In the spring of 1998, a look inside San Antonio schools and classrooms implementing New American Schools designs would have led one to believe that the transition from design selection to implementation had been successful to date. In MRSH schools, for example, one saw standards posted ubiquitously on classroom walls and in hallways next to abundant displays of student work. In SFA/RW schools, posters of hand signals for classroom management purposes were taped to the hallway walls. Classrooms and bulletin boards alike were print-rich. All students engaged in 90 minutes of reading instruction at the same time every day and were expected to read for 20 minutes every night. In ELOB schools, posters of the design’s principles were found in classrooms and on hallway walls; drafts and redrafts of student work were openly displayed. Teachers developed expeditions into which they incorporated project work. In Co-NECT schools, students utilized computers to conduct research and frequently worked on interdisciplinary projects in small groups.

The NAS proposal was introduced to San Antonio schools by the district with hopes that the marketed “break the mold” designs would provoke teachers and administrators to engage enthusiastically in comprehensive school reform. The thought was that an external model provider would be more successful at pushing and sustaining change than the central office could ever be alone. The district had every intention of fully supporting its NAS schools in all ways. Not only did it plan to pay for the services of design teams in its schools,
it aimed to provide instructional support via the Instructional Stewards and Guides. Moreover, the district moved toward granting its schools the autonomy to make school-specific instructional decisions.

Given this, in 1996, when NAS designs were first introduced, one might have expected that in time, design schools would look, feel, and in some ways function differently from one another as well as from schools that had elected not to take on comprehensive school reform models.

However, a closer examination of both whole-school and individual classroom activities tended to reveal a more complicated story. In this chapter, we present our findings from the perspective of schools, focusing on the factors in NAS schools that were important for design implementation. With information from our surveys (i.e., the longitudinal sample of 40 teachers) and fieldwork, we focus here on the challenging educational environments that these schools faced, the high-stakes accountability system in which they operated, the process for adopting NAS designs, support for implementation including training and professional development, principal leadership, and teacher collaboration and support of the NAS designs.

NAS DESIGNS PROVIDED ASSISTANCE TO CHALLENGING SCHOOLS

NAS design teams assisted lower-performing schools in San Antonio, facing many challenges—as was the case in other jurisdictions (see Berends, 1999; Berends and Kirby et al., 2001).

In Texas, the relative performance of individual schools is determined each spring by the TEA. Ratings are issued based on a combination of factors that include average performance on the TAAS, attendance, and dropout rates. Schools are rated “low performing,” “acceptable,” “recognized,” or “exemplary.” We calculated average annual ratings for NAS and non-NAS schools from the 1995 through 1999 school years as shown in Figure 4.1; for this figure, we examined all schools that were NAS by the 1998–1999 school year and tracked their ratings back in time. In 1995, test scores throughout the district placed all schools below the acceptable rating (averages for NAS and non-NAS schools were 1.96 and 1.97, respectively).
The state officially assigned the district a “warning” status that year, putting it on notice to improve. After 1995, average ratings improved at a higher rate for non-NAS schools than for NAS schools. By 1999, the rating for NAS schools was 2.10, while the average rating of non-NAS schools was 2.24.

The premise that schools adopting NAS designs tended to be lower performing than the non-NAS schools was borne out by differences in teachers’ perceptions of their students. In both the 1998 and the 1999 surveys, teachers were asked to rate the average academic ability of students in their classes compared with “the national average.” In 1999, 77 percent of the NAS teachers reported that the academic ability of their students was below the national norm compared with 36 percent of non-NAS teachers (see Figure 4.2). Although this perception of both NAS and non-NAS teachers increased from the year

---

1The NAS designation includes any elementary schools that had adopted NAS models by the 1998–1999 school year. The non-NAS schools are the other elementary schools in the district.
before, the more important point to note is that a significantly greater percentage of NAS teachers than non-NAS ones reported their students’ academic ability as being below the national norm.

Teachers also reported on a variety of factors that moderately or greatly hindered their students’ academic success, including the students’ lack of basic skills, motivation, or discipline; inadequate preparation in subject areas; student mobility; inadequate support from parents; student advancement to next grade without meeting promotion requirements; and poor student attendance (see Table 4.1). In each category and in each year, substantially higher percentages of teachers in the NAS schools reported that specific factors hindered student achievement, indicating the types of educational challenges they faced in their schools and classrooms.

Although average TAAS test scores and TEA ratings increased for both NAS and non-NAS schools between 1998 and 1999, teachers’ perceptions of their students’ academic abilities tended to become more negative. In general, schools that chose to adopt NAS designs,
Table 4.1
Percentage of Teachers Who Reported That the Following Factors Moderately or Greatly Hindered Student Academic Success

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of basic skills</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate prior student preparation in the subject areas</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of student motivation</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student advancement to next grade without meeting promotion requirements</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of student discipline</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High student mobility in and out of the school</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate support from parents for students</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor student attendance</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Percentages are based on teacher reports in a total sample size of 40 teachers—26 NAS and 14 Non-NAS.

or were encouraged by the district to do so, tended to be lower performing relative to other schools in the district.

PRESSURES TO IMPROVE STATE TEST SCORES

The press to increase student achievement and improve test scores in San Antonio schools was clearly evident during the time of our study. To this end, the district, under the superintendent’s leadership, actively engaged itself in the process of reorganizing in accord with the U.S. Department of Education’s criteria defining comprehensive school reform. District staff were aware of these federal cri-

2Critical components of schoolwide designs under the federal CSRD program include curriculum and instruction, content and performance standards, assessments, pro-
teria during the 1998-1999 school year and began to examine their district educational reform initiatives according to them. Toward that end, the district established an Office of Curriculum and Instruction responsible for developing a sequential, standards-aligned curriculum across grade levels in all schools throughout the district. The core subjects—namely mathematics and reading and an emphasis on standards—were given primary attention at first because of professional development, school organization and governance issues, and parent involvement. According to the program, “a comprehensive school reform program is one that integrates, in a coherent manner, all nine of the following components”:

1. Employs innovative strategies and proven methods for student learning, teaching, and school management that are based on reliable research and effective practices, and have been replicated successfully in schools with diverse characteristics;

2. Has a comprehensive design for effective school functioning, including instruction, assessment, classroom management, professional development, parent involvement, and school management, that aligns the school’s curriculum, technology, professional development into a schoolwide reform plan designed to enable all students to meet challenging state content and performance standards and addresses needs identified through a school needs assessment;

3. Provides high-quality and continuous teacher and staff professional development and training;

4. Has measurable goals for student performance tied to the state’s challenging content and performance standards, as those standards are implemented, and benchmarks for meeting those goals;

5. Is supported by school faculty, administrators and staff;

6. Provides for the meaningful involvement of parents and the local community in planning and implementing school improvement activities;

7. Utilizes high-quality external technical support and assistance from a comprehensive school reform entity (which may be a university) with experience or expertise in schoolwide reform and improvement;

8. Includes a plan for the evaluation of the implementation of school reforms and the student results achieved; and

9. Identifies how other resources (federal, state, local, and private) available to the school will be utilized to coordinate services to support and sustain the school reform.

Schools and districts have considerable latitude in developing strategies to achieve the program’s goals, provided these strategies encompass the nine defined components listed above. The legislation provides a list of school reform models as examples. The guidance in the legislation encourages schools to consider other models (or their combination) that have evidence of effectiveness. Indeed, schools can create their own models of schoolwide reform by using a combination of approaches to curriculum instruction, assessment, and organization reform. The aim is to implement effective, schoolwide improvement strategies (see http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/compreform).
the low achievement of the district’s students. According to a top district administrator, the central office was attempting to bring "an intense instructional focus to the district, supported by quality programs and professional development—intense . . . professional development, not shoot from the hip, one-shot kind of deals.”

Additionally, the district partnered with New American Schools to help tighten its focus and to encourage school improvement. Suddenly, schools were not only exposed to many ideas, but required to implement them at once, naturally resulting in some confusion and resistance on the part of school staff.

The emphasis on increased student achievement not only called for greater student learning, it heightened the district’s focus on improved TAAS performance as well. Tied to the Texas system of school accountability, TAAS scores provided concrete measures of achievement readily reported to and understood by administrators and teachers alike. The act of addressing targeted skills enabled educators to work toward specific academic goals during a time of great change in the district. Based on our classroom observations and conversations with teachers, it appeared that successful TAAS performance became not only the goal easiest to visualize but in fact the goal to attain. Schools paid a price for this, however. According to teachers, the focus on TAAS tended to mute creativity and channel all activities toward preparation as the test approached. About half the teachers we talked with reported incorporating test-taking strategies and TAAS vocabulary into their lessons from day one of the school year.

We are very TAAS focused at the beginning of the year. A lot of us would think in that direction from the beginning when you start learning how to highlight in the book and pick out what is important. There are a lot of strategies that we teach that start off from the very beginning in all the lessons. (SFA/RW)

I think TAAS takes up pretty much the day, and I think as teachers we get bogged down with those worksheets and don’t come up with other creative ways to implement the objectives that they test on in TAAS. So I think we’re very worksheet oriented because I think when the children do get that test booklet, it won’t be in the form of
a game, it won’t be in the form of a project. But it would be in paper, pencil test. (ELOB)

When you plan and divide kids up, you’re always getting ready, getting prepared for TAAS, getting instructed in TAAS, getting the kids ready for it. Your instructional time, you know, you’re heavy into the reading. (Co-NECT)

In addition, lack of time during the school day—a chronic issue—became even more problematic in light of teachers’ needs to balance TAAS preparation with other instruction. Many teachers reportedly coped with the multiple demands on their time by putting aside other activities to focus almost exclusively on TAAS as the test dates grew closer.

Come January, MRSH is over here, you know, on the side . . . . From January through the end of February, which is when we have our writing TAAS, we write compositions . . . we write all day, every day in the month of February. So then MRSH is out the window . . . . Maybe once a week we could do that, but you can’t teach a unit once a week. And so it just doesn’t happen. Okay, as soon as that’s over [TAAS writing], like March 1st, then we’re cramming for the TAAS-formatted math and reading . . . . And we do that for two months solid.

Honestly, [TAAS] plays a very, very, very big role in how we structure time . . . . Starting in January, that’s when it’s pretty much drop everything but the reading program, drop everything except SFA and TAAS.

During the 1998–1999 school year, schools administered as many as four district-directed TAAS simulations, after which teachers were required to analyze the results and pinpoint their students’ weaknesses.

[you] have assessments schoolwide that you have to do and figure out the percentage of students passing and write out a pass plan on how you can get those students who did not pass up to passing mode. You have to turn it in, a sheet with every student’s name as to what objectives they have passed and what objectives they’ve failed.
We give a TAAS simulation and if your class is extremely weak in a certain area, it is your [the teacher’s] responsibility to boost that one target area.

In many classrooms, bar graphs were posted, revealing individual students’ scores on each TAAS subtest. Interestingly, we heard from teachers of two low-performing schools that they were “encouraged” by the district to suspend all activity that did not directly stress TAAS skills. For one school, this meant neglecting its NAS design altogether in favor of engaging in basic skills instruction all year long. At the other school, the poor performance of their students on a TAAS simulation resulted in teachers being asked to suspend all design activity after spring break to prepare intensively for the upcoming test.

At several schools Instructional Guides remarked that 1998–1999 was the first year teachers were explicitly asked to “teach to TAAS.” The administration disliked having to make such a request, but felt that their schools had no substantial say in the matter. Schools feared being placed on lists that threatened their existence. Moreover, a district policy enacted at the start of the 1998–1999 school year based teachers’ evaluations in part on their students’ TAAS scores. In the words of an Instructional Guide:

Our TAAS scores are probably not where they should be. Therefore some other people influenced us a bit to do different things versus a Co-NECT model. So we haven’t been able to focus on it as should be. . . . We really haven’t been focusing on the Co-NECT model as we should at all. . . . We have always felt very strongly about . . . teaching. I mean really get in there and teach reading and teach math and . . . not spend a lot of time on how to take a test and this kind of thing. And we’ve been forced to turn around and do much more of that.

According to one teacher: “[The district] has just about threatened to disown schools who were doing ELOB because we weren’t concentrating on TAAS. And TAAS is the be-all, end-all. . . . But we’re seeing scores that are not acceptable.”

Whether or not schools were directly told to focus on TAAS preparation, teachers at all schools in our sample reported feeling pressure to “teach to TAAS” given the high-stakes nature of the test.
To help students perform better on TAAS, teachers spent time not only on reviewing the skills that would be tested, but also on the art of test-taking. This included teaching test-taking strategies and exposing students to test vocabulary, wording, and format.

And then we practice with bubbles, transferring back and forth. And they've got to have a, b, c, d, e, and f. . . . And they really have to practice and practice and practice with that. And I don't know why it is so hard. . . . I would like to know why it is so difficult for them to make the transfer. (MRSH)

It's how to read and understand what it's asking because if you understand what the TAAS is looking for, you can figure out how to answer it. . . . As we teach skills we teach strategies with it and figure out exactly which strategy is appropriate for this question. (SFA/RW)

we try to format anything we do the way [TAAS] is given. (SFA/RW)

the kids are not . . . familiar enough with the format of the question or the vocabulary. (Co-NECT)

It is within this context of high-stakes accountability, challenged schools, and high expectations for school improvement that the NAS designs were introduced to and implemented in schools.

ADOPTION OF DESIGNS

Upon talking with teachers, principals, and district staff, it became clear that the process by which teachers learned about NAS designs varied somewhat from campus to campus. Teachers at some schools reported being exposed to all the designs supported by the district—Co-NECT, ELOB, MRSH, and SFA/RW. Others heard about only a select few. A number of schools in our sample sent a select group of teachers to design presentations. These teachers then came back to their schools to share what they learned with their colleagues so that all could vote on their design of choice. Some schools had teachers visit actual design schools and report back to their colleagues. In some cases, teachers listened to the presentations of design representatives at their own schools. In the MRSH schools, the principals
introduced the design to their teachers after each visited a demonstration site. Though teachers at these schools were told about at least one other design, MRSH seemed to be the one favored as it was introduced.

Regardless of the number of designs to which each school was introduced, all teachers across our sample were given the opportunity to vote. At many of the schools exposed to multiple designs, teachers first discussed the suitability of each to their respective campuses, then approved the design most favored through a vote. In some cases, all presented designs were listed as choices to be voted on. Early on, in accordance with district policy, at least 60 percent of all teachers and school staff had to vote in favor of a given design for it to be implemented.

Across our sample of NAS schools, teachers reported feeling pressure to choose a design. Given that in time all district schools were expected to take on a design, teachers never had the choice to reject design adoption altogether. Some non-NAS principals, however, reported during interviews they were able to resist initial adoption of a design because their schools were performing better than others. They told us that their colleagues in lower-performing schools had less of a choice in the matter.

Interviewer: Did the school feel pressure to adopt a design?
Teacher: Yes. Yes, we did. We were pretty much told either pick it now or we’ll pick it for you later. (Co-NECT)
Teacher: Yes, definitely. We were pressured. We were pressured to adopt a design. (ELOB)
Teacher: Most definitely. Yes. (MRSH)
Teacher: Right. We had to [choose a design]. (SFA/RW)

Not only was there pressure to take on a design, several teachers stated that they were given little time to learn about and decide upon a comprehensive reform model. According to one of our MRSH teachers: “I remember that it was a rush, rush thing . . . and I know that at the time we voted on it, we had no idea what it was . . . . All we were told was the teacher would have a lot of input.” In the words of the Instructional Guide at one of the SFA/RW schools, “I think there
could have been more time exploring the designs, but on the other hand you can over-examine maybe some things." The Instructional Guide at one of our ELOB schools stated, "Truthfully, I felt that we could have and should have looked at other designs. But because of the time constraints, we had to immediately decide, and we did not get an opportunity to look at as many designs as there are out there."

Teachers reported choosing designs that seemed to match their schools’ visions and instructional approaches. For many this meant going with the design that required the least change. Teachers at one Co-NECT school, for example, stated that this design over the others suited them best given that they already had reworked their curriculum and were unwilling to rewrite it:

As a staff what we were looking for was something that would fit what we already have. . . . We weren’t willing to chuck all the work that we had already done. . . . Co-NECT allowed us to keep the curriculum that we had and perhaps enhance it with technology.

The community engagement aspect of Co-NECT appealed to teachers as well. At our other Co-NECT school, teachers already employed project-based learning and technology to some extent, making this design more appealing. In the words of one teacher:

planning projects we’ve always done. We’ve always worked on a thematic basis, even before Co-NECT was here and that was one reason why we chose it because we felt that it would be easier for us to implement.

At one of the SFA/RW schools, teachers stated that having to write thematic-based units turned them off to their other choices. In the case of our ELOB schools, the design principles and project-based approach to instruction appealed to teachers and school staff.

Thus, while teachers were attracted to certain aspects of NAS designs and were given the opportunity to vote to adopt a particular design, the time constraints to make a decision inhibited a greater understanding of what teachers could accomplish with a NAS design in place.

As for the two schools in our sample that had decided not to adopt a design early on, the teachers at both found that they had enough to
do just implementing the district-required initiatives. The teachers we spoke with reported that their schools were in the process of investigating the various NAS designs and considering which one would work best in their respective buildings. Unlike the teachers at NAS schools, the teachers at the non-NAS schools we visited reported not feeling pressure to adopt a design right away.

**DISTRICT ASSISTANCE FOR DESIGN IMPLEMENTATION**

All schools, whether NAS or non-NAS, received increased support for teachers in the form of Instructional Guides. The Guides assumed responsibility for handling all curricular issues on campus and for keeping abreast of the latest instructional strategies and techniques. When needed, they assisted teachers in classrooms by modeling skills, for example. Instructional Guides also helped to identify and locate resources. Not only did they tutor and test students, they provided training to school staff as well. Furthermore, they worked closely with their respective principals, serving to facilitate communication between teachers and administrators. Given their many roles, Instructional Guides tended not to spend as much time in classrooms as they would have liked. Many reported that a good chunk of their time was spent away at training sessions. Instructional Guides at NAS schools attended both district in-services and design training.

When asked whether the district supported their schools’ design implementation efforts, most teachers indicated that it did so passively. The central office allowed schools to choose from a selection of designs, for example. Additionally, it did not dictate how to proceed with design implementation. Most important, the district provided the funds to enable comprehensive school reform. Clear to teachers, however, was that the central office’s emphasis was on test results. Thus, teachers in design schools were required to implement the district’s mathematics and reading initiatives in addition to their reform models of choice. In this way, support from the central office for design implementation was conditional. According to one teacher:

It’s left up to the campus and the grade levels on how . . . to integrate all of this information. So I don’t want to say that the district
doesn’t support the design. They do, but they support just as much the things that the district is implementing onto the campuses as well.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development is a crucial element for school improvement (Bodilly, 2001; Garet et al., 1999). One of the challenges facing NAS schools has been that districts, not schools, control the resources for professional development. Districts also differ in the amount of funding they have to focus on specific professional development efforts for NAS design implementation. Moreover, some designs stress the importance of specific design team training for implementing the designs (e.g., MSH and SFA/RW). Others (e.g., Co-NECT and ELOB) emphasize the importance of long-term development of teachers’ capabilities and professionalization, which in turn should contribute to ongoing school improvement. Whatever the approach, the availability of resources for design team training, district training, and overall professional development efforts for design implementation remains a challenge within districts that have competing goals, objectives, and incentives for teacher professional development.

Design Team Assistance

Besides the district and the Instructional Guides, design teams provide another important source of support for implementation. Design teams assist implementation by providing schools and teachers support such as training, professional development, and materials (Bodilly, 1998; Glennan, 1998). Each design team aims to provide schools and teachers with resources to assist in implementation, especially in terms of communication between design team members and school staff, and design-related professional development. Teachers’ responses to our surveys provided a broad picture of how all design schools were progressing in implementation, and changes that occurred from one year to the next. For instance, in 1998 a relatively high proportion of teachers in the NAS schools (58 percent) agreed that each of their respective design teams had clearly communicated “its program to school staff so that it could be well-
implemented.” This type of communication improved in 1999 (88 percent of teachers agreed with this item).

Training by Design Teams

As for the actual design training, however, there was little regular, consistent assistance provided, according to teacher interviews across design schools. Over time, there was even less contact between teachers and their respective design representatives.

In large part, this had to do with the fact that these representatives serviced numerous schools, making it difficult for them to be attentive to any one. It also appears that from the start, strong relationships rarely were established, making it unlikely that teachers would rely on their respective design representatives for external technical support and assistance. In some schools, design representatives turned over, disrupting what rapport had been established. Several teachers in our sample saw their design representatives so infrequently that they didn’t even know their names. The SFA/RW schools should have received the most regular design assistance given that each had one facilitator on campus to meet its needs. Additionally, the program included a series of implementation visits conducted by SFA consultants. At one of our SFA/RW schools, however, the Instructional Guide took on the SFA facilitator role as well, making it very difficult for her to efficiently address issues having to do with the design team’s reading program.

Few design representatives entered classrooms on a regular basis. Teachers reported that visitors to classrooms tended to be district staff. The teachers were given little, if any, outside “expert” support that enabled them to objectively assess their progress and growth as design teachers. Teachers reported that when in need of help, they tended to turn to their colleagues or Instructional Guides first. Across design schools, teachers didn’t have enough interaction with their respective design representatives to feel their absence.

In addition, teachers reported on our surveys that their participation in design-related professional development meetings/conferences declined from one year to the next. In 1998, 62 percent of teachers reported participating in these types of activities more than twice during the past 12 months; 50 percent of teachers reported doing
so in 1999. The percentage of teachers who reported attending workshops or courses related to the NAS design also decreased from 50 percent in 1998 to 39 percent in 1999.

In part, these decreases may be due to design teams emphasizing teacher training more during the initial stages of implementation. However, the decline may also be a signal that the level of implementation itself was declining in these schools because the district was shifting its focus away from NAS efforts.

Consistent with the survey results, our interviews and observations revealed that teachers at ELOB, Co-NECT, and MRSH design schools saw their respective design representatives with little regularity—an impediment to design implementation. Regardless of their schools’ adopted designs, teachers reported the need for more concrete, hands-on training that would enable them to better understand design processes.

A teacher at a Co-NECT school said that she would have found it helpful if at design training, participants were given concrete ways to involve the community in their school affairs, actual samples of Co-NECT products, and/or demonstrations of effective instructional strategies endorsed by Co-NECT, for example.

Teachers at MRSH schools expressed the need for workshops that actually demonstrated how to write units deemed high quality by MRSH standards and by the district/state standards. They felt that they had some sense as to what to incorporate; however, they didn’t always know how to judge the quality of their work. Moreover, teachers expressed the need for workshops that actually taught Core Knowledge, a critical curricular component of MRSH. Not all teachers knew much about Islam and the Holy Wars, China, or the Middle Ages, for example.

Teachers at one SFA/RW school remarked that they would have found it helpful to periodically have SFA/RW representatives sit in their classrooms and provide feedback afterward. This way, any uncertainties they had about the program and its implementation could be immediately and effectively addressed.
Teachers at ELOB schools stated that they would have liked to see what defines a high-quality culminating project. They desired more assistance with respect to curriculum writing as well.

District Training and Professional Development

In addition to training by design teams, teachers at NAS schools also received the district’s professional development, as did their colleagues from non-NAS schools. Much of the in-service professional development revolved around the district’s reading and math initiatives. Teachers at SFA/RW schools attended reading in-services provided by the design rather than the district. Additional workshops for training in language arts instruction were offered during the 1998–1999 school year. Teachers attended technology training and workshops concerning state standards and curriculum alignment as well. Relatively speaking, few social studies or science workshops were provided.

Because NAS teachers were obligated to attend as many of these various in-services as their colleagues in non-NAS schools, the amount of training activities served only to heighten frustrations. All of the designs but SFA/RW required teachers to develop units and write curriculum. While encouraging schools to implement NAS designs, the district simultaneously constrained their ability to do so by telling teachers what to teach and how.

The district and design teams did not tend to coordinate their efforts with respect to professional development, so teachers were left on their own to merge the information they received from each. This was not easily done without modifying the essence of each design. Not only did this effort burden teachers’ workload, it also led to confusion as to what to prioritize.

On our surveys, we asked several questions that addressed teacher participation in professional development activities not specifically related to the NAS designs. In general, compared with NAS teachers, a higher proportion of non-NAS teachers reported participation in a wide variety of professional development activities covering topics such as alternative student assessments, content standards, single-subject teaching areas, teaching techniques, classroom management, and educational technology. Respondents from the NAS
schools indicated greater levels of participation in fewer activities: student portfolio development, assessment, and site-based management.

One survey item asked teachers the extent to which students’ academic success was hindered by a lack of coherent, sustained professional development. As indicated in Figure 4.3, 31 percent of the NAS teachers reported that a lack of coherent professional development was a moderate or great problem in hindering students’ academic success; this declined somewhat to 27 percent in 1999. Non-NAS teachers reported similarly on this measure in both 1998 and 1999.

Several survey items asked teachers about the quality of the professional development they received in the past year. Teachers indicated the extent to which they agreed or disagreed (4-point scale) that overall, “the professional development activities sponsored by the NAS design team, your school or the district,” during the past 12 months had:

![Figure 4.3—Percentage of Teachers Who Reported That a Lack of Coherent, Sustained Professional Development Hindered Students' Academic Success Moderately or Greatly in NAS and Non-NAS Schools, Spring 1998 and 1999](image-url)

NOTE: Percentages are based on a total sample size of 40 teachers—26 NAS and 14 Non-NAS.
• Been sustained and coherently focused, rather than short-lived and unrelated;
• Included enough time to think carefully about, try, and evaluate new ideas;
• Been closely connected to the design team’s activities in their school (NAS respondents only);
• Included opportunities to work productively with colleagues in their school;
• Deepened their understanding of the subject matter they teach;
• Led them to make changes in their teaching;
• Helped their school’s staff work together better;
• Changed the way teachers talk about students in their school;
• Deepened their understanding of how students learn the subject matter they teach; and
• Altered approaches to teaching in their school.

We combined these items into a composite measuring the overall quality of professional development.3

Overall, less than 40 percent of all surveyed teachers reported that they agreed or strongly agreed that the professional development they received was of high quality (see Figure 4.4). In 1998, 38 percent of the NAS teachers reported that they agreed or strongly agreed across the items in the professional development composite compared with 27 percent of non-NAS teachers. In 1999, NAS teacher reports declined slightly (36 percent), while the non-NAS teacher reports increased slightly (29 percent).

PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP

When considering implementation of NAS designs, an important school resource to note is the leadership of the principal. Other

---

3 The alpha reliability of this quality of professional development composite was 0.92 for 1998 and 0.94 for 1999. The range of correlations for the individual items was 0.34 to 0.38 in 1998 and 0.45 to 0.50 in 1999.
studies have shown the importance of leadership in establishing effective school improvement efforts (Edmonds, 1979; Brookover et al., 1979; Purkey and Smith, 1983; Berends and Kirby et al., 2001). Based on our surveys, we found differences between NAS and non-NAS teachers’ perceptions of principal leadership in their schools. For the principal leadership composite, teachers were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed (4-point scale) with the following statements:4

- The principal lets staff members know what is expected of them;
- The school administration’s behavior toward the staff is supportive and encouraging;
- The principal does a poor job of getting resources for this school (reverse-scored);

4The alpha reliability for the principal leadership composite was 0.90 for 1998 and 0.84 for 1999. The range of correlations for the individual items was 0.38 to 0.47 in 1998 and 0.26 to 0.30 in 1999. More positive scores on this composite reflect more positive perceptions of teachers about principal leadership in their school.
• My principal enforces school rules for student conduct and backs me up when I need it;
• The principal talks with me frequently about my instructional practices;
• In this school, staff members are recognized for a job well done; and
• The principal has confidence in the expertise of the teachers.

Less than 40 percent of both the NAS and non-NAS teachers in both years agreed or strongly agreed that their principals were strong leaders according to these items (Figure 4.5). The generally low ratings on the principal leadership composite might be a reflection of the high level of curricular and programmatic change in the district, coupled with the pressure to improve student performance on the TAAS.

In both years, however, teachers in NAS schools reported higher scores on this principal leadership composite than teachers in non-

---

**Figure 4.5—Percentage of Teachers Who Reported That They Agreed or Strongly Agreed with Principal Leadership Composite Items in NAS and Non-NAS Schools, Spring 1998 and 1999**

NOTE: Percentages are based on a total sample size of 40 teachers—26 NAS and 14 Non-NAS.
NAS schools by 20 percentage points in 1998 and 15 percentage points in 1999. Previous studies have emphasized the importance of strong leadership in design implementation (Berends and Kirby et al., 2001; Kirby et al., 2001). However, in San Antonio, because each school had an Instructional Guide who took on some of the functions of instructional leader, perhaps teachers’ reports across NAS and non-NAS schools reflect this delegation of tasks. The more positive perceptions of principal leadership in the NAS schools may reflect that these principals played an important role in facilitating the choice and adoptions of NAS designs in their schools.

TEACHER COLLABORATION

In addition to principal leadership, the implementation process for NAS designs hinges on teachers working together (Bodilly, 2001). The extent to which teachers coordinate their efforts, learn from each other, and work together to develop and/or teach the curriculum is critical for whole-school change (Louis and Marks, 1998; Louis et al., 1996; Newmann & Associates, 1996).

Because schools adopting NAS designs were expected to engage in teamwork, resulting in increased levels of cooperation among school staff, we measured teacher collaboration with a composite, combining several survey items. This composite was constructed from items that included a variety of response formats in which teachers were asked the extent to which the program elements described their schools (6-point scale ranging from does not describe my school to clearly describes my school), the extent to which items had changed in the past three years (5-point scale ranging from greatly improved to greatly worsened), and the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with statements (4-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree). The following statements comprise the standardized teacher collaboration composite:5

5The alpha reliability for the teacher collaboration composite was 0.84 for 1998 and 0.85 for 1999. The range of correlations for the individual items was 0.39 to 0.53 in 1998 and 0.42 to 0.49 in 1999. Some items were reverse-scored so that a positive value on this composite reflected greater teacher collaboration. This unweighted composite was constructed by calculating standardized values (mean 0, variance 1) for each individual item within each year. These values were added together for each observation and then divided by the number of items used.
• Teachers are continual learners and team members through professional development, common planning, and collaboration;
• Teachers' learning from one another (worsened or improved);
• Most of my colleagues share my beliefs and values about what the central mission of the school should be;
• There is a great deal of cooperative effort among the staff members;
• Teachers respect other teachers who take the lead in school improvement efforts; and
• Teachers at this school respect those colleagues who are experts at their craft.

Overall, there was not much difference in the degree of teacher collaboration among teachers in NAS schools compared with those in non-NAS schools. Since the items in the teacher collaboration composite were not based on a common response metric, we report whether teacher responses for this composite were positive or negative on the standardized scale combining the different survey items. In both 1998 and 1999, 54 percent of NAS teachers scored positively on this composite. Exactly 50 percent of the non-NAS teachers’ scores were positive in 1998. This rose to 57 percent in 1999.

Our interviews revealed that teachers generally praised the designs for nurturing collaboration among school staff. The designs themselves were unable to dissolve the teacher factions that existed at several schools, but they did bring about more teacher interaction and sharing of ideas according to our interviews with teachers. Additionally, the implementation of designs enabled teachers to be more aware of what their colleagues at other grade levels were responsible for teaching. Consequently, there was less overlap of subject material from one grade level to the next. A greater sense of unity developed among teachers as well with respect to curriculum, instructional strategies, and educational mission.
I find that that’s one thing it’s done is that we get together a whole lot more. Before you were pretty much in your room and you accomplished it and they’d come out and say here’s your thing, and you know, you did it. But you didn’t know what the others had done. You know, but now we’re always . . . meeting and discussing and sharing papers. . . . So that to me has helped a lot because you don’t feel like you’re out there all alone. (Co-NECT)

I think on a grade level maybe, it gives us time to work together. Something to work for. (ELOB)

[The design is] getting the teachers better acquainted and mixed together so that we don’t have factions in the building, like we used to. . . . And that [the MRSH design] has been kind of a common ground that we’ve all met on and that’s helped. (MRSH)

[The design] is promoting more getting together within the grade level, and it opens up all of the lines of communication there, but I think grade level by grade level it changes. . . . (MRSH)

It is difficult to know, however, whether the designs themselves were solely responsible for such changes. Soon after her arrival, the superintendent aimed to build collaboration and communication not only between the district office and schools, but also within schools themselves. She encouraged every school to practice state-mandated site-based management, pushing for the institutionalization of campus-based advisory committees, referred to as Instructional Leadership Teams.6 In essence, the teams, comprised of teachers, parents, community members, business representatives, paraprofessionals, classified staff members, and students, were responsible for oversee-

---

6The implementation of site-based management was mandated for all Texas school districts in 1992. According to the TEA, campus planning serves to decentralize the decisionmaking process. Schools determine how to improve student performance through collaboration. Together, principals, teachers, campus staff, parents, and community and business representatives assess the educational outcomes of students, determine performance objectives and strategies, and ensure that strategies are implemented and adjusted to improve student achievement for all students.
ing the production and implementation of their respective schools’
campus improvement plans.\textsuperscript{7}

In reality, NAS schools were not all that different from non-NAS
schools in that common planning periods tended to be used similar-
ly. At all schools in the district, teachers were given one weekly
grade-level planning period to promote collaboration.

At NAS schools, schedules were arranged to allow for double plan-
ning periods. Teachers were to use this time to write curriculum,
discuss projects, gather resources, and develop units. NAS teachers
complained that though they were given more time to work with one
another, in actuality, they were often impeded from doing so by
having to discuss a variety of other issues typically district-generated.
Planning time, too, was frequently curtailed in favor of addressing
district issues. NAS teachers also reported not meeting at times to
take care of such administrative business as paperwork, book-
keeping, and testing. As one teacher stated:

\begin{quote}
The paperwork has multiplied like ten-fold it seems like. Every time
we turn around we have to do a paper. . . . I mean we have to write
everything the kids are doing and where they are low, where they
are not low, what they need, what they’ve done, how you addressed
it, what still needs to be done. . . . There’s always something coming
from the . . . district office that we have to fill out. . . . Everyone is
feeling overwhelmed.
\end{quote}

**TEACHER SUPPORT FOR THE NAS DESIGNS**

Over the two school years we conducted our research, one indication
of changes in NAS implementation came from an item that asked
teachers how strongly they supported or opposed the NAS design
team program in their school. In 1998, 54 percent of teachers indi-
cated that they “strongly support a NAS design team program” in

\textsuperscript{7}In accordance with district requirements, each school must include the following
four sections in its Campus Improvement Planning Document: (1) the introduction;
(2) needs assessment component; (3) goals, objectives, and strategies; and (4) activi-
ties and evaluations.
their schools, but this fell to 25 percent in 1999. The proportion of teachers indicating that they strongly opposed or somewhat opposed NAS designs in their school increased from 15 percent in 1998 to 43 percent in 1999.

Clearly, the central office played as active a role in initiating change across the district as did design teams in their select schools. The actions of the central office made it difficult for NAS teachers to view design implementation as a district priority. Consequently, these teachers were not able to fully commit to the ideas described in their respective designs’ literature. Some feared that the NAS initiative, too, like many others that had been introduced over the years, would fade away in time. Furthermore, aspects of designs such as ELOB, MRSH, and Co-NECT overwhelmed many teachers. The task of writing curriculum was not an activity readily undertaken or easily accomplished by many, given their lack of time and experience.

During our interviews, teachers reported variation with respect to levels of design implementation within their schools. Implementation in individual classrooms depended in large part on teachers’ feelings for designs, their willingness to invest time and energy, and their particular strengths and weaknesses. One teacher in our sample stated that within her school, differing levels of competency existed among teachers. The task of having to write curriculum “exacerbated the unevenness”:

There’s always strengths and weaknesses, but when you have teachers filling dual roles of the writers of the curriculum and the implementers, then you compound whatever weaknesses you have. And also compounding strengths, that happens too.

Another teacher reported that within her school, some of her colleagues were more engaged in design implementation than others. In her words, “We have some who are very reluctant, who are barely doing anything. . . . Now slowly but surely they’re coming around, but it’s not at the same speed as a lot of others.”

Other teachers stated:

You have to have your commitment factor. Some people are very committed to it and other people are not, so that affects how you’re going to implement it.
as far as some elements of Co-NECT, it’s pretty basic and everybody has the same level. Now to the extreme of using the Internet sites or all those types of things, that would depend upon that individual staff member or grade level on what access they’re going to be utilizing out there that’s provided by Co-NECT. So I think there’s some very beginning stages for everyone to get you started and then how far you take it beyond that, of course, is how much time or energy you have to spend in Co-NECT.

A number of teachers believed that NAS designs alone did little to help children who lacked solid academic foundations. Due in large part to other district activities that were pushed, some came to view designs as hands-on, project-oriented approaches to education that built on, not up, basic skills. One teacher at an ELOB school believed that her students needed more orderly classroom experiences, given that many came from “unstructured home environments.”

it would work probably better with a group of kids that are on grade level, that have a lot of self-control. . . . If they come from a home where there is no structure [and] they come into a classroom where there is no structure . . . that’s the problem. But I really feel, and I might be wrong, that this works with a different population much better than what it has worked with our students.

Teachers at a Co-NECT school stated that their design units had to be “modified” to address their students’ basic skills needs. At SFA/RW and MRSH schools, teachers expressed less doubt about the potential of NAS designs to bring about desired change in school achievement. This may have to do with the fact that their respective designs either gave them a curriculum to follow (SFA/RW) or topics to develop and standards to incorporate (MRSH).

In the next chapter, we focus specifically on the curriculum and instructional conditions in NAS and non-NAS classrooms. When examining these classroom conditions, it is important to remember the influences described of district, design teams, and school environments on NAS teachers’ capacities to fully implement the instructional components of NAS designs.