

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Case Study of a California High School under Academic Sanctions

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

by

Eric Adam Beam

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The dissertation of Eric Adam Beam is approved.

Robert Cooper

John McDonough

Eugene Tucker, Committee Co-Chair

Wellford Wilms, Committee Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

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My deepest love and gratitude to my family.

To Payal - my wife, friend, and partner. Your support and sacrifice made this possible. You are my rock.

To my parents – You made education the foundation for my past, present, and future.

VITA

October 23, 1972	Born, Middletown, Connecticut
1996	B.A., Psychology University of Massachusetts, Amherst Amherst, Massachusetts
1999	M.S., Applied Educational Psychology Northeastern University Boston, Massachusetts
2000	C.A.G.S., Applied Educational Psychology Northeastern University Boston, Massachusetts
1999-2005	School Psychologist Antelope Valley Union High School District Lancaster, California
2002-2005	President Antelope Valley Association of School Psychologists Lancaster, California

2005-2007	Coordinator of Psychological Services Antelope Valley Union High School District Lancaster, California
2006 – 2008	Region VIII Representative California Association of School Psychologists Sacramento, California
2007-2008	Vice Principal Antelope Valley Union High School District Lancaster, California

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Case Study of a California High School under Academic Sanctions

by

Eric Adam Beam

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Professor Eugene Tucker, Co-Chair

Professor Wellford Wilms, Co-Chair

This study is a mixed-methods case study of Antelope Valley High School (AVHS). AVHS was one of the first six schools in California to receive academic sanctions since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. It was also the first high school to receive a State Trustee who was embedded at the school every day for two school years. AVHS participated in California's Immediate Intervention for Underperforming Schools

Program (II/USP), the School Assistance and Intervention Team (SAIT) Process, and sanctions that included the Trustee in the 2006-07 and 2007-08 school years. This study included publicly available data, eighteen interviews, and forty survey respondents. It describes the highs and lows expressed by administration and faculty throughout the SAIT Process, Program Improvement, and sanctions. The experience of AVHS was consistent with the current research base on high-stakes accountability, reconstitution, school takeovers, school improvement, and organizational change. The discussion includes recommendations for organizations that oversee schools facing similar sanctions.

CHAPTER 1

Statement of the Problem

Introduction

In a press release on March 4, 2006, Jack O'Connell, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, announced the first six Californian schools to receive state sanctions for failing to show adequate academic progress (O'Connell, 2006). In addition to other sanctions, the state appointed a new School Assistance and Intervention Team (SAIT) for three schools. For the other three, the state appointed a State Trustee with the power to veto any decision made by school administration. This announcement was groundbreaking not just for the historical precedent it set, but for the number of schools that may follow. According to statistics from the California Department of Education in the 2007-08 school year, as many as 335 schools may be in similar predicaments if they do not show adequate progress (California Department of Education, 2007). In California, improvement is defined by a combination of standardized test scores, graduation rates, test participation rate, and California's Academic Performance Index (California Department of Education, 2006b; United States Department of Education, 2002). By these rules, schools must show

improvement overall and in each subgroup of significant size by ethnicity, low socioeconomic status, and special education status.

State imposed sanctions due to academic achievement are recent phenomena. From 1988 to 2000, forty U.S. school districts had been subject to city or state takeovers. Of these 40, only one was taken over solely for academic reasons. Governance and financial management were the primary reasons for school takeover (Wong & Shen, 2002). Even after the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, only five states had acted upon their right to takeover schools by 2005 (Steiner, 2005).

Choosing the sanctions to impose is a difficult venture. The state must essentially force improvement on schools that have failed to make adequate improvement for over seven years. In those seven years, these schools have received a progression of supports and implemented interventions that have not produced the necessary results. Although the specifics of the interventions may vary from school to school, the most severe sanctions include some level of forced staff turnover (reconstitution) or change in governance by the state or agent of the state (takeover) (United States Department of Education, 2002).

Assigning a Trustee is one type of takeover. In California, the Trustee works through a County Office of Education on behalf of the State

(O'Connell, 2006). This one person must serve as a catalyst for improvement at a school identified most resistant to improvement. To make the job more challenging, the Trustee enters as an outsider, imposed on a school that has already been subjected to invasive actions from the State, including, but not limited to, forced removals of staff and administration.

I conducted a case study of a Trustee/school pairing to answer some basic, fundamental questions.

1. What were the perceptions and historical context leading to the appointment of the Trustee at the school?
2. In what ways did the appointment of the Trustee affect the faculty and staff; particularly in staff composition, attitudes, morale, daily duties, and instruction?
3. What were the Trustee's and site staff's perceptions of the changes made at the school during the period of trustee oversight and the likelihood of sustainability of the changes made after the trustee is discharged?

One School's Sanctions

The challenge that the No Child Left Behind Act places on the State of California is almost too vast to fully comprehend, but one school's story gives a vivid illustration. Antelope Valley High School is the oldest high school in the Antelope Valley Union High School District. It resides in one of the fastest growing regions of the state. In the past decade, the district has almost doubled in size to a student population just over 25,000 in the 2006-07 school year (Education Data Partnership, 2008). The growth trend is towards more poor students and English Language Learners. Antelope Valley High School (AVHS) served almost 3,000 students. Eighty percent of AVHS students were in the Free or Reduced Lunch Program. Approximately one-fifth of the students were English Language Learners. The Academic Performance Index for the school had made moderate gains since the school year 2000-01 to 2005-06, but it had not consistently met its targets.¹

Prior to being sanctioned by the state, Antelope Valley High School attempted various reforms through California's Immediate Intervention for Underperforming Schools and the School Assistance and Intervention Team programs. These programs created several changes at AVHS. Instructional

¹ The Academic Performance Index (API) is a scale from 200-1000 derived from standardized test scores. Schools that do not score an API of 800 are expected to improve their API by five percent of the difference between their API and 800.(Education Data Partnership, 2007)

coaches were added to improve instruction in English, mathematics, and special education. Literacy instruction was supported through a commercial program called *Read 180*. Weekly meetings were held to review data, standards alignment, and student performance. It was also in the summer of 2003 that the entire administrative team was replaced.

Mr. O'Connell, the State Superintendent of Schools, reported his conclusions of the school's efforts to improve when he announced sanctions for AVHS (O'Connell, 2006). According to Mr. O'Connell, the benefit of professional development for AVHS faculty had been negated by high teacher turnover. There had been difficulty in balancing the needs of campus safety with community access. He reported early promise in the literacy program implemented at AVHS. He also noted a severely negative reaction by the school faculty towards interventions that were placed upon the school, including changes to the daily schedule. There had been an estimated 150% turnover of administration in the previous 6 years. This was precipitated by the dramatic removal of the entire administration in the summer of 2003. As a result, Mr. O'Connell announced three sanctions for AVHS. In the 2006-07 school year a Trustee was appointed until AVHS meets its goals for two consecutive years. A supplemental services program was mandated. 100% of the school's faculty must meet the NCLB requirements as being "highly-qualified."

The Study

I studied the impact of the sanctioning process at Antelope Valley High School through its administration, faculty, and staff. I compared a timeline of the events leading up to sanctions with changes in staff composition over time. I also surveyed and interviewed staff to identify common themes in their perceptions on the sanctioning process. I used these methods to assess how the staff believed sanctions have affected their role in school improvement, their morale, their attitude towards their peers and administration, changes in their classroom instruction, and their attitude toward their career in the future. Using this information, I identified the most common and pervasive themes to present a vivid picture of the impact on the sanctioning process to the staff of this case example. I compared these themes to prior research.

Significance

Although the primary clients for my study are the school district and the State Trustee, county offices of education and the California Department of Education, which oversee the Trustee process, also hold an interest in this research. The national educational communities affected by the sanctioning process outlined in NCLB are potential consumers of this information.

Summary

In 2007, California had 726 schools that were facing the highest level of state intervention under the No Child Left Behind Act (California Department of Education, 2007). Although it may be apparent that the status quo had not worked for these schools, there is little information on alternatives that will be both effective in raising student achievement as well as in meeting the more punitive requirements of No Child Left Behind.

As of the 2006-07 school year, only three California schools have received this sanction for academic reasons. This small sample size, when compared to all the variables that influence a school's achievement scores, creates a scientific dilemma of designing a study with generalizable results. Meanwhile, the State is under pressure to enact drastic measures that will

improve student achievement while the educational community is under great pressure to find what works immediately. The only option is to garner as much information as possible from each attempt, success, and failure. Over time, the information from each case will add to the collective knowledge base.

I performed a case study of Antelope Valley High School, which was currently under the State Trustee sanction from the 2006-07 to the 2007-08 school years. The purpose of the study is to understand the perceptions and historical context leading to the appointment of the Trustee at the school; the ways the appointment of the Trustee affected the faculty and staff composition, attitudes, morale, daily duties, and instruction; and the Trustee's and site staff's perceptions of the changes made as well as their sustainability after the Trustee is removed.

The results from this one case study do not provide information that can be generalized to the scale of implementation facing the state. Regardless, there is a great interest for any information regarding successful interventions for these schools.

There is a large audience for this information. The AVUHSD and Trustee are the primary clients for my study. The California Department of Education and its County Offices of Education are the secondary audience

concerned with the outcome of this particular intervention. Every district facing the imminent threat of similar sanctions has a stake. In addition, these interventions and their results are of interest to the research community at large.

CHAPTER 2

Conceptual Framework

I performed a case study of Antelope Valley High School, a school that has progressed through years of district and state assisted interventions that did not yield the required improvement in academic achievement. For the 2006-07 and 2007-08 school years, AVHS was under State sanctions that included the appointment of a State Trustee who oversaw and influenced all activities of the administration. The purpose of the study was to understand the historical context of successes and failures that lead to the sanction; the ways the appointment of the Trustee affected the faculty and staff in staff composition, attitudes, morale, daily duties, and instruction; and the attitudes of the prospects for sustained improvement of staff, administration, and the Trustee through the use of this process.

In examining a case of a sanctioned school paired with a State Trustee, there were many variables at play. Primarily, the lasting impact of the Trustee cannot be effectively measured in the time span of my study. The appointment of a Trustee is not one discrete intervention in itself. The placement of a Trustee does not guarantee the implementation of any particular interventions or changes in classroom instruction. With no past

record for this type of sanction, it is difficult to predict what changes any Trustee will create or sustain. One case study cannot be generalized, especially given the differences among schools assigned Trustees and the different skill sets individual Trustees bring to the assignment. The assignment of a Trustee is new school intervention concept with essentially no research base to call its own.

To better understand the Trustee process, I reviewed its fundamental components. First, I reviewed the processes that lead to this sanction and their potential influence. I discussed the challenges in defining success in programmatic interventions with a young research base. Finally, I reviewed the research on the primary influences of the State Trustee as a sanction: program improvement, accountability and sanctions, reconstitution, and government takeovers of school governance.

The Path to Sanctions

Schools undergo a long process before their failure to improve places them in danger of being sanctioned by the State. For most, the process started with the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). Under the accountability requirements of NCLB, states were required to create systems of assessment to ensure that the state, districts, and schools

all met NCLB's benchmarks for improvement called Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). In addition, the states were required to create progressive systems of support, intervention, and, if necessary, sanctions for those districts and schools that failed to meet AYP ("No Child Left Behind Act of 2001," 2002). In California, Adequate Yearly Progress is defined by a combination of standardized test scores, graduation rates, test participation rate, and California's Academic Performance Index (API).

California's response to NCLB was Program Improvement. Publicly funded schools that failed to meet AYP goals for two years in a row were monitored under Program Improvement (California Department of Education, 2006b). Most aspects of Program Improvement are the direct mandates of NCLB. There are five years in a Program Improvement plan. Schools enter Year One of Program Improvement on the third year after failing to make AYP for two consecutive years.² Every year that a school fails to meet AYP, it progresses one year into the program. If it meets AYP goals for one year, it remains in the same Program Improvement Year. If it meets the AYP goals for two consecutive years, it exits the program and is not monitored unless it reenters PI1 for not meeting two consecutive years of AYP goals.

² This is commonly referred to as "PI1" for the first year, "PI2" for the second year, etc.

PI Years One and Two are categorized as “School Improvement” and require school- and district-based improvement initiatives. Supplemental instructional services, funding for professional development, offering school transfers to students in underperforming schools, and school improvement plans are common requirements for schools in PI1 and PI2. These requirements are primarily school-based with increasing district involvement.

The third year of Program Improvement is categorized as “Corrective Action” and requires interventions that are more aggressive. In addition to continuing earlier requirements, districts must implement at least one of the following at PI3 schools: replace school staff, implement new curriculum, decrease management authority of school-level administration, appoint an approved outside consultant, extend instructional time, or restructure the internal organization of school. PI3 also increases accountability reporting to parents and the state.

Program Improvement Years Four and Five are categorized as “Restructuring.” In addition to continuing all previous interventions, districts of PI4 schools must plan a major restructuring of the school to be implemented if they enter PI5. The districts must consider reopening as a charter school, replacing the principal and almost all other staff, state takeover, management by a third-party contractor, or any other similarly

invasive plan approved by the state. Schools that continue to fall short of AYP remain in PI5 under threat of more punitive measures.

The first six schools sanctioned by the State were selected because of their participation in a voluntary pilot program called Immediate Intervention for Underperforming Schools Program (II/USP) which relied on California's Academic Performance Index (California Department of Education, 2006a; O'Connell, 2006). The II/USP provided money and services to schools in greatest need. This help also came with the threat of consequences if the Academic Performance Index (API) scores of the participants failed to show adequate growth. Although these six schools faced early sanctions due to their participation in II/USP, the State still must decide what to do with the schools in Program Improvement that failed to meet their Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under No Child Left Behind. As currently designed, the AYP expectations of NCLB get increasingly more difficult to attain every year.

Approximately one-quarter (2210 out of 9553) of California's publicly funded schools started the 2007-08 school year with Program Improvement status. 598 California schools started the 2007-08 school year on PI5. Of those PI5 schools, 335 were on PI5 the previous year. This all adds up to one giant challenge for the State. To be compliant with NCLB, the State must

impose improvement on schools most resistant to improvement initiatives, regardless of the logistics.

Defining Success

It is nearly impossible to measure the effectiveness of any one intervention for overall school improvement. A review of the relevant literature will show that the research base for many of these interventions is young. Most interventions have as many success stories for their proponents as they have failures for their opponents. Given the high number of variables in any particular intervention, it is difficult to isolate how individual components contributed to the outcome. In any one program, there is usually a long list of interventions enacted over the course of several years. Anecdotal reports of successes are insufficient to explain if interventions are generalizable or if their successes are attributed to their unique contexts and/or the effective matching of circumstance with intervention.

The term “success” is not consistently defined in research. The difference between success and failure may rest in how success is operationally measured. Standardized test scores and measures outlined in NCLB currently receive the most attention, but the formulae for determining Adequately Yearly Progress did not exist prior to the passage of

NCLB. Therefore, researchers using data prior to the existence of AYP data defined their own parameters for operationally defining success.

This review of the school improvement literature will examine the authors' definition of success. More time may be needed to associate a reform with student achievement scores, but preliminary research can be used to identify intermediate measures of success. Intermediate, benchmark measures may not lead directly to improvements in student achievement, but they can help differentiate interventions with greater promise for success by identifying those factors that have the highest correlation with improved student achievement scores.

Improving Achievement at the School Level

The importance of quality classroom instructional practice is quite possibly the one thing on which everyone seems to be able to agree. Pamela Sammons (1987) has published work that is often cited for showing the importance of instruction (Mortimore & Sammons, 1987). Her research is supported by the work of Robert Marzano and the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development through the use of meta-analysis (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). Marzano et al. conclude that the

body of educational research shows that the quality of classroom instruction is the most significant correlate in improving student achievement.

Too much time is required between the initiation of a new intervention and the release of State AYP and API data to be within the scope of this study. However, sanctions can be evaluated in terms of how well they lead to increasing faculty experience and qualifications, increasing resources dedicated to classroom instructional support, or other factors associated with improved classroom instruction and teacher quality (Ballou, Sanders, & Wright, 2004; Rice & Malen, 2003; Sanders, 1998; Schmoker, 2006) The importance of improved classroom instruction is important when reviewing reforms caused by NCLB.

High Stakes Accountability and Reform

As a result of the NCLB's focus on high stakes accountability and sanctions, Heinrich Mintrop participated in two studies of accountability and sanction predecessors to NCLB. The first study reviewed the history and research based of the accountability movement and studied of the effects of sanctions in 11 schools in two states (Mintrop, 2003). The other study focused on a broad scale study of state imposed corrective actions (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005).

In Mintrop's review of the accountability movement's research base, he expressed concerns about the difference between the consequences of high-stakes accountability and its lack of conclusive evidence. The majority of sanctioned schools stopped their trends of declining test scores, but few showed significant growth. The sanctions also created issues that limited their effectiveness. Placement on sanctions created a small increase in staff motivation. The announcement of sanctions placed greater awareness and external pressures to increase test scores, but this was countered by decreases in staff morale. The stigma placed on the schools also decreased their attractiveness to potential employees. Administrators appeared to feel the most pressure, which often resulted in more autocratic and rigid leadership styles. Most importantly, few changes were made to improving classroom instruction. In fact, less than ten percent of teachers listed improved instruction as a high priority for school improvement.

The next study was a more wide-reaching review of corrective actions in seven states and two large, urban districts (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005). Mintrop and Trujillo developed principles that spanned through the different environments. No single strategy proved universally successful across the different environments studied. The most promising corrective actions were one part of a set of improvement initiatives. Promising actions helped build school capacity for reform. Relationship and team building

also needed to be emphasized to minimize conflict and increase commitment, trust, and cohesion. Further examination of specific sanctions will reinforce these generalizations of the high stakes accountability.

Reconstitution and Takeovers

As described in California law, the road to sanctions involves two aggressive school reform interventions. Prior to being sanctioned, California's implementation of NCLB requires a major change in staffing, administration, or governance. This change is often called, "Reconstitution." Finally, there is the actual introduction of state-sponsored oversight at the site level, which is considered a state takeover. Although specifics may vary, these are the common denominators as prescribed by current state and federal procedures (California Department of Education, 2006b; No Child Left Behind Act of 2001," 2002)

Reconstitution is a widely used term that does not have a universal definition. At its most basic level, reconstitution involves a radical change in staff and leadership (Rudo, 2001). In some educational research, it may involve a restructuring of processes and procedures. However, most current research on reconstitution resulting from NCLB focuses primarily on the aspects of radical faculty or leadership change. For the purpose of my

research, reconstitution was operationally defined as any large scale change in staff and administration (Rudo, 2001).

The underlying assumption of reconstitution is that the current staff have proven so resistant to positive change that they must be removed and replaced with staff that will, hopefully, be less of an obstacle to reform (Rice & Croninger, 2005). Due to the severity of reconstitution, the United States Department of Education labeled it an intervention of “last resort”(Doherty & Abernathy, 1998).

The term “takeover” in NCLB is not as radical in practice as its connotation. In the past, “takeovers” had been forced sanctions due to legal action for things such as fiscal mismanagement or corruption (Steiner, 2005). However, under current rules, it may also include voluntary submission to the oversight directly from the state or a state approved contractor. In cases of takeovers for academic reasons, almost all overlapped with reconstitution. For this reason, these two interventions will be studied as a pair.

Kenneth Wong is frequently cited for attempting to study takeovers empirically and on a large scale. In 2002, he studied 40 cases of city or state takeover (Wong & Shen, 2002). Of these cases, 19 had no academic consideration at all. These cases were based on financial or management

issues. The remaining 21 cases had some level of academic involvement, but only one takeover was solely for academic reasons. This study made five empirically supported conclusions in regards to academic achievement. Mayoral takeovers appeared to raise achievement in lower grades. Academic gains were greater in the lowest performing schools. Mayoral takeovers were less effective in higher grades. State takeovers that produced the most political and administrative turmoil negatively impacted student achievement. Some state takeovers were effective after a prolonged period of adjustment.

Wong and his associates also performed a study of districts that had been subjected to state take over and successfully released (Wong, Langevin, & Shen, 2004). The level of tension between the local and state officials was the key predictor in the length of time needed to meet the requirements for release from takeover. Wong et al. cite the need to learn more about the political issues associated with the restoration of local control after a takeover.

In 2005, five states had enacted state sponsored takeovers as an academic intervention (Steiner, 2005). Alabama reported mixed results using two state officials (one administrator and one instructional leader) who work alongside existing administration. Alabama's method of state takeover is the closest match to California's State Trustee. Maryland

outsourced management to four takeover schools. The three run by Edison Schools reported improvement. The fourth run by Victory Schools performed worse, and the contract was terminated. Louisiana outsourced seven takeover schools to nonprofit organizations with results not presently known. Massachusetts and Rhode Island each report one takeover school with inconclusive academic results. The study makes recommendations for common denominators of successful programs. These conclusions match the themes of takeover as part of a comprehensive, well-planned reform and sensitivity to local political and staff concerns.

Due to Alabama's close match to the California State Trustee process, it merits further discussion for my study (Steiner, 2005). According to Steiner, Alabama sanctioned six schools with the state administrator and instructional leader pairing. All six demonstrated adequate improvement to merit an end to the sanction. However, Steiner reports mixed results for five of these six schools after the state takeover terminated. One school closed; one school was back on the state watch list; one school made insignificant progress, and two made substantial improvements in standardized test scores.

The most studied case of reconstitution is the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD). SFUSD reconstituted sixteen schools over a period of fifteen years. This particular reconstitution was the result of a federal

consent decree resulting from a class-action lawsuit alleging systemic discrepancies in the education of African-American and Latino students (Goldstein, Kelemen, & Koski, 1998b). However, only six schools were part of the original consent decree in 1983, the others were identified for intervention over time. This study conducted by Stanford University reviewed the use of reconstitution and concluded two major findings. With mixed outcomes, reconstitution was only successful in the cases where it was a component of a larger set of interventions. Goldstein et al. concluded that “vacating the adults” alone did not yield higher student achievement. In the later years, the use of reconstitution as a threat to underperforming schools negatively affected morale and retention of experienced teachers.

The research most critical of reconstitution and takeover comes from the University of Maryland, College Park. This criticism is based on research analyzing reconstitution’s “Theory of Action” (Malen, Croninger, Muncey, & Redmond-Jones, 2002). Theory of Action is an indirect means to evaluate interventions through the underlying theories, principles, and assumptions of an intervention. It then seeks out empirical evidence of the reliability and validity of these assumptions (Argyris & Schon, 1978).

Using their framework, Malen et al. identified three fundamental theories of practice for reconstitution: reconstitution creates a more capable and committed faculty and staff, these changes would facilitate a re-design

in the schools, and that this re-design would yield improvements in student achievement. These assumptions were then analyzed in six reconstituted schools.

Their results showed that the underlying theories of reconstitution were not empirically supported and possibly contradicted. The faculties of the reconstituted schools demonstrated a decline in teacher indicators of certification, experience, and reputation. Drops in morale made the successful veterans just as likely to leave as those not performing well, only to be replaced with rookie teachers. The new administrators were mostly young and inexperienced. Staff turnover did not lead to significant restructuring of schools. In many cases, staff reported “chaos” or “survival-mode” because of the turnover. For example, new administrators and teachers needed time to learn the more mundane policies and procedures. In addition, administrators spent a disproportionate amount of time recruiting and filling vacancies. Initial academic scores suggested that the two schools were experiencing academic improvement while the other four declined.

The Malen et al. study prompted a cost analysis of reconstitution on human capital and resource allocation. In addition to re-affirming the concerns of the original study, reconstitution had a high cost across the measures of task, social, and psychological factors (Rice & Croninger, 2005)

The researchers also concluded that inadequate resources were provided to address these burdens (Rice & Croninger, 2005). In terms of task cost, reconstitution placed a disproportionate burden on the administration to fill vacant positions, often with very inexperienced teachers. This created an increased cost in recreating organizational infrastructure and processes, including those that had worked well or did not affect student achievement. Finally, task cost analysis showed that additional resources for increased professional development did not match the burden. In terms of social and professional network costs, reconstitution decreased stability, increased turnover, and decreased trust and collaboration. Although more difficult to empirically define and measure, reconstitution negatively affected morale and stigmatized the school and its staff.

Overall, the research suggests that reconstitution's application suffers from "throwing out the baby with the bath water." In many cases, the practice of reconstitution is contrary to its name. It is commonly effective in deconstructing a school's staff composition, lowering the morale of staff, and breaking down infrastructure without ensuring better replacements. When reconstitution demonstrated success, it was well-planned prior to reconstitution, included strong oversight, was sensitive to local culture and staff concerns, and had a deliberately planned exit strategy (Steiner, 2005).

Summary

When viewed as an aggregate, the research regarding reconstitution and takeovers share some common themes. The value is not inherent in these sanctions by themselves, but in how well they serve as a catalyst to other reforms that will improve classroom instruction and student achievement. There is also preliminary agreement on the characteristics that determine the quality of these interventions. Reconstitution and takeover must be accompanied as part of a greater package of school reform and interventions that must have a high level of planning and preparation prior to their enactment. They require a long-term commitment that focuses on sustained reform. Planning and preparation must focus more on the building of capacity after enactment and less on the removal the old patterns and staff. Reconstitutions and takeovers that create the least amount of political turmoil and impact to staff morale are more successful. Although necessary for success, it is extremely difficult to create a post-sanction team that is more experienced, trained and supported, and focused with higher levels of resources on improved classroom instructional practices.

For these reasons, my case study focuses on the factors that can be assessed through the site staff. I reviewed the composition of staff in terms

of credential status as it relates to the timeline of interventions and sanctions. I explored the faculty and administration's perceptions on the sanctioning process and their instructional practice. Finally, I have found common themes in their reported attitudes with the appointment and implementation of a State Trustee. With this information, I will present the historical context of successes and failures that led to the sanction; the ways the appointment of the Trustee affected staff composition, attitudes, morale, daily duties, and instruction; and the attitudes of the prospects for sustainability from the staff, administration, and the Trustee through the use of this process.

CHAPTER 3

Methods

Introduction

In the first two chapters, I established that the Trustee appointment is a rather new way to impose school reform with little research base to call its own. However, the appointment of a State Trustee has a similar process to the interventions of reconstitution and school takeover. The research on reconstitution and takeover has a small sample size and is too new to draw definitive conclusions of their efficacy to raise student achievement, but there is an emerging consensus on some basic principles for potential success.

In order to increase probability for positive benefit on student achievement, this type of intervention must be viewed as a means of accessing the benefit of other interventions and reforms. Reform strategies must be bundled in a set of comprehensive, sustainable solutions. They must be well planned to create a faculty and administration that is more prepared and capable than previous to improve classroom instruction, which can be considerably difficult due to the negative experiences of these schools. Finally, interventions should minimize the amount of political turmoil and impact on staff morale as much as possible.

By performing a case study on a school that is sanctioned with the appointment of a State Trustee, I attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What were the perceptions and historical context leading to the appointment of the Trustee at the school?
2. In what ways did the appointment of the Trustee affect the faculty and staff; particularly in staff composition, attitudes, morale, daily duties, and instruction?
3. What were the Trustee's and site staff's perceptions of the changes made at the school during the period of trustee oversight and the likelihood of sustainability of the changes made after the trustee is discharged?

Research Design

In my case study, I used a combination of primarily qualitative methods to understand the impact of a State Trustee on one comprehensive high school. I assessed the morale and attitudes of the staff through the use of survey data as well as interviews with the Trustee, school and district administrators, and members of the faculty. I established common themes in the perceptions and attitudes of the staff towards the impact of the

Trustee on their instructional practice, ability to improve their practice, desire to remain as teachers at this school, and overall morale.

In ideal circumstances, quantitative methodology could be used to empirically verify conclusions derived from my study. However, the exploratory nature of the study inhibited my ability to accurately identify and operationally define the most relevant variables in advance. In addition, the case study's single school sample prevented any use of inferential statistics to create conclusions for generalization. For these reasons, statistical analysis was limited to the use of descriptive statistics.

Site Selection

Site selection was very limited because only three schools in California have been appointed a State Trustee as an academic reform intervention. Antelope Valley High School is the oldest high school in a district described as being the urban fringe of a large city. It resides in one of the fastest growing regions of the state. In the past decade, the district has almost doubled in size to a population just over 25,000 in the 2006-07 school year (Education Data Partnership, 2008). The growth trend is towards poorer students and English Language Learners. Antelope Valley High School's enrollment had peaked just fewer than 3,000, but its

enrollment declined to approximately 2,000. This enrollment decline is primarily due to the opening of the eighth high school in the district for the 2005-06 school year. At the time that sanctions were announced in 2006, 80% of the student body qualified for the Free or Reduced Lunch program and 16% were designated English Language Learners. The school's ethnic population was approximately 40% African-American, 30% Latino, and 20% Caucasian.

Established in 1912, AVHS was the first high school in the Antelope Valley. In its first 75 years, it produced a long line of distinguished alumni that included local and state-level politicians and various professionals. Many local business and civic leaders are alumni of AVHS. Since then, it has established a reputation for being the lowest performing and challenged high schools in this rapidly growing district. In 1999-00, the school was awarded a Planning Grant in the Immediate Intervention for Underperforming Schools Program (II/USP) for this reason. This program was a pilot for California's attempts to introduce an accountability and assistance system for underperforming schools ("Antelope Valley High School WASC Self-Study," 2008).

I have been an employee of AVUHSD since 1999. I worked in AVUHSD as a school psychologist and as the Coordinator of Psychological

Services. During this study, I was a vice principal at another comprehensive high school in the district.

Sample Selection

I attempted to reach as large a sample as possible of consenting volunteers of current faculty and academic support staff, school administration, district administration, and the State Trustee at Antelope Valley High School. I requested volunteers through school-wide memoranda, email, and word-of-mouth. I made efforts to solicit volunteers across content area, levels of experience, and years of placement at Antelope Valley High School. Years of Placement differentiated between those who worked at AVHS prior to the announcement of sanctions and staff placed after the announcement.

Data Collection

Documents

Both the California Department of Education and the district collect descriptive data of staff composition each year. When available, I relied primarily on California Department of Education databases because these were the data readily available to other researchers. Descriptive data of Antelope Valley High School's staff composition were collected since the

2000-01 school year. Composition was measured based on credential status.

Survey

All survey data were collected in the spring of 2008. The protocol was designed to serve as a probe to identify specific issues related to the research questions for follow-up in the interviews.³ There were 40 valid survey respondents. It contained basic descriptive information on job description, department, credential status and experience. It probed for respondents' basic attitudes and priorities of their experience with the appointment of the State Trustee and other interventions for which they were present. Respondents were also asked what changes most affected their daily duties and how they believed those changed impacted student achievement. The survey was digitized into a web-based format. A link to the survey was sent several times through the district email system. (See Appendix A.)

³ See Appendix A for the Survey Protocol.

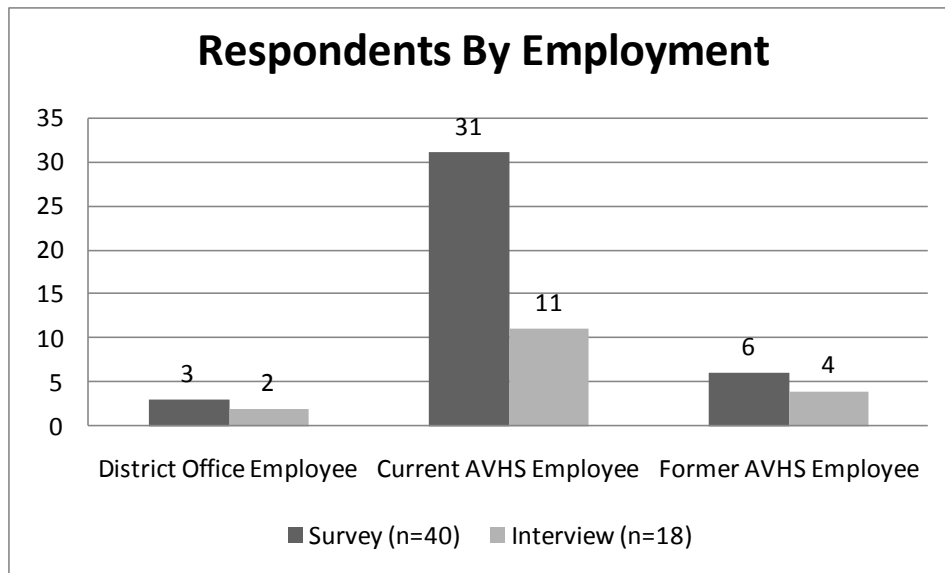


Figure 1. Respondents By Employment

Interviews

Eighteen interviews took place primarily with the Trustee, administration, and individual teachers for greater depth of analysis.⁴ All interviews were held in the spring of 2008. The majority of the interviewees were administrators and core teachers, but former employees and noncore teachers were represented (See Figure 2).

Administrators and the Trustee were interviewed at the location of their choosing during their workday. Teachers were interviewed at the location of their choosing either during their conference period or after the

⁴ See Appendix B for Interview Protocol.

workday. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. The interviews averaged in duration approximately one-half hour each. (See Appendix B)

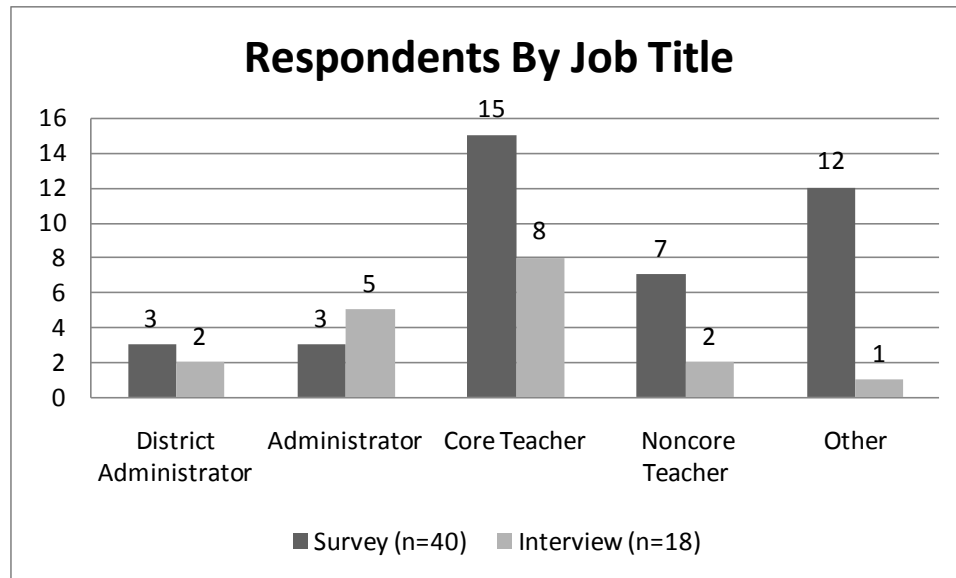


Figure 2. Respondents By Job Title

Focus Groups

A Focus Group protocol was created. However, logistics prevented Focus Groups from being held. In addition, when subjects expressed an interest in participating in Focus Groups, they only wanted to participate with specifically identified individuals. They stated that their preferences were based on comfort and trust. The groups, as requested, lacked the homogeneity necessary to perform the Focus Group Protocol.

Data Analysis

Documents

Descriptive data of staff composition was charted by academic school year. This is charted in a timeline that denotes Program Improvement status and all major interventions and/or sanctions that occurred each year.⁵ In Chapter 3, I present a qualitative, descriptive overview of this timeline. Variable descriptors were defined as:

Job Title: District Administrator, School Administrator (including Trustee), Teacher (either classroom or instructional coach), or Other.

Core versus Noncore (for teachers): By department, focused on academics measured in the Academic Performance Index. Core (English, Math, Science, Social Studies, and Special Education in these subjects) or Noncore (Physical Education, Arts, Industrial Technology, Behavioral Science, Foreign Language, and Special Education that do not teach Core.)

Years of Experience in Current Job, Years Employed by District, and Years at AVHS: Grouped by less than five years and five or more years.

Credential Status: Full versus Not Fully Credentialed (University Intern, District Intern, Pre-Intern, Emergency, or Waiver.

⁵ See Appendix C.

Trustee experience: Employed at AVHS prior to July 2006 or Employed at AVHS since July 2006.

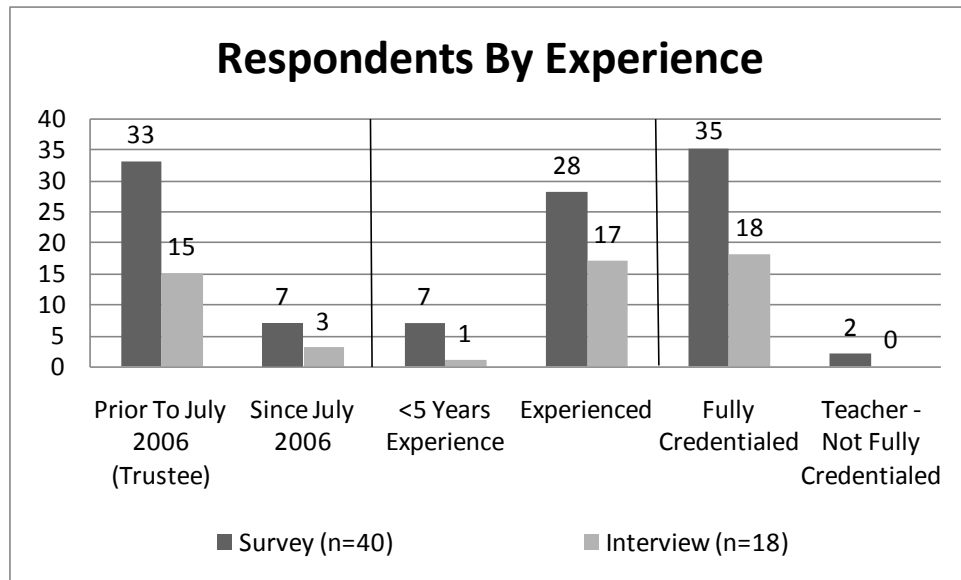


Figure 3. Respondents by Experience

Survey

Survey data were electronically collected from a web page format. The sample respondents that were employed at AVHS at the time of survey were cross-referenced to assess the degree that the subjects represented the staff population. Qualitative and open-ended responses were reviewed once for the identification of common themes. These themes were then operationally defined, and the frequency was noted.

Interviews

Basic descriptive data of respondents was calculated. Transcripts were reviewed once for the identification of common themes. These themes were then operationally defined using the same definitions used in the survey instrument. Interview data were coded on those operational definitions and charted for frequency.

Overall

All coded themes were reviewed for frequency, and the most frequently expressed themes have been presented. Findings were analyzed once holistically. A second analysis of findings was focused specifically on site administration and API-measured departments, but their representation in the sample yielded similar results. Findings were deemed most significant when they were expressed in both data collection methods. Findings were deemed most generalized to the school based on highest representation across respondent variables, and any finding specific to a particular group was identified as such. Findings were then applied to the research questions.

Validity, Reliability, and Credibility

The open-ended and exploratory nature of this case study necessitated diligence to maintain validity, reliability, and credibility. School sanctions also carried some highly emotional responses by the staff. The following measures were implemented to mitigate this challenge.

Sampling was highly important to maintain validity. Attempts were made to ensure that respondent numbers were maximized to reach a sample that represents the staff population and avoid skewing data collection to a vocal minority. Any trends of disproportionate sampling have been identified in the analysis. This is discussed in specific detail in Chapter Five.

Greatest weight was placed on those coded themes that had the highest representation across data collection methods and respondent variables. In addition, the second analysis focused on site administration and API measured departments was made to give greater consideration in their relationship to required outcome measures, and their results were found to be consistent with the entire sample.

The initial survey was the primary means to guard against researcher bias in the interviews. The interviews were altered to match the priorities and themes identified in the broader survey. This helped to prevent the

researcher from influencing the conversations away from unpredicted, but significant, themes.

Respondent bias would be high if the respondents perceived that their participation may influence potential policy decisions or personal consequences. This could occur on several different levels. Respondents who think poorly of the sanctioning process may try to negatively skew outcomes in hopes that this will influence policy. Conversely, some respondents could have been fearful that any statements contrary to the Trustee or Administration may result in consequences to the school or themselves. I was especially concerned with my employment in the district. Formerly a school psychologist, I was a site administrator at another school during the data collection.

Several steps were taken to address these concerns. I designed protocols that avoided program evaluation. My research evaluated neither the state's use of the Trustee as an intervention nor the school's fidelity to State mandates. All focus was placed on being an exploratory investigation of common themes and issues that had arisen through this process. This focus was maintained throughout data collection and analysis.

In addition to the standard assurances to maintain respondent confidentiality, quotations were cited with very generic identifiers. For

example, teachers were labeled as either “Core” or “Noncore” and not by their specific department. The Trustee, who had a unique job description, was grouped with site administration. More important than the implementation of these safeguards, I produced frequent and redundant reminders of the purpose of research, voluntary participation, and the measures to protect confidentiality.

Finally, I created an informal committee of four individuals who represented a diagonal, cross-section of the school. Throughout this study, these individuals were consulted for factual accuracy and assurance that all findings were regarded as valid and reliable.

Limitations

There are two major limitations to this form of research. The research did not measure intervention effectiveness. It was also limited to conclusions unique to this one school. Its application and impact can only be measured when enough time and case studies have accumulated to establish common trends over time and settings.

This research was not designed as an attempt to objectively evaluate the effectiveness of the Trustee as an intervention technique. The vast majority of the data collected was on the attitudes and perceptions of the

staff. These data may provide some insight into themes and issues that are consistent with the current research base.

Summary

The purpose of my research was to explore some core issues that have arisen in one school's experience with the use of an appointed State Trustee as an intervention and sanction. Although I present some basic descriptive data for this case, the majority of the data focused on the experiences of the staff. One case study cannot cross the large distance between the demands of the No Child Left Behind Act and a conclusive research base, but it is one step in providing understanding into one of the first academically sanctioned schools in California.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

Introduction

In the past eight school years, beginning in 1999-2000, Antelope Valley High School (AVHS) participated in the California Immediate Intervention for Underperforming School Program (II/USP), the School Assistance and Intervention Team (SAIT) Process, and spent two years under State sanctions that included the appointment of a State Trustee at the school for school years 2006-07 and 2007-08. This case study was designed to answer the following questions:

1. What were the perceptions and historical context leading to the appointment of the Trustee at the school?
2. In what ways did the appointment of the Trustee affect the faculty and staff; particularly in staff composition, attitudes, morale, daily duties, and instruction?
3. What were the Trustee's and site staff's perceptions of the changes made at the school during the period of trustee oversight and the likelihood of sustainability of the changes made after the trustee is discharged?

These questions were designed “to gain in-depth understanding of situations and meaning for those involved” (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). For AVHS, the experience of being placed under academic sanctions can be broken into three main time segments: the period of time leading to the implementation of sanctions, the two years under the Trustee and sanctions, and the perceived staff prospects for the future. These three components offered very different experiences.

The announcement and implementation of sanctions did not happen immediately. There was a progression of five years of State involvement before the Trustee arrived in the Fall of 2006. Sanctions could have been averted had the school made two consecutive years of “adequate” improvement in achievement test scores. This study focused on the staff’s experience before and during sanctions to ascertain which experiences were the most productive or counter-productive to the goal of improving student achievement.

Once the Trustee was placed on campus for the 2006-07 school year, an analysis of the staff’s experiences was made. The placement of a Trustee was not a stand-alone intervention. The changes at AVHS that came along with the appointment of the Trustee were identified as the most significant staff experiences.

Finally, and most importantly, the potential long-term prospects of these interventions were examined. Once the Trustee and sanctions are gone, it is the responsibility of the remaining staff to maintain or improve whatever success had been introduced under the Trustee's leadership. In this chapter, I examine not only what the staff believes to have worked, but I also identify what the staff believes will work in the future.

Research Question One: What were the perceptions and historical context leading to the appointment of the Trustee at the school?

In studying the timeline leading to sanctions at AVHS, staff perceptions of changes did not necessarily fall into exact historical timelines. While a staffing change had a definitive start date, many interventions had fluid degrees of implementation, and they often lacked discrete transitions. For example, many teachers experienced the utilization of instructional coaches at different times. The English and math departments used instructional coaches much sooner than the rest of the faculty. In addition, the amount of time allocated to instructional coaching increased each year.

The most significant years for the respondents were the Program Improvement and SAIT Process years, which spanned from the passage of

NCLB until the implementation of the Trustee as a sanction, 2002-03 to the 2005-06 school years.

In general, respondents expressed their opinions of the SAIT Process through comparative statements from the tenure of the Trustee. For example, survey respondents did not directly make any negative statements regarding the School Assistance and Intervention Team, but stated that the Trustee “allowed the Principal and her team to lead the school in a way that is non-intrusive, but [the Trustee] is very much a part of the decisions that are made.” (Core Teacher) and, “I think that we should have had one from the beginning.” The data will show that, holistically, these statements combined with the interviewees’ statements to present a picture of a staff that viewed the SAIT Process very negatively, and they were pleasantly surprised once the Trustee arrived in the summer of 2006.

There was very little explicit discussion of the time before the passage of NCLB. Forty-eight percent (n=19) of survey respondents and 44% (n=8) of the interviewees worked at AVHS prior to the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act. Both the survey and interview questions focused primarily on the SAIT Process and the Trustee. As such, none of the survey respondents made any direct comments regarding this period of time, but three interviewees did make comments regarding this period.

Despite being the oldest high school in the Antelope Valley Union High School District and having produced a long line of distinguished alumni in its first 75 years, the school, in recent years, established a reputation for being the lowest performing and challenged high school in the district. In 1999-2000, the school was awarded a Planning Grant in the Immediate Intervention for Underperforming Schools Program (II/USP). This program was a pilot for California's attempts to introduce an accountability and assistance system for underperforming schools. The program was voluntary, but the grant money required that recipient schools make adequate improvements in the state's Academic Performance Index (API) or face the possibility of sanctions. AVHS was in the first cohort of II/USP grant schools to enter the sanction portion of this process that involved the School Assistance and Intervention Team (SAIT).⁶

As a result of this grant, AVHS agreed to create an improvement plan to spend the funds on professional development, a school-wide study of learning, a continuing study of standards based instruction, and an increasing emphasis on assessment. This plan was aligned with the school's 1999 Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) accreditation

⁶ To avoid confusion, the following terms will be used, as follows: "SAIT" will refer to the Student Assistance and Intervention Team; "SAIT Process" will refer to California's state-specific accountability program; and "Program Improvement (PI)" will refer to California's system of accountability that complies with NCLB. Any subject quotations that deviate will be properly annotated.

report for areas of critical need ("Antelope Valley High School WASC Self-Study," 2008). On the positive side, the report also cited strengths in campus safety, facilities, good relationships with administration and staff, and a personalized approach to learning. The II/USP Planning Grant of 2000-01 was followed with two years of an II/USP implementation grant. For the 2002-03 school year, AVHS contracted with the first of a string of several State approved consultants for assistance and implemented the *Instructional Data Management System (IDMS)*.⁷

It started a long time ago when [another] School opened in [1995]. Teachers and students were transferring, and that started the cycle. Then, the II/USP process started... They looked like they were at the same place and had the same stigma on them, but they [another school in II/USP] were able to build away from that end result."
(District Administrator)

The remainder of this section will show that early issues with the stigma of low student achievement, morale and skepticism soon exploded to crisis levels.

⁷ Instructional Data Management System was a commercial product that was purchased with the intention of improving the use of data analysis and formative assessment to guide reform and instructional practice.

The 2002-03 school year was the first year that AVHS began the SAIT Process. The administration communicated its sense of urgency.

Right at the beginning of teacher orientation... (the principal) said, "The first thing that they are going to do is remove administration. You know that we need to improve."...There were a lot of people who really believed that it was not going to happen. Everybody did not feel the magnitude of what was going to happen. (Administrator)

This prediction came true in the form of the most infamous event. In the spring of 2003 a meeting was called.

They just marched the administrative team in front of the faculty and staff. They announced that they would all be removed and replaced by an entirely new administration. Everybody gone... All of the relationships that the administration had with the teachers, and they replaced it with a new administration." (Former Noncore Teacher).

Seventy-two percent (n=13) of the interviewees volunteered comments on the administrative removal, and 100% of all interviewees had an extremely negative view of this event.

The event had a ripple effect across the district and across time. None of the administrators lost their jobs; they were transferred to different positions in the district. This affected the entire district.

School is out in four to six weeks at the most... the State required that a new administrative team be moved in the two months of summertime... That resulted in 25-28 overall administrative moves within the district during that summertime. (District Administrator)

The next three school years 2003-04 through 2005-06 represented Program Improvement Years Two, Three, and Four, respectively. The most striking finding was the negativity experienced during this period. Ninety percent (n=36) of survey respondents and 100% (n=18) of interviewees made negative statements regarding the SAIT's effectiveness and that their experience with SAIT made them skeptical of the Trustee sanction which followed later. The majority of statements were extremely negative and, often, emotional. The following comment from a teacher was typical of those made by a number of respondents:

They weren't even real educators. They were consultants, and the trust between us was nonexistent. That made a big difference. They came in and did check-marks on a list... It was pretty much the administration against the faculty. They went to the department

chairs, and something happened. Then, they went to the board and said how glorious things would be, and how wonderful things were. In fact, they weren't. (Former Noncore Teacher.)

Only four of the interviewees made moderate responses. They attributed the problems to the fact that AVHS was one of the first schools to be sanctioned and that the problems were due to a “learning curve”, “pilot program”, or “reconciling with fed[eral] mandates.” However, another four interviewees questioned the motivations of the SAIT consultants. “Let’s just say that there are a lot of people who stand to make some serious money with the current system for SAIT and DAIT teams.” (District Administrator)

The loss of the administrative team was the first of several identified factors in creating a negative attitude towards the State, the SAIT Process, and the SAIT. Eight interviewees identified failed interventions recommended by the SAIT that further decreased the consultants’ credibility with staff. The first failed change was starting the school day an hour later.

Whoever made that decision could not have been a school principal... It removed kids if there was any activity or athletics. The coaches left by third period because of distances. Kids would have to leave, and others were stuck with substitute teachers... The

other critical thing is that this made school get out at the same time as the continuation and other schools. There was always sheriff involvement, fighting, and other stuff going on. (Administrator)

A student advisory was another oft-cited failure. The advisory was a weekly period for students to receive instruction or advising in non-academic areas. The advisory was supposed to allow time to address issues such as study skills or life skills. Teachers refused to participate, citing contractual issues. The first year, AVHS attempted to use community volunteers for the advisory.

The advisory was a mess. It no longer exists... The first year, we had 35 community volunteers... Eventually, they never came back. Admin and counseling got tossed in there with no curriculum and no direction... Each vice-principal was assigned a grade level to make sure it was run... It had to be an activity that I could just give a teacher... It was a mess. Half of the time they were watching videos... It turned into a huge headache and was very ineffective. (Administrator)

As a result, the staff described the SAIT as top-down bureaucrats making recommendations that were out of touch with reality. Seventy-eight

percent (n=14) of the interviewees volunteered or agreed that many of the mandates were too generic for the specific context at AVHS.

If you were to Google “school sanctions” or “school improvement”, their suggestions would come up. It did not look personalized; it looked very canned...They threw a bunch of stuff on the walls to see what was effective. All of the things that they tried to do did not have a proven track record. (Former Noncore teacher)

The staff's low opinion of SAIT was further exacerbated by a lack of correlation with immediate feedback and results. For example, several interviewees noted the discrepancy between the SAIT's intermediate reports and their results for the year.

You have people that come from the State and meet with the principal or a few people exclusively. We get nothing but positive reviews at the time. The scale was one to four, and we were hitting three's and four's... Mandates that were given to us were from an outsider's view. There was close to fifteen to twenty mandates that we were requested to follow. (Administrator)

Another five interviewees pointed out that the various SAIT's and consultants did not necessarily agree with each other over the course of time.

But each SAIT or consultant team that came in had their own flavor, or whatever. They were not always aligned to where we were headed, or with each other. And anything that is not aligned is not going to last. (District Administrator)

The negative view of SAIT was also magnified by having an administration that was either new to the school or new to administration. Fifty-six percent of interviewees (n=10) made some reference to the lack of experience of the new administrative team. To keep their jobs, the new team had to meet the immediate SAIT mandates and produce better test results with an increasingly resentful and resistant faculty.

We were very much Ready, Fire, Aim! We had to get in, make changes, and do them quick... We were not allowed to fix our own issues. We were told how to fix them by people from the outside. As a result, relationships were severed. Many people left, and those that were here did not trust administrators... We were given a timeline, and it needed to be done. Or else! It could have been our jobs. (Administrator)

All of the non-administration, or 61% (n=11) of interviewees, volunteered comments on the divisions and adversarial nature of these years. In general, the faculty and staff described a loss of empowerment

combined with a perception of close association between the new administration and the SAIT. This created, or cemented, factions and a very adversarial work environment. One support provider described an attitude of many faculty members that would make any positive change impossible to implement.

“Dig your feet in and screw’em... no one from the outside is telling us what to do. We are going to keep doing what we feel is working, and maybe we will listen to them; maybe we won’t.” That was exacerbated by the fact that morale was so poor. (Former Support Provider)

Several teachers described the stress from this time period. The underlying theme was conflict and the feeling that teachers were being devalued. “It was hell for me... It was almost a war for years. There were a lot of teachers who jumped ship and asked for transfers. They were never questioned. They just let them right out the door. (Core Teacher)” Five teachers who were interviewed made statements regarding personal stress during the SAIT years. “It takes a toll on you... it cost me physically and mentally. It affected my personal and family life. It affected me in the classroom.” (Former Noncore Teacher).

The most compelling evidence of this turmoil was the turnover through the SAIT Process. In the 2001-02 school year (PI1), AVHS had five school administrators and 117 teachers, and 80 of the teachers taught core subjects. By the first year of the Trustee and sanctions in 2006-07, only 39 total and 24 core teachers from 2001-02 remained. Approximately two-thirds of the original faculty and all of the original administration had left during the SAIT Process. (See Appendix C)

In all of the data regarding this time period, there was an underlying assumption of the SAIT's power. This was illustrated in many of the quotes cited. The previously cited "Ready, Fire, Aim!" quote best illustrates the point, but this assumption was evident in the comments of every site administrator during the SAIT Process. This contrasted with the published stages of how Program Improvement was designed. These standards show only incremental increases in State authority from PI2 through PI4 (California Department of Education, 2006b). Planning to remove an entire administration is not mentioned until PI3, and it is not until year PI5 that local autonomy is removed by the State in the form of sanctions. In contrast, almost every statement from staff regarding this time period assumed that SAIT had full power and authority. This assumption appeared to be the direct result, at least in part, of the removal of administration. The administrative removal occurred at the end of PI1. According to one district

administrator, if the Program Improvement standards were implemented, “They would not have been allowed to take that step [of removing the administration] and... being told that they are a failing school.”

Not only is the assumed power of the SAIT present in the majority of administrative comments regarding the SAIT, 71% (n=5) of the administrators interviewed recommended that, if other administrators find themselves in similar positions, they should engage SAIT in greater debate to advocate for building off of previous successes versus their punitive and harsh changes.

The advice that I would give... that when other agencies come in, don't just take what they say to be what is and what you are going to do. Question. You sit down and debate... We need to let that voice be heard. (District Administrator)

Unfortunately, many acknowledged that fear for their jobs inhibited them from speaking out. However, they were emphatic in the need to overcome this threat.

If ever there is a time for your voice to be heard, it is now, Even if you feel like you are going to hurt yourself, it still needs to come out. You need to be honest and real with your feelings on what you think is the best for the school. (Administrator)

In the spring semester in 2006, State Superintendent Jack O'Connell announced that AVHS would be one of the first six schools sanctioned by the State. AVHS was in the first cohort of II/USP schools, and it failed to make mandated improvement goals in the Academic Performance Index (API). AVHS was one of three schools, and the only high school, to receive a State Trustee. Later in the year, the principal left and the Assistant Principal was promoted to be the Principal for the 2006-07 school year. A Vice-Principal was promoted to Assistant Principal for the 2006-07 school year. Eighty-eight percent (n=35) of survey respondents and 56% (n=10) of the interviewees stated that they were apprehensive or preparing for an increase in the same problems seen after the announcement of the first administrative removal. The majority later revealed that they were pleasantly surprised.

It is again apparent that the SAIT Process had been extremely negative for the faculty.

The first thought was that here is someone else that will come in and tell us what we need to change rather than allow us to do what is best for our students as we know them. This was based on what had happened in the past with SAIT. (Current Core Teacher)

Their statements expressed the damage done by the SAIT Process. “Where are the transfer forms? I pictured a dictatorship, where we marched to their tune or else were released.” (Former Noncore Teacher) These were the opinions of the individuals who chose to stay from a staff that only retained one-third of its faculty through the SAIT Process.

The research data contain one omission that is worthy of comment. The interviewees did not engage in deep discussions of specific academic interventions that had a positive benefit. During the SAIT process, the *Read 180* reading program was initiated, the number of instructional coaches or “teacher-leaders” was increased, data utilization and other initiatives to improve standards based instruction had begun. Although they were all questioned and prompted to discuss the benefits of academic interventions, most subjects would return to discussing things like morale and their opinion of SAIT. Thirty-three (n=6) of interviewees identified reforms with which they were involved, but four of them made no value statements on their participation. They merely stated that they were involved. The other two stated that they saw a lot of promise and early benefit in these efforts, but they also expressed deep frustration in their belief that their efforts were not acknowledged or supported.

In summary, the years of the SAIT Process prior to the appointment of the Trustee spanned the school years 2002-03 through 2005-06. This

was a tumultuous time for AVHS. That first year, the entire administrative team was removed under the SAIT's advisement. This was described as the primary precipitating factor for several difficult years. Staff turnover was high. Morale was low, and many faculty members resisted the recommendations of the SAIT and administration. The staff stated that these recommendations were too heavy-handed, generic, and lacked proper perspective to be effective.

Research Question Two: In what ways did the appointment of the Trustee affect the faculty and staff; particularly in staff composition, attitudes, morale, daily duties, and instruction?

As previously stated, 90% of survey respondents and 100% of interviewees expressed negative experiences from the earlier SAIT Process. Two-thirds of the faculty and all of the original administration in 2002-03 had left AVHS by 2006-07. This resulted in 88% of respondents and 56% of interviewees explicitly voicing apprehension or skepticism at the onset of the Trustee as a sanction. For most, these concerns were short-lived. Of the 35 survey respondents that had negative initial impressions, 25 stated that the Trustee was a more positive experience than they anticipated. Ten of

those respondents cited no change in their perception, and no one stated that their opinions got worse.

The first actions of the Trustee and the new principal were to focus on the low morale, skepticism, and push-back by working on relationships with the school staff. Seventy-two percent (n=13) of the interviewees and 15% (n=6) of the survey respondents volunteered that relationships, teamwork, and morale improved since the Trustee's appointment. There were little or no statements of positive support expressed when discussing the SAIT Process.

The lack of relationships, people did not know each other. The lack of a collective goal, which is tied with communication. People did not have a common goal. They were surviving day-to-day, that was about it. Collaboration amongst stakeholders just was not there.
(Administrator)

In a more colorful commentary, one teacher used many analogies to describe the difference in relationships and collaboration. Although I have omitted such references as “evil empire”, the emotions are still powerfully expressed.

When the SAIT Team finally got removed... We were extremely fortunate because of the State Trustee... All of the sudden, we felt

like we had a voice again on campus, and now we had an open dialogue on how we can move forward... It was like the Renaissance after the Dark Ages... It raised morale. We used to have a 30-50% [teacher] attrition rate every year. I think this year it was five percent... During the SAIT, no one wanted to work there.

(Former Noncore Teacher)

Interviewees expressed irony about the juxtaposition of words. The SAIT Process, whose name contains the words “assistance” and “intervention”, was described by the staff as negative and adversarial. In contrast, the Trustee, who held the authority that represents a school take-over, was described as more supportive and less authoritative. This is a nearly unanimous finding, but one teacher best illustrated the Trustee and new principal pairing.

It really is not like it sounded. They did not “take-over” the school. They were really supportive. I found that they were supportive of me. I don’t know how other teachers felt. Some really did not like it. I do not know if that was justified on their part. (Former Core Teacher)

This focus on relationships was aided by the fact that the Trustee was embedded at the school site every day. Sixty-seven percent (n=12) of the

interviewees made extremely positive statements regarding the Trustee's embedment at the school. They cite two specific advantages to this modality, but no one was willing to weigh either factor as more important. It helped overcome the staff's resentment of an outside entity forcing changes on them. They also believe that it allowed the Trustee to balance the objective data with the day-to-day realities of the school to create better, tailored reforms.

It is the old iceberg theory. So much lies beneath the water, but you only see the top... What I saw when a person or team came out once a month, they already had an idea on what should be happening... They would put those elements in place without looking at the culture of the school or getting people's input as to where we were going as a school. I am very much an advocate [of the Trustee]... if you are under a sanction, the person needs to be there every day.
(Administrator)

Many respondents used these statements to communicate their belief that, in isolation, charts and graphs do not create effective interventions.

One important factor was the Trustee's relationship with the site administration. All of the site administrators and one of the two district administrators interviewed discussed the Trustee's mentorship with the

administrative team. This was expressed most strongly by members of the site administrative team.

I have learned an incredible amount from [the Trustee]. I am a better person, and my career is going to be better. I will be a better administrator...I also feel that I have learned to motivate teachers... Some of them have become our biggest allies. (Administrator)

One district administrator believed that this role should ideally be incorporated into daily practice, if resources were freed up to do so.

I think that the role that [the Trustee] was able to play as a coach for a relatively new [administration] was probably one of the positives that came at that time... I believe that it would be beneficial if we did have additional coaching, where we can match administrative teams and principals with mentors...Why not have an executive coach? (District Administrator)

The result of this change in teamwork and morale removed the existing obstacles to collaboration on instructional issues. Many of the efforts to improve instruction were attempted before the Trustee; the interviewees stated that there was little concerted focus as a team. Seventy-eight percent (n=14) of the interviewees and 28% (n=11) of the survey

respondents mentioned improved instructional collaboration. One district administrator called this “opening the door.”

I think “opening the door” changed daily life the most. What I mean is teachers are pretty autonomous in the classroom. They shut the door and teach... I think that really focusing on instruction... Having folks take a look at what you’re doing. (District Administrator)

The concept of “opening the door” was expressed in two contexts. It required a new level of trust and collaboration that did not exist during the SAIT Process. It was also paired with the first signs of positive progress of classroom instruction.

It created a much more collaborative environment... What was nice about this collaborative piece that it was not done from the top down. They talked to the staff. They talked to department members. It was more of a group decision. We all came together... that opened the door. Communication is a lot better. (Core Teacher)

The survey respondents made 58 statements regarding positive improvements in curriculum and instruction. Although the mechanism for many of these changes may have technically started prior to the appointment of the Trustee, most interviewees cite that their benefit had

not been realized. This was attributed to two key points. In addition to morale being an obstacle, they mentioned a lack of continuity in implementation. One core teacher contrasted the difference in focus, “That is one of the big differences here. A lot of times, we would start something, then throw it out, then start all over again. I attribute that to different interpretations of what the State wanted.”

When discussing the two years under sanctions, every interviewee made some comment about different instructional and curriculum improvements; pacing charts, instructional coaches, daily agendas, formative assessment, welcome center, lesson study, etc. However, they unanimously expressed the opinion that the specific intervention was not the critical issue. Progress was primarily attributed to the quality of implementation. The subjects primarily communicated that the critical change was a focused, team approach to implementing fewer things, but implementing them well. One site administrator stated the view of many regarding the focus of the SAIT, “In the first three years, I did not see much... I just felt that there was not a direction.”

Despite the positive commentary, the respondents expressed experiencing difficulty under sanctions. By this point, a lot of dissenting teachers had already self-selected themselves out. The evaluation process and progressive employee interventions had increased.

We identified 29 teachers that needed incredible support... There were seven teachers that should not be on this campus... We were able to move those teachers... I expected to go to court, and none of that happened... Several people, independent people would secretly say, "It should have happened a long time ago." (Administrator)

Despite some of this aggressive action, there was still a marked decrease in push-back and grievances. This was primarily attributed to the faculty's opinion of the Trustee and the administration as partners and not adversaries.

I personally believe that because we no longer fear negative consequences, or write-ups, or threats... There were some grievances, but they were not grounded or sound grievances... It was only in their benefit, and they were not punitive when they asked those people to transfer. (Core Teacher)

One negative byproduct of the focus on collaboration was an increase in the number of meetings. The surveys contained 18 complaints on the number of hours spent in meetings, and 8 interviewees conceded that there were too many meetings. There were three basic opinions stated by interviewees regarding meetings. One interviewee saw them as completely useless. Three interviewees saw them as a necessity. The remaining four

interviewees saw them as initially necessary, but they believe that their necessity was waning.

Student discipline was one topic of strong conflict. There was one group of subjects that believed that the previous disciplinary system was a convenient excuse for poor teachers to remove challenging students. Forty-four (n=8) of interviewees voiced this opinion and believed that deemphasizing punishment has had a positive benefit on instruction. This attitude was best expressed by one administrator, “It really lies in the teacher. The ones that rely on external discipline most are the weaker teachers... We still follow disciplinary procedures, but we do a lot of incremental discipline (Administrator).” On the other hand, a very vocal group of individuals believe that new policies have diminished student accountability. Twenty percent (n=8) of survey respondents and 2 interviewees complained about a lack of disciplinary accountability for students.

The kids just walk around, they walk into class. They have this attitude... and it is horrible, and it's so stressful on the teachers. The teachers act like there is nothing they can do about it... The teachers are very frustrated by that. (Core Teacher)

Although the majority of people viewed the Trustee as a positive influence, there were a small, but vocal, group of subjects that believed things would have been better without any external influence. One interviewee questioned the merit of NCLB altogether. Two interviewees (11%) and ten survey respondents (25%) expressed the belief that AVHS would have done just as well, or better, without outside interference.

Once we made all of these positive changes, but after the SAIT... it all went completely downhill... Keep structures that exist at the school or institution to strengthen them. Don't deconstruct them or throw them out the window. We still have not recovered from that. We have lost very good people. (Former Core Teacher)

There was one noteworthy ambiguity in many subjects' responses. They rarely expressed any distinction between the Trustee as a sanction and the Trustee as an individual. Eleven interviewees (61%) made statements about the Trustee as a remarkable individual, and expressed a level of doubt if these qualities were inherent in all Trustees. This district administrator believed that the Trustee was simply a great instructional leader.

I don't know what the possibility of other schools encountering someone like [the Trustee]... I know that there is not another 100...

If there were that many good leaders, why not bring them back to the districts? (District Administrator)

Overall, the data show that the opinions of staff over the past two years with the Trustee and new Principal can be characterized as a time where relationships were mended or built, there was a more unified collaboration on curriculum and instruction, and there is a general question of, “Why was this not done sooner?” This is not to say that everyone was happy. Many teachers transferred, with various degrees of self-selection or external pressure. There were also staff members who complained about the number of meetings that they had to attend, and there were also differing philosophies on student discipline.

Research Question Three: What were the Trustee’s and site staff’s perceptions of the changes made at the school during the period of trustee oversight and the likelihood of sustainability of the changes made after the trustee is discharged?

The interviewees expressed mixed views of sustainability for the future. They discussed two competing factors: resources and culture. When

asked about sustainability, 72% (n=13) of the interviewees expressed concerns with resource allocation and the economy. AVHS had favorable extra resources in administration, special education, and professional development. The SAIT Process came with extra funding from the State, and those funds came with a matching fund mandate to the district. “Yes, we had an extra vice-principal here for a semester. That is unheard of... enrollment is down... We received a lot of help.” (Administrator). This can be evidenced by the amount of teachers that were retained during declining student enrollment (See Appendix C). The interviewees were concerned about maintaining progress if those resources are lost or reduced. One district administrator gave an in depth explanation of the resource issue. He explained that schools in SAIT get extra money with the mandate that their districts match funding. However, this does not guarantee that funding matched the expense of SAIT mandates.

Then you get a team that is sent as well and say, “Oh, by the way, these are the instructions that you need to do.” Now, maybe that will be enough to fund it, or maybe it will not. In most cases, my experiences have been that it does not... what happens is that you get it for two years, this money, but then it is gone... if that funding system goes, then what does the district not fund in order to continue those positive things? (District Administrator)

Despite the concerns with finances and resources, 67% (n=12) of the interviewees cited positive cultural changes amongst staff that they believed would persist after the sanctions were lifted. These interviewees cited greater focus on collaboration and culture, improved instruction for all students, and a focus on excellence. In this regard, they were optimistic that the progress made under the supervision of the Trustee is a foundation for sustainable change.

In terms of teacher empowerment [and leadership]... I believe that is very sustainable... We've only done it for a year and a half. I would say the three year mark. Then it should be running smoothly and be self-sustaining... The progress that we made in this area is huge... It builds and builds and builds, and it starts to sweep across campus. (Administrator)

However, ten interviewees (56%) made statements related to long hours, hard work, and burn out.

I am concerned that burnout is going to be increasing from this last year. First semester might as well have been two years worth of work. It is very intense, almost every day. It was two or three hours of meetings before or after school. (Core Teacher)

Some of the interviewees anticipated a reduction in the stress from external oversight from the State. Eight interviewees (44%) made statements that they were looking forward to being able to relax the focus on process and focus more on results.

What we need to do is sit back a little, and let the roller coaster finish its momentum. See where it takes us at that point without pushing for another program... We can't implement programs in that way. We need time to evaluate and see what is happening (Core Teacher).

In the survey, respondents were asked to identify three things that they believed should be the biggest priorities for improving student achievement in the future. The most identified priority was maintaining current changes in curriculum and instruction (n=12). Improving student behavior and discipline was the second most frequent response (n=10). Improving student engagement received eight responses. Improving professional relationships and professional collaboration each received six responses.

Conclusion

The findings were extremely compelling in many regards. Under the current rules, the five years prior to formal State sanctions and the Trustee were supposed to be a period of progressive interventions and gradual loss of autonomy. Instead, AVHS experienced an immediate loss of its entire administrative team under II/USP. The following years were described as a conflict between the SAIT and the staff. The staff described the SAIT as outsiders who made numerous top-down mandates with little regard for the daily realities of the individuals at AVHS. The staff felt devalued and scapegoated, and they responded by using transfers, the labor contract, or outright refusal as means to resist the influence of the SAIT. A new site administration was caught in the middle. They needed to immediately implement the mandates of SAIT under fear for their jobs, and they faced increasing resistance from the staff. Only one-third of the original faculty in 2002-03 remained by the 2006-07 school year.

In stark contrast, the last two years under the Trustee and new principal were described quite differently. Although the school was formally sanctioned and the Trustee had greater authority than the SAIT, this period was described much more positively. There was a greater unified focus on classroom instruction. This focus was only possible after skepticism and conflict were replaced with trust and collaboration.

The staff had mixed predictions for the future based on two factors. They feel confident that it will be possible to maintain a culture of higher standards and focus on improved classroom instruction, but they would like to have seen more years of implementation. On the other hand, many fear the loss of resources due to the overall economy and the funding structure under sanctions.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

Introduction

Antelope Valley High School (AVHS) was one of the first six schools academically sanctioned by the State of California, and it was the first high school to receive an embedded State Trustee as one of those sanctions. This process started in the 1999-2000 school year with participation in the Immediate Intervention for Underperforming Schools Program (II/USP). This continued with the School Assistance and Intervention Team (SAIT) Process from 2002-03 through the 2005-06. These years also represented Program Improve (PI) Years One through Four, which is California's accountability system that is compliant to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). A State Trustee was placed on campus for the 2006-07 and 2007-08 school years.

Throughout the SAIT Process (2002-03 through 2005-06), the staff at AVHS reported an adversarial relationship with the various SAIT's. The SAIT's recommendations were viewed as too numerous, generic, ineffective, and forced upon them. This time period was described as frustrating, adversarial, and tumultuous. This can be evidenced by the fact that only one

third of the faculty and none of the site administration from 2002-03 remained by the 2006-07 school year, and the total number of credentialed teachers dropped by twenty. AVHS failed to make its goals on the Academic Performance Index (API).

The Trustee's tenure in the 2006-07 and 2007-08 school years was described quite differently. By most accounts, the Trustee and newly appointed principal focused on building collaborative relationships and rebuilding trust with the school staff. These years were also characterized with a focus on less numerous changes, but the school focused on better implementation on those things that affected classroom instructional practice.

Consistency with Current Research

Although the jury may still be out on the effectiveness of the Trustee in improving student outcomes at Antelope Valley High School in the 2006-07 and 2007-08 school years, these two years provided a much more positive and optimistic experience when compared to the SAIT intervention previously. The findings were very compelling; the majority opinion of the individuals surveyed and interviewed suggested that the SAIT interventions were actually counter-productive.

Most startling was how the SAIT Process was introduced: the entire administrative team was removed. The team removal was based on the theory of action that reconstitution leads to a more capable and committed staff and that the change in staff will lead to a re-design of school processes and structures and better student achievement (Malen & Rice, 2004; Rice & Croninger, 2005; Rice & Malen, 2003). More current research concludes that, in reality, reconstitution usually leads to “throwing the baby out with the bath water.” The loss of impediments to progress, be they staff or systemic, is countered by the loss of quality and experience in staff. Research also finds that when systems or infrastructure are broken down, they are not readily replaced with anything better. A drop in morale is often an immediate result. In most cases, the cost of reconstitution on resources outweighs any benefit. Examples of successful reconstitution are characterized by less focus on removal and greater planning to ensure actual building and establishing staff and capacity, which is the definition of the term. Successful cases of reconstitution generally require significant oversight of the process, and sensitivity to local culture and staff concerns (Doherty & Abernathy, 1998; Goldstein, Kelemen, & Koski, 1998a).

The SAIT Process utilized at AVHS almost perfectly matched the researched pitfalls of reconstitution. The new administrative team was either completely new to administration or new to AVHS. Although it was

announced that only the administrative team would be removed for not producing adequate change, data during the SAIT years indicates that twenty fewer credentialed teachers (82 to 62) were employed and replaced with non-credentialed teachers, all while student enrollment remained relatively equal. The majority of respondents believed that they lost more positive influences than negative. To say that morale was poor could be considered an understatement. The period was described by interviewees as “hell”; the “dark ages”; and as the era when people either left, fought the establishment, or just tried to survive. Many subjects believed that their input and local culture were completely ignored. Some questioned the motives and oversight of the individuals composing the various SAITs. These factors contradicted the likelihood to improving classroom instruction or student achievement that the SAIT anticipated (Wong et al., 2004; Wong & Shen, 2003). On the other hand, the findings show that the years of the Trustee and new principal were the first signs of repairing relationships and morale harmed by the SAIT time period. They also show the first signs of any substantive improvement caused by focusing on classroom instruction.

A comparison to the research on high stakes accountability and takeovers yields similar results. A review of this research concluded that high-stakes accountability often slows decline, but it rarely yields significant

improvement in achievement. It often lowers morale and creates a negative stigma around the struggling school. The pressure on administrators often creates leadership styles that are more authoritarian and less collaborative (Mintrop, 2003, 2004; Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005). These factors make it harder for struggling schools to keep and retain teachers. The teachers that remain can often demonstrate less motivation for reform when their job security combines with these negative factors. Positive cases of school improvement strategies are characterized by increasing capacity and team building. The most decisive factor in takeover success is in limiting turmoil that results from the takeover.

The findings from my study demonstrate that the era of the SAIT Process perfectly match the caveats summarized by previous research. All my findings that demonstrate evidence of building capacity, reducing turmoil, building teamwork, and focusing on the greater issue of improving classroom instruction were primarily from the years of the Trustee and new principal. In general, it appears that the SAIT Process failed to represent a progressive intervention leading to the Trustee. Instead, the Trustee needed to work in spite of SAIT.

It is at this point that I wish to point out that I am in no way placing any blame for poor results on a specific individual or individuals. Nor am I questioning the motives or motivation of the individuals in the study.

Rather, my study is the holistic summation of the subjects' perceptions combined with objective indicators from the time period in question. For example, there is plenty of evidence of hard-working teachers attempting to innovate their instruction to improve student outcomes during the "dark-ages". However, when the school is viewed as an aggregated whole, all of the negative factors from this period overshadowed the positives. The net bottom line was that inadequate improvement was made. Their effort was best illustrated by their expressed frustration. If teachers and administrators simply did not try or did not care, there would be little expressed frustration. Quite the opposite, the voices of frustration were deafening.

The Trustee and principal explicitly stated and demonstrated the specific behaviors that characterized successful reforms. All actions focused on the ultimate goals known to improve student achievement: an obsessive focus on classroom instruction, the use of data to guide teaching and decision making, and a focus on capacity and team building (Marzano et al., 2001; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Schmoker, 2006). All other initiatives were correctly viewed as means to that end. This contrasts wildly to the previously cited "twenty to thirty mandates from SAIT." This leads to the theme of depth. The SAIT process was characterized by numerous

reforms with little or no depth of implementation, where staff did just enough to “check the box.”

In this case study, it appeared that the largest determining factor for success was the focus on morale, team-building, and relationships. By most accounts, the Trustee and principal worked together to heal the damage incurred during the SAIT Process. To most subjects, the Trustee embodied the exact opposite traits of their characterization of the SAIT. The Trustee was characterized as someone who took the time to learn about the individuals and culture unique to AVHS. This resulted in two important responses to reforms during the two years under oversight by the Trustee. These reforms were perceived as more specifically tailored to AVHS, as opposed to the perceived “cookie-cutter” reforms recommended by SAIT. The Trustee’s reforms were also perceived as more native than the SAIT’s which were viewed as forced upon them from the outside. These two factors resulted in much greater buy-in and implementation. Although the Trustee possessed more official authority over AVHS than did the SAIT team, the staff perceived that the Trustee exercised less authoritative power over them than the SAIT. This perception will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter, but it also leads to one unanswered question, “How effective could the Trustee have been if AVHS had more positive than negative experiences under the SAIT Process?”

Organizational Change

A comparison of my findings to the findings from other educational research is necessary and revealing. The findings from my case study of AVHS are consistent with and confirm related research. This is important because improving student academic performance is the underlying premise of the SAIT process and sanctions. However, educational research alone is incomplete.

With a deeper analysis of AVHS, it became apparent that the difference between success and failure was not about the specific educational issues of curriculum and instruction. The differentiating factors between success and inadequate progress were rooted in organizational change. To this end, my study should also invoke a conversation about James Collins' work *Good to Great* (Collins, 2001) and Bolman and Deal's *Reframing Organizations* (Bolman & Deal, 2003). This is most evident by considering that things that worked under the Trustee and new principal were actually started, but with less success, many years earlier. The mere presence of data management systems, instructional coaches, or curriculum pacing is less significant than how well they were implemented and utilized.

There is also the issue of generalization. This case study alone cannot answer one powerful question, "If the Trustee's leadership did yield

significant progress, was it the result of the appointment of a Trustee as a process, or was it the result of an exceptional individual in the right circumstances?” My findings suggest that it was both. Regardless, a more complete approach to understanding AVHS’s change is to discuss greater issues of organizational change.

Jim Collins

The foundational concepts discussed in *Good to Great* can be found throughout my case study findings. Collins’ first chapter is entitled “Good Is the Enemy of Great.” This concept could be considered a summary of the SAIT Process years. A lot of the statements made by teachers from this time period were consistent with the culture of mediocrity described by Collins. This language begins to change in the later years of the sanctions. “Don’t put up with mediocrity if you accept the position, because it exists. Hounding to get what is right and effective while engaging everybody would something that I believe is the most important.” (Site Administrator)

Many events that occurred with staffing are consistent with the concept of “First Who... Then What” or “getting the right people on the bus.” Staff self-selected themselves to leave or stay through transfers. The Trustee and administration aggressively “facilitated” the transfers of other

teachers. In addition, the descriptions of the Trustee's mentorship of site administrators are also consistent with Collins' concept of developing leadership capacity from within an organization.

A review of interview transcripts showed much more of the language found in the work of Collins. For example, one site administrator discussed the necessity of having "tough conversations" and asking "difficult questions." This discussion is a compelling testimonial to Collins' assertion that organizations must "confront the brutal facts" and have a climate where the truth is heard as a prerequisite for greatness.

Collins also believes that the fear of authority inhibits confrontation of the brutal facts, and, therefore, positive organizational change.

Throughout the study, we found comparison companies where the top leader led with such force or instilled such fear that people worried more about the leader... than they worried about external reality and what it could do to the company... The moment a leader allows himself to become the primary reality people worry about, rather than reality being the primary reality, you have a recipe for mediocrity, or worse. (Collins, 2001)

Certainly, Collins would disapprove of the amount of fear that staff, especially administration, had of the SAIT.

Although the parallels to Collins run deeper than this discussion, I will end with one final example. This is the “Hedgehog Concept.” Collins uses the analogy of comparing a fox and a hedgehog. The wily fox is jack-of-all-trades and master-of-none in its various ways of attacking prey. In contrast, the hedgehog has mastered one simple defense. It rolls into a tight ball with its quills radiating out in all directions, a technique that works masterfully every time. Collins asserts that being a hedgehog is a prerequisite to become great. The Trustee’s focus on classroom instruction is far more hedgehog-like than the numerous structural mandates of the SAIT.

Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal

The issue of generalization is further detailed when evaluating the four “frames” of organizations (Bolman & Deal, 2003). In their work *Reframing organizations: artistry, choice, and leadership*, Bolman and Deal view organizations from four paradigms or frames. They believe that many problems in organizational change can be seen when these frames are not adequately balanced. The frames are entitled Structural, Human Resources, Political, and Symbolic.

The Structural Frame is the classic view of organizational change. It includes understanding of structures, infrastructure, processes, and systems. The mandates of the SAIT fall almost entirely in this frame. This makes sense given their need to standardize and present reforms in a report format to the State. There are several issues with the SAIT's intervention in this frame. The first is the over reliance on structural change. In addition, many respondents questioned SAIT's reliance on one-size-fits-all recommendations. This concern has multiple facets. The first is push-back. A staff will resist any reform that it views as generic, top-down, or not based out of an appreciation of the individual school. The second concern is that two schools can claim similar structures and processes on paper, but there may be vast differences in the depth and effectiveness of implementation. The final concern is in data gamesmanship. For example, the district administrators cited discipline data as objective evidence of improved campus climate. However, these same administrators did not endorse that the State consider this as a required data point. If rewards or consequences were to be based on reduction of a particular disciplinary data point, say the frequency of suspensions, a school staff could simply choose to suspend less without fixing any underlying problems. This conflict exists whenever a data indicator becomes the end product unto itself.

The Human Resources Frame works on the assumption that, if you take care of your people, your people will take care of you. This is the most striking difference between the SAIT and the Trustee. The SAIT Process led to decreases in morale, increased staff push-back, and an adversarial relationship with the staff. The initial efforts of the Trustee and new principal were almost exclusively human resources based: relationships, morale, and trust. It is extremely improbable that creating a resentful, resistant staff will lead to successful reform. The largest gap in NCLB is that it cannot mandate teacher buy-in. Highly-qualified, credentialed, and tenured teachers have the highest ability to resist changes that are forced upon them.

The Political Frame does not refer to standard connotations of politics as the name might imply. Instead, it focuses on an individual's or an organization's ability to create alliances and access resources. Again, this was a demonstrated failure of the SAIT time period. Rather than foster alliances, this period was rife with factions and power struggles. At best, the local community was not utilized. The issue of resources will also merit more discussion. There are serious faults when temporary resources are allocated to invoke long-term change, especially when it is questionable if these resources are adequate to cover the strings to which they are attached.

The final frame is the Symbolic Frame. The Symbolic Frame warns us not to underestimate the power of vision and symbolism. NCLB has an inherent conflict in this realm as well. In the politicians' pursuit to create the symbol for change and accountability, they are often simultaneously stigmatizing and demoralizing the staff of underperforming schools. This same staff is not likely to be cooperative with those that publicly admonished them. In the case of AVHS, the subjects described the SAIT as the archetype for bureaucrats who were out of touch with the daily realities of their classroom. In contrast, the Trustee developed the persona of someone who is a partner and collaborator who truly walked a mile, or two years, in their shoes.

In reality, separating the research of organizational change from the educational research is an artificial construct. The research uses similar language of collaborative team building, political turmoil, staff morale, etc. In the case of AVHS, it needs to be stressed that these issues were far more important than the details of the use of the various reforms such as lesson-study, master schedule development, or a new data management system.

Limitations

There are some very specific limitations to this research project. It is a single case study, which severely limits its generalizability. Current results of effectiveness are only preliminary, and even if positive results are found, the sheer number of variables involved makes isolating the significant variables impossible at this juncture. One significant variable may be the reduction in student enrollment since the opening of a neighboring high school for the 2005-06 school year. (See Appendix C) There were also some logistical issues that need to be addressed. However, the power of the information provided should not be underemphasized for the reasons that follow.

Sampling is the first concern that appears. The sample of interviewees is weighted so that administration has the highest representation. Administrators were the most willing and able to meet for interviews when compared to teachers who had difficulty coordinating availability for interviews. Although 22% (n=4) of the interviewees were former employees of AVHS, they were all still employed by AVUHSD. Fifteen percent (n=6) of the survey respondents were former employees of AVHS, and one respondent is no longer employed in the district. Seven interviewees (39%) were current teachers at AVHS. In addition, thirty survey respondents were teachers, which means that approximately 1/6 of

the faculty participated in the survey. In addition, core teachers were very well represented.

Due to this breakdown, several trends were apparent. Current employees and recent transfers out of AVHS, but still working in AVUHSD, were the top two populations represented. The least represented groups were individuals that left AVHS more than several years ago and those that have left the district. The impact of this under-representation is minimized by two facts. First, the current sample spent considerable time talking about the negative aspects of campus climate prior to the appointment of the Trustee. Therefore, it is unlikely that they presented an inaccurately optimistic view of this time period. In addition, the former employees' absence from the study parallels their absence from campus. Therefore, their under-representation has minimal relevance on the questions of current implementation or future sustainability.

Another trend in sampling is that more individuals expressed negative opinions of the current situation in the surveys than was expressed in the interviews. This makes logical sense given the level of anonymity that the survey provided, but it is unlikely that this is the only reason. Many respondents and interviewees at all levels complained about the difficulties related to long hours and many meetings. Therefore, a voluntary meeting with a researcher was not likely to be a high priority. This shows the

greatest impact in the level of depth of their responses. The survey allowed them to voice negative opinions, but they did not have the ability to explain with greater depth as to how or why they feel this way. This should be taken into account when analyzing the results of this study.

It is likely that anyone struggling with time management and/or fear over their job security – new teachers – would not be well represented. Indeed, veteran, tenured teachers were exclusively represented in the interviews. Newly credentialed teachers made up less than 1/6 of the survey respondents. At the time of the study, fully credentialed teachers comprised 76% of the faculty. This study should be considered a perspective of the changes forced on veteran teachers, and it does not represent the opinions of novice teachers or those new to AVHS. This could be especially unfortunate if a struggling school is having difficulty recruiting and retaining experienced teachers.

It may be too soon to tell the measurable benefit of the successes under the Trustee's leadership at AVHS, and it is definitely too soon to attribute the key reasons behind any successes. These facts still hold minimal impact on the utility of the study. My study contains both responses to the positive and negative. So although conclusions of positives may not be ready for strong conclusions, the negative findings can be confidently stated. It is highly improbable that anyone repeating the

negative findings at AVHS would be able to achieve a positive result. Therefore, future practitioners and researchers alike may only have a hazy idea of which way to steer, but they will have great clarity in the obstacles to avoid.

Finally, one single case study may not lend itself to much generalization. This needs to be given due diligence in analysis. However, many of these findings are consistent with the existing body of research. In the areas of consistency, this case is a continuation of the existing body of research. It is only the areas that are inconsistent with, or not addressed by, the current body of research that this case study truly stands alone.

Conclusions

The SAIT Process was a very negative experience for the staff, and the experience with the Trustee was more positive.

The time period of the SAIT process was characterized a time of turmoil and unhappiness. The precipitating event for the time period of the SAIT Process was the administrative removal in the spring 2003. The new administrative team was either new to administration or new to AVHS, and they worked under fear of their jobs to immediately implement the mandates of the SAIT. This resulted in a rebellious or skeptical attitude

from many faculty members. The Trustee and new principal took action to mitigate this damage, but it handicapped their efforts for improvement.

In contrast, the staff and administration were less fearful of the Trustee, who technically held more authority than the SAIT. It was this contrast in perception that made them more willing to openly accept and implement recommended changes. The staff identified three main items of contrast. They viewed the Trustee as a support, a resource, and an ally. They viewed the Trustee's recommendations/mandates as coming from within AVHS and not Sacramento. They believed that the time that the Trustee spent on campus lead to recommendations that were tailored to address specific nuances of AVHS and its students.

Proponents of reconstitution may argue the necessity to deconstruct negative artifacts of AVHS that prevented school improvement, but this deconstruction was not adequately paired with the creation of positive structures. Some respondents stated that something radical may have been necessary as a "wake-up call." However, even their consensus is that this could have been done with greater focus on developing positives and strengths. Weak staff may have left, but so did good staff. The drop in morale created a staff that was adverse to the SAIT Process, and some staff actively fought the process. The mere definition of the word "reconstitution"

communicates the intent to emphasize that the greatest effort should be placed on building capacity.

There was little evidence supporting a consistent or progressive master plan for AVHS. If one existed, it was not evident to the staff or administration. Recommendations from the SAIT were perceived to be more related to the individuals composing the team than the assessed needs of the school. Whether true or not, this perception sabotaged any hope of serious implementation. Although beyond the scope of this study, no subjects were able to ascertain the level of oversight for the various SAIT's from year to year.

Focused implementation was more successful than changes in structures or processes.

Many of the Trustee's actions were consistent with the WASC recommendations from 1999. These concepts were not new to the school when the Trustee began in the 2006-07 school year. The major difference was the focus on deep implementation. By contrast, the SAIT Process involved a focus on numerous changes, mostly in structures and processes, which appeared to have various degrees of actual implementation.

This conclusion has an inherent challenge with many mandates of NCLB. It is far more difficult to quantify and document depth of implementation when compared to reporting changes in procedures or flowcharts, especially under tight time constraints. NCLB does not have a provision for measuring the quality of professional relationships. The higher the stakes, the less likely that benchmarks or indicators will be used as tools to measure improvement; they will be perceived as the end product or goal. As a result, we risk losing focus on student achievement and more on appeasing the reporters' expectations.

Stigma, morale, relationships, and team-building need to be positively addressed or implementation will be shallow, at best.

Compliance or submissiveness are not synonymous to implementation. Addressing stigma, morale, teamwork, and relationships may not guarantee improved student achievement. However, they are prerequisites. Failing to do so is counter-productive. The findings are powerful to this conclusion. They call into question how NCLB is being implemented.

These findings show the necessity to focus and support the people that deliver or support classroom instruction – teachers and instructional

leaders. Outside of the requirement for Highly Qualified Teachers, the implementation of NCLB often does quite the opposite in supporting teachers and instructional leaders. NCLB uses punitive measures to mandate the use of data, accountability, and research-based techniques. It does not address the fact that these humans are necessary to effectively implement and deliver, or that certain methods of enforcement may be counter-productive to achieve the desired results. NCLB also does not appear to acknowledge the current reality of supply and demand for quality educators.

The early experience of AVHS possessed inherent contradictions to the design of NCLB.

Although not often stated explicitly, many subjects pointed out contradictions in this experience. The Trustee possessed greater authority over AVHS, but the staff feared SAIT more. The district received money to implement change, but received mandates that exceeded the financial support. Administrators were held accountable for results, but they were also mandated to which practices they may, or may not, implement. From a policy standpoint, these contradictions and resulting dissonance diminish staff buy-in and cooperation.

In reality, the first years of the SAIT Process were based on California's processes and expectations under the Immediate Intervention for Underperforming Schools Program (II/USP). II/USP did not align to the current Program Improvement system that should guide the progression of the loss of autonomy (California Department of Education, 2006b, 2007). The findings at AVHS suggest a reversal of this progression. The staff describes the first year in Program Improvement (2002-03) as ending with the most punitive action, the removal of the administrative team. In contrast, they describe the two years under sanctions (2006-07 and 2007-08) as the most supportive. Even if the design of the Program Improvement system was fully complete in the beginning, its basic outline was already released in 2002 by NCLB ("No Child Left Behind Act," 2001; United States Department of Education, 2002). In addition, the research providing the caveats from this type of action was becoming increasingly available (Doherty & Abernathy, 1998; Goldstein et al., 1998a; Hunter & Brown, 1999; Malen, Croninger, Redmond, & Muncey, 1999; Malen & Muncey, 1999; Marzano et al., 2001; Rudo, 2001).

These contradictions appear to be rooted in the duality of California's current system for accountability. A report released by the California Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) criticized the use of two accountability systems (Hill, 2008). This report claims that maintaining a descendent of

the State accountability system in addition to the federally compliant system sends mixed messages to schools, magnifies the weaknesses of both systems, is confusing, and expends large fiscal resources on things that do not improve student achievement. The LAO recommended that California unifies accountability into one streamlined system, makes the system more district-centered, differentiates sanctions and supports based on district need, and focuses more resources on reforming core problems.

Sustainability will be based on two competing factors, resources versus changes in culture and practice.

Provided the staff turnover remains low, many subjects felt that certain changes will remain after the Trustee leaves. Improvements in teacher collaboration, data usage, classroom instruction, etc. are all things that have been introduced and reinforced to the culture of expectations. It does not cost money for teachers to have an attitude that focuses on classroom instruction and away from students' poverty and home life.

Facilitating these changes required resources, and some of these additional resources leave with the Trustee. Given the state of the current economy, many educators fear that they will be held accountable for higher standards while they receive less support and resources. Those individuals

that did discuss the sustainability of resources question the sustainability of reforms based on a temporary addition of resources and not a long-term reform in funding.

Recommendations

School reform should include a greater emphasis on supporting human capital.

Staff reaction to the SAIT, Trustee, and administration was the most determinant factor between problems and potential successes. Schools have little control over variables in the community – crime, poverty, involvement in probation or foster care, etc. However, they should be supported in their attempts to attract and retain quality teachers, especially in underperforming, urban schools. This topic was enough of a priority to the district prior to NCLB that the superintendent studied it in his own dissertation (Vierra, 2001). Almost all positive attributes used to describe the Trustee and changes at AVHS under the Trustee were rooted in the human element. The Trustee was described as a mentor, collaborator, and resource. Although a large number of teachers were put on improvement plans, a larger number of subjects viewed these plans as more supportive and less punitive than in previous years.

Even if these efforts do not yield immediate results, not doing so can guarantee failure. Proponents of accountability and reconstitution often use rhetoric that dysfunctional staffs need to be removed with little acknowledgement that better trained and committed replacements do not exist. If one person can have such a positive impact, “Why not bring them back to the districts?” (District Administrator) It is entirely possible that if this was addressed positively at an earlier stage, sanctions would become less necessary. Current research supports this assertion. These findings also suggest the need for continuous study of trends in the workforce in public education.

The entire process should be planned and supervised to assure progression and continuity from year to year.

In this case, there was little correlation between the progression of authority of State representatives described in the Program Improvement process and the perceived authority experienced at the site. In fact, the most punitive action was performed at the earliest stages of the SAIT process. This was counterproductive in the long run. Conversely, some expressed that they wished that the Trustee, the sanction, came sooner in the process.

Staff also complained that they saw little carry over from year to year during the SAIT Process. The research states that the most successful interventions are those that focus on comprehensive planning and capacity building. When this does not happen, credibility issues and problems with staff buy-in hinder improvement (Mintrop, 2003, 2004; Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005; Wong et al., 2004; Wong & Shen, 2003).

Focus on fewer reforms, but emphasize deep implementation.

Changing an educational organization is not a quick or shallow process. This is easily forgotten under the pressure to show immediate results. From the beginning, very few people disagreed on *what* needed to happen, the primary challenge was in *how* to make it happen.

The implementation of reform takes time. Assessments for API and AYP start in March, which is approximately seven months or less from the beginning of the school year. This is simply not enough time to evaluate, develop, implement, and assess new reforms from scratch every year. Each year must cumulatively build off of the previous.

State representatives performing oversight, assessment, and intervention should spend more time at the site.

I was not be able to conclusively conclude that spending more time understanding the individuals, culture, and community that compose a school would lead to different or more effective recommendations. However, the mere perception of staff creates reality. If a staff is convinced that a reform will not work, it will not.

At first, this recommendation may appear cost prohibitive. However, the cost of doing any less proves in this case, as well as previous research, to be a waste of resources. If implemented correctly, investing this time and money up front should create a savings when fewer schools require more intrusive interventions. With hundreds of schools in PI5 in 2007-08, it will be extremely expensive to not invest in more effective interventions in PI1 through PI4.

The current system of funding and accountability needs to be evaluated and researched.

It is counter-intuitive to hold school leadership accountable for results while simultaneously reducing their autonomy of fiscal spending and daily operations. If the focus of accountability will be on results, then

autonomy over resources and process needs to be given to schools and districts. If NCLB does not allow this autonomy during sanctions, it should at least be exercised to non-sanctioned schools. This extends beyond the scope of this study, but the works of William G. Ouchi and the California Legislative Analyst's Office are a good introduction to this concept (Hill, 2008; Ouchi & Segal, 2003).

APPENDIX A

Survey

1. I am _
 - a. A current employee at AVHS.
 - b. A former employee of AVHS. Last date of employment (mm/yyyy)____/____.
 - c. District office employee of AVUHSD.

2. Job Title
 - a. District Administrator
 - b. Trustee
 - c. School Administrator
 - d. Teacher (either classroom or instructional coach) Please state department.
 - i. English
 - ii. Math
 - iii. Science
 - iv. Social Studies
 - v. Special Education
 - vi. Physical Education
 - vii. Arts, Industrial Technology
 - viii. Behavioral Science
 - ix. Foreign Language
 - e. Academic Support Personnel (para-educator, counselor, ELL Coordinator, Student Services provider (at site), or Title I Coordinator)
 - f. Other. Please specify _____.

3. Date started at AVHS. (District Office personnel please state placement at AVHS or DO, whichever came first.)
 - a. July 2002 or prior.
 - b. July 2002 to June 2003
 - c. July 2003 to June 2004
 - d. July 2004 to June 2005
 - e. July 2005 to June 2006
 - f. July 2006 to June 2007

g. July 2007 or after.

4. How many years have you held a credential? _____ Or N/A
5. How many years have you worked for AVUHSD? _____
6. How many years have you worked at AVHS? _____
7. What is your current credential status?
 - a. Full
 - b. University Intern
 - c. District Intern
 - d. Pre-Intern
 - e. Emergency
 - f. Waiver
 - g. N/A
8. In what ways has the appointment of a State Trustee affected your daily job duties the most?
9. In what ways has the appointment of a State Trustee most affected the students of AVHS?
10. When you first heard of the appointment of AVHS, what were your immediate thoughts and attitudes?
11. Currently, how have those initial thoughts and attitudes changed, if any?

12. In your opinion, what should a researcher studying the appointment of a State Trustee investigate?

13. In the first column, please state the changes or interventions that have most impacted your job duties. Then, please rate your opinion on the remaining columns 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest).

Intervention	Improves Student Achievement	Affects my daily duties

14. What do you believe should be the three biggest priorities to improve student achievement at AVHS?

- a.
- b.
- c.

15. Please add any additional comments that you feel are relevant.

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol

Interviewee: _____ Title: _____

Meeting Date: _____ Meeting Time: _____

1. Consent and start recording.
2. Review disclaimers, role boundaries for researcher and limitations of research in more depth.
3. *Before we start, do you have any questions?*
4. *Please review your history with AVHS and its reforms to improve student achievement.*
5. *Let's review those (for each reform):*
 - a. *What was staff's reaction to (each reform)?*
 - b. *How did (each reform) affect your daily duties?*
 - c. *From your perspective, how did (each reform) affect student achievement? Long-term?*
6. *In what ways has the appointment of the State Trustee most changed your daily job duties?*

7. *What do you see are the most lasting effects of the appointment of the State Trustee?*
8. (Time permitting, if necessary) Open discussion for any items found on survey or focus group that were not discussed.
9. *What do you feel are important to know about the experience of working at AVHS that have not been discussed?*
10. *Please let me know where you intend to be in your career in 5 years and how these issues have influenced your decision.*
11. Wrap-up, disclaimer review, and thanks.

APPENDIX C

Descriptive Data

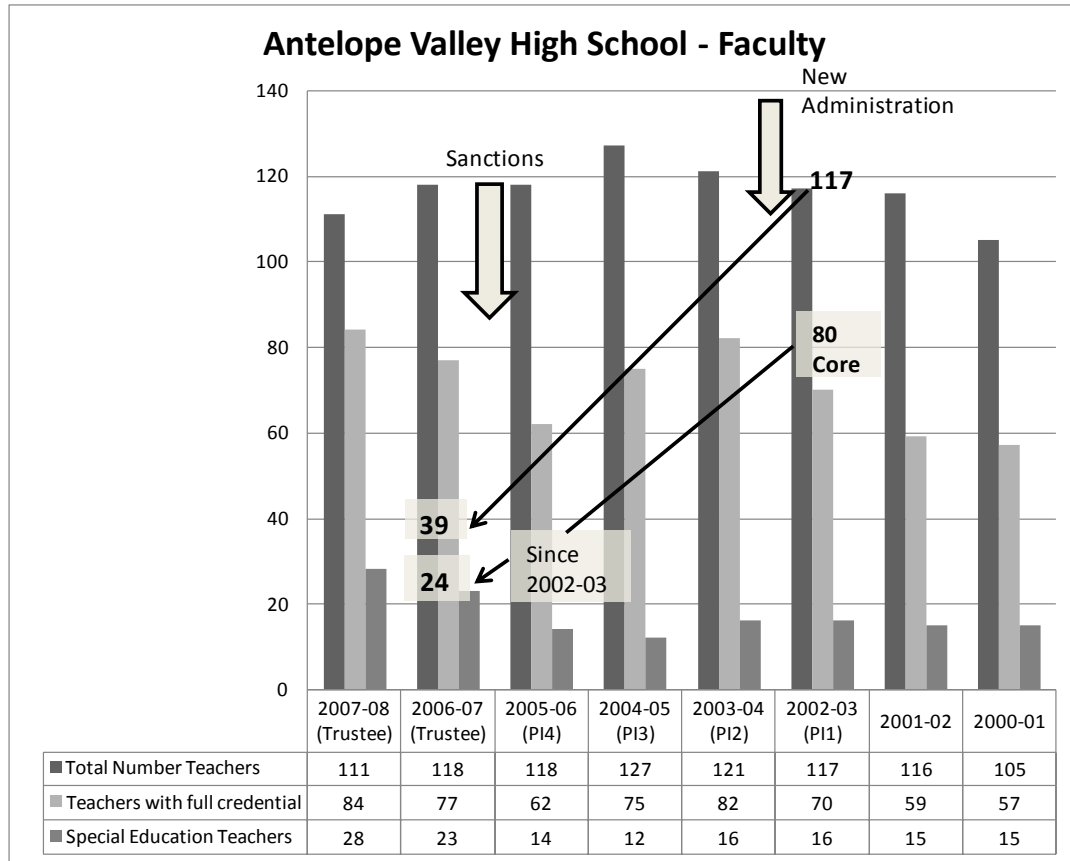


Figure 4. Antelope Valley High School - Faculty.

(AVUHSD, 2008; California Department of Education, 2008)

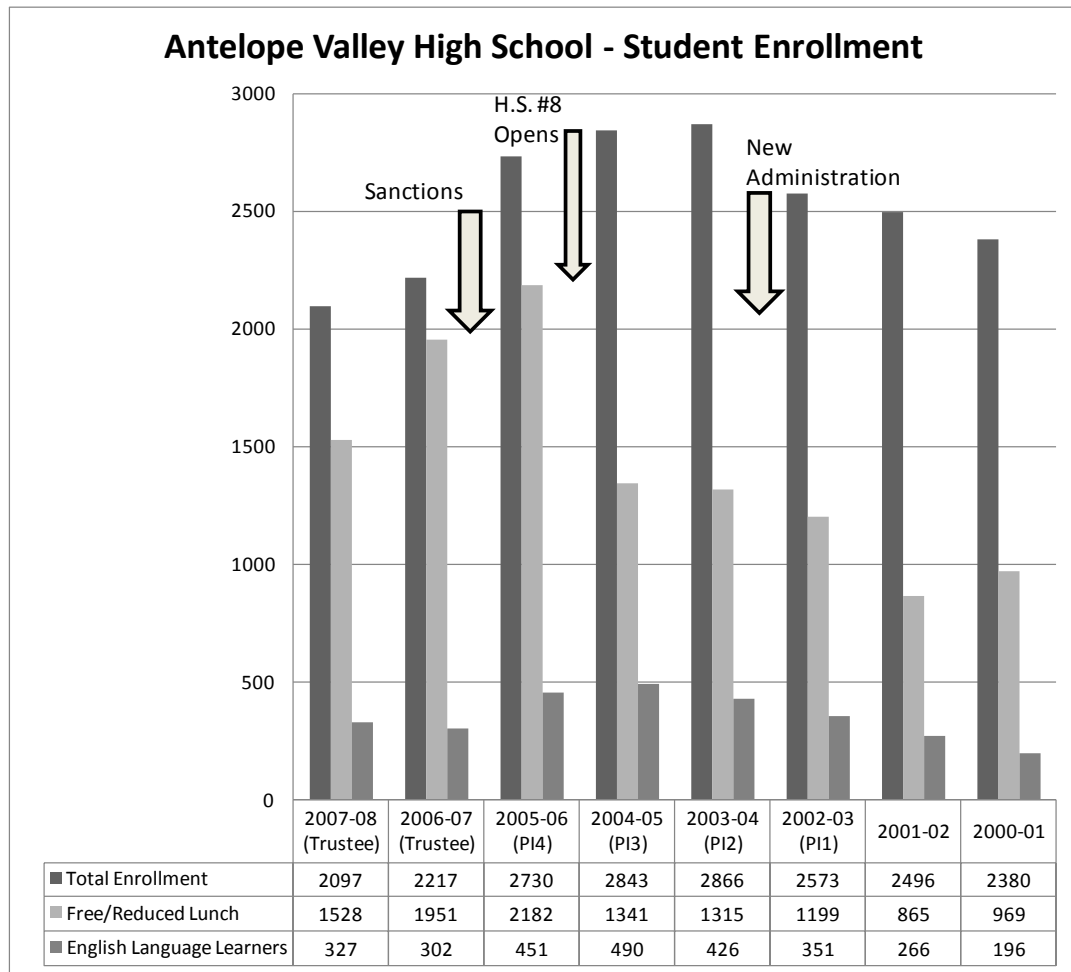


Figure 5. Antelope Valley High School - Student Enrollment

(Education Data Partnership, 2008)

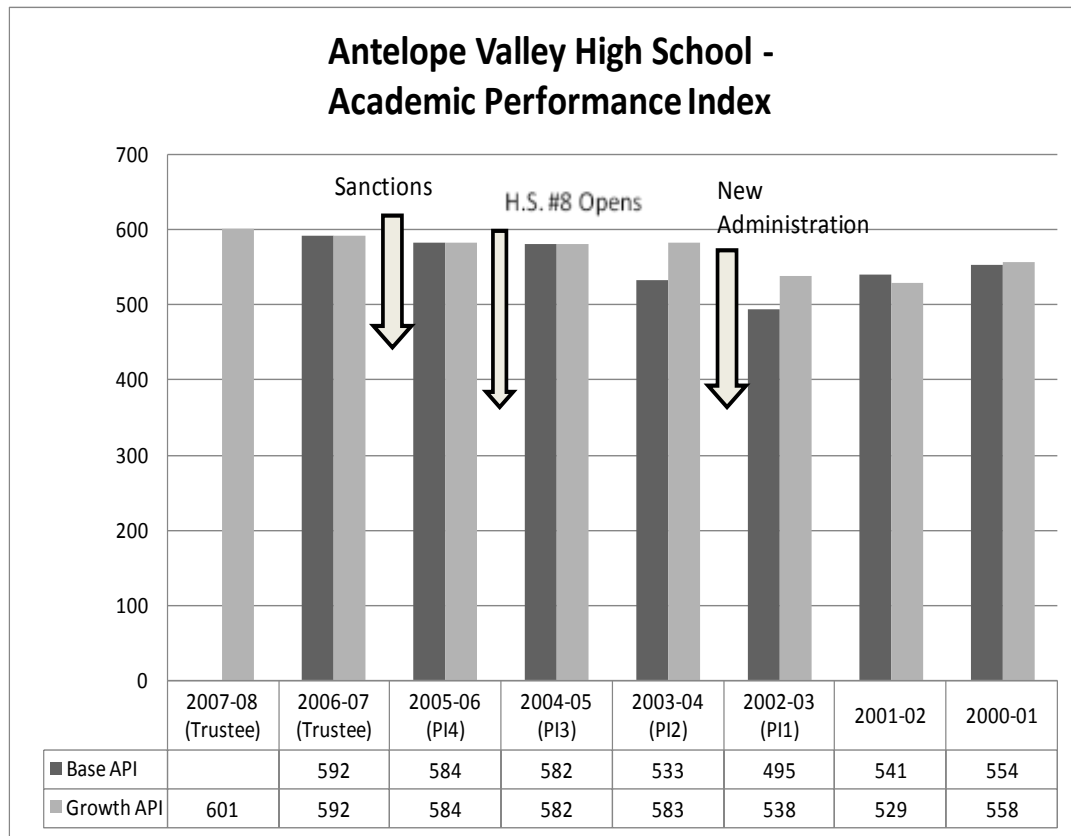


Figure 6. Antelope Valley High School - Academic Performance Index

(Education Data Partnership, 2008)

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