The Annual Case:
Developing, Organizing, Using,
and Disseminating Craft Knowledge

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Abstract: An annual-case process that examines principal leader-ship over the course of a year can provide extensive opportunities for practitioners and professors to collect, examine, and dissemi-nate knowledge in, of, and about practice. Such cases can support professional development and pre-service preparation and become bases for research across multiple sites.

Every principal faces multiple problems during a school year. How these problems are addressed and resolved directly affects how well a school accomplishes its agenda over the course of a school year. This suggests neither that the principal solely identifies and solves the problems nor that the problems chosen for action are the only ones that face a school and its community. Rather, a principal's knowledge about practice and leadership helps the school focus on the problems that are

the most important to address and resolve during the course of a single year to move the school toward its goals.

Craft knowledge, even though trusted by practitioners, has not been viewed as credibly as other types of knowledge (Barth, 2001) because it neither is collected with any consistency or rigor nor codified systematically. To address this situation, we have proposed elsewhere (Bellamy, Fulmer, Murphy, & Muth, 2003) a Framework for School Leadership Accomplishments (FSLA, see Figure 1) for organizing practitioner knowledge. Additionally, we have discussed accomplishment-minded practice by examining three interrelated domains of school leadership—leadership for sustainable purposes, strategic focus, and effective action—and the nature of the annual cycle that pervades action and accomplishment at the school level (Muth, Bellamy, Fulmer, & Murphy, 2004). Here, we outline the "annual case" as a means of continuous data collection across multiple sites, events, and years to improve knowledge *of*, *in*, and *for* practice (Jenlink, 2001).
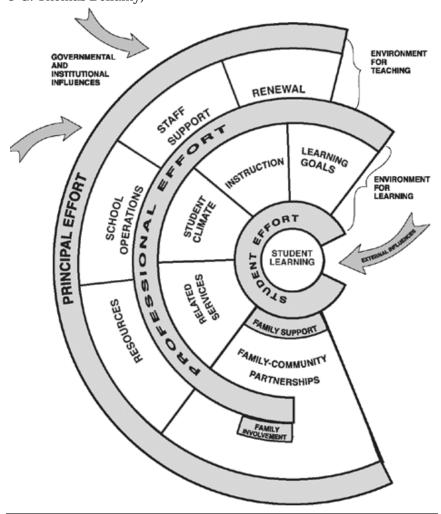
Building Knowledge from Practice through Professional Cases

In their discussion of a practitioner knowledge base for teaching, Hiebert, Gilmore, and Stigler (2002) suggested that practitioner knowledge is important precisely because it reflects experience with specific problems of practice. Because such knowledge links actions to specific problems, it is "detailed, concrete, and specific" (p. 6). However, practitioner knowledge is difficult to exchange and accumulate for many of the same reasons that it is important: contexts are idiosyncratic and practical knowledge is difficult to share beyond immediate colleagues. Under these circumstances, practitioner knowledge often remains tacit (Polanyi, 1967) or serves only to strengthen practice in small, interconnected communities. Thus, we need additional ways to document, communicate, and accumulate practitioner knowledge if is to build over time in ways that strengthen our profession.

In many professions, "case documentation" serves as the foundation for organization and communication of practitioner knowledge. As Silver (1983) noted,

> Record keeping in accordance with standardized occupation-wide formats is a normal part of practice in the applied professions. . . Whether . . . case histories and treatment protocols, case briefs, job specifications and blueprints, or floor plans, they are maintained . . . in a form agreed upon by the entire field.. . [making] it possible not only for individuals to learn a great deal from their own past practices but for the field as a whole to learn as well, for it is primarily the research based on analysis of such

Figure 1
The Framework for School Leadership Accomplishments (Bellamy, 1999;
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records that has enabled those professions to generate tremendous
bodies of technical knowledge and effective practice. (p. 103)

Potential Benefits of Professional Cases

Such professional cases serve many purposes. First, they extend the
profession's knowledge base through the explicit inclusion and honoring
of practitioner knowledge as a source of important information. Second,

professional cases can provide hypothesis and questions for social science research, helping to bridge the gap between practitioner knowledge and more formal research results. For example, in medical fields cases serve as the accumulated "professional text" which confirms or questions treatment prescriptions. Third, professional cases can facilitate leadership succession in schools. For example, case notes in law are so standardized that attorneys can quickly learn the background of a case when transfer of responsibility occurs. Fourth, case notes can support communication with a school administrator's many constituencies just as case notes in architecture (plans and models) help regulators, clients, local residents, and others envision what is planned and what its impact might be. Finally, professional cases serve as a basis for professional learning and development. While professional cases often are quite different from teaching cases, case development and sharing can provide insights about decision processes in schools and their short- and long-term effectiveness.

Requirements for Useful Professional Cases

To serve these many purposes, professional cases should meet several standards. They should

1. be public, sharable, and stored for access by others (Hiebert et al., 2002)

2. reflect a useful unit of analysis of the profession's work (Hiebert et al.)

3. provide a description of context that is sufficient to facilitate analyses and comparisons.

4. support sharing critical, ethical, and legal reasoning as well as procedural knowledge.

The Annual Case

For the principalship, an annual case in the life of a school appears to meet these criteria. The annual-case concept is based in the annual cycle of school leadership illustrated in Figure 2. This annual cycle of events, aimed toward improving practices and outcomes in schools, and a particular year's problems of practice are directly related to longer-term issues that extend beyond any single year's boundaries. And each selected accomplishment is composed of micro-problems, each of which must be addressed for the larger, longer-term outcomes to be achieved. Further, the purposes a school serves—both public and private—are a significant part of the context of practice and school improvement. It is within these
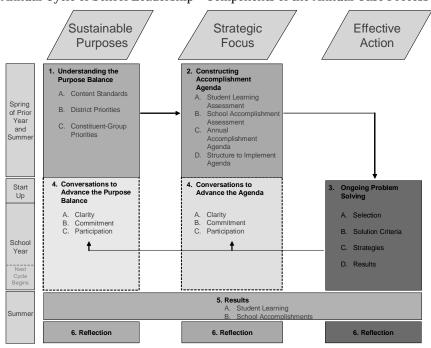
Figure 2
Annual Cycle of School Leadership—Components of the Annual Case Process

	Sustainable Purposes	**Strategic Focus**	**Effective Action**
Spring of Prior Year and Summer	**1. Understanding the Purpose Balance** A. Content Standards B. District Priorities C. Constituent-Group Priorities	**2. Constructing Accomplishment Agenda** A. Student Learning Assessment B. School Accomplishment Assessment C. Annual Accomplishment Agenda D. Structure to Implement Agenda	
Start Up **School Year** - - - - - *Next Cycle Begins*	**4. Conversations to Advance the Purpose Balance** A. Clarity B. Commitment C. Participation	**4. Conversations to Advance the Agenda** A. Clarity B. Commitment C. Participation	**3. Ongoing Problem Solving** A. Selection B. Solution Criteria C. Strategies D. Results
Summer	**5. Results** A. Student Learning B. School Accomplishments		
	6. Reflection	**6. Reflection**	**6. Reflection**

multiple contexts and time frames that the types of knowledge needed to address school problems, the framework in which they are lodged, and the array of school purposes provide heuristics for selecting and bounding problems annually. The annual cycle generally works well, too, because the annual calendar for most schools provides natural beginning, ending, and reassessment periods. Each year, then, is a substantive "case history" in the continuous improvement and renewal cycle through which schools proceed annually.

Components of an Annual Case

As we envision it, the annual case of school leadership consists of six major components, together with supporting appendices. Figure 2 identifies these components, and the following sections elaborate their contents. The sections deliberately address all three domains of school leadership—sustainable purposes, strategic focus, and effective action—as these occur in an annual cycle of school work. The annual case also is intended to incorporate many familiar aspects of annual planning pro-

cesses for school improvement, responsibilities of stewardship for a school mission, and the daily work of problem selection and problem solving. The annual case includes a school leader's work to establish purposes and goals, creating the context for daily work, as well as methods for addressing that daily work. It also is intended to frame the explicit and extensive use of data to guide both annual planning and daily action.

Phase 1: Sustainable Purposes—
Understanding the Local Purpose Balance

The first section of the annual case describes the school's community and the balance of purposes that exists among the school's various constituencies, information helps that to anchor the goals of the school. Today, most schools work with "standards plus" expectations; that is, students in a school are expected to do well on external measures of learning related to content standards, and they are expected to meet additional expectations that reflect particular values and purposes in the community. This portion of the case documents how the principal understands the purpose balance in a community and its impact on what constitutes success in the school.

Phase 1 of the annual case addresses such questions as these:

● which of the six school purposes are given greater weight in this community?

● would school success in meeting content standards alone satisfy most constituents, or do the additional expectations carry greater weight in this community?

● what conflicts among groups affect how school purposes are balanced?

● what defines the working center of school purposes for the community?

● do district and board policies adequately address the interests of a particular school's community, or are additional priorities needed at the school level?

Each year, a school community and its leadership, embodied in the work of a principal and a school's leadership team, develops, implements, and assesses its annual agenda of school accomplishments for student learning. But this agenda is not isolated; that is, each annual agenda or case is lodged within a framework of ongoing scrutiny of school success—and failure—that continually recontextualizes where a

school is relative to its goals and what it needs to do to continue to get better.

Among the areas considered as a leadership team reviews prior years and begins to select data and other information on which to base provisional decisions for the coming year are these:

- the school's profile or its repertoire of resources and the pertinent trends that affect its progress

- its school improvement plan and an assessment of their success carrying it out in previous years

- any professional development activities that were intended to support the plan

- the state's and district's content standards for student achievement and other test data

- district priorities

- the concerns of internal and external groups important to the success of the school

Additionally, a principal's background, perspectives, values, knowledge, and skills will figure prominently in the selection of agenda items and the methods by which they are developed and pursued. Here, however, we consider only the content standards, district priorities, and the views of constituent groups. Then, we examine the time frame in which these considerations might occur in preparing for a new year, a new annual cycle.

A. Content Standards

Beginning in spring, a school's leadership team takes stock: How well did we do, given state standards for performance? Usually, these standards are minimums. That is, the state sets a floor for all students in all districts, and districts can choose to raise the bar higher or explicitly follow what the state has decreed. Multiple factors will determine just where a district or school falls on the continuum. In a particular district, for example, children might be expected to meet certain levels of proficiency earlier than demanded by a state's guidelines or required to meet additional challenges not specified by the state. The same can be true for district expectations about teacher and administrator performance.

In Colorado, for instance, the Colorado School Assessment Program (Colorado Department of Education, 2002) places minimum, albeit high, expectations for proficient performance at multiple levels throughout a child's progress from grade school through high school. We say "high"

only because the state has changed expectations for school performance significantly but has provided very few resources to assist districts and schools, particularly those with limited resources and children with high needs, to jump start formerly languishing systems. Rather, the state has made its test results high profile by publishing them annually and singling out schools that are "low" or "unsatisfactory," now giving them only two or three years to improve before they can be taken over (Colorado Department of Education) or before their students, particularly poorer students, can go to other schools and districts, including private and parochial schools, with district-financed vouchers (Colorado Department of Education). In Colorado, the incentives to perform are largely sticks, not carrots.

Faced with such challenges, a school's leadership team would consider the prior year's expectations for student performance and any discrepancies between those expectations and actual achievement, other factors that might have affected the outcomes positively (e.g., teacher focus, new curricula, lower student-teacher ratios) or negatively (e.g., student mobility, teacher turnover, low teacher or community confidence), the consequences of new or modified programs put in place to support prior accomplishments, and myriad other data sources (see Appendix 1) that might recommend alternatives to move the school more rigorously towards its goals. These trend data provide continuing measures against which progress toward school goals can be calculated.

B. District Priorities

The next step in establishing the purpose balance is for the team to examine district priorities for all schools and any peculiar ones for its school. For example, districtwide initiatives aimed at changing approaches to staff development (FSLA 2, see Figure 1) or the overall culture of the district and its schools (FSLA 8, see Appendix 1) would have to become part of any decisions about what strategies are undertaken. District testing programs, too, would figure prominently in (a) determining time lines, (b) using district tests as predictors of statewide test results, or (c) modifying school practices. Further, district priorities may necessitate development of success criteria in addition to those suggested by the latest and best research or those demanded by the community. For instance, in a district with meager resources, the principal and the leadership team might recognize the need to develop alternative sources of support (FSLA 9) and might turn to community leaders to assist with fund raising through grant writing and various forms of business support. After, clarifying particular needs, the school could establish focused fund-raising efforts, making needs clear and addressable.

C. Constituent-Group Priorities

The process of determining community priorities is largely one of inductive analysis. Almost daily, principals encounter evidence of what one or more people want from the school: in meetings with parents or neighbors, from editorials in the school newspaper, in the community's press, in testimony before the school board on its new policies, and so on. Essentially, understanding the balance of school purposes is a matter of being sensitive to and synthesizing all this information as well as understanding the points of agreement and conflict, areas of strongly held beliefs or expectations, and areas where the community is comfortable with the exercise of professional judgment by school staff.

In order to share the data through which a principal reaches an inductive understanding of purposes, the annual case format asks for supporting artifacts to be included in appendices to the case (see Appendix 2). For example, Appendix A might include one-sentence summaries of meetings in which constituents expressed an expectation or "want" from the school, news clippings, and so on.

The accomplishment perspective offers two conceptual tools that could help construct this aspect of the annual case. The first is the categorization of school purposes into six competing areas: enculturation, economic, and child care, both public and private. This taxonomy can assist principals in identifying the issues that most effectively activate the community. What, for example, are the major points of conflict among constituencies? Do members of the community believe that the school should prepare youngsters for college or for careers—or both? Are the arts highly desired? Is school safety a critical issue? Determining from the outset what motivates a community relative to school outcomes is of considerable importance to the success of a school. As artifacts and experiences are mined for answers to these questions, a principal might begin to categorize each of the community's expectations under one or more of the six purposes.

As knowledge of a community's expectations and purposes deepens, a principal could represent the balance of purposes in ways that various school constituents could understand. For example, Figure 3 represents a common purpose balance in an affluent community where private economic interests (special credentials and competitiveness for college admission) have more emphasis than other school purposes, while Figure 4 illustrates a community where work on standards has overwhelmed practically everything else.

Time Frame

A principal and a school's leadership team need to examine all of the
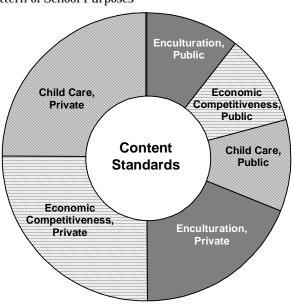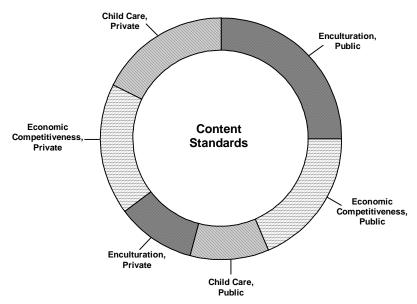
Figure 3
Balanced Pattern of School Purposes

Figure 4
Pattern of School Purposes Focused Primarily on Standards

considerations, factors, and data that go into formulating decisions for the coming annual cycle prior to the beginning of the school year. Because most schools end their terms in May or June and resume them in August or September, late spring and late summer are the most likely times when principals and their teams can analyze past successes and continuing shortfalls. Before school closes in early summer, they might review data then available in relation to the school's improvement and staff development plans, determine to what extent goals were realized, and begin laying out areas in which modified or new accomplishments need to be developed. Before the school begins its new annual cycle, then, the principal and the team could lay out provisional plans for the year's school improvement process, staff development, and other areas that must be addressed, using the FSLA to organize the coming year's expectations and work.

Phase 2: Strategic Focus—
Constituting an Accomplishment Agenda

Given the early planning discussed briefly above, the principal and the school need to discern which accomplishments are most likely to advance the school's improvement agenda, facilitate what the school needs to do to reach its goals, and ensure that students learn what various constituencies prefer. For this, the FSLA provides clear guidelines for organizing data, raising questions, and specifying an accomplishment agenda.

A. Student-Learning Assessment

The essential question about student learning is what was learned from the analysis of student-learning data (See Appendix 1, 1. *Learning Goals*, for examples of data that might be gathered and used to determine areas for improvement or success in areas of accomplishment.) What accomplishments were established for the prior year, and how close do current data indicate that the school came to reaching them? For example, the previous year's reading-test scores may have shown that third-grade students fall below the statewide mean for reading comprehension, and in response the school adopted a new reading series along with intensive related training for all third-grade teachers. Did the school's third graders' scores on reading comprehension improve? Did this improvement occur in all classrooms and to what levels? Were the changes due to improved instruction and materials, to the talents of the new third graders, or to some combination of factors?

Given responses to these questions, knowledge of the community's purpose perspectives, and content and process knowledge available from best-practice research along with other sources of knowledge, what choices are required to focus the annual agenda on those essential elements that

will most likely drive the school toward improved student learning? Does the school need to focus on clarifying learning goals, implementing new approaches to instruction, building family-community partnerships, or targeting school operations? Which of the areas are most likely to garner increased learning outcomes for students at all levels?

B. School-Accomplishment Assessment

As a principal examines school accomplishments, the key question is what was learned from analyses of the school's operation. That is, what supports were provided to what ends? For example, were instructional teams or coaches assigned to the school by the district to help the school achieve its instructional goals? Were budget allocations in various areas sufficient to undergird essential areas? Were career-track programs supported by community internships? Did the district ensure that data were available when needed to make decisions about student placements?

Using responses to such questions, a principal can select the areas directly or indirectly affecting student learning that appear to be the most likely to advance student learning. For instance, for children who are not performing well on reading or writing tests, more focused instruction might be needed, and the school might establish a process to monitor advances through continuing conversations among grade-level teachers about student progress and alternative strategies to help those who are struggling.

C. Annual-Accomplishment Agenda

After examining student learning and school accomplishments, a principal is ready to establish the accomplishment agenda for the next year. What, then, are the overall goals or priority accomplishments that need to be established for the school, what processes will advance the priorities, and who will be included in the process? Will the whole staff be involved in setting goals, reviewing data analyses, clarifying their professional development needs, and regularly reviewing progress toward the goals? What is the role of the community? Were the accomplishments set in the prior year—the learning goals, the instructional plans, or the renewal efforts—clearly defined, supported, and modified as needed over the past annual cycle, or are modifications or new accomplishments needed for the upcoming year? What quality or success criteria specify who needs to do what, when, and how?

D. Structure To Implement Agenda

To implement the agenda for the coming year, what structural changes need to be made to implement the annual agenda. Who needs to be included in conversations about goals and processes? How will the staff be involved? What are the expectations for the district or the community?

Will student learning needs be compromised by adult issues: contractual, capacity, or choice? What support will staff need?

Time Frame

The process of establishing the accomplishment agenda parallels that of examining and clarifying sustainable purposes, and both might occur simultaneously. Knowing purposes facilitates analyzing prior successes and determining the agenda for the coming year. Further, by keeping the leadership team and other members of the staff involved as school closes and before it reopens, the importance of focusing on accomplishments, using data to clarify successes and identify needs, and modifying plans and activities based on data become cultural expectations that suffuse plans, projects, and practices. As the new cycle begins, intentions are clear, plans are in place, and monitoring functions can be ready.

Phase 3: Effective Action—Ongoing Problem Solving

Once the principal and school establish an initial agenda, they need to engage constituencies in conversations to advance the school's purposes and agenda (see below). In addition, selecting daily problems of practice for action helps ensure that the agenda is advanced. In the sections immediately below, we discuss how a principal and the school's leadership team can select and attack problems, according to specific criteria and strategies, moving toward results characterized by the accomplishments.

A. Selection

Often, observing and examining data with a spirit of inquiry can simplify problem selection. For example, in its quest to improve learning outcomes, a school's leadership team might determine that playground bullying (negative student climate) has seriously affected the ability of the bullied students to engage effectively in school activities. Their attendance has declined, and their fear of attack has diminished their attentiveness in class. In addition, the team has noted that several of the children already disciplined as bullies come from the classrooms of two new teachers who appear to be having problems with classroom management (student climate, instruction, staff support). Further, when these children have been disciplined, their parents have come to school with multiple explanations for why their children are not at fault, often blaming the very victims of the bullying (family-community partnerships). From the teams' perspective, solving these problems will lead to improved student climate, better instruction, and stronger family-community relations, if appropriate strategies can be put in place and monitored over time to assess their initial and ongoing effectiveness.

B. Solution Criteria

Solving problems, though, requires that those directly—and indirectly, if possible—involved contribute to the development of solutions leading to improvement in underlying conditions. Initially, dialogue about the school's needs, preferred outcomes, and associated accomplishments and strategies might take place among the principal, the school's leadership team, and selected community members to (a) clarify intended outcomes and accomplishments, (b) diagnose problems affecting realization of the accomplishments, (c) lay out initial strategies (action, monitoring, assessment, and follow through) to address the problem(s), and (d) develop "constraint sets" that "define what counts as an acceptable solution to [a] problem" (Robinson, 1998, p. 18).

Such constraints might rule out particular solutions to a problem, thereby limiting solutions that might otherwise be acceptable. Such constraints might include values and beliefs, resources, and other important practices (Robinson, 1998). Thus, a school seeking to improve its student climate, for instance, might determine that bullying places many children at risk, adversely affecting their full participation in school, and thus requires multi-pronged and multi-level solutions to ensure that the student climate for learning improves.

The solution constraints, or quality indicators, that the team develops might include (a) attendance to due process for all involved, (b) inclusion of parents and community agencies in decisions and follow-up, (c) classroom management assistance for all teachers, and (d) help with anger management for children at risk of being or continuing as bullies.

C. Strategies

Based on the solution criteria developed, then, the team creates plans for action-workshops for teachers which combine specific information about classroom management with in-class observation and coaching. In addition, the team calls on social services and district counselors to develop anger-management and bully-identification and avoidance techniques for children in the school and for parents of the affected children. The team also works out monitoring procedures to track disciplinary referrals, playground incidents, and student absenteeism, looking for declines in all measures.

D. Results

Most focused activities that include assessment processes are likely to succeed. In the scenario above, over time student climate would be improved—and student learning as well—because of reduced fear of bullying; the involvement of agencies, parents, and counselors as problem-solving partners; and the increased effectiveness of the classroom-

management skills of all teachers. Fewer referrals, reduced absenteeism, greater parental involvement, and increased professional attention create the climate for more effective learning.

Time Frame

As might be expected, problem solving is a fundamental and ongoing part of a school's annual cycle. Thus, problem solving occurs throughout the year, and the problems are great and small. Regardless, they are organized within the accomplishment focus which facilitates problem solving with purpose. That is, instead of solving problems as they arise, the FSLA pushes school leadership to anticipate and organize for economical, effective, and ongoing problem solving within a purposeful context.

Phase 4: Sustainable Purposes and Strategic Focus— Conversations to Advance the Purpose Balance and the Annual Agenda

To realize a school community in which everyone focuses on student learning calls for extensive and ongoing conversations with all who are or who should be involved in student success. These conversations are continuous so that the principal and other school professionals have their fingers on the pulse of expectations for the school and can thereby gain support for a shared agenda directed at school improvement and student learning.

A. Clarify

In order to build from strength toward change, a principal needs to clarify community and school expectations. Such conversations engage staff, community members, community agencies, businesses, parents, and other interested, involved, or affected parties in continuous dialogue about the school's values—the purposes of schooling in the community, the preferences that people have both for process and outcomes. Working toward consensual understanding of the common and uncommon expectations helps school leaders understand what can be emphasized effectively and what community and school resources can best be focused on particular accomplishments. For example, if the predominating sentiment in a community is that schools are primarily custodial, then a principal might emphasize accomplishments in student climate, family-community partnerships, and school operations.

B. Developing Commitment

Having learned what a person or group might value, an effective principal targets messages to the capacities and preferences of those whom the principal seeks to involve in school activities or to provide support for the school in specific ways. Groups and individuals, for myriad

reasons, want to help schools. General appeals, though, tend to fall on deaf ears because they do not resonate with the distinctive orientations, preferences, or capacities of the recipients. Specific tasks or unique contributions—things that people can do with their limited time and that they enjoy doing—are the commitments an effective principal seeks. These commitments need to be tracked to see if they produce the intended results, and the actual data can become part of the basis for future decisions.

C. Organizing Participation

By focusing on organized groups and harnessing their members' interests in children and schools, a principal conserves effort while building coalitions around common values and those peculiar to particular groups. Appearing before organized groups also provides a principal considerable opportunity to talk about the school's successes and challenges, enlisting support for needs addressable by special groups.

Getting people together to talk about schools always is tough, unless something goes wrong. Knowing this, an effective, accomplishment-oriented school leader works with existing organizations—social service agencies, businesses, Rotary and Lions clubs, block associations, the Chamber of Commerce, and other organized groups as well as individual parents and parent groups such as PTAs or PTOs—to gain support for school goals, always listening for expressions of values that can be used to chart a community's purposes.

Time Frame

These conversations, a fundamental part of a principal's responsibilities, occur year long but primarily during the school year. Attending regularly scheduled service-club meetings, continuously working with parents and parent groups, and engaging community members in school activities and responsibility not only raises community awareness but can provide the school with significant support as challenges arise.

Phase 5: Results

Given all of the processes involved, inevitably things boil down to one question that the principal must address: Did the school achieve what it set out to achieve? If so, what needs to be done to ensure continued success? If not, why not? What do the indicators suggests needs to be done to turn things around or to keep the positive trends moving upward?

A. Student Learning

As we have reiterated, schools are about student learning. And in the schools that achieve their accomplishments, all children learn. So, the

principal and the leadership team need to ask whether the accomplishments articulated and the problems solved have in fact lead to upward movement in student learning. Have students at all grade levels attained what they should, given school, community, and state expectations for performance? To what structural or other changes is the increase in student performance due? Did the changes made in instruction, student climate, or staff support have the intended effects?

B. School Accomplishments

Besides examining student learning results, the principal needs to examine results in overall school accomplishments. Did the accomplishments specified in the school's annual agenda and the particular problems solved change outcomes over past years? Were the strategies invoked effective? Are teachers better able to identify and address the learning challenges that students face, based on professional development activities targeted at those challenges? Has the number of volunteers helping teachers in the classroom increased, and has their help permitted teachers to focus more time effectively on specific student needs? Has the capacity of all teachers to manage potential disciplinary problems improved so that problems that once required outside interventions have decreased?

Time Frame

Analysis of results should occur throughout the year, but with testing schedules as they are, most analyses will take place during early summer when district or statewide test results are available and in late summer as schools open. A principal's effective analysis and contemplation of results lays the groundwork for the coming annual cycle.

Phase 6: Reflection

Given student and school results, a building principal might ask questions beyond those confined to the outcome indicators of success—or nonsuccess. For example, principals should consider whether their leadership in the three domains—sustainable purposes, strategic focus, and effective action—was effective in preparing, facilitating, and assessing their school's annual agenda.

Review Purposes

Based on meetings with many publics and staff during the year, a principal needs to ask and re-ask whether purposes have been clearly identified and then articulated effectively in actions taken to improve student learning. For example, was the community's concern about high school students' behavior during lunch hours adequately addressed by the revised policy limiting off-campus privileges at lunch time to juniors

and seniors? Did the workshops in inclusion-oriented practices help teachers integrate all students into mainstream classroom activities to the satisfaction of the students' concerned parents (student climate, instruction)?

Reconsider Agenda

Even if all of the goals were met at satisfactory levels, the agenda for the coming year needs to be developed, as do all of the support processes that will move the new agenda forward. What needs further refinement, more input from relevant stakeholders, or better assessments? What new problems may be brewing, and which accomplishment areas do they affect? What people currently on the outskirts need to be drawn into one or more phases of the annual cycle?

Reflect on Problem Selection and Results

Knowing that the FSLA is only a framework that helps organize problems for focused intervention, the reflective principal re-examines the prior year's plans and outcomes, asking whether something has been missed. Were the problems well defined? Were the definitions clear to all so that efforts were well focused on the solutions? Were the success criteria consistently applied? Were the results all that they could have been? Could more students have achieved more if something different were done?

Review Results and Their Long-Term Implications

While we have focused on the annual cycle as a manageable period that frames the school year for most schools and their principals, it is also true that each year unfolds in the context of past years and future expectations. Within this longer-term context, a principal might ask whether the level of parent and community involvement is getting successively better, staying about the same and topping out, or declining. Whatever the answers, the next step is to determine from the data the trends and possible explanations for them. For example, can increased attention to parent support for in-school homework classes improve student learning over time? Can parent-led groups be developed to take responsibility for these classes? Will greater focus on teacher participation in after-school activities with students reinforce a culture of caring? Would this focus increase the number of teachers working with children after school is out? What structural supports would be needed to build such participation for the long run?

Assess Fit with Personal Commitment

Reflection on years past should help a principal renew commitment to personal and professional goals that help a school continuously improve student learning. On the other hand, if the community purposes

are changing and no longer reflect values dearly held by the principal, it may be time to plan for a school's next leadership cycle.

Time Frame

For those on traditional calendars, such reflection, while best a continuous process, is emphasized most during summers. For principals in year-round schools, reflective practice of necessity is year round, and using reflections to assess one's commitment and effectiveness is a continuous activity.

The Annual Case and Preparation for the Next Cycle

Clearly, the annual-case process is ongoing. One year's case provides a foundation for the next, and planning for the next requires analysis of data, plans, and results from past cases. Each year, then, is a successive approximation of the idealized state that a school's leadership and the school's community desires for the children who attend the school over time.

Selecting Types of Data

The types of data needed in any year will depend heavily on the type of accomplishments selected for an upcoming year. Types of data generally available in districts in Colorado for each accomplishment area in the FSLA are outlined in Appendix 1. While such data sources may vary by district or state, they are simply indicative of the kinds of information potentially available to case participants.

Developing Processes

How one goes about doing an annual case will vary from school to school, based largely on the leadership of the principal, the experience and capacity of the staff, the expectations of the community, the resources available, and the nature of the students. Irrespective of the varying conditions—the public and private purposes, the level of achievement of a school currently and over time, or the types, quality, or abundance of recourses available—explicit and consistent processes for data collection, planning, community involvement, feedback processes, and the like are fundamental to successful, continuous improvements in student learning. Appendix 3 provides an initial outline of a case format, including the following information:

- location and participation information (who has been involved).

- the year of the case (for context across comparisons).

- characteristics of the community (for local context).

- a list of the defined accomplishments pursued during the case year.

- the success criteria develop for each accomplishment to specify the quality-performance indicators.

- the important problems addressed.

- the data collected, the ways that they were collected, and the methods used to analyze them.

- the results that attended each accomplishment.

- plans for the next annual cycle.

- a list of documents that support the annual case process.

An example listing of supporting documents appears in Appendix 2.

Doing Action Research

Action research (Stringer, 1996) is the logical methodology for most school-based data collection processes. While action research has gained credence in the last decade or so as a legitimate way to understand schools and schooling processes, it still remains a "second fiddle" in the orchestra of research in university settings. This is not so, however, in settings where more formal and often slow research processes give way to the need for quick, useful, and targeted information that can lead to immediate improvements in classroom learning.

Action research focuses on understanding and improving outcomes (Quigley, 1996). Inductive by nature and using extant or created data to build understanding and explanations, action research provides data for individuals or groups to interpret what occurs in their environment and to take action on those interpretations. Action research is eclectic: Any appropriate method of data collection and analysis can be used as long as it serves the overall goal of providing valid and reliable information. Multiple methods can be used as well, including grounded theory, case analysis, ethnography, surveys, interviews, document analysis, and so forth. Thus, action research supports and facilitates change in school in ways specified by those involved in setting goals, collecting data, and making decisions about improving practices.

Key to effective action research in gathering data for an annual case is participation, collaboration, and observation. In particular, action research is more likely to be implemented if those involved in the change process also are involved in the research and decision making based on the research. In this regard, action research facilitates "action learning" (McGill & Beaty, 1995; Morley, 1989), a process through which close collaboration among the "researchers" and the "researched" builds

learning-based relations which are mutually respectful and trusting (Rehm & Muth, 1998). Ideally, the subjects of action research become partners in intentional change that is specific and local. In schools, this means that students, most often the subject of action research, themselves would become knowledgeable participants in the action-learning process.

Analyzing a School

The development of sound cases that have use beyond their immediate environment requires full disclosure of contextual information, starting with the characteristics of the community and the school. This context should include local support and expectations, nature of staff, and so forth. In addition, a good case will marshal student data from the past through the present to establish comparative bases for future efforts and improvements. Further, how the school functions—what works and what does not—needs to be examined carefully.

Recording and displaying school and community characteristics. As a principal and school-leadership team begins a school-level analysis, the initial goal is to determine how to adjust the school's emphasis on the purposes of public education. For instance, what community characteristics and politics require a strong emphasis on education for school safety, economic participation, and so on? What values are associated with the various purposes important to the community? Which stakeholders are most invested in these values, and what assets do they have that can assist—or impede—the school in achieving its goals? Here, the case analysts might ask questions like these:

● How is the community served by the school, including its economic, linguistic, and ethnic demographics, and its population changes?

● What patterns in the community's political activism are related to education and do these patterns establish conditions or constraints on the school's actions?

● Do particular orientations at the district level emphasize some purposes and values above others?

● Which values held for the role of public schools by the public require special attention?

Generally, any principal, new to a school, would want answers to these questions from multiple data sources. However, the emphasis on public-private purposes can help sensitize a principal to important sources of information about expectations for schooling outcomes and provide frameworks for organizing such information.

Beginning the process. The purpose of the following questions is to develop a rich description of the principal's annual process of setting goals for improving learning.

- What has been the learning and achievement of the students served by the school?

- What are the results of analyses and the disaggregation of statewide and other testing data?

- In what groups, ages of students, and subject areas is the school succeeding?

- Where are the problems and achievement gaps?

- What needs to be done?

- What action strategies are possible?

- Who should be involved to what ends?

- How can it all get done?

Developing an agenda. Responding to such questions to determine a principal's agenda establishes bases for school improvement that take into account community characteristics and preferences. What should be changed to achieve the student learning (and other goals) for the school is the essential question.

- Using the components of the FSLA as an outline (see Figure 1), what does the beginning-of-the-year evaluation say about the school's strengths and weaknesses?

- What criteria are necessary to decide which areas were strong and which are weak?

- What is the agenda for change during the year, and which aspects of the FSLA need to be targeted for improvement in the coming year?

- Why were the accomplishment areas chosen the most important points to attack?

Implementing an agenda. Another consideration is how the principal and the school's leadership team handled a set of critical and representative problems that occurred during the year that provided opportunities to make progress on the annual agenda or that posed threats to that agenda. To analyze this, a principal would select a problem or circumstance during the year that provided a particular opportunity or challenge to the school's improvement agenda.

- Why was this problem important?

- How the problem defined?

- What constraints (solution requirements, objectives) were used to define the outcome needed to resolve the problem?

- What strategies were used to act on the problem?

- What happened?

- How did the result advance or retard the agenda?

- What were the unanticipated consequences on other aspects of the school?

Ending the process. Especially in schools, all good things must come to an end—in order to being anew. The school analysis provides data and perceptions on what changed during the year related to both the annual agenda and specific goals for student learning.

- What were the student-learning results for the year?

- What progress was made on the goals identified at the beginning of the year?

- What new problems are apparent that now need to be addressed?

- What evidence shows progress on the agenda?

- Did accomplishments selected for improvement actually change for the better?

Getting ready for next year. Finally, a school analysis provides the opportunity for a principal to reflect on what was learned from the year and consider how that learning might lead to different leadership, management, and action strategies during the next year.

- Looking back on the year, what was learned about setting goals, developing an agenda, selecting problems for attention, establishing solution constraints, or choosing action and leadership strategies?

- What kinds of events or problems can the school now anticipate that it did not anticipate before?

- Who else should be involved?

- What should be done differently—and how?

When such questions are detailed satisfactorily, a final case can be

written and "published" as an historical record, an assessment of progress, a foundation for decisions for the coming year, and a sample for distribution to other principals and preparation programs. Also, the case could be archived online for student and faculty use and distributed through workshops as a "learning case" for professional development and practice improvement.

Reflecting on Accomplishments and Practice

Integral to the annual case process is reflection on what is being learned, how, and to what ends. Such reflections can be facilitated in multiple ways to assist principals and aspiring principals to become deliberative practitioners (Kennedy, 1987). The first way of encouraging reflection is through the case analysis process in which principals—and students—are asked to analyze their role in the case process, think critically about the consequences of their actions, and ask questions about alternatives and their likely outcomes and effects. These reflections can be developed as journal entries, as part of the regular debriefing process, and as part of the case writing process.

A second way of encouraging reflective practice is through appreciative inquiry (Barrett, 1995; Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987), the process of analyzing situations from positive perspectives. This approach asks first, "What's going well?" or "What is 'right' about processes and outcomes?" in order to establish the types of accomplishments that need to be honored, emulated, repeated, and developed further. An appreciative process is designed to be holistic, contextual, and forward looking. This approach helps make the assumptions of those in the setting visible, puts them "on the table" for discussion, and allows them to be challenged by focusing on what is going well and how more can be done well (Rehm & Muth, 1998).

The Multiple Uses of Annual Cases

Annual cases can serve multiple ends. In particular, they provide principals and staff an annual process for systematically, regularly, and continually examining goals, trends, and outcomes to refine plans and practices. They can, as well, systematically gather data in a common framework that can be used for professional development and preservice preparation. Further, annual cases can provide the field of educational administration with a ready supply of authentic field settings that are at once more complex, contextual, and complete than most cases currently available for teaching (Ashbaugh & Kasten, 1991; Snowden & Gorton, 1998). Moreover, the field can do cross-case analyses to develop practice-based theory on successful practices. Finally, such cases can be used to strengthen the overall knowledge base in educational administration,

adding over time a potentially huge body of practice-based knowledge to the field's already strong knowledge bases in social science, ethics, critical-reasoning, and law.

Generating and Codifying Knowledge

Systematically undertaken with a common structure (see Appendices 2 and 3), annual cases can provide the field with a consistent framework for developing, collecting, and codifying practice-based craft knowledge. While case texts abound (Ashbaugh & Kasten, 1991; Insert, 2003; Snowden & Gorton, 1998), the range and types of data are limited and the specifications for what constitutes a "case" are inconsistent and sparse. One purpose of the annual-case process is to provide explicit and systematic procedures for gathering and organizing data about decision processes and outcomes in schools and make possible comparisons across schools and districts to support the continuous improvement of field-based knowledge about effective practice.

Eventually, members of the educational administration research community might want to determine the types of assessments necessary to establish whether particular practices are successful in specific situations. Data from systematically organized annual cases could provide researchers with cross-case data that could lead to insights about practice.

Dissemination of Cases:
Supporting Principals and Aspiring Administrators

The University Council for Educational Administration has developed an online journal of cases, *The Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership*, designed "for use in programs that prepare educational leaders . . . " that "embody relevant and timely presentations of issues germane to the preparation of educational leaders" (Insert, 2003, p. 2). The aspiration here is that annual cases developed by practitioners, practitioners with students, and practitioners and university faculty would serve a similar purpose. In addition, annual cases also could become a source of professional development activities for principals and other school leaders in and across school districts, a means of developing insights about practice and generalizations across cases, and a way of developing and codifying craft knowledge. It is this last development that we see as most germane to the improvement of professional leadership practice in schools. Rich practice-based knowledge is simply not available systematically to practitioners, to those who study practice, or to those who prepare future practitioners.

Preparing Practitioners

Engaging students in authentic work with practicing principals

through the annual-case process can only add to the capacity of future principals to understand and anticipate the problems of practice that they will have to address in their leadership positions. Additionally, reading cases, helping to write one as part of a team working with a school, and analyzing cases across similar problems to determine successful practices should add significantly to the authenticity of the principal-preparation experience.

A Note on "Case Teams"

It is well recognized that principals are very busy, immersed in often frenetic activities in pursuit of success for children and youth in schools. To ask them to add one more task to their already overloaded plate is, perhaps, folly. Yet, if the annual case process were embedded in expectations for school improvement, used to assess school and principal performance, and viewed as a means of continuous reflective practice, then it is likely that the annual-case process would become part of the "normal" expectations for principal work. To facilitate such a culture change over time, case teams, composed of faculty and doctoral students and students preparing to be principals, might work with practicing principals to implement the annual case process over time. Each case team might have a case manager, and students in preparation would be expected to work closely with the principal, developing the case over the course of the year, and adding the results to the students' portfolio. Doctoral students might evolve dissertation topics that both satisfy their program requirements and add data to the field about effective practice.

A case team could meet periodically with a principal to work through the design, implementation, and assessment processes necessary to install the processes to support the work of the principal and the school's leadership team while facilitating the continuous improvement of student learning. Initially, the team could simply debrief the principal, seeking data about a school's successes and challenges while assisting the principal in developing plans to address current problems as well as those on the horizon. The team could also develop with the principal ways to collect and process data that speak to the problems, eventually contextualizing them in a longer time frame. Preliminary case write-ups could be discussed and critiqued regularly as part of case team visits out of which consistent procedures for data collection and analysis, the involvement of relevant stakeholders, and the development of an annual accomplishment agenda might emerge.

Accomplishments to be pursued could be selected by the principal or the team according to success criteria important to the school at that time, and success criteria could be established initially according to

known or desired practices. The processes could be broadened to include other constituents over time as the principal and school become comfortable with the processes and find the outcomes useful for involving a school's leadership team and faculty in problem solving and for improving student engagement and learning,

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Appendix 1
Possible Sources of Data/Information by Accomplishment Area

1. Learning Goals—Within the Framework for School Leadership Accomplishments (FSLA), learning goals include graduation goals, academic goals, and social and behavioral objectives of a school and district. Various types of data and standards that might be analyzed and promote accomplishment selection include[1]

    a. School mission statements
    b. District performance standards
    c. District and school strategic goals
    d. District graduation requirements and results
    e. State and district literacy mandates (e.g., basic literacy, early child hood staffing)
        i. Test of Phonemic Awareness
        ii. Concepts of Print
        iii. Basic Reading Inventory
        iv. Graded Word Lists
    f. Individual educational plan data
    g. State testing data
    h. Nationally normed achievement test results
    i. District standards-based assessments
    j. Building-level assessments (e.g., writing)
    k. Report card data
    l. Retention data (e.g., retention incidence reports)

   m. Staffing committee records
   n. Referrals to special programs
   o. Annual accountability reports

Other data that might be useful can include character-education program expectations and outcomes, disciplinary referrals and suspensions, attendance records, Monday-Friday staff absences and use of substitutes, and similar reports. The data available or generated can be used to determine how well strategies are contributing to accomplishments and intended outcomes.

2. Instruction—In the area of instruction, accomplishments can be specified for assessment processes, including frequency, type and uses; classroom and non-classroom instructional activities; types of assistance provided to students and parents; feedback given to students, parents, staff, and community; and class-room organization. Types of data that might be gathered include

   a. District graduation requirements and results
   b. Annual data reports from the district on standardized test data
   c. Feedback from instructional improvement committees and central
         staff curriculum coordinators
   d. Textbooks adopted for use
   e. Performance assessments in math and science
   f. Periodic, impromptu writing assessments
   g. Levels of grants/staffing at school sites for gifted and talented
   h. Principal observations
   i. Teacher accounts/interviews
   j. Achievement data
   k. Professional development activities
   l. Curriculum materials

Other data that might be useful include the use of student and teacher assistance teams, designed within district guidelines, to focus on particular instructional and learning issues; quarterly reports and end-of-the-year impressions of the progress of students receiving such assistance; records of enrichment activities for students; records of student and staff achievements, both in and out of school; and so on.

3. Student Climate—The focus here is on student-adult relationships, student-peer relationships, student participation, and school rules and supervision. Data that might be used in developing and assessing progress toward accomplishments and outcomes in this are could include

   a. Codes of conduct
   b. Disciplinary referrals, records, reports
   c. Suspension and expulsion rates
   d. Data on schools of choice
   e. Transiency records
   f. Student attitude surveys
   g. Classroom observations
   h. Parent surveys or interviews

Other data that can be used to assess performance relative to student climate

might include office referral records, mediation reports, during and after-school crime reports, family court records, and so forth.

4. Related Services—Service collaboration, referrals, and events and entertainment are areas that school personnel can control that support the school's community. Data sources in this area can include

    a. Work-to-career programs
    b. Community-based programs
    c. Cooperative education programs
    d. Participation in parks and recreation programs
    e. Use of school facilities by the community
    f. Volunteer programs
    g. Community attendance at social events
    h. Numbers of parent and community volunteers (e.g., volunteer hours
        per month by school level)
    i. Record of support for district elections per precinct
    j. Interviews with parents and community members

Other data that might be useful here include leadership in the community of district personnel, community support for referenda, philanthropic support of schools, community appreciation of diversity, two-way communication, collaboration and cooperation among community agencies and schools, and pride in and vision for the future of schools in the community (Clement, 2002).

5. Family-Community Partnerships—Families are essential to the well-being of children and their success in school, and the supervision of children, opportunities to participate in school activities, and information about the school and their children are important to the interface between schools and the families of their children. Data in this area can include

    a. Before and after school care availability
    b. Participation DARE activities
    c. School resource officers, social workers, and health-care professionals
    d. Early childhood programs
    e. Parent newsletters
    f. Records of parent organizations activities and attendance
    g. Parent conference reports and attendance
    h. Records of family events at school (e.g., yearly calendars)
    i. Number of parent contacts, conferences, and specific interventions
    j. Parent contact logs
    k. Service referrals
    l. Data from departments of justice and social services

Other data that can be useful to analyze include the types of reading programs available that include parents in support roles, types of outreach programs and numbers of families and children served, records of student absences for illness and unexcused absences, and so on.

6. Renewal—This area includes regular improvement cycles in schools, regular feedback on performance expectations, and effective decision processes. Data that could be used in this area include

    a. Types of and participation in district advisory boards
    b. Evaluations of staff and programs
    c. Strategic plan and goals
    d. District- and building-level professional development activities
    e. Proportion of budget allocated for staff development
    f. Numbers participating in staff development activities
    g. Staff meeting agenda

Other useful data can include the number of collaborative programs with area businesses and other agencies, the numbers and types of volunteers who assist in the schools, and teacher participation in business, industry, and university renewal partnerships.

7. Staff Support—Second to students, staff are the most important ingredient in a successful school, and principal leadership is essential in keeping staff engaged effectively in their work, providing the support needed to make staff work effective, and working with the community both to integrate community concerns and perspectives in school-based conversations about school improvement, to secure community support for instructional and other staff efforts, and to involve staff in community-based interactions. Data for this area might include

    a. Participation rates in professional development opportunities
    b. Out-of-contract work of classified and non-classified personnel
    c. Continuing education of staff
    d. Staff absenteeism, turnover
    e. Staff engagement in community activities
    f. Availability of paraprofessional support for classrooms
    g. Participating of staff in schoolwide problem-solving activities

Other useful data can include numbers of volunteers working with teachers in classrooms, staff attendance at school events, use of coaches and others to assist teachers, occasions on which teachers and other staff are honored for their work, and the like.

8. School Operations—Organizational support for schools, support services provided, and schedules and assignments for staff are key in this area. Sources of data might include

    a. District-level curriculum and instructional support teams
    b. Responsibilities of assistant superintendents
    c. Staffing of an assessment and accountability unit
    d. Staffing of a public-relations department
    e. Staffing of a business-services division
    f. Staffing for a pupil services and special education unit
    g. School schedule

Other data that might be useful in this category include the numbers of staff at the district level specialized to assist schools with specific student- or staff-related problems, staff wellness programs, computerized systems and their use for monitoring instructional processes, and so forth.

9. Resources—This area of the FSLA focuses on community support for schools, personnel selection, district services to schools, and budget requests supported.

Data sources here might include
a. Revenue and expenditure reports
b. Personnel department information on applicants
c. Budget surveys at the district and site levels
d. Records of grants applied for and received
e. Records of PTA gifts
f. Records of business and community financial and other support
g. Records of staffing levels relative to numbers of students and other formulas
h. Records of general fund raising success
i. Records of numbers and types volunteer activities
j. Record of numbers of parent and community volunteers per month

Other data that might be useful in this area include the numbers and quality of applicants for teaching positions and other positions, the proactivity of district-level searches and support for quality candidates, support for continuing education of staff, the use of contingency funds to address emergency educational needs of schools, and so on.

Note

[1]Contributions of possible sources of data in the nine areas of the FSLA came from principals who participated in parts of the project leading to this listing. In particular, we wish to thank David Benson and Priscilla Huston, principals in the Poudre School District in Ft. Collins, Colorado.

Appendix 2
Documents Supporting an Annual Case

A. Artifacts that describe expectations of individuals and groups for school performance
Example 1: one-sentence summaries of the principal's meetings with various constituencies (source: "daytimer" entries)
Example 2: clippings from local newspapers (source: district clipping service)
Example 3: testimony provided at board meetings (source: meeting transcripts)
Example 4: district memos (source: hard-copy file)
Example 5: internal and district e-mails (source: computer files)

B. Presentation of student learning data
Example 1: analysis of trends of student performance for last three years
Example 2: correlation of district and state tests
Example 3:
Example 4:
Example 5:

C. Presentation data on school operations
Example 1: analysis of changes in school operations
Example 2:
Example 3:
Example 4:
Example 5:

D. School improvement/accountability plans
    Example 1: analysis of previous years' plans (2-3)
    Example 2: plans for coming year
    Example 3:
    Example 4:
    Example 5:

E. Documentation related to critical problems addressed
    Example 1:
    Example 2:
    Example 3:
    Example 4:
    Example 5:

F. Summary of annual results
    Example 1: statewide test data for prior years
    Example 2: statewide test data for current year
    Example 3: district and school test data for prior years
    Example 4: district and school test data for current year
    Example 5: analysis of trends and projection of likely future outcomes

Appendix 3
An Annual Case Template

Name of School: _____Annual Case Year: _____

Name of Principal: _____

Names and Positions of Participants in Case:
_____

1. Characteristics of School/Community

2. Annual Accomplishment Agenda (accomplishments selected for special attention)

    a. Accomplishment 1

    b. Accomplishment 2

    c. Etc.

3. Customized Success Criteria

    a. Accomplishment 1

    b. Accomplishment 2

    c. Etc.

4. Illustrative Problems Addressed During the Year

5. Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

6. Results

      a. Accomplishment 1

      b. Accomplishment 2

      c. Etc.

7. Plans for Next Annual Cycle

8. Listing of Supporting Documentation