Do teacher opinion leaders impact other teachers

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DO TEACHER OPINION LEADERS IMPACT OTHER TEACHERS

A Thesis

Presented to the
Communication Department

and the
Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

Annette Eyman

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College, University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree Masters of Arts, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Committee

[Signatures]

Chairperson Sheree Bingham

Date 11-27-01
Abstract

DO TEACHER OPINION LEADERS IMPACT OTHER TEACHERS

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University of Nebraska, 2001

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The purpose of this study was to determine if there were identified opinion leaders among teachers and how those opinion leaders may have influenced teachers' acceptance levels of the standards and assessment implementation for the language arts curriculum. Three phases of research were conducted. Twenty-four secondary language arts teachers and 109 elementary classroom teachers in the Papillion-LaVista School District were first surveyed to determine their level of acceptance of the standards and assessments for language arts. Each of the respondents was then asked to identify the opinion leaders, or those they turn to and trust regarding the standards and assessment implementation. The identified opinion leaders were then asked to participate in focus groups where they were asked to share their sources of information and views regarding the standards and assessment process.

A total of 32 teachers were identified as opinion leaders. The list of identified opinion leaders was compared to the list of teachers who served on the core team that was responsible for writing, and disseminating information regarding the standards and assessments. The acceptance levels of those four
schools that had opinion leaders on the core team were compared to the
acceptance levels of those schools without opinion leaders on the core team.
There were three elementary schools and one secondary school. It was
discovered that elementary schools that had teachers on the core team had a
higher level of acceptance than the other elementary schools that did not have
opinion leaders on the core team. This was not found to be true for the
secondary schools.

The findings also indicate that overall elementary and secondary teachers
are neutral regarding their acceptance levels of the standards and assessment
process. The elementary opinion leader teachers were more positive about the
process citing the direct correlation between the assessments and the curriculum
as the main strength. The secondary opinion leader teachers were not as
positive, citing the fact that the assessments were not taken from the curriculum
as a weakness. Additional findings indicate that the media and general talk in the
education community were the first sources of information and being involved, for
those that were, was the most influential as the opinion leaders determined their
level of acceptance.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The role of the classroom teacher in implementing an educational reform effort is critical (Fullan, 1991; Engler & Tarrant, 1993; and Waugh & Godfrey, 1993). When the reform effort is tied directly to assessments that occur in individual classrooms, the role of the classroom teacher becomes paramount to the success or failure of the innovation (Stiggins, 1997). However, frequently in an educational setting, much thought is given to the development of the educational innovation, and little thought is devoted to promoting acceptance of that innovation to the key stake-holders (Wright & Palmer, 1995). Most often the primary stakeholders are the teachers.

The diffusion theory states that one experiences five major stages in the adoption of new ideas (Rogers, 1983). Those stages are awareness, interest, evaluation, trial and adoption. It is the belief of diffusion theorists that both mass communication and interpersonal communication are used in the various stages. Primarily, mass communication is used in the stages of awareness and interest, while personal influences are used in the other three stages. Therefore, mass media are used to disseminate information about new ideas, but interpersonal communication and peer education programs are used to persuade individuals to adopt innovations.

When individuals enter into the final stages of adoption they often turn to
their personal networks for direction and guidance (Coleman, 1993). Within these personal networks are opinion leaders. Opinion leaders are defined as individuals who serve as a source of information for a wide range of individuals and shape the opinions of many (Jaccard and Levinson, 1995). Research shows that opinion leaders, through their communication efforts, have been effective at bringing about many changes. These changes include accelerating the rate of the diffusion of innovation (Valante & Davis, 1999). Opinion leaders play an important role in the diffusion theory because of their ability to influence others.

Research shows that acceptance by teachers of an educational innovation is critical, particularly when that innovation is related to classroom assessments. The implementation of educational innovations requires dissemination of new information. Thus, the application of basic communication strategies in the diffusion of the innovation is appropriate. In this process of communication, new information must often be accepted by opinion leaders before it can be effectively transmitted to the entire group. This concept of using opinion leaders to communicate and bring about change is widely accepted and practiced in many marketing and management fields (Engel et. al, 1986). It also has been successful in the medical field, where doctor opinion leaders have been used to bring about change among their peers (Soumerai et. al, 1998). However, no published research is available on its application in the educational setting.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine if there are identified opinion leaders among teachers, and if so, whether the opinion leaders are
influential as teachers determine their acceptance level of the implementation of the standards and assessment innovation. The setting for this study is the Papillion-LaVista School District.

This paper will begin by providing background information on the Papillion-LaVista School District and the implementation of the standards and assessment process. Following the background information will be a review of the literature on the uses of the diffusion theory and the role of opinion leaders in the successful adoption of an innovation. The review will also look at the role of teachers in the adoption of an innovative classroom assessment. A statement of purpose summarizing the literature and outlining the basis for the study will follow the literature review. The methodology section will then explain how the study will be conducted and what measurement instruments will be used.

Introducing Standards and Assessments in the Papillion-LaVista Schools

During this time of educational accountability there has been a push for public school districts across the United States to implement standards and assessments for evaluating student achievement. Nebraska was no exception, however, it was one of the last states to implement the process. Nebraska's approach was much different than any of the states that had previously adopted the process. The state of Nebraska, through many meetings and much persuading from local school districts, decided not to have a universal high stakes test (a consistent test that every district would take) but to allow individual
school districts to establish their own standards and methods they wanted to use to assess those standards. The only requirement was that the individual school district standards had to be more rigorous than the current state standards.

By allowing the individual school districts to determine their own assessment models, a “pass or fail” mentality was alleviated. Districts were allowed the flexibility to measure whether students in their own schools were learning the district curriculum and meeting the district standards. The school districts could establish their own standards based around their curriculum and what they believed were important benchmarks for students to know at designated grade levels. Assessments were the way to measure if students were reaching those benchmarks. This unique approach took schools out of the mode of teaching to the test and put them in the mode of assessing the district’s expectations and what was actually being taught. This approach made the challenge of acceptance among teachers even more important because they were directly involved and would impact the entire process.

Throughout the 2000-2001 school year, fourth, eighth and eleventh grade Nebraska public school teachers are required to implement standards and assessments in the curriculum area of language arts. The Papillion-LaVista School District chose to meet this requirement by bringing a core group of teachers together.

Beginning in the spring of 2000 teachers from throughout the school district were brought together to form the core team. This core team began the
long process of outlining what standards and assessments would look like in the Papillion-La Vista School District. Just prior to the end of the 1999-2000 school year, members of the core team presented an overview to staff at each school in the District. This overview provided a general look of what was ahead in relation to the standards and assessment process.

The core group then worked throughout the summer of 2000 and the beginning of the 2000-2001 school year to develop the standards and write the assessments that would be used to measure if students were meeting or exceeding those standards. In October 2000, all fourth, eighth and tenth grade teachers were brought together for a half day training on how to implement the standards and assessments in their classrooms. (Even though the State required the test to be given in the eleventh grade, the Papillion-LaVista School District used tenth grade because tenth grade English was required and therefore all students would be included. This change was approved by the Nebraska Department of Education.) In November 2000, all fourth, eighth, and tenth grade teachers throughout the district began implementing the assessments in their individual classrooms. (See Appendix A for detailed timeline of communication.)

The effective implementation of the standards and assessment process, as well as the teachers’ acceptance of the process is very important to the Papillion-LaVista School District. The percentage of students meeting the standards and assessments will become a public measurement of the overall
success or failure of the District. Extensive efforts were made by the district to involve teachers in the process through the core team. However, once the standards and assessments went from the core team to implementation in the individual classrooms, the successful implementation was placed in the hands of the classroom teacher. When this happened, the district became somewhat removed from the process and had no structured means upon which to measure its success or failure.

The information from this study will be used to measure the strengths and weaknesses of the standards and assessment process as outlined by the District. The information will also be used to develop a communication model that can be used not only as other curriculum areas implement standards and assessments, but also as a means of implementing any change and communicating educational issues throughout the Papillion-LaVista School District.
Literature Review

Four main areas will be explored in the literature review, including: a brief history of milestone research that brought the literature to where it is today; the definition and uses of the diffusion theory; the uses and measurement techniques of opinion leaders; and the role of teachers in the adoption of innovative classroom assessments.

Milestone Research

Prior to the 1940's the "magic bullet" theory of media influence was of concern to many (Lowery & DeFleur 1995). This general theory proposed that a "media message would reach every eye and ear in the same way, like a symbolic 'bullet,' immediately bringing about the same changes of thought and behavior in the entire audience" (Lowery & DeFleur, 1995 p.13). Believing the bullet theory, most people early in the twentieth century, when film and broadcasting were relatively new, thought that mass media were powerful, manipulative and therefore dangerous (Lowery & DeFluer, 1995). It was within this guiding framework that empirical research on the influences of mass communication began. However, by the early 1940's, research already began to breakdown the concepts behind the bullet theory (Rogers, 1983). According to Lowery and DeFluer (1995), one of the milestone studies that moved thinking away from the extreme of the bullet theory toward the concept that personal influences play a role in an individual's decision making is the People's Choice.
The People’s Choice was a large scale longitudinal study in 1940 that was intended to discover the role mass media political propaganda played in shaping voting decisions (Lowery & DeFleur, 1995). After the study was underway, a serendipitous finding emerged. The finding was that people were talking to each other about elections and these interpersonal exchanges impacted voters’ decisions. This discovery led the investigators to revise their study and collect data on the interpersonal flow of communication.

Due to their new findings, the investigators developed the two-step flow hypothesis, which states “ideas often flow from radio and print to the opinion leaders and from them to the less active sections of the population” (Lowery & DeFleur, 1995, p. 89). What they discovered was that certain individuals were serving as “opinion leaders.” These opinion leaders were highly exposed to the media and highly respected by others. The opinion leaders would pass along the information they obtained from the media, as well as their own interpretations, to individuals who had less exposure and interest. The researchers concluded that mass communication plays a role in influencing voter decisions but to truly understand that role one must look at the social relationships between people.

After 1940, the concept of information flowing from the media to opinion leaders to the less active section of the population was overlooked for more than a decade. However, in 1955, this concept was the focus of an important book, titled, Personal Influence: the Two-step Flow of Communication, published by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955).
Personal Influence looked at the two step flow in a more systematic way. Katz and Lazarsfeld conducted a study, which became known as the Decatur study. This study focused on the role of opinion leaders as they influenced others in four areas of decision-making including marketing, fashion, public affairs, and the selection of movies. The goal was to determine who influenced whom. Personal Influence is recognized for having opened up a new avenue of research (Lowery & DeFluer, 1995) exploring the role of key individuals in the social flow of information and their influence over others.

Similar to the People’s Choice and Personal Influence is The Iowa Study of Hybrid Seed Corn. The Hybrid Seed Corn study, conducted by Ryan and Gross (1943), looked at the major factors involved in the adoption of innovation. Among other issues, Ryan and Gross wanted to discover what role mass media channels played in the adoption of innovations. What was discovered in their study was that mass communication did not play an important role in either informing the public about the innovation or in persuading them to adopt it. As Lowery and DeFleur (1995) note, the insignificant role of the media in the Hybrid Seed Corn study was primarily attributed to the rural setting of the study. Future studies indicate the media do play a role in informing. Today, in a more urban setting, mass media clearly play a more significant role as a source of first learning about a product, idea, or service (Coleman, 1993; Valente & Saba 1998; and Mahler & Rogers, 1999).
These three milestone studies, *Personal Influence, People's Choice* and the *Hybrid Seed Corn*, provided the groundbreaking research that influenced future scholars to further explore how personal networks impact an individual's decision making and adoption process. These groundbreaking studies, occurring in the early 1900's, set the stage for the focus of this thesis.

**Diffusion of Innovations**

In their Hybrid Seed Corn study, Ryan and Gross (1943) discovered that the adoption of innovation was a process that started with awareness, concluded with action, and utilized a combination of interpersonal relationships and mass communication. This view of innovation as a process continues to impact the adoption of innovation research today.

Several corporations and organizations apply the diffusion theory to impact the adoption of an innovation. Some of those applications include adoption of a voluntary downsizing program (Weening, 1999), adoption of organizational goals (Collins-Jarvis, 1997), and dissemination of health related communication (Tardy & Hale, 1998). Whatever the task at hand may be, understanding the diffusion theory can help in the adoption of an innovation (Rogers & Kincaid, 1981).

Valente and Saba (1998) conducted a study using the principles of diffusion. They studied the impact of the mass media verses personal networks on the adoption of contraceptives. They compared the relative influences of mass
media and personal networks on the specific behavior change steps as defined according to diffusion principles. The study was designed to determine how well a specific media campaign disseminated information about reproductive health and whether the campaign influenced adoption of contraceptives. The influences of mass and interpersonal communication were considered both separately and jointly in the contraceptive adoption process. Valente and Saba (1998) found that the mass media campaign was associated with increases in information-related behavior change steps, whereas personal network exposure was more strongly correlated with all six-behavior change steps.

Weening (1999) also examined the adoption of innovation as a process. This study investigated how the diffusion of an innovation in an organization is influenced by existing informal communication ties and how strong this influence is in relation to the influence of formal communication. The setting was a large Dutch branch of a multinational commercial organization that had developed an outplacement program to assist with downsizing. The data were collected by means of a mail questionnaire which inquired about the respondents' communication networks within the organization, their awareness, knowledge, attitudes and intentions concerning the outplacement program and the extent to which the respondents had heard of, or talked about, the program by means of formal and informal communication. Consistent with previous studies, Weening (1999) found that formal communication sources contributed more to the process of information diffusion, whereas informal communication sources (especially the
employees' strong ties) were more influential on attitudes and adoption intention.

Collins-Jarvis (1997) used collective active organizations as the setting for their research on the diffusion process and examined the organization members' mode of participation and support of organizational goals. Collective action organizations are defined as associations of individuals who voluntarily come together and organize their resources to address some common need or problem. The researchers found that members who participated in an action organization through a direct mail structure (mass media only) exhibited a lower degree of goal consensus than members who participated through volunteer groups. The volunteer groups, which participated through interpersonal and mass mediated channels, agreed more with dominate leaders' goal ranking than did direct mail members, who participate primarily through mass-mediated channels. Once again, the results of this study were consistent with previous studies; interpersonal networks are more influential than mass communication.

Mahler and Rogers (1999) explored whether the diffusion process for more interactive innovations, in which a critical mass is presumably involved, is different from the diffusion process for non-interactive innovations. The critical mass is defined as the minimal number of adopters needed in an interactive innovation, in order to further the rate of adoption to be self-sustaining (Mahler & Rogers, 1999). For example, for interactive telecommunications services that are new and perceived as an innovation, the prior adoption by others with whom the individual wishes to communicate via the telecommunications service is crucial.
The value of the innovation for the individual depends on how many others have adopted it. Mahler and Rogers (1999) collected data through a questionnaire completed by 392 randomly selected German banks. The questionnaire focused on the adoption of 12 telecommunications innovations. The researchers found that the most important obstacle to the adoption of new telecommunications service by banks is a low degree of diffusion (which suggests the general importance of the critical mass). They also found that German bankers might evaluate the utility of a telecommunications innovation, at least in part, on the basis of other bankers' adoption decisions and their experience with the innovation. Once again, these findings illustrate the importance of others. The action one bank took was influential over other banks.

Instead of simply looking at informal communication and personal networks in general, Valente and Davis (1999) looked in-depth at the use of opinion leaders in accelerating the diffusion of innovation. They first outlined a detailed model of the use of opinion leaders. This model includes steps such as how to identify opinion leaders and how to match opinion leaders with the appropriate group. Valente and Davis (1999) then presented a computer simulation that implemented their model. This simulation compared the use of opinion leaders to a group of randomly selected individuals. The results showed that the use of opinion leaders accelerated the diffusion of innovations.

Similar to Valante & Davis (1999), Tardy and Hale (1998) looked at the role of opinion leaders in the diffusion process. They conducted an ethnographic
study of diffusion using participant observation, personal interviews and network analysis. The guiding objective of their study was to investigate a construct involving health communication and how communication operated within the group involved. They studied a group of stay-at-home mothers with infants and toddlers who met weekly for playgroup and who had a monthly “mom’s night out” gathering. The researchers found that there were established social networks among the members of the playgroup (Tardy & Hale, 1998). Key members of the group emerged as opinion leaders. The health related views of these individuals were then disseminated and diffused among other members of the group. Once again, this study illustrates that personal networks or opinion leaders can impact others and play an important role in diffusion.

In summary, six distinct studies focused in different areas but looked at the role of diffusion and its impact. Each study found similar results, personal networks, informal communication and opinion leaders are all important in the diffusion of innovation process. The next section will look in more depth at the key opinion leader research.

Opinion Leaders

Whether an organization is selling a product, conducting a public service campaign, or simply implementing an overall communication plan, the role of opinion leaders is critical in accomplishing a task. Opinion leaders, through their communication efforts, have been effective at bringing about many changes.
Changes can range from decreasing the rate of unsafe sexual practices (Kelly et al. 1991) to decreasing the rate of cesarean births (Lomas et al. 1991) to accelerating the rate of diffusion of innovation (Valente & Davis, 1999). Whatever the communication task may be, role models that act as opinion leaders within their communities can be important determinants of rapid and sustained behavior change (Valente & Davis, 1999).

Many programs, interventions and communication campaigns are designed to change an organization or community by directing messages at mass or local audiences (Coleman, 1993). These messages are disseminated to the entire audience with little regard for the internal structure of that organization or community. The structure of communities and organizations can be thought of as a network of interconnected individuals. It could be a network that is used, rather than ignored, when creating communication strategies - a network of opinion leaders. According to Jaccard and Levinson (1995), an opinion leader is an individual who serves as a source of information for a wide range of individuals and shapes the opinions of many. This section of the paper will review research conducted on opinion leaders. This research will be looked at in two areas including uses and measurement.

**Use of opinion leaders.**

There are numerous uses for opinion leaders (Kelly et al. 1991; Valente & Davis, 1999; Lomas et al. 1991). Much of the opinion leader literature focuses on those uses in health communication research, and in AIDS research in particular.
The increasing rates of sexually transmitted diseases, particularly that of the HIV virus, are of concern (Jaccard & Levinson, 1995). Understanding this, the need for public awareness to reduce risk-taking behaviors is needed. Several studies look at the use of opinion leaders to effectively communicate this public service message.

Sikkema and Jeffery (2000) focused their research on women in impoverished inner city neighborhoods who are at high risk for contracting HIV. The purpose of their study was to utilize opinion leaders among this group to conduct HIV risk reduction workshops and community HIV prevention events. The results indicated that among the women who had participated in the intervention programs, unprotected sexual activity declined from 50 percent to 37.6 percent. The percentage of women's acts of intercourse protected by condoms increased from 30.2 percent to 47.2 percent. Sikkema and Jeffery (2000) concluded that the use of opinion leaders among peer groups could bring about reductions in high-risk sexual behaviors.

Jaccard and Levinson (1995) also utilized the concept of opinion leaders in the health area of AIDS. Understanding and believing the important role student opinion leaders play in decisions made by college students, Jaccard and Levinson focused their research on the knowledge level of identified college student opinion leaders. They found that among men, the AIDS opinion leaders tended to have a larger number of sexual partners and were more likely to practice safer sex or be more knowledgeable about safer sex. Female AIDS
opinion leaders tended to engage in less sexual activity but showed a greater reluctance to communicate with men about condom usage. Jaccard and Levinson concluded that reaching AIDS opinion leaders on college campuses, because such opinion leaders may be promulgating misinformation and encouraging or accepting practices that are not conducive to safer sex, is critical to successful change.

Understanding the limited financial resources available for public awareness campaigns, Pinkerton and Holtgrave (1998) looked at the financial side of using opinion leaders to implement a community-level HIV Prevention intervention program among gay men. The study was conducted in three phases at two gay bars in Biloxi, Mississippi. During the first phase the opinion leaders among gay men who frequented the bars were identified. These leaders were then recruited for a series of instructional sessions where they were taught how to effectively communicate about HIV risks and safe sex. The opinion leaders then implemented what they learned and a pre and post survey indicated an increase in the knowledge of HIV risk factors and an increase in the practice of safe sex among those who came into contact with the opinion leaders. When correlated with the cost of other interventions it was discovered that the use of opinion leaders is a significant cost saver.

In each of the three AIDS prevention studies outlined, opinion leaders were determined to effectively disseminate the message and influence those whom they came in contact with.
Research on opinion leaders has also focused on other health issues. For example, one study examined the medical practice of using cesarean sections for giving birth (Lomas et al., 1991). The medical profession was struggling with ways to best change some of the long-standing practices of physicians. The practices some were concerned about were conducted without evidence of effectiveness or need, including the practice of conducting cesarean sections on the second birth if the mother had a c-section on the first birth. Lomas et al. (1991) utilized three groups to implement changes in the practice of giving cesarean sections on the second birth. Each group approached the change in a different manner. One group used evaluated audit; one used feedback and the third group used opinion leaders. After a 24-month period the use of labor and vaginal birth rates in the audit and feedback groups were no different. However, in the opinion leader group the use of cesarean section birth was decreased, illustrating that the use of opinion leader physicians can impact the way other physicians practice medicine.

In a similar study, Soumerai et al. (1998) looked at the quickest way to implement the use of lifesaving drugs for acute myocardial infraction (AMI). Thirty-seven community hospitals were examined and twenty of the hospitals implemented the change through the use of opinion leaders. Of those hospitals using opinion leaders the adoption of beneficial AMI therapies was much quicker. Again, opinion leaders proved to be a successful way to bring bringing about change.
Hong and Ching (1990) also used a hospital setting to look at the role of opinion leaders in accomplishing the overall goals of the organization. Hong and Ching wanted to discover the best way to implement ongoing education for nurses. Three groups were identified. Each group underwent the same continuing education however, opinion leaders were used in one of the groups. Similar to the findings of Soumerai et al. (1998) and Lomas et al. (1991), the groups that utilized opinion leaders as the instructors were more effective.

In each of the studies illustrated, opinion leaders were effective at bringing about change. Each group discussed above, no matter what the level of income or the educational background, identified opinion leaders who were effective at influencing others. The next section will look at how to identify opinion leaders.

**Measurement of Opinion Leaders**

According to Rogers and Cartano (1962) the three major approaches to the measurement of opinion leadership are sociometric methods, key informant methods, and self-designating methods. Sociometric methods consist of asking group members whom they go to for advice and information about an idea. This method is more applicable to a research design in which all members of a social system are surveyed than to one in which a relatively small sample within a larger universe is contacted. Key informant methods ask others to identify individuals who serve as main sources of information and influence. The concern with this type of measurement is that it is dependent upon the informant's subjectivity and their ability to truly know who the opinion leaders are. Self-
designating methods involve self-reports of an individual’s own role as an opinion leader. This method is dependent upon the accuracy with which respondents can assess and report their self-images on opinion leadership.

All three approaches have wide spread usage, however the sociometric method is the most valid method (Rogers & Cartano, 1962). In their research, this technique involved having nurses identify other nurse opinion leaders. Nurses were asked the following question.

We are going to introduce a guideline for the control of catheter-associated urinary tract infection and we need the help of a nurse in your ward. Can you recommend someone who: a) possesses good knowledge and or interest on the subject and b) is able to educate the ward staff on the new guideline and effectively influence them to comply with the recommendation (Hong & Ching, 1990 p.2).

Each nurse identified three nurses in order using 1, 2, 3, labeling. The nurses receiving the most votes were identified as the opinion leaders.

This next section reviews literature on change and adoption of innovative ideas in an education setting and the role teachers’ play in the acceptance of change particularly in the area of assessment.

Adoption of Change in Education

The book Student-Centered Classroom Assessment by Richard J. Stiggins, (1997) begins with the following quote by E.F. Lindquist:

If measurement is to continue to play an increasingly important role in education, measurement workers must be much more than technicians. Unless their efforts are directed by a sound educational philosophy, unless they accept and welcome a greater share of responsibility for the selection and clarification of
educational objectives, unless they show much more concern with what they measure as well as with how they measure it, much of their work will prove futile and ineffective (Stiggins, 1997, p. 2).

This quote clearly defines that the “measurement workers,” meaning the teachers, must accept and believe in the assessment process in order for that process to be successful and meaningful.

Throughout his book, Stiggins (1997) outlines four roadblocks to quality assessments. Those roadblocks include: adult emotions about assessment and evaluation, the fear adult teachers have of being assessed themselves; forces from within the school-community relationship preventing educators from meeting standards of quality assessments; time barriers preventing teachers from meeting the standards of a quality assessment; and an educator’s lack of understanding regarding what is a quality assessment and how does one meet that standard of quality. As Stiggins outlines these barriers, it illustrates the important role teachers play in the entire assessment process. Without the teacher’s acceptance of the assessment process the entire process cannot be successful.

Stiggins (1997) explains that a teacher’s acceptance and support in implementing new assessments is tied directly to the success of students. Through his research he found that teachers must have the vision of what academic success is, how it is defined, and what the students must master to reach that success. Once their vision is clearly defined they must be committed to share that vision with the students because it is only when both the teachers
and the students are aware of how academic success is defined that students can truly reach that success. When teachers lack that vision or choose to keep it a mystery as a means of retaining power and control, the students' academic success is in jeopardy. The key to student success through appropriate assessments is really determined by the teacher.

Not only is student success through assessments dependent upon the teacher but the successful implementation of change, like new assessments, is also dependent upon teachers' attitudes and beliefs (Fullan, 1991; Englert & Tarrant, 1993). “Educational change depends on what teachers do and think – it's as simple and as complex as that” (Fullan, 1991, p. 117). Therefore it is not important that teachers just adopt the standards and assessment process; they must also accept and believe in it.

Fullan (1991) suggests that change is not merely an event, but a process. To assimilate innovations, teachers need opportunities to reformulate their ideas about the teaching-learning process, just as the creator of the innovation underwent mental restructuring in developing the innovation. Fullan encourages the managers of change to think of it as a process and allow teachers time to accept the new innovation.

Similarly, Englert and Tarrant (1993) found that a major obstacle in educational reform efforts concerns the way program innovators, policy developers and educational researchers think about and engage in disseminating innovations to classroom teachers. Over a three-year period, Englert and
Tarrant (1993) monitored a collaborative approach to staff and curriculum development between the researchers at Michigan State and the teachers in a Lansing School District. This collaborative model was built around four characteristics (a focus on creating longitudinal and ongoing interactions in the community, an attention to teachers' beliefs, the building of knowledge in the community through frequent opportunities to talk about experiences and problems, and the promotion of ownership through dissemination activities). Englert and Tarrant (1993) found that researchers, involved in the collaborative model, were more likely to make significant and lasting differences in educational practice. They also found that teachers who had a voice in the curriculum development process and teachers who had the opportunity to disseminate their knowledge of the innovation, had more ownership in the innovation.

Through 23 years of research documenting the history of change in a public elementary school, Gold (1999) outlined the reasons innovation fails. Those reasons include: incorrect assumptions about the behavior of students and teachers by policy makers; planning deficiencies; implementation difficulties, the culture of the school resisting reform; ideological contradictions that create destructive conflict, and a variety of social, financial and political obstacles. Once again the importance of teachers in acceptance of change is illustrated.

This is again found by Waugh and Godfrey (1993). Through their research they concluded that in any major educational change which involves teaching in the classroom, the attitudes and behaviors of the teachers who have
to implement the change, and particularly the strength of their receptivity to the change, are important determinants of the success of the implementation of that change.

In summary, literature on innovation in educational contexts illustrates that if successful change is going to take place, particularly in the area of assessment, then teachers have to be actively involved in that change. Teachers must accept and believe in the change for long range sustainability and meaningful impact. Teachers also take more direction and ownership if they are actively involved in the change process.

**Purpose Statement**

During the 2000-2001 school year all fourth, eighth and tenth grade teachers in the Papillion-LaVista School District were mandated to implement standards and assessments for evaluating student achievement. For such an adoption to impact student success, the teachers must not only implement but also must accept and believe in the process (Fullan, 1991; Englert & Tarrant, 1993).

Research indicates that when adopting a new innovation one experiences five major stages: awareness, interest, evaluation, trial, and adoption. Dissemination of information to the masses is influential in the first few stages of informing an individual of an innovation (Valante & Saba, 1998). However, when one reaches the final stages of determining acceptance or rejection of the
innovation, they are impacted by their personal networks or the opinion leaders among their group. Opinion leaders refer to “the degree to which an individual is able to informally influence other individuals’ attitudes or overt behavior in a desired way with relative frequency” (Rogers & Kincaid, 1981 p.123). These opinion leaders have been influential at accelerating the rate of diffusion (Valante & Davis, 1999) and bringing about organizational change (Lomas et al. 1991; Soumerai et al. 1998). In a hospital setting, doctor opinion leaders have been used to decrease undesirable medical practices (Lomas et al., 1991) and to implement the use of a new medication (Soumerai et al., 1998).

In the Papillion-LaVista School District the implementation of the standards and assessment process is new to the teachers throughout the district. It is an innovation that teachers are required to implement, but research shows that without their acceptance and belief in the process the implementation will not be successful. Therefore, the teachers’ acceptance is critical to the successful implementation of the standards and assessments. Even though no published research is available on the use of opinion leaders among teachers, it is clear that opinion leaders in an organization are influential over their colleagues. Opinion leaders have been proven to bring about successful organizational change. Knowing that acceptance by teachers is critical to success and opinion leaders have been successful at bringing about change, this study focuses on opinion leaders and diffusion of an innovation in an educational setting.
The primary purpose of this study is to determine if there are identified opinion leaders among teachers and how opinion leaders may influence teachers’ acceptance of standards and assessment implementation. In health related fields the identification of opinion leaders has been used to bring about change (Soumerai et al., 1998; Hong Ching, 1992; and Sikkema & Jeffery, 2000). Through these studies staff members emerged as opinion leaders through a simple questionnaire completed by the staff of the organization. Similarly, particular teachers may emerge as opinion leaders within schools.

RQ1: Do teachers identify particular teachers that stand out as opinion leaders?

The implementation of a standards and assessment process is being mandated by the state of Nebraska and the administration of the Papillion-LaVista School District. Implementation is required but acceptance by teachers is not something that can be mandated. According to Stiggins (1997), for the implementation of assessments to be successful and meaningful, teachers must accept and believe in the assessment process. In a hospital setting, controlled research groups that used opinion leaders to disseminate information were more successful than controlled groups that didn’t use opinion leaders. It may be possible that in a natural organizational setting, opinion leaders may emerge and their views may influence their peers causing a higher or lower rate of acceptance, depending on the views of the opinion leaders.

Only a core group of teachers developed the standards and assessments
and played a role in disseminating information to other teachers throughout the Papillion-LaVista School District. Because the core team members were put in a position of communicating the process, and research shows that opinion leaders are turned to for information and direction, opinion leaders who were on the core team may be more successful at generating acceptance by their peers.

RQ2: Did the core team of teachers that developed the standards and assessment process include opinion leaders?

RQ3: What is the level of acceptance of the standards and assessment process among teachers in the district?

RQ4: What is the level of teachers' acceptance of the standards and assessment process in each school in the school district?

RQ5: In schools that had at least one opinion leader on the core team, were teachers more accepting of the standards and assessments than in schools that had no opinion leaders on the core team?

By definition it is known that opinion leaders inform and influence others in their group. Knowing this, it is equally important to know how opinion leaders collect information and what is influential to them as they determine their attitudes and opinions. Understanding how opinion leaders obtain information and form their attitudes, can be important information in developing a strategic communication plan.

RQ 6: Where did the opinion leaders among teachers obtain their information about the standards and assessment process?
RQ7: How do opinion leaders view and evaluate the standards and assessment process?

RQ8: What is influential to opinion leaders as they formed their attitudes and opinions towards standards and assessments?
CHAPTER 2
Methodology

Subjects

All participants were selected from Papillion-LaVista School District. The district includes eleven elementary schools and three secondary schools, all of the schools were asked to participate in the study. All of the schools were selected because they were all implementing the standards and assessment of student achievement.

Prior to beginning the study, permission was obtained from the Superintendent of Schools, the central office administration (see Appendix B), and the IRB (see Appendix C). The building principals were then contacted for permission and support in administrating the study. After gaining permission from each of these individuals, a questionnaire was given to all certified classroom teachers at the elementary level and to all certified teachers who teach the language arts curriculum at the secondary level. This includes the possibility of 186 elementary classroom teachers and 32 secondary. The secondary teachers include a possibility of eight at each junior high and 16 at the high school. All subjects hold a minimum of a bachelor's degree and many hold advanced degrees or additional schooling.

Only certified staff participated in the study. Classified employees (i.e.: non-teachers) were excluded because they may have a different background and thus different opinion leaders (Black, 1982; Reiken & Yavas, 1983). For this
same reason, only language arts teachers at the secondary level participated. At
the secondary schools only the language arts teachers are impacted by the
implementation of the language arts standards and assessment process.

Measures

Acceptance

A variety of scales have been used to measure acceptance levels (Connor
& Lake, 1988; Gagne et al., 2000; Johnson & Meyer, 1997; and Kahai & Cooper,
1999). In this study, the questions used to measure acceptance are modeled
after the questions used by Gagne et al. (2000). The questions outlined by
Gagne et al. (2000) were modified and/or rewritten specifically to address
teachers’ acceptance levels of the standards and assessment process.
Additional questions were added to increase the reliability of the measurement,
for a total of 5 questions. All questions were answered on a 5-point scale
ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (completely) (see Appendix D).

A factor analysis was run to assess the number of dimensions being
measured by the acceptance items. Each factor was grouped based on the high
loadings on the factor. Although two factors were identified, the standards and
assessment questionnaire was used to report a total “acceptance” rating using
only questions 1-5 on the instrument. Furthermore, the reliability of the
standards and assessment scale as determined by Cronbach’s coefficient alpha
was .91. The results for question six are also reported. The remaining items
were excluded from further analysis.
Table 1: Acceptance Level Questionnaire Items and Their Loadings on Acceptance and Job Responsibilities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Factor 1: Acceptance</th>
<th>Factor 2: Job Respons.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. To what extent do you view the standards as appropriate benchmarks for student learning?</td>
<td>.884</td>
<td>-.152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. To what extent do you view the assessments as an appropriate measurement of whether a student is achieving the identified standards?</td>
<td>.867</td>
<td>-3.738E-02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. To what extent do you accept the implementation of the overall standards and assessment process?</td>
<td>.848</td>
<td>-.223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. To what extent do you support the implementation of the overall standards and assessment process?</td>
<td>.876</td>
<td>-.137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. To what extent do you see the standards and assessment process as an improvement in how teachers in the Papillion-LaVista School District measure student achievement?</td>
<td>.813</td>
<td>-.158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. To what extent is your acceptance of the standards and assessments based on the fact that it is mandated by the Papillion-La Vista School District?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Eigenvalue | 3.904 |
| Percent of Variance Explained | 65.1% | 79.9% |

**Opinion Leaders**

Following Sikkema and Jeffery (2000) and Soumerai et. al. (1998) only three questions were used to identify the opinion leaders. Specifically, the participants were asked to name the teachers in their school whom they most like...
and trust for advice on language arts curriculum. As discovered by Robertson & Meyer (1969) and Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) opinion leadership is topic and situational specific. Therefore, the questions, as outlined by Soumerai et. al. (1998), were modified to be topic specific, asking participants to identify opinion leaders for the language arts curriculum (see Appendix E).

Opinion leaders were collected by school. Teachers were asked to identify others they turn to for advice, those they trust and those whom they are influenced by, all of these questions were in relation to the language arts curriculum. A list was then determined based on the names of those teachers identified. One point was given for each time an employee’s name was listed. A total score was then obtained for each individual named. As used in Sikkema & Jeffery (2000) and Soumerai et al (1998), opinion leaders were then identified based on those who received the greatest number of peer nominations. The number of opinion leaders varied between the 14 schools depending on the results from the survey.

**Views of Opinion Leaders**

The identified opinion leaders were invited to participate in focus groups in which they were asked to discuss their attitudes and opinions regarding the standards and assessment process (see Appendix F). Focus groups, as defined by Lindlof (1995) create settings in which diverse perceptions, judgments, and experiences concerning particular topics can surface. Focus groups provide the participants with the opportunity to interact with other members of the group in
order to share, debate or resolve issues. Focus groups are a routine method of collecting detailed information in the Papillion-LaVista School District and participation was voluntary. The focus group was operated with the facilitator first making introductions, explaining the purpose, and establishing the rules. Once these introductory details were covered, the facilitator opened the discussion by asking a question off the prepared list and then allowing the dialogue to begin. The facilitator then managed the group lightly, not to interrupt the discussion but probing for additional detail or asking additional questions when appropriate.

The opinion leaders were asked about their sources of information and what they believed was influential as they formed their opinions regarding the process. The purpose of the focus group was to look more in depth at the attitudes and opinions of the opinion leaders. (The focus group questions are included in Appendix G).

**Procedures**

Prior to collecting the data, the questionnaire was pre-tested by an advisory group compiled of administrators and teachers. The input from the advisory group was then incorporated into the survey and the final version was administered. The data were collected in three distinct parts. The first two parts, including the identification of opinion leaders and the rating of acceptance levels, was administered by the Principal at each school. At an administrative meeting the principals were briefed on the survey and its purpose. The surveys and the
directions for administering the survey, were then delivered to each Principal by the researcher. This provided Principals the opportunity to ask questions so they had a clear understanding of what they were administering. At the Elementary schools, each Principal read the directions out-loud and distribute the acceptance survey and opinion leader survey at a staff meeting.

At the elementary schools, the first part of the survey was the acceptance measurement. After the first part was completed, the Principal followed the same procedure to administer the second portion of the questionnaire, opinion leader measurement. This measurement asked teachers to identify other teachers they turn to and trust. This portion was administered separately to promote confidentiality. The teachers' completed surveys were then inserted into a provided envelope and mailed via inter-school mail to the researcher. Anyone choosing not to participate was allowed to write that on the survey (as to appear that they were completing the survey) and return the survey.

At the secondary schools the surveys were distributed by the Principal at a language arts curriculum meeting. The teachers were then allowed to take the surveys and complete them. The completed surveys were returned to the school secretary. Once all the surveys were collected, they were sent, in the envelope provided, to the researcher via inter-school mail.

Based on the questionnaire responses, the opinion leaders were identified at each of the schools. Opinion leaders from all 14 schools then participated in one of the four focus groups. A total of 32 opinion leaders, including 26 from
elementary schools and 6 from secondary schools, were invited to participate. All but one opinion leader attended. Three of the groups focused consisted of elementary opinion leaders, the remaining group was for the secondary opinion leaders. The number of focus groups was based on the total number of opinion leaders identified.

**Data Analysis**

Responses to the survey items were compiled and analyzed with respect to the research questions. To answer the first research question, the data on opinion leaders was examined. The data from each school was analyzed separately to see if there are particular staff member(s) in each school who are repeatedly identified as influential. A master database was compiled by school including all of the names identified in the survey. Each time a teacher’s name was listed on the survey he or she received one point. A total for each person named was then obtained and the opinion leaders were identified based on those receiving the highest number of nominations. The master database was also examined to determine if there are identified opinion leaders district-wide. This included individuals who were named at more than one school.

Once the list of opinion leaders was compiled, this list was compared to the list of core team members, identified by the Papillion-LaVista School District Assistant Superintendent in charge of Curriculum. These data were used to
answer RQ2. The opinion leaders’ names were changed to fictitious names to protect the anonymity of the opinion leaders.

The data from the acceptance instrument were used to answer RQ3, RQ4, and RQ5. To answer RQ3 and RQ4, the mean acceptance level including questions 1-5 was determined for the district and each school. These acceptance levels were then compared and described using descriptive statistics.

To address RQ5, an independent t-test was used to examine the significance of the difference between those schools with opinion leader representation on the core team and those schools without opinion leader representation on the core team. Two separate t-tests were run. The first test compared secondary schools with opinion leaders on the core team to those without. The second compared elementary schools with opinion leaders on the core team to those without. A .05 alpha level was employed to help control for Type I errors.

RQ6, RQ7 and RQ8 were answered by analyzing the focus group data. The data from the focus groups were collected and analyzed according to the taped-based analysis method as outlined in Krueger (1998). When using this method an abridged transcript is prepared based on the tapes and notes from the session (see Appendix H). Based on these transcripts, the researcher analyzed the data for emerging themes. Initially the data was examined as a whole, all four groups together. However, some distinct differences emerged between the
elementary and secondary school opinion leaders. The elementary school data was looked at separately from the secondary school data.
CHAPTER 3

Results

The purpose of this study is to determine if there are identified opinion leaders among teachers and how opinion leaders may influence teachers' acceptance of the standards and assessment implementation. A written survey using a 5-point scale was used to obtain information regarding teachers' acceptance levels of the standards and assessment process. There were a total of 133 surveys completed, which included results from 14 schools, 11 elementary, 2 junior highs and 1 high school. Twenty-four surveys came from the secondary schools; this is a 75% return rate. At the elementary level there were 109 surveys completed, which is a 59% return rate. Of the completed surveys, 126 were returned by females and 7 were returned by males. Seventy-one of the surveys completed were by teachers with 15+ years of experience, nine had 11-15 years, 27 had 5-10 years and 26 had less than 5. Eighty-one of the teachers were currently implementing the standards and assessment process, 47 were not implementing and 5 did not indicate whether they were currently implementing the process.

A separate survey was used to obtain the opinion leader data. In that survey, teachers were asked to identify those they turn to for advice, those they trust and those whom they are influenced by. After the opinion leaders were determined, they were asked to participate in focus groups. Through the focus groups additional information was gathered regarding how opinion leaders
diffuse an innovation, particularly where they obtain information and what was influential to them.

The results are outlined below, categorized according to the research questions asked.

Findings of the Study

Research Question One

Do teachers identify particular teachers that stand out as opinion leaders?

The number of opinion leaders at the 14 schools varied by school. The largest number of opinion leaders identified by a school was four; the smallest number was one. At schools 4 and 5 the opinion leaders clearly emerged, receiving votes from almost everyone who completed a survey. At school number 3 the opinion leaders clearly emerged as well. At this school, the top opinion leader was identified as the Principal. At schools 5, 9, and 13 the principals were also among the most frequently named individuals but they did not receive the highest number of votes.

The two central office administrators responsible for the implementation of the standards and assessment process were named at least once on every school list except schools 1, 2, 4, 7, and 10. At schools 6, 8, 9, and 12 one of the two administrators was listed among the top opinion leaders. At schools 1, 6, 7, and 8 a teacher who is employed at a different school or the central office emerged among the top opinion leader names. Based on the total number of names that appeared on the school list and the difference between the number of
votes those on the list received, the only schools that had problems clearly identifying an opinion leader among their staff are 1, 6, 8, and 10 (see Appendix I for the results by school. The names have been changed to protect anonymity.)

When the results were compiled a total of all school nominations were reviewed. A few of the individuals, primarily central office personnel, were identified on the list for multiple schools. The top eight individuals receiving the highest number of votes from throughout the district are listed by job title, in order of decreasing number of votes: (1) Teacher assigned to work at the central office (2) Central office administrator responsible for the implementation (3) A teacher at one of the elementary schools (4) The other central office administrator assigned to implement the standards and assessment process (5 & 6) Two additional elementary teachers (7 & 8) Elementary principals. (See Appendix J for results. The names have been changed to protect anonymity.)

Research Question Two

Did the core team of teachers that developed the standards and assessment process include opinion leaders?

The list of opinion leaders by school was cross-referenced with the list of members on the core team. There were four schools where the identified opinion leaders also served on the core team. Those schools include one secondary school and three elementary schools. The schools are number 3, 4, 5, and 13. In school 3 one of the opinion leaders is a principal and only one of the remaining three opinion leaders was actually on the core team. At school number 13, the
secondary school, two of the three identified opinion leaders are on the core team. In the other two elementary schools all of the opinion leaders identified were on the core team.

**Research Questions Three and Four**

What is the level of acceptance of the standards and assessment process among teachers in the district? What is the level of teachers' acceptance of the standards and assessment process in each school in the school district?

To measure acceptance level, teachers responded to five items on a five point Likert-type scale ("1" = not at all, "2" = very little, "3" = neutral, "4" = almost completely and "5" = completely). A mean score for the district and for each school was obtained for each question. Responses to these five questions were then summed and averaged to get an overall mean score for each school and for the district as a whole. The scores between the schools were then compared.

For the district the overall mean score is 3.42 (SD = .80). The mean scores for the 14 schools range from 3.0 (SD = 1.15) to 3.84 (SD = .54). Table 2 reports these scores by school. The total of the five questions were also looked at by the frequency of response in each of the areas on the five point scale ("1" = not at all, "2" = very little, "3" = neutral, "4" = almost completely and "5" = completely). Some schools clustered around neutral. In other schools, the frequency of responses was spread around throughout the five point scale.
Table 2

Teachers Total Level of Acceptance by School and for the District Displayed by the Five Areas & the Mean Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Not at All</th>
<th>Very Little</th>
<th>Neut.</th>
<th>Almost Comp</th>
<th>Comp</th>
<th>Mean Score Q 1-5</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary #1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary #2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary #3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary #4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary #5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary #6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary #7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary #8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary #9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary #10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary #11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary #12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary #13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary #14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>District Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>22</strong></td>
<td><strong>67</strong></td>
<td><strong>279</strong></td>
<td><strong>236</strong></td>
<td><strong>85</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.42</strong></td>
<td><strong>.80</strong></td>
<td><strong>133</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With the implementation process being mandated by the school district, and understanding how that may impact acceptance levels, question 6 was included in the survey to determine the degree to which the acceptance was attributed to the mandate. (To what extent is your acceptance of the standards
and assessments based on the fact that it is mandated by the Papillion-LaVista School District.) As was suspected, according to the factor analysis, question 6 focuses on a different factor than questions 1-5. Question 6 focuses more on the job description/directive than on acceptance levels. Therefore, this question was not included in the acceptance level means listed in Table 2. However, it is important to look at the data obtained in question 6. Table 3 reports the mean scores for question 6. To obtain the mean scores the responses were reverse keyed in order to parallel the acceptance level questions ("5" = completely accept, "4" = almost completely accept, etc...).

Table 3
Level of Acceptance Attributed to Mandate Mean Scores by School and for the District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary #1</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary #2</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary #3</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary #4</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary #5</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary #6</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary #7</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>.96</td>
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**Research Question Five**

In schools that had at least one opinion leader on the core team, were teachers more accepting of the standards and assessments than in schools that had no opinion leaders on the core team?

There were four schools, 3, 4, 5, and 13 identified that had opinion leaders on the core team. School 13 is a secondary school and all of the remaining schools are elementary. Because of the difference in the implementation at the elementary and secondary level, the secondary schools with opinion leaders on the core team were compared only to the secondary schools without. The same is true with elementary, the elementary schools with opinion leaders on the core team were compared only to the elementary schools without. The elementary schools were not compared to secondary and secondary schools were not compared to elementary.

The comparison for the secondary staff's acceptance levels of the standards and assessment process was not found to be statistically significant. The mean score on the standards and assessment questionnaire of those secondary schools with opinion leaders on the core team (\( M = 3.23, \ SD = .43 \)) was not significantly greater than the mean score on the standards and assessment questionnaire of those secondary schools without opinion leaders on the core team (\( M = 3.19, \ SD = .98 \)) \( (t \ (15) = -.135, \ p = .894, \ two \ tailed) \).

The comparison for the elementary staffs' acceptance levels about the standards and assessment process was found to be statistically significant. The
mean score on the standards and assessment questionnaire of those elementary schools with opinion leaders on the core team \((M = 3.73, \ SD = .71)\) was significantly greater than the mean score on the standards and assessment questionnaire of those elementary schools without opinion leaders on the core team \((M = 3.37, \ SD = .83)\) \((t(107) = -2.154, p = .033, \text{ two tailed})\).

**Research Question Six, Seven and Eight**

Where did opinion leaders among teachers obtain their information about the standards and assessment process? How do opinion leaders view and evaluate the standards and assessment process? What is influential to opinion leaders as they formed their attitudes and opinions towards standards and assessments?

After the opinion leaders were identified at each of the schools, four focus groups, including those opinion leaders were conducted. Three of the groups focused on elementary opinion leaders, the remaining group was for the secondary opinion leaders. The data from the focus groups were collected and analyzed (see Appendix H). The data were looked as a whole, all four groups together. However, there were some distinct differences between the elementary and secondary schools. Therefore, the elementary data sometimes were analyzed separately from the secondary data.

For the ease of reading and understanding the data will be presented by research question.
Sources of Information

Throughout the four focus group sessions participants overwhelmingly identified their first sources of information, regarding the standards and assessment process, as the media, and just general talk around the district and in the education community (including workshops and meetings outside the District). Participants felt they began hearing about the standards and assessment process as much as a year and half prior to the implementation. Though the specific sources varied depending on the individual’s involvement, those sources mentioned most frequently included general talk at work and in the community, the media and discussions in meetings. All teachers in the focus groups felt they knew the process was coming. One school talked about clipping a newspaper article where the State Board of Education talked about the standards. That school then posted the article as a reminder of what was coming.

As standards became more real and implementation drew closer for the teachers in the Papillion-La Vista School District the sources of information became closer to home. For the focus group participants that served on the committee that prepared the standards, they had an ongoing source of communication. They were writing and preparing the standards and assessments therefore, they had a direct source of information regarding the process. Their communication came from being involved.
A meeting for all 4th, 8th and 10th grade teachers throughout the district was held to orient the teachers to the new process. This meeting was the major source of communication explaining the process provided by the school district to the employees. Following this meeting the focus group participants identified their main sources of communication as each other. They shared and networked within their schools, between their staff based on the information they were provided in their notebooks. (The notebooks contained all of the information on the standards and assessment process. They were given to each 4th, 8th and 10th grade teacher.)

Opinion Leaders’ Views Towards the Standards and Assessment Process

Overall the attitudes of the elementary teachers were fairly positive. Though there are specific items that could be addressed to improve their acceptance of the standards and assessment process, for the most part there was a sense of accomplishment for completing a year of implementation. However, it is important to note that this feeling of accomplishment was probably more apparent from the 4th grade teachers who were opinion leaders, than the teachers who were at other grade levels. It is also important to note that it was apparent through the focus group discussions that the intensity of the positive attitudes varied among the schools.

This positive summary is based on a common theme that was heard throughout all three elementary focus groups. That theme is the connection between the standards and assessment process and the curriculum. It was
heard over and over from the focus group participants that the standards and assessment process adds a focus to the curriculum. It allows teachers to prioritize what they should be teaching. It was commented that prior to the standards and assessment process the curriculum varied greatly between schools. This process provides a focus. It was also noted that the standards and assessment process is tied directly to the curriculum. The assessments aren't added onto what is already being done; instead they are taken directly from the day to day teachings. There is a direct connection between the curriculum and the standards and assessment process. This is what led to the positive attitudes of the elementary teachers.

It was noted that everyone might not understand this connection. However, it was believed by the focus group participants that teachers are going to have to go through the process to really “get it”.

The elementary focus group participants also shared some concerns. These concerns can be divided into two areas: a sense of being overwhelmed and an issue with time. Though the two areas are very much interrelated they are also separate.

Many focus group participants talked about being totally overwhelmed with the process. Particularly at first, the teachers were trained and allowed to preview the notebooks that contained all the information about the assessments however, they were not allowed to keep the notebooks. Therefore they were given all this information about what was expected of them but they didn’t have
materials. Then when they received the materials they were in the isolation of their own classrooms and it was very overwhelming.

Though being overwhelmed was heard from many focus group participants, time was the concern heard consistently from all focus group participants. Beginning with the distribution of the materials, teachers did not receive their notebooks, which outlined the assessments, until November. The assessments were supposed to begin in October. This timing issue started the entire process off negatively, contributing to teachers' sense of being overwhelmed.

The other big time issue was the amount of time it takes to prepare, administer and complete the paperwork for the assessments. Many of the focus group participants felt they had been given additional responsibilities and duties with no additional time. Though some participants argued that teachers need to look at what else they were doing with their day and prioritize the standards and assessments, it was the consensus of the participants that adding time, either release time or planning time, would improve teachers' acceptance of the entire process.

These same two issues were echoed by the secondary focus group participants. They too felt as though they were overwhelmed and that time was a major issue.

The views of the secondary focus group participants were not as supportive as the elementary. Though the issues of time and being
overwhelmed are consistent across groups, the major difference between the
groups is the attitude towards the overall purpose of the standards and
assessment process. Contrary to the elementary, at the secondary level, the
standards and assessments are not seen as being tied to the curriculum.
Though it appears that at the high school minor adjustments have been made to
try to tie them to curriculum, at the junior highs the assessments are in addition to
what teachers are teaching and assessing every day. According to the focus
group participants, many of the assessments are not even related to what is
being taught (or at least the teachers are not making the connection).

At the junior high there is also a concern about how the committee
members were selected and the fact that no 8th grade teachers, the teachers who
implemented the standards and assessments, were on the committee. Along
with the issue of feeling like they were not invited to participate on the original
committee, it is the belief of the participants that select junior high teachers
volunteered to work over the past summer to revise the standards and
assessments for the 2001-2002 school year and were not allowed to do that
either. The junior high focus group participants feel as though there is no
administrative leadership assisting with the process at their level. And there is no
interest in involving teachers in the process.

Even though there are many negative feelings at the secondary level,
primarily junior high, it was still believed by the focus group participants that the
standards and assessments have positive things to offer. The participants
believe the standards and assessment process would make them take a serious look at the curriculum and what is being taught. However, they were frustrated because that has not already occurred.

To completely answer the research question it is important to also note the impact of administrative support. The attitudes at the elementary and secondary schools varied based on the support the teachers felt from their administrators. Those schools that felt supported wanted to talk about how they were supported and the special things their principals did for them. Those schools that did not feel supported wanted to point out that the concerns in their school could be attributed to the administrator. This issue was very school specific and was not really probed into during the focus group. However, it repeatedly came up and it definitely had an impact on the teachers' attitudes and views towards the process. The only common issue was at the junior high where both schools noted that they felt in isolation with no administrative leadership.

Influential to Opinion Leaders

What was influential to the opinion leaders who participated in the focus groups varied depending on the background of the individual. For any of the focus group participants that were involved on the core committee, that involvement was identified as being the most influential in forming their attitudes and opinions towards the standards and assessment process. At the elementary schools, for the focus group participants that implemented the standards and assessment process, surviving the experience and successfully implementing
was deemed as influential. For others, the quality of the assessments and the quality of the materials was identified as being influential.

Additional Findings

It is important to note two additional themes that emerged from the focus group discussion. These themes do not answer a particular research question. However, they provide insight into why teachers may have answered some of the questions the way they did.

The first theme is the need to share the results of the assessments with the staff, students and parents. It was discussed in the focus groups that sharing these results would help provide each of these three groups, students, staff and parents, with a better understanding of why the standards and assessment process is necessary. At the time of the focus groups the results of the assessments had not been shared with anyone. Several focus group participants noted that there was a plan to share the results with staff, however, it had not occurred yet at the time of the discussion. There was no plan to share the individual student results with the parents and students.

The concern was that without seeing the results and being trained in what to do with the results the entire process is somewhat meaningless. It was stated that it was difficult for teachers to see the big picture when the picture is not brought full circle. One teacher noted, “I don’t see how this drives instruction.” It
was discussed that sharing the results and analyzing the results gives the entire process more of a purpose.

The second area that it is important to recognize is the mixed reactions to change. These reactions fell into two areas. The first approach was a positive approach, let’s go for it, it’s good for kids and education so let’s do it. The second approach was an underlying feeling that the process is somehow a question of a teacher’s professional capabilities. One teacher noted, “I felt like I was doing everything right, now I realize that things need to change”. There was an underlying question of “what was wrong with the way we were doing it?” These two different reactions varied from teacher to teacher and school to school.
CHAPTER 4

Discussion

As the Nebraska Department of Education mandates that public schools across the state implement standards and assessments of student learning, teachers, whose time is already very limited, are asked to take on additional responsibilities. Even more challenging, teachers are being asked to restructure the way they were assessing student learning. Though change in any type of an organization is challenging, this particular change put schools in a new area. Not only were public schools asked to implement a change, but this particular change involved every classroom teacher and in order for the change to truly be successful, teachers not only needed to participate because it was mandated, but they needed to accept the process (Wright & Palmer, 1995).

In the Papillion-La Vista School District the implementation of the standards and assessment process was new to the teachers throughout the district. It was an innovation that teachers were required to implement, but research shows that without the teachers' acceptance and belief in the process the implementation could not be successful (Stiggins, 1997; Wright & Palmer, 1995). Therefore teachers' acceptance was critical to the successful implementation of the standards and assessment process. Even though no published research was available on the use of opinion leaders among teachers, it is clear that opinion leaders in an organization are influential over their colleagues. Opinion leaders have been proven to bring about successful
organizational change. These changes include accelerating the rate of diffusion of innovation (Valante & Davis, 1999).

This study examined the use of opinion leaders among teachers as the Papillion-La Vista School District implemented the standards and assessment process for the language arts curriculum. Believing in the importance of the standards and assessment process, the school district wanted to know if using teacher opinion leaders would increase the level of acceptance among other teachers.

The purpose of this study was to determine if there were identified opinion leaders among teachers and how opinion leaders may influence teachers' acceptance of the standards and assessment process. This chapter interprets the findings of the data collection, which was presented in Chapter Three. The results from that chapter will be used as a basis for this discussion. Conclusions drawn from this study will also be used to make recommendations for actions and for further research. The limitations of the research will also be presented.

**Identification of Opinion Leaders Among Teachers**

Research question one asked if teachers identify particular teachers that stand out as opinion leaders. The sociometric technique (Rogers and Cartano, 1962) was used to determine that there are opinion leaders among teachers. A total of 22 opinion leaders were clearly identified at ten schools. At
the remaining four schools, 10 opinion leaders were identified but not as clearly. The total number of opinion leaders was 32.

Due to the structure of school districts, with a central office and numerous schools which report to that office, opinion leaders may look different in schools than in other organizations where all of the employees are confined to one building. The results suggest that opinion leaders for the language arts curriculum can be classified in two areas, school specific or district-wide. First, some opinion leaders are school specific, meaning they work and teach in the school where they are an opinion leader.

However, other opinion leaders may come from the central office and may impact several schools district-wide. For example, the Cadre teachers, who are assigned to the central office to assist with projects, were identified at several schools as opinion leaders. These individuals were actively involved in the standards and assessment process by serving on the core team. They also were involved in other capacities at many schools, which provided them with the exposure to teachers at numerous buildings. It is not surprising that they would appear as opinion leaders.

One of the more interesting results from the opinion leader data was the number of administrators that appeared. Four of the 14 schools had principals identified near the top of their opinion leader list. The principals were identified as being influential in teachers’ acceptance of the process. Along with the principals, the two central office administrators that developed and led the
process appeared on nine of the fourteen schools’ lists. In four of the schools they were among the top opinion leaders identified. One reason for these administrators being named so highly at these schools could be because these schools either didn’t have representation on the core team or the individual that represented the school on the core team was not highly respected and seen as a leader among their peers. This may have caused the teachers in these four schools to turn to someone outside their school for guidance, and who better than the administrators in charge.

According to Rogers (1983) the sociometric technique is a highly valid measure of opinion leadership because it is measured through the eyes of the followers. This technique has been used extensively in previous research to identify opinion leaders by asking each member within a group who they are (Rogers & Cartano, 1962; Hong & Ching, 1990). The present study supports the value of this technique for identifying opinion leaders and extends its application to teachers in elementary and secondary schools.

In health related fields the identification of opinion leaders has been used to bring about change (Soumerai et al., 1998; Hong Ching, 1992; and Sikkema & Jeffery, 2000). Similarly, the opinion leaders among the teachers in this study may be integral to the implementation of the new standards and assessment process.

**Opinion Leaders on the Core Team**

Research question two asked if the core team of teachers that developed
the standards and assessment process includes opinion leaders. The results suggest that eight opinion leaders were included on the core team. This is important because as was found in Englert and Tarrant (1993) individuals that were involved in change, were more likely to make significant and lasting differences in educational practice. Englert and Tarrant (1993) also found that teachers who had a voice in the curriculum development process and teachers who had the opportunity to disseminate their knowledge of the innovation, had more ownership in the innovation. Thus including opinion leaders on the core team puts these individuals in an ideal position to have positive impact on the school district's process of adopting the new standards and assessments.

As the opinion leader results were being tabulated three elementary schools immediately emerged as having clearly identified opinion leaders. At school 3 one individual received 17 nominations as an opinion leader. At school 5 one individual received 19 nominations and at school 4 one individual received 21 and another received 18. Comparing these numbers to the other elementary schools where the highest number of nominations ranged from 6 to 11, it is obvious that these three schools had clearly identified opinion leaders. Interestingly, these three schools also had opinion leaders on the core team. These opinion leaders may have been leaders prior to joining the core team but their involvement on the team may have given them the information and empowerment to take their leadership role to a level not achieved in other schools.
**Teachers' Acceptance of the Standards and Assessments**

Research questions 3 & 4 focused on the level of acceptance among teachers in the district and specific schools. Overall, throughout the district, the mean score for teachers' acceptance level of the standards and assessment process is 3.42. When looking at these scores on a school by school basis the range is from 3.0 to 3.84.

The average scores for every school and the district fell into the "neutral" category (3 on a 5-point scale). The results indicate that the teachers as a whole are not feeling strongly one way or another. Throughout the school district as a whole there is not overwhelming acceptance of the process, but there is not overwhelming negativity towards the process either. Moreover, there are differences among schools and among individual teachers. When looking at the distribution of response across the five point scale ("1" = not at all, "2" = very little, "3" = neutral, "4" = almost completely and "5" = completely), it is illustrated that some schools had several teachers whose responses were not neutral.

For the first year of a major change like the one being implement in the school district, these results can be viewed as a positive sign. As was indicated in Fullan (1991) change is a process and managers should think of it as a process and allow teachers time to accept the new innovation. When considering that teachers were asked to restructure the entire way they assess student learning and restructure a lot of the way they are teaching, a neutral attitude so early in the change process can be interpreted favorably. Now the district knows
it must continue to work on increasing the level of acceptance.

It is also important to note that with such a low number of teachers completing the survey at each school, one or two people's scores have a great impact on the overall assessment level. This was illustrated in Table 2.

When comparing the acceptance scores between schools, one issue emerges. That issue is the difference between the overall elementary scores and the secondary scores. The mean acceptance score for all elementary schools is 3.5, while the mean score for the secondary schools is 3.2. Moreover, there were only two elementary schools that scored as low as the secondary schools. With there being 11 elementary schools and 109 teachers who participated in the survey, compared to 3 secondary schools and only 24 teachers, the potential for negativity at the elementary level is much higher. However, when you look at the secondary scores compared to the elementary scores, the secondary scores overall are lower.

This difference may be at least partly explained by opinion leaders' membership on the core team and by the actual assessments that were written at the secondary level. Overall the assessments at the secondary level may not have been as strong as the elementary assessments. This issue is addressed in more detail in the next section.

Overall the District should be pleased with the acceptance of the process. There is definite room for improvement and increasing the acceptance levels needs to be focused on. Overall, with a change of this magnitude it could be
much worse. The fact that there are not pockets of schools that are increasingly negative is something the district should be proud of.

**Opinion Leaders & Levels of Acceptance**

Research question 5 asked whether schools that had at least one opinion leader on the core team, have teachers who are more accepting of the standards and assessments than schools that had no opinion leaders on the core team.

Previous research shows that opinion leaders, through their communication efforts, have been effective at bringing about many changes. These changes include accelerating the rate of the diffusion of innovation (Valante & Davis, 1999). The research of Valante & Davis was supported by the findings of this study. There were four schools that had at least one opinion leader on the core team. Of those schools, three were elementary and one was secondary.

For the secondary schools, the acceptance level at school 13, which had opinion leaders on the core team, was not statistically different from the acceptance level at the schools that didn’t have opinion leaders on the core team. This was not surprising.

For opinion leaders to be influential they must be near or have contact with those they are influencing. At school number 13, it is important to note a few specific facts that would make that contact difficult. For this school three opinion leaders emerged but their ability to impact opinions was weakened by circumstances. The individual that received the highest number of nominations
was not originally involved on the core team, she did not work on the team most of the summer, and went on maternity leave for three months during the year.

The second opinion leader was originally placed on the core team as a teacher from another secondary school in the district. She transferred to school 13 for the beginning of the 2000-2001 school year, so for the actual implementation she was a new teacher at her school. The third opinion leader had been at the school the entire time but was not involved on the core team.

For the elementary schools, the mean acceptance level of the three schools that had opinion leaders on the core team was found to be statistically higher than the acceptance level at the schools without opinion leaders on the core team. This is an important finding for the school district for many reasons. This tells the school district that the make up of the core team impacts the acceptance levels of teachers throughout the district.

When thinking about the makeup of the core team, there are two important implications. The first is that every school needs to be represented on the core team. With the language arts core team every school was not represented. This left those schools with no direct line of communication to the process and what was happening.

The second implication is that the individual selected to represent the school on a committee needs to be the “right” individual. It needs to be someone that is seen or could be seen as an opinion leader. Otherwise, the school is not taking advantage of what was discovered in these findings, that opinion leader
teachers can influence the acceptance levels of other teachers. Some of the schools on the language arts core committee were represented but the individuals representing those schools were not seen as opinion leaders among their peers.

For example, school 6, 9 and 14 had representation on the core committee. However, the names of the individuals representing these schools were mentioned no more than 2 times on the opinion leader list. One could conclude that these individuals had all the information about the process but their peers didn’t turn to them to get this information.

School districts in general know that teacher involvement in any change process is important. However, the findings in this study take this knowledge to another level. It is not just important to involve teachers but it is important to involve the right teachers.

**Opinion Leaders’ Sources of Information and Influences**

Research questions 6 and 8 focused on where opinion leaders obtained their information about the standards and assessment process and what influenced to opinion leaders as they formed their attitudes and opinions toward standards and assessments.

The diffusion theory states that one experiences five major stages in the adoption of new ideas (Rogers, 1983). Those stages are awareness, interest, evaluation, trial and adoption. It is the belief of diffusion theorists that both mass communication and interpersonal communication are used in the various stages.
Primarily, mass communication is used in the stages of awareness and interest, while personal influences are used in the other three stages. Therefore, mass media are used to disseminate information about new ideas, but interpersonal communication is used to persuade individuals to adopt innovations. When an individual enters into the final stages of adoption they often turn to their personal networks for guidance (Coleman, 1993). Within these personal networks are opinion leaders.

Within the framework of the diffusion theory, this study explored where opinion leaders get their information and what is influential as they form their opinions. Consistent with the diffusion theory, the findings suggest that one of the opinion leaders' first sources of information is the mass media. This was identified as a first source along with general talk in the education community. Overall, the focus group participants felt that they knew the standards and assessment process was coming. They were aware and it certainly had their interest.

As the opinion leaders entered into the stages of evaluation, trial and adoption, the sources of information and what was influential varied depending on the opinion leaders' specific involvement. For those opinion leaders who served on the core committee that developed the standards, being involved was influential. Through their involvement on the core team, the opinion leaders had ongoing communication about the process. They were the ones developing the process.
For those not involved in the process, the sources of information were not as clearly identified. The opinion leaders that were 4th, 8th or 10th grade teachers obtained the majority of their information from the training that teachers at these grade levels attended. Approximately a month following that training these teachers were given a notebook outlining the details of the new assessments. Based on the information in these notebooks, teachers then turned to each other for advice and information on the process. As the diffusion theory suggests, in the final stages the teachers turned to their personal networks. For these individuals surviving the experience and successfully implementing it were identified as being influential, along with the quality of the assessments and the quality of the materials.

For those opinion leaders, who were not involved in the process and were not a 4th, 8th or 10th grade teacher, information came from what they heard in their school.

Aside from the opinion leaders that were on the core team, there was really very little planned information provided to the other opinion leaders. This was especially true if the opinion leaders were not a 4th 8th or 10th grade teacher. The information teachers obtained was really by chance or through their efforts to seek information. There was one meeting just prior to the actual implementation and another meeting near the end of the year, but that was the extent of the planned communication.

Through these findings it becomes clear that the opinion leaders who were
not involved on the core team, or were not a 4th, 8th or 10th grade teacher, were not given enough information to be influential to their peers.

**Opinion Leaders' Views of the Standards**

Research question 7 asked how opinion leaders view and evaluate the standards and assessment process. There are major differences between the elementary and secondary teachers’ views of the standards and assessment process. Overall the attitudes of the elementary teacher opinion leaders, who participated in the focus groups, were fairly positive. The secondary representatives were not as supportive. The findings from the focus group point to one major reason for this difference. That reason is the overall focus of the standards and assessment process.

At the elementary schools, overwhelmingly the standards and assessments were seen as being tied to the curriculum. They were identified as being important because they provide teachers a focus for what they should be teaching and how they should assess that teaching. At the elementary schools, a concentrated effort was made to ensure that the assessments were taken directly from the current curriculum. Therefore, they were not added on to assessments already taking place but were a part of those assessments.

At the secondary level the opposite occurred. The secondary assessments were in addition to what was already being taught. The current curriculum was not analyzed to see how the standards and assessment process could fit into it. Instead they were added on to what was already being done. If a
teacher was already assigning a short story and asking students to share that story through a short class presentation (otherwise known as book talk), they were now asked to do another short story and an additional book talk. The first one could not count as an assessment because it was already being done. If a teacher did a descriptive writing prompt, they were now asked to do a persuasive writing prompt as well. This sense of the standards and assessment process being such an addition to an already busy day led to a very overwhelming feeling for the secondary teachers.

It is important to note that at the high school, the administrator in charge of the curriculum met with her teachers and talked about revisions and as a team they decided to work on revising the assessments during the 2001-02 year. However, both junior high schools said they shared their concerns and then waited all summer to be called on to do rewrites and the calls never came. The junior high schools feel as though there is no administrative leadership over their process.

There is one thing that is keeping the secondary schools from being even more negative. This is the fact that teachers can see that if some of the assessments get rewritten and the process becomes more closely tied to the curriculum, standards and assessments can be a positive for the district and for the teachers. This process will force them to review their curriculum and prioritize their teaching.

Two other issues surfaced through the focus groups. These issues were
common at both the elementary and the secondary schools and the two issues were really tied together. The first issue was that of being overwhelmed. Over and over throughout all of the focus groups, teachers continued to talk about how overwhelming the process was. It was such a major change and so many new assessments that teachers felt like they were overwhelmed. The process, the change, the timing of information and more importantly the amount of paperwork overwhelmed them.

This sense of being overwhelmed attributed to the second issue of time. Teachers felt like in order to complete the standards and assessment process successfully they needed time. They wanted time to do the paperwork, time to plan with other grade level teachers, and time to troubleshoot with district-wide teachers. Having such an overwhelming change and being given very little time was an issue that was being felt throughout the district.

The role of the administration in the acceptance of the process was also an important finding through the focus group portion of the research. It was clear that teachers' acceptance levels varied from school to school depending on the support they felt from their school administrator. The role of administration came up in each of the focus groups. From some schools it was in a complimentary manner, talking about how teachers felt supported and their Principals were there with the teachers making this work. From other schools the issue of administrators came up because teachers didn’t feel supported. They felt like they were being told to just do it. Though the study wasn’t designed to look at
specific administrative roles it is an important finding to note that support of the administration can influence the acceptance levels as well.

Two additional findings that were important in explaining how teachers felt about the standards and assessment process are the need to share the results and the mixed reactions to change. The fact that teachers, students nor parents had seen the results of the assessments at the time of the focus groups was important. It was discussed that without seeing the results it was difficult to understand why this process was necessary. The results were really the final piece of information that was needed to explain the full picture.

It is also important for the District to be aware of teachers' mixed reactions to change. Though many of the focus group participants were accepting of the change there was a small underlying feeling that this change was somehow a question of a teacher's professional capabilities. The question of “what was wrong with the way we were doing it?” was expressed in the focus group discussions. The School District needs to be conscience of this feeling and try to reassure staff that this change is not a reflection of something teachers were doing wrong.

**Limitations**

As with all studies, there are limitations in this one. The majority of those limitations fall into the area of the data collected through the focus groups. After the groups were over, it was discovered that it might have been better to group
them differently. As with any focus group, these were kept in homogenous groups (Lindlof, 1995). It was the belief of the researcher that the homogenous groups were like schools, and like grade levels. Elementary were with elementary and secondary were with secondary. However, this became limiting because within the group were teachers who were involved in implementing the standards and assessments and teachers who were not. There were groups where some of the teachers were on the core team and some of teachers were not. At times it was like running three separate groups within one. This limited the amount of probing that could be done because it was singling out a particular teacher and a particular issue. This made it difficult to have a focused discussion of where individuals obtained their information and what was influential.

Another limitation was the way teachers answered the acceptance survey. As with any survey it can only be as good as the data collected. In this particular situation it was possible that teachers could have answered the questions more positively because they didn’t want their school to look poorly. Teachers’ responses could have also been effected by the fact that their school principal administered the survey. Some teachers may have been hesitant to answer the acceptance survey negatively because they felt their administrator might see their response.

The final limitation was simply approaching the study from a district perspective, but yet trying to obtain information about the individual schools. To clearly develop a picture of what was occurring and how the opinion leaders were
processing information, each school should have been looked at in isolation. Focus groups could have been held at each school with staff from that school. By including multiple schools in one focus group and targeting the questions as “district issues” each school was looked at as a part of the district. This was limiting because so many issues were very school specific. (For example: the role of the administrator in the process.)

Future Research

Because there is no published research on the role of opinion leaders among teachers the opportunities for future research are unlimited. This study was conducted after the process of standards and assessment in the area of language arts had been occurring for a year. Further research might examine the role of opinion leaders at an earlier stage in the process. It would be worthwhile to identify the opinion leaders, include them on the core committee for another area of the curriculum such as science or social studies, and then do a pre and post test to see if the use of opinion leaders on the core team makes a difference in acceptance levels.

There are numerous areas that could be explored further regarding opinion leaders among teachers. For example, can opinion leaders be created? If teachers were hand selected to be included on the core team and then those teachers were empowered by their Principals to take a leadership role, would they emerge as opinion leaders? Or are the opinion leaders predetermined by their peers? Another area may be identifying what is the role of administrators or
supervisors as opinion leaders? Can administrators have the same impact as peer opinion leaders if they are seen in that role by the teachers?

A final area that could be explored would be to do the same acceptance level survey a year later and see if the acceptance levels have increased. This first survey could be used as baseline data and then the progress could be monitored by repeating the survey. The survey could also be modified slightly and used to determine the acceptance levels of the math standards and assessments. You could then compare the acceptance of the language arts, which was the first area implemented, to the acceptance of the math.

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study several recommendations can be made. The first and most obvious is that the district needs to look at including opinion leaders on the core team for science and social studies. The math committee is already established but the opinion leaders for math could be identified and if they are not on the core committee a formal communication plan could be developed to include these individuals in the process. This way opinion leaders are provided with the information they need to be influential in the process.

The concerns of the secondary schools, particularly the junior high need to be addressed. As soon as possible a meeting of the secondary committee members and the 8th grade teachers needs to be held to identify what steps should be taken to improve the standards and assessments. The secondary
teachers are still in the “neutral” area so it is important to address their issues before they become negative.

The District needs to look at offering teachers release time in some manner to complete the standards and assessment process. This could be an early release once a week, or another staff development day once a month. Whatever the plan may be, somehow release time needs to be offered. This will help with the feelings of being overwhelmed and it will demonstrate to the teachers that the district believes this is important and will provide them the time to do it.

The District also needs to develop a communication plan to share the results with students, staff and parents. The results need to be shared with staff so they see the complete picture of how this will drive instruction. The individual student results also need to be shared with the students and parents. By sharing the results the importance of the entire process is elevated.

Finally, the district needs to look at the role of administrators in the process. At the junior high an administrator needs to be assigned to curriculum so those teachers feel as though they have some type of support. This could be a current principal at the junior high or it could be a central office person. Someone needs to be designated as “in charge” in an administrative capacity. Then the role of administrators throughout the district needs to be defined. Administrators need to see the data from this study to realize that they play an important role in how teachers feel about this process.
Though this recommendation does not pertain to standards and assessments, the data from this study should be used to restructure the internal communication plan for the school district. Opinion leaders should be identified for "general district issues" and information regarding district issues should then be communicated to the opinion leaders. Thus will help insure that the individuals in influential roles have the information the district wants communicated. In the same manner these opinion leaders could be empowered to ask the district questions about any issue they hear in order to assist in rumor control.

**Conclusion**

As the Papillion-La Vista School District implemented the new standards and assessment of student learning, they knew it was important to have a process that was teacher driven. For that reason, they developed a core team of teachers to write the standards and assessments and assist with the implementation process. The intentions of the district were in the right place. They wanted teachers to be involved. But the results from this study will provide the district will information on how to take teacher involvement one step further. These findings can be categorized in three areas: the role of teacher opinion leaders; the views of teacher opinion leaders towards the standards and assessment process; and how opinion leaders diffuse the innovation of the standards and assessment process.

Based on the findings in this study, the District now knows that the makeup of the core team is very important. It is important to involve teachers but
it is even more important to involve the teacher opinion leaders for each school. This is important because through the findings of this study the District has discovered that the acceptance levels of the elementary schools that had opinion leaders on the core team were significantly higher than the elementary schools that didn’t have opinion leaders on the core team. Involvement of teachers was not enough because there were elementary schools that had involvement on the team. However, the teachers representing those schools were not viewed as opinion leaders among their peers. Therefore, the results would indicate they were not influential. If a district is going to go to the effort of having teachers involved then it is critical to have the right teachers involved.

The findings in this study also provided the school district with information about the opinion leaders views on the standards and assessment process. It was discovered that there are some differences between the elementary and secondary schools. Overall, the opinion leaders from the elementary schools view the process as fairly positive. They see that the process is tied directly to their curriculum. However, the secondary schools opinion leaders, particularly the junior highs, are not as supportive. They believe that a strength of the process is that it will require the secondary schools to look at the curriculum and identify priorities. However, they are frustrated that this has not already happened. In the meantime they believe they are being made to do a lot of extra work because the standards and assessments are not tied to their curriculum.

Two other important findings also emerge in relation to the opinion
leaders' views of the standards and assessment process. Those findings are a sense of being overwhelmed and a sense of needing more time. These are issues that teachers are dealing with but the District needs to look at addressing.

The final important area regarding the data collected in this study is in the area of how opinion leaders diffuse an innovation. Where do they get their information, and what is influential. It was discovered that the majority of the opinion leaders obtained their initial information, regarding standards and assessments, from the media or simply general talk in the educational community. Once the process became more real and actually started effecting the teachers, the sources of information and what was influential varied depending on the person's involvement.

For the opinion leaders involved on the core committee that involvement was their source of information and was what was influential. For the opinion leaders that were 4th, 8th and 10th grade teachers, their sources of information came from each other, training, and the notebook they were provided. For the elementary schools, the fact that the assessments were respectable, the materials were good and the teachers survived the year was influential. For the opinion leaders that were not on the core team and were not 4th, 8th or 10th grade teachers they received their information from conversations within their schools.

From the results of this study it is clear that school districts need to be conscious about the role teacher opinion leaders play in influencing other teachers.
References


Appendix A

Flow of Communication
Flow of communication
Language Arts
Standards and Assessments

Spring 00, Summer 00 & Early Fall
* Committee worked to develop standards and assessments
* Put together Language Arts notebook

Spring 00
* Core committee presented overview at each school on the standards and assessment process.

September & October 00
* 8th & 10th grade teachers reviewed notebook – a.m. training
* 4th grade reviewed notebook and were trained on sound fluency – offered 3 days
* Began implementation at the schools

Spring 01
* Met with 8th and 10th grade to review question/pros and cons

March 01
* Met with 4th grade teachers to review questions/pros & cons
* Held grade level meetings to solicit input from 1st, 2nd, 3rd grade … on their assessments to be implemented in the fall.

May 01
* Collected results of assessments from 4th, 8th, and 10th grade teachers

Summer 01
* Prepared other grade level assessments – revised 4th, 8th, & 10th

September 01
* Began distribution of grade level assessments (distributed through Principal at admin meeting).
* Trained reading consultants on how to implement other grade level assessments
* Reading consultants and principals reviewed with grade level teachers the assessments they needed to implement.
Appendix B

Letter of Support from the

Papillion-La Vista School District
Dear Dr. Prentice,

I am writing this letter to express the support of the Papillion-LaVista School District for the research being conducted by Annette Eyman. Annette is Communications Director for the Papillion-LaVista School District and as a part of her job, she is responsible for research in the area of communication.

Collecting data on teachers' attitudes and opinions is done as a matter of routine for the Papillion-LaVista School District. We are a district that believes in the importance of teacher input. We frequently utilize data from employee surveys to make policy decisions, implement change and improve communication.

Throughout this year the 4th, 8th and 10th grade teachers in the Papillion-LaVista School District have been implementing standards and assessments for the language arts curriculum. The entire concept of standards and assessments is new to the teachers in the district, as is the implementation process. However, throughout the next four years standards and assessments will be implemented for the other core curriculum areas. Therefore, it is important that we obtain data on the strengths and weaknesses of our current process.

The data from the research conducted by Annette will provide us this needed information. It will be used to identify the strengths and weaknesses in our current standards and assessment process and it will provide us with ideas for improving the process as we implement it in the other curriculum areas. This data will also be used to develop a communication model that can be implemented to communicate educational issues and implement change.

As a District, we are interested in the teachers' attitudes towards the standards and assessment process. This is important information because we can strengthen the process based on their input. There is no risk for teachers to participate in the research. The process is new to the District and we expect there to be room for improvement. This research will provide teachers with the opportunity to have input towards that improvement. In the long run, they will be the biggest benefactors of the research.

Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions you may have. We are eager to get this research conducted and therefore encourage you to approve its implementation.

Sincerely,

Jef Johnston Ph.D.
Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum
Appendix C

IRB Approval
June 6, 2001

Annette Eyman
Communications, ASH 107
UNO - VIA COURIER

IRB # 210-01-EP

TITLE OF PROPOSAL: Do Teacher Opinion Leaders Impact Other Teachers?

SECONDARY INVESTIGATORS:

DATE OF FULL BOARD REVIEW ________ DATE OF EXPEDITED REVIEW 05-09-01

DATE OF FINAL APPROVAL 06-06-01 VALID UNTIL 05-09-02

EXPEDITED CATEGORY OF REVIEW: 45CFR46.110; 21CFR56.110, Category 7

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects has completed its review of the above-titled protocol and informed consent document(s), including any revised material submitted in response to the IRB’s review. The Board has expressed it as their opinion that you are in compliance with HHS Regulations (45 CFR 46) and applicable FDA Regulations (21 CFR 50.56) and you have provided adequate safeguards for protecting the rights and welfare of the subjects to be involved in this study. The IRB has, therefore, granted unconditional approval of your research project. This letter constitutes official notification of the final approval and release of your project by the IRB, and you are authorized to implement this study as of the above date of final approval.

Please be advised that only the IRB approved and stamped consent/assent form can be used to make copies to enroll subjects. Also, at the time of consent all subjects/representatives must be given a copy of the rights of research participants. The IRB wishes to remind you that the PI or Co-PI, is responsible for ensuring that ethically and legally effective informed consent has been obtained from all research subjects.

Finally, under the provisions of this institution’s Multiple Project Assurance (MPA #1509), the PI/Co-PI is directly responsible for submitting to the IRB any proposed change in the research or the consent document(s). In addition, any unanticipated adverse events involving risk to the subject or others must be promptly reported to the IRB. This project is subject to periodic review and surveillance by the IRB and, as part of their surveillance, the IRB may request periodic reports of progress and results. For projects which continue beyond one year, it is the responsibility of the principal investigator to initiate a request to the IRB for continuing review and update of the research project.

Sincerely,

Ernest D. Prentice, Ph.D.
Co-Chair, IRB

EDP/kje
Appendix D
Acceptance Level
Survey Cover Letter
Cover Letter

May 18, 2001

To: Elementary Classroom Teachers and Secondary Language Arts Teachers

From: Dr. Jef Johnston, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum

RE: Standards and Assessment Opinion Survey

As you are very much aware, throughout this year the 4th, 8th and 10th grade teachers in the Papillion-LaVista School District have been implementing the standards and assessment process for the language arts curriculum. This has been a difficult task that has added to the already busy workloads for these teachers. However, it is a task that was mandated by the State of Nebraska and is important to the students and residents in the Papillion-LaVista School District.

The implementation of standards and assessments has the potential to provide all of us with good information on student achievement. However, if the standards and assessment implementation process is not managed appropriately and implemented in a manner that you, the classroom teacher, feel involved, our potential for failure is great. Therefore, we are asking for your assistance.

Attached you will find the first part of a two part survey. The purpose of the survey is to assess how accepting teachers are of the standards and assessment implementation. We are asking that each of you openly and honestly complete the survey. It is important for us to know how teachers feel about the standards and assessment process. We can then use this information to make necessary changes.

Your participation is voluntary. However, if you choose to participate we will also ask that you complete the second part of the survey. The second part of the survey will ask you to identify colleagues that you trust and turn to for information regarding the standards and assessment process. It does not matter if these individuals are supportive or not supportive of the process, we are simply interested in whose opinions you value and trust. These identified individuals will then be asked to participate in focus groups where we will look in depth at the strengths and weaknesses of the standards and assessment implementation.

Prior to your agreeing to participate in this survey, we also want you to know that the data obtained from this research will be published as a part of a Masters thesis. However, when published, no names of individuals or schools will be used.

I want to thank you in advance for your participation. Your willingness to work together on the standards and assessment process will help as we implement standards and assessments in the other curriculum areas. It will also help us strengthen our language arts standards and assessments. But most importantly, it will help us improve our assessment of student achievement.
Appendix E

Acceptance Level

Survey Instrument
Standards and Assessment Questionnaire

Instructions: The Papillion-LaVista School District is looking at the standards and assessment implementation process in relation to the language arts curriculum. It is the goal of the District to collect information regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the process so changes can be made to improve the implementation. Participation is voluntary, and individual results will be kept confidential. If you choose to participate please answer the questions below. If you choose not to participate mark the line below and return it as if it was completed.

I am not participating.

Demographics (Circle one answer for each of the questions below)

1. At what school do you currently teach?
   - Anderson Grove
   - Carriage Hill
   - G. Stanley Hall
   - Golden Hills
   - LaVista West
   - Rumsey Station
   - Trumble Park
   - Papillion Junior High
   - LaVista Junior High
   - High School
   - Hickory Hills
   - Parkview Heights
   - Tara Heights
   - Walnut Creek

2. Are you currently implementing the standards and assessment process? Yes No

3. What grade level do you teach? ___________

4. What is your gender? male female

5. How many years have you been a teacher?
   - less than 5
   - 5-10 years
   - 11-15
   - more than 15

Acceptance measurement

Use the following 5-point scale to complete each of the survey questions below:
1 = not at all 2 = very little 3 = neutral 4 = almost completely 5 = completely
(Please circle the appropriate number)

1) To what extent do you view the standards as appropriate benchmarks for student learning? 1 2 3 4 5

2) To what extent do you view the assessments as an appropriate measurement of whether a student is achieving the identified standards? 1 2 3 4 5

3) To what extent do you accept the implementation of the overall standards and assessment process? 1 2 3 4 5
4) To what extent do you support the implementation of the overall standards and assessment process? 1 2 3 4 5

5) To what extent do you see the standards and assessment process as an improvement in how teachers in the Papillion-LaVista School District measure student achievement? 1 2 3 4 5

6) To what extent is your acceptance of the standards and assessments based on the fact that it is mandated by the Papillion-LaVista School District? 1 2 3 4 5

7) Are you someone others turn to for advice on the language arts standards and assessments? Yes No

8) Approximately how often do you talk with other Papillion-LaVista teachers regarding the Language Arts Standards and Assessments?
   - daily
   - weekly
   - monthly
   - never

9) In what setting do you most frequently talk about the standards and assessment process?
   - meeting format
   - teachers lounge
   - casual conversation
Appendix F

Opinion Leader Survey
Opinion Leader Survey

The School District is trying to find the individuals you talk to and trust regarding the implementation of standards and assessments. These individuals are people whose opinions are valued by staff members. Who comes to mind for each of the following questions? Please provide no more than two names for each question. The same name may be used to answer more than one question.

1. In relation to the standards and assessments in the language arts curriculum, whom do you turn to for advice?

2. In relation to the standards and assessments in the language arts curriculum, who do you most trust to give you advice?

3. Who has influenced your opinions regarding the standards and assessment process?

4. At which school do you teach?
   - Anderson Grove
   - Carriage Hill
   - G. Stanley Hall
   - Golden Hills
   - LaVista West
   - Rumsey Station
   - Trumble Park
   - Papillion Junior High
   - LaVista Junior High
   - High School
   - Hickory Hills
   - Parkview Heights
   - Tara Heights
   - Walnut Creek
Appendix G

Focus Group Invite
Focus Group Invite

September 24, 2001

Dear

We Need Your Help!!!

As you are very much aware, throughout the past year the 4th, 8th and 10th grade teachers implemented standards and assessments in the area of language arts. As a classroom teacher your input on the strengths and weakness of this implementation is very important. You may remember completing a survey last spring, where we asked all elementary classroom teachers and the secondary language arts teachers about their acceptance level towards the standards and assessment process. As a second part of that survey, we asked teachers to identify the colleagues whose opinions they value and trust. You were one of the individuals identified by your colleagues.

Now we need your help to complete our research! We are inviting you to participate in a focus group session on Wednesday, October 3rd at 3:30 pm. The purpose of the focus group is to have open in depth discussion regarding the standards and assessment process. We would like to learn what you see as the strengths and weakness and what you would suggest for improvements. As a teacher, you know better than anyone the overall sense of how you and your colleagues feel about the process. Your input is vital as we take the steps to make improvements.

The focus groups will take no longer than one hour. All information shared within the focus group will be kept confidential and your identity will not be shared publicly. All meetings will be in the Central Office Conference Room. For the focus groups to be effective we need to assure that we have a broad representation of the District. Therefore, please RSVP to me via phone (537-6209) or email by September 28, 2001.

Thanks for your help!

Annette Eyman,
Director of Communications
Appendix H

Questions for Opinion Leader Focus Groups
Focus Group Questions

1) Where did you first get your information regarding the standards and assessment process?

2) Which of these sources was influential? Why?

3) What other sources or experiences influenced your opinions?

4) How do you view the standards and assessment process? Why?

5) What do you view as the strengths and weaknesses of the standards and assessment process?

6) How could the standards and assessment process be improved?

7) How should the district proceed with gaining acceptance by all teachers for the standards and assessment process?
Appendix I

Opinion Leader Transcripts
Focus Group A

1st Sources of Information
* Meetings – reading meetings
* Talk between teachers
* When establishing NCA goals began talking about standards
* Talked about on reading committee but never saw until 4th grade got materials
* Knew it was coming from media
* Knew from talk it was coming
* Came from another District - knew from there
* Reading Committee
* Talked about on portfolio committee but didn’t really know what it was

Influential
* The assessments were respectable – knew that because they weren’t in isolation
* Felt there was a connection between the assessments and the curriculum
* Being involved in the process
* Worked on the committee

Strengths
* Principal offered release time to review materials – felt supported
* Time offered comfort level
* Made it through a year – 4th grade teachers are experienced
* They provide us a focus
* Liked-having opportunity to make changes last spring
* Notebook was good
* Ties to the curriculum – already teaching and doing
* After we got into it we realized it is not as bad as we thought it would be

Areas of Concern
* Not all Principals offered release time
* Administrators have to buy in and support – they have to understand the process
* Need uninterrupted time to prepare
* Anxiety is now at other grade levels – feel they are behind
* Need information in time to implement
* Need information in time to review
* Just hearing about it not enough – want the materials to keep from the training
* Don’t understand why we are completing “best practice” sheet
  - maybe because everyone was doing their own thing
  - was negative because the sheets – take a lot of time to date
* Didn’t know who the language arts committee was – like it was a big secret
* Don’t know what happens with results
* Other than 4th grade, teachers don’t see the connection or purpose
* Not all 4th grade sees the connection
* Haven’t seen the results
* Attitude of administration – Just do it – not very supportive
Very overwhelming

Suggestions for Improvement
* Need more support / empathy / encouragement that all is going to be fine
* The timing of information needs to be improved – Need notebooks earlier
* Specialists need to be required to be included – not optional (i.e.: HAL SPED)
* Administrators need to be more knowledgeable
* Administrators need to validate importance by providing time and showing support
* Need to be more open with the process and who is on the committee
* Parents need to understand why
* Need little pieces so not so overwhelming

Focus Group B
1st Sources of Information
* Language Arts committee
* Meetings at school
* Media
* General talk – info from legislature

Influential
* Realized it wasn’t new – we were already doing
* Being involved in the beginning on the committee
* We are already doing
* It was ok because we were already teaching – tied to curriculum – now that 4th grade teachers
  are done much more comfortable with process
* Being involved in developing the process – knowing it was coming
* Knowing horror stories from Texas and that our process was so much better
* Can see the positive but it is hard to accept because it is something else to do – particularly the paperwork

Strengths
* Need to go through the process before you can feel comfortable
* 4th grade teachers can see how it is driving instruction but other teachers can’t
* Smaller meetings are better
* Assessments this way are more meaningful
* Felt like I was doing everything right but now I realize that things need to change
* Letting teachers be frustrated is ok
* Using our own teachers as experts is a positive
* Study teams were offered in our school that was very positive
* Administrative involvement in our school
* Staff helping each other is strength
* Ties to the curriculum

Areas of Concern
* Teachers were very overwhelmed – recording and paperwork
* Need to be careful that we aren’t assessing for the purpose of assessing
* A lot we are already doing – but didn’t realize at first because of timing of information
* Very overwhelming at first
* Would have helped to have information/notebooks early
* The volume of paperwork very overwhelming
* Some of it we knew but some of the assessments were very new
* Needed help with electronic pieces
*Assessments need to guide planning as much as instruction – give us time to do right
*The timing of the information caused a lot of problems and hard feelings towards the process
*District training not always led in a positive manner – told to do or else – threatening to ask questions if we didn’t understand

**Suggestions for Improvement**
*Get community to support paid teacher leave (early dismissal time)
*Make suggestions for what can be taken away
*Provide time to fill out paperwork
*Have the people who wrote the assessments communicate them
*Need positive strokes
*Need positive perks
*Philosophy of assessments is very new need time to accept
*Teachers need to understand why we chose to do assessments this way
*Timing of information needs to be improved
*Administrative support and understanding is some schools

**Focus Group C**

**1st Sources of Information**
*Media
*Building level presentations
*Knew it was coming from general talk but didn’t know it was here until building level presentations

**Influential**
*Being on math committee made it real
*Being involved in the process
*Assessments were good – provided continuity in what is taught
*Materials were very valuable

**Strengths**
*Inservices that were provided were valuable (six trait and literature circles)
*Fits well NCA – one focus
*Teachers were involved in the process
*Teachers need to take ownership
*After experiencing begin to see big picture
*Teachers have to experience to see big picture
*Previously teachers spent a lot time doing their own thing in the classroom – projects that don’t fit the curriculum – this gives us a focus
*Gives opportunity to look at what we are teaching and prioritize
*Gives us the priorities
*Not hard to do but takes time – need time
*Using our own experts (i.e.: sound companion) good to know teachers in our own district are using and supportive – comforting
*Teachers helping teachers
*Fits with NCA – gives us focus

**Areas of Concern**
*Other grade level still don’t get big picture – don’t know what PLUS is
*Information came out so late
*New reading series at same time was very overwhelming
*Time commitment – felt all you were doing was assessing
*Teachers don’t get big picture
*Very overwhelming
*Lots of paperwork with no time to do – takes time away from kids
*Don’t see how assessment drives instruction
*Will data drive instruction?
*Haven’t seen results
*Teachers generally not good data collectors – operate from gut
*Not taught in college what to do with data – not a strength of teachers
*Need to fit with NCA – doubling effort
*Need reflection time – what does this data tell us?
*No time to sit and look at weak areas
*Committee members didn’t take a lot of ownership

**Suggestions for Improvement**
*Need release time for training
*Would be nice to regroup as a district – all 4th grade teachers – what does all this mean
*Have administrators question your activities – if it doesn’t fit don’t do it – may mean some of the “fun” activities get cut
*Needs to come out more in steps - not so overwhelming
*4th grade teachers and committee members need to help make other grades more aware
*Need time to work on assessments – time to plan
*Maybe have PTO’s cover classrooms – give building teams time to plan and do paperwork
*Look at early release time (Millard concept)
*Teachers need to hear “not anything you’re not already doing”
*Committee members need to take negative people under their wings – they know who the negative people will be in their school
*Need cheerleaders in each school

**Focus Group D - Secondary**

**1st Sources of Information**
*Had the paper cut out and posted
*Knew it was coming
*Heard at an inservice meeting at high school

**Influential**
*Being involved on the committee

**Strengths**
*Going to make us, though we haven’t done that yet, sit down and look at our entire curriculum
*Our curriculum needs to be revamped – (i.e.: grammar big part of our curriculum but not state standards – need to look at priorities)
*Forced us to look at our curriculum – which should have been done years ago
*Assessments are suppose to go into our curriculum – the assessments made us look at our teaching and say hey we are doing this
*Made us see the holes in our curriculum (i.e.: English 10 no reading)
*Made us talk to each other in the English department – we were all scrambling so it forced us to share how we each accomplished different things.
*It is forcing us to look at curriculum and say are we teaching the things that we should be teaching – if we are teaching these things then let’s assess what we are teaching. Ultimately these assessments are to go along with the curriculum so they are not high stakes tests.

**Areas of Concern**

*Don’t remember ever being asked to be on the committee  
*Not enough time to adequately pull it all together  
*Didn’t get notebooks until November were suppose to start in October  
*Timing of notebooks led to starting process feeling very negative  
*Language arts needed to lay the groundwork it took more time to do that  
*Panic ked to get it all in  
*Needs to match the curriculum better  
*The tools used at the junior high didn’t match the curriculum – they weren’t drawn from the curriculum but were added on –  
*According to Jef, the purpose was to draw from what you teach but that didn’t happen at the junior high  
*There was some misunderstanding because at first it was believed that we couldn’t use what was already in our curriculum  
*We teach 7 short stories and we were told we had to add 3 more because it couldn’t come from the curriculum  
*At the high school the reading had to be an addition because we don’t teach reading  
*Because of assessments there were over 20 days that we lost of instruction time not to mention the amount of time grading  
*That is one thing that is so much better for the math – it fits right along with the curriculum  
*The curriculum in English 10 wasn’t clearly defined prior to this – everyone kind of did their own thing so some of it had to be additional but pieces of it fit.  
*Overwhelming because Language Arts encompasses speaking, listening, reading, and writing – should these be included in science and social studies also?  
*Didn’t have enough time to write the assessments because they were so large – that led to timing issues  
*I don’t teach fluency but I have to assess it – therefore, I am assessing something I have no control over.  
*Fluency seemed to be added at the end – at first we weren’t going to do it and then we had to  
*If we are doing what we are suppose to “best practices” – having them reading out loud – then we are teaching fluency.  
*But at one time I am told don’t have them read out loud unless they have practiced and other I told do – don’t know if I should or shouldn’t  
*Computer aid was very helpful in administrating fluency  
*Big difference between elementary and secondary 30 verses 130 kids to assess  
*At the junior high the frustration came from the fact that we now we have to do additional on top of what we are teaching  
*The frustration came from not being involved in the process  
*It was not curriculum based  
*At first the committee thought it had to be something the students hadn’t seen before so it was set up as being in addition to  
*Not only were we frustrated with the assessments, but we were changing literature books on top of it  
*At the junior high still waiting for notebooks for this year –  
*Volunteered to work on it over the summer to help fix – waited all summer but never asked to help – won’t volunteer again  
*Was told from CO that no one volunteered to help so they weren’t updated
*Had copy of email from the junior high to the CO that asked when we can get together to update? Response was let’s wait until school starts.
*So we waited and not it is the end of the first quarter and nothing has happened – don’t even have notebooks
*At the high school decided as a team with administrative support from the high school – to go through another year and then look at changes.
*Don’t understand why we have to do each assessment three times?
*If they came out of curriculum that would be fine but if it is in addition.
*At the high school we talked and decided to give it another year
*The 8th grade writing prompt was so bad
*Kids had no ownership in this, maybe that was teacher attitude, if not graded kids don’t care.
*At the high school we made them count as a grade.
*At the high school we have a lot of support from our asst. principal that is working with us. She made the writing assessment work because it changed at the last minute from 10th grade to 11th.
*The leadership at the high school has been great.
*The only one from the junior high school that has been involved is the department leader and as 8th grade teachers we don’t see her. No one else has been involved or given that leadership.
*The leadership at the high school tells us they want us to succeed. She had been very involved all along.
*She came to the meetings and always knew what was going on. Even when they were being written, she would attend meetings and offer suggestions.
*If we were having problems, she would trouble shoot or involve Dr. Johnston and then we would work through as a team
*At the junior high, it is not that they aren’t supportive just that they are not involved. In fact, the NCA process is duplicating the reading fluency because no one is involved in the assessments to even know that we are already doing that
*Some of the junior high teachers may have their notebooks but don’t know if the guts are in it.
*Thought we were going to revise so we pitched pieces of it.
*Haven’t seen the results
*Sounds like the level of frustration is so high that we won’t want teachers answering questions
*Having not been involved in the process from the beginning makes it very difficult to support.
*They were written for the 8th grade without 8th grade teachers involved
*Heard about process at an inservice meeting but we weren’t given the notebooks. Got the notebooks in November and found out the first assessment was due in October.
*Morale at the junior high is low - we are working our butts off and know that we are not looking good. Need to know where to met, when to meet and what needs to be done.

**Suggestions for Improvement**
*At the high school the dialogue is happening on how can we be sure the assessments tie to the curriculum
*Communication has to be improved
*Would like a one page summary from meetings – outlining what happened
*Need to know who is in charge of secondary assessments Connie, Jef, anyone? No one wants to be in charge of secondary. Need one drummer to follow.
*We are sitting back going who cares?
*Slap our hands if they need to be slapped but let’s move forward. We need the meat and potatoes of the assessments – they need to match curriculum
*Someone needs to take the leadership at the junior high
*Want to be told what to do.
*Would have been nice to have some organization or group meetings at the building level.
*Need time to share
*Need to have discussion on what we are doing
*Need someone to take a leadership role at the junior high and sit down with the teachers to look at the curriculum and assessments and determine where to go from here.
*At the high school we are doing a 9-12 curriculum toolbox with administrative leadership.
*Need meetings at beginning of the year – November a little late to pull teachers together – still don’t know time and place of meetings.
Appendix J

Opinion Leader Results
By
School
### Opinion Leaders By School

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