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"It's Hard Answering Your Calling": Teacher Teams in a Restructuring Urban Middle School

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Abstract

Considered a successful university-operated, urban middle school serving an overwhelmingly African American student body, "Charter" Middle School was dechartered suddenly, then merged a year later with students from a neighborhood school to become "Choice" Middle School, a school of choice in the urban district. Using a situated learning framework and an ethnographic methodology, this paper examines teacher teams in the school—one aspect of the schooling model the urban district promised to continue—before and after restructuring. Charter was almost a textbook case of a professional learning community before restructuring, but after restructuring leadership lacked a deep understanding of the interconnected nature of the model of schooling and of teacher teams' function therein. Over time, teacher teams lost their place in and importance to the school's operation. In particular, the school lost teacher empowerment, focus on *all* students, and communication within the building and between school and families. Restructuring destabilized reform and diminished the likelihood that teachers could meet the needs of students. Implications for teacher teams in middle grades education during times of administrative change and school restructuring are discussed.

Introduction

Teacher teams are a common middle school organizational structure (Hackmann et al., 2002). They serve as a way not only to deliver instruction, but also to maintain closer social and emotional connections between teachers and students at a critical educational juncture (Picucci, Brownson, Kahlert, & Sobel, 2002). However, in today's educational climate, politically and economically motivated changes in school structures are common. New policies, especially those associated with the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), provide for restructuring schools—such as "reconstituting" a school's teachers when test scores fail to show adequate yearly progress. In addition, restructuring schools often occurs in response to economic hard times brought on by declining student numbers and/or tax revenues, by leadership changes whether at the building or district level, by shifting school boundaries to accommodate growth in one area of a district, by teacher retirement or movement to other situations, and—as in this case—by restructuring a school first dechartered to become a

school of choice in an urban district, then a year later merged with students and teachers from a district neighborhood school where adequate yearly progress waned. What happens to teacher teams during restructuring is an important issue, because changes could disrupt team functions important to student learning. Yet, little research sheds light on what happens to teacher teams when school structures change. This article focuses on teacher teams before and after restructuring, first reviewing salient scholarship and discussing modes of inquiry, then presenting findings and implications.

Teaching Teams in Middle Schools

Teachers working in teams to serve common groups of students grew out of calls to reform middle school education (Picucci et al., 2002). In 1989, the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development produced its watershed report, *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century*, which targeted the education of early adolescent youth. Thinking expansively about the extent to which middle grades schools, health institutions, and community organizations serve these youth, *Turning Points* proposed a systemic response to producing capable teens that would transform middle schools into equitable places that cared for teens while preparing them academically. Such schools would 1) create small communities for learning, 2) teach a core academic program, 3) ensure academic success for all students by shaping educational programs to fit students' needs, 4) empower teachers and administrators to make decisions about the experiences of middle grades students, 5) staff middle grades schools with teachers expert at teaching young adolescents, 6) improve academic performance through fostering health and fitness, 7) reengage families in the education of young adolescents, and 8) connect schools with communities (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989). Researchers studying the progress of reform programs like *Turning Points* (e.g., Erb & Stevenson, 1998, 1999a, 1999b; Lesko, 1994; Stevenson & Erb, 1998) found that students' academic performance had not seen the kinds of growth envisioned. Carnegie Corporation of New York released another report, *Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents in the 21st Century* (Jackson & Davis, 2000) that expanded on the ideas of the original report. In particular, *Turning Points 2000* emphasized that in addition to changes in middle grades organization, educators must make further changes in curriculum, student assessment, and instruction (Jackson & Davis). Thus, we wondered: To what extent did Charter engage *Turning Points* before and after restructuring?

Systemic middle school reform like the *Turning Points* reports proposed *interconnected* educational structures to produce effective schools:

- Strong, *shared* leadership, which elevates equity and diminishes hierarchical relations, holds true to a school's purpose, keeps decisions collaborative and close to students, supports teachers (especially eliminating distractions such as discipline), establishes a culture of teaching and learning, and provides for critical feedback as a way to routinely improve educational practices (Ehman, 1995; Geiser & Berman, 2000; Gunn & King, 2003; Holland, 2002; Picucci et al., 2002; Supovitz, 2002; Trimble & Peterson, 1999).
- Attention to *all* students, which makes high expectations the norm (a commitment to equity), allows teachers to really know their students and to make decisions based on data, as well as provides a way to attend to social, developmental, and emotional needs of students via after-school programs and in-school social services (Crow & Pounder, 2000; Picucci et al.).
- Teachers who *learn* as a routine part of their work, where professional development is ongoing and focused on specific readily integrated issues, teachers develop skills for teamwork such as practicing critical discourse, and teachers are linked to curriculum specialists who observe and provide feedback on teaching (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999; Gunn & King; McLaughlin & Talburt, 2001; Picucci et al.; Resnick & Hall, 1998; Wenger, 1998).
- Collaborations among all stakeholders which are *enculturated*, where trust in each other and a commitment to educational philosophy exist, where teacher-teacher collaborations develop into a close-knit "family" to provide both emotional support and teaching advice about balancing caring for students with serving their academic needs (Ehman; Gunn & King; Holland; Picucci et al.; Supovitz; Trimble & Peterson).

Taken together these inextricably interconnected aspects produce schools with potential to become *thoughtful* organizations—to promote data-driven change and improve the likelihood of raising the educational prospects of all students (Picucci et al.; Supovitz). Thus, teacher teams are embedded in a school's organization and not isolated from it. We began to wonder: How did teacher teams fit into the school before and after restructuring?

By 2000 over 80% of middle schools surveyed reported the use of teaching teams (Hackmann et al., 2002; Petzko, 2002). As middle school reform progressed, support among researchers grew for thinking of teaching as a learning profession, one where learning is a central feature of everyday practice for teachers, not just for children (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999; Resnick & Hall, 1998). Teaming became both something teachers must learn about and a place where learning occurred (e.g., Hackmann et al.; King, 2002; Picucci et al., 2002; Supovitz, 2002). In time, teaching-team involvement in decision making provided a venue where reflective practice became spread across groups of teachers. Thus, with learning, collaboration, and reflective practice replacing earlier models of isolated individuals using stand-and-deliver practices, researchers advocated ways to foster professional communities of learning (Holland, 2002; King; Lee & Smith, 1996; McLaughlin & Talburt, 2001; Resnick & Hall; Supovitz; Trimble & Peterson, 1999). In fact, professional communities should be democratic in nature, and provide important models of democratic action where students see civic responsibility and democratic virtues (liberty, equality, and justice) practiced:

> [T]he critical dimensions of a strong, school-wide professional community consist of (a) a clear shared purpose for student learning, (b) collective understanding of and responsibility for instructional practices to achieve learning goals, (c) professional inquiry by staff members to address the challenges they face, and (d) opportunities for staff members to influence the school's activities and policies. (Gunn & King, 2003, p. 175)

When these criteria are met, instead of being merely cogs in the educational machinery, teachers become intelligent designers of the organization, and organizational practices become reoriented to be *responsive,* filled with people able to think collectively about, and enact, change as conditions dictate (Holland; Resnick & Hall; Williamson & Johnston, 1999). This led us to wonder: To what extent did teachers have opportunities to learn, collaborate, reflect, and contribute to school-wide decision making before and after restructuring?

In the 1990s, schools began responding to educational policies (e.g., Erb, 2001; Improving America's Schools Act, 1994; National Middle School Association, 1995, 1996; No Child Left Behind, 2001) that place student academic achievement at the center of educational decision making (Picucci et al., 2002; Supovitz, 2002, Trimble & Peterson, 1999). This posed a dilemma for middle school practices, since reports of teaching teams' impact on achievement have been mixed. No simple "fix" for low student achievement exists because a wide range of factors affects academic achievement. For instance, several important classroom practices led to positive outcomes: "visibility of standards and assessments, strong and varied instructional practices, professional development in both content and pedagogy, curriculum that is aligned with state and local standards, and outreach to parents" (Picucci et al., p. 3). Plus, academic achievement increased in schools that addressed developmental needs (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Erb; Jackson & Davis, 2000), and where teachers had common planning time and teaming that explicitly followed a particular coaching model (Picucci et al.). Academic achievement also grew in relation to teaming frequency and ensuring appropriate teaching practices (Mertens & Flowers, 2003). In fact, in high poverty schools, teachers' scoring higher on team and classroom practices correlated with students' higher achievement (Mertens & Flower). Thus, organizational practices improved the likelihood of achievement gains. Among the most promising, teachers required common planning time to discuss institutional practices and students' academic and developmental needs, and to communicate with parents (Ehman, 1995; Picucci et al.; Trimble & Peterson). A study of seven effective public middle schools found teaching teams contributed in central ways to student success (Picucci et al.). Six of seven schools grouped students and teachers into grade-level teams, which allowed teachers to know all students and focus on meeting their needs. Specifically, teachers in these schools used data to determine areas of need, data-use skills they learned in school-provided training. Teachers also participated in processes to define target areas requiring more services. Though a comprehensive study of all factors

influencing student achievement remains outside the scope of this article, we wondered: How did teachers use information as a routine part of teacher-team practice before and after restructuring?

Teacher teams emerged from a commitment to democratic participation (Gutmann, 1989; Young, 1990), but effective teamwork does not simply happen after selecting teams, carving out time for teachers to meet, and assigning teams a set of students (Crow & Pounder, 2000; Trimble & Peterson, 1999). Gunn and King (2003) provided an insightful reflective case study based on Gunn's 10-year experience as a community insider. This study detailed how implementing a schoolwide professional community plan played out. Unlike the vast majority of research into teacher teamwork, their analysis encompassed power relations and equity. They paid close attention to persistent pre-reform hierarchical relations, which blunted the input of some teachers, and ultimately led to undermining the professional community. In that setting, in spite of a democratic ideology, "an authority system arose in practice that mitigated the input of faculty" (p. 182). Thus, interpersonal relations and curricular matters could not be disentangled; leadership must facilitate teachers' engagement in substantive discussions about issues of teaching and learning because it takes times for effective teacher teams to evolve; and finally, teachers must not only clarify models they use to teach but also learn to critically reflect on *and change* their practices (p. 190). This led us to ask: How did relations of power affect teacher teams before and after restructuring.

Empirical research about teaching teams makes clear that teams are an integral part of complex models of schooling grounded in efforts to reform middle grades education. Thus, the study contextualized teams in the school's shifting organizational practices, which were expected to follow a *Turning Points* model of schooling, and within larger ideological frames of reference through which teachers made meaning of events in the school. In fact, as with other kinds of social situations, teacher teams were shaped by the school, just as simultaneously teacher teams shaped the school. Thus, understanding teacher teams before and after the restructuring merged two schools—one a recently dechartered school that became a school of choice in an urban district and the other a district neighborhood school edging toward NCLB-mandated changes—required understanding:

- To what extent did the school embody *Turning Points* ideals empirically shown to improve student outcomes?
- How did teacher teams function in the school's organization; what were teachers' opportunities to learn, collaborate, reflect, and contribute to school-wide decision making; and how did they use information in teacher-team practice?
- How did power relations grounded in ideological differences play out in teams?

And, ultimately, what are the implications of our findings for middle grades schools and restructuring?

Conceptualizing Teamwork

Research into teamwork processes, whether studied indirectly through survey responses or directly via observational data, followed two main conceptual paths. One borrowed from organizational theories about effective teamwork in workplaces (Conley, Fauske, & Pounder, 2004; Crow & Pounder, 2000; Pounder, 1999), especially Hackman and Oldham's *work group model* (1980, revisited in Hackman, 1990). In this theoretical tradition, teamwork effectiveness was hypothesized as related to context (rewards and objectives, task-relevant training, clarity of task requirements), design (work characteristics, group composition, group norms), and interpersonal processes (coordinating efforts and fostering commitment, weighing inputs and sharing knowledge, inventing and implementing performance strategies) (Crow & Pounder). Those espousing this approach entered the field with a sense of the realm under study, monitored along the dimensions listed above, and parsed group activity into the theory's aspects. While helpful in filling a void of studies about teacher teamwork, taking such a deductive approach may not appreciate some aspects of group work, in particular how teachers continuously learn while participating in teams or the societal/structural ideologies revealed in power relations. This suggested that an inductive approach might prove useful for studying teacher teams, especially in a school undergoing unprecedented change.

The second theoretical path borrows from activity theory, as incorporated in *situated learning theory* (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) and sociocultural studies of education (e.g., Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999; McLaughlin & Talburt, 2001; Resnick & Hall, 1998; Supovitz, 2002). Whether termed learning communities or communities of professional practice, theorizing teacher teamwork in the sociocultural tradition involves persons interacting with others in a specific institutional setting imbued with a history and connected to society. In their groundbreaking book, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, Lave and Wenger theorized the complex relationship between person and world. Theirs was a dramatic shift away from studies of learning as simply a process contained in the mind of a learner, a rendering that ignored the lived-in world. "The idea of learning as cognitive acquisition—whether of facts, problem-solving strategies, or metacognitive skills—seems to dissolve when learning is conceived as the *construction of present versions of past experience for several persons acting together*" (Lave & Wenger, p. 8, italics added). Learning in such a setting became evident not in what people answered on pencil-and-paper measures, but as *"changing participation and understanding in practice"* (p. 5, italics added). Situated learning theory was grounded in studies of out-of-school communities where learning is central (such as apprenticeships) and linked persons to historical practices through participation in community activities. Knowledge was held in the community and spread over and among persons, artifacts, and structure. Learning became a normal product of participating over time in the everyday, practical activities of the community and becoming a proficient or mature practitioner implied continued learning. Because this theory held promise to unravel the complexity of teacher-team life, we used it to study teacher-team organization, practices, and context.

Methods of Inquiry and Data Collection

The research followed the school using a holistic approach to data collection before dechartering (September 2002), immediately after dechartering, and then finally after merging the two schools (August 2003). Data came from two ethnographic research projects: a pre-dechartering teacher-team case study using observations in teams and interviews with a teacher and a team leader (October 2001); and a larger three-year study (fall 2002–spring 2005) using teacher-team observations and interviews with students, parents, teachers, and key administrators at the university and school, as well as university consultants. Overall, we interviewed two university administrators, two university consultants to the school who had long-term relationships there, five school administrators (two of them before and after restructuring), and one non-teaching staff member; and conducted focus group interviews with teachers (three groups in year one, total $n = 14$; two in year two, $n = 9$; one in year three, $n = 13$), parents (one group in year one, $n = 6$), and students (three groups in year one, $n = 19$; two groups in year two, $n = 17$). Interviews lasted about an hour, were transcribed verbatim, and focused on experiences at school and thoughts about changes in the school's structure. We also gathered field notes in two 90-minute parent meetings in year one where the merger was discussed (approximately 200 parents were present with over 50 speaking in the open forum), and in year two at teacher-team meetings (sixth and seventh grades 12 times each, and eighth grade on only three occasions, since meetings were canceled) and at about 10 required staff meetings. Following cultural anthropology practices (Spradley, 1979), hand-written field notes captured, to the extent possible, the exact words of those speaking, the general tone of the meetings, and the behaviors of those present. From these an expanded account of each event was typed. We surveyed annually all students and teachers, and a representative sample of parents. One especially knowledgeable insider served as an *informant* for the study, someone communicating with researchers, but out of view of other participants. S/he eased access, provided an historical perspective, and helped us make needed contacts and avoid pitfalls inherent in complicated sets of social relations.

Our interest in the restructuring decision's ripple effect meant seeking out differing interpretations of events (LeCompte & Schensul, 1997; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Spradley, 1979, 1980) and indications of power relations (Popkewitz & Brennan, 1998). A critical approach, especially schooling for social justice (Brighouse, 2000; Gutmann, 1989; Howe, 1997; Lipman, 1998, 2004), provided a way to scrutinize the restructuring process from charter to school of choice. Analysis proceeded in the ethnographic interpretivist tradition (Denzin, 1997; Spradley, 1979, 1980). In particular, using semantic domain analysis to follow patterns of sameness and componential analysis to discern patterns of difference in the data, along with

taxonomic analysis to organize within and among domains, provided a way to capture participants' understandings of events (Spradley, 1979). Refining these preliminary findings continued via a "constant-comparative" approach—reading and rereading data to rule out competing interpretations (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Rigor was built into the study through triangulation of theories, methods, and sources; prolonged engagement (Colombo's experiences in the school eased access and Tonso's year one fieldwork reconnaissance and trust-building activities reduced the potential for unduly changing the setting while studying it); persistent observation (systematically observing in teacher teams, hallways, wings of the school, office, and lunchroom); member checks (including informal conversations with insiders, interview questions about conjectures, and a reading of findings by the informant); and keeping a researcher journal where conjectures could be noted and later evaluated through fieldwork and analysis (Lincoln & Guba). Thus, we stayed close to the data with a constant-comparative approach and used a researcher journal and member checks to control researcher bias during interpretation.

Findings

The scholarly literature suggests the central importance of school organization to teacher-team function, which requires that findings make sense of teamwork in the context of school structures; "Charter" Middle School provided the context for studying changes in teacher-team function. Though ostensibly one school, for clarity we use two names—Charter and Choice—to indicate two distinct operational periods. As *Charter*, we mean the school as it existed before dechartering (prior to September 2002), together with the year immediately following dechartering when little in the school changed; that is, through June 2003, the end of the first year as a district school of choice. As *Choice*, we signal the school after restructuring, when it changed principals, moved into Neighborhood School's building, and combined with students and teachers from the district (August 2003–June 2005). Thus, we begin with Charter and teamwork practices, then turn to school circumstances at Choice and teamwork there to provide a sense of how teacher teams functioned before and after restructuring.

Charter Middle School

Charter successfully educated approximately 600 sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade African American youth (per year). Most came from homes with limited financial means. Developed in the early 1990s by a nearby university, Charter adhered to *Turning Points* ideals and was specifically intended to counter the educational practices of the urban district. But, as the university's strategic mission changed, Charter came to seem out of place at the university. To make peace with the district and focus on their higher education mission, the university dechartered the school and transferred it to the urban district as a school of choice (Tonso & Colombo, 2006). The university's decision angered Charter parents, risking losing students the district needed to offset declining enrollment. Through a complicated agreement, the district agreed to continue Charter's model of schooling where teacher teams were key.

Interconnected administrative, teacher, and social service teams. During the 2001–2002 school year, Charter's organization structure consisted of one administrative team, three grade-level teaching teams, and one social services team (see Table 1). Each of the grade-level teaching teams was divided into groups of four teachers, mixed-content subteams that served the same cohort of students. Staff contained 42 teaching and other professional staff members: 8 were new, 7 had two to four years, and 16 had more than five years at Charter. About 75% were women and half were African American. Team leaders were something like teachers with administrative duties. In 2002 there were two team leaders, one for eighth grade, the other for sixth and seventh, and both continued as administrators at Choice.

Table 1
Charter Middle School Teams

Administrative	Grade-Level Teaching Teams	Social Service Team
Principal	Team Leader	Social Work Coordinator
Grade-Level Team Leaders	Subject Area Teachers	Nurse Practitioner
Technology Support Manager	Fine and Performing Arts	Special Education Teacher
Extended Day Manager	Teachers	Health & Social Responsibility Teachers
Social Services Coordinator	Physical Education Teachers	
Health Services Manager		

With extended-day sessions and social services, school insiders termed the organization a "wrap-around" model of schooling. Systematic links between teams supported vertical connections and (to the extent possible) shared decision making. Rather than hierarchical relations where the principal, for instance, made decisions and passed them down a chain of command, at Charter information flowed among teams. Team leaders and coordinators/managers connected the administrative team to grade-level teaching teams and the social service team respectively; and, as described more fully below, the social service team connected with each grade-level teaching team during weekly meetings. Grade-level teaching teams were divided into sub-teams of four academic core teachers, one each for math, science, social studies, and language arts. Teachers on a subteam served a common cohort of students.

Teacher-team meetings before restructuring. A uniform school-day structure prevailed in the school. Seven periods (50 minutes each) divided the school day. Full-time teachers taught five classes per day, grade-level teams met four times a week during the sixth 50-minute period, and the seventh period served as individual-teacher "prep" time. Team "prep" time on different days of the week covered different issues: Mondays concerned social service and special education, Tuesdays and Wednesdays parent and student sessions (as needed), and Thursdays curriculum (T, I–3; TL, I–12)[1]. The principal, psychologist, special education consultant, social work interns, and nurse practitioner (the "special forces") attended as needed. Combined sixth, seventh, and eighth grade-level teams met once a month for several hours during the all-day faculty inservice, while across-grade subject teams met several times a year.

Because a holistic understanding of the differences between teaching-team meetings before and after restructuring is crucial to making our case, we present vignettes representing typical teaching-team meetings. The team-meeting vignette before restructuring (below) illustrates, among other things, that team talk was rich with conversation about individual students and about how best to meet their complex needs and that members of the administrative and social services teams played a key role in teachers' meeting the needs of students; that is, that teacher teams were systematically integrated into the life of the school, not partitioned off in classrooms. In this meeting, a grade-level team meets with the social services team (social work, counseling, and psychology). Notice how team meetings provided a place for openly sharing information among administrators, teachers, and social service personnel; the extent to which meeting talk focused on students; how information was shared that educated teachers about student needs; and how staff made decisions about how to proceed to meet students' needs.

> With 13 teachers present (on October 8, 2001), the team leader (TL) begins: "Hello everyone. We've got three teachers missing today. [Names] are out sick, and [name] is at a conference. Curriculum consultant (CC) is here; researcher is here." She nods to the CC and the meeting begins [with no written agenda today]. The principal (P) enters, sits down with a nod to the TL.
>
> CC begins: "I want to hear how the schedule is going—although I think your team has less problems because you're not blocking [block-scheduling]." There is clarification of the impact of schedules on particular students and then a discussion about activities for the anticipatory set portion of class time. The CC concludes with, "Anything else? Have a good meeting and thanks for your time," and leaves the room. The principal (P) reads a note describing a behavior contract for Terrence and announces that he is on a

one-day suspension. His mother will be moving him to another school, but he will remain here for two more weeks. P introduces the psychologist (PSY) and says, "PSY is here to help us get to Nov. 2 [when the two-week period ends]." PSY educates teachers about a specific need: "Terrence has an emotional impairment as it relates to authority. This is valid, not something he is putting on." PSY then describes strategies that teachers can use when dealing with Terrence and suggests that they call him when they are having difficulty. After a brief discussion, the P says, "it seems like we failed with Terrence, but a traditional school setting, even ours, isn't enough." PSY continues, "There is no way, as we are presently situated, that we can serve him. He needs a classroom of 6 or 7 students, no grades, and 24-hour adult contact." He ends the discussion with: "Hope I was helpful" and a few voices say "You were." The P and PSY leave.

TL looks at social worker (SW) and says "You're on" and SW begins to talk about a student. In twenty minutes, eight students are discussed.

The discussion begins with updates on students who were previously referred for services, routine follow-up at CMS. Latisha's and Kamal's parents have refused social work services. Tania has been referred to the PSY. The discussion moves to new student referrals. A SW intern asks, "I want to know why Erica has been referred to SW services." Five teachers and the TL make comments such as: "because she's so quiet," and "she's withdrawn, no facial expression." The SW probes further, "Is there anything else going on here? What should we focus on?" The TL replies that Erica is repeating eighth grade and she needs to prepare for high school. TL also mentions that Erica lives with her aunt who has approved counseling. (Counselor enters.)

COUN then speaks up and says, "Sorry for being late, but I wanted to asked about DeJuan." (At that point one of the teachers begins to grade papers while the discussion continues.) The TL and teachers offer comments like, "His desk is constantly moving." He demonstrates by putting his hands at the top of the desk and rocks it up and down. "He has his giggle days." A teacher talks at length about DeJuan and his habit of staying after class to talk to the teacher. "Maybe he needs someone to talk to. He has all those sisters." At that point the COUN says s/he will talk to him at lunch. The TL cautions him not to be late because once DeJuan is involved in lunch he won't be readily interrupted. COUN nods. *[Taken together, these comments suggest that teachers know DeJuan, and their other students, well.]*

TL asks "Can we put on the burner having a group for students who have lost someone?" SW replies, "Grief Counseling" and writes something down. The group then names four students whose parent/grand parents have died. (COUN leaves the room and a teacher arrives.)

…Discussions about students end with the TL asking, "Anything else, sports fans?" She mentions a Monday memo and pizza and donuts. A teacher says, "I have two chairs missing from my classroom." And the TL advises, "Put masking tape with your room numbers on the bottom of your chairs—replace them for now with chairs from this room." The same teacher (while rubbing her temples, looking tired) says, "I need an intern on Monday and Tuesday to help with water testing. I need extra hands to help the students with experiments." Several teachers ask questions and talk about the logistics of having their interns assist. The TL suggests breaking the class into two groups and having them work in two rooms. Another teacher says "Fifth hour starts at 12:35, but some students are coming to class at 12:25—they are cutting into my prep time." TL asks for names and says she'll check what class they are coming from. *[Teachers discuss several topics, from equipment like chairs, to teaching strategies, to receiving class room assistance, to reinforcing building rules about entering classrooms early—all in a very quick set of exchanges.]*

TL then reads a list of student names and says, "These students are missing their technology consent forms. First-hour teachers need to get them." TL concludes with "Anything else?"—and, when no one answers, participants get up quickly and leave.

In this meeting, teachers and "special forces" take the individual social and emotional needs of their students very seriously. Teachers' comments were not simply about "behavior" issues, but about underlying causes or contributions to students' well-being that had behavioral symptoms, most of which interfered with academic progress. In addition, overarching issues could be discussed, such as the curriculum consultant's comments, or the psychologist's explanation of Terrence's situation. Nearly every teacher had something to say in the meetings observed—some more than others. Only once was someone observed who appeared disengaged from the meeting (10/8/01, O-13).

Other teaching-team meetings served as places where teachers interacted more centrally around curriculum and student academic achievement. In these meetings, teachers talked in specific terms about approaches that worked and compared notes on individual children—such as how to motivate a student, whether a child needed special services, or how mainstreamed students (those identified as needing special services) fared. Working from comprehensive files kept on each child, they used day-to-day classroom assessments and standardized test results to think about each child's academic progress and how best to improve it. Thus, setting aside team sessions for specific conversations gave the school community routine opportunities to attend to students' academic, social, and emotional needs, and to revisit these regularly. Teachers also met with parents to discuss student needs, behaviors, and academic concerns. Though teachers discussed methods of teaching and shared ideas about classroom practices, they did not create collaborative or interdisciplinary lessons. As one consultant noted:

> From the security guard to the principal, there was a great fluidity in people being willing to step in and do whatever needed to be done at the particular moment. Even if it wasn't part of their job description. There was a team level of activity, but there was a sense that we are all in this for the benefit of the children. And, I think the principal clearly and repeatedly, always, articulated that what they [teachers] had to keep their eye on was what was best for the children. I saw that in how they interacted and in the decisions that they made. (University consultant, 7-18-03, I-3)

Instead of working from a deficit model of urban stereotypes to explain why students were the way they were, especially using explanations that dismissed complex student needs, teachers' team-meeting talk centered on empirical data and—through interactions with those in the social services team or via in-house workshops—teachers learned ways to respond to students' needs.

Having conversations focused on one child at a time could not have been possible unless teachers had close relationships with their students. As teachers explained: "One of the things that makes it worthwhile to me is the relationship that we all develop with our students…. Here, I get to know all of my students very well…" (5-6-03, FGI-4). "We don't give up on our kids" (5-6-03, FGI-9). Teachers on each grade-level subteam compared notes about particular children and developed a united front that incorporated all of their wisdom, which they could convey as a group to a parent/guardian or to members of social services and administrative teams. Clear, frequent communication that improved teachers' sense of each child was noticed and valued by parents:

> Every time I've come here, staff has been open. I had a concern as a parent about my child's behavior and they were willing right away to meet with me so we could talk about some strategies to work with my child. … And, [they were] very receptive to continuing that open line of communication all year with me. If I've asked for it, or emailed it, I've gotten a response the same day… They're more than willing to put your face with a name and associate you with your child. (Parent, 5-8-03, FGI-2)

Also, teamwork provided a venue for teacher learning on a regular basis, which was a school-wide focus. Teachers noted their workshop opportunities for learning new ideas about technology, other content, and topics like special education (5-12-03, FGI-3). In addition to workshops and team-time learning, the entire staff gathered to pore over two central sets of information: state-mandated tests and their annual school-wide evaluation. Teachers used state test results to think in a more comprehensive way about the curriculum and state grade-level content standards:

> We not only meet as a team, as an eighth grade, but when we have our in-services we take time out, have sixth grade, seventh grade, eighth grade. We come together; get the curriculum so seventh grade will know where to pick up from sixth grade and eighth grade will know where to pick up from seventh grade. We are still referencing with one another to make sure that we are all on the same page. (5-6-03, FGI-4)

The annual evaluation provided insights into parent and teacher satisfaction, a way to systematically improve the school's function. On one occasion, parents reported a need for earlier information about upcoming grade reports and the school added mid-term progress reports as a way to give parents a chance to encourage their children to complete and turn in missing lessons, etc. Finally, administrators and teacher leaders observed teaching and provided feedback that improved teaching, even among senior teachers (Teacher Interview, 5-04).

Thus, the school promoted a form of teacher-team practice that remained true to models of professional learning communities (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999). Teamwork put the school's philosophy into action via an enculturated *process* that connected 1) those in the school to one another, 2) teachers and staff to students and their families, and 3) teachers to new ideas and skills. In fact, the principal maintained school structures that supported teaching efforts, took teachers' ideas and opinions seriously, and involved parents and guardians. Teachers had information needed to make informed decisions about nearly every aspect of school life: teaching their own classrooms, as well as assigning teachers and students to teams, setting the school calendar and budget, selecting textbooks, and working out curricula. The entire community pivoted on meeting the needs of all students and this goal was at the core of teamwork practices. The principal maintained Charter's model, even when experienced teachers left and new ones arrived, by ensuring teacher commitment via hiring teachers attuned to the school's philosophy, many of them former Charter student-teachers. Teamwork brought new teachers into the fold and propagated the school's model through teacher-teacher, and principal-teacher interactions in teams. Working together in this environment allowed teachers to become "extended family" (T, 5-6-03, FGI-4) and trust in one another. Within their community teamwork prospered. Ultimately, teamwork processes produced teacher empowerment; that is, teachers had the expertise to meet students' needs, as well as control over decisions leading to meeting students' needs and support for their decisions.

Concern about the school's future kept teachers and parents anxious during the first year as a school of choice. Ultimately, district decisions about building use brought new "opportunities" for those at the school.

Choice Middle School

Late in the 2003 school year, district administration announced that Charter teachers and students would combine with Neighborhood School and be renamed "Charter Middle School at Neighborhood." We shortened this name to *Choice* for descriptive purposes. This would be no simple change in school circumstances, because tensions were built into the restructuring—animosities rooted in differences of opinion about the place of teacher unions in schools and about local control versus district (bureaucratic) governance. The overall school climate and difficult circumstances set the tone for the merger with aspects that impaired teacher-team function.

Loss of "family" attended the merger. Charter teachers found the dechartering decision and merger with a district school secretive and divisive (Tonso & Colombo, 2006), but the promise of achieving a long-time goal of implementing their model of teaching in a building with science labs, a gymnasium, swimming pool, and schoolyard made the merger palatable (Coordinator interview, 10/23/03). This hopeful feeling was quickly dashed when Charter teachers learned that colleagues without full certification (about half the staff) would take substantial pay cuts to continue in the district as substitutes. (Most left to seek new charter-school jobs.) Teachers from Neighborhood and other schools filled vacancies, about half of those employed at Choice. However, in late June, shortly after teachers signed contracts, Charter's long-time principal resigned over differences of opinion with district administrators. The community lost the person who "had a big hand in making the school the kind of school it is" (University consultant, 7/9/03). To ensure the program's success, the leader selected need[ed] to be able to "…acknowledge the wisdom and experience of both sets of people and come up with a way to implement the [Charter School] philosophy in a different setting with a wider array of kids" (University administrator, 7/11/03), as well as "enculturate" the staff and "to possess some incredible [people] skills" (University consultant, 7/9/03). In August a district K–8 assistant principal arrived to lead the school.

The schooling context for teacher teams changed dramatically after the merger with serious impacts on teacher-team function. First, teachers came from two very different traditions, which several days of consultant-led "team-building" workshops in early August failed to bridge. In particular, teachers did not come together around Charter's model of schooling, especially how teams operated and fit into a larger set of organizational structures (FN 8/7 through 8/22/03). The new principal provided little input into workshop content and did not attend. Important issues were ignored: How would teachers in a union district accept previously non-union charter-school teachers? How would district teachers learn about, develop a commitment to, and become adept at working in teacher teams (which they associated not with standard middle school practice, but with charter schools)? Would teachers with knowledge about Charter's model of schooling have the standing needed to promote Charter's model of schooling among the other teachers? When school started, even former Charter teachers were uncertain of the merged school's philosophy (Sixth-grade Teachers, FGI 5/3/04). Having two prep periods seemed widely accepted, but few of the structural supports that kept various aspects of the school connected, and were essential for effective teamwork existed. For instance, the forum for the social service team to meet and attend grade-level teacher meetings ceased (FN 9/14/03; Teacher FGI, 6/06/05). Thus, teacher teams lacked input about students' social, emotional, and physical well-being, impairing their ability to be responsive to students at Choice.

Second, school began chaotically in the Neighborhood building a week later than originally scheduled. Building renovations continued in and around the new building (during school hours) well into the beginning of the school year. Sweltering rooms, no locking doors, dark hallways, no access to phones or computers, and noisy tar pits with smelly fumes created disorder for teachers and students (FN 8/25/03, 9/14/03, 10/20/03, 10/21/03).

In this troublesome climate and with insufficient books and other teaching materials, teachers reported "just surviving" (Teacher FGI, 6/6/05). All teachers criticized this period. And, it seemed that this chaotic beginning set a tone of playing catch-up for the year. One former Charter teacher said:

> I felt that we were very, very unprepared from the beginning when we set foot into this building. When those students walked in the first day, I felt that the administration really didn't do a lot to create an environment where the new kids and the old kids would kind of mesh. I think they really underestimated that things would just naturally fall into place and I just didn't see a lot of leadership and even now I see very little leadership. As little things happen, it's almost like everyone's going around putting out the fires, but no one's really leading. No one's really being proactive enough to foresee a problem and prevent it from happening, whether it's with the paperwork or with kids or with discipline…. I think they kind of all stepped back, hoping that the model that was set up before them, that the momentum would just kind of carry it through the year. As problems arose, I didn't see strong leadership out of the office. (Seventh-grade Teacher FGI, 5/3/04)

Almost identical comments came two years after the merger (Teacher FGI, 6/6/05).

Over time, many school issues came to be framed in terms of Charter versus Neighborhood (or district) ways of life, and brought to the fore tensions inherent in the merger. For instance, it became common for former Neighborhood (and other district) teachers to incorporate contract terms in conversations about building particulars. District teachers filed (and won) a grievance over being asked to continue the Charter practice of eating lunch with students (Teacher FGI, 6/6/05). And, discussions about when to consider students tardy and how to effectively release students on a busy thoroughfare—ultimately with little teacher participation, led former Charter teachers to conclude that decisions seemed based more on the union contract and less on the "best interests of children" as had been the custom at Charter (FN, 9/24/03). Staff polarization resulted from differences in expectations between the two groups of teachers (FN, 9/24/03). In time, Charter's tradition of non-hierarchical, collaborative relations among all stakeholders eroded and this disposition carried into teacher-team meetings.

Teacher-team meetings after restructuring. At Choice, as the following vignette of a typical teacher-team meeting after restructuring illustrates (from representative field notes mid-October through November 2003), the focus of teaching teams shifted. Notice that information moves from administrators to teachers, that talk about the best interest of students has all but disappeared, that parents are shifting from being seen as partners to troublemakers, that opportunities to learn are limited and do not encompass learning more about students or about how to teach them, and that teachers' requests for important resources are not met. Researcher asides (italics in square brackets) indicate what came to be discernible patterns in the function of teacher-team meetings.

A teacher enters and says she is tired. Another responds: "It's hard answering your calling; some days you want a busy signal or to hang up!" Someone says paychecks arrived and teachers go to the office to pick theirs up. One returns and notes: "This is the first one they got right." Another is not so lucky; an error made in September did not get corrected, again; several have not been paid for teacher meetings in August. *[Teachers often did not know where they stood or which promises would be honored.]* Teachers expected to meet with the principal today to discuss CL's role and her skills, but the principal "forgot" and attended another meeting downtown (at district main offices). [*Teachers' avenues for making their wants and needs known to leadership disappeared from team meetings.]*

Most sixth-grade teachers are here when the Curriculum Leader (CL) arrives. S/he turns to the topic of Lesson Plans, "They need to be turned in on time, because [administrators] are doing evaluations of teachers." She circulates a list of what's supposed to be in them. "Be sure to list everything that is required for every day. If that is not in there, I will have to issue a letter of reprimand." Teachers counter with concerns: they lack pacing charts because theirs were destroyed during remodeling; files are at home (otherwise they too would have been destroyed); there are limited computers available (10 sixth-grade teachers share four computers) and they lack adequate resources (copier, teaching manuals, texts, curriculum guidelines) to prepare lesson plans adequately. The science teacher mentions postponing lesson plans until Monday, because she must teach based on finding out what unused equipment she can borrow from other schools, information not available until the weekend. The CL responds that teachers get 9–10 preps per week, so should not be concerned about using one to do lesson plans. "Turn in lesson plans on Friday at 1 pm." *[Administrative dictates became the norm, rather than sharing leadership and problem solving with teachers. Team prep time became a time for administrative work and, in the eyes of administrations, otherwise expendable.]*

CL: Ladies, this is just as frustrating to me. They ask for a packet of lesson plans and if I don't have it—they want to know why not. I get a look. I tell them that we are working on it. They look for you to be excellent. I tell them that you can't dig a ditch in four hours if you don't have a shovel. If you are digging a ditch with your hands and feet, then they can't expect it will be done in four hours. It's not fair….

T: Why is the lesson plan such a big deal? We do this at every school. Maybe we should bring in the union to cover our, C-Y-A. When [state test] comes WE know there's no book; WE know there's no objectives; WE know we couldn't do it. *[Teacher talk about the contract reified an administration/teacher hierarchy.]*

CL: Do the best job you can. *[Teachers' requests for essential resources fell on deaf ears and a survival mode was promoted.]*

Teachers return to an earlier concern—interactions with parents. As one teacher says it:

T: I'm concerned about where parents are coming from. They come in with an attitude that they're going to whip somebody. They need to give teachers respect. Who are these parents? Why are they so angry?

CL: They are mostly angry with their children. She knows that her child has an attitude and anger problem. She wants him/her to be an A student. In the old environment, s/he got an A, now the grade is affected by the anger. Parent wants to put the fault on the teachers.

T: She thinks she can intimidate us.

CL: That won't work here. I have your back. No one intimidates my teachers.

Then, as became a custom in offering advice to teachers, the CL tells a story, here about her God-baby's (God-daughter) thinking she could get away with misbehaving in her school. CL went to school and attended classes with her, which straightened out the child who asked her not to embarrass her again. CL said that she wouldn't need to if child minded her manners. *[Teacher talk about individual students in this building was replaced by homilies from administration.]* Teachers ask the CL to "get the records in front of us—last year's grades, etc.—so we can talk about this instead of having to depend on parents' representations." *[Teachers lacked information from which to make data-driven decisions.]*

But CL does not acknowledge their request and says:

CL: You need to pull his work, keep folders. He won't have it. I used to stand outside in the morning, but now I'm inside. And when parents go to the security officer, then start to head upstairs, I tell them that they have to go to the office. I tell them they don't go to teachers' rooms that they can't go down the corridor. *[Parents were no longer seen as partners, but as people to be kept away from teachers.]* Also, no student can go to the lavatory in the morning. At 8 they are still walking up and down the hall. The 7:30 bell rings and they come in and hang up their stuff. The sub started marking them tardy at 7:45. They need to be in their rooms at 7:40, 7:35-7:40. There are no book-bags allowed in the class. *[Basic policies about school-wide routines were not set or enforced consistently.]*

Assistant Principal (AP) enters and says he needs someone to cover a class during the period when these teachers have individual prep time. One grudgingly agrees to substitute, after others claim substitute-teaching recently. A teacher asks how they will be compensated for teaching during their prep time. AP will check into that. *[Teacher-team time disappeared for lack of subs.]*

CL shifts gears: "Ladies, you received something from the After-School Tutorial Program about nominating students for that." And, teachers begin to offer names of homeroom students who could use extra help. As they do, CL quizzes them about each student named: "Is he a behavior problem? Has she been absent a lot? Is she a D student?" In time, the district's criteria for the tutoring program emerge: C students who are really trying but not getting it, who attend school and behave in class. Only 60 students will be tutored, 30 from each of the sixth and seventh grades, fewer than 15% of those enrolled and none who are failing. Teacher teams begin to balance the number that will come from each homeroom, roughly four children from each. *[No longer did the school focus on all students, but adopted a meritocratic, not egalitarian, approach. District directives replaced teacher talk about students.]* CL departs.

A teacher announces that a memo in mailboxes says progress reports must go out in two days. This directive from the Assistant Principal angers most teachers, but they set to work to meet this unexpected demand. While teachers average grades, write grades and comments by hand on sheets—one per student (that are passed from teacher to teacher), and pull labels from the master address list and affix them to envelopes for mailing the progress reports, they discuss a wide variety of issues: concern that the school's potential is not being met without a systematic plan to raise test scores and missing so many key resources (books, computers, copier, library), payroll errors and efforts to work these out with advice given from more senior district teachers, planning for a potluck for the day before the holiday, the lack of

> a functional discipline system, the lack of foresight on the part of administration, and a general concern that teacher-team time has become an "administrative" prep, instead of being a time when they can talk about individual student needs. *[Even in their absence, administrators control the meeting. Teachers managed only snippets of discussion about their shared students, something that in prior years overwhelmed team meetings.]*
>
> A teacher enters to use the phone that all sixth- and seventh-grade teachers share, installed early November. Noise in the hall increases, leading a teacher to say in a singsong: "Here come the children," to which another replies, "Awesome! Ready for education to begin." Teachers pack up to collect students; one comments, "This is total insanity." *[The lack of organizational structure in the building wore teachers down.]*

A rich dialogue about students' academic, social, and emotional needs, so central to Charter's function, never developed at Choice. Instead of teachers at Choice systematically and routinely comparing notes about a particular student, sharing approaches that work in another classroom or for a similar student, and learning not only about students but also about ways to meet students' needs, such conversations became infrequent and were preempted by administrative homilies of personal experience. The practice of announcing administrative requests to teachers at the last minute, instead of developing a calendar, disrupted the flow of teacher-team function during team prep time.

At Choice, instead of teachers who served a cohort of students following Charter's routines, teacher-team practice was "eclectic," with only some four-subject teacher groups transcending district/charter and union/non-union tensions. Teams composed of district teachers never received important information about focusing on one student at a time, and rarely functioned as teams had at Charter. Teams comprising Charter and unwilling district teachers split, with district teachers not participating in teamwork. Teams composed of Charter teachers and willing district teachers spent team time negotiating team practices and eventually attempted operating as at Charter. Teams including Charter teachers tried operating as before.

As shown in the example team meeting after restructuring, instead of focusing on students, teachers spent the vast majority of team time doing administrative work. In fact, by pulling teachers out of team prep to cover for absent teachers and in other ways disrupting teacher-team time—such as when the Curriculum Leader expressed little sympathy for constraints on lesson plan preparation, saying: "[You] get 9–10 preps per week, so shouldn't be concerned about using one to do lesson plans." Administration gave the impression that team prep time was a perquisite, not something central to student success. Also, opportunities for teachers to learn and improve teaching disappeared. Ultimately, weekly (contract-mandated) after-school staff meetings served as the only place where teachers routinely interacted with the principal. Here, following a principal-prepared agenda and a specified time limit, information about upcoming events was announced *to* teachers, not discussed *with* them. Though some teachers sought answers to recurring questions (such as asking for resources and information about payroll, grade sheets, attendance reports, and test preparation), answers were usually deferred, and most teachers stopped asking questions.

Teams also lacked important information about students' progress. When test results arrived late in the school year, results were not shared with teachers. Rather than viewing results as an opportunity to reflect on their first year together, the administration hoped only that scores exceeded district averages. Ultimately, in spite of considerable room for improvement, Charter's practice of setting aside professional development time to consider where to improve ceased. Not sharing test results with teachers made it impossible for teacher teams to work collaboratively—by subjects, across grades, or for curriculum pacing—to ascertain where to improve their work with students. This removed aspects of teacher teamwork that had been routine at Charter, leaving less for teams to do, and teachers without a share in school-wide decision making.

Likewise, teacher teamwork seemed to fall by the wayside when administration allowed only those students who "deserved" tutoring—regularly attending students with "C" averages who tried hard to learn—into district-provided sessions for improving state-mandated test scores. Having administration decide which

students "deserved" tutoring meant that teacher teams who knew students better than others in the building would have a much smaller role in making decisions about individual students and their educational well-being. In fact, in the example of selecting students for tutoring, teachers did not share among themselves in the decision, but each turned to her grade book and decided which of her homeroom students to put on the list. Former Charter teachers agonized over leaving so many struggling students off the list.

Discipline practices at Choice also interfered with teacher-team function, especially via leadership's lack of support of the interconnecting educational structures central to Charter's model of schooling. For instance, at Charter students served "in-house" suspensions, completing schoolwork in a separate room staffed in a variety of ways over the years (AP1, 6/18/04). Teachers knew where students were; students did their schoolwork and did not fall behind, but were isolated from their peers. But this did not continue at Choice. Ultimately teachers thought that no consistent, fair, or acceptable discipline system existed (Teacher FGI, 6/6/05). Students sent to the small main office for misbehaving often waited for long periods and continued to misbehave, while missing learning time. Persistent misbehavior led to suspensions, but promised suspension lists were sporadic and inaccurate. Teachers seldom knew if missing students were to be marked absent or if they had been suspended (Teacher FGI, 6/6/05). This may seem a small matter, but teachers new to the district learned that mistakes on attendance documents required complicated changes, which necessitated using team time while experienced district teachers explained how to correct paperwork. Again, teamwork shifted away from informed discussions about students to time for handling administrative paperwork. In addition, many behavior referrals from teachers required a parent-teacher conference before readmission at Choice, but administrative methods for readmitting suspended students did not take teacher paperwork into account and parents did not meet with teachers. Structures that had integrated the Charter discipline system with teacher-team function waned. Over time, then, teachers began to feel cut off from their students' lives, important opportunities for teachers and parents to collaborate on issues such as behavior disappeared, students most in need of extra help became least likely to get it, and teachers felt like they could not serve students' needs.

Discussion of Findings

When Charter restructured to become Choice, it underwent substantial changes in its structure: loss of University affiliation, a new principal, combining students and teachers from two schools with very different educational traditions, and moving into a building that was not ready for school. Any one of these might disrupt a school's internal function, but such wholesale change all but guaranteed rocky times. A dramatic shift away from a reform mindset became apparent in the school's changing commitment to *Turning Points*, in teacher-team function, and in power relations.

"Turning Points" at Charter and Choice

To what extent did Choice embody ideals of *Turning Points?* Though Charter embraced key *Turning Points* practices—team structure and teamwork, empowered decision making, full-service school, and an extended school day, the interconnections central to being an effective school were lost at Choice. As in other professional learning communities (Ehman, 1995; Gunn & King, 2003; Holland, 2002; Picucci et al., 2002; Supovitz, 2002; Trimble & Peterson, 1999), Charter teacher teams developed into a close-knit "family," providing emotional support and teaching advice, without between-team rivalries (Sixth-grade Teachers FGI, 5/12/03; Seventh-grade Teachers FGI, 5/6/03). Second, like earlier research (Ehman; Geiser & Berman, 2000; Gunn & King; Holland; Picucci et al.; Supovitz; Trimble & Peterson), Charter teams became the primary forum for empowered decision making and shared leadership by keeping decisions collaborative and as close to students as possible. Not surprisingly, teachers felt angry and betrayed when they were not included in the dechartering decision (Tonso & Colombo, 2006). Third, Charter followed *Turning Points* to become a full-service school:

> …meaning that we believe that in the middle school model [with its focus on the whole child], not only academics.… You need to do other stuff like a nurse and social worker and special education…; like counseling not only for kids, but for families if necessary; medical services in the school, a teen clinic; special education services which are mandated by law but [also] a real emphasis on making sure that not

> only does it take place with individual students in categorical classrooms [those devoted to a specific need], but that general education teachers are tied in to this too so the kids are not separated all the time.... Also part of that would be food services, breakfast, lunch, [snacks], dinner if necessary. (Administrator, 6/10/03)

University social work, nursing, and education programs provided qualified personnel such as a social worker and interns, an on-site nurse practitioner, and some of the extended day staff (Administrator, 6/10/03). Fourth, rather than have students go home to empty houses (Informant), an extended day portion of the school provided tutoring, recreation, and social activities after the regular school day (Administrator, 6/10/03) that most viewed as integral to student progress (Coordinator, 10/23/03). As the vignette from Charter team meetings illustrated, staff and administration of the school pulled all services together via team meetings, which kept the focus on giving students 110%, made the school what it was, and helped students to achieve (Eighth-grade Teachers FGI, 5/6/03). Charter deployed most of the tenets of the first *Turning Points*, though had not yet taken up the expansive *Turning Points 2000*.

But the "can do" attitude, sense of family, after-school and social service programs connected to academic classrooms, and teachers routinely having a say in school-wide decision making did not continue at Choice. Over time, without concerted effort to educate new administrators—especially the principal, without leadership to orchestrate teachers' professional development that promoted *Turning Points* ideals to newcomers, and without school-wide structures to build teacher teams into the fabric of school life, Charter's model of schooling and its allegiance to *Turning Points* faded.

Choice leadership played a key role in these changes, because there was a loss of knowledge about (and commitment to) the vision and philosophy (Seventh-grade Teacher FGI, 5/3/04).

> [L]osing the head of the administrative team put a hardship on those that had to be administrators…. It was very difficult for them to have the same vision that we had been working with over the years, because they [earlier administrators] had been completely indoctrinated because they know the system and they know the way of doing things. (Seventh-grade Teacher FGI, 5/3/04)

Though one teacher thought the change in key personnel had potential to be better for the merged school, because leadership might have the perspective of creating a new school with the best of the model program without having a biased allegiance to the old school, lack of follow-through and coherence undermined these hopes (Seventh-grade Teacher FGI, 5/3/04).

Ultimately, teamwork at Choice was disconnected from the larger school community and ceased to exist as a process linking academic achievement and decision making. Though 4 of the 7 four-subject teams eventually found ways to devote time to discussing student progress and meeting with parents and coordinate curriculum across the four academic areas (Teacher FGI, 6/6/05), such conversations did not systematically connect to administration, grade-level teams, subject-matter teams (all math teachers, for instance), non-academic teams (health, gym, art, etc.), or social services.

Teacher-Team Function

How did teacher-teams function in Charter's organization, both teachers' opportunities to learn, collaborate, reflect, and contribute to school-wide decision making, and their use of information in teacher-team practice? As a consequence of structural changes, teachers' opportunities to learn, collaborate, reflect, and contribute to school-wide decision making, and their use of information in teacher-team practice diminished dramatically. At Choice, opportunities to learn dealt almost exclusively with learning district and building administrative practices (such as completing payroll, student attendance, and substitute teacher paperwork, as well as filing lesson and substitute-teacher plans). Notably, leaders made little effort to build a school community among new stakeholders. For instance, no staff meetings during the school year discussed the merger process, Charter's model of schooling and its implementation, nor district goals and objectives. Only in one sixth-, one seventh-, and two eighth-grade four-subject teams, composed of former Charter and willing district

teachers, did team time become a place where teachers reflected on their practice, shared ideas about teaching, and learned about teaming (Sixth-grade Teacher FGI, 5/3/04; Seventh-grade Teacher FGI, 5/3/04; Teacher FGI, 6/6/05).

Without a commitment to prior Charter practices, teachers lost the ability to run their own meetings, and set their agendas and meeting formats. This not only disconnected school-wide decision making from classrooms, but also removed teachers from decision making beyond their classrooms. Even when administrative staff did not explicitly run a team meeting, meetings followed administrative directives (e.g., FN, 8/14/03, 8/21/03, 8/27/03, 10/20/03). The full-service model suffered from not having a social services team and from little, if any, coordination between administrative, teaching, and social service teams (see Figure 1). Echoing colleagues, a teacher said, "I thought that the model, like the rest of us, was going to be transferred, and that we would continue the work that we'd already started. However, as you've heard so far, it didn't happen that way" (Seventh-grade Teachers FGI, 5/3/04). This was a bitter pill to swallow, since Charter teachers stayed at Choice because they thought the model would be transferred and they believed the model was responsible for students' successes (Seventh-grade Teacher FGI, 5/3/04) as others have found (e.g., Crow & Pounder, 2000; Picucci et al., 2002; Supovitz, 2002; Trimble & Peterson, 1999).

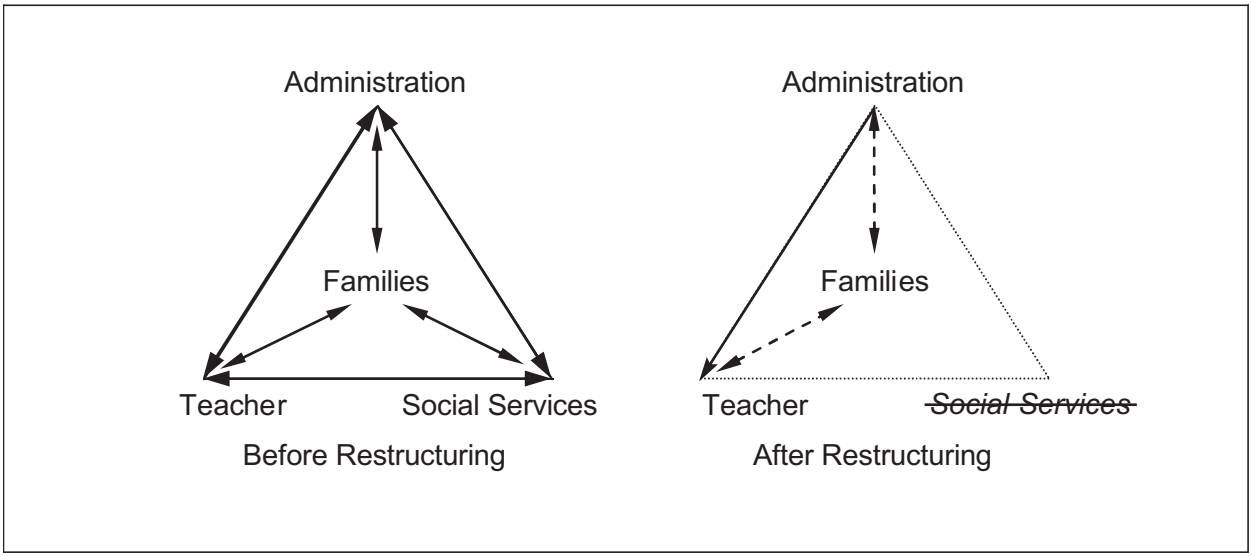

Figure 1. Change in flow of information among teams and families

Teacher involvement in decision making decreased dramatically and administrative support for such decisions diminished (Sixth-grade Teacher FGI, 5/3/04). Only glimmers of control over daily life existed—such as on a sixth-grade team composed of former Charter and willing district teachers who sometimes decided to cover for one another, then informed administration. Former Charter teachers reported that "you can control what goes on in your classroom pretty much, but you don't have much input into anything else," or as another characterized it, "The only flexibility you have is in your delivery" (Teacher FGI, 6/6/05).

Though teachers at Charter routinely made data-driven decisions related to academic achievement, student behaviors, social, medical, and emotional needs, and school function, these did not persist at Choice. Administration's secretive approach kept teachers in the dark about important matters, such as content covered on a district-wide mid-year test. Lack of up-to-date student files also made it difficult to understand children's circumstances and needs (Administrator, 07/05). The annual evaluation, performed by outside consultants, was delayed when district testing administrators failed to deliver individual student achievement data for year two—the merger year—until after the end of year three. In essence the evaluation became an academic exercise, not something used to make annual corrections in school operations. Thus, no forum for conversations about adjusting practices at Choice existed at the teacher-team, grade, academic-subject, or school levels.

Power Relations at Choice

How did power relations play out in teams? Contestations about how teams operated at Choice occurred overtly and covertly, and these ultimately supported the power of union over non-union, administration over teachers, and district over Charter. District teachers' taking a laissez faire "that's how things are" approach, administration's acting as if it were following the model (without understanding its procedural and structural components), and the district's making so many decisions formerly made in-house gave the impression that this was more like a district school than a model of Charter Middle School. District teachers grieving Charter practices that contradicted the union contract; counselors' not cooperating in the discipline plan; and administration holding parent-teacher conferences during the day (instead of the evening as at Charter) implied that this was a union school where decisions about teacher work were grounded in the contract. Former Charter teachers interpreted this to mean that students did not come first at Choice. Administration's monopolizing what teachers did during team meetings, playing their cards close to the vest instead of sharing information with teachers, and making decisions affecting teachers without their input sent messages that administration held power over teachers and did not share leadership. Finally, the district's inability to be responsive to inquiries about the construction, the lack of a secured workplace, the availability of supplies such as textbooks, copiers, and other typical school furnishings, and information about when teachers could expect errors in payroll to be corrected signaled how district bureaucracy came ahead of an individual building's needs. Ultimately, few ways existed within Choice's organizational framework to make power relations apparent, allow reflection about them and their deleterious impact on the school's function, or change them.

Implications for Middle Grades Teacher Teams

Structural changes to schools using teacher teams can ripple down into teacher-team function and undermine reform efforts. Though the case considered here illustrated a school at the intersection of three ideological divides, which likely heightened the visibility of such contestations, ideological differences exist in almost every school and can have a dramatic impact on children's educations. What should be abundantly clear from this case study is that deforming a fairly successful school seemed relatively easy to accomplish, even though every major stakeholder before and after dechartering and restructuring could genuinely claim to care deeply about the education of African American students in the urban area. When all was said and done, power relations growing out of political (district bureaucracy versus local-control organizations), social (administration versus teacher), and economic (union versus non-union) differences explained more of our findings than did other considerations. These ideologies framed how insiders gave meaning to combining Charter and Neighborhood schools to form Choice. In a district where reform of the sort envisioned by *Turning Points* was not the norm and where teachers have been dramatically and negatively impacted by charter schools, Charter's model of schooling—and teacher-teams' influence on schooling via this model—lost potential to continue largely because 1) it was conflated with the charter school movement, 2) non-union Charter teachers lacked standing to promote it against other forms, and 3) administration failed to support interconnecting structures essential to the model. In the final analysis, those making everyday decisions fell back on established ways of life and, when ideological tensions emerged, relations of power developed that reinforced district practices (explaining some of the obduracy of urban schools others found [Geiser & Berman, 2000]). If reform is the motive, then changing deep-seated ideologies must be part of the conversation about how best to educate children.

The school community seldom capitalized on important opportunities for learning and this limited both the utility and purpose of teacher teams. We were routinely struck by the fact that everyone at Choice declared their belief in Charter's model, in spite of the fact that most administrators and teachers from the district—those new to Choice—never gained an adequate appreciation of it. In fact, we wondered if claiming to follow the model diverted attention from learning about it. Part of the dilemma stemmed from former Charter teachers holding most of the knowledge about teamwork practices, expertise discounted by administrators using an ideology of social status where administration came ahead of teachers, and by many district teachers who remained distrustful of those coming from non-union worksites. However, in teams where learning about the model became a desirable teacher activity, district teachers and former Charter teachers collaborated and portions of the model were preserved. But, what was learned related narrowly to how academic-core teacher teams functioned and the wider interconnections and wrap-around aspects of Charter were lost, which limited

the impact teacher teams could have on their students' progress. Charter teachers expected their expertise would grow via having their teaching observed by members of the administrative team and receiving feedback about how to become better teachers. Without this opportunity to learn, teachers felt their skills diminishing and worried about their capabilities to serve students. Here, falling back on a conventional sense of teachers as people who *know*, instead of the more revolutionary notion of teachers as people who *learn*, undercut teacher teamwork.

The lack of appreciation for the model and for actions that undercut it presented an opportunity for collective reflection about school function that went unrealized. When interconnected with other facets of a school's model, teacher teams might serve as an ideal place for inculcating collective reflection, especially about power relations and the underlying assumptions, motivations, and desires that contribute to school stasis. There seem few other ways around the conundrum of everyone claiming to follow the model, than having avenues to challenge such assertions—and we reaffirm the importance of collective reflection and consensus building in professional learning communities.

Echoing a vast literature—to create effective middle grades educational settings using teacher teams—it is not adequate to place teachers in teams, give them team prep time, and assign them students. Teacher teams at Choice could have been taken seriously as groups who have influence beyond their classrooms, "people who take on new challenges to serve students" (Teacher FGI, 6/6/05). In fact, effective school structures and routines ideally would connect teams to other parts of the school, and provide processes to take teachers' expertise, needs, interests, and desires into account. As our case demonstrated, without structures and leadership promoting shared understandings that guaranteed teacher teams were systematically connected to the wider school function, teacher-teams' abilities to serve students diminished.

Ultimately, when opportunities exist for teachers to be partners in a school's future, teacher empowerment is built into the professional learning community, not something that serendipitously occurs. Empowerment at Charter went well beyond simply participating in decision making about classroom situations, to include receiving feedback on one's teaching, asking for and receiving additional training in a wide range of topics, knowing administration would support decisions taking students' best interests to heart, being listened to at all communication levels, not being told what to do so much as asked whether an approach might work, having data upon which to make decisions, and otherwise being taken seriously as people with growing expertise whose opinions mattered and whose requests for instructional materials and other items deserved consideration. These aspects gave teachers at Charter influence over school functions and without them Choice staff lost their voice. As one teacher alluded, serving children was a calling, and disempowerment at Choice—the niggling ways that structures limited, instead of facilitated, teacher-team function—made it hard to answer a calling to teach.

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[1]Citations to data follow a convention indicating the individual, date, kind of data (O = Observation, I = Interview, FGI = Focus Group Interview), and page of the quote cited.

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