions and begins to fray the edges of the focus, ultimately leading to its dissolution. (p. 6)

Frames for understanding trust. Dirks and Ferrin (2002) argued there are two frames for exploring trust: relational trust (in immediate supervisor) and trust in organizational leadership (e.g., central office). The concept of relational trust has dominated the study of trust in schools. This is logical given that most studies have focused on trust between principals and school staff and community, where proximity and frequent interactions lead to relationships that are more intimate and close. In such settings, issues of care and consideration in the relationship are central (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). High relational trust in schools and other organizations has been shown to elicit citizenship behavior—going beyond what is expected for the good of the whole (Konovsky & Pugh, 1994; Tschannen-Moran, 2003).

The concept of trust in organizational leadership, however, deserves some consideration when exploring trust between central office and school sites. This concept suggests that followers make inferences about their sense of vulnerability in the hierarchical system based on their perceptions of general leadership's characteristics such as integrity, reliability, competence, and fairness (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Given the current structure of school districts, where there may be little contact between central office personnel and

school principals, these inferences are often based on fleeting interactions in highly formal meetings. As was found in this study, the management meetings, prior to the initiation of trust-building activities, were primarily information downloads. Time was rarely set aside for discussion, dialogue, or debate that would foster the development of mutual expectations (Six & Nooteboom, 2004). As the district had grown in size, central office staff seemed to have little contact with schools, and schools operated fairly autonomously. In fact, many in the central office seemed to be operating on the belief that there were high levels of relational trust, and little attention was given to broader issues of organizational leadership trust.

When this district was smaller and a family-like feeling pervaded the culture, the possibility of relational trust existed between site and district leaders. As new teachers and administrators had been added to meet the growth needs, however, structures had not evolved to maintain relational trust or foster organizational leadership trust. The shifts in the management meetings could be interpreted as efforts to address organizational leadership trust through setting norms for meetings that would guide behaviors of all. The trust report cards represented central office leadership efforts to allow site leaders to judge leadership qualities or characteristics and to openly discuss shortfalls. Mayer et al., (1995) and Mayer and Gavin (1999) suggested that revealing such vulnerability enhances the likelihood that followers "will be more comfortable in engaging in behaviors that put them at risk" (cited in Dirks & Ferrin, 2002, p. 613). Although most site administrators in this case indicated that they saw benefits from the process, the data also showed that some had reservations and still questioned the genuineness of the central office. In contrast, the principals' strong endorsement of the site visits indicates that these visits may have created an opportunity not only to strengthen overall perceptions of trust in the organizational leadership but also to build relational trust with specific central office administrators. The visits provided an opportunity for the central office administrators to show care and concern and address the affective dimensions of trust.

These two frames for exploring trust between central office administrators and school site leaders suggest fertile ground for further research in school systems. As Dirks (2000) found in hierarchical systems, it is trust in leadership rather than trust among teammates (principals in this case) that will have an effect on performance (cited in Dirks & Ferrin, 2002).

Implications for District Trust Building

The literature on trust in schools suggests some ways in which trust can be cultivated among adults in schools (Brewster & Railsback, 2003; Bryk

& Schneider, 1996; Kochanek, 2005; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). However, as most researchers note, building trust takes time, a resource that educators often fall short of when pressed by high-stakes accountability and the needs of their diverse clientele, students and parents. The central office in many of its trust-building processes attempted to make time for interaction and the subsequent building of trust. The following section outlines several implications for districts interested in enhancing leadership trust.

Follow-through. Follow-through is a key aspect of both reliability and integrity. Given the fragile and tenuous connections that often exist between school district offices and their schools, follow-through is often difficult to fulfill and yet is vital to trust building (Brewster & Railsback, 2003; Sebring & Bryk, 2000). Based on interview data, it appears that District Y could significantly enhance trust if more of the ideas brainstormed during the grand conversations were quickly followed-up by district staff. As Argyris et al. (1985) argued, actions must follow words, and espoused theories must match theories in use if trust is to grow.

Shared and transparent decision making. Another foundational element of reliability, integrity, and communication is demonstrated through shared decision making and transparency (Blase & Blase, 2001; Brewster & Railsback, 2003). This idea of transparency in leadership also links directly to the concept of organizational leadership trust. If the rationale behind decisions is clearly explained to site leaders, it models openness and an opportunity to create a shared theory of action. The site administrators in this district do not seem to be clamoring for decision-making authority as much as they are asking for decisions to be made more openly and for the thought processes behind decisions to be articulated. Agullard and Goughnour (2006) also found that transparency was critical. When superintendents make explicit their theories of action, there is greater potential for the central office to develop a shared theory of action. In support of this idea, they argued,

> Another finding points to the relationship between the central office's shared theory of action and the creation and implementation of school improvement structures, such as strategies, staff positions, or program. . . . Structures without theory lead to fragmentation and theory without structures remains just that—theory. More specifically, greater district-wide implementation appeared to result when the central office adhered to an explicit theory of action. (p. 6)

Experiences with District Y suggest paths that other districts could follow to ensure greater transparency and to develop a more explicit and

shared theory of action (Agullard & Goughnour, 2006; Argyris et al., 1985; Kochanek, 2005). For example, hosting multiple systemwide summits on key topics, providing sustained professional development for school leadership teams, and implementing a strategic planning process represented important first steps in bringing the sites and district leaders together to create a common language, shared vision, and communication systems. Previous research on school and district reforms indicates these structures are more likely to be perceived as trust building if school site participants see them as part of a larger and ongoing plan for school improvement (Kochanek, 2005; Louis, 2003).

Redesigning the system. One of the tasks of leadership identified by Leithwood and Riehl (2003) is redesigning the system for increased effectiveness, and for many schools systems, this means enhancing trust relations. Although not reflecting a major redesign, changing the focus of the management meetings represented one small step that other districts could consider. A more dramatic redesign was reflected in assigning each of the four top leaders to a cluster of schools and scheduling regular visits. A design in which the central office is positioned as a service hub that links clusters of schools, perhaps organized by feeder patterns, could be one way in which a system could shift from a hierarchical structure to a more fluid, dynamic structure. This redesign may support the building of trust and communication and may ultimately reduce the transaction costs in the system, thereby creating a more effective organization (Fukuyama, 1995). Our work with the school leadership teams across the district also suggests that regularly meeting with a teacher and site leader from each team could be another way the system could increase coherence and foster a shared theory of action. Fertile ground for trust building may also be providing ongoing professional development for the school leadership teams and recognizing their critical role as a bridge between the larger school staff and the central office.

Theoretical Implications and Future Research

Scholars have identified the critical role of the central office in districtwide reform but have not specifically attended to the construct of trust as a resource to support this reform. In addition, most of the work on trust has been carried out at the school level. This article bridges the study of district reform and work on trust as an essential element to district improvement. Furthermore, although the discussion and focus on trust in general is important as a resource, we would argue that to make substantive improvement, a central

office may need to mine specific facets as a way to set direction and take action. Mining the facets may contribute to building a more finely grained theory of trust, as discussed by Bryk and Schneider (2002). This theory must recognize both relational and organizational leadership trust (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). The facets attended to may be influenced by the degree of turbulence and change that is occurring in the district that alters previous scripts and patterns of interactions. Based on the findings of this study, these alterations highlight the facets of risk, integrity, openness, and communication and background the remaining facets.

It is important to note that the findings from this study come from a single district case and are not generalizable to other districts but contribute to theories about trust at both the relational and leadership levels (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Yin, 2003). Further studies are needed to explore the role external partners can play in surfacing trust and building a shared and explicit theory of action. Longitudinal studies would determine whether sustained efforts to build trust yield better perceptions among adults and gains in achievement for students.

Concluding Thoughts

In conclusion, both the quantitative and qualitative data indicate that greater trust seems to be emerging between site and district leaders. Because mistrust developed over time, it will take time for district members to truly trust one another. Individuals and institutions develop organizational memories that create a dominant script that guides actions of the actors (Doerr, 2005; Hanson, 2001). These institutional scripts can be rewritten if all parties agree the benefits outweigh the cost of change and actors in the system are willing to invest the time and resources needed (Tolbert & Zucker, 1996). Both district and site leaders have made an investment in this district to rewrite the script.

The threat and potential sanctions of NCLB hanging over district leaders and many of the district's schools, however, raise questions of whether the changes made to build trust have been sufficiently far reaching. The district may need to expand the conversations not just to aspects of trust but also to the other components of effective districts (Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001; Chrispeels et al., 2000; Chrispeels & González, 2006; Elmore & Burney, 1998; Fullan et al., 2004; Hightower et al., 2002; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003b; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). The recently completed strategic plan indicates district leaders are working actively to take steps that may enable them to implement strategies identified in high-performing districts—and be the "little district that could" climb the NCLB mountain.

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