Sustaining Leadership... (continued from page 17)

were back from our state testing that afternoon. Our third-grade reading scores had gone up by 15%, the highest gain in a district of 84 elementary schools and our school's highest score ever on third-grade reading. More stark to me was the gain in poverty-level students (free and reduced), whose scores had doubled, had cut the achievement gap from 20% to 5%. Our biggest gain came with our Latino students, who had increased from only 18% proficient to 64% proficient, making the gap now only 7% from the previous gap of 38%. In my bones, I had known it would happen, and from the Chicago hotel room that night I called each of the 4 third-grade teachers at home. We didn’t say much, but we knew we had accomplished something special.

After some much deserved celebration, it was my role to create space for reflection on how something like this happened and how we might continue making it happen again and again. Lastly, it was to step back and let the teachers return to their students with a greater sense of hope and belief about what was possible.

Each gain brought up new steps needed to complete the circle. I realized over time that I could not sustain the work in my community role. I had others who could, and would, devote more time to it than myself. In March, two parents moved to the forefront of the parent/community volunteer role and we began to systematize the initial, organic work that we had done. For me, I had a thousand things playing in my mind. Do they share the big vision? And as I peel away a bit: Will they maintain it? Is it impacting student achievement? Does it support or detract from our core mission? Is it what the teachers were calling for?

By this time I had already communicated to the staff that I was leaving to spend time with my ailing father. What was so striking about that abso-

utely miserable and ruthless day was that it made us stronger. Through tears and disappointment, it forced us to look at sustaining the work, not just creating it. It is amazing how people act when they get something they wanted, how they don’t want to let it go. freedom, love, identity. All of these can be damaged carelessly for casual consumption. They are meant for much deeper sustenance. For the staff, it was not about their new principal, it was not about improved student responsibility, it was not about more folks in the school or about the better scores. It was about hope. They had tasted it, ingested it and now had no interest in going hungry again.

In the last month and a half of school we shifted a great deal of energy to prepping for the following year. That didn’t mean cleaning up. It meant doing very thoughtful preparatory work: activities with kids for the next year, teaching vigorously till the last possible minute, assessing thoughtfully to get the most accurate read on students, communi-
cating and collaborating with other teams to design classes and schedules, setting up a literacy-based summer school, and being extremely meaningful about closure.

Your questions are probably many. Where was the staff development piece? Did you initiate CFGs? What did you do for celebrations? How did you begin to address achievement gaps and equity issues? How did you solicit the second-language families? How did you put students in roles of responsibility and leadership? How do you know if what you did is going to have lasting power and influence on the culture of the school? Good questions all and the staff of another reflective article... Scott Murphy has been a high school English teacher, middle school English and science teacher, district staff development coordinator, NSF National Facilitator and an elementary school Principal. You can reach Scott at smurphy@jeffco.k12.co.us

Creating Great Schools:
Six Critical Systems at the Heart of Educational Innovation
Book Review by Peggy Silva, New Hampshire

Peggy Silva reviews Creating Great Schools: Six Critical Systems at the Heart of Educational Innovation by Phillip Schlechty.

Schlechty pulls no punches in declaring his purpose for writing. He states that he wrote “to help leaders design school systems that invite inventions, as opposed to systems that mandate implementation of programs that will serve only to shore up for a brief time a system of schooling that must either be changed in fundamental ways or die.” He organizes his thinking around structures he defines as social systems: recruitment; knowledge transmission; power and authority; evaluation; directional systems; boundary systems.

We are used to examining a school’s organization and the impact on student and teacher behavior. Schlechty turns that perspective around to wonder how the structure and the culture affect learning. Each chap-
ter addresses a single structure and creates a strong argument for the need for transformation. He borrows C.M. Christensen’s ideas of disruptive innovations as imperatives for schools, if they want to move from obsol
cence
to engagement.” He expresses his frustration with structures that accept o
xymorons in design—although he devotes his study to a legitimate school activity, he states that as much studying goes on in a school restroom as exists in a study hall.

Schlechty argues that disruptive innovations require “supportive structural and cultural changes,” and that new ideas never receive their due because of the penchant for “insisting that only programs based on convincing data are worthy of support.” The author’s arguments will find strong sup-
port
from his readers. The strength of this text, however, lies in the series of key questions at the end of every chapter, questions that could be used to examine and redesign existing social systems. In his chapter on knowledge transmission systems, Schlechty stresses the importance of discussing norms within specific contexts.

When arguments are developed, how are they grounded, and do people agree on this grounding? For example, when a person advances an argu-
ment is it justified by research, by moral tradition, or by conventional ways of doing things? Which of these knowledge bases are viewed by others in the school as valid grounds, and which of these knowledge bases are rejected by others? In his exploration of power and authority sys-
tems, Schlechty asks: Which persons or offices have control over the resources that provide the bases of power (for example, who can hire and fire, bestow status, or confirm reputations), and how diffused or centralized is this control? He further asks whether rewards are linked to mainte-
nance of the current system, as opposed to rewards available in the effort to support the change effort. In discussing boundary issues within school structures, he asks questions about account-
bility norms and mechanisms to protect those who work in school from “dysfunc-
tional conflicts with...outside groups.”

Although Schlechty does not explicitly address issues of race, sex, or gender, issues of equity are embedded in each one of the series of questions asked at the end of each chapter.

School communities involved in studying their sys-

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