

The Power of Community in Rural High School Reform: A Case Study

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The Case Study

- Rural high school
- Purposively developed a plan for school improvement
- Improved student achievement as measured by pass rates on proficiency exams, achievement of AYP, and attendance and graduation rates
- Sustained over five years

Research Questions

- What factors led to school's success in increasing student achievement?
- What factors inhibited change process and were they overcome?
- How was change process structured in terms of leadership, governance, and decision-making?

Valley High School

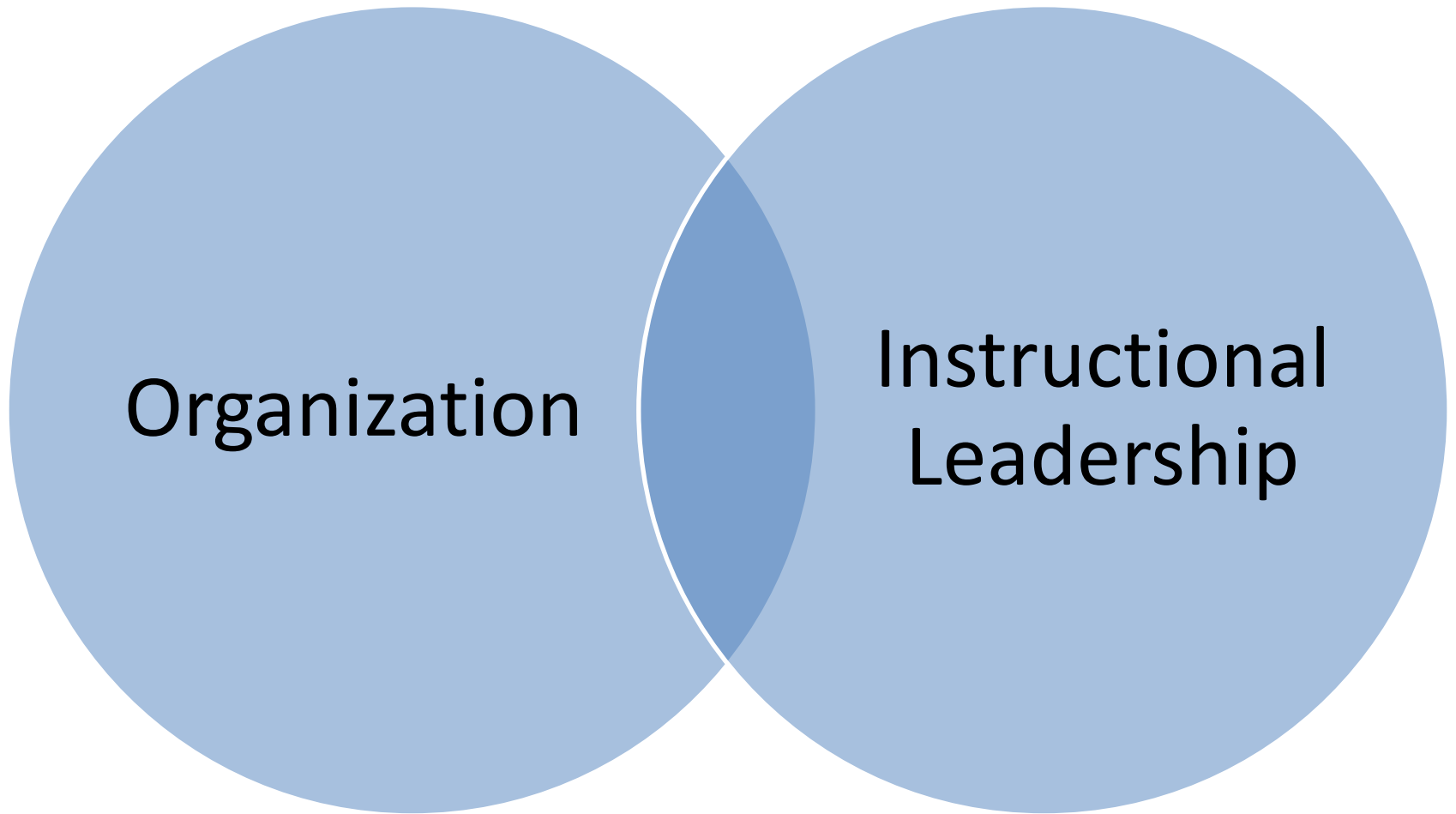
- Small town located on busy highway
- One traffic light on Main Street
- Growing Community
- Changing Population (growing Hispanic/ELL)
- Moved from “failing school” to “high achieving school over 5 year period



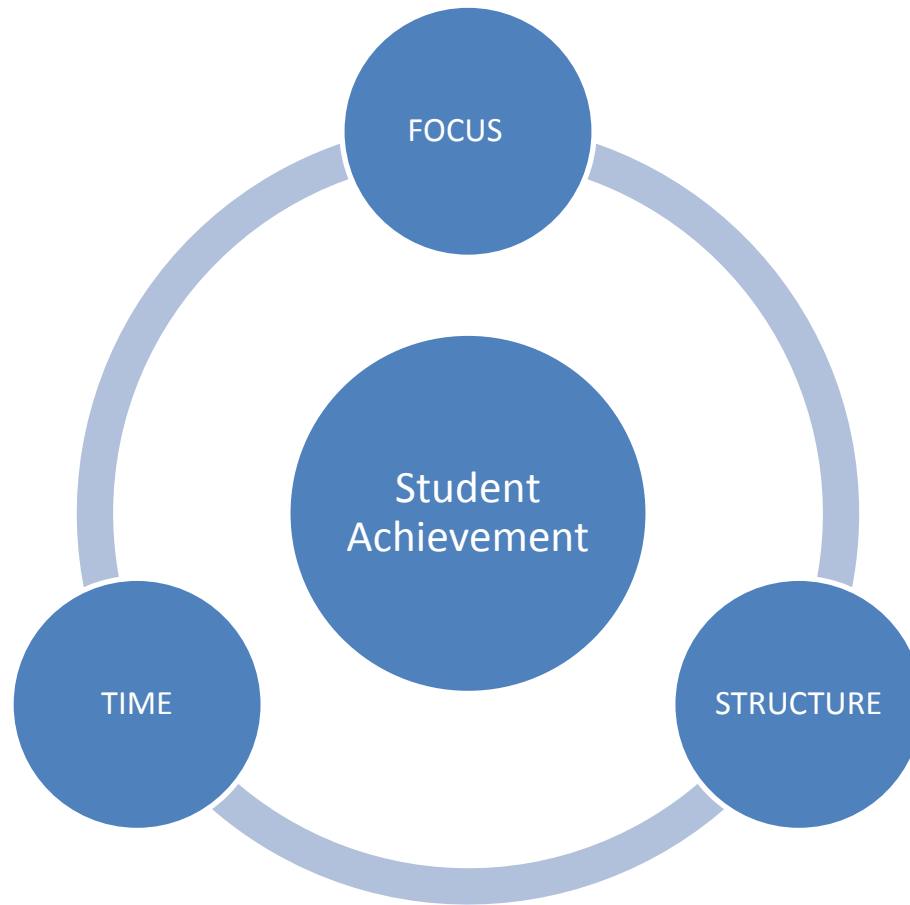
COLLABORATION

Essential Mechanism for Engaging Teachers, Developing Vision, and Focusing on School Improvement

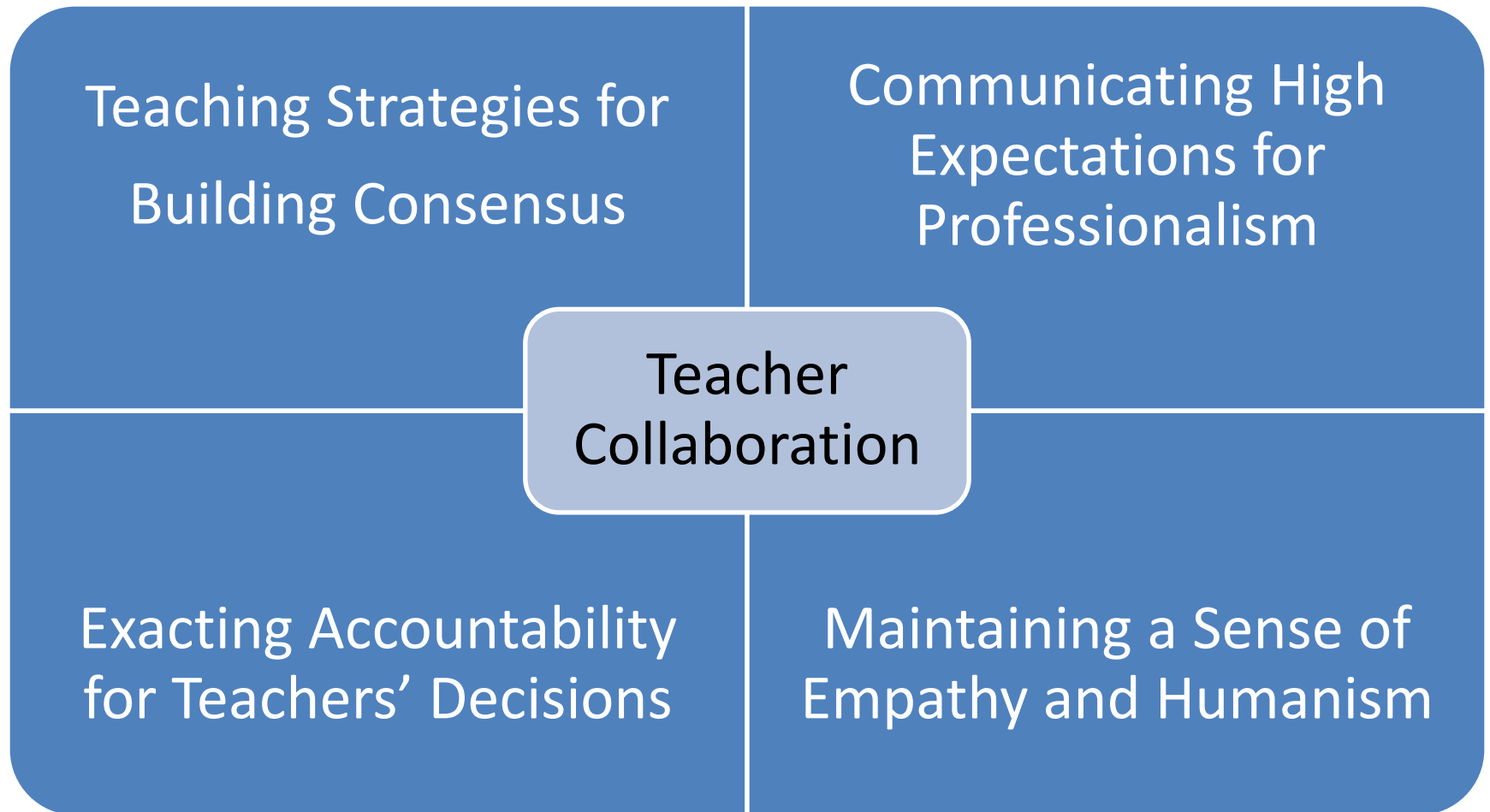
Essential Elements for Successful Collaboration



Organization for Collaboration



Instructional Leadership Behaviors



Teacher-Defined Tasks

Developing Essential Outcomes

Aligning the Curriculum

Developing Common Assessments

Analyzing Student Work and Test Data

The Rural Context: The Factor of Size

- “Keeping a watchful eye out on all of the kids”
- “You know everybody and know to go to if you need help.”
- “We’re still small enough where we can make a difference.”

Intentional Relationship Building

- “There is truly a caring attitude at our school toward our kids.”
- “My teachers care about me.”
- “Our teachers not only teach with passion, but they bend over backwards for kids.”
- “It is common to see teachers give up their own time to help kids.”
- “Our freshmen academy . . .came into light due to the fact that . . .teachers know the importance of having a positive relationship with kids.”

Trust

- Rural roots provided tradition for close-knit, family atmosphere
- Rural context in and of itself does not ensure trust
- Leadership willing to embrace teachers and teachers willing to reach out to students

Implications for Rural Schools

- Small populations and dense relationship networks
- Knowledge of community resources
- Common values and interests



Postscript:

**CONNECTION TO SURVEY OF RURAL
PRINCIPALS**

Areas Rural Principals Perceived as Least Knowledgeable

- Communicating about their school to the public.
- Supporting teachers to develop and use formative assessment practices.
- Empowering teachers to take ownership in school governance
- Balancing and managing the multiple, competing demands on their time
- Assisting teachers to promote the achievement of students with disabilities
- Assisting teachers to promote achievement of English learners
- Fostering partnerships with the community

Over 50% Reported Not Spending Enough Time on These Tasks

Task [Rank order]	Generally Knowledgeable?
Assisting teachers to promote achievement for all students	Y
Fostering partnerships in community	N
Helping teachers adopt effective instructional practices	Y
Supporting teachers to develop/use formative assessments	N
Supporting teachers to use standards based lessons/curriculum	Y
Implementing strategies for promoting student achievement	Y
Assisting teachers to promote achievement of ELL	N
Balancing demands on time	N
Assisting teachers to promote achievement of students with disabilities	N
Communicating about my school to public	N
Guiding instruction using data	Y
Recognizing effective instruction	Y
Creating/communicating shared vision	Y

Implications & Considerations: More than Instructional Leadership?

- ▶ Skills and strategies to navigate and circumvent highly structured bureaucracies and political mandates
- ▶ Resource alignment and allocation—skills and strategies to marshal resources and aligning practices and policies in order to achieve goals
- ▶ Knowledge of community and political systems and feedback loops and skills to work with various stakeholders to engage support for students
- ▶ Human resource development—skills and strategies to empower teachers, realign responsibilities, and restructure organization
- ▶ Entrepreneurship—creative approaches to customize education that is relevant to stakeholders