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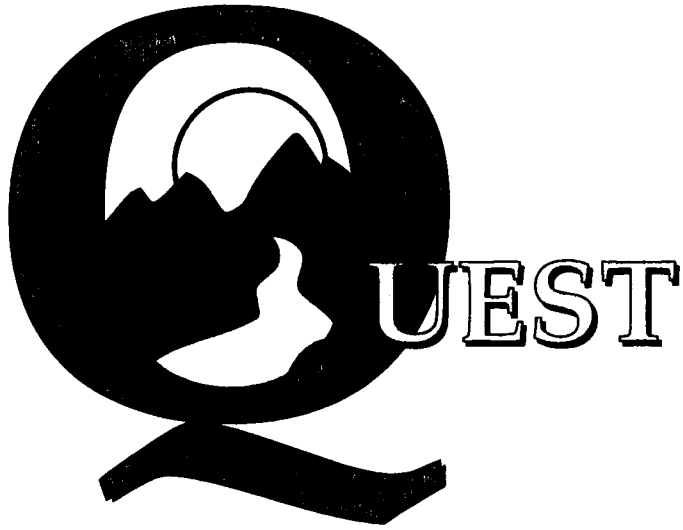
ABSTRACT

As part of its contract to develop a framework for continuous school improvement in its four-state region (Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia), Appalachia Educational Laboratory staff designed the Quest project. Based upon principles of inquiry, collaboration, and action research, Quest supports and investigates ongoing school improvement efforts through conferences (renamed rallies), summer symposia, a Scholars program, visits to participating schools, communication via listserv and mailings, and the creation of a Quest network of schools. This report describes and assesses the second high school network rally, convened February 8-10, 1998, at Pipestem State Park, near Bluefield, West Virginia. Teams of students, teachers, parents, and administrators from each of seven high schools attended. A total of 42 participants attended, 16 of whom had participated in the first conference. Evaluation data were generated by evaluator participant observation, unstructured interviews, feedback forms, and pre-rally and follow-up questionnaires. Data indicate that the conference's four goals--reconnect with colleagues, think about student learning, create a creed embodying shared beliefs about student learning, and commit to action--were successfully achieved. Participants appreciated the opportunity to discuss school improvement with colleagues from the region, and most reported that the focus on student learning was useful. Three months later, many participants reported school improvement activities at their schools, but some wrote that their teams had not met since the rally. Recommendations are presented for improving future rallies. Appendices present feedback forms, pre-rally and follow-up questionnaires, and the evaluation standards checklist. Contains 14 references. (Author/TD)

Evaluation of QUEST High School Network Rally, February 1998



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AEL's mission is to link the knowledge from research with the wisdom from practice to improve teaching and learning. AEL serves as the Regional Educational Laboratory for Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. For these same four states, it operates both a Regional Technology in Education Consortium and the Eisenhower Regional Consortium for Mathematics and Science Education. In addition, it serves as the Region IV Comprehensive Technical Assistance Center and operates the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of its contract to develop a framework for continuous school improvement in its four-state Region, Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) staff designed the QUEST project. Based upon principles of inquiry, collaboration, and action research, QUEST proposes to support and investigate ongoing school improvement efforts through bi-annual conferences—which staff renamed rallies, summer symposia, a Scholars program, visits to participating schools, communication via listserv and mailings, and the creation of a QUEST network of schools. This evaluation report describes and assesses the second high school network rally, convened February 8-10, 1998.

One team from each of seven schools participated in the rally; five schools had been involved in the earlier rally for high schools, while the remaining two schools were new to QUEST. A total of 42 people attended, 16 of whom had participated in the prior rally. There were three principals, three assistant principals, nineteen teachers, nine students, seven parents, and one central office supervisor of adolescent education in attendance.

The rally was evaluated in terms of whether and to what extent the rally goals were met. To this end, a variety of data were gathered: field notes were taken during evaluator participant observation of all rally activities; participants completed a pre-rally questionnaire, two written feedback forms, and a follow-up questionnaire administered several months after the rally; and unstructured interviews were conducted throughout the conference. The follow-up questionnaire also enabled assessment of the impact QUEST had upon participating schools.

Analysis of the feedback data revealed that participants thought that the rally goals had been met well. Many appreciated the opportunity to discuss school improvement with colleagues from across the AEL Region, and most reported that the rally focus on student learning had been useful. Follow-up data suggested that some schools had begun to plan and implement what might be deemed school improvement projects, although some QUEST teams had been unable to meet since the rally.

Based upon these data, the evaluator concluded that the rally for high schools had continued to provide support and encouragement to those undertaking continuous school improvement, particularly on the personal level. Recommendations included increasing QUEST staff participation in group discussions, modifying the pace of rally activities, developing activities more relevant to parents, and offering school teams more time to convene during project events.

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1996, QUEST staff at the Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) began working with teams from school communities in three West Virginia county school districts to invigorate efforts for continuous school improvement, using a variety of techniques for gathering input from all those with a stake in their local schools (Howley-Rowe, 1998c). This first "learning community," called Leadership to Unify School Improvement Efforts (LUSIE), was comprised of school teams including students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community members. Ultimately, this group wrote individual school visions and improvement plans, and co-authored (with AEL) *Creating Energy for School Improvement* (1997), a supplemental guide for those poised to write their own state-mandated school improvement plans.

QUEST staff also were committed to creating learning communities devoted to exploring continuous school improvement across the AEL Region. Hence, staff scheduled a pilot Inquiry Into Improvement conference in April 1997 for selected Region high schools. Schools were selected in several ways. Some schools were recommended for the QUEST experience by central office staff or school administrators. Other schools were asked to join QUEST because they had participated in previous AEL programs. Still other schools were invited because QUEST staff believed they were primed for the kind of collaborative inquiries into school improvement QUEST was designed to provide.

In October 1997, in Roanoke, Virginia, another conference was held for designated high schools in AEL's Region, this time with an explicit emphasis on forming and nurturing a network of schools (Howley-Rowe, 1998b). A similar conference was held in Nashville, Tennessee, for designated Region elementary schools in November 1997 (Howley-Rowe, 1998a). In order to facilitate the development of a QUEST school network and to continue to help invigorate continuous school improvement efforts within network schools, staff planned a sequence of events following these initial conferences. Dissatisfied with the conventional and prescriptive connotation of "conference," QUEST staff chose to call these events "rallies." Thus, all events previously called conferences are now termed "rallies." This report summarizes evaluation of the third high school rally, held in February 1998, in terms of how well rally goals were met. These goals were (1) to reconnect with one another, individually and collectively, and as member schools; (2) to think, individually and collectively, about student learning; (3) to create a creed embodying shared beliefs about student learning; and (4) to commit to action in participants' respective school communities.

The primary audience for this report is QUEST staff. It is intended to provide information to staff as they make decisions about future rallies and the development of the network. In addition, this report will be a part of an ongoing series of reports about QUEST events (Howley-Rowe, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c). This series will document the evolution of the QUEST network and the process whereby staff strive to enable continuous school improvement. Consequently, this report may also prove useful to others interested in building networks or promoting school improvement over time.

One purpose of this report is to assess whether, and to what extent, rally goals were met. In addition, this report discusses the ways in which the February 1998 rally compared to the earlier

QUEST conferences. And the report attends to participants' assessments of the impact the rally had upon their schools, their QUEST teams, and their individual perceptions. The description and analysis of the rally also contribute to ongoing documentation of the QUEST project and of the development of the QUEST network.

METHODOLOGY

The methods used for this evaluation component of the QUEST project were qualitative. During the rally, the evaluator engaged in participant observation (Becker & Geer, 1957; Emerson, 1983; Glazer, 1972; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1980), a method highly suited "for studying processes, relationships among people and events, the organization of people and events, continuities over time, and patterns" (Jorgensen, 1989, p. 12). Furthermore, consistent with the QUEST paradigm, participant observation involves "a flexible, open-ended, opportunistic process and logic of inquiry through which what is studied constantly is subject to redefinition based on field experience and observation" (Jorgensen, 1989, p. 23). This method "is a commitment to adopt the perspective of those studied by sharing in their . . . experiences" (Denzin, 1989, p. 156), thereby enabling researchers to evaluate how an event or process appears and feels to participants. By "exploit[ing] the capacity that any social actor possesses for learning new cultures, and the objectivity to which this process gives rise," participant observation further produces data that is both rich and valid (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p. 8).

During this rally, the evaluator played a role more akin to what Denzin typifies as "observer as participant," rather than as a complete participant observer (1989). That is, the evaluator's contact with rally attendees was not as a participant in the activities in which they were engaged, but instead as a roaming onlooker and occasional conversationalist. The evaluator sat in on participant group endeavors, watched the large group as the rally unfolded, shared evening entertainment activities, and took advantage of serendipitous occasions to chat.

In order to corroborate the theses generated by participant observation, the evaluator also analyzed data from the feedback forms designed by QUEST staff soliciting participant assessment of the process (see Appendix A). Using several data sources in order to corroborate theses is what Brewer and Hunter (1989) call "multimethod research" or "triangulation." This approach posits that the strengths of each method will compensate for the weaknesses in others, ultimately providing a more complete account of that being studied. Hence, in addition to participant observation, two evaluation forms were used to collect further information. One feedback form asked attendees to discuss their experiences during the first day and a half of the rally. This form asked participants to record: "Learnings, insights, aha's from the day," "Ways in which I contributed," "Things I want to explore further," "Things that worked especially well for me," "Things that would have allowed me to contribute more," and "Things to trash." The second feedback form was distributed at the very end of the rally and asked participants for their evaluations of specific activities, such as Jigsaw and Snowflake. This form also provided prompts for attendees to complete based on the rally goals (e.g., "I connected with . . . ," "I am committed to . . . .").

Participants also completed a pre-rally questionnaire immediately prior to the beginning of the rally (see Appendix B). This questionnaire sought participants' perceptions about the impact the previous QUEST rally had on individuals, within school teams, and in the larger school community.

In addition, the questionnaire requested participants to describe the impact of the QUEST listserv. Finally, it asked respondents to discuss their expectations for the upcoming QUEST gathering.

Unstructured interviews also were conducted during the course of the rally. As opportunities arose for relatively private conversation, participants were asked to discuss their assessments of the rally generally and of the achievement of rally goals specifically. Interview responses were later categorized and analyzed by theme.

Additionally, QUEST listserv activity was monitored. Often, participants chose to communicate privately via e-mail with QUEST staff rather than with the entire network via the listserv; these communications were reported to the evaluator. Other data came from QUEST staff following each rally during "debriefing" activities; staff shared their assessments of the rally and reported interactions with participants that they found significant.

Finally, participants responded to a mailed questionnaire three months after the rally (see Appendix C). This questionnaire, sent to all who had attended the February rally, asked respondents to discuss the rally's impact upon them at the individual level. It also asked respondents to describe what activities, if any, their QUEST team had engaged in following the rally; what changes, if any, had taken place within their schools due to participation in QUEST; the extent and nature of communication with QUEST participants from other schools; and suggestions for the improvement of QUEST itself. Respondents were asked additionally to mark which of several listed QUEST activities they were planning to attend. Participants who had not returned completed questionnaires were sent a reminder card three weeks after the initial mailing. A second reminder was sent four weeks later with an additional copy of the questionnaire and stamped, addressed return envelope.

Analyses of participant observation field notes, interview data, evaluation forms, follow-up forms, and QUEST communications were made by question, but more often by theme.

RALLY ACTIVITIES

Convened in Pipestem State Park, near Bluefield, West Virginia, February 8-10, 1998, the third rally for selected Region high schools sought to bring together teams, both those new to QUEST and those already involved, to focus on student learning. One team from each of seven schools participated; five schools had been involved in the previous rally for high schools, while the remaining two schools were new to QUEST. An eighth school had planned to attend, but severe weather prohibited their participation. The seven school teams who were able to attend consisted of students, teachers, and parents, as well as school administrators. One school team included a central office staff member as well. A total of 42 people attended the rally, 16 of whom had participated in the earlier rally in Roanoke. There were three principals, three assistant principals, nineteen teachers, nine students, seven parents, and one central office supervisor of adolescent education in attendance.

The rally began with a welcome from the facilitators to the participants, after which participants engaged in an activity meant to facilitate introductions of inquiry group members. The inquiry groups, made up of participants from different schools, states, and role groups, sat around rectangular tables. There were a total of nine inquiry groups, each consisting of between four to five participants, around the conference room. On each table were yellow name placards; colorful wooden windcatchers; containers of markers, pens, tape, and other supplies; and a large QUEST three-ring binder for each new participant. The binder included an explication of the QUEST framework, essays on school improvement, activity guidelines, and room for participants to add additional materials. Staff had placed posters of quotes pertinent to inquiry and school improvement around the perimeter of the room, as well as several tables filled with books, resources, and extra supplies to the side. Participants were dressed casually.

As the rally continued, QUEST facilitators, while focusing on exploring the question "What supports or hinders student learning?" modeled several processes for gathering data from school communities. Hence, the use of processes such as Snowflake, Jigsaw, and Mind Map served the dual purpose of allowing attendees to think constructively about student learning and success and of displaying activities that might be useful in local school improvement efforts. Briefly, Snowflake is a process whereby participants generate ideas that represent components of a larger concept; attendees then categorize the various ideas collectively. Jigsaw is a method of distributing knowledge to a large group by first asking each member of each small group to focus on one aspect of a broader concept. These individuals then convene within "expert groups" to discuss and explore their particular piece of the larger concept, after which they each return to their inquiry groups to share their insights. And Mind Map is a process whereby a large group creates a visual representation of their ideas and the relationships between them.

To support discussion of student learning, staff focused on the QUEST concept of SMART learners. The acronym represents Successful, Motivated, Autonomous, Responsible, and Thoughtful learners. This is one of the six major components of the QUEST framework for continuous

improvement, and is included to suggest that student learning must be considered a vital part of ongoing improvement work. QUEST staff used these traits as a springboard to explore the central question of the rally: "What supports or hinders student learning?"

Another focus of the rally was action; that is, participants were asked to think about what projects or activities they might undertake back in their school communities to inform or organize school improvement. Some school teams considered action research projects, while others planned to involve the broader community in discussions about what might improve student learning in their schools.

These foci were reflected in the rally goals; the facilitators posted these on butcher paper in the conference room at the beginning of the rally. These goals were (1) to reconnect with one another, individually and collectively, and as member schools; (2) to think, individually and collectively, about student learning; (3) to create a creed embodying shared beliefs about student learning; and (4) to commit to action in participants' respective school communities.

Day One

After a welcome from the facilitators, during which the goals and foci for the rally were described, attendees were asked to consider adopting several "habits" during their participation. These included asking questions "from a place of genuine not knowing," "suspend[ing] judgment," "reflect[ing] on your own experiences and assumptions," "listen[ing] deeply," and "maintain[ing] the focus on questions, not answers." QUEST staff also briefly described the sorts of activities and groups in which participants would be involved over the course of the rally.

Participants were seated at tables, having been assigned their positions by QUEST staff. In order to facilitate introductions and reconnections among network members, the facilitators asked participants to engage in an activity in which inquiry group members responded to various prompts provided in their QUEST binders. These prompts, titled "Networking Notes," asked questions about a variety of topics from professional experiences to favorite meals. Attendees appeared to enjoy this activity very much, laughing and making jokes.

After this activity, the facilitators gave a history of the QUEST project. They discussed the project vision and values, using a large picture of a tree, rainbow, and sun to illustrate the various components of QUEST. Then they requested that participants read a description of an ideal school according to the QUEST vision; attendees were then to "look for the one concept [written in the excerpt] that most captures you." The evaluator listened as one group discussed this. One network member thought that the concept of collaboration was most important, asking "how do you do that—that's the question!" To which another replied, "Well, yeah, that's why we're here—to get ideas and methods." Still another added, "I have to agree with you. If you have collaboration, then you'll eventually get around to putting it together." A parent participant noted that including parents in continuous school improvement efforts was necessary.

The facilitators then asked participants to share their thoughts with the whole group. Three groups reported that their members thought collaboration was an important component of the QUEST vision. Other groups mentioned characteristics such as proactivity, the notion that "everyone's a learner," and student-centered teaching. Two student participants reported that they believed risk taking to be a significant part of the QUEST vision. An attendee asked how she might involve everyone in improvement efforts, noting the difficulty of this. One of the facilitators answered, "One of our major jobs is to energize you, because only you can do the work."

Next, a staff member presented some information about AEL and the resources it had available. After this, participants were asked to convene with network members from their schools to discuss what they had done since the last rally. Schools newly joining QUEST were to consider what they were hoping for from the rally and involvement with QUEST. Project staff then requested school teams to write their activities on a large QUEST time line, indicating what work they had accomplished when. Attendees then gave brief reports of this information to the larger group. One school said that they intended to conduct a self-study the following year; they were attending "to get ideas." Another school reported that they had presented a PowerPoint presentation about QUEST to their faculty, discussed QUEST at an interclub council meeting, and "worked on shared leadership." A principal noted that her school had completed a unified school improvement plan as a result of participating in an earlier QUEST pilot, LUSIE. She reported that her school had since set higher standards for student learning, although she "sees things we still need to do." A team from another school mentioned that they had instituted a student recognition process through their faculty senate. One principal said that he had noted enhanced parent involvement, and an evaluation team visiting his school had surveyed community members who "seem to think we're doing okay in terms of education." A parent shared that the QUEST team from her school had made presentations about the project to their advisory council, student government association, and parent organization. A parent committee had undertaken to improve signs around the school building, and another committee had begun reviewing the school improvement plan, considering the ways in which they might incorporate some of the ideas they had taken from QUEST.

At 5:45 p.m., the facilitators asked attendees to transition to a new activity, Data on Display. In this activity, participants were provided a sheet with several questions. The directions asked participants to "Read each statement . . . and decide the extent to which this statement is true for your [school or organization], with 0 being 'not at all' and 100 being 'to a very high extent.' Place an 'x' at the appropriate point on the continuum." The continuum included 10 anchors in 10-point increments. On the wall were charts that each displayed one of the questions as well as a 10-point continuum. Each question was written in a different-colored ink. After responding to the questions on their individual sheets, participants were asked to place Post-it notes (which corresponded to the color-coded questions) along the 10-point scales on the wall charts. By placing their ratings on the poster paper sheets, participants created several graphs representing their collective responses, which they then discuss.

Attendees appeared to enjoy this activity; they talked quietly at first and then began to discuss the implications of the data they had generated as the graphs were completed. Several people

noted their disappointment at what the data revealed. For instance, as she analyzed responses to a question concerning the percent of successful learners attendees believed their school contained, one participant said, "10 to 15 %! I couldn't believe it—that's your problem there!" Another said, "In my professional opinion, all of these should be 100%." "But it's not reality," replied a group member. "But it could be," another rejoined. In another group, students discussed the various ways in which social promotion was supported by their schools and communities. "It's okay because the community protects them, because they're not going to leave," reported a student from a rural district.

After discussing the data in their inquiry groups, participants were then asked to discuss some of the inferences they had drawn from the data. In fact, many continued to ask questions. These included, "What *is* a successful learner?," "What's the effect of class size [on success]?" and "How does the community support learning?" After some vigorous discussion and conjecture about the data, one of the facilitators asked attendees to consider Data on Display as a tool they might use back in their schools. The group was silent in response, and then collectively laughed at their silence. The other facilitator rephrased the question: "Would you consider using this process? And why or why not?" The group then spent some time discussing this, making the point several times that school improvement could be "launched" by discussion with school communities. Finally, the facilitators asked participants to write in their journals, reflecting on the day's events. Attendees wrote quietly and then began to disperse for the evening.

Day Two

The second day began with facilitators asking role-alike groups to convene. That is, all the administrators sat together, the parents sat elsewhere, students were at one table, and teachers met as a group. They were then to use the "Networking Notes" prompts in their binders to introduce each other. During a brief interview with the evaluator, a parent said, "The more I learn about [QUEST], the more I like it."

In the next activity, Mind Map, role-alike groups were first to discuss what traits they thought successful learners possessed. The evaluator listened as one group conversed. "Is passing class being a successful learner?" asked one group member. "If he gets a B, is he a successful learner?" asked another. "I think it goes back to being a productive citizen," said a participant. Another agreed, " I think maybe teachers look at it from a narrow point of view." Success, offered yet another, "depends on where you are in the setting," referring to grade and ability level. A participant asked further, success "doesn't mean they're all college-bound, but are they flourishing in society?" For this attendee, the notion of citizenship continued to be an important indicator of success. The group then discussed how some very academically successful students were also "socially inept." Ultimately, the discussants in the group appeared to believe that success did not refer only to intellectual ability.

In the second phase of the activity, participants generated a diagram representing their collective thoughts about successful learners and illustrating the ways in which various ideas connected with one another. Collectively, participants believed that successful learners were goal-oriented, responsible, explorative, collaborative, self-motivated, balanced, persistent, independent, and mature. Participants also thought that successful learners possess ability to retain and apply knowledge, share knowledge with others, receive high grades, participate in extracurricular activities, move forward, reach their personal potential, have positive attitudes, learn beyond the classroom, meet teachers' goals, are happy, solve problems, are willing to struggle, overcome obstacles, know their own learning styles, have a work ethic, self-monitor, challenge teachers, and contribute to the teaching and learning dynamic. During discussion following this activity, one teacher said in reference to the traits listed on the Mind Map, "[This] is very demanding. I don't have a lot of students who look like this." Another participant commented that 10% of students are the high achievers who possess many of the traits listed, and 10% are low achievers. These 20%, the attendee continued, take up 80% of teacher time; the rest "fall by the wayside." One of the facilitators asked, "How can *we* help that 80% [of students] adopt habits of successful learners?" adding that "we don't have the formula. That's part of our quest." One participant replied that funding constrained teachers' ability to address such an issue. "Okay, resources are part of it. But outside of that, what can *we* do?," returned a facilitator. A student answered that it was "a matter of not being content" with one's own learning and teaching. Another student shared his grandmother's oft-repeated phrase, "Your attitude determines your altitude." The group also discussed the relationship between the traits listed and state standards for student achievement. One attendee said that achieving one's individual potential may have nothing to do with state standards. One of the facilitators agreed that there was a tension between the two ways of assessing success. She also noted that some of the traits listed on the Mind Map were contradictory, making the point that success was a difficult notion to define.

Following a break, participants repeated the Data on Display activity, this time using the variously colored Post-it notes to represent their role groups. Then QUEST staff announced a new project component, the Scholars program, and began another activity in which attendees were to discuss their responses to several questions, including, "What do teachers do to support student learning?," "What do parents do to support learning?," and "What about the school itself supports or hinders student learning?" Next, the facilitators directed participants to return to the inquiry groups to which they had been assigned. QUEST staff then reiterated the rally goals, emphasizing that they hoped participants would think individually and collectively about student learning. They further described a few ways of thinking about assumptions. "We don't see things as they are; we see them as we are," staff had written on a piece of butcher paper. The facilitators discussed a definition of mental models and introduced a tool for revealing these—a "ladder of inferences"—depicting the often unconscious steps involved in making assumptions. In addition, QUEST staff provided participants with cards on which were printed various protocols for improved inquiry, advocacy, and listening. Participants were then asked to discuss what supports or hinders student learning, using the protocols to enhance their exchanges. After 10 minutes, staff requested that attendees write in their journals about the experience of using the protocols, and then asked if anyone was willing to share their experiences with the larger group. "I don't always analyze," said

one attendee. "Tina [pseudonym] asked me questions using the card. I had to stop and analyze [my answers]." A facilitator asked for an example. "She said, 'Why did you do it that way?,'" replied the participant. Another said, "I think we were all listening actively . . . I think it gave us a framework to get at more depth." "Questioning helped me to understand . . . because I had a totally different assumption about what she was saying," offered an attendee about a discussion in which he had participated. Joking amongst themselves, another group said, "We did not use the tool or the ladder. We were the control group." To the whole group, one participant said, "We got into more personal things." A facilitator asked if using the protocols had been a positive experience. "It took more time [than not using it would have]," answered an attendee. Another said, "I thought it was very positive . . . It increases understanding." One of the facilitators commented that "the room was a little quieter [during the activity] . . . People were leaning in [towards each other], with their hands on their temples . . . But maybe we're seeing the data we wanted to see." The group laughed.

After quickly analyzing the data from the second Data on Display activity, participants were to move on to a new activity, Snowflake. Participants first spent time in their inquiry groups brainstorming about what supports student learning, writing each brainstormed idea on Post-it notepaper. Groups then were to choose the one they felt to be most important and the one they agreed would be easiest to accomplish. The facilitators collected these Post-it notes and began the process of categorizing the compiled ideas by whole-group consent.

Next participants returned to their home school teams and were given a work sheet entitled "Taking the QUEST Home," which asked which of various processes and concepts presented might be useful to invigorate and support ongoing improvement in member schools. Participants answered individually and then discussed their answers in their inquiry groups. Most groups seemed to discuss the work sheet, while one discussed the havoc wreaked by an inadequate teacher at their school. QUEST staff asked if anyone would be willing to share what they thought might be useful. Two attendees said that they thought the various concepts explored during the rally could be communicated to their staff. Another suggested that the various input-gathering processes were valuable because "making the data visible makes it less abstract," adding that such processes were also amenable to student use because "graphs make more sense, mean more to them."

After returning to their inquiry groups, the facilitators explained the next activity, Jigsaw. This would focus on the various traits of SMART learners—Successful, Motivated, Autonomous, Responsible, and Thoughtful—and required each member of inquiry groups to choose one of the traits on which to focus. Thus, each group would have an "expert" on each trait. Next, each "expert" was to join a group of other "experts" on the same trait to read about and discuss a selection concerning that characteristic. Afterwards, the participants would return to their inquiry groups to share their new insights.

This activity appeared to proceed smoothly, with groups dividing up and then reconvening to discuss their combined insights concerning the concept of SMART learners. Following this activity, QUEST staff made several announcements about a hike scheduled after lunch, books for sale, and readings to be completed, and then dismissed participants for their lunch break.

When participants reconvened at 4:30 p.m., they watched excerpts from the movie *Mr. Holland's Opus* and a videotape of a Japanese geometry classroom, from which they then made further inferences about the elements that support or hinder student learning. These new inferences they wrote on Post-it notes, which QUEST staff collected and continued the process of categorizing for the Snowflake activity. The categorization took approximately 30 minutes.

At 6:01, the facilitators asked attendees to turn their attention to remembering a meaningful learning experience they had had. They were then asked to write a brief story about this. Staff explained that stories are "windows and mirrors"—windows into other people's perspectives and mirrors of our own experiences—and are thus useful for learning in community. Participants seemed to write their stories intently, and then smiled and leaned in toward each other as they listened to one another's stories. As participants finished sharing their stories, the facilitators asked attendees to discuss some of the themes from stories. These included the necessity of parent involvement and the benefits of persistence. By 6:35, QUEST staff announced that they had run out of time, and would be unable to debrief about using storytelling as a learning tool. They did, however, give participants a reading assignment for discussion the following day.

Day Three

On the final morning of the rally, participants began their day by convening in their school teams to discuss again some of the prompts on the work sheet "Taking the QUEST Home." The evaluator observed one school team as members discussed the potential usefulness and drawbacks of the Jigsaw process. The team also spent some time talking about "what as a school we need to focus on to continuously improve." "We need to let people know what continuous improvement is—some people don't know," said one group member.

QUEST staff also returned data to school teams from their administration of an instrument measuring the degree to which the schools functioned as professional learning communities. The facilitators asked participants to consider whether the data were useful and in what ways the feedback could be utilized. Teams spent some time first analyzing the data, saying, for instance, "We used to do a lot more of number four," and "I was surprised this was so low." One participant submitted that the instrument was useful because "I see it as addressing professional learning community, which our improvement projects will." Other participants wanted to make comparisons across schools: "It would be good to talk to teachers of the same subject from other schools." In reaction to her school's mean on an item concerning classroom observations, an attendee said to her team, "I think we can do it. It's a question of finding the time."

Next, the facilitators announced ongoing QUEST rallies and another new offering, summer symposia, which would be more like conventional professional development workshops than rallies were. QUEST staff then introduced a new activity, passing out a list of nine personal traits that promote continuous improvement. Each participant was asked to identify one trait they would most like to improve in themselves. Next, they were convened at one of nine stations around the room

corresponding to the traits. There, the participants discussed their reasons for wanting to enhance their chosen trait, and what they might undertake in order to do so. Interestingly, the group with the highest membership considered the "collaborative" trait. After their discussions, each group was to give a report to the larger group concerning what activity they might undertake in order to strengthen their chosen trait. The group discussing persistence, for example, reported that they needed to prioritize projects, work on staying focused, and learn to face disappointment. The group talking about being reflective said that they needed to evaluate their work more often, asking themselves "why do we do the things we do?" And the group discussing courage, after pretending to be afraid to report, said that they needed to remind themselves that their opinions are important and that risk taking is necessary for growth.

After breaking up the largest trait group into two groups, the facilitators "auctioned" the various categorized lists generated during the Snowflake activity to the trait groups. Synthesizing the ideas contained in each category, the trait groups were to write creeds about what supports student learning. During the 30 minutes participants engaged in this activity, the meeting room was filled with noise and discussion. Groups not only wrote creeds, they displayed them on poster paper with colorful illustrations. Once completed, the creeds were presented by each group to the larger group. Participants clapped and nodded in agreement as each was read. Two attendees volunteered to type the creeds and send them back to QUEST staff. A principal said, "think about doing this with a whole district—how powerful!"

Attendees then were directed to reconvene with their school teams for the remainder of the rally. One of the QUEST staff gave a brief presentation on structures for including student voice in school improvement work, distributing an AEL product in which student voice was central. Two participants described processes that they had used in their schools for garnering community input.

After discussing a reading selection and taking a brief break, participants watched a video concerning action research, which led them to talk about how action research might be a useful catalyst for school improvement efforts. Attendees left for lunch after several minutes of journal writing.

Approximately a third of the participants did not return from lunch for the remaining activities. One of the QUEST staff members offered network members yet another new project opportunity—site visits. She described several purposes for such a visit, including providing QUEST staff with a "snapshot" of network schools, investigating with each school what impacts student learning and school improvement, and providing some specific on-site technical assistance. The staff member continued with a discussion of the procedures and paperwork that would be involved with arranging visits.

In a final activity, the facilitators requested that attendees discuss what action research they might undertake once back in their schools. School teams quietly talked, while QUEST staff walked around the room, occasionally consulting with teams. One school appeared especially engaged in this discussion, while two others were distracted or discussed other topics. At 2:04 p.m., the

facilitators reminded participants about upcoming QUEST events, noting that they had already received one application to the Scholars program. Then they asked for brief reports concerning what action research teams planned to undertake. One school intended to research more "student-friendly schedules," while another planned to create a student QUEST advisory committee that would examine student success with parents and teachers. One school team wanted to receive more input from the rest of their faculty, but wanted to increase student voice in their school improvement work. Two school teams reported that they hoped to further explore the question concerning what supports student learning. "Mesh[ing] projects" was another school's intention, as well as increasing community involvement in creating a unified school improvement plan. A final school planned to focus on improving the performance of lower achievers, and hoped to solicit input from community members regarding the issue.

The rally ended amidst clapping and whistling. The facilitators thanked each other and the participants; the participants thanked the facilitators.

FINDINGS

Twenty-eight of the total 42 participants completed the pre-rally questionnaire, representing a return rate of 67%. Thirty-two attendees, or 76%, responded to the mid-rally feedback form. And 23 participants completed the final feedback form, a return rate of 55%. Other data include participant observation, unstructured interviews, and QUEST staff communications concerning network activity.

Comparative Findings

Perhaps the most significant difference between this rally and previous rallies was an improved overall rapport between participants. This rapport was evidenced in the quality and depth of attendees' discussions and in their personal comments about how they felt the rally was unfolding. One parent noted in a brief interview that whereas she had felt out of place and unsure of her role in the previous rally she attended, she now felt much more at ease. She noted that the emphasis on collaborative efforts to improve student learning made her role as a parent on the QUEST team much clearer to her. Eighty-three percent of attendees who completed the final feedback form answered the prompt "I connected with . . . " in terms of their interactions with other attendees. By comparison, 66% of respondents who completed this prompt immediately following the earlier high school rally in Roanoke mentioned other participants.

Relatedly, the facilitators represented the network as an ongoing entity with new projects and activities planned for the coming spring, summer, and fall. These activities included site visits to member schools, summer symposia on specific topics, the QUEST Scholars Program providing opportunities for participants to conduct research on school improvement in collaboration with QUEST staff, and an administrators' institute. Such projects provided opportunities for school teams to continue and deepen their involvement with the network. Several participants told the facilitators they planned to attend the symposia or apply to be a QUEST Scholar, indicating their willingness to continue involvement with the project. One student in particular submitted his application early, before the end of the rally. A QUEST staff member relates this student's experience: "Probably the most significant thing that happened was that Sean [pseudonym] filled out an application to be a QUEST scholar. Sean was a student--disenchanted, flunking as best as I understand, but very bright--who they [the school team] brought so they would have a 'diversity.' A couple other students had to cancel, and it turned out Sean was the only high school aged student from [that school]. His mother, a single-parent mom, felt badly about 'making' him come after the first afternoon--which she loved but thought he would have hated. Wrong! He told her he loved it. I think he connected with the kids in the group. Again, I wasn't in the midst of it, so I can't know in what ways he contributed. But this event *touched* Sean and his mother. That may have been the single most important thing that happened." Sean's experience may indicate that the QUEST network is growing, inclusive, and motivational even to those who are otherwise alienated from school.

Also, participants at this rally appeared to think that their ongoing participation in QUEST had impacted their school improvement efforts. As a QUEST staff member wrote, "I remember being pretty impressed, when they reported out what they had done since Roanoke, that at least a couple of schools made reference to the QUEST framework." For instance, several school teams presented the QUEST philosophy to their staff. One of these schools consequently chose to focus on nurturing shared leadership, one of the components of the QUEST framework for continuous improvement. Another school reported that they were "reviewing [their] school plan, looking at ways to incorporate QUEST ideas."

Whole-group discussions also seemed somewhat more probing and exploratory. For instance, after a Data On Display activity in which participants displayed their aggregate answers to several questions about successful learners on large charts, attendees spontaneously queried what was meant by "successful learners." "What *is* a successful learner?" "Well, it's not just a test score." "Which students are we talking about? It varies by their ability level." The Data on Display activity queried participants about their perceptions of the role teachers, parents, administrators, the whole school, and students themselves played in successful learning. The debriefing of this activity resulted in participants posing the following questions: "What would it be like if a student had *no* support in any one area?" "What if a student maxxed out in one area?" "What's the effect of class size on successful learning?" "What's the effect of school size?" "How much [size] is too much?" "Where do students spend their time, and how does that impact learning?" "How does the community support learning?"

Participants also wrote on feedback forms how useful they felt the discussions were. Sixteen (70%) of the 23 attendees who completed the final feedback form noted that group discussions and inquiry were among some of the methods that worked especially well for them. For instance, one participant wrote that "hearing and telling stories that helped me relate with the concepts" worked best for her. Another said, simply, "I loved the group discussions."

However, some participants found it difficult to engage in inquiry that did not resort to "blaming the victim," a tendency that was also present during the earlier QUEST high school rally. For instance, one principal said in an informal interview, "I came here to learn how to make kids who don't care *care* . . . Three kids [at my school] take physics . . . out of 700. They're scared. They want the easy way out." Likewise, another participant, in response to the prompt "Things to trash...," wrote "Believing that everyone has a desire to learn." During a discussion of what supports or hinders student learning, one school team focused on family. Near the end of the conversation, one participant said, "I wonder if it doesn't all come down to genetics." While such perspectives may have come from attendees' quandaries about school improvement and student learning, they may have also reinforced conceptions of low-achieving students as entirely responsible for their fates. Further, focusing on the role of family or the individual deflects attention from how schools, teachers, and school administrators can improve student learning.

On the other hand, many of the discussions observed did not conclude with "blaming the victim." Instead, these conversations were about how to plan for school improvement, how to incorporate student and community voice into such plans, and ways to maintain energy for the effort.

Finally, at least one parent felt that the second rally provided greater opportunities for parents to contribute. This participant shared in an interview with the evaluator that at the previous rally, "We felt left out. We weren't part of the whole thing. It was extremely hard to get motivated to come here because our role wasn't clear." At the end of the rally, however, the participant reported that the activities regarding collaboration had been very valuable to her, adding that the "role of parents was much more clear." She said she "can't wait to tell Marion [pseudonym]," another parent who had participated in the prior rally. Yet follow-up data collected several months after the rally suggest that meaningful parent involvement in QUEST continues to be a challenge.

Achievement of Rally Goals

QUEST staff presented participants with four goals for the rally. These were (1) to reconnect with one another, individually and collectively, and as member schools; (2) to think, individually and collectively, about student learning; (3) to create a creed embodying shared beliefs about student learning; and (4) to commit to action in participants' respective school communities. The four goals differed slightly from the six goals presented at the earlier high school rally in Roanoke, Virginia. These earlier goals were to (1) connect with colleagues; (2) create a learning community; (3) connect with concepts and stories related to continuous school improvement; (4) create personal and shared meaning; (5) commit to continue learning with this community; and (6) commit to continue the QUEST back home. The revised goals were more relevant to the activities and circumstances of the Pipestem rally. That is, participants who had attended a previous QUEST rally would be reacquainting themselves with other participants who had also attended the earlier rally. The conceptual focus of this rally differed as well, with a concentration on student learning rather than on an introduction to the QUEST framework. Part of this work included participant creation of creeds articulating beliefs about what supports student learning. The final revised goal differed slightly from the earlier goals, with an emphasis placed upon participants committing to action in their schools. Hence the goals for this rally were germane to its focus and context.

Goal 1: Reconnect with One Another

Of the 23 participants who completed the feedback form at the conclusion of the rally, 19 (83%) wrote that they had connected with other attendees successfully. For example, responses to the prompt "I connected with . . . " included "nearly everybody," "students as active members of group," "the members within my inquiry group. We were together only a short time, but came to know [each] other very well," "several teachers I plan to stay in contact with," and "a ton of people."

Participant observation also revealed that attendees connected with each other. Introductory activities, such as the activity in which inquiry group members became acquainted using a variety of written prompts, were successful. Some participants shared details about themselves during this activity that went beyond the information solicited by the prompts. Inquiry group members accepted such revelations by leaning farther in towards each other, listening intently, laughing at jokes, and interjecting occasional comments. When inquiry group members worked together in other group configurations, they referred to information revealed during earlier activities, suggesting that they had been attentive to one another.

Some participants made the attempt to connect but were not able to do so. For example, during a school team discussion near the end of the rally, a principal and parent struggled to understand each other. The parent's adolescent son mentioned that he was concerned that there was little communication between the adults and the children in his school. The principal asked what the student might suggest to remedy the situation. The student responded that the faculty ought to appoint an "ambassador" to student activities in order to exchange information; he noted that students felt powerless and uninformed at school. The principal queried him about what he hoped to achieve by having an ambassador attend student club meetings. The student's parent then interjected, "What Steven's [pseudonym] asking you to do is very different from how things are done. He's asking you to flatten the hierarchy. He's listened to me spout rabid critical theory for the last three years!" The principal then replied, "You mean, as opposed to the real world?" The parent answered, "No, no. It's very real in Europe." This interchange highlights the very different perspectives held by the participants, as well as the difficulty they had in articulating their disparate assumptions, jargons and world views. Whereas the principal did not know what was meant by critical theory or how it could be applicable to practice, neither did the parent appear to understand the principal's confusion about what might be the impetus for reorganizing the hierarchy, nor even what constraints the principal might be under. This seems to be an instance in which participants' "subjective realities" (Fullan, 1991) were widely divergent.

This conversation continued briefly. The parent drew a picture of a conventional hierarchical organizational structure, a triangle, reiterating that her son wanted the principal to consider "flattening" the hierarchy. The principal answered, "I don't see it that way. I see it as a circle," and then drew a small sketch of her vision of the school structure. Meanwhile, the student showed signs of increasing disenchantment, slouching in his chair, gazing around the room, and giving his mother apparently meaningful looks. However, at this point the facilitators ended the discussion time and arranged for the next activity to begin. Perhaps if the participants had more time to continue their conversation, they might have come to a clearer understanding of each other's perspectives.

In fact, when asked what might have allowed them to contribute more during the rally, 17 (53%) of the 32 participants who completed feedback forms at the end of the first day and a half of the rally reported that they would have preferred more time for discussion. They offered a variety of reasons for wanting more time, including "to digest mine and others' thoughts," and "to talk among our group."

Goal 2: Think about Student Learning

As one teacher new to QUEST reported during an interview, "I'm enjoying throwing ideas around. We don't take time for philosophizing at school." Other participants wrote of their experiences thinking about student learning: "Loved the mind-mapping for successful learning," and "The different strategies helped me focus on my own beliefs about the successful learner."

Some participants reported insights they gained as a result of thinking about student learning and school improvement. One attendee wrote, "The definition of a successful learner is dynamic and relative . . . [An] emphasis on extrinsic motivation stifles creativity." Another wrote, "Extracurricular activities are another essential learning activity that should reinforce classrooms. I had thought of them as distractions previously." Yet another participant described her pleasure at being able to consider new ideas: "This is hard to put into words, but, simply vocalizing ideas and listening to other educators, administration help[ed] to open my mind to new ideas and I feel desperately in need of new ideas."

On the other hand, when asked what "learnings, insights, [or] aha's" they had gained after the first day at the rally, many participants gave vague answers. One respondent wrote that the learning she gained was the "correlation of all the variables." Another wrote, "Education can be exciting on a large scale." "I learned a lot about what I think about school related topics," wrote one respondent.

When asked for an assessment of the SMART learner focus on the final feedback form, five (22%) of the 23 respondents had negative evaluations. While one participant thought too much time had been allotted to student learning, three felt too little time had been devoted. Another participant simply reported that the SMART learner focus was "not meaningful."

However, the remaining 18 respondents (78%) assessed the emphasis on student learning positively. One participant wrote, for instance, "Good to focus on the concept—draws focus to the learner and the importance of emphasizing the whole learner." Another said of the SMART learner focus, "Excellent, very informative, enlightening, and thought provoking."

Goal 3: Create a Creed

A culmination of all other rally activities, the writing of creeds "embodying shared beliefs about student learning," as staff explained it, was accomplished near the end of the rally. Organized into small self-selected groups focusing on one of nine traits discussed during the gathering, participants used data categorized during Snowflake to inspire their creeds.

One of the QUEST staff assessed the creed writing in this way: "This activity, I believe, constituted 'authentic work' for the participants. It was an 'understanding performance,' I believe, because it asked them to use all of what had preceded it--interview results, ratings, readings,

dialogues, discussions, etc.--and to engage in thinking at the highest levels (synthesis and evaluation). They did all of these things; they did, in fact, *create*, as we had hoped that they would."

The participants generated an atmosphere of celebration and enthusiasm, offering applause as each creed was read aloud. The statements themselves were written on large pieces of butcher paper, often in colorful magic markers, some with illustrations or cartoon renderings as well. The language participants used to phrase their creeds was passionate and forceful.

- "We believe that successful student learning can occur when all participants involved master the ability to focus upon the process of learning and the desired result."
- "We believe that a teacher should be knowledgeable and passionate about subject matter in order to spark curiosity in students, using persistence, patience, relevance, and the ability to exchange ideas and stimulate higher order thinking skills, creating lifelong learners."
- "We, teachers, parents, and community members, believe that shared high expectations for students' becoming productive members of society support learning."
- "We believe that a school community that encourages successful learning embodies an open atmosphere that bristles with passion and promotes positive risk taking."
- "We believe our opinion is important. Realize it is okay to take risks."
- "We believe that the students should be respected as individuals and as a body occupying a significant position in the school. We also believe that students should be treated fairly, despite their class, gender, ethnicity or academic status. When the professional learning community role models have respect for one another it provides the proper atmosphere for student learning."
- "We believe students should be actively engaged in learning. Students learn by teaching one another. Students should have a voice in the curriculum."
- "We believe teachers should use a variety of teaching strategies. Teachers should teach students how to learn. Teachers should allow for individual and collaborative problem solving. Teachers should incorporate 'think time.'"
- "We believe that successful student learning is enhanced by providing adequate time, resources, funding, and technology for all students."
- "We believe that by involving the community as a whole in creating a vision of what is to be accomplished and how it is to be accomplished, we create a sense of ownership in the vision, which will ensure that all segments of the community will work toward a common goal and ensure its success. We believe that for successful student learning to occur, curriculum delivery should begin where the student is in each domain. We believe that successful student learning will occur as skills develop to meet real life challenges.
- "We believe that teachers have the right to expect the very best from their students and students have the right to expect the very best from the teachers."

Goal 4: Commit to Action

All of the 23 respondents to the final feedback form wrote of their commitment to school improvement, from enhancing student learning to, for instance, bringing "students, parents, faculty, administration, [and] community together to form a cohesive group."

At the conclusion of the rally, school teams were asked to share their action research plans with the whole group. One school planned to explore student-friendly schedules, while another wanted to create a "student QUEST group." Another school hoped to increase student voice, especially in the school improvement process. Two schools planned to study what supports or hinders student learning. Yet another wanted to focus on lower achievers.

In response to the prompt "I am committed to . . . " on the final feedback form, 22 (97%) of the 23 respondents made statements about being devoted to improving their schools in some fashion. Only four (17%) of these, however, wrote of having specific plans of action. The remainder responded that they were committed to, for example, "helping my school improve," "help in any way I can," or "involving students whenever possible to help improve student commitment to learning."

After the rally, one school communicated to QUEST staff the action that had been inspired by their participation in QUEST: "While we were talking, she told me about what they had done during their faculty senate day with QUEST. They basically replicated what we did on the 'successful learner.' Bobby [pseudonym] played a big role in this. They were extremely pleased with their faculty's reception--said they took it as seriously as the group in Pipestem, found the activity energizing, etc."

Follow-Up

Three months after the rally, participants were mailed a follow-up evaluation form. Three letters were sent over the course of the next three months, reminding those who had not returned their completed forms to do so. Of the total 42 attendees, 24 responded to the questionnaire, a return rate of 57%.

Respondents were asked what, if anything, they had gained personally from attending the rally. Responses tended to fall into four major categories, with some respondents providing answers that fell into several of these. Eight responses indicated that the rally had offered participants motivation and insight regarding continuous school improvement, while seven suggested that the rally had made new friendships with colleagues possible. The rally had provided five respondents with techniques for incorporating input from a variety of school community members. Three participants reported that one of the things they had gained from the rally was an increased awareness of other schools and their struggles. "It is helpful to discuss common concerns and see

how others have handled similar situations," as one network member put it. Three respondents did not answer this question and a fourth reported being "stressed again."

When asked what activities their QUEST teams had undertaken since the rally, seven reported that their teams had not met at all and three did not reply. The remainder gave answers that reiterated four themes; some provided answers that described several activities. Four participants said that their teams had met to discuss plans for improvement. Two respondents wrote that they or a team member had given a presentation to various school committees about QUEST, while another two said that their team had participated in a QUEST co-venture site visit. Nine participants reported that they had begun what might be considered school improvement projects, including conducting team-building workshops for faculty and working on school improvement plans. One respondent wrote that each of the members of her school team had joined other committees "to branch out the ideas of QUEST."

Several respondents reported changes that had taken place in their schools due to QUEST participation. Again, responses tended to fall into categories, with some responses describing multiple changes. Five participants wrote simply that their school communities were more "aware" of school improvement as an issue. Six reported that their school climates had improved. For instance, one said that his school was "more relaxed," and another reported that "people are reflecting more on education." Three participants wrote that new committees had been formed around school improvement, and three described facility improvement efforts. Another said that her school had used "techniques we learned at the Pipestem [rally] in our focus groups for the school." And one respondent reported "several positive changes" but was "not sure how they relate to QUEST." However, seven participants wrote that they had observed no changes at their schools that they might attribute to involvement with QUEST.

Asked if and for what reasons they had been in contact with other QUEST network members, most respondents (14) said they had not communicated with other participants since the rally. Eight respondents replied that they had received messages from the QUEST listserv or had been in other electronic communication with network members. Two reported that they had participated in a co-venture site visit with QUEST staff, and one said that she had "tried to arrange a visit to another QUEST school to assess their block scheduling but there was a conflict in dates." Another participant wrote, "I have received mail from several QUEST schools regarding their progress and other info. Our school as a whole sends some responses but I haven't personally been in contact with any other QUEST schools."

Respondents offered a few suggestions for facilitating network communication beyond the rallies. One suggested that "maybe we could team up as sister schools," and another wrote "If you want a serious program, we need to establish local groups which meet at least once a month to discuss progress." "I would like to be more involved with the elementary section of QUEST," submitted a respondent. Other suggestions included continuing distributions of QUEST directories with participant contact information, a parent newsletter, and more rally time devoted to

communication between schools. A few also suggested that, as one phrased it, "it is on the shoulders of the participants to take the time to make contact."

Finally, participants were asked to suggest improvements for QUEST in general. Two respondents suggested that QUEST might improve schools' levels of involvement: "Please help my school get more involved," wrote one. The other said, "[I] still don't feel looped in," adding that "QUEST's purpose still isn't clear to me." Three respondents offered the suggestion that parents be more meaningfully involved in project events. For instance, one wrote, "[the] parental group may be weak at this point—I have not been clear on what my role is to be re: QUEST at our school." Other suggestions were unique to those offering them: "More specifics—less generalities," and "Perhaps less structure in conferences and more structure in follow-up." "Try to keep the rallies as centrally located for all as possible," submitted another. Two attendees suggested that school teams be allotted more time at rallies to discuss their school improvement issues. Seven respondents had no suggestions for improvement.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Several conclusions about the February 1998 high school rally can be made based upon the data collected and analyzed.

First, returning QUEST participants appeared to have reconnected with each other, and new QUEST attendees seemed to connect with others as well. Many noted they had made new friends and enjoyed working with other attendees. Follow-up data indicate that the formation of new friendships was an important benefit of attending the rally to participants.

While some participants found the focus on student learning to be unproductive, the majority felt that they gained valuable insights from rally activities. Many reported finding the SMART learner concept useful.

Attendees did create creeds embodying collective beliefs about what supports student learning. Not only did the QUEST rally offer activities that led to the writing of creeds, most participants appeared enthusiastic about their final statements.

All participants reported that they were committed to action. Although very few attendees noted specific plans of action, many of the remainder nonetheless communicated that they at least had some sense of commitment to creating change within their school communities. Follow-up data suggest that at least some schools had begun to plan and implement various school improvement projects.

Follow-up data also indicate that many participants felt they had gained support and friendship during the rally. In addition, many respondents reported that school improvement activities were taking place at their schools, although seven wrote that their teams had not met since the rally and no changes had taken place at their schools as a result of QUEST participation. Most reported that they had not been in communication with other network members, although some said they had used e-mail and the QUEST listserv. (From the middle of February to the first week in August, five QUEST members—only three of whom were affiliated with high schools—sent a total of seven messages to the listserv, the majority of which addressed QUEST staff and concerned the logistics of upcoming events. Staff sent a total of 27 messages to the QUEST listserv during this time. Thus, it is likely that the above participants received more e-mail via the listserv than they sent.)

Recommendations

Several recommendations can be made based upon the data gathered and analyzed.

QUEST staff may consider increasing their participation in small-group discussions throughout project events. This might help mediate the tendency some attendees showed for describing the difficulties they faced rather than focusing on the topics under investigation. By participating more actively in group discussions, staff would be better situated to redirect conversations as needed.

QUEST staff also might want to address participants' reports that they experience a scarcity of time during rally activities. Staff could schedule fewer activities and thereby offer more time for those they do schedule. Alternatively, QUEST staff might consider sharing their reasons for designing a fast-paced rally with participants.

Some participants suggested that they would benefit from spending more time with their school teams during rallies. Project staff could design activities at upcoming events that would facilitate this.

Relatedly, data suggest that network members felt they had gained much personally from participation in the rally, but somewhat fewer reported QUEST team, or whole school, impact. Although project philosophy advocates the notion that change begins on the individual level, QUEST staff might also consider developing activities that support school team cohesion.

Meaningful parent roles in QUEST activities appear to elude some participants. Relatedly, because most network members are educators, many discussions tend to concentrate on their role in school improvement. QUEST staff might therefore consider developing activities that more clearly address the concerns and experiences that parents bring to improvement efforts. Although project staff cannot ensure that school teams will continue to honor parental input back in their school communities, they can offer activities that are particularly relevant to parents during rallies.

The purpose, history, and ethos of QUEST may need to be better clarified for new network members. Project staff might provide an introductory session at rallies for this purpose. Such a session might also be useful to network members who have been unable to attend all QUEST events.

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APPENDICES

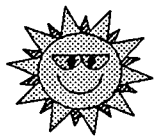
APPENDIX A:

Feedback Forms

Inquiry Into Improvment
Feedback Form

The conference planners would appreciate your comments based upon the first day's experience.

Learnings, insights, ah-ha's from the day...



Things that worked especially well for me...

Ways in which I contributed...

Things that would have allowed me to contribute more...

Things I want to explore further...

Things to trash...

Other comments:

Inquiry Into Improvment

Please give us your feedback about the conference. In the top four boxes, we are asking for your reaction to four different experiences offered at the conference. How did the following "work" for you:

Inquiry group?	Storytelling as a Learning Tool?
School stories?	Home school team meetings?

In the bottom four boxes, we invite your comments to the following prompts:

I was personally renewed by...	My curiousity was piqued about...
I connected with...	I am committed to...

Use the back side of this paper to write other comments.

APPENDIX B:

Pre-Rally Questionnaire

Pre-Rally Questionnaire
QUEST High School Network
Pipestem State Park * Bluefield, WV
February 8-10, 1998

1. How many QUEST conferences/activities/rallies have you attended to date? _____

2. If you attended the Roanoke QUEST conference/rally, what, if anything, did you learn from it? _____

3. If you attended the Roanoke QUEST conference/rally, what, if anything, have you or your QUEST team done as a result of participating? _____

4. Do you have access to the Internet? Yes___ No___

If no, skip to question 5.

If yes, have you been a part of the QUEST electronic listserv? Yes___ No___

If yes, in what ways, if at all, has the listserv affected you? _____

If no, would you like to participate on the electronic listserv? (Participation means that you could receive and send messages to other QUEST network members.) Yes___ No___

If yes, please provide your name and E-mail address: _____

5. As you think about the journey of continuous improvement in your school, what do you hope for from this QUEST rally? _____

APPENDIX C:

Follow-Up Questionnaire

QUEST Follow Up
High School Network

As you may know, AEL staff are interested in continually improving QUEST, and your input helps us do that. Please take a few minutes to complete the following questionnaire and return it in the enclosed stamped envelope. Your responses will remain confidential. Thank you for your help!

1. Now that several months have passed since the last QUEST rally, what, if anything, have you gained personally from that experience?

2. If your school team has met since the last rally, please describe the activities and/or discussions you have had.

3. What, if any, changes have taken place in your school due to your school's participation in QUEST?

4. What criticisms or suggestions for improvement, if any, do you have of QUEST at this point?

5. To what extent, if at all, have you been in contact with QUESTers from other schools? By what means? And for what purposes?

(Over)

6. What would facilitate your contact with other QUEST participants or teams?

7. What, if any, other QUEST activities are you planning to be involved with?
___ Scholars Program
___ Summer Symposium on examining student work
___ QUEST rallies
___ QUEST site visits to your school
___ Visits to other QUEST schools
___ Work with the Lab Network Program School Change Collaborative
___ SEDL community of learners project with Beth Sattes

Thank you again!

APPENDIX D:

Completed Evaluation *Standards* Checklist

Citation Form

The Program Evaluation Standards (1994, Sage) guided the development of this (check one):

____ request for evaluation plan/design/proposal
____ evaluation plan/design/proposal
____ evaluation contract
_X_ evaluation report
____ other: _____

To interpret the information provided on this form, the reader needs to refer to the full text of the standards as they appear in Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, *The Program Evaluation Standards* (1994), Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.

The *Standards* were consulted and used as indicated in the table below (check as appropriate):

Descriptor		The Standard was deemed applicable and to the extent feasible was taken into account.	The Standard was deemed applicable but could not be taken into account.	The Standard was not deemed applicable.	Exception was taken to the Standard.
U1	Stakeholder Identification	X			
U2	Evaluator Credibility	X			
U3	Information Scope and Selection	X			
U4	Values Identification	X			
U5	Report Clarity	X			
U6	Report Timeliness and Dissemination	X			
U7	Evaluation Impact	X			
F1	Practical Procedures	X			
F2	Political Viability			X	
F3	Cost Effectiveness	X			
P1	Service Orientation	X			
P2	Formal Agreements	X			
P3	Rights of Human Subjects	X			
P4	Human Interactions	X			
P5	Complete and Fair Assessment	X			
P6	Disclosure of Findings	X			
P7	Conflict of Interest	X			
P8	Fiscal Responsibility	X			
A1	Program Documentation	X			
A2	Context Analysis	X			
A3	Described Purposes and Procedures	X			
A4	Defensible Information Sources	X			
A5	Valid Information	X			
A6	Reliable Information	X			
A7	Systematic Information	X			
A8	Analysis of Quantitative Information			X	
A9	Analysis of Qualitative Information	X			
A10	Justified Conclusions	X			
A11	Impartial Reporting	X			
A12	Metaevaluation	X			

Name Caitlin Howley-Rowe Date: 8/20/98
(typed)
Caitlin Howley-Rowe
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Relation to Document: _____
(e.g., author of document, evaluation team leader, external auditor, internal auditor)

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