

High School Principals' Perspectives on Curriculum Reform Policy:
A Qualitative Examination Exploring How Nine New Jersey High School Principals
Relate to Option Two

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Chapter I

Introduction

Systemic reform seeks to transform a school program through changes to curricula, governance, teacher preparation, assessment, and student accountability (Fuhrman, 1993; Fuhrman & Massell, 1992; Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning [MCREL], 2000), among other things. The central goal of systemic reform is better alignment of these components to create more effective schools (O'Day & Smith, 1993). However, aspects of systemic reform policy such as how principals learn about, understand, and use reform policy, as well as how they sustain success or overcome challenges when implementing policy, are still relatively unexamined.

Extensive research about the history, evolution, and current state of systemic reform policies has traced the shift in the development and delivery of reform policies from the federal to the state level (Conley, 2003; Firestone, Fuhrman, & Kirst, 1990; Parker, 1993; Shepard, Glaser, Linn, & Bohrnstedt, 1993; Stromme, 2005; Timar, 1989). Since the early 1980s, individual states have assumed greater responsibility for educational reform (Elmore, 1993; McDonnell, 1988; Starratt, 1998; Stromme, 2005; Wilson & Rossman, 1993). As they assumed ownership of school policies, many states have changed curricula and aligned them with skill-based standards to raise high school graduation requirements (Clune, White & Patterson, 1989; Conley, 2003; Education Commission of the States, 1990; Elmore, 1993; McDonnell, 1988; Starratt, 1988; Wilson & Rossman, 1993).

My review of the literature on state curriculum reform initiatives revealed some troubling gaps. Several states, including Delaware, Kentucky, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Maryland, South Carolina, New York, New Jersey, and Washington, have initiated large-scale reform efforts at the policy level. Unfortunately, research has not specifically addressed how principals learn about the policies, how they understand the policies, what effect the curriculum component of the reform plan is having on school programs, and what successes or challenges the principals experience when implementing the policies (AEL, 2000; Cleaver, 1997; Croissant, 1991; Dana, 1992; Goertz, Floden, & O’Day, 1996; Goldman & Conley, 1994, 1996; KIER, 1996; Pliska, 1997; Shepherd, 2001; Stecher, et al., 2000; Swanson, 1990; Wilson, Rossman & Adduci, 1991). It is important that this gap be addressed because principals are central to the implementation of curriculum reform policy (Fullan, 2001; Hall, 1980).

One related state-specific problem is New Jersey’s foray into the systemic reform movement, which led to the 1992 formation of the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards (NJCCCS), detailed in New Jersey Administrative Code (NJAC) 6A: 8 (New Jersey Department of Education [NJDOE], 1996). NJAC 6A: 8 lists the subjects to be taught, content “frameworks” that guide the development of curricula, student assessments to be employed, and the requirements for high school graduation. The state’s efforts aimed to strengthen the quality of instruction and “better prepare students to become excellent thinkers and doers” (Achieve, Inc., 2000, p. 2).

Since 2000, A sub-policy defined in NJAC 6A: 8, commonly referred to as Option Two (NJAC 6A: 8-5.1.II), has allowed high school principals to provide students with alternative learning opportunities that deviate from the traditional classroom

experience while allowing them to complete the requirements for graduation (NJDOE, 2004b; Taylor, 2003).

However, there is scant literature on how principals in New Jersey learn about, understand, and use Option Two (L. Morse, personal communication, October 23, 2006). My research contributed to the literature on curriculum reform policy by conducting a study in two phases that explored how eight of nine high school principals in New Jersey learned about, understood, and used Option Two. It is important to examine how principals understand and apply Option Two if it is to be used extensively and effectively throughout New Jersey.

Option Two: A Backdoor to Graduation

Option Two was created four years after the development of New Jersey's standards policy. In 1996 the state had, for the first time, core course proficiencies, occupational competencies, and course specific high school graduation requirements (Doolan, 2004). Much attention during this time was also paid to high school issues, including school course and credit requirements for graduation (Doolan, 2004). By 1997, the state's education reform efforts led to the development of cross content workplace readiness standards that focused on advancing the NJDOE's school-to-work philosophy. An emphasis on exposing high school students to career majors and post-secondary work experiences was incorporated into all of the content standards (Doolan, 2004).

Soon after these reform efforts, in 2000, the NJDOE amended NJAC 6A: 8-5.1.II to include language that would allow school districts to create learning experiences that would support the state's focus on school-to-work and post-secondary preparation by

providing them the power to “determine and establish...curricular activities or programs that aimed at achieving the Core Curriculum Content Standards for graduation purposes” (NJAC 6A: 8-5.1.II, p. 1). Jay Doolan and David Hespe, two authors of the amended policy, described Option Two as a “backdoor” option that allows students to satisfy the graduation requirements stipulated by the NJCCCS while following a non-traditional curriculum (J. Doolan, personal communication, April 24, 2003; D. Hespe, personal communication, April 17, 2003).

The following excerpt offers a summary of Option Two (see Appendix A for full code):

The 110-credit requirement set forth in (a) 1i above may be met in whole or in part through program completion as follows: District boards of education may determine and establish [a set number of] curricular activities or programs aimed at achieving the Core Curriculum Content Standards for promotion and graduation purposes.

Curricular activities and programs may involve in-depth experiences linked to the Core Curriculum Content Standards, such as interdisciplinary or theme-based programs, independent study, co-curricular or extra-curricular activities, magnet programs, student exchange programs, distance learning opportunities, internships, community service, or other structured learning experiences (NJAC 6A: 8-5.1.II).

The policy language above is further explained in a recent NJDOE memorandum that defined the legislature’s intent behind Option Two:

The New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards establish a core body of knowledge and skills that all students need in order to become healthy, productive, well-informed employable citizens of an ever-expanding and changing world. The department acknowledges, however, that all students will not achieve the standards in the same way, at the same pace, or with the same level of success. In order to maximize student achievement, the department encourages local school districts to permit alternative learning experiences that are stimulating and intellectually challenging, and that enable students to fulfill or exceed the expectations set forth in the Core Curriculum Content Standards (NJDOE, 2004a).

The opportunity to create the alternative learning experiences cited by the code gives high school principals flexibility to create innovative programs while reforming high school programs, even in a climate of high-stakes accountability. The call to reform high schools and federal reform initiatives such as *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) has not dissuaded NJDOE officials from sanctioning Option Two (B. Librera, personal communication, April 2, 2007). In fact, Option Two has been seen as a “way to get out of the suffocating framework of NCLB” and remains a relevant mechanism for creating different types of learning experiences (B. Librera, personal communication, April 2, 2007; L. Morse, personal communication, March 26, 2007).

It is important to conduct research on Option Two because to the best of my knowledge, principals’ perceptions of Option Two have not been examined. It is also important to conduct research on Option Two because policymakers intended it to create alternative learning experiences for high school seniors and research has made the case for changing the high school senior year (NJDOE, 2004b; NCHSSY, 2001). The National Commission on the High School Senior Year (NCHSSY) suggested that a student’s last year in high school be revamped, calling for a “more productive senior year for students in American high schools” and stating, “The final year of high school is simply the culmination of a number of trends and pressures” (NCHSSY, 2001, p. 3).

Option Two supports the Commission’s ideas because it contains language that allows principals to engage students in programs such as job internships, service learning projects, college classes, and independent projects (NJAC 6A: 8-5.1.II). The policy does not contradict testing mandates put in place by No Child Left Behind but still heeds the call for change in high school programs (particularly the senior year curriculum) while

allowing school leaders to offer new curricular programs and nontraditional experiences that may better serve students' learning styles and needs.

To the best of my knowledge, however, no researchers have investigated how high school principals in the state learn, understand, and use Option Two; how Option Two influences school programs; and the successes or challenges principals may be experiencing while implementing the policy (L. Morse, personal communication, October 23, 2006). The Director of the NJDOE Office of District and School Improvement Services pointed out that the department does not know how well principals understand Option Two or the extent to which they are using the policy, stating: "We have little information on Option Two and we can give you the names of the schools that use it..." (L. Morse, personal communication, October 23, 2006).

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. I provide background information about the topic and describe the history and evolution of Option Two in the first chapter. I also explain my interest in this topic, the purpose of my study, the organization of my study (including the conceptual framework and my research questions), a brief description of my methodological design, and the significance and limitations of the study.

I review the literature related to curriculum reform, schools' implementation of state curriculum reform policies, the effects of reform policy on school programs, and the conditions under which curriculum reform can be successful in the second chapter.

I explain why I chose the sites and participants, describe the methods of data collection and analysis, and explain how I will mitigate threats to the validity of my study in chapter 3.

I review the findings of the research in chapter 4 by discussing the profiles I created for my participants and by comparing and identifying trends in the interview data.

I discuss the results of my research, point out the implications of my findings, and make recommendations to the New Jersey Department of Education and principals in the last chapter of my dissertation.

Purpose of the Study

My study served two purposes. It contributed to the literature on the implementation of curriculum reform by examining how Option Two was being used in New Jersey high schools. It also shed light on how high school principals in the state learned about and understood Option Two so as to contribute to the NJDOE's promotion of the policy.

Contributing to the Literature on Curriculum Reform Policy Implementation

My study examined how a group of high school principals: a) learned about Option Two, b) described and understood Option Two; and c) used Option Two to create programs that offered alternative learning experiences to students. I also studied the policy's influence on programs in their schools, and the successes or challenges these principals faced when using the policy.

The first phase of this interview study involved the selection of nine principals of comprehensive high schools because the NJDOE identified their schools as using Option Two and because they represented different socioeconomic communities and regions of New Jersey (NJDOE, 2004b). My review of all of the documents produced by the NJDOE showed that these nine were among 20 schools identified by the agency as having programs developed as a result of Option Two (Taylor, 2003). Eight of these nine principals fit my selection criteria because my initial data collection revealed that the principal at one of the schools did, in fact, not use Option Two. After identifying the principals, I then focused on four of the nine participants and four of the district level administrators with whom they worked because I wanted to learn more about how Option Two, if at all, influenced the other curricular programs in their schools. This second phase of the research also assisted me in examining trends that emerged from the first round of data.

I took advantage of the relationship I established with a member of the NJDOE. I communicated with Linda Morse, Director of the Office of District and School Improvement Services (L. Morse, personal communication, October 23, 2006). She provided me with information such as memos and department documents about Option Two that assisted me in my research. This relationship was mutually beneficial because my research will provide valuable information to the NJDOE.

Providing Information to The NJDOE

My study may provide the NJDOE with information it can use to promote Option Two by helping principals understand and implement Option Two. The information that I will share with the agency includes how these principals learned about and used Option

Two, how their use of the policy in their schools either supported or undermined the agency's intentions for the policy, how the principals perceived Option Two was used as a lever for school improvement and what challenges principals faced as they implemented the policy. My analysis seeks to inform the policymaking body's efforts to improve the ways in which the NJDOE articulates Option Two to principals and to inform the NJDOE about how it may help principals overcome challenges identified by the study.

The participants in my study will not be present during my meeting with the NJDOE, and I will not make any references to their names, their schools' names, or any of the pseudonyms I used in my dissertation.

Personal Interest

My interest in this topic stemmed from my prior role as a high school principal who witnessed the benefits of Option Two. My experiences using and studying Option Two posed threats to the validity of my study and I will discuss how I tended to this in the validity section.

Option Two allowed senior students in my school to enroll in internship programs in which they worked alongside professionals for three days a week instead of taking physical education classes. Students participated in activities such as organized athletic events, exercise programs, and dance lessons, which were not affiliated with the school program. They had to log at least 50 hours in such programs in order to receive physical education credit. Thus, students met New Jersey's graduation requirement for physical education.

My interest also resulted from my pilot study of Option Two, which involved 33 high schools in Monmouth County, New Jersey (Taylor, 2003). This study included a survey of the participants and found that few schools used the policy to create innovative curricular programs. The results of my pilot study motivated me to pursue this dissertation study of the policy inside and outside of Monmouth County.

Table 1

Results of Taylor's (2003) Study of Option Two in Monmouth County, New Jersey.

Overall Sample Group	Findings
<i>Are you familiar with Option Two?</i>	Yes: 94%
<i>Do you use Option Two?</i>	Yes: 12%
Sub-Group That Uses Option Two:	Findings
<i>Why do you use Option Two?</i>	Solve a program challenge: 100%
Sub-Group That Does Not Use Option Two:	Findings
<i>Why don't you use Option Two?</i>	Lack of general interest from administration and faculty: 44%
	No need to use policy to create innovative programs: 35%
	Schedule does not allow for policy: 14%
	Lack of extensive knowledge about the policy: 7%

Table 1 illustrates the findings of my pilot study. Most of the participants in this study were familiar with Option Two but hardly any of them used it. The schools that did use it employed the policy to solve a problem in their schools. Most of the schools that did not use Option Two did not see the need to innovate their programs or felt there was a lack of interest in the policy (Taylor, 2003). The research questions in this dissertation addressed some of the questions that arose from my pilot study. I wanted to know the depth of knowledge about Option Two held by the principals in the schools in this study and why so few of them used the policy to innovate their curricular programs. The research questions below address this interest.

Research Questions

I conducted my study in two phases. First, I focused on how nine high school principals learned about and used Option Two (NJDOE, 2004b). Then, I more closely examined how four principals (who I identified from the first round of data collection as using Option Two extensively) used the policy to promote curricular change in their schools. Finally, I interviewed four school district leaders who worked with these four principals who were familiar with the Option Two programs in their schools. Three of these leaders were district supervisors of guidance and one district leader was a superintendent. The following main research questions guided my study:

- 1) How do eight of nine New Jersey high school principals describe the ways in which they learn about Option Two? How do these principals perceive the intent of Option Two?

- 2) How do these principals describe the ways in which they use Option Two to create curricular programs in their schools?
- 3) How do these principals and their district leaders describe the ways, if at all, Option Two is used to leverage school improvement?
- 4) How do these principals and their district leaders perceive the successes and/or challenges of using Option Two for school improvement?

Conceptual Framework

My review of the literature on state-developed curriculum reform policy revealed four main areas of study that informed my methodological design: a) *articulation* of reform policy to schools; b) *implementation* of reform policy in schools; c) *effects* of reform policy on school programs; and d) *conditions* for effectively implementing reform policy. I examined these four areas to inform my exploration of how these New Jersey high school principals learned about curriculum reform policy, how they used it in their schools, how the policy influenced the development of curricular programs, and the challenges these principals encountered as they implemented the policy.

Articulation of Curriculum Reform Policy

Prior studies regarding how the state DOE articulates curriculum reform policy to schools indicates that policy is not communicated effectively (Ball, 1997; Finley, 2000; Fuhrman, 1993; Gregg, 1992; O'Day & Smith, 1993). My review of the literature showed that agencies responsible for disseminating policy information to school leaders do not explain and describe the information effectively. While the literature describes how policy is communicated to schools, it does not examine how principals learn about

policy. Part of my study focused on how high school principals learned about Option Two.

Creating Programs Other Than Those Intended by The Policy

Fuhrman (1993), McLaughlin, (1990), and Wilson and Rossman (1993) pointed out that schools tend to use curriculum reform policies to create curricular programs in ways policymakers do not intend. My review of prior studies showed that reform policies are implemented according to the needs of local communities (Timar, 1989). I wanted to extend these studies to examine how eight of the nine New Jersey high school principals I interviewed implemented Option Two in their schools.

Effects of Option Two on School Programs

The literature on the effects of curriculum reform policy on school curricular programs is inconclusive about how policy translates to curricular change (Clune, White, & Patterson, 1989; Fuhrman, Clune, & Elmore, 1988; Hargreaves, 1994; McLaughlin, 1996; Taylor, 2003). For instance, my pilot study of Option Two showed that some principals used it as a lever for curricular change, while others used it to solve non-curricular problems. One principal used the policy to help individual students who entered the school from another state to satisfy New Jersey graduation requirements if they lacked the academic credentials to complete the high school program in 4 years. Another principal used Option Two to offer students who excelled in writing to participate in independent study programs in lieu of coursework (Taylor, 2003). Studies of policies in other states also have found mixed results about the effects of policy on school curricular programs (Clune et al., 1989; Fuhrman et al., 1988; Hargreaves, 1994;

McLaughlin, 1996). This range of results calls for further exploration of how curriculum reform policy influences the development of curricular programs.

Challenges to Implementing Reform Policies

A review of the literature on the conditions necessary to implement curriculum reform policy revealed that two of the challenges principals face is the lack of time to focus on policy implementation and the lack of clear, coherent policy information (Dwyer, 1986; Goertz et al., 1996; Sarason, 1996). In addition, principals often have to tend to matters that are unrelated to implementation of reform policy (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002). I discovered that several factors could prevent a principal from learning about curriculum reform policy and from using it to influence curricular programs. I conducted research about the challenges to implementing reform policies because I wanted to learn more about how lack of time and policy language clarity affected principals' abilities to use policies in their schools.

Overview of Methodological Design

One purpose of my research was to examine how eight of the nine high school principals who used Option Two perceived the policy. I used a qualitative research design because it allows researchers to understand others' perceptions of their experiences (Maxwell, 1996). I sought to learn more about how principals make meaning of their experiences with Option Two. Yin (2002) defined a case study as an "[Investigation] of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context." My study reviewed how Option Two (the contemporary phenomenon) was being understood and used in the context of a comprehensive high school environment ("real-life context").

I conducted my study in two phases. First, I selected nine high school principals listed by a NJDOE memo as being leaders of schools using Option Two since 2004 (NJDOE, 2004b). Their schools were located in different parts of the state and in communities with different socioeconomic profiles. I interviewed these principals for 60 minutes each. The second phase of my research included four of the nine principals who I determined were using Option Two extensively. This phase of the study helped me address my third research question because I examined how the principals perceived the influences of Option Two on curricular programs in their schools. My interviews with each of these principals lasted for 60 minutes. I conducted member checks during these interviews with four of the principals in order to better understand the data I collected from them during the first round of interviews (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). I also conducted 60-minute interviews with school district leaders (three district guidance supervisors and one superintendent) who were familiar with Option Two programs in the four schools on which I focused. Interviews with the district leaders occurred during the second phase of my research. I sought to clarify the principals' responses and gain a better understanding of how Option Two influenced curricular programs in the schools. In total, I relied on approximately 17 hours of interview data to inform my research.

I conducted my data analysis in two phases as well. Each phase of my data analysis included five steps. First, I reviewed the analytic memos I taped. Second, I transcribed the interviews and developed emic and etic code lists. I used the emic and etic code lists to fracture the data in the transcripts. Third, I placed the fractured data into matrices. Fourth, I developed profiles of each of my participants using the data I placed in the matrices. The profiles helped me examine trends and emergent themes from the

data (Barone, 1990). The last step of the data analysis included cross-case theory development. I went back to the matrices and reviewed the data to examine the information for themes and trends. My results are discussed in chapter 4. I explain the implications of my findings and make recommendations to the NJDOE and high school principals in chapter 5.

Implications and Significance

McDonnell (1988) argued that research can inform policy in at least three distinct ways: by providing a general framework for thinking about policy, by defining a policy problem and identifying potential solutions, and by assessing the feasibility of the implementation and effects of existing policies. Slavin (2002) supported McDonnell (1998) in a more recent assessment of the value of research to policy development by pointing out that research can help policymakers replicate effective educational ideas.

The importance of the principal's relationship with policies that can improve programs cannot be understated. It is clear that the principal is central to the improvement of curricular programs because he or she must lead the change process if a reform initiative is to be implemented with any surety (Dimmock & O'Donoghue, 1997; Fullan, 1991; Hall & Hord, 1987; Louis & Miles, 1990).

My research enriched the literature on curriculum reform policy by examining nine principals' perspectives of reform policy. As noted, there is a dearth of research on school leaders' relationships to reform policies. My research sheds light on the principals' role in using curriculum reform policies, that they are either required or encouraged to use, such as Option Two.

My contribution to the research on curriculum reform policy is also important because research about state education policy can lead to significant improvement in how the policy is delivered. Information collected from the leaders who are responsible for implementing policy--principals--may help policymakers rethink how they approach policy development. As a result, reports from principals might compel policymakers to reconsider the language they use to create the policy, the ways they communicate the policy to principals, and the ways they expect principals to use the policy.

My research may help the NJDOE's efforts to understand, and possibly improve, how principals promote the use of Option Two in New Jersey's high schools. What little is known about Option Two indicates is that it is not widely used. My pilot study of 33 high schools in Monmouth County New Jersey revealed that only four schools were using Option Two (Taylor, 2003). My dissertation builds on this pilot study by examining nine high school principals and thereby increasing the knowledge of how these principals learned about and used Option Two.

My examination of the way principals worked with Option Two, the first major study of this policy, may also be important to the NJDOE as it promotes the policy. The state is dedicated to having schools use Option Two to promote innovative curricular programs, and the NJDOE clearly has designated principals as responsible for implementation decisions regarding Option Two (L. Morse, personal communication, March 26, 2007). According to NJAC 6A: 8.5 (the first part of Subchapter 5), "[Principals] it is stipulated, shall certify completion of curricular activities or programs..." (NJDOE, 2004, p. 2). Additional specific language indicates that education

leaders are to be given control over programming initiatives prompted by Option Two (NJDOE, 2004).

The state agency might also appreciate insight into how principals learn about Option Two to revisit the way in which it articulates the policy to school leaders. My exploration of how eight of nine principals described and understood the policy can allow the NJDOE to consider the effectiveness of its campaign to inform principals about Option Two. Finally, the description of how eight of the nine principals in my study used Option Two to create programs and the identification of challenges they faced when using the policy might enable the NJDOE to help school leaders use the policy more effectively in their schools.

Study Limitations

My study was limited in three ways. First, my sample was limited to nine of the schools that the NJDOE identified as using Option Two. My research was only a snapshot, not a comprehensive review, of how principals understood, used, and confronted challenges related to Option Two, since there may be other unidentified high schools in New Jersey that use the policy.

Second, this study was conducted in New Jersey within the context of a current state reform initiative (the implementation of Option Two in high schools). The state reform context frames the findings regarding this state policy, and the results are specific to New Jersey. Thus, the findings cannot be generalized to the discussion about curriculum reform policies in other states.

Third, participants in my study did not provide examples to support some of their statements. For instance, the principals and district administrators who believed Option Two improved their school programs and who believed Option Two programs were successful in their schools did not use illustrations or provide evidence to support their statements. They may not have had any evidence to support their perspectives that Option Two improved school programs. Thus, the findings of my study that relate to how Option Two led to school improvement and to how principals perceived the success of Option Two programs in their schools are based solely on the participants' opinions that I present in chapter 4.

Summary

This dissertation was a result of my interest in how New Jersey high school principals learned about, understood, and used Option Two. I was also interested in knowing how the policy influenced curricular programs in high schools and what challenges and successes principals faced when they implemented the policy. My work aims to help the NJDOE with its delivery of curriculum reform policy information and to assist high school principals who are interested in using the policy or who currently implement the policy in their schools. It also aims to contribute to the literature on curriculum reform policy.

Chapter 2 includes a review of prior studies on:

- How school leaders learn about curriculum reform policy,
- How curriculum reform policies are used to create curricular programs,
- How these policies influence curricular programs, and

- The necessary conditions for curriculum reform policy to be implemented effectively.

I also discuss how my study addressed the gaps in the literature and extended studies that warranted further research.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

In this chapter, I describe the conceptual framework that informed my research by discussing the prior studies that contributed to my research questions. I first review the literature on how school personnel learn about curriculum policy. This research led to my first research question, which considered how the NJDOE articulated Option Two to principals and how these principals understood it, if at all, the intent of the policy. Next, I examine how schools have used state curriculum reform policies, which speaks to my second question. The third section of my literature review considers the influence of curriculum reform policies on curricular programs that informed my third research question. I derived my last research question from my review of the literature that explains the preconditions for curriculum reform. I examined the research on how principals are able to implement curriculum reform policies while tending to the managerial responsibilities they bear. I also review the literature on the impact of policy language on the ability of principals to implement curriculum reform policies.

My literature review focuses on studies grounded in theory and prior research. I reviewed studies conducted in several states that have already initiated curriculum reform. Each sub-section in this chapter focuses on research that examined initiatives in Kentucky, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Maryland, South Carolina, New York, New Jersey, and Washington State.

Learning About Curriculum Reform Policy

Curriculum reform policies must be written clearly and coherently so they can be understood and effectively implemented by school leaders (Cohen & Hill, 2001; Spillane & Thompson 1997; Spillane & Zeuli, 1999). A policymaker's intent can be misinterpreted or not interpreted at all by the policy implementers if the language of the policy is ambiguous or fragmented (Cohen, Moffitt, & Goldin, 2007). The literature shows that curriculum reform policy is articulated incoherently to school personnel (Ball, 1997; Finley, 2000; Fuhrman, 1993; Gregg, 1992; Honig & Hatch, 2004; Beem, Jones, May, Neff-Sharum, & Poague, 2005; O'Day & Smith, 1993).

“Incoherence” is a term used in the literature when explaining the potential problems and pitfalls of policy delivery from the governmental level (Goldman & Conley, 1994, p. 3). Policy incoherence may be defined as fragmentation among elements of policy, or a disconnect among these elements (Fullan, 1999). Fullan (1999) further describes policy incoherence as a lack of connectedness among policy elements (Cohen et al., 2007; Fuhrman, 1993; Goldman & Conley, 1994; Malen & Rice, 2004). When this occurs, those responsible for implementing the policy do not see how the elements of a reform policy fit together (Firestone et al., 1990). Incoherence also results in mixed signals to school personnel who end up not knowing how they are expected to use the policy (Conley, 2003; Crowson, 2003; Firestone et al., 1990; Goertz et al., 1996).

Incoherence sometimes results when multiple directives are communicated to principals (Goggin et al., 1990). Goggin and colleagues (1990) described schools being bombarded with messages from state policy makers. The barrage creates the potential for a confusing “distortion of messages about the policy” (Goggin et al., 1990, p. 33). This

confusion can be exacerbated if the principal misinterprets the language of the policy (Hill, 2006).

The impact of policy language on implementers is very important. Policymakers must understand that the words they use can convey different messages to the intended audience as they learn about a new policy (Johnston & Moore, 1990). Readers of a policy will interpret the language in different ways unless the policy explicitly describes its implementation and the policymaker's expectations its use (Johnston & Moore, 1990).

Often the language of policies is ambiguous even when the policies are assumed to be explicit. Brodtkin (1990) noted that the texts of reform policies typically include language that does not define the terms of compliance and the guidelines for policy usage. Cohen and Ball (1999) argued that some policies are not specific and consist mainly of goal statements with few plans for action and minimal supporting materials. DiBiase (2005) identified this kind of linguistic ambiguity in a review of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). DiBiase (2005) found that the policy does not clearly identify the roles of the local and state education agencies. My study extended the research on NCLB by including an analysis of Option Two. I focused on how nine principals interpreted Option Two, and I specifically asked the participants in my study if they felt Option Two language clearly explained how the policy should be used and to describe their role in policy implementation.

The language of a policy can sometimes reflect the policymaker's philosophical view about teaching and learning. As a result, a principal may have a hard time interpreting the policy if his or her views about these things differ. The difference in the way the policy writer and implementer view knowledge acquisition and pedagogy can

lead to a difference in the way the policy is interpreted and, subsequently, implemented (Meltsner, 1983; Yanow, 1996). I investigated this notion by probing nine principals' understanding of the intent of Option Two and by reviewing how eight of these principals used the policy in their schools.

The misinterpretation of the language used in a reform policy may inhibit the understanding of the policy, especially for a policy implementer (Crowson, 2003). In the end, how well the policy is communicated to the people who must implement it influences how effectively the policy is learned and then put into practice (Yanow, 1996). I reviewed many studies of state reform efforts that support the view that policy coherence is of greater value than the accurate interpretation of policy language (Armstrong, Davis, Odden, & Gallagher, 1989; Clune, 1991; Cohen, 1987; Doolan, 2004; Foley, 2001; Goldman & Conley, 1994, 1996; PKSR, 1996; Pliska, 1997; Stecher, 2000). My research extends the discussion about how reform policy is articulated to educators and how a group of principals learned about and understood the policy. To do this, I focused on one key group of educators- eight New Jersey high school principals who used Option Two and who were responsible for implementing the reform policy in their schools.

One of the largest studies of a reform effort is the RAND Corporation's (Berends, 2002) national review of New American Schools (NAS), a nonprofit corporation that was formed to disseminate reform programs for elementary and secondary schools. RAND (Berends, 2002) conducted extensive case studies of the 1000 NAS schools between 1991 and 2001 and, in its summary report for NAS schools, cited the importance of having policymakers clearly and consistently communicate school reform ideas. RAND

(Berends, 2002) found that while half of the NAS schools successfully implemented the reform ideas presented by NAS, the other half were plagued by poor communication from the NAS program developers to the leaders and teachers at the school level. My study extends the RAND (Berends, 2002) study by looking at how, if at all, the NJDOE informed nine New Jersey high school principals about Option Two.

State-Specific Studies of Policy Communication: Incoherence and Ambiguity

Reform policy must be clearly articulated so that principals can use the policy to create programs (Brandt, 1987; Fullan, 1992; Rutherford, 1985; Schlechty & Cole, 1991). Administrators will have an uphill battle if the reform policy that they must promote has not been clearly articulated (Fullan, 1993; Snyder, Acker-Hocevar, & Snyder, 1994; Wagner, 2001). Goertz, Floden, and O'Days' 1996 study of California, Michigan, and Vermont (cited earlier in my literature review) illustrates how a reform policy that is not clearly articulated to a school can complicate the implementation of that policy. The curriculum reform ideas proposed in Michigan were diverse and numerous; yet, these elements were not well presented to school staff. This was frustrating to the school staff and impeded the progress of reform (Goertz et al., 1996).

The expansive studies of Oregon's "Educational Act for the 21st Century" undertaken by Goldman and Conley (1994, 1996) also cited the problem of curriculum reform policy that is poorly articulated to school personnel. Their findings described "...a system pulled in contradictory directions, and educators trying to make sense of it all" (p. 8). The researchers found very large differences in the way Oregon's school districts implemented reforms; the primary reason was the lack of consistent policy directives from the state's Department of Education (Goldman, & Conley, 1996).

The Oregon policy delivered systemic change initiatives, including policies that: a) forced a change in school program structure (graduation requirements, curriculum standards), b) enhanced public accountability (a comprehensive report of student and school data), and c) led to the inclusion of expanded early childhood education, and a mandate to reform curricula (Goldman & Conley, 1994). This study focused on a policy similar to Option Two in that both initiatives intend to promote curricular change.

The Goldman and Conley study (1994) revealed that teachers had a difficult time understanding the “abstract” reform efforts put forth by the state of Oregon. Staff were left to “muddle through” the policy requirements and instituted programs as best they could despite the lack of clarity about the details (Goldman, & Conley, 1994, p. 49). As the authors pointed out, “These data present a clear picture of a system being pulled in contradictory directions, and educators trying to make sense out of it all” (Goldman, & Conley, 1994, p. 50).

Goldman and Conley’s 1994 study of the policy was expansive because it relied on a large sample group of 116 schools. My work differs in that I limited my research to an in-depth study of nine schools and conducted a more detailed review of how four high school principals were using Option Two. Goldman and Conley (1994) collected data by using both surveys and focus group interviews. My study took a different approach to data collection by conducting several rounds of interviews. My research compliments the work of Goldman and Conley (1994) by looking at a reform policy from the perspective of nine New Jersey high school principals.

Goldman and Conley’s 2-year study looked at all elements of the Oregon system reform package. While curriculum reform was mentioned in the study, it was only one

aspect of the research. My study focused exclusively on curriculum reform by targeting how the NJDOE articulated Option Two, if at all, to nine New Jersey high school principals and how these principals understood it. Unlike the Goldman and Conley study (1994), which surveyed all school personnel affected by reform policy, my work targeted the sample group that is responsible for implementing school reform policies: principals who were identified by the NJDOE as using Option Two (NJDOE, 2004b).

Like Oregon, the state of Kentucky implemented a far-reaching systemic reform policy in the early 1990s. The Kentucky reform package was one of the most comprehensive education reform efforts in the United States (PKSR, 1996). One element of the policy sought to change curricula at the school level. The Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 has been widely researched. The Kentucky Association of School Superintendents (KIER, 1996) undertook a study of 176 state school superintendents that assessed their opinions of the state reform policy. A survey instrument that garnered a 65% response rate found, among several conclusions, that inconsistent and confusing directions from the Department of Education caused uncertainty about the policy and frustrated the administrators who were responsible for overseeing its implementation (KIER, 1996).

Unfortunately, incoherent policy articulation is not limited to Oregon and Kentucky. An examination of four other states' reform efforts revealed similar problems. Foley reviewed Philadelphia's systemic reform initiative, Children Achieving, in 2001. The report mentioned the city's "poor sequencing" of reform ideas and the "mixed signals" sent to local school administrators (Foley, 2001, p. 49).

The Policy Center of the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) conducted a wider report on reform efforts in school districts in California, Michigan, and Vermont and found that all three of the states struggled to develop coherent policy (Goertz et al., 1996). The prevalence of incoherent policy is made clear in the Oregon, Kentucky, and CPRE studies, indicating the need for further research to consider how policy is articulated to schools. My study supplemented the research by presenting more recent information about how policy was articulated, if at all, to nine high school principals.

Besides problems with incoherence, schools perceive some policies as too ambiguous. Pliska's 1997 study of Pennsylvania's Outcome Based Initiative (a reform plan that allowed districts to alter curricula, grading systems, and assessments through a strategic planning process) examined the program's implementation. The review of Pennsylvania's systemic reform policy looked at the mandated curricular changes required of the state's high schools. The author's finding is similar to Goldman and Conley's (1994) findings in that the policy was not communicated to schools in a clear manner, citing the "ambiguities in the mandate" (Pliska, 1997, p. 3). Like the Oregon study, this study cited school personnel's frustration over the lack of organization of the state's policy.

The purpose of Pliska's (1997) study was "to investigate the problems...that emerged as school districts in Pennsylvania tried to implement a [reform] mandate" (Pliska, 1997, p. 4). Beyond educators' trouble understanding the policy, the findings indicated that the reform policy was confusing because the Pennsylvania Department of Education did not delineate its expectations of the educators who were supposed to

implement the policy. My research extended this work by looking not only at the challenges that schools (and especially principals) may be facing when using reform policy, but how school leaders *make meaning* of reform policy. My first research question explores how principals learn about and understand policy. I looked at how nine principals understood Option Two and how this understanding influenced their use of the policy. I presented interview questions to the principals in my study to explore the relationship between understanding and implementation.

According to a study of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning, which examined the state's new requirements for mathematics curricula, principals did learn effectively about a reform policy in Washington state (Stecher et al., 2000). The survey of 150 principals found that "almost all principals reported that they understood the central elements of the educational reform well or very well" (Stecher et al., 2000, p. 21). The study's authors attributed the successful articulation of Washington's reform policy to the state's distinctive gradual approach to implementation (Stecher et al., 2000). My first research question framed data collection and analysis to include an examination of the history of New Jersey's implementation of Option Two so that I could show how the rate at which the state presented Option Two may have influenced the principals' abilities to learn about the policy.

Policymakers must coordinate all components of a reform policy if they wish school leaders to learn about them (Armstrong et al., 1989; Clune, 1991; Cohen, 1987; Howard, 2006). If policymakers can convey all of the aspects of an initiative clearly to administrators, they will most likely understand and implement it as intended (Education Commission of the States, 1992).

New Jersey Policy Communication

The clarity with which a policy is conveyed to school leaders is an issue in New Jersey (Doolan, 2004). Teachers' unions and professional groups have criticized the ambiguity of the NJCCCS' language (Doolan, 2004). Doolan found that "The Core Curriculum Content Standards...were general and vague" (Doolan, 2004, p. 344). Referring to how the New Jersey's curriculum reform effort was articulated, MacFarquhar (1996) stated that "...general lack of clarity provided difficulty during implementation," indicating not only that the policy was not communicated clearly to schools, but that the lack of clarity contributed to a problem with implementation (Doolan, 2004). I explore the issue of how the problem with clarity undermines the effectiveness of reform policies on school programs later in this chapter.

My study involved interviewing nine New Jersey principals because they are ultimately responsible for implementing policy initiatives (Pigford & Pigford, 2001). My research fills a gap in the literature because prior studies did not investigate how school principals learn about reform policy. My research also extends the literature by considering the effectiveness of the articulation of reform policy in promoting understanding of the policy. This is another area that prior studies have overlooked. My first research question and the data collection and analysis methods framed by this research question support this investigation.

School Implementation of State Curriculum Reform Policy

Policymakers must rely on school leaders to implement initiatives with the hope that the initiatives will be enacted as they intended (Fowler, 2000). Unfortunately, in

most cases the authors of policies do not fully understand how policy is actually put in place in schools (Cohen & Barnes, 1993). It is critical for policymakers to understand how their work is being used in schools so they can help bring about meaningful change (Pigford & Pigford, 2001).

In this section of my literature review I discuss research investigating how principals in several states use curriculum reform in their schools. Analysis of the research about reform efforts in New Jersey, Kentucky, Michigan, North Carolina, Florida, California, Maryland, Oregon, New York, and Washington shows that the way reform efforts are put in place in schools differs from the intent of policymakers (Clever, 1997; Croissant, 1991; Dana, 1992; Goertz, 2001; Goldman, & Conley, 1994, 1996; Meyer, 2006; Shepherd, 2001; Standerford, 1993; Swanson, 1990; Wilson, Rossman, & Adduci, 1991). In most cases, schools implement reform policy in accordance with the needs of the local school community (Cibulka & Derlin, 1998; Spillane, 1998). My focus on how principals used Option Two and my integrated data collection and analysis methods built on prior studies by demonstrating how the use of the policy differs, in some ways, from the intentions of the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE).

It should not be surprising that prior studies have concluded that schools in each locality implement policies differently. Theorists point to the historical significance of local control in the United States to explain why schools tend to use policies to meet local needs. Thompson (1976) pointed out that “localism has been the keynote of American education” (p. 23). Local control of school systems is so prevalent that even though states have legal control over education, the local government has the last word. School districts are influenced by their political culture and the decisions that are made in these districts

tend to reflect regional and local values (Crowson, 2003; Kosar, 2003; Sharansky, 1970). This influence has made it difficult for legislative bodies to find common ground and values among schools in different communities that are required to implement reform policies (Timar, 1989).

The local control over schools is very prevalent in New Jersey (Wichert, 2007). In a February 24, 2007 article, *The New York Times* emphasized how sprawling the state's public education system is, citing the 615 schools districts spread among 566 municipalities, illustrative of New Jersey's "past penchant for subdividing government" (Hu & Jones, 2006, p. B2). This situation factored into my research as I examined how Option Two is being used in the schools in different districts. My method for selecting nine schools (explained later in this dissertation) reflected my mindfulness of the diversity of New Jersey's educational communities, and the sites I studied represented communities with different demographic backgrounds.

Prior studies have discussed the influence of local needs on education policy implementation. These studies have noted that it has been particularly difficult to translate state mandates into significant and observable behavior change at the building level because of competing local interests (Fuhrman, 1993; McLaughlin, 1990; Wilson & Rossman, 1993). Research on state efforts to reform curricula programs illustrates this analysis.

As discussed in the first sub-section of this chapter, Kentucky put in place very comprehensive and complex reform measures with the passage of its Education Reform Act of 1990 (Hunter, 1999). Researchers have praised Kentucky's curriculum reform for promotion of student achievement (AEL, 2000). However, the Cleaver (1997) report

concluded that while the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) made a positive impact on learning tasks and activities at the district level, “organizational patterns... sustained by the context of the district” (p. 45) influenced its implementation. The distinctive characteristics of the state’s school districts shaped the way in which Kentucky’s schools implemented KERA. Blasczyk’s 1996 study of KERA confirmed Cleaver’s findings. Along the same lines, I studied how curriculum reform policy is implemented from school to school when I considered how eight of the nine school districts in my study used Option Two.

While local interests and needs may affect how schools use curriculum reform policies, the inability of a school leader to understand a policy can also contribute to a variation in how policies are implemented in different schools. This happened in Michigan. Standerford’s 1993 study of two small school districts in Michigan concluded that while a particular reading reform endorsed by the state was implemented at the school level, limited knowledge of the rationale for the policy and few opportunities to learn more about it led educators in the two districts to adapt that approach to reflect school needs and practices.

Studies in North Carolina, Florida, and California reported similar findings. District planners were left to adapt their states’ policies to meet local needs because they did not understand the focus of those policies (Croissant, 1991; Dana, 1992; Shepherd, 2001; Swanson, 1990). The Consortium for Policy Research in Education found that in these states, “how districts [approached] curricular and instructional changes...[varied] substantially” (Massell, 2000, p. 4). My study contributes to the literature by looking at how nine New Jersey high school principals understood and perceived Option Two and

how eight principals' perceptions of the policy influenced the way they used it to create curricular programs in their schools.

Regardless of a school leader's perception of reform policy, the influence of local community needs and interests influences the implementation of the policy. Extensive literature discusses the impact of local needs and interests on policy implementation. In their review of Maryland's major reform of 1987, Wilson, Rossman, and Adduci (1991) cited "profound differences in how local schools adopt state policy" (p. ii) after conducting a 4-year study of the state's reform policy. The study of Maryland's reform initiative is pertinent to my study because it emphasized curriculum reform and I examined systemic reform, specifically curriculum change (Wilson et al., 1991).

The authors of this study stated that school district implementation of the state policy corresponded to the "complex mix of history, local economic conditions, student and community characteristics..." (p. ii). They based their findings on data collected at five high schools representative of the Maryland high school experience, using interviews with the entire staff of the district in which the school resided and document analysis of course catalogues and school schedules (Wilson et al., 1991). Although only five of 39 schools were selected, the sample size for the study was substantial (Schooltree.org, n.d.); researchers conducted more than 850 interviews with administrators, teachers, support staff, and members of the state department of education. Thus, the authors listened to many voices when looking at how the policy was being enforced in the schools.

All five schools framed the policy differently and created programs that satisfied needs related to factors such as local economic conditions, internal resource allocations, and cultural characteristics of the community. The authors concluded their study by

implored policy makers not to ignore such variation in local response when designing reform legislation (Wilson et al., 1991). My research builds on this study and supports the findings of Wilson and colleagues (1991).

Goldman and Conley's (1996) study of Oregon's reform initiative also reported variation in how policy is implemented from school to school. I noted Oregon's policy in the first sub-section of this chapter and it is worthy of discussing again because, like Kentucky, Oregon's reform program was a landmark comprehensive package that has been studied at length (Goldman & Conley, 1996). A 1994 study of Oregon's Educational Act for the 21st Century (a comprehensive policy intended to restructure school curricula, high school graduation requirements, and school governance) found that many localities were left to "reinvent" the policy because educators in school districts viewed the policy "through the lens of their own buildings and their own needs" (Goldman & Conley, 1994, p. 49). This approach to implementing state policy was very functional. Local educators did what they could with the policy they were required to enforce by adapting such measures to meet their school community's needs (Goertz, 2001; Goldman & Conley, 1994).

In their 1998 report, Goldman and Conley developed their prior analysis of the reform program to investigate how curricula might have changed 8 years after the state mandated reform policies. This report was based on 25 schools from the original 1994 sample and four new schools. Again, the authors distributed surveys to administrators and staff. The authors found that, similar to the Kentucky study, schools adapted the reform policy to fit their specific school community needs. The Goldman and Conley report (1998) diverged from the studies of Kentucky's reform program by finding that overall,

educators complied with the curriculum reform measure in Oregon. The force of *institutionalism* (the collective values and ideals of the individuals in an organization) at each school dictated the way the policy was used (Meyer, 2006). This study informed my construction of interview questions; I considered how institutionalism influences the ways that eight of the nine principals in my sample implemented Option Two by asking questions about how they used Option Two.

The study of reform efforts in Kentucky, Oregon, Maryland, North Carolina, California, New York, Michigan, and Washington State also found that use of reform policy varied by locality. Cibulka and Derlins' 1998 work affirmed the findings in these states, citing that "the local context influences how policy is interpreted." Spillane's (1998) research found that state policy was interpreted at the local level even when the state's reform message was coherent.

The RAND study (2002) mentioned earlier in this chapter found that schools implemented NAS reform programs according to local needs. The study found that the implementation of policies was a process of adapting the intentions of the policies to the realities of local needs. A correlation between the NAS initiative and the school districts' agenda was important for effective implementation. RAND found that implementation was most influenced by needs at the local level (Berends, 2002).

The powerful influence of school districts' agenda and its potential to undermine state policy efforts was also evident in the RAND study (2002). Though the study's authors pointed out that the district's undermining of the NAS initiative may have been "unintentional" (p. 91), the requirement of schools within a district to incorporate districtwide initiatives conflicted, in some cases, with design approaches to curriculum

and instruction that were laid out by NAS. Schools in the study were left, in these cases, to “juggle multiple responsibilities and initiatives” (p. 91) that were presented to them by both the district and the state.

School districts’ contradiction of a state’s reform efforts may also occur when the school districts’ interpretation of state policies is clearly at odds with the state’s intentions (Cibulka & Derlin, 1998). The difference between how schools use reform policies and how states intend them to be used is illustrated in Cleaver’s comprehensive review of Kentucky’s 1990 statewide reform effort (1997). My research builds on the work of Cibulka and Derlin (1998) and Cleaver (1997) by examining whether or not Option Two is being used in eight of the nine schools in my study in ways other than how the NJDOE intends.

Pilot Research: The Implementation of Option Two in One New Jersey County

My first examination of how Option Two was being used in schools included a pilot study of 33 high schools in Monmouth County New Jersey in 2003. Local school community needs shaped four high schools’ use of the policy in the central New Jersey county in which my sites were located. In the only study of its kind, my research examined how these high schools used Option Two, revealing that none of the schools used the policy to create nontraditional programs as the NJDOE had intended. Rather, they used Option Two to help students meet the state’s high school graduation requirements. Each school used the policy in a manner that reflected the needs of the community. One high school, based near a military institution, used Option Two to help transfer students catch up on their high school credits so they could graduate on time. Another high school with a large population of student-athletes used Option Two to allow

those students to opt out of physical education classes in order to complete homework in study halls that they otherwise would have missed because of athletic commitments (Taylor, 2003).

My research builds on the findings from my pilot study by looking at a greater number of schools using Option Two and by conducting a more in-depth analysis of data. I undertook a thorough study of how eight of nine principals used the policy, and I considered how the eight principals balanced the state's intentions for the policy with local needs.

In sum, the literature and my pilot research indicates that reform policies are used differently among local school districts and are dictated by the needs of the local school community. My second research question expanded on my pilot study and the literature by exploring how principals use the policy in their schools to create curricular programs.

The Effects of Curriculum Reform on School Programs

I was intrigued by the influence of Option Two on high school curricular programs and student success after I conducted my pilot study (Taylor, 2003). The study concluded that schools did not use Option Two as a lever for curricular change or student achievement. Most of the principals in the study used the policy to solve problems in their schools that did not relate to problems with their curricula (Taylor, 2003). I developed my third research question for this dissertation as a result of this finding. I wanted to know if eight of the nine New Jersey high school principals in my study used Option Two to promote curricular change and/or student success.

The literature is mixed in its assessment of how policy affects programs and student achievement. Some authors write that state reform policies cannot affect curriculum and the way that teachers teach (Fuhrman et al., 1988; McLaughlin, 1996). Others argue that state reform policy does influence certain aspects of a school's program, including more time on core subjects and more graduation requirements (Clune et al., 1989; Hargreaves, 1994). I review specific studies illustrating these two positions below.

The Kentucky Institute for Education Research's (KIER) 1996 work culled all of the studies of the state's reform program through 1996 and reported that reform policy did have a positive influence on curricular programs. This report identified the positive impact of a preschool and "extended school services program" on schools though the passage related to the effect of curriculum reform implementation was comprised of one paragraph in the 265-page document. Prior studies of the KERA curriculum reform program were positive, indicating rising student grades, passed courses, and higher graduation rates as a result of curriculum reform policy implementation (KIER, 1996).

Lusi (1997) extended the KIER research by conducting a review of Kentucky's initiatives. The author stated, "KERA reforms do have some strengths...in changing teaching and learning" (Lusi, 1997, p. 28). Unlike other studies on KERA, Lusi's (1997) work provided a more involved review of the state's reform program from the educators' perspectives; the methodological design included interviews of school leaders responsible for implementing KERA, a review of school-level documents related to KERA, and personal communications with educators.

Lusi (1997) provided a critical view of the policy. One Kentucky principal in the study said, “They [Kentucky policy makers] have outlined a [good plan]...” (p. 69). On the other hand, another Kentucky principal expressed frustration with the policy because of its lack of clarity (Lusi, 1997).

Like the studies on KERA, my pilot research was inconclusive about the positive influence of curriculum reform policy on student achievement (KIER, 1996; Lusi, 1997; Taylor, 2003). The review of a California mathematics reform program (Cohen, 1990) was also inconclusive about the effect of curriculum reform policy on curricular programs and student success. The state’s policy called for schools to restructure math curricula around frameworks that established the core concepts that children were expected to learn. The policy also compelled teachers to change their instructional practice. Cohen’s (1990) work noted that the policy did change some teacher practices but was limited in its delivery of instruction. The author cited the prevailing views that were held in schools regarding teaching styles and philosophies about pedagogy.

The Cohen (1990) study did reveal that “practice had influenced policy,” but teachers’ “extant knowledge and beliefs about mathematics and their experience of mathematics teaching” greatly influenced how they implemented the California math reform policy (p. 5). My research expanded on Cohen’s (1990) finding by posing questions based on my research question related to the effect of Option Two on programs in the nine schools in my study. My research examined how principals’ perceptions of teachers’ beliefs and experiences affected Option Two’s influence on curricular programs.

Studies of other state programs also have pointed to Cohen's (1990) identification of teachers' influence on policy. Teachers in Michigan altered the way the state's systemic reform policy impacted programs as they came to understand them (Jennings, 1996). As Jennings (1996) explained, "As teachers make sense of policy, it must be accepted that teachers will make different sense of policy" (p. 95). Studies of reform efforts in Oregon and Pennsylvania confirmed the findings of Cohen (1990) and Jennings (1996).

Teacher attitudes about reform policies also impacted the ability of the Oregon Department of Education to implement the state's reform policy described earlier in this chapter (Goldman & Conley, 1994). To review, the study assessed the impact of the Oregon Educational Act for the 21st Century. The authors' final remarks noted the reform plan's failure to improve school programs. Goldman and Conley (1994) referred to the "hearts and minds of educational professionals" and explained that school personnel did not "accommodate" the reform (p. 50). The study suggests that the state department of education can use reform to influence programs only as long as principals are willing to establish them.

Pliska's 1997 study of Pennsylvania's reform program also cited how school personnel can influence a policy's effects on school programs. Her examination of administrators and teachers (who she referred to as "stakeholders") in 17 school districts revealed:

Ambiguities in the mandate and inconsistent expectations from the Department of Education created varied opinions and perceptions among the stakeholders [and this] hampered progress. (Pliska, 1997, p. 3)

The author found that the policy did not have a positive impact on school programs and pointed out that administrators could look to suggestions made in the paper to implement

the policy (Pliska, 1997). My research of Option Two, like Pliska's (1997) study, suggested ways to solve any problems that may have interfered with principals' efforts to implement the New Jersey reform policy.

Stecher and colleagues' (2000) study of Washington state's reform policy also noted how teacher and administrator perceptions influence the effectiveness of a reform in changing programs. This study confirms what was observed in California and Oregon. In Washington, curriculum reform was identified as beneficial to school programs. Almost all of the teachers and principals surveyed believed that reform was "encouraging changes [in instruction]" (Stecher et al., 2000, p. 27).

The story of the Washington State Education Reform Act presents more than just evidence of the importance of school personnel's attitudes about reform. As explained in the first sub-section of this chapter, the Washington State Department of Education incrementally introduced the policy to schools and made sure that principals and teachers fully understood it. Stecher and colleagues' (2000) study found:

Principals and teachers in Washington...spent a great deal of time learning about the reform, and they believed they understood its key components well. (p. 1)

This study offers a model for curriculum reform policy implementation because it showed the importance of knowledge and understanding for successful implementation of a policy.

I asked eight of the nine high school principals in my study to explain how their knowledge and understanding of Option Two might have influenced their ability to implement it. Washington's success is a good starting point for discussing the conditions necessary for implementing curriculum reform, which I discuss in the next section.

Challenges to and the Necessary Conditions for Implementing Curriculum Reform Policy

A policymaker must recognize the obstacles that principals encounter when using a policy before it is even written (Pigford & Pigford, 2001). If the policymaker wants the policy's intentions to be fully realized, he or she also must know the conditions for using the policy in the school before designing it (Elmore, 1993). As Fullan (1996) stated:

The greatest problem faced by school districts and schools is not resistance to innovation, but the fragmentation...and incoherence [of policy]. (p. 402)

The Challenge of Comprehending Policy

A principal can only implement a reform initiative as long as he understands the policy that frames it (Prince, 1989). Reforms that are comprehensive need to be focused. In New Jersey, school leaders must be able to dispel confusion about reforms if they are to use Option Two. I examined how Option Two is communicated, if at all, to nine principals in New Jersey when I interviewed the participants in my study and considered how the articulation of a policy might impact their abilities to implement it.

Fullan (1996) discussed the importance of understanding a policy if it is to be implemented and noted that "comprehensiveness" and "focus" cannot be mutually exclusive (p. 13). He mentioned that policy incoherence discourages school leaders and explained that the presence of a "multiplicity of change initiatives" can undermine an administrator's reform effort (Fullan, 1996). An administrator who is introduced to one reform measure after the other is likely to become confused and eventually discouraged (Bryk, Easton, Kerbow, Rollow, & Sebrig, 1993). Firestone (1991) also mentioned this problem, pointing out that the American education system is bombarded with theories for improvement.

The Challenge of Being a “Superleader”

Another condition necessary for the implementation of policy is the opportunity for principals to be instructional leaders (Tucker, 2003). The literature that supports this premise dates back to the 1980s (Cawelti, 1999; Edmonds, 1979; Guskey, 1988). Unfortunately, finding time to be instructional leaders and to engage in a serious review of reform policies is often an “impossible quest” for administrators (Blendinger & Snipes, 1996, p. 4). A focus on reform (particularly curricular) may now be a job for “superleaders”: administrators who can manage a myriad of tasks and responsibilities (Lashway, 2003, p. 2). Dwyer (1986) and Sarason (1996) cited the inability of principals to be instructional leaders because of the need for them to be, first and foremost, mediators among many constituencies.

The principal’s role as “superleader” may limit the opportunity to use policy to create programs (Lashway, 2003, p. 2; Sarason, 1996). The additional complication for school leaders, though, is their role as managers of complex bureaucracies. School administrators are expected to tend to matters that are unrelated to implementation of reform policy (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002). “Principals serve as managers by their very position” as their job entails such tasks as “mediating the different demands of students, teachers, parents, community members” (Gordon, 2007, p. 62).

My last research question examined the successes and challenges that principals face when putting Option Two in place. Challenges identified by eight of the nine participants in my study were reviewed in light of the conditions discussed in my literature review.

Summary

My review of the literature revealed that there is a great deal of research on issues related to reform policy, but the literature also showed gaps in specific areas. First, as noted in my analysis, most of the literature on school reform policy focuses on how school personnel understand and describe policy but neglects to explain how principals understand and describe the policies communicated to them. Second, most of the literature on reform policy implementation examines how the different elements of systemic reform policies are put in place in schools but not how curriculum-related reform policies are implemented at the school level. Third, in most cases the literature discusses state level reform programs that require schools to put mandatory ideas in place but does not examine voluntary state level reform programs like Option Two. Fourth, much of the literature on state reform policy implementation is outdated. My research contributed to the literature by providing current data that shows how principals voluntarily used Option Two, a specific curriculum reform policy. I describe the methodological design that guided my research and led me to the findings that contribute to the literature in chapter 3.

Chapter III

Methodology

In this chapter I describe my research methodology. First, I explain why I used a case study design and the conceptual framework that supported this study. Then, I describe the sites and the participants I selected, including my selection criteria. Third, I discuss my procedures for data collection and analysis. I end the chapter by discussing validity threats to my study and how I minimized them.

Research Questions

It is helpful to review the research questions that framed my study before discussing my methodological design. I selected nine principals for my study, but I focused on eight of these principals because one did not learn about Option Two at all. Four primary questions guided my research:

1) How do eight of nine New Jersey high school principals describe the ways in which they learn about Option Two? How do these principals perceive the intent of Option Two?

2) How do these principals describe the ways in which they use Option Two to create curricular programs in their schools?

3) How do these principals and their district leaders describe the ways, if at all, Option Two is used to leverage school improvement?

4) How do these principals and their district leaders perceive the successes and/or challenges of using Option Two for school improvement?

Selection of Sites

I originally selected 9 New Jersey high schools as my research sites because the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) identified these schools, as well as 11 others, as using Option Two (NJDOE, 2004b). I chose the nine schools because they were located in different parts of the state and because they served communities with different socioeconomic profiles. I wanted to represent different regions so I could compare and contrast how the location and/or socioeconomic characteristics influenced, if at all, the ways these schools used Option Two. Three of the schools were in northern New Jersey, three were in central New Jersey, two were in southern New Jersey, and one was in Western New Jersey. The schools constituted a socioeconomic cross-section of New Jersey's school communities, and each high school in my study represented a different District Factor Group (DFG). Two of the schools were located in urban areas (City High School and Shore High School), one school was located in a rural area (Western High School), and the remaining six schools were located in suburban areas.

The DFG is “an indicator of the socioeconomic status of the citizens in each school district” (NJDOE, 2006, p. 1). The formula devised by the NJDOE to determine a school's DFG takes the following variables into account: percentage of adult residents who failed to complete high school, percentage of adult residents who attended college, occupational status of adult household members, population density (the number of residents per square mile), median family income, percentage of those in the work force who received some unemployment compensation, and the percentage of residents below the poverty level. A scale devised by the NJDOE identifies the DFG of each school district. Schools districts on the lowest end of the scale are designated “A” districts, and

school districts on the highest end of the scale are listed as “J” districts (NJDOE, 2006).

Appendix E contains a detailed memo that further explains DFG.

Three of the sites selected for my study were identified as either DFG A or B schools. Three of the schools fell within the “C” to “E” range, three schools were within the “F” to “H” range, and four schools were in the highest socioeconomic quartile, being listed as “I” to J schools. Table 2 illustrates how the different sites represented different socioeconomic groups and different regions of the state. I protected the anonymity of the participants in my study so aliases identify the sites and the participants in this table.

Table 2

Site Selection According to Socioeconomic Classification and Regional Location

Site	DFG	Region
Western High School	A	Western
City High School	A	Northern
Shore High School	A	Central
Northeastern High School	B	Northern
South Central Regional High School	F-G	Southern
Southern High School	GH	Central
Southeastern High School	I	Southern
North Central High School	I	Northern
Eastern Regional High School	J	Central

I considered the DFG of my sites when I analyzed the data. I found trends in the data from schools of similar socioeconomic makeup that can be attributed to the schools' DFG. For instance, when answering my first research question, the data showed that schools of certain DFG groups learned about Option Two and understood the policy in a way that might reflect the schools' socioeconomic characteristics.

Selection of the Participants

The first sample for this study contained the nine principals of the selected high schools. My selection of these principals was purposeful because each of the principals led a school that the NJDOE identified as using Option Two (Maxwell, 2005; NJDOE, 2004b; Patton, 1990). My decision to examine these principals' perspectives was also deliberate because these principals were responsible for implementing Option Two. The NJDOE points out that the principal has "primary responsibility for the implementation of [an] Option Two program and must oversee all aspects of the program" (NJDOE, 2004b, p. 4). The first round of data collection revealed that only eight of the nine principals had, in fact, used Option Two. The ninth principal did not know about Option Two because he was not the principal of the school at the time it was identified by the NJDOE as using Option Two (NJDOE, 2004b). I will point out why the principal did not know about the policy in chapter 4.

The second sample for my study consisted of four of the eight principals who had indicated in the first round of interviews that they had used Option Two extensively. In the second round of interviews I wanted to focus more specifically on how they used Option Two to influence curricular programs and to conduct member checks (Guba &

Lincoln, 1989). The sub-sample also allowed me to learn more about the participants' responses to my first set of interview questions. I used the first round of data collection to inform my questions for this set of four principals (Berg, 2007). Pseudonyms were used to refer to all of the participants in my study, including the four principals I interviewed in this second round- Bill (North Central Regional High School), Jane (Western High School), Robert (South Central Regional High School), and Ellen (Eastern Regional High School).

I then selected four school district leaders as my third sample in order to determine what factors external to the school, if any, may have influenced the implementation of Option Two from their perspective. I also wanted to understand the role district leaders played in the implementation of Option Two. I chose these district leaders by asking the principals from the second sample to identify those at the district-level who were aware of how Option Two was being used and who may have played a role in implementing the policy. Berg (2007) referred to this method of identifying another set of participants for a study as "snowball sampling" (p. 44). Two of the principals, Jane and Robert, identified the supervisors of guidance. One principal, Bill, identified the district supervisor of social studies and one principal, Ellen, identified the district superintendent as the leaders who played a role in implementing Option Two.

Table 3 contains a list of the participants and identifies the location of the schools they lead. Because of confidentiality agreements, I have not used participants' real names; instead, I have used pseudonyms.

Table 3

Identification of Participants and Locations of the Schools They Lead

Site	Location	Principal	District Leader
Western High School	Warren County, New Jersey	Jane	Stephanie, Supervisor of Guidance
City High School	Essex County, New Jersey	Dave	
Shore High School	Monmouth County, New Jersey	Rick	
Northeastern High School	Hudson County, New Jersey	Anthony	
South Central Regional High School	Burlington County, New Jersey	Robert	Michael
Southern High School	Mercer County, New Jersey	Jim	
Southeastern High School	Camden County, New Jersey	John	
North Central High School	Union County, New Jersey	Bill	Joshua
Eastern Regional High School	Monmouth County, New Jersey	Ellen	Tom

Data Collection

I collected my data by conducting 17 interviews in three phases. I tape-recorded each interview with permission from the participants. First, I interviewed the nine high school principals. Then, I returned to meet with four of these participants and the district leaders they identified as being familiar with how Option Two was used in the school and who they perceived to have had a role in implementing the policy.

The 17 interviews each lasted for approximately 60 minutes and were semistandardized. Berg (2007) described semistandardized interviews as:

Somewhere between the extremes of the completely standardized interview and the completely unstandardized interview structures. (p. 95)

I chose this interview protocol because I wanted to probe the participants' responses to my predetermined questions. Berg (2007) pointed out that the semistandardized interview allows "Freedom to digress" and to "Probe far beyond the answers to their prepared standardized questions" (p. 95).

Phase One of Data Collection: Examining the Nine Principals in my Study

The interview questions for the first protocol were grouped into topics that were directly related to my research questions. I recognized that my research questions framed what I wanted to understand in this study and that my interview questions were the mechanisms through which I would gain this understanding (Maxwell, 2005). I used the first interview protocol with the nine high school principals I interviewed in the first phase of data collection. The questions in this protocol focused on obtaining information about how they learned about Option Two, how they understood the policy, how they

used the policy, and the challenges and or successes they experienced with Option Two. The protocol is included in Appendix B.

Phase Two of Data Collection: Studying Four Principals More Closely

The first round of interviews helped me craft the second protocol that I used with the four principals I chose to study more closely. This protocol was divided into topics that were connected to the main questions I focused on during the second phase of interviews. I asked the principals to talk more about how Option Two influenced their schools' curricular programs, how they perceived the role of district administrators with regards to the implementation of Option Two, and how they were handling the successes and challenges they identified in the first round of interviews. The second protocol is appears in Appendix C.

Phase Three of Data Collection: Understanding the Perspectives of Four District Leaders

I used the third protocol with the four school district leaders in the third sample of my study. Questions were broken into topics that clarified their role in the implementation of Option Two, and drew out the perspectives of these district-level leaders on how Option Two was used in their districts' high schools. When necessary, I asked additional questions for clarification throughout each interview (Patton, 1990). This protocol is included in Appendix D.

The Interview Questions

I developed my interview questions without simply "converting" the research questions into my interview protocol (Maxwell, 2005, p. 92). I was cognizant of the need

for the data I collected from the interviews to inform my research questions, and I was mindful of the importance of fostering a “symmetrical” and “collaborative” relationship with my participants (Maxwell, 2005, p. 92). Doing so enabled me to draw out the participants’ knowledge about Option Two from their own perspectives without influencing their responses with my own research intentions (Maxwell, 2005).

My interview questions were specific, but I allowed for additional questions when necessary. I used information I obtained from documents I collected from six of the nine schools in my study to make any necessary changes to my interview protocols. Only six of the schools in my study generated documents related to Option Two. I collected these documents from Shore, Western, South Central Regional, Southern, North Central Regional, and Eastern Regional High Schools. Documents included memoranda sent by the principals or to other administrators or teachers, Board of Education minutes, and student handbooks. My analysis of the documents before the interviews also influenced my adherence to the interview protocol. Information I gleaned from the documents warranted, in some case, further probing, so I sometimes asked additional questions of the participants regarding these documents.

Table 4

Schedule of Individual Principal Interviews For the First Phase of Data Collection

Participant	Interview Date
Bill: North Central Regional High School	July 23, 2007
Jane: Western High School	July 24, 2007
Dave: City High School	August 12, 2007

Jim: South Central Regional High School	August 14, 2007
Anthony: Northeastern High School	August 21, 2007
John: Southern High School	September 23, 2007
Rick: Shore High School	November 7, 2007
Ellen: Eastern Regional High School	November 26, 2007
Robert: South Central Regional High School	December 6, 2007

Table 4 indicates the schedule of interviews for the nine principals in my first sample group. The names of the participants and their schools were kept confidential so as to protect their privacy.

Table 5

Schedule of Individual Principal Interviews For the Second Phase of Data Collection

Participant	Interview Date
Bill: North Central Regional High School	February 28, 2008
Jane: Western High School	February 28, 2008
Robert: South Central Regional High School	February 29, 2008
Ellen: Eastern Regional High School	March 5, 2008

Table 5 includes the dates I interviewed the four principals I selected for the second round of data collection. Again, aliases were used to protect the confidentiality of those who participated in my study.

Table 6

Schedule of District Leader Interviews For the Second Phase of Data Collection

Participant	Interview Date
Michael, Supervisor of Guidance: South Central Regional High School district	March 3, 2008
Joshua, Supervisor of Social Studies: North Central Regional High School district	March 3, 2008
Stephanie, Supervisor of Guidance: Western High School district	March 5, 2008
Tom, Superintendent: Eastern Regional High School district	March 4, 2008

Table 6 points out the schedule of interviews for the four district leaders I spoke with after interviewing the four principals. The names of these district leaders were not disclosed so as to maintain their privacy.

Data Analysis

My data analysis was framed by my research questions. I recognized the importance of making this critical connection to the research questions when deciding on my analytic methods, and I relied upon categorization and contextualization methods to make sense of the data (Maxwell 2005).

I conducted my data analysis in five phases because I wanted my review of the data to be ongoing and parallel to my collection of the data. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) advocated that data collection and analysis “be going on simultaneously” (p. 2). By doing this, I was able to react to the data and make changes to the collection and analysis if necessary (Heinrich, 1984).

Phase One of Analysis: Initial Review of Analytic Memos

Reviewing observational notes is a common first step in the analytic process. The first phase of my analysis included reviewing the analytic memos of my recorded thoughts, which I created upon completion of each interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2004). These memos informed me about the interviews before I began the next phase of data analysis. I recognized the importance of reflecting after each interview about how my participants discussed how they learned about Option Two, how they described the policy, how they used the policy, how the policy influenced their curricular programs, and the challenges they faced.

Phase Two of Analysis: Coding

The second step of my data analysis began with examining the transcripts from the 17 interviews (transcribed by a professional transcriber). I recorded interviews using a computer and external microphone, which was advantageous for two reasons. First, I was able to back up the recordings from my computer to numerous hard drives. Second, I was able to convert the files to any digital format in case I wanted to transfer the recordings to other media (e.g., CD-R, iPod).

I printed each transcript before coding the data. I wrote observational notes about what I “saw” and “heard” in the data so that I could develop additional ideas about categories and relationships (Maxwell, 2005, p. 96). This also allowed me to consider other new emic codes. I then reviewed each transcript to identify a list of emic codes that I used to code the interviews (see Appendix F). Seidman (1998) referred to this step as “marking what is of interest in the text” (p. 89), or “unitizing,” according to Guba and Lincoln (1989, p. 344). It was an important initial phase in the categorization process because it helped me develop the matrices I used to display the codes.

My code lists consisted of etic codes based on constructs and themes I derived from the literature (see Appendix G). I also used emic codes I derived from my review of the analytic memos and transcripts (Drago-Severson 2004; Maxwell, 2005). For example, one of my interview questions asked, “How would you describe Option Two?” The response generated the emic codes I labeled as “description of policy” and “interpretation of policy intent.” I was open to adding more emic codes to my list as I read the transcripts because additional codes emerged from a closer review of the interview data. Some examples of etic codes in my list included “use of policy to innovate” and “principals as instructional leaders.” The same etic code list was used with each interview transcript. I developed separate emic code lists for each interview transcript.

Next, I fractured the data by coding the interviews. Strauss (1987) referred to fracturing as a process whereby data are identified according to certain categories. I identified the fractured data according to the “bins,” or categories, that I created on the basis of my emic and etic code lists (Maxwell, 2005, p. 97). As pointed out earlier, I crafted these categories from my literature review, which directly related to my research

questions (etic codes). The categories also stemmed from the interview transcripts derived from my interview protocol, also directly related to my research questions (emic codes).

This phase of my analysis took place for each interview. I completed one transcript at a time before making comparisons between the different interviews. I highlighted passages to be coded so that I could refer to the specific data later in the analysis process. I then labeled the highlighted terms, phrases, or complete sentences above the highlight with the codes from my etic and emic code lists.

I then placed raw information in the matrix for each transcript. Miles and Huberman (1994) referred to matrices as displays and make the case for using such visual tools because it facilitates a comparison of the data placed in each cell.

Phase Three of Analysis: Displaying the Data

The next step was a review of the data in each matrix. I constructed matrices to contain raw data (as opposed to summarized data). I then transferred the coded data into the cells of the matrices. This allowed me to view data in an organized fashion. I sequentially ordered the information in the cells, according to events. For instance, I placed the coded data about how a participant intended to use Option Two before data about how the participant actually used the policy. Ordering the data this way assisted me in crafting profiles and categorizing information because it provided a discernible structure to the information.

Phase Four of Analysis: Profiles

Seidman (1998) wrote about “cutting” and “filing” marked passages before crafting profiles as a means of organizing information (p. 103). I was able to “cut” and “fill” my data by reordering information in the matrices so that they made sense to me while I prepared to construct the profiles of each participant. I used analytic questions that I derived from the data in the matrices to help me order the data. The questions framed my profiles and helped me make sense of the information from the matrices. Examples of analytic questions include: “What challenges did the principal face when using Option Two?” and “How did the principal learn about Option Two?” The analytic questions directly related to my study’s research questions.

Profiles are often included in qualitative research reports as an accompaniment to categorizing analysis” (Barone, 1990). The profiles of my participants helped me delve deep into the stories each told about his or her experiences with Option Two. My interview protocols generated a wealth of information that had to be managed beyond the categorization phase and the profiles helped me make sense of all of this information.

I examined the clustered data that I placed in organizational categories for information that answered the analytic questions I developed for the profiles (Seidman, 1998, p. 92). Mishler (1986) explained that categories derived from coded data can “Provide a set of codes for classifying the ‘narrative functions’ of different parts of the account” (p. 82). I used the analytic questions I developed from the data in the matrices as headers for the clustered data when creating the profiles.

I was careful to use the participants’ own words in profiles, which negated any sense of “distance” from the participant (Seidman, 1998, p. 103). I wanted to be sure not

to “intrude” on the principals’ ideas by transposing their responses into my own words (Seidman, 1998, p. 104).

In the end, the profiles conveyed the participants’ “experiences” and helped make meaning of what the nine principals and four district leaders in my study said during the interviews (Seidman, 1998, p. 103). I based these profiles on the contextual relationships I identified from the data in each matrix. I addressed my research questions because the stories I derived from each participant’s responses derived from the coded data I placed in the matrix.

The profiles emerged directly from my research questions because the analytic questions I used to craft the profiles were based on my research questions. Aligning my research questions with my analytic questions allowed me to examine trends in the respondents’ understanding of Option Two, learning about Option Two, use of the policy to create programs, potential for the policy as a lever for improvement, and the challenges and successes to using Option Two (concepts related to my research questions). I was then able to sketch the ways in which principals perceived the policy. I used the four profiles of the principals in the second phase of my data collection to expand on the emerging themes and trends from the first set of profiles. The school district leaders’ profiles also assisted me by building on the analysis of the four principals’ profiles. The stories told by these district leaders also presented me with different perspectives about the principals’ answers to my questions. These perspectives were helpful as I developed my discussion of findings in chapter 5.

Phase Five of Analysis: Cross-Case Analysis

The last phase of my data analysis was to revisit the matrices to review the data and examine the information for themes and trends. The data in the matrix cells were categorized so that I could make comparisons. Maxwell (2005) pointed out that rearranging the data into organizational categories aids in the development of theoretical concepts. The organizational categories in which I placed the clustered data arose from my research questions. This phase of my analysis allowed me to understand the data in context, which Maxwell (2005) validated by stating, “This connecting step is necessary for building theory, a primary goal of analysis” (p. 98). The findings from this part of the analysis supplemented the findings I derived from the profiles I crafted. First I compared the data from the nine principals. I then examined the matrices from the four principals and the four district leaders to identify trends, similarities, and differences in the themes that emerged.

I chose to use both categorizing strategies and the development of narratives because each has strengths that can contribute to analysis. Using both techniques allowed me to tell the “stories” of my participants about their relationship with Option Two and to answer the research questions related to the policy.

Validity

The point made by Przeworski and Salomon (as cited in Maxwell, 2005, p. 105) regarding the importance of validity when proposing research resonated with me. They asked the important question: “How will we know that the conclusions are valid?” In this section I identify two validity threats with respect to research design: reactivity and

researcher bias. The second part of this section describes three threats to interpretation: descriptive validity, theoretical validity, and interpretive validity and explains how I dealt with these threats (Maxwell, 2005).

Study Design: Addressing Reactivity and Researcher Bias

Reactivity is the “influence of the researcher on the setting or individuals studied...” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 106). My prior role as a high school principal who used Option Two extensively and successfully may have placed my participants on the defensive. Before each interview I described my professional background, including my experience with Option Two, and my interest in the topic. The principals might have thought that they lacked my expertise and been uncomfortable talking about their challenges with implementing the policy. They might also have been concerned that I would compare their knowledge against the other principals I interviewed.

The principals might also have been reticent about discussing the reasons why the policy was not used to create programs in their schools. As I will point out in chapter 4, all of the Option Two programs that were created by the principals I interviewed were facilitated off-site and did not involve any of the teachers in the schools in my study. The principals I spoke with did not discuss why they didn’t involve teachers in the programs created by the policy. My prior role as a principal and my current role as a researcher may have led the principals to be guarded in their responses to some of my questions.

I responded to this validity threat in two ways. First, I made it clear to the participants that I interviewed them because I was very interested in their perspectives and I respected their knowledge of and experience with Option Two. I reminded the participants that the NJDOE saw them as the experts in this area because the DOE

identified them as leaders of schools using the policy. Second, I presented a Letter of Informed Consent (see Appendix H) that reiterated my commitment to using the information I obtained only to support my research and that allowed the participant to decline any of my questions. The letter also pointed out that I would not use their names in my study, thus protecting their anonymity.

A second threat to validity is researcher bias (Maxwell, 2005). My success with Option Two could have influenced my approach to my research and the way I interpreted the data I. I might have brought assumptions to my research about how Option Two should be understood and used. To mitigate this threat, I used analytic memos to reflect on the preconceived notions and assumptions I had in order to acknowledge the influence such bias wields over my research and to be mindful of them throughout the process (Wolcott, 1995). I also sought help from fellow doctoral students at Teachers College, Columbia University about any potential biases they could identify in my work by working with peers in ORLA 7501.

Descriptive Validity

I was also aware of threats to descriptive validity (Maxwell, 2005). To be sure that what I transcribed from the interviews was factual and accurate, I hired someone to transcribe the recorded interviews verbatim. I also relied on interview data to counter this threat. I had approximately 17 hours of information that provided insights that helped me see a “full and revealing picture of what [was] going on” (Becker in Maxwell, 2005, p. 110).

Theoretical Validity

I was also aware of threats to theoretical validity. I wanted to make sure that my analysis of data presented in chapter 5 was as accurate as possible. Maxwell (1996) says this type of validity threat can come about if the researcher does not consider data that may disprove theories made in a study. I attended to this threat by looking at data I collected and considered any information that could disprove theories I proposed or that could provide “alternative explanations or understandings” of how Option Two was learned and used in the schools in my study (Maxwell, 1996, p. 90).

Interpretive Validity

I minimized threats to the way I made sense of my participants’ responses, what Maxwell identified as interpretive validity (Maxwell, 1996, p. 90), by reviewing my interpretations of the data with the participants. I wanted to be sure that I did not misinterpret what they said. I followed up each interview by calling the participant to thank him or her for participating and to verify the accuracy of any information on the transcript that was unclear to me.

I reiterated some of the interview questions I asked in the first phase of interviews with the four principals from the original sample who continued in my study. This process, which Guba and Lincoln (1989) terms *member checking*, enabled me to verify my interpretations of the data with the four principals in the second round after data analysis.

The member checks that I conducted during the second round of interviews with the four principals I studied more closely also gave these participants an opportunity to review my findings. I started each second round interview by presenting the principals

with excerpts from my findings in chapter 4. The excerpts captured my main points based on the first round of interview data. The principals were given time to comment about each excerpt before I completed my dissertation. In this way, I was able to verify my interpretations of the data with the four principals I studied more closely.

Summary

I was able to glean more about how a group of high school principals in New Jersey learned about, understood, and use Option Two in their schools by conducting interviews in three rounds. I developed my findings by employing both categorization and contextualization methods of data analysis. These processes of analysis allowed me to effectively tell the stories of my participants and make meaning of their responses to Option Two.

I explain the results of my research in chapter 4 and then discuss the findings in chapter 5. I made several recommendations for the NJDOE and New Jersey high school principals based on my findings. These recommendations are presented at the end of chapter 5.

Chapter IV

Research Findings

My study served two purposes. It contributed to the literature on the implementation of curriculum reform by examining how Option Two was being used in New Jersey high schools. It also shed light on how high school principals in the state learned about and understood Option Two so as to contribute to the NJDOE's promotion of the policy.

This chapter is framed by my research questions and an overall analysis of how each school in my study worked with Option Two. The profiles I created of each of the participants described their experiences with Option Two. Each high school principal and district leader I interviewed provided a snapshot of how the policy had been learned, understood, used, and the challenges and successes that were encountered at their respective schools.

In the sections below I present the following findings:

- 1) How the principals learned about Option Two
- 2) How, if at all, they understood Option Two
- 3) How these principals used Option Two and how Option Two was used differently in the schools in my study
- 4) The roles of other personnel in the schools, including the district leaders in implementing Option Two
- 5) How principals and district leaders perceived Option Two as a lever for school improvement

- 6) Why these principals chose to create Option Two programs
- 7) The challenges principals confronted when implementing Option Two
- 8) The successes principals experienced with Option Two, and
- 9) A summary of how eight of nine high school principals learned about Option Two, how these eight principals used the policy, and the challenges they encountered (with data in this section organized by school)

The Data Collection Process

The findings presented in this chapter are a result of the data that was collected over an 8-month span. The interviews I recorded and transcribed generated 17 hours of conversations. I interviewed nine principals once, four of these principals a second time, and four district leaders. The data were coded and placed into displays. These displays allowed me to craft profiles of each of the participants.

Overview of the Findings

The findings show that eight of nine New Jersey high school principals in my study learned about Option Two in a variety of ways. Only one of the principals reported that he had received information directly from the NJDOE. Six of the eight principals who learned about Option Two learned about the policy from colleagues, former principals, or the superintendent in the district. There were mixed assessments of the clarity and coherence of the policy information the principals received.

All but one of the principals in this study understood Option Two and the NJDOE's rationale for using the policy. Some principals were able to provide specific

details about the policy that reflected in-depth knowledge of Option Two. Other principals were able to provide at least a cursory explanation of the policy and its intent.

Some version of Option Two was used by all but one of the principals in my study. The extent to which the principals in my study used Option Two varied. The policy was sometimes used in a multitude of ways, but in other cases, Option Two was used to create a singular type of program. All of the Option Two programs that were created were facilitated off school grounds and none of the teachers in the schools in my study were involved in these programs.

A closer analysis of how Option Two was used by four of the eight principals I identified as using the policy in my study revealed that the district administrator was a pivotal part of the policy implementation process. The district administrators in all of these schools mostly acted as liaisons between the schools and the community partners involved in the Option Two programs.

Four of the principals in my study used Option Two programs to support student and/or community needs. Principals specifically identified problems they used Option Two to solve. Some of the principals used Option Two both to solve problems and to offer students alternative learning experiences.

Option Two was used to do more than simply solve problems in the four schools I examined more closely by conducting interviews with the principals and district leaders. The four principals and the four district administrators in the second and third sample groups of my study perceived Option Two as a lever for school improvement.

One principal in the second sample group felt that Option Two promoted student interest in school programs by engaging them in different learning opportunities. Two

other principals and two district administrators from the second and third sample groups believed Option Two improved students' study and organizational skills. One of the other principals and two of the other district administrators from the second and third sample groups reported that Option Two directly improved curricular programs in their schools because it encouraged the entire faculty to think critically about their programs.

There were challenges to using Option Two, though. Seven of the eight principals who used Option Two to create programs in their schools identified challenges associated with the policy. Three of the principals identified the lack of community and Board of Education support to be a challenge. Two principals struggled with accommodating students' ideas for independent projects. One principal cited a lack of financial resources as a problem. Despite these challenges, six of the eight principals who used Option Two believed their Option Two programs were successful.

The Principals in My Study

Before presenting my analysis, I briefly describe the principals in the study so the reader can more effectively place the data that informed my findings in context. Each participant is listed by pseudonym.

Bill- North Central Regional High School. Bill, from North Central Regional High School, was the only principal I interviewed who had earned a doctorate. We discussed the dissertation research process briefly before I conducted the interview. Bill said he understood the process as a result of his own experiences. He said that he responded promptly to my request for the interviews partly because he realized the rigors of this process.

Bill was thorough in his responses to my questions. We discussed high school reform after the formal interview because he wanted to continue talking to me about topics unrelated to Option Two.

Jane- Western High School. Jane, from Western High School, was the second principal I interviewed. She earned her master's degree after the school district suggested that she pursue a career in education leadership. Jane spent her entire career in the Western High School district. She previously was the athletic director for the school district. Jane lives in the community and intends to retire in the district.

Jane was an enthusiastic and optimistic participant in my study. She had a lot of energy during the interview and spoke positively about her role as a high school leader, the students she served, and the teachers with whom she worked.

Dave- City High School. Dave was the principal at City High School. He earned a master's degree and spent most of his educational career in New York City. He retired from there prior to taking the helm at City High. Dave had to interrupt the interview several times so he could help people in the school's office. Based on my observations, Dave seemed to be busy during the meeting with various managerial responsibilities that the other principals in my study didn't have to tend to during their interview sessions.

Jim- Southern High School. Jim was the principal at Southern High School. He holds a master's degree and served as principal of the school after working as the athletic director for Southern. Based on my observations, Jim was very detail oriented and well prepared for the interview. He provided documents about Option Two as soon as I entered his office, and his answers were very thorough.

Anthony- Northeastern High School. Anthony served as the assistant principal at Northeastern High School before becoming the principal. He holds a master's degree and grew up in the Northeastern community. Before the interview, Anthony explained that he did not intend to become the principal of the school. He decided to apply for the position after the Board of Education expressed interest in his candidacy.

Anthony was, based on my observations, particularly congenial during the interview. He repeatedly stated that he "wanted to learn more" about Option Two and offered to follow up the interview with more information if I did not feel he answered my questions completely. Anthony's responses to my questions were complete but brief and limited in detail.

John- Southeastern High School. John, the principal of Southeastern High School, commented a great deal about high school reform before, during, and after the interview. John holds a master's degree in counseling (he previously was the director of guidance for the school district) and joined the staff at Southeastern as principal because he wanted to "do a lot of good things" for the students in the school. John was the only principal in my study who expressed positive feelings about being a principal, and many of his responses to my interview questions included stories about children he helped during his tenure in the district.

Rick- Shore High School. Rick was, based on my observations, very focused on improving student achievement in his DFG A school. Before and after the interview, Rick and I discussed his efforts to use standardized test data to focus on helping students who required remediation before and after the interview. He holds a master's and, like Jane and Jim, he was an athletic director prior to becoming principal of the school. Rick

was very enthusiastic about his efforts to promote his school in the local newspaper. At one point in the interview, he shared an article about the changes to the school's curricular and extra curricular programs he and his staff implemented.

Ellen- Eastern Regional High School. Ellen was, based on my observations, the liveliest principal in the study. She was very energetic for the duration of both interview sessions and encouraged me numerous times throughout the sessions to contact her again if I had any additional questions. Ellen also holds a master's degree but, unlike the other principals, served as the director of curriculum in a different high school district before coming to Eastern Regional High School.

Robert- South Central Regional High School. Robert, the principal of South Central Regional High School, holds a master's and worked as the assistant principal of the high school before becoming its leader. Like Jane, he lives in the community in which he worked and his children are students in the South Central Regional system.

In summary, Bill and Dave were the only principals who served as high school leaders in their previous roles. Jane, Jim, Anthony, John, Rick, Ellen, and Robert were in their first positions as principals. Bill was the only principal with a doctorate. John has a master's degree in guidance; the others' graduate studies related to educational leadership. Jane and Robert were the only principals in my study who lived in the communities in which they worked.

Learning about Option Two

The principals had different accounts of where and how they received information about Option Two. Seven of eight of the principals pointed out that they learned about Option Two from the NJDOE, though not directly from the literature. These seven

principals initially learned about the policy from their peers, predecessors, or superiors. The department of education did not send them any emails or other documentation regarding Option Two. Only one of the participants in my study, Bill from North Central Regional High School, learned about Option Two directly from the NJDOE. Bill obtained information first-hand from the agency because he attended an NJDOE-sponsored meeting regarding high school programs.

Bill described the meeting, called Reinventing High Schools where he learned about Option Two. He stated:

[I] went to this conference and I suspect that's how we got on that list. I remember receiving a memo. Option Two was a big item of discussion at the Reinventing High Schools conference. I think I got this [policy information] off the Internet. Yeah, this is from the NJDOE website. (Personal interview, July 23, 2007, p.1).

Bill claimed that he also obtained information from the NJDOE website. He later added that the state agency did not provide him with a “whole lot from the NJDOE.” He went on, “I wouldn't say I learned a great deal about Option Two from NJDOE.” Bill was the only principal who mentioned having participated in the *Reinventing* meeting. This meeting took place in 2004 and resulted in the NJDOE memo that listed exemplary uses of Option Two (NJDOE, 2004b). This meeting was an important source of Bill's knowledge about Option Two.

On this same topic, Jane, principal of Western High School, explained that she also had not received much information from the NJDOE. “We don't have a whole lot of information outside the code and we get from the Department of Education.” She claimed that she received “regulation memos” but that her superintendent would receive these

memoranda and then pass the information along to the principals at “monthly administrative meetings.”

Information from the NJDOE was provided to Ellen, the principal of Eastern Regional High School via the superintendent in her last district. She learned about Option Two from a memo her school’s chief passed along to her:

[I learned about the policy] in my last position as director of curriculum, my superintendent really said pretty much, ‘[Ellen], this fax came over, and figure something out.’ And, we went obviously through code at this point. I believed it [policy information] was a fax from the county office. I believe it went to my superintendent. (Personal interview, November 26, 2007, p. 39).

Both Ellen and Jane referred to “code.” While they learned about the policy from NJDOE information, they depended on the New Jersey Administrative Code to interpret the policy (NJAC 6A: 8-5.1.II). None of the principals in this study reported receiving the actual legislative language for Option Two from the NJDOE. Those like Ellen and Jane, who took it upon themselves to explore Option Two, looked to administrative code for guidance.

When policy information did not come directly from their superiors, many principals learned about Option Two from their immediate predecessors or from colleagues. Jim, principal of Southern High School, stated:

No, [professional association did not provide information]. It was more from our curriculum department in looking at- one of our past assistant superintendents for curriculum worked on a pretty high level, a deputy commissioner with the state. You get your missives from the county superintendents and stuff or through the county superintendents from the commissioner’s office. [We learned about the policy] between curriculum and guidance, curriculum because it is a piece of our curriculum, and guidance because the kids are using it for high school graduation credit. Together they keep the principals informed. (Personal interview, August 14, 2007, p. 23).

The principal of Southeastern High School, John, had learned about Option Two from other administrators in his district. Like Jim, his superior had intimate knowledge about NJDOE policies since he had enjoyed a close relationship with the education commissioner. John described his learning experience as a “fiat [that] came down” from this superior, his superintendent who promoted Option Two. He continued:

[We also learned] through bureaucratic notices from the office. The former commissioner [Bill Librera] was promoting it, through county meetings. ASCD had some materials on senior projects, senior alternatives. [I did] not really [get information from the NJDOE]. A lot of this was using just opportunity and authority we had to bless someone for a year. They’re [NJDOE] certainly not giving us anything. [The information about Option Two from superintendent] was very simple. One of the reasons we would be so conscious of it was that Librera enjoyed a fine relationship with our superintendent. (Personal interview, September 23, 2007, p. 31).

Both Jim and John explained that they benefited from the relationships the upper administrators in their school districts had with NJDOE employees. Learning about Option Two indirectly through these sources no doubt enriched Jim and John’s knowledge of the policy. I will point out later in this chapter that Jim and John clearly understood the policy’s intentions and both took full advantage of what the policy has to offer schools by creating programs for students.

Along similar lines, Anthony, Northeastern High School principal, learned everything he knows about Option Two from the previous principal in his school. Anthony had not seen any documentation regarding Option Two. When asked to tell me how he learned about the policy, Anthony pointed out that he didn’t even know where his predecessor got the information:

[I learned about Option Two] in conversation with the principal of the school at the time when I was in the position of Vice-Principal. And we had some discussion. [We didn’t talk about it] in great length, but discussion about our students that were involved in athletic programs being exempt from taking

Physical Education classes. My conversation was only with him [previous principal]. Where he got the information from, I really don't know, and I haven't received any documentation this past year from the State Department of Education. I never saw any documentation. We [previous principal and Anthony] just discussed it verbally. (Personal interview, August 21, 2007, p. 28).

Anthony used the term "discussion" to describe the way in which he had learned about Option Two. He did not mention having reviewed any documents about Option Two. The person Anthony spoke with verbally explained the policy to him and provided nothing in writing. Unlike Ellen and Jane, Anthony did not pursue this "lead" about Option Two and attempt to learn more about the policy. He worked with what little information he had to produce a program in his school. Later in this chapter I will describe how Option Two is used at Northern High School.

Rick, principal of Shore High School, obtained information about Option Two from sources within his former school district. Rick described how he learned about Option Two:

[I learned about Option Two] when I was [an] administrator for Regional. We started looking at ways to reduce the number of students in the phys. ed. Class. Yes, [policy information is] on the Web site and we spoke to the County Superintendent. [I obtained information] from the Web site, from what we were trying to do over at Regional. So, I had the information here. I wrote it up, I quoted it- I quoted from what I had on the Web site and what I knew from Freehold. [I didn't learn about policy from other sources], that was it. I called somebody at the DOE and then they said, 'You know, we have a Web site, why don't you look at that.' And then, there's some schools that do it, or they listed that they did it- samples, because they give you a template. Our Assistant Superintendent had brought it up as a suggestion. (Personal interview, November 7, 2007, p. 35).

In Rick's case, the NJDOE did steer him to a Web site but only after he contacted the agency. He noted that the information he obtained from the department was sent upon request. Most of what Rick learned about the policy came from sources within the district he had worked in before coming to Shore.

South Central Regional High School principal Robert explained that he too had learned about Option Two from a fellow administrator. He stated:

[We learned about the policy] through a former superintendent here. He was at a superintendent roundtable. Maybe the Department of Education was there, and they threw out this, or he just read it in whatever. And he brought the idea back to the principal and said, 'This is something that is up-and-coming. I think we are doing something now, but we want to expand on how we want to work with this program.' So, Fred got pretty much involved with the nuts and bolts of the statute that allows us to do this and started articulating with businesses and colleges and thinks like that to come up with ways in which we could get involved with Option Two. (Personal interview, December 6, 2007, p. 46).

Only in one instance did a principal in this study state that he did not receive any information about Option Two from any source, including the NJDOE. Dave, principal of City High School reported that he did not hear anything about Option Two and that he read an article in *Newsweek* that described a policy similar to Option Two. He stated that the NJDOE did not inform him about the policy and professional organizations did not provide him information either. Dave notably did not identify other colleagues as sources of Option Two information. No one in his school district had shared information about the policy with him and it was apparent that he did not benefit from whatever information his fellow district administrators might have had. Dave made a point of saying that he did not receive any information from the NJDOE.

I explained Option Two to Dave after he stated that he did not know about the policy. He said he wished he could have learned about Option Two sooner because he believed it could benefit the students in his urban high school. Dave said that, had he known about Option Two, he would have used the policy to create job internship programs that "would be good experiences for those youngsters who may not be going to college." Based on what he learned from me about Option Two, Dave believed his school

could offer “a greater diversity of programs” because the school’s urban community setting has so much to offer in terms of potential work experiences.

Clarity and Coherence of Information

The participants’ perception of the clarity and coherence of the information they received about Option Two was also mixed. Seven of the eight principals who had learned about Option Two commented on the kind of information they received. Four principals thought what they read and heard about the policy was understandable, whereas the other three principals thought the information was not clear.

Bill described the policy as “nebulous” but understandable.” He went on to say:

When I read through what the state had given us, there was no confusion on my part whatsoever, none. None whatsoever... When I got the information from the state, it wasn’t confusing to me in terms of what they were trying to do.
(Personal interview, July 23, 2007, p. 3).

Jane agreed, stating, “There’s nothing more that needs to be done [to clarify Option Two]. It’s pretty self-explanatory. It was very understandable.” She appreciated the lack of “legal jargon” in the policy because it made understanding the policy easier. Anthony noted that “[Information from the previous principal] was fairly understandable.” John described the information he received about Option Two as being “simple,” implying that it was articulated in such a way that was comprehensible.

However, three principals thought that Option Two information obtained from the NJDOE was not very clear. Ellen stated, “I don’t recall it [information] being that clear. It was so vague and non-specific.” Robert said, “I don’t think [the information is] clear...,” believing the policy language “...was vague on purpose.” He felt the NJDOE wanted principals to have leeway when using the policy, and the vagueness of the language

would leave the door open for flexibility in terms of use. Rick thought Option Two information he obtained from the NJDOE “wasn’t clear because it was all over the place.” He went on to describe that information as “nebulous.”

Understanding Option Two

The NJDOE intends for Option Two to be used to provide students with non-traditional learning opportunities while allowing them to complete the requirements for graduation (NJDOE, 2004b; Taylor, 2003). All of the participants in my study were asked to describe their sense of the NJDOE’s intentions for the policy and to express how, if at all, they understood Option Two.

Eight of the nine principals knew the policy’s intentions and they thought they understood Option Two well enough to implement the policy. Bill said he knew “exactly what it [Option Two] was” and was able to define the NJDOE’s intentions as a tool for high schools to become more innovative. Bill continued, “It’s a conduit, it’s an avenue that allows schools to move from the structure that has been used since the early 1990s.”

Jane was even more specific than Bill in her description of Option Two’s intent:

I think that the Department of Education had in their mind when they came up with Option Two- I would just say it's a creative enrichment experience for kids to meet the New Jersey standards that is outside of the school building. I'd just say to provide accelerated, creative- I'm using the same words over and over again- relevant, very relevant is a key word there, experiences for kids, to bridge the gap between high school and college. (Personal interview, July 24, 2007, p. 13).

Jane echoed the comment made by Commissioners Doolan and Hespe when they described Option Two as a “back door” that allows students to satisfy the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards (J. Doolan, personal communication, April 24, 2003; D. Hespe, personal communication, April 17, 2003). Jane’s reference to “bridging the

gap between high school and college” also reflected one of the examples for policy-use cited in the NJDOE memo about Option Two (NJDOE, 2004b). It was apparent to me that Jane’s understanding of Option Two was excellent and complete. She was able to interpret the meaning of Option Two and its intention.

Like Jane, Jim, Ellen, and Robert were able to accurately describe the intention of Option Two by citing examples from the NJDOE memo that described how some New Jersey high schools used Option Two (NJDOE, 2004b, p. 9). Jim talked about helping high school seniors “[plan] a direction for college” by participating in college courses.

Ellen and Robert also described Option Two’s intention accurately when they referred to it as a tool they could use to help students explore career options and make the senior year of high school meaningful.

Ellen illustrated an even deeper understanding of how Option Two could be used when she elaborated upon her explanation of Option Two in reference to the “political agenda” the NJDOE may have had for Option Two:

My personal belief is I think that Option Two was created to help get rid of senior year. If you limit, if you cut every high school, by 25 percent, and ultimately that's kind of what's going on, I think that is the long-term intent, you cut the operating cost of a high school by a nice fraction. (Personal interview, November 26, 2007, p. 40).

Ellen’s take on Option Two was that it is more than just a curriculum reform policy; it was a cost-cutting measure by reducing the number of years that high schools operate:

I think some politicians feel that the senior year is a waste. I think this was done as a long-term cost savings in the property relief category, tax relief category. So, I think in the politician's world, that was the ultimate, and I think educators that have picked up on it are saying, ‘Okay, well, how can we utilize this to benefit kids?’ And, that's the good part. The bigger plan is to eliminate the senior year. (Personal interview, November 26, 2007, p. 41).

Ellen gave Option Two much thought. Her understanding of the policy was multidimensional. She considered the implications state politics may have on development of the policy as a means of changing the structure of the entire high school program.

Though they did not cite language from the NJDOE memo or elaborate on what Option Two may be intended to do beyond impact curricular programs, Rick and John offered specific examples of how they saw Option Two being used. These examples support the NJDOE's stated intentions. Rick said he believed Option Two was a way to create alternative learning experiences for students who are interested in traditional classes:

It gives students a 'so what' for going to school. Like, 'Why am I going? Well, I hate this math, science, and social, but I love my Option Two class.' And it allows me to do something I'm really interested in. So, you're creating- it helps you create the schools within schools and it gives the kids a more informalized approach to career choices, to actually getting immersed in school choices. (Personal interview, November 7, 2007, p. 36).

John believed Option Two was a way to offer seniors different pathways to graduation:

Option Two sort of challenges those traditional notions, because there's no right option, there's no more one valued option. It's a way of bringing opportunity sooner to students. [Option Two] used to provide the initial way is to provide relief for kids who really have had enough of this. It [Option Two] opens up the field of education and suggests that it's not just book learning, it's not just the stuff in the classroom, but we should acknowledge something akin to, in some cases, apprenticeship, mentoring. It helps to shape in a less traditional way one's life. (Personal interview, September 23, 2007, p. 31).

Rick and Johns' responses were unique in that they focused on how Option Two could be used to break tradition. The other six principals described Option Two in terms of its potential to create alternative learning experiences. Granted, one of the six principals,

Ellen, did discuss the potential for Option Two to restructure the entire high school experience. But, Rick and John clearly believed Option Two was a change-agent, a mechanism they could use to alter the way curricular programs have been created in their schools.

When asked to describe Option Two, Rick asserted that he appreciated how the policy language did not include many rules, stating, “Rules- I think the more rules you have, the more it dampens your enthusiasm for trying to do things that [are different].” Likewise, John talked about using what he perceived as the policy’s encouragement of breaking tradition, pointing out, “Option Two sort of challenges traditional notions, because there’s no right option, there no more one-valued option.” Rick and Johns’ responses suggested a deeper understanding of the policy because they alluded to a statement made by Commissioner Librera, who referred to the policy as “a way to get out of the suffocating framework of NCLB” (B. Librera, personal communication, April 2, 2007). Rick and Johns’ comments indicated they see Option Two as a way to “release” their programs from the “chokeholds” of traditional curricular programs.

Using Option Two

Each participant in my study was asked to describe how, if at all, he or she was using Option Two to create curricular programs. All but one of the nine principals provided examples of programs that had been created as a result of Option Two. The programs created by each of the principals are listed in Table 7.

Table 7

Type of Programs Created Using Option Two

Participant	Types of Programs
Bill: North Central Regional High School	Independent learning project
Jane: Western High School	Off-site college classes, off-site community college classes, job certification program
Dave: City High School	None
Jim: South Central Regional High School	Off-site college classes, college classes (distance-learning), job internship, independent learning project, service learning project
Anthony: Northeastern High School	Off-site community college classes
John: Southern High School	Off-site college classes, off-site community college classes, job internship
Rick: Shore High School	Job certification program
Ellen: Eastern Regional High School	Off-site community college classes, job internship, service learning project
Robert: South Central Regional High School	Off-site college classes, off-site community college classes, independent learning project

Bill limited his Option Two programs to a single project. Students at his school, North Central Regional, completed internships with local professionals. The school's student handbook described the Option Two program as "[An] opportunity to engage in an experience that could benefit the community and provide students with career ideas." As Bill pointed out, students were responsible for crafting the program around their interests: "They're [students] responsible for going out, finding someone, arranging it."

Bill also pointed out that some students completed Option Two projects because there were times when they could not attend regular classes at the high school. In one case, a student at North Central traveled with a rock and roll band for an entire school year. The student acquired his high school graduation credit by engaging in projects that satisfied the school's requirements. The student "checked in" with Bill from time to time during the course of the school year to update the school on his Option Two project.

A greater variety of Option Two programs were offered at Jim's high school. The first alternative learning experience he described was "...a senior option program where kids go out and do internship stuff." The school's course catalogue specified that the Option Two program was "Senior Option Career Internships or Senior Option Service Learning projects." The document framed the programs as "internships in a career-focused, work-related residency and [part of] service learning with community agencies."

Senior projects were also listed as the Option Two programs made available to students at Eastern Regional High School. Ellen described the Option Two program as: "...an opportunity [for seniors] to conclude their high school experience by providing volunteer services to the community and/or civic organizations." Students at Ellen's school could also engage in action research projects.

The majority of Option Two programs at Eastern were situated in the community. For instance, several students worked in the music industry by engaging in independent projects with local professionals who were involved with major record companies. Ellen described the experiences of one student who worked for a local fashion boutique in a nearby town. Other students at Eastern Regional engaged in projects that had them working alongside teachers in nearby elementary schools because they were interested in early education careers.

Only one of the principals I interviewed described an Option Two program that was solely established to provide job certification for the school's students. Rick described the program at Shore High School as an opportunity for students to obtain certification as Emergency Medical Technicians. The program was conducted at the high school by medical technicians from the nearby medical center.

Half of the schools in my study used Option Two to create independent study projects. Four schools provided students with the opportunities to create flexible programs fashioned around their interests. What shaped the decisions of the principals in these schools to use the program in this way is not entirely clear. One factor could be that the principals sought to meet the needs of the students and the community by implementing flexible and non-restrictive student projects.

The principals of these four schools, Bill, Jim, Ellen, and Robert detailed how Option Two was used to meet challenges. Bill described his Option Two program as follows: "It's [Option Two independent project] more of an option that I use to help a student who might be in trouble..." A document explaining Option Two to parents and students in Bill's community reflected his sentiments about the program by referring to

the senior project as a “valuable opportunity to engage in an experience that could benefit the community...”

When asked to discuss how Option Two helped to resolve challenges in his school, Jim explained his program in this way: “We've had a clamor for different ways to include educational experiences towards graduation.” He reacted to the call for alternative learning experiences by using Option Two to create nontraditional programs in his school.

Ellen also described using Option Two to meet the needs of students in her school. She described how she used Option Two in her school in the following manner:

And you know, some kids are not wired to have nine periods a day, and that's not who they are. That formula didn't fit when they were in third grade, and it certainly didn't fit in 11th grade. So, the students, their success is shooting up. We have special education students that are involved in Option Two, because if they know they just have to sit tight for four periods a day and just do what they have to do for four periods a day, then they can take their time to do something much more meaningful for them. (Personal interview, November 26, 2007, p. 43).

Ellen also felt that Option Two addressed the needs of students she considered “risk takers.” She used the policy because these students, in her view, didn't respond effectively to the “institutional, dogmatic approach” to learning.

Robert also pointed out that he tried to meet the needs of the students in his school who were involved in extracurricular activities. He allowed these students to use Option Two to use their extracurricular experiences as substitutes for regular high school classes. He intended to help students get high school credit for experiences they were already engaged in that proved they had satisfied the requirements of regular classes. Some of these extracurricular experiences included college courses that some students took after regular school hours.

Six of the eight principals in the study described two-year and four-year college programs as alternative learning experiences they created with Option Two for seniors in their high schools. It is clear that Option Two is used frequently to forge relationships with nearby institutions of higher education so high school students can participate in college programs and receive college credit.

Jane emphasized the use of Option Two to collaborate with the college located several miles from the high school campus:

[We do have a Lafayette art experience [at] Lafayette College. We have classes over there [Lafayette] for accelerated art students. There's all this service learning right now. Senior Options program your senior year, which means you go to Warren County Community College for a half day. And you take courses out there you get college credit for. We pay for it but those credits are transferable to anywhere in New Jersey and many schools outside. Some of the [college] classes- they get high school credit for that. (Personal interview, July 24, 2007, p. 14).

Jane's commitment to using Option Two to create alternative learning experiences focused on the relationship she established with the nearby Lafayette College and the Warren County Community College. Students at Western High School received college credit while taking courses at Lafayette College during regular school hours. Jane also pointed out in her interview that high school seniors participated in Lafayette classes in lieu of high school elective courses they would have taken to fill their schedule.

Students at Southern High School could "choose to pursue opportunities to enroll in college level work" according to the school's student handbook. Jim elaborated on the high school-college connection when he stated, "We have a relationship with Princeton University. We use Option Two to help meet those kids' needs in terms of math." Students who pursued the Option Two college program could take math courses at Princeton and receive high school graduation credit.

Similarly, Anthony described the Option Two program at Northeastern High School as a way [to] “offer... classes at Hudson Community College to our seniors who have met all the requirements for graduation and are up to date with everything.”

Likewise, John said that thanks to Option Two, Southeastern High School students took advantage of the colleges nearby in Philadelphia:

[We have been] placing students at colleges, universities and both in Philadelphia, South Jersey, the community system, the state system, to take a course. It was a creative opportunity that my superintendent embraced at the time. Camden Community College, we have students at Rutgers. (Personal interview, September 23, 2007, p. 32).

Students at Eastern Regional made use of the relationship Ellen fostered through Option Two with the county community college. She described how students embraced the program:

We've had students graduate high school with twelve college credits in their pocket, in the bank, and often, they go right through the summer, so they're actually picking up more, because they're, ‘Oh, I'm here anyway. Why don't I just pick up another one in the summer?’ So, they're walking out of here with fifteen credits essentially. (Personal interview, November 26, 2007, p. 44).

Robert also emphasized the strong relationship that he forged with the local community college:

Part of our Option Two program is a program that we have through Burlington County Community College, and that student can go to Burlington County Community College the second semester of senior year. It's part of our Option Two. So, kids- the motivated students or students with special interests can leave our building and not return for any classes because they're taking classes at Burlington County Community College or Mercer County Community College, and we do that through Option Two. (Personal interview, December 6, 2007, p. 48).

Both principals described their college programs as the means for motivated Option Two students to acquire a good deal of college credit. Students at Eastern and South Central

could earn more college credit than students who were involved in college programs in the other schools.

How the Principals Used Option Two Differently

One principal in my study did not use Option Two at all. Five of the eight principals who implemented Option Two used it to create a variety of programs that enhanced the schools' regular curricular offerings. The other three principals focused on creating only one type of program.

Three of the four principals whose schools were classified as either DFG A or B used Option Two to create single programs or did not use the policy at all. Dave, the principal of one of the two urban high schools in my study, did not use the policy because he did not learn about it from anyone inside or outside his school district.

Rick, the principal of the other urban high school in my study, used Option Two to create a single off-site program. Students at Shore High School had the opportunity to participate in a job certification course that led to EMT certification. Rick collaborated with a local medical institution to provide the training for his students. The program was limited to 12 students per class in order to accommodate the institution's requirements.

Anthony, the principal of a DFG B school, limited his use of Option Two to a single program. Seniors were granted the opportunity to take classes offsite at the nearby community college. Anthony said he explored expanding Option Two but it "just didn't seem like I would be a good for use...just too many variables."

Five of the other six principals I interviewed used Option Two in multiple ways. All of these principals, except for Jane, led schools in the DFG F-J categories. These principals facilitated at least three different types of Option Two programs in their

schools. The programs included college enrollment opportunities, independent projects, and job internships.

Putting Option Two in Place: The Roles of Other Personnel

The principal, according to the NJDOE, is mostly responsible for implementing Option Two in the high school because it is the principal's job to "oversee all aspects of the program" (NJDOE, 2004b, p. 4). District administrators in the four schools in my study who I interviewed in my second round of data collection also played a role in implementing Option Two. Teachers did not have any part in helping administrators implement the policy.

Robert, Ellen, Bill, and Jane were on the front lines of using Option Two. Each worked directly with students to advertise the program, facilitate discussions about the policy, and generate program ideas. Robert specifically said he was the "facilitator of the development" of Option Two programs. Ellen saw her role as "overseeing the management" of the policy.

In Bill's school, North Central Regional, the supervisor of social studies had a role in helping the principal with Option Two. But, Joshua pointed out, the principal was the most involved person with Option Two and worked mostly on developing new Option Two programs.

Jane's district administrator partner at Western High spoke in broad terms about the role of the principal, describing it to be that of "main supporter" of the programs already in place. The principal, according to Western High's guidance supervisor, was not involved in the "nuts and bolts" of Option Two.

District administrators in two of the four high schools I examined in the second round of data collection tended to handle the “nuts and bolts” of Option Two. At Western High School, for example, the supervisor of guidance, Stephanie, said she took care of students’ applications for Option Two programs and other matters related directly to the organization of the individual student’s Option Two experience.

Michael, supervisor of guidance in the South Central Regional High School district, said he oversaw the creation of “contracts” for students engaged in independent projects, information letters for parents, and all other “paperwork” required for students to complete the school’s Option Two programs successfully.

The other two district administrators who I interviewed were mostly responsible for communicating with agencies or community organizations that worked with the school on Option Two programs and the Board of Education in the district. For instance, the superintendent of Eastern Regional High School said that he made sure the Board applied its goals through Option Two, when possible. Tom and Ellen agreed about their respective roles with Option Two. Ellen felt Tom was supposed to be the “conduit” between the Board and the high school, and Tom believed Ellen had a more “intimate” role with the kids so she could handle all of the management needs of the Option Two programs.

The roles established by Joshua and Bill at North Central Regional resembled those at Eastern Regional. Joshua supported the principal whenever possible and served to “coordinate” community relationships. Bill talked about Josh’s role with Option Two in the same light. He believed Bill was the “liaison” with the groups outside the school that could support Option Two programs.

Teachers did not have any role in helping the principal or district administrator maintain or operate Option Two programs. Jane said that she did not assign teachers to help with paperwork and other program needs. Another principal, Jim, said he implemented Option Two programs with the help of his “tech guy”—not a teacher who was able to help him maintain databases of Option Two information.

Tom, the superintendent at Eastern Regional, stated that his teachers did not play any role in helping his high school use Option Two. He also commented about the teachers’ reaction to the policy. He pointed out that teachers in his district had concerns early on about the security of their jobs when the high school first implemented Option Two. The staff was assured that “it [Option Two] was not going to become a job issue.” Nevertheless, teachers at Eastern Regional perceived Option Two as a threat and Tom did not employ them to assist the school with using the policy.

When commenting on the role his teachers played in implementing Option Two at North Central Regional, Joshua, the social studies supervisor, stated that he felt teachers did not overwhelmingly support Option Two because “there’s just so many things they’re asked to do.”

Why the Principals in this Study Used Option Two

Together, the eight principals and four district administrators who worked with the four principals I studied more closely in the second round of data collection put Option Two programs in place to help their students. Eight of the nine principals in this study explained that they were using Option Two to satisfy student needs and to solve problems with the school’s schedule or curricula. The ninth principal, Dave, expressed a

desire to use the policy one day to solve a building space problem and to help the students in his school even though he did not use the policy.

Bill also stated that he used Option Two so students could pursue interests outside of school: “It’s more of an option I use to help...students who have other interests outside of school and in some cases it interferes with school (internship or senior project).” Bill believed the seniors in his school needed alternative learning experiences because they had already shown success in school: “Look at our SAT scores, well above the state and national average. So it’s hard to justify that need for change.” According to Bill, students at North Central Regional needed something more than the common learning experience, and Option Two programs apparently satisfied this need by providing them with “valuable opportunities to engage in experiences that could benefit the community and provide each student with career exploration.”

Jim also said he created Option Two programs to respond to the needs of his students who he described as being academically successful and highly motivated. Programs at Southern were clearly geared for students who wanted a competitive edge as they prepared to enter four-year colleges. The programs Jim created with Option Two included advanced math courses, gifted and talented classes, and college experiences that provide students with credits they can apply to the four-year higher education transcript when they enter college. Jim described why many of his students were interested in Option Two programs:

The number one course that kids take on their Option Two for us is when they come from eighth grade is algebra I over the summer- so they have the possibility of getting calculus as a senior. They [students] take that [required courses] in the summer so that they can maintain four years in the orchestra. They [students] use it for their fine arts elective with us, but it [Option Two] gives them course in fashion, if that’s something they think they want to be in when they go to college.

We also have a relationship with Princeton University. We use Option Two to help meet those kids' needs in terms of math. (Personal interview, August 14, 2007, p. 24).

Many students, Jim claimed, were using Option Two programs to gain an academic advantage. The two examples cited above illustrate how Option Two was being used to satisfy the competitive demands of the Southern High School community. The "number one course" was a math program that students could use to stay on an advanced mathematics track. The relationship with Princeton University was used mostly to allow students to accrue math credits so they could enroll in an advanced high school math program.

Jane also thought about her students' needs when she described how she used Option Two to resolve problems or challenges at Western. Unlike Bill and Jim, she thought that Option Two programs, specifically the college experiences offered to the seniors at her high school, motivated her students to reach higher academic standards: "But then you've got that average kid...feeling good about [himself], 'I'm part of a group of kids that [isn't smart] in the upper echelon that [is] going to this program.'" Unlike the students whom Bill and Jim served, students who the principals thought needed to be engaged in alternative learning experiences because they excelled in the school's regular programs, Jane referred to her students as "average kids" whose potential could be tapped by venturing off school grounds to take part in special experiences.

Robert and John believed that Option Two was a way to solve principals' main complaint about senior year. Robert pointed out: "It has helped in satisfying the problem of kids in their second semester of their senior year having little to do." John described

how students caught “senioritis” in the waning months of the senior year and “[Option Two] was often a solution to senioritis.”

John, though, cited the needs of his average or underperforming students:

Using it [Option Two] with students who were at risk or just not performing- it worked for kids who were largely disenfranchised or who were struggling in their fourth year of high school. These were students [seniors who completed all course work] who needed something other than what we could provide. I had a young man who was dysfunctional as a freshman and entered the sophomore year pretty marginal, who appeared one day like in July and wished to enroll in AP Chemistry. He was an extreme case of Option Two, because we knew this was not a fitting environment for him. We knew we didn’t have a whole lot to offer him. (Personal interview, September 23, 2007, p. 32).

Western High School and Southeastern High School were situated in two very different socioeconomic brackets (DFG A and DFG I respectively). Yet, it was made clear that the principals in both schools Jane and John, respectively, saw the need to respond to the demands of those students who were not performing well in the traditional high school setting. John, like Jane, recognized how Option Two could solve students’ problems. Another principal of a DFG I school, Ellen, explained how Option Two could be used to help students who did not fit the traditional high school mold.

Ellen, like John also recognized that not all students performed in the traditional school environment. She pointed out: “...some kids are not wired to have nine periods a day.” Later she described how the Eastern Regional program benefited these students:

We have special education students that are involved in Option Two, because if they know they just have to sit tight for four periods a day and just do what they have to do for four periods a day, then they can take their time to do something much more meaningful for them. (Personal interview, November 26, 2007, p. 43).

Unlike John and Jane, Ellen mentioned special education students as a target population for Option Two programs. Ellen’s Option Two programs were used to meet the needs of

two types of students: those who can't "sit" for more than four periods a day and those who wanted to extend the school day beyond the traditional nine periods.

Unlike Bill, Jim, Robert, John, Jane, and Ellen, who all focused specifically on student needs, one principal explained that he used Option Two because it helped him solve school program issues that do not directly relate to student needs. Rick said that he used Option Two so he could accommodate his schedule to changes in the student population:

It allows a flexible schedule by allowing- to create a flexible schedule to meet the particular needs that can be a static need over the years or a fluid need as the population changes. So, you can change, you can add, you can subtract. You can do it during the day; you can do it after, depending on the need. (Personal interview, November 7, 2007, p. 36).

Despite not using the policy, Dave still expressed a desire to solve problems related to school scheduling and building space. Dave cited the potential for Option Two to free up classrooms as students attend programs off-campus as a practical solution to the problem of overcrowding in his school. He also pointed out how he would use Option Two to address a need that was fueled by his own desire to create a cadre of teaching professionals. He stated: "[I want to] look at ways of how we can expose high school youngsters to become new teachers." He went on to describe his ideal Option Two program: "I'd like for us to set up over the course of the last two years that kids would have six months to a year internship working in those [skilled labor] kinds of areas." His desire to learn about Option Two in order to meet the needs of his students and his challenges was evident: "When I'm finished with you I'm going to go find out a bit more about it in terms of how I can get my superintendent to help make this work."

Option Two as a Lever for School Improvement

The four principals who I interviewed a second time, Robert, Jane, Bill, and Ellen, talked about how they believed Option Two could influence school programs and student achievement, saying that Option Two was either currently improving or had the potential to improve their programs and students' achievement. Each of the four district administrators who worked with these principals made similar statements about the influence Option Two had on school programs and student achievement.

Robert believed Option Two could provide students with "more options" so they could be more "satisfied" with their high school experience. From his perspective, Option Two made for a "better environment" in his school because of the excitement his students felt when they had the chance to go out to community colleges and break up the regular school day.

The district guidance supervisor who worked with Robert on Option Two also believed it was a lever to promote student achievement. Michael observed that Option Two positively impacted students by showing them the relevance of what they learned in their traditional high school classes. He reported that these students found success in Option Two programs because they were able to apply the skills they learned in the regular high school program to a real-world setting. This confidence, Michael believed, contributed to a student's success in other academic areas as well.

Jane felt Option Two "presents a seriousness about life, and achievement, and [students'] scholastic career and what [it takes] to be successful." She also believed Option Two boosted the self-esteem of the students who took part in programs. "They feel good about themselves," stated Jane.

Stephanie, the guidance supervisor who worked with Jane, said she believed Option Two improved student achievement in a different way. She felt that Option Two programs had the potential to improve study and organizational habits. Jane and Stephanie both viewed Option Two as a school improvement vehicle that directly impacted students' lives in a positive way.

Bill at North Central Regional High School stated that he thought Option Two "could do a lot for our high school" by having his faculty "rethink [the] existing program." Bill's perspective on how Option Two could improve his school program was that the policy could encourage educators to think differently about the traditional programs they were offering students. Bill believed that Option Two could be a mechanism that could help make "curriculum more rigorous and more relevant" by compelling everyone to reflect on the school's existing programs.

Bill's district administrator colleague, Joshua, made similar comments about Option Two's effect on the school program, citing it as a tool to encourage faculty and administration to "expand the idea of what school is." Bill and Joshua held similar views about the potential for Option Two to improve school programs. They believed the policy could force a change in the way educators in the school perceive the existing curricular program.

Tom, the superintendent in the Eastern Regional High School district, echoed Bill's opinion of how Option Two forced the school community to reflect on curriculum offerings. Tom's comment that Option Two "caused us to really examine our curriculum" paralleled Bill's projection that Option Two could sway people to critically examine existing programs. In Tom's case, Option Two specifically compelled him to facilitate a

review of the “pathways” for entering the senior year and the “exits” for kids as they leave Easter Regional.

Ellen, the principal at Eastern, perceived Option Two’s positive impact on the students and school program in a different light. She said that Option Two programs in her school enhanced “soft skills,” which she described as social-interaction skills, for example the ability to talk on the phone properly with adults and construct memoranda and other communiqués effectively.

In general, the district administrators’ ideas about how Option Two made positive changes fell along two lines that corresponded to their roles as district-level leaders. For instance, the two supervisors of guidance with whom I spoke--Michael and Stephanie--believed that Option Two helped students develop skills they could use to get along effectively in the workplace and in college.

Joshua and Tom believed that Option Two was a vehicle for school programming change. Tom, the superintendent of his school district, believed the policy forced the district to examine its curricula from a new perspective. He felt that this critical look at programs was moving good curriculum ideas forward in development. Joshua, a supervisor of social studies for his school district, believed that Option Two was making the curriculum “more rigorous and relevant” than it had been.

Facing Challenges to Implementing Option Two

All but one of the principals in my study identified challenges to implementing Option Two. Most of these challenges centered on the concern that the community and the local board of education often did not feel confident in and sometimes did not support the programs. Two of the principals indicated a problem with staffing and managing the

programs the Option Two programs they created. Two principals described the challenge of being able to approve project ideas students proposed based on the criteria they established for the Option Two programs. One principal also pointed out that the lack of fiscal resources was a challenge to using Option Two.

Unlike the others who found challenges to implementation, Ellen responded to my question about program challenges by stating, “I really haven't come across [challenges]. If we didn't have a designated administrative position, we'd have a lot of challenges.” Eastern Regional hired an administrator to work with students enrolled in Option Two programs. Ellen clearly benefited from this resource, emphasizing that the administrative position has steered her from having to be involved in the myriad responsibilities assumed to be related to implementing Option Two programs.

Jane noted the problem that her school confronted when personnel resources were not so plentiful. She stated, “We need a person in place that can facilitate this because even though theoretically, this all sounds nice, we’re still dealing with teenagers.” Jane did not specify what she meant by the comment “we’re still dealing with teenagers,” but she might have been referring to the need to make sure students were following Option Two program rules and regulations, were being transported safely to the program sites, and were maintaining proper attendance and completing all tasks and assignments. Jane did not suggest a solution to her problem.

Jane said that she believed her challenge with personnel would be exacerbated by budget constraints in the next fiscal year. She pointed out that she would be “dealing with less resources than ever in the history of the school” the following year and this would

impact her staffing. Jane's problems with personnel would impact her Option Two programs, but she stated "we're doing it, but we could be doing it better."

Jim did not describe budget problems as being a challenge to using Option Two, but he did mention the problems of organizing projects and keeping up with the paperwork related to Option Two programs as being obstacles to implementing the policy. Southern High School did not have anyone assigned to handling Option Two.

Consequently, Jim said:

The challenge that we have with Option Two right now is to keep track. It's more or less the bookkeeping of it. How do we, one, ensure that the classes that the kids are taking are up to the level of our own curriculum? Online is a challenge too now [because] you have kids taking online courses. You have to match up what they do our courses and make sure that it meets our needs. (Personal interview, August 14, 2007, p. 26).

To get around this problem, Jim explained that he enlisted the help of his "tech guy" to use databases and other computer applications to track Option Two program applications, student grades, and completion of project assignments.

Two principals, Robert and John, also said they struggled with how to use Option Two to meet needs of particular students who approached them with ideas that did not seem to meet the criteria for Option Two programs according to the language of the policy. For instance, Robert said, "The kids that come to you, and they want to do something; you just can't figure out a way for them to do it because it doesn't fit." Fortunately, this was a rare occurrence, said Robert, implying that the problem was not a serious one, dismissing these cases as "little bumps in the road."

John also described the problem of not being able to adapt Option Two to help students whose ideas could not "formally" be considered policy-created. Bill suggested that he could not open Option Two to any idea a student would present to him because

“colleges are still very traditional.” This framed the way Bill approved Option Two programs. He said he was careful to make sure Option Two programs met state graduation requirements and he did not make board members or parents nervous about children’s attractiveness as college applicants.

Concern about parent and board member support was on the minds of four of the eight principals who used Option Two in my study. Ensuring community and local board of education support and trust was the common roadblock to the principals’ ability to use Option Two more effectively. In expressing his concern about the reaction of the community to Option Two, Bill stated:

You might find parents, especially parents that are traditional and maybe parents of especially high achieving students wondering, I don’t know if this is going to work or not? When you start talking about things like that, people get nervous-board members especially. Parents get nervous. They were very excited about our being part of this, but when it came to the rubber hitting the road- whoa, wait a minute, let’s stop, let’s take little baby steps here. They [BOE] got a little nervous. (Personal interview, July 23, 2007, p. 4).

Bill said that his challenge in dealing with the Board was clearly his chief concern regarding the use of Option Two. He pointed out the Board’s reticence about using Option Two again when I interviewed him during the second round of data collection. He felt “the Board issue is a big one” and went on to say, “getting the Board to buy into it [is a big issue].”

Bill’s concerns were echoed by Anthony who explained, “One of the challenges is getting staff, the district, the Board of Education to buy into it [Option Two programs].”

John also listed community buy-in as a challenge to using Option Two:

I think by virtue of the culture of the community, it’s not clear to everyone that it’s [Option Two] institutionally credible. Their concept would be, you sit with people who are poets in a classroom, as opposed to sitting with them in a coffee

bar. In the public perception, I think it [Option Two] creates a credibility issue. (Personal interview, September 23, 2007, p. 33).

Credibility was an underlying theme in the responses of the principals who identified parent and Board of Education support as a challenge. Option Two programs are nontraditional and changing the way students learn and experience high school; this can be disconcerting to the school's stakeholders. Bill, Anthony, John, and Rick seemed to be aware of concerns that the communities may have had with charting a new course for their high school curricular programs.

Rick's concerns about the Board's support were similar to those of Bill, Anthony, and John. He stated, "The challenge is [also] convincing the Board to approve the program." To solve this problem, Rick went on to say that he "doesn't throw too much at them." Rick's approach to instituting Option Two programs in his school supports this comment.

Only one principal said that time constraints posed a challenge to using Option Two. Bill's concern about time was significant because it illustrated a challenge to using curriculum reform policies that the literature identifies (Lashaway, 2003). Bill's description of his daily tasks reflects Lashaway's (2003) depiction of the principal as "superleader" (p. 2). He clearly described the difficulties to managing the responsibilities of an instructional leader with the routine "housekeeping" matters, as he puts it, that take him away from focusing on Option Two. Bill explained,

I'm dealing with housekeeping items, discipline, things like that, so, those things keep you from focusing on things like Option Two. Teaching and learning, it's hard. Finding time to devote to that is not easy and it's becoming more and more difficult. (Personal interview, February 28, 2008, p. 11).

Bill also felt that NCLB testing requirements impacted his use of Option Two because he had to devote more time than ever to preparing for the administration of the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA). He characterized the HSPA as a time-consuming endeavor that took the focus away from developing curricula, stating, “How much time do we spend planning for the HSPA? We basically, are very focused [on HSPA]...”

Joshua, the supervisor who worked with Bill also believed NCLB requirements distracted educational leaders from focusing on curricular program development. Joshua felt “things like Option Two often get shunned in favor of things that are concrete like...Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).”

Jane commented on NCLB’s influence on her use of Option Two, describing it as a mechanism that makes educators “narrow [curricula] in scope.” While she did not believe NCLB requirements consumed her time (as was the case with Bill), Jane did believe NCLB is forcing high schools to “eliminate electives and push more math, more science.”

The two other principals who I interviewed in the second round of data collection, Robert and Ellen, did not believe external accountability mechanisms like NCLB impacted their use of Option Two. Robert and Ellen both felt that Option Two programs, intended for senior students, were not impacted by NCLB requirements because students who took the HSPA, a standardized test that juniors must take for NCLB purposes, was administered a year before they were even eligible for Option Two programs.

Successes With Option Two

Despite the difficulties of using Option Two that seven of the eight principals who used the policy presented, there were several success stories. Six of the eight principals who used Option Two felt their Option Two programs had been successful.

According to Bill:

We were successful in all respects, from the students going to college their senior year, to the students who can fulfill their PE requirement through their activities and the senior project. It was a win-win for everybody. Students are heading off to college early. (Personal interview, July 23, 2007, p. 3).

His students apparently got what they wanted out of the program: college credits and fulfillment of class requirements without having to “sit” for the classes. Bill’s approach to keeping his Option Two programs successful has been to put the community at ease by showing how the Option Two students satisfy their graduation requirements.

Jane said, “It [Option Two] has been very positive.” She was more emphatic when she said, “I think it’s [Option Two programs] outstanding. It’s [Option Two] obviously a great opportunity for them [students].” John also considered his Option Two programs to be successful and he called the policy a “formula for being successful.”

Along the same lines, Jim stated, “It [Option Two] is a big plus. It allows kids to do anything they want to do.” Despite his limited use of Option Two, Anthony still believed the college programs he fostered were working. “I think they’re working extremely well,” he stated. He later cited what he believed was a high frequency of participation: “We have approximately 25 to 30 students in the Farleigh Dickinson program. We’ve had these programs probably the last five or six years, so they’ve been successful.”

Rick also mentioned the popularity of his Option Two program as an indicator of success:

We opened the program up to 12 students. We had 40 apply. I had to turn away 38 kids. It [EMT program] was a success because it proved to everybody [it could work]. There's about 40-plus kids there. And there was- no, there was about 50, 55, 60 kids. They said, 'They can only take 12 kids. We thought they were taking all of us.' (Personal interview, November 7, 2007, p. 38).

The local medical center's emergency medical technical trainers had to limit the number of student participants to 12 due to national training regulations. Rick attributed the success of this program to his slow approach to using Option Two. In explaining how he would sustain this program and build on its success, Rick stated: "I know I have to go slow..."

Ellen touted the Option Two programs at Eastern as "awesome" and as "amazing opportunities" for students to take part in experiences that were not available to them in the traditional high school program. She attributed her successes with Option Two to the favorable perception the public in her school community had about the programs. She pointed out:

I think really making a commitment to advertise it, making a commitment to talk about it, making a commitment to talk about it at like our parents' advisory council meetings, really keeping it alive and well and showcasing amazing anecdotes [made Option Two successful]. (Personal interview, November 26, 2007, p. 45).

Robert also thought Option Two programs were successful because they provided students with activities that steered them away from the confines of the traditional high school program and led to accomplishments they might not otherwise have reached. He stated:

The participation in the program [has been successful]. The most obvious thing is the kids that we have in 8th grade that are taking Algebra I that it's a success when we have these kids that can do what they want to do and be able to move through our curriculum faster or higher than they wouldn't have been able to do if that wasn't available to them. (Personal interview, November 26, 2007, p. 50).

The Evolution of Option Two in Eight New Jersey High Schools

It is helpful to examine the evolution of Option Two in each school, including the way in which the participants learned about the policy, the ways they used the policy in their schools and the challenges and successes they faced. Therefore, the data in this section is organized by school. Presenting the data this way will show the reader how Option Two has impacted each school in the study.

North Central High School

Bill from North Central Regional High School learned about Option Two after he attended an NJDOE-sponsored conference. He later obtained information from the NJDOE Web site. The information Bill received was understandable and he was able to identify the NJDOE's intentions for the policy.

Option Two was used at North Central to create independent learning projects. Students worked with professionals in the field during school hours in lieu of taking classes at the school. Bill stated that he planned to use the policy to create innovative learning opportunities, "I want to do that through the thing called 'Course Ahead.' If you have a teacher with a master's, the kids will get a transcript from Georgian Court..."

Bill believed that Option Two opportunities energized his students and that they could enjoy their high school experience more as a result of participating in Option Two programs. He admitted that he had not measured the effect of Option Two programs on

his students, but theorized that tracking participating students' standardized assessment scores over time could inform him about how Option Two impacts student achievement in his school.

Joshua, the district administrator at North Central, felt that Option Two could influence student achievement. Like Bill, Joshua said that Option Two programs motivated students. He also believed that Option Two could enhance the high school's curricular programs by facilitating the development of distance learning opportunities. Joshua envisioned Option Two as a supplement to the slate of courses offered by providing students graduation credit for their involvement in classes via videoconferences.

Bill developed Option Two plans while admitting that the Board of Education is "a little nervous" about the policy. He believed that the fact that his school served a high-achieving student population and is located in an affluent community could explain why the Board was "a little shaky" about the policy, stating that the community's perception was there was less of a need to make changes. His concerns about the Board's perception of Option Two were echoed during the second interview and confirmed by Joshua. Bill intended to counter these objections by "[slowing] down" his plans but insisted that "[Option Two] has been successful."

Bill also expressed concerns about the limited amount of time he had to focus on his Option Two programs. He explained that he often dealt with "housekeeping items" that prevented him from maintaining and developing his Option Two ideas, a challenge that Bill could not foresee resolving very easily.

Eastern Regional High School

Ellen also led a school in an affluent community (DFG J) of high achievers. She learned about the policy from the superintendent in her previous school district. Ellen had a harder time understanding the information she found from the NJDOE, and she did her own research to obtain clarification, stating, “[I] went right to code and statute.” She was able to describe and identify the intentions of the policy clearly and accurately.

Option Two programs were already in place at Eastern Regional when Ellen arrived as principal. She described most of the programs at the school as being related to job internships, independent learning projects, and service learning opportunities. In Ellen’s view, these programs improved her school’s program by enhancing the opportunities for students to take part in career exploration experiences. The superintendent of the district also felt Option Two improved the high school’s program, but for different reasons. Tom felt the policy caused the administrators in the school to examine the curriculum more closely.

Ellen’s school community was supportive of Option Two programs and she pointed out that the school district committed to helping the programs by assigning an administrator to oversee Option Two operations. Ellen had not experienced challenges related to Board or community support, and she was prepared to expand the policy to complement the college programs in which students at Eastern could participate. Tom corroborated her perception of the community’s support for Option Two. Both administrators deemed the programs to be successful. Ellen noted that students benefited from the college courses they have taken, “[Students] are walking out of here with 15 credits essentially. That’s awesome.”

Western High School

Jane at Western High (DFG A) was hoping to expand Option Two, but she recognized that community support may have been lacking for her ideas: “You get in other embedded urban districts where the parents are dysfunctional, they’re not there...” Having the community back her plans was her biggest challenge to expanding Option Two. Nevertheless, Jane used the policy to create three different types of programs in her school: off-site college classes, off-site community college classes, and job certification programs. These programs were successful, according to Jane who stated, “I think [Option Two] has been very positive.”

The other challenge to using Option Two was her recent budget problem. Unlike any of the other principals in my study, Jane confronted looming budget cuts that she feared could make it difficult to sustain the Option Two programs in her school.

Jane learned about Option Two from her superintendent. She was one of four participants who had learned about the policy from her superior. She understood the policy and was able to identify its intentions clearly.

Like the other four principals who I asked about Option Two’s influence on student achievement, Jane believed that Option Two could promote enthusiasm in students. Jane saw the potential for Option Two to motivate “average kids” who may not have responded to traditional curricular programs with the same excitement they brought to the Option Two programs.

The guidance supervisor at Western High also believed Option Two could impact student achievement, but Stephanie believed the policy had potential to improve study

skills. She also said that the college programs created by Option Two had the potential to help students develop effective organization tools for their post-secondary schooling.

South Central Regional High School

Three of the sites I visited to collect my data were schools in the middle of the socioeconomic scale. One of these schools was South Central Regional High School. Robert, the principal, described the policy and clearly understood its intentions. He learned about Option Two from his superintendent.

Like Ellen at Eastern Regional, Robert inherited Option Two programs when he assumed the job of principal at South Central. The school used the policy to facilitate off-site college and community college class experiences. Robert described the successes of these programs, pointing out that “[kids] are getting an opportunity to get out of the building and take college classes” and some students were able to graduate from community college before completing their high school studies.

Robert believed that Option Two provided students with “more options” for suitable learning experiences. Better “fitting their needs,” Robert stated, led kids to be “happier, healthier...” The district’s guidance supervisor, Michael, also felt that Option Two had this influence on student achievement. From his vantage point, Option Two’s college programs provided “formats” that worked better for students who didn’t “flourish” in high school.

Unlike his peers, Robert did not identify lack of community support as a challenge to using Option Two. Parents in the South Central Regional school community felt that Option Two was “beneficial to their children.” “No one,” Robert stated, “ever said, ‘this is stupid. What are you doing?’”

Robert did struggle with how to use Option Two to meet needs of particular students who approached him with ideas that did not seem to meet the criteria for Option Two programs according to the language of the policy. Robert believed that “Kids... they want to do something... you just can’t [help] them to do it because it doesn’t fit.”

Southeastern High School

The third school I studied that was located in an affluent community, Southeastern High School (DFG I), used Option Two to allow students to work with professionals in the field and to take college classes. John, the principal of the school, started using the policy to create these programs after he learned about it from the superintendent in his district. Unlike Bill and Ellen, John learned about the policy directly from his superior. He had a good understanding of Option Two and was able to identify its intentions.

John’s school community was hesitant to accept Option Two. He stated:

I think people were not believing in the option, it wasn’t a credible option to some...I think by virtue of the culture of the community, it’s not clear to everyone that it’s [Option Two] institutionally credible... Their concept would be you sit with people who are poets in a classroom, as opposed to sitting with them in a coffee bar...in the public perception; I think it [Option Two] creates a credibility issue... (Personal interview, September 23, 2007, p. 33).

John made it clear that his community did not embrace Option Two programs. For him, the challenge to using the policy was generating enough enthusiasm among the students and parents to take part in Option Two programs. He had success with the policy and he relayed one story in which he helped improve a “dysfunctional” second-year student’s academic experience by placing him in an Option Two job internship. The young man

completed the internship and found it to be a more “fitting environment” in which to learn.

Shore High School

On the other end of the affluence spectrum was Shore High School (DFG A). Rick, the principal of Shore learned about Option Two the same way that Ellen at Eastern Regional had learned about the policy: from colleagues in their previous districts. These colleagues provided them with their introduction to Option Two and they then learned more through NJDOE memoranda and other resources on the agency’s website. Rick understood the policy’s intentions and he was able to describe it in detail.

Option Two was used at Shore to create one program: a job certification class that provided students who complete the course with emergency medical technician certification. Like Bill at North Central Regional, Rick wanted to establish a relationship with Georgian Court College. Through the “Course Ahead” program he hoped to have teachers become certified college instructors so seniors at Shore could take classes for college credits via Option Two. The only obstacle Rick expected was the Board’s lack of support for Option Two. “Convincing the Board to approve the program” is what Rick thought stood in the way of expanding Option Two in his school. He did think that the program was a success, citing the large number of students who volunteered to participate in the program.

Northeastern High School

The backing of teachers, parents and the Board of Education was a problem for Anthony at Northeastern High School. When asked to identify the challenges to using

Option Two he said, “One of the challenges is getting staff to buy into it. The district. The Board of Education.” Nevertheless, Anthony was able to sustain existing Option Two programs that included off-site community college classes to students.

Northeastern allowed its students to take classes at Hudson Community College. Anthony had a plan to use Option Two in the future. He said, “I could see it helping us with some more of our vocational programs as well as some academic programs.” He described ideas for using the policy saying, “I’d like to see more corporations getting involved, bringing students to do some hands-on training in their businesses.” When asked if he saw success with Option Two in his school, Anthony replied, “I think [the programs] are working. I think they’re working extremely well.”

Anthony also learned about Option Two from his predecessor. In fact, this was the only vehicle through which he learned about the policy. He indicated that the NJDOE did not send him any information during his time as principal at Northeastern. Despite obtaining all of his information from this one source, Anthony was able to describe Option Two accurately and he correctly identified the policy’s intention.

Southern High School

The eighth participant who used Option Two was Jim from Southern High School. Jim learned about Option Two from his superior, the assistant superintendent in the school district. He believed that the information he received was clear and he had no problems with the way in which learned about the policy. He stated, “The information delivery system is not the problem.” Like everyone else who used Option Two in this study, Jim was able to describe the policy and he understood its intentions. He used his knowledge to create the widest variety of programs among the participants in this study.

Five types of Option Two programs were implemented at Southern: off-site college classes, distance-learning college classes, job internships, independent learning projects, and service learning projects.

Jim was the only principal to identify “bookkeeping” as a problem with Option Two. For Jim, keeping track of the college courses students were taking through Option Two and checking to make sure the courses meet the criteria of South High School were the challenges he encountered with the policy. Nevertheless, Jim exclaimed, “Option Two is a big plus.” He clearly believed that Option Two was serving his school and its students well.

Summary

My first research question sought to identify how nine principals learned about Option Two and how, if at all, they understood the intent of the policy. My research findings showed that seven of the principals in this study initially obtained information about Option Two from sources other than the NJDOE. Only one of the eight principals, Bill, learned about Option Two by obtaining information directly from the agency. The other seven leaders had to get the information on their own, either by using the NJDOE website or by speaking with other administrators in the school district and leaders in other school districts.

Principals are on the front lines of putting Option Two in place and making sure policy regulations are followed. Section C of the law states:

The principal shall certify completion of curricular activities or programs based upon specified instructional objectives aimed at meeting or exceeding the Core Curriculum Content Standards. (NJAC 6A: 8-5.1).

Yet, policymakers shared Option Two information with principals inconsistently.

Fortunately, the eight principals who I interviewed in the first round of my data collection found ways to make sense of the policy and understood its intent. Eight of the nine principals I interviewed accurately described the intent of Option Two. Eight of the nine principals provided descriptions of Option Two. My findings suggest that the information that was available to all of the principals in my study was sufficient to provide them with enough background to use the policy.

In my second research question, I sought to understand how eight of the nine principals in my study used Option Two to create curricular programs. Five of the nine principals in my study used the policy to create a variety of programs. The other three principals used Option Two to create just one program in their schools: one created a job certification program, one offered college courses to students and the other crafted an independent learning project program. The majority of the principals used Option Two to forge relationships with local two or four-year institutions of higher education. Six of the eight principals who used Option Two allowed students to participate in courses at these institutions.

My findings also suggest that the responsibility of overseeing the management of Option Two programs in the high schools I visited fell mostly on the shoulders of the principals. District administrators played a part in implementing Option Two, but my findings illustrate that their primary roles were to connect the high school with external agencies that might offer Option Two programs or to process paperwork (e.g., applications, communications to home) related to the programs. My findings also indicated that teachers did not play any part in facilitating Option Two programs.

Together, all of the district administrators and eight of the nine principals in my study used Option Two to create five of the 11 types of learning experiences the NJDOE intended the policy to promote. All of the Option Two programs that were created in the schools in my study were facilitated off-site. None of the programs involved learning experiences in the school buildings.

Only one of the nine principals did not use Option Two. The one principal who did not use the policy said that this was because he did not know anything about Option Two and did not have any colleagues to present him with information about the policy. Principals like Dave who are not fortunate enough to have colleagues aware of Option Two may never know about the policy unless they receive some kind of communiqué from the NJDOE.

Those who used the policy said they believed it was improving school programs. The findings from the four schools I examined more closely showed three consistent trends: First, Option Two was used, or has the potential to be used, as a vehicle for students to become more enthusiastic about their learning. Second, Option Two was used, or has the potential to be used, to improve student's skills. Third, Option Two was used, or has the potential to be used, as a mechanism that can force educators to think about curricular programs in nontraditional ways. These findings addressed my third research question that sought to understand how principals used Option Two to leverage school improvement.

The last research question in my study asked how principals perceived the successes and/or challenges from using Option Two. In terms of challenges to using the policy, none of the participants referred to policy-sharing as an obstacle. (I will discuss

the way the NJDOE has distributed Option Two information in chapter 5 because I do believe it is a problem.) Dave's experience indicated that other high school principals in New Jersey might not know about Option Two because they had not received any information about the policy and no one in their school district had either received or shared information.

The principals in my study did confront challenges that included a lack of community support and Board of Education support, accommodating students who had particular ideas for using Option Two, and a lack of personnel resources to help maintain Option Two programs. Only one principal indicated that a lack of fiscal resources was a problem.

Six of the eight principals who used Option Two felt their programs were successful. The majority of them said they believed Option Two impacted their students in positive ways. Two of the principals did not mention successes with the policy during the interviews.

The findings that I presented in this chapter led to the following implications: a) the two urban high school principals I interviewed did not learn at all about Option Two from anyone in their school districts; b) Option Two was used minimally in the less advantaged schools in my study and more extensively in the affluent schools in my study; c) teachers were never involved in using Option Two in any of the schools in my study; d) the principals in my study did not use Option Two to create any on-site programs, including interdisciplinary, themed, magnet, or co-curricular programs.

I will discuss these implications, explain how my research contributed to the literature, and present recommendations to the NJDOE and New Jersey high school principals in chapter 5.

Chapter V

Discussion, Implications for Practice and Recommendations

In this chapter I discuss the implications of my findings, the contributions my study makes to the literature, and the recommendations I make based on the results of my study. The first part of the chapter presents my analysis of the findings that have implications for the way Option Two is communicated to New Jersey high school principals and used in schools throughout the state.

The second part of this chapter connects the significance of my study to the literature I reviewed in chapter 2. I explain how my research fills the gaps I identified in my review of the literature and how it supports prior research.

The third part of this chapter includes my recommendations for the NJDOE and high school principals. I use my findings to suggest how the NJDOE can make Option Two more effective for high school principals in New Jersey and how principals can be successful with Option Two programs. I make additional recommendations for further research in the last part of the chapter.

Discussion

Two urban principals I interviewed, Dave and Rick, did not learn about Option Two from any of the colleagues, predecessors, or superiors in their school districts. There was a difference in the way the principals in the less advantaged and wealthier schools in my study received information about Option Two. I will also point out that the less advantaged and wealthier schools in my study used Option Two differently. The data

illustrates that less advantaged districts used the policy minimally, if at all, while the wealthier districts used the policy to create multiple programs for their high schools.

Teachers were not part of the Option Two implementation process in any of the schools in my study. I will explain why I believe this was the case, and I will point out the importance of involving teachers in using Option Two in the future.

The data from this study shows that all of the Option Two programs that the eight schools in my study created were facilitated off-site. The NJDOE provides examples for using Option Two that include the creation of “interdisciplinary or theme-based programs...co-curricular activities, magnet programs, student exchange programs...” (NJAC 6A: 8-5.1.II, p. 1). None of the principals in my study used Option Two for these purposes. They did not take full advantage of a policy that was intended by its authors as a means to reform curricula programs that take place on school grounds. I will discuss what I believe was the principals’ reticence to using Option Two to create programs that teachers could have deemed a threat to their own programs. I will also explain why I believe principals focused on using Option Two to develop off-site programs instead of on-site programs.

Urban School Principals Did Not Learn About Option Two From Anyone in Their School Districts

The two urban school principals I interviewed, Dave and Rick, did not learn about Option Two from anyone in their school districts. Dave did not learn about Option Two at all. Rick obtained information about the policy from colleagues in the suburban district he worked in prior to assuming his role as principal at Shore High School. The high school principals from the six suburban communities and one rural community in my

study did acquire Option Two information from other administrators within their school districts.

The NJDOE did not provide the information directly to seven of the nine high school leaders I interviewed. In most cases, the information was provided instead to the central office staff. It was incumbent upon the superintendents or assistant superintendents to pass the information along to the principals if the policy was to be considered for implementation in the district's high schools.

It was clear that the district administrators who worked with Rick and Dave did not share Option Two information with them. Rick used Option Two to create a single program, thanks to his prior knowledge about the policy garnered from outside his district, whereas Dave did not have the opportunity to use the policy because he had no knowledge of it at all. My findings point to a disparity between the way the urban school districts shared Option Two information with their high school principals and the manner in which the districts in the suburban and rural school districts in my study distributed policy information.

My concerns regarding the lack of access to policy information in urban schools are reinforced by a recent study by the Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement. The study examined how urban high schools used policy information to improve school programs. The results of the study indicated there was "limited availability" of policy information and it proved to be a barrier to improving the schools' programs (Lachat & Smith, 2005, p. 6). The findings of my study support the Lachat and Smith (2005) study; it was evident to me that the urban school principals I interviewed were not offered any access to Option Two information.

I believe that it is especially important for urban high school principals to receive information directly from the NJDOE about Option Two on a regular basis because Option Two offers so many opportunities that can benefit children in these schools. In his interview, Dave pointed out the potential benefits of Option Two in an urban community when he discussed the diverse opportunities urban centers have to offer.

The NJDOE has a strong history of working to close the achievement gap between the less advantaged and wealthier schools in New Jersey (Doolan, 2004). I believe that my study's findings expose a gap in the way high school principals are using a potentially powerful policy because of the different ways in which they are learning about the policy. Later in this chapter, I make a recommendation to the NJDOE that can help alleviate this gap and promote the use of Option Two in urban schools.

High Schools in Affluent Communities Used Option Two More Extensively Than High Schools in Less Advantaged Communities

I believe that the two urban schools in my study used Option Two narrowly or not at all because policy information was ineffectively shared. Option Two was not used at all at City High School and was used very minimally at Shore High School. Obviously, Dave could not use a policy about which he had no awareness.

Rick used Option Two to create a job certification program. Perhaps he did not use the policy to create other programs such as job internships or independent learning projects because he did not believe his efforts would be supported; after all, none of his colleagues or superiors in the district had discussed Option Two with him. Rick expressed very specific concerns that his Board of Education would not fully support his Option Two programs. Perhaps district administrators were discouraged to promote

Option Two because of the Board's feelings about the policy. I recognize that Rick did not say he felt unsupported by his colleagues or superiors, and this is an inference I made from the data. A further study of how Option Two was applied by urban high school principals might expand on my inference; such a study could ask these particular principals whether or not they felt they were supported by their district colleagues and superiors.

Overall, the four high schools in my study that were located in DFG A or B communities either used Option Two in singular fashion or not at all. The five high schools in the wealthier DFG E-I communities used Option Two in myriad ways. I believe there is a stark difference in the way less advantaged and wealthier schools used Option Two and this difference should be investigated in future studies of Option Two.

Principals Did Not Empower Teachers to Create Option Two Programs

Most of the programs the NJDOE suggests Option Two be used to create were not implemented in the schools in my study. For instance, there were no traces of interdisciplinary or theme-based programs, co-curricular or extra-curricular activities, or magnet programs (NJAC 6A: 8-5.1).

Another trend that emerged from my findings about how principals used Option Two suggests that none of the eight principals in my study who used the policy created programs that directly involved the schools' faculty or classes held in the school building. All of the programs created by the principals involved institutions outside the schools, including colleges, local businesses, regional training programs, or other schools that provided distance-learning opportunities.

I believe that one reason why the principals in this study may not have implemented Option Two programs such as interdisciplinary units that require teacher involvement could have been that they did not want to risk demoralizing teachers by adding more job tasks to their already busy schedules. Implementing Option Two programs that did not require teacher involvement shifted the burden elsewhere.

The notion that Option Two could be perceived as a job threat to teachers might be another reason the principals in my study did not involve teachers in application of the policy. Two district administrators in my study expressed their belief that teachers would have a problem with Option Two programs in the school because of job security concerns.

Although they did not expressly mention it, I believe the principals were also concerned about requiring their teachers to take on more job responsibilities. Teachers' time is limited and in most cases their days are confined to teaching, supervision, and planning (Zederayko & Ward, 1999). The recent increase in testing requirements mandated by NCLB has directly and indirectly required teachers to spend more time preparing and implementing assessments and less time being involved in other instructional activities (American Teacher, 2008). Using Option Two to create interdisciplinary, themed, or magnet programs would have required teachers to collaborate on the planning of additional units that could engage students in projects that integrated more than one content area.

The eight principals who used Option Two may have recognized that their attitudes and behaviors were critical to maintaining teacher job satisfaction (Goldberg &

Proctor, 2000). They may not have wanted to risk political capital with the teaching staff by alienating them or by discouraging them for the sake of using the policy.

Thus, Option Two was implemented using a top-down approach to decision-making. Principals did not engage teachers in the process of using the policy other than the district administrators who helped them. Had the teachers been empowered to use Option Two, the policy might have been used more extensively in the schools in my study.

I believe that giving teachers ownership over the Option Two program-building process would have refuted the concerns principals expressed about involving their teachers in using the policy. Principals could have entrusted the teachers in their schools to creatively devise exciting interdisciplinary, themed, or magnet programs in such a way that made them feel that Option Two programs could co-exist with their own curricular programs.

In my opinion, these empowered teachers would have crafted their own curricular programs with these concerns in mind if they were given the responsibility and authority to create programs with Option Two. Option Two programs could have been created without having to supplant existing curricular programs or require extensive amounts of time for planning and implementation.

Principals Did Not Take Full Advantage of Option Two

Prestigious reports touted deregulation as a means to improve school performance (Fuhrman & Elmore, 1995). Educational theorists and policymakers believed that flexibility led to autonomy and this was an incentive for schools to reform their programs (Purkey & Smith, 1983). Option Two clearly does not include rules or regulations for use

in schools other than to identify who should be held accountable for maintaining the policy.

Principals were given wide authority to use the policy to create innovative curricular programs in their schools. Three of the principals I interviewed acknowledged that the language of Option Two was vague and two of these principals appreciated the vagueness of the policy because it gave them leeway to create innovative curricular programs. Why, then, did not the principals in my study take advantage of the vagueness of the policy language to extensively reform their school programs?

I believe that the principals in my study shied away from using Option Two to build interdisciplinary, themed, magnet program, or co-curricular programs in their schools for two reasons. First, I believe the principals were discouraged from using Option Two to create any programs that would upset teachers. Second, I believe the principals were discouraged from using Option Two to a greater extent because they would have to hire additional staff, purchase additional materials, or other needed resources.

I noted earlier that principals did not involve teachers with Option Two because they were concerned that staff would feel threatened by policy programs and because the principals believed the teachers would be overworked by additional responsibilities related to Option Two. Two district administrators confirmed that workload was an issue that affected implementation of Option Two. These administrators stated that teachers in their school districts felt threatened by Option Two and were concerned about additional responsibilities. As I explained in the last section, principals could have empowered their teachers to create innovative curricular programs and thus used Option Two to its fullest

potential. Instead, Option Two programs were left to the community to help facilitate. All of the programs these principals created were rooted in the community.

Creating new curricular programs in a school sometimes requires additional funding. At a time when schools have to cut costs, finding the funds to expand programs like those that Option Two could create may be hard to do (Hu, 2008). In fact, lack of funding was mentioned by one principal in my study as a challenge to using Option Two. She explained that she could have used Option Two more extensively but the fiscal crisis she was attempting to manage curtailed her efforts to expand her use of the policy. The other principals I interviewed did not raise the issue of funding Option Two programs, but I suspect this problem stifled their motivation to create programs on-site. I recognize that my theory is based on the statement of only one of the nine principals in my study. I suggest that further research in future studies validate my perspective by asking principals if funding influenced their use of Option Two.

The Study's Contributions to the Literature

My study contributes to the literature on curriculum reform policy articulation, curriculum reform policy implementation, the effects of curriculum reform on school programs, and the conditions necessary for using curriculum reform policy effectively.

Contribution to the Literature on Curriculum Reform Policy Articulation

According to the literature, curriculum reform policy has not been clearly communicated to school leaders (Ball, 1997; Finley, 2000; Fuhrman, 1993; Gregg, 1992; O'Day & Smith, 1993). My research does not entirely support this assertion. Even though the NJDOE did not provide information to the nine principals in my study on a regular

basis, most of the information that was received (either directly or indirectly) was understandable. The eight principals who did receive information about Option Two were able to describe the policy accurately even when the information provided to them was not clear or coherent.

My review of the literature revealed that the way in which a policy is written affects a school leader's ability to understand the policy, including the way its provisions are explained, the language of the policy, and the focus on purpose of the policy (Brodkin, 1990; Conley, 2003; Crowson, 2003; Firestone, Fuhrman et al., 1990; Goertz et al., 1996; Hill, 2006; Johnston & Moore, 1990; Yanow, 1996). The results of my study do not fully support the findings of the literature on curriculum reform policy clarity and policymaker understanding.

In the case of Option Two, the NJDOE was able to provide information that, despite its ambiguity and incoherence, was understood by high school principals. The NJDOE may have intended to keep Option Two's language vague and ambiguous. The policy was described by two of its authors as a "backdoor" option to working around aspects of the New Jersey high school graduation requirements and as a "way to get out of the suffocating framework of NCLB" (D. Hespe, personal communication, April 17, 2003; B. Librera, personal communication, April 2, 2007). In keeping with the authors' intentions, it would make some sense that the language of the policy omits specific guidelines for its use.

The results of my study signify that these high school principals are, like other school leaders, not able to see clarity and coherence in curriculum reform policy

language. The results also indicate that high school principals can understand policies despite the problems with how those policies are articulated and disseminated.

Contribution to the Literature on Curriculum Policy Implementation

Despite the vagueness of the language of Option Two, all but one of the participants in my study, Dave, interpreted the goal of Option Two as the policy's authors intended. These results are different than the findings in the literature, which indicated that the way reform efforts are put in place in schools differs from the intent of policy makers (Clever, 1997; Croissant, 1991; Dana, 1992; Goertz, 2001; Goldman & Conley, 1994, 1998; Meyer, 2006; Shepherd, 2001; Standerford, 1993; Swanson, 1990; Wilson, Rossman, & Adduci, 1991). Even though the principals in my study did not use Option Two to the fullest extent possible, they did utilize the policy somewhat as the NJDOE hoped it would be used—to create alternative learning experiences as exemplified in NJAC 6A: 8-5.1.II.

The Effects of Curriculum Reform Policy on School Programs

It was apparent from my findings that Option Two can be used as a lever for school improvement. All of the principals and school district leaders with whom I spoke about school and student achievement in the second round of data collection described the ways Option Two helped students develop important skills, garner more interest in their studies, and improve the schools' curricular programs.

Much of the literature on the effects of reform policies on school programs focuses on the ways in which teachers influence the policy's implementation in the school. This is because prior studies looked at reform programs that relate to instructional

practice at the classroom level (Cohen, 1990; Goldman & Conley, 1994; Jennings, 1996; Pliska, 1997). The Option Two programs created or not created in the schools in my study depended on the principals for implementation and were facilitated outside the classroom.

My findings contribute to the literature on the effects of curriculum reform policy on school programs by illustrating how a curriculum reform policy (Option Two) that fosters the creation of programs outside the classroom positively influences schools programs.

The Conditions Necessary for Using Curriculum Reform Policy Effectively

The eight principals who used Option Two in my study did not find lack of policy clarity and coherence to be obstacles to their successful implementation of Option Two.

My study informs the literature by showing the importance of community support in implementing curricular reform policies. Building strong relationships with the community can “make or break” a school reform program (Porter & Soper, 2003). The eight principals in my study who used the policy knew this, and their attention to parents and the members of their boards of education was, in their estimation, what made them successful with their use of Option Two.

Recommendations for The New Jersey Department of Education

My review of the literature found that this is the first study of Option Two. I make three recommendations to the agency based on four observations that emerged from the results.

*Recommendation #1: Present Option Two Information to High School Principals
Consistently and Focus on Urban School Principals*

I observed that only one of the eight principals in my study received information about Option Two from the NJDOE. The NJDOE should distribute information annually to New Jersey high school principals. School administrators currently receive annual information about other policies related to matters such as district mentoring plans for first-year teachers and district professional development plans from the agency. The department should also send paper memoranda or email communiqués to principals each year in order to ensure the consistent dissemination of Option Two policy information. One principal, Jane, did suggest the Internet: “To me, the best way to get information is to get on the Web site” (Personal interview, July 24, 2007, p. 13). Regardless of the method of communication, the NJDOE should keep high schools principals consistently and regularly apprised about Option Two.

According to my study, one principal, Dave, did not know about Option Two at all. Dave, an urban high school principal, was not provided any information about Option Two from colleagues or superiors. Rick, the other urban principal in my study, did not learn about the policy from the colleagues or superiors in his district. He learned about Option Two from peers in the suburban district he worked in prior to coming to Shore High School. Particularly notable in my findings is that there was no dissemination of information about Option Two in the urban schools in my study. The NJDOE should focus its information sharing efforts on the state’s urban high schools. I explained why I believe the principals in urban schools did not learn about the policy, and it was clear that

there was a disparity between the way Option Two information was shared in suburban districts and urban districts.

Urban principals like Dave might take advantage of the policy if they know about it. In the interview, Dave said he wanted to see "...places that have it working" (Personal interview, August 12, 2007, p. 22). Rick also suggested that principals get together to share ideas about Option Two. He stated:

Let everybody talk to each other. Create a forum where we all meet and say, 'What are you doing and how did you do it? What were your obstacles?' (Personal interview, November 7, 2007, p. 40).

The Reinventing High Schools Conference was an effective way for at least one principal to learn about Option Two. Collaborative discussions about reform can enable leaders to "form knowledge and skills by focused...interactions with learning peers..." (Kemp, 2005, p. 1). Bringing New Jersey's high school principals together to talk about Option Two could not only enhance their knowledge about the policy, but also energize them and motivate them to use the policy (Zimmerman & Jackson, 2003).

There are 63 urban school districts in New Jersey (NJASA, 2008). The NJDOE should consider holding a conference, similar to Reinventing High Schools, that specifically brings together urban high school principals so they could learn about Option Two and collaboratively discuss how they can use the policy in their schools.

Recommendation #2: Provide Greater Support to Less Affluent High Schools so They are Encouraged to Use Option Two More Extensively

I observed that the wealthier schools in my study used Option Two more extensively than the less advantaged schools used the policy. The NJDOE should recognize that principals in schools situated in socioeconomically challenged

communities have different needs. For instance, principals in less advantaged schools may have a greater need to attend to NCLB requirements than principals in wealthier schools. As a result, the NJDOE should help principals in less affluent communities understand how they can use Option Two without compromising other curricular programs that might interfere with the implementation of Option Two.

The agency could develop communiqués that provide suggestions for using Option Two in ways that would not conflict with the demands principals may be facing. For instance, there may be ways in which principals could use Option Two to develop interdisciplinary programs in their schools that actually serve to better prepare students for the standardized tests they have to take. The NJDOE should provide concrete examples of programs Option Two could create that serve multiple purposes, including preparation for the assessments NCLB has emphasized.

Recommendation #3: Encourage Principals to Use Option Two to Develop Interdisciplinary, Themed, Magnet, and Other Curricular Programs On-Site

I observed that the principals in my study did not use Option Two to create interdisciplinary, themed, magnet, or other curricular programs on-site. Option Two was intended to be a “backdoor” option that allows students to satisfy high school graduation requirements (J. Doolan, personal communication, April 24, 2003; D. Hespe, personal communication, April 17, 2003). Despite its intended purpose, the principals in my study did not use the policy to create most of the programs listed in the policy’s language. The NJDOE should make a concerted effort to encourage principals to take advantage of this reform policy by addressing the two issues that I believe contributed most significantly to

the limited use of Option Two in the schools in my study—concern about teacher perceptions of the policy and lack of funding.

I recommend that the NJDOE work with the New Jersey Education Association, the largest teacher’s union in the state, to develop helpful ideas about how Option Two could be used by teachers to enhance their existing programs without supplanting them. The two organizations should also create guides that provide suggestions for principals about how they can manage new Option Two on-site programs efficiently, without having to overburden teachers in the school. Doing this may alleviate teacher concerns and provide principals with more confidence about building Option Two programs in their schools.

I also recommend that the NJDOE provide specific suggestions about how principals can fund Option Two programs that are facilitated on-site. For instance, the agency could distribute a memo or establish a website that provides information about public or private grants that could fund on-site programs. The NJDOE should help principals be resourceful by sharing ideas with them that could support expensive on-site programs. Encouraging principals to creatively find money to support their Option Two program ideas may motivate them to create these programs in their school buildings.

Recommendations for New Jersey High School Principals

I make four recommendations in this section that serve to provide high school principals with ways to create Option Two programs or build on existing ones they have already forged with the policy.

Recommendation #1: Involve Teachers in the Development of Option Two Programs and Take Advantage of What Option Two has to Offer

I learned that teachers were not involved in any of the Option Two programs that were implemented in the schools I studied. Option Two could have been used to create innovative curricular programs with the cooperation of teachers in the schools in my study. The principals in my study could have taken advantage of the vagueness of the language of Option Two to create interdisciplinary, themed, magnet, and co-curricular projects. With the help of teachers, innovative ideas could have been realized.

Empowering teachers to develop curricular programs has been proven to promote school reform (Henson, 1996; Levine & Alan, 2007; Seed, 2006). Principals should heed the literature on teacher empowerment and school reform by engaging their teachers in development of Option Two programs.

Principals should start by meeting with their teachers to explain the intention of Option Two and share the example curricular programs that are listed in the policy's language. The principals should also work closely with the local teacher's union to establish guidelines for using Option Two that frame the teachers' development of policy programs. Guidelines should address the concerns two of the district administrators believed teachers have about using Option Two, including anxiety about job security and additional job responsibilities.

As follow-up to these meetings, teachers should be afforded planning time during the school day to develop their programs. I recognize that funding Option Two programs, particularly during the planning stages, may be a challenge for many principals, so I suggest that teachers be given release time from their classes or other duties so they can

work on their Option Two programs without having to be compensated monetarily. The teachers' programs should be implemented after they have been carefully developed and assessed for viability. Option Two programs devised and facilitated by teachers should be celebrated and recognized by principals. These new additions to the school's curricular programs should be advertised and touted as the innovative practices the NJDOE wants them to be.

Option Two enables principals to create innovative curricular programs. The policy was created when New Jersey imposed standards that lent structure to curricular programs for the first time. The NJDOE intended Option Two to help principals innovate despite the standards (J. Doolan, personal communication, April 24, 2003). New Jersey's high school principals should take advantage of the legislation by brainstorming with the professionals who work with children on the front lines—teachers. Teachers who feel empowered to develop curricula will likely bring all kinds of wonderful ideas that the principals had not previously considered (Petty, 2007). Putting Option Two in teachers' hands can alleviate the concerns they may have about the policy and lead to creative ideas that can further schools' improvement.

Recommendation #2: Find Cost-Effective Ways to Use Option Two

I observed that Option Two was not used to the fullest extent in any of the schools in my study. I believe lack of funds to support Option Two programs on-site was one of the reasons why principals were discouraged from using the policy. I recognize the current state of fiscal affairs for schools in New Jersey and suggest that principals find creative ways to avoid having to hire extra personnel, pay teachers to develop curricula, and purchase additional materials (Chen, 2008; Hu, 2008).

Principals should consider adjusting teacher schedules to accommodate Option Two programs that require supervision so they do not have to hire extra staff. For instance, two teachers may be able to merge classes in order to create an available supervised time slot for an additional Option Two-related class. Principals and teachers may also be able to find ways to create Option Two programs that do not require supervision. For example, a teacher could be placed in charge of supervising a student research project that the student can work on in the school library. Such a project would not require the services of the teacher during regular class time. The student would work independently in a learning space already supervised by the school's librarian.

I would also suggest that principals provide teachers with release time from their classes to develop Option Two programs. It would likely be less costly to hire a substitute teacher to supervise a classroom while the regular teacher uses the day to develop the curricular programs than it would be to pay the teacher to work extra hours after the regular day.

Finally, I recommend that principals try to make do with the materials and other learning resources they already have in their schools to support Option Two programs on-site. Existing textbooks could be used as learning tools for interdisciplinary programs. Library materials could serve students who are involved in co-curricular programs such as research projects that are related to existing content-area classes.

Principals should also consider soliciting community organizations to donate materials that could support Option Two programs. For instance, local manufacturers could provide used equipment that students who are involved in magnet programs could use to learn about certain trades. Nearby medical institutions could team with health

supply representatives to provide schools with equipment that could be used to supplement an Option Two magnet program focused on healthcare occupations.

Recommendation #3: Maintain an Effective Public Relations Campaign

Several of the principals in my study indicated lack of community support as a challenge they faced to using Option Two. Option Two programs can be implemented effectively as long as there is backing from the teachers, parents, students, and the local Board of Education. Principals who want to sustain the successes of their Option Two programs or who want to expand existing programs will need to maintain an effective public relations campaign that touts Option Two programs as important elements of the school's curricular program. Those principals who sensed a lack of community support would be advised to launch a public relations campaign.

One important aspect of a public relations campaign that should not be overlooked is verbal advertising—word of mouth. Principals can rely on students to present positive experiences about Option Two programs in which they are involved. Ellen used “word of mouth, having students talk about their experiences to the next group [of students]” to increase interest in the programs (Personal interview, November 26, 2007, p. 51).

Showing the local community the importance of Option Two programs can establish and reinforce the foundation upon which principals can build new and innovative curricular experiences using the policy. As four of the participants in my study explained, the school community may not feel completely comfortable about Option Two. It is incumbent upon the principal to allay concerns about the new learning activities produced by the policy in order to maintain or expand its use. Inviting visits to

“open houses” by reluctant members of the school community can generate interest, support, and ideas for other programs that might be developed under Option Two.

Recommendation #4: Rely on the District Administrator to Help With Implementing the Policy

As Bill’s case shows, lack of time can be an impediment to tapping the full potential of Option Two. Even though he used the policy in various ways, he still wished he had the time to expand the programs in his school. Bill could have benefited from more help from Joshua, the district administrator.

Managing time is a difficult task for a principal (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1999). Not managing time effectively can spread the principal thin and keep him or her from being an effective instructional leader (Dwyer, 1986; Sarason, 1996). Connolly (2007) referred to the principal as a “butterfly on speed pills who... can’t devote sustained attention to anything” (p. 33). Bill and other principals like him who want to attend to using Option Two more extensively should be cognizant of the roles their district supervisors or superintendents can play in helping them implement Option Two.

Delegating responsibilities to other colleagues can be one solution to the problem of not having enough time for instructional projects that Option Two can support (Brown, Corkill, & Tucker, 2006; Rooney, 2007). New Jersey high school principals should share the responsibilities of working with the Board of Education, managing with paperwork, and overseeing other “housekeeping” chores that Option Two programs may require. Finding the best model for role sharing was outside the scope of my study, but my findings do indicate the need for principals to find ways to allocate some of the duties of

implementing Option Two to other leaders in the school district. District administrators should be available to assist them in their quest for support from peers and colleagues.

Recommendations for Future Research

My study was limited in that my sample consisted of only nine schools. My research was just a snapshot of how high school principals in New Jersey are learning about, understanding, using, and confronting the challenges related to Option Two. I recommend that further research be conducted about Option Two. There are 343 high schools in the state of New Jersey. The voices of other principals should be heard so that the NJDOE can obtain a more comprehensive review of Option Two. My study involved extensive interviews that elicited rich data, albeit from only nine principals. There may not be enough resources to allow for interviews of the principals of all 343 high schools in the state. Other means of collecting data may need to be considered if such a thorough study is to be conducted.

In addition to expanding the breadth of high schools included in a future study similar to the present one, I also recommend that further research be conducted to determine which principals are using Option Two. Interview questions for principals identified as using the policy should compel them to cite examples that support statements about whether or not Option Two led to school improvement. Member checks can include follow-up questions that work to elicit these examples. School leaders in my study did not specify in their statements exactly how Option Two led to school improvement. A future study of Option Two should shed more light on the responses I

received about the use of Option Two as a lever for improvement so that these responses can be corroborated with evidence of improvement.

Not all of the school leaders in my study discussed the impact, if any, that NCLB requirements had on their use of Option Two. Interview questions in a future study should strive to elicit more responses and greater details about the pressures principals, especially those in less advantaged schools, may be experiencing to prepare their students for standardized tests. Questions should also ask principals how funding influenced their use, if at all, of Option Two.

Additional interview questions in a future study should also work to elicit responses from principals that I may not have been able to gather from the participants in my study. My role as a researcher from Teachers College and my prior role as a principal who used Option Two successfully may have kept the principals I interviewed from providing information about Option Two because of a lack of trust or a concern that I would have an opinion about their responses. The NJDOE should pay special attention to reactivity, a threat to the validity of this study, when conducting a future study involving principals.

Results from such a future study, compounded with the results of the current study, could inform the NJDOE about how well promotion of the policy is faring and whether opportunity for improvement exists. How frequently is Option Two being applied in New Jersey's high schools? The answer to this question could determine the NJDOE's next steps as it considers further research and whether or not to implement the suggestions I proposed earlier in this chapter.

Conclusion

My study's findings indicate that Option Two is a curriculum reform policy that New Jersey high school principals can use to benefit their curricular programs and their students. School leaders can enhance childrens' learning experiences by creating curricular programs that allow them to work with professionals outside the boundaries of the school walls, take college classes off the secondary school campus, and work with and in the community through service learning projects. They can foster and improve important skills that students will need in order to function well beyond the confines of secondary school. They can redefine their curricular programs for nontraditional students who could thrive when given the opportunity to participate in alternative learning experiences.

Unfortunately, the principals in my study did not use Option Two to the fullest extent. Students did not benefit from interdisciplinary or themed programs, or any other curricular programs the NJDOE suggests be developed on-site. My study concludes that Option Two can improve school programs, but the NJDOE must do more to promote greater use of the policy.

The NJDOE must do more for principals in less advantaged school districts. These principals must receive information about Option Two on a regular basis directly from the NJDOE. These principals must also be encouraged to use the policy despite possible pressure placed upon them to meet external accountability expectations such as those generated by NCLB. The NJDOE should also provide funds specifically for Option Two programs in less advantaged schools. I believe that one reason all of the principals I interviewed may not have used Option Two fully was because they simply did not have

the fiscal resources to hire personnel, such as additional teachers or quasi-administrators, who could help coordinate Option Two programs.

In sum, the findings of my study suggest that principals want to use Option Two, and they should use Option Two because it can leverage positive change. Regardless of the obstacles that stand in their way, eight principals in my study saw how Option Two could promote positive change in their schools through the creation of alternative learning experiences. Four of the nine principals I spoke with in the first phase of my research mentioned plans for using Option Two in the future.

The recommendations I made in this chapter are intended to help the NJDOE and New Jersey's high school principals implement Option Two successfully. I made three recommendations to the NJDOE and presented four suggestions to high school principals who are considering using Option Two. My recommendations are based on the findings of this study, and, if heeded, they could expand the use of the policy in some schools and put the policy in place for the first time in other schools.

Additional recommendations for improving the implementation of Option Two could arise from further studies of the policy. My study focused on 9 of the 343 high schools in New Jersey. A survey should be conducted to assess the frequency of use of Option Two so that the NJDOE can determine how it is promoting the policy and how its promotion efforts could be improved. Results of the survey may also illustrate the level of interest high school principals have in Option Two programs. The NJDOE can then conduct a more thorough study of Option Two by incorporating some or all of the suggestions for further research that I made earlier in this chapter. The agency may yet find affirmation in its belief that Option Two is a potentially powerful change agent that

can lead to the creation of alternative learning experiences for high school students that might not otherwise be available to them.

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Appendix A- NJAC 6A: 8-5.1 (Option Two)

Below is the exact language of the policy commonly referred to as Option Two.

This policy is the subtext of the legislation that governs graduation requirements in New Jersey Administrative Code 6A: 8-5.1

ii. The 110-credit requirement set forth in (a) above may be met in whole or in part through program completion as follows:

(1) District boards of education may determine and establish [a set number of] curricular activities or programs aimed at achieving the Core Curriculum Content Standards for promotion and graduation purposes.

(2) Curricular activities and programs may be organized around an interdisciplinary model based on themes involving the Core Curriculum Content Standards, such as the following:

(A) Arts and Humanities;

(B) Business and Information Systems;

(C) Mathematics, Science, and Technology; or

(D) Health and Human Services.

(A) Curricular activities and programs may involve in-depth experiences linked to the Core Curriculum Content Standards, such as interdisciplinary or theme-based programs, independent study, co-curricular or extra-curricular activities, magnet programs, student exchange programs, distance learning opportunities, internships, community service, or other structured learning experiences.

(B) Programs and appropriate assessments shall be planned for individuals and/or a group based on specific instructional objectives aimed at meeting or exceeding the Core Curriculum Content Standards.

(C) The principal shall certify completion of curricular activities or programs based upon specified instructional objectives aimed at meeting or exceeding the Core Curriculum Content Standards.

Appendix A- NJAC 6A: 8-5.1 (Option Two) continued

(D) Group programs based upon specific instructional objectives aimed at meeting or exceeding the Core Curriculum Content Standards shall be approved in the same manner as other approved courses.

(E) Individual programs based upon specific instructional objectives aimed at meeting or exceeding the Core Curriculum Content Standards shall be on file in the local district and subject to review by the Commissioner or his or her designee;

(3) District boards of education may utilize performance or competency assessment to approve student completion of programs aimed at meeting or exceeding the Core Curriculum Content Standards at the secondary level, including those occurring all or in part prior to a student's high school enrollment;

(4) District boards of education may recognize successful completion of an accredited college course that assures achievement of knowledge and skills as delineated in the Core Curriculum Content Standards or includes learning that builds on and goes beyond the standards.

Appendix B- Interview Protocol for the Nine Principals

The questions below are part of my interview protocol (one aspect of my data collection). Questions are grouped by topic and are aligned directly with my research questions.

Warm-up

1. How many years have you been working in education? What roles have you had?
2. How many years have you been a principal at the school? Why did you decide to become a principal?
3. What have been the greatest joys and challenges in being a principal?

Topic A: How principals learn about Option Two

4. How and when did you learn about Option Two? How did you feel about it at first?
5. How did the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) inform you about Option Two? When was that? How did you feel about it? What were you thinking initially?
6. Did any other state agency or professional organization inform you about the policy? If yes, which ones? If no, why do you think they didn't? What would have been helpful in terms of learning about the policy from them? Why?
7. Was the information you received clear? Helpful? What else could have been more helpful?
8. Was the language used in the explanation of the policy understandable? Was anything unclear?

Appendix B- Interview Protocol for the Nine Principals continued

9. How else would you (past or present) like to receive information about the policy? Why? How might this be beneficial?
10. What questions do you have about the policy at this point and time?

Topic B: How principals describe and understand Option Two

11. How would you describe Option Two? What does it mean to you?
12. What do you think is the purpose of Option Two? What is your understanding of it?
13. How do you think Option Two should be used? Why? How, if at all, is this similar to or different from what you see as the State's intentions? Can you provide any examples?
14. How well do you feel you understand the policy? What would help you to understand it better? Have you told anyone about this? Why or why not?

Topic C- Creating Option Two programs

15. Can you describe for me any programs have you may have created with Option Two? How do you feel the programs created by Option Two are working in your school?
16. How long have you used Option Two? What has your experience been like?
17. What, if any, program challenges does your school currently face? Examples?
18. How have you used Option Two to solve these program challenges (if relevant)? Why did you choose to use Option Two to solve these program challenges?

Appendix B- Interview Protocol for the Nine Principals continued

19. How, if at all, have Option Two programs in your school satisfied other programming needs you have previously identified? What were those needs? How has it helped? Why or why not?
20. How do you think principals in other schools are using Option Two to create programs? Examples? How do you think it's working for them? For their schools?

Topic D- Successes and Challenges principals face when using Option Two

21. What have been the major challenges, if any, you have faced as you create programs in your school using Option Two? Can you give me some examples? Do they still exist? How do you handle them? How's that working for you?
22. How do you feel you have managed these challenges? Examples?
23. What would help you manage these challenges more effectively? Have you asked for help? From whom? How did that work out?
24. What successes have you had using Option Two? Can you give me some examples? What would you consider to be a major success?
25. Why do you think you were successful with Option Two?

Closing

26. Are there any other comments you would like to make? Is there anything I haven't asked you about in relation to the policy that you think is important for me to know?
27. What is your overall assessment of Option Two?
28. Do you have any recommendations for the NJDOE regarding Option Two?

Appendix B- Interview Protocol for the Nine Principals continued

29. Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix C- Interview Protocol for the Four Principals

The questions below are part of my interview protocol for the second round. They served to cull more information about Option Two from four principals in my study who used Option Two. This protocol assisted my research by providing a deeper understanding of the concepts and themes that emerged from the first set of data I collected.

Warm-up/Member Checking

1. Thanks very much for our last conversation. How has your school year been going since I spoke to you last?
2. I would like to share my interpretation of what I learned from you during our last conversation/interview. Could you please review my preliminary learning's and comment on the information I have included here?

Topic A- The role district administrators play implementing Option Two

I would like to learn more about how the role district office administrators have played in using Option Two has influenced your use of the policy.

3. Could you describe the role district administrator may have played, if any, in your implementation of Option Two?
 - a. What role, if any, do you expect the district leader to have in implementing Option Two?
 - b. Was this role helpful?
4. How would you describe the district leader's understanding of Option Two?

Topic B- The influence of Option Two on school improvement

Appendix C- Interview Protocol for the Four Principals continued

I am also interested to learn how you may have used Option Two to leverage school improvement, if you did at all. Do you have a question about my use of the word “leverage?”

5. Do you believe Option Two can be used as a vehicle for school improvement?
6. Can you describe any resistance to the curriculum improvements you made that may have been lessened due to the presence of a state policy (Option Two) that was designed to facilitate curriculum improvement?
 - a. External accountability demands (e.g. HSPA, NCLB) are certainly ever-present realities for principal and school district administrators. Can you describe how, if at all, these contributed to resistance to the curriculum improvements you made?
 - b. In what ways, if any, did Option Two enable you overcome this resistance?
7. Can you describe how, if at all, the school’s budget influenced your use of Option Two?
8. Can you describe how, if at all, you will measure the influence Option Two may have had on student improvement? On school improvement?

Topic C- Successes and challenges with Option Two

9. Last time we talked you said your Option Two programs were going well. Are they still successful? If yes, why do you think they are still successful? If no, why haven’t they been successful since we last spoke?

Appendix C- Interview Protocol for the Four Principals continued

10. Last time we talked you also identified a challenge to using Option Two. Does this challenge still exist? If yes, could you describe the challenge(s)?
- a. What, if anything, have you have done to resolve the challenge?
 - b. How, if at all, did the challenge influence your use of Option Two?

Closing

11. Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix D- Interview Protocol for the School District Leaders

The questions below are part of my interview protocol for the district leaders in my study and were included in the third round of interviews. The questions served to examine how school district leaders described their roles in the implementation of Option Two and how they described their perspectives of Option Two.

Warm-up

1. How long have you been a school district leader? How long have you served in your position in this school district?
2. As a school district administrator, do you have any responsibilities for curriculum supervision at the high school?

Topic A- District leader's role implementing Option Two

As you know, I am conducting research for my dissertation that focuses on how schools interpreted and used Option Two that went into effect in 2002.

3. From your perspective as a district level administrator, what do you believe is the purpose of Option Two?
4. What role, if any, do you think is appropriate for a district administrator to play in the implementation of Option Two?
5. What do you think the principal expects your role to be in the implementation of Option Two?

Topic B- The influence of Option Two on school improvement

6. What observations do you have about the way the high school principal (name) utilized Option Two?

Appendix D- Interview Protocol for the School District Leaders continued

- a. Can you recall a specific example or incident in which the principal used Option Two in this way?
 - b. What do you think were the principal's objectives in using Option Two in this manner?
 - c. If Option Two had not been available, do you think the principal would have been able to achieve the same outcome(s)?
7. What political factors do you think were influenced by the realization that Option Two was a state-approved vehicle for curriculum improvement? For school improvement?
 8. What other factors do you think were influenced by the realization that Option Two was a state-approved vehicle for curriculum improvement? For school improvement?
 9. Do you believe that the principal viewed Option Two as a vehicle for school improvement?
 10. How would you characterize the school board's awareness and involvement, if any, in the use of Option Two as a vehicle for school improvement?
 11. How would you characterize the parent reaction to the use of Option Two to effect improvements in the high school curriculum? Improvements in school programs?
 12. How would you characterize the community reaction to the use of Option Two to effect improvements in the high school curriculum? Improvements in school programs?

Appendix D- Interview Protocol for the School District Leaders continued

13. How would you describe the success(as), if any, the high school has had with Option Two?
14. What challeng(es), if any, do you think the high school has encountered with Option Two? How, if at all, do you think the high school has overcome these challenges?

Closing

15. Is there anything else you feel I should know about the use of Option Two that I have not already asked about?
16. Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix E- Data Collection DFG Explanation

The memo below comes from the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE, 2006). It explains the District Factor Group (DFG) process and the means by which districts are identified by a particular DFG.

Executive Summary

The District Factor Groups (DFGs) were first developed in 1975 for the purpose of comparing students' performance on statewide assessments across demographically similar school districts. The categories are updated every ten years when the Census Bureau releases the latest Decennial Census data.

Since the DFGs were created, they have been used for purposes other than analyzing test score performance. In particular, the DFGs played a significant role in determining the initial group of districts that were classified as Abbott districts. Additionally, subsequent to the *Abbott IV* court ruling, the DFGs were also used to define the group of school districts on which Abbott v Burke parity remedy aid would be based.

The DFGs represent an approximate measure of a community's relative socioeconomic status (SES). The classification system provides a useful tool for examining student achievement and comparing similarly-situated school districts in other analyses. The DFGs do not have a primary or significant influence in the school funding formula beyond the legal requirements associated with parity aid provided to the Abbott districts.

In updating the DFGs using the data from the most recent Decennial Census, efforts were made to improve the methodology while preserving the underlying meaning of the DFG classification system. After discussing the measure with representatives from school districts and experimenting with various methods, the DFGs were calculated using the following six variables that are closely related to SES:

- 1) Percent of adults with no high school diploma
- 2) Percent of adults with some college education
- 3) Occupational status
- 4) Unemployment rate
- 5) Percent of individuals in poverty
- 6) Median family income.

Unlike the model used to create the DFGs based on the 1990 census data, this model has omitted population density as a relevant variable. The same statistical method (principal components analysis) was used to determine districts' relative SES. The method used to group the districts into DFG categories was also the same.

A number of methodological decisions were made to avoid classifying a school district in an inappropriate DFG category. First, communities in which there were fewer than 70 respondents to the Census questionnaire are omitted. Second, school districts in which more than half of the school-aged population is enrolled in non-public schools were not classified in a DFG. Both of these limitations are consistent with methods used in the previous DFG report. Third, school districts' DFG ratings are adjusted to account for students who are part of sending-receiving relationships and, as such, live in other communities. This is the first time that such a method has been used. Note that since students' characteristics are counted in the school district in which they attend school, non-operating school districts do not receive a DFG classification.

Appendix E- Data Collection DFG Explanation continued

It has been suggested that the Decennial Census data may not accurately reflect the demographics of enrolled in a district's schools. Despite this concern, the census data are used for two reasons. First, experimentation with other data demonstrates that there are no viable alternatives to the census data. Second, considerable research suggests that community characteristics, not only an individual's characteristics, are relevant in terms of the impact of demographics on student performance.

Additionally, a small number of school districts have experienced exceptionally rapid enrollment growth in the past few years. It is possible that, despite having similar socioeconomic backgrounds, students who have lived in a particular community for a shorter period of time may not perform as well as their peers who have not recently been relocated. Some caution should be exercised when comparing student performance in such districts to others.

Appendix F- Data Analysis- Emic Code Matrix

These matrices illustrate the relationships among the research questions and the emic codes that were used during the data analysis phase of my research. These in vivo codes were derived from the respondents' answers.

Bill, Principal of North Central Regional High School (July 23, 2007)

Category	Code	Abbreviated Code For Text
1. Learning about Option Two	"How policy was learned"	DHHPL
	"Source of policy information"	DHSPI
	"NJDOE informational role"	DHNJDOE
	"Clarity of policy information"	DHCPI
2. Understanding Option Two	"Description of policy"	DHDP
	Interpretation of policy intent"	DHIPI
3. Using Option Two	"Reason for using policy"	DHRUP
	"Use of policy to create programs"	DHPP
	"Research and use of policy"	DHRP
	"Assessment of policy programs"	DHAP
	"Local values' impact on policy implementation"	DHLV
4. Success and Challenges to Using Option Two	"School community reaction to policy"	DHSCRIP
	"Successes with policy"	DHSP
	"Sustaining successes"	DHSS
	"Challenges with policy"	DHCP
	"Resolution of challenges"	DHRC

Bill, Principal of North Central Regional High School (February 28, 2008)

Category	Code	Abbreviated Code For Text
1. Learning about Option Two	"How policy was learned"	DHHPL
2. Understanding Option Two	"Description of policy"	DHDP

Appendix F- Data Analysis- Emic Code Matrix continued

3. Using Option Two	“Reason for using policy”	DHRUP
	“Use of policy to create programs”	DHPP
	“District administrator role implementing Option Two”	DHADMIN
	“Expectations of role of district administrator”	DHEXPECT
4. Option Two as a lever for school/student improvement	“Option Two potential to improve student achievement”	DHACHIEVE
	“Option Two potential to improve student programs”	DHIMPROVE
	“Influence of NCLB on Option Two”	DHNCLB
	“Use of data to measure Option Two’s influence on student/school improvement”	DHDATA
5. Success and Challenges to Using Option Two	“Teacher reaction to Option Two”	DHTEACH
	“Time as a challenge to using policy”	DHTIME
	“Student reaction to Option Two”	DHSTU
	“Successes with policy”	DHSP

Joshua, Supervisor of Social Studies at North Central Regional High School district (March 3, 2008)

Category	Code	Abbreviated Code For Text
1. Perspective of Option Two	“How policy was learned”	BSPL
	“Interpretation of policy intent	BSIPI
	“How policy is used to create curricular programs”	BSPP
	“How principal is using”	BSPRINCUSE
	“Use versus intent”	BSUVI
	“School community needs impact on use”	BSCNIU
2. Role in the Implementation of Option Two	“Role in curriculum”	BSCURR
	“Role in Option Two implementation”	BSROLE
	“Expectations of role of principal”	BSEXPECT
	“Expectation principal has for	BSPRINC

Appendix F- Data Analysis- Emic Code Matrix continued

	district administrator's role in Option Two implementation"	
	"Expectations of role of other district administrators"	BSADMINS
3. Option Two as a lever for school/student improvement	"Option Two potential to improve student achievement"	BSACHIEVE
	"Option Two potential to improve student programs"	BSIMPROVE
	"Influence of NCLB on Option Two"	BSNCLB
	"Option Two influence on political factors in the school community"	BSPOL
4. Success and Challenges to Using Option Two	"Board reaction to Option Two"	BSBOARD
	"Teacher reaction to Option Two"	BSTEACH
	"Student reaction to Option Two"	BSSTU
	"Parent reaction to Option Two"	BSPARENT
	"Challenges with policy"	BSCP

Jane, Principal of Western High School (July 24, 2007)

Category	Code	Abbreviated Code For Text
1. Learning about Option Two	"How policy was learned"	MJHPL
	"Source of policy information"	MJSPI
	"NJDOE informational role"	MJNJDOE
	"Clarity of policy information"	MJCPI
	"Opinion of policy"	MJSO
2. Understanding Option Two	Description of policy"	MJDP
	"Interpretation of policy intent"	MJIPI
	"Understanding of policy"	MJU
3. Using Option Two	"Reason for using policy"	MJRUP
	"Use of policy to create programs"	MJPP
	"Use of policy to resolve problems"	MJRP
	"Impact of policy on programs"	MJPP

	Principal's role"	MJPR
	"School community's needs and impact on policy use"	MJSCN
	Community needs and policy use"	MJPERC
4. Success and Challenges to Using Option Two	"School community reaction to policy"	MJSCRP
	"Local values' impact on policy implementation"	MJLV
	"Successes with policy"	MJSP
	"Sustaining successes"	MJSS
	"Challenges with policy"	MJCP
	"Resolution of challenges"	MJRC

Jane, Principal of Western High School (February 28, 2008)

Category	Code	Abbreviated Code For Text
1. Learning about Option Two	"How policy was learned"	MJHPL
	"Source of policy information"	MJSPI
	"Clarity of policy information"	MJCPI
2. Understanding Option Two	"Interpretation of policy intent"	MJIPI
3. Using Option Two	"Reason for using policy"	MJRUP
	"District administrator role implementing Option Two"	MJADMIN
	"Expectations of role of district administrator"	MJEXPECT
	"School community's needs and impact on policy use"	MJSCN
	"Community needs and policy use"	MJPERC
	"Influence of school budget on Option Two	MJBUD
	"Plans for future use"	MJPLANS
4. Option Two as a lever for school/student improvement	"Influence of NCLB on Option Two"	MJNCLB
	"Influence of school DFG on use of Option Two"	MJDFG
	"Option Two potential to improve student programs"	MJIMPROVE
	"Option Two potential to improve student achievement"	MJACHIEVE
	"Use of data to measure	MJDATA

	Option Two's influence on student/school improvement"	
5. Success and Challenges to Using Option Two	"School community reaction to policy"	MJSCRIP
	"Student reaction to policy"	MJSTU
	"Local values' impact on policy implementation"	MJLV
	"Successes with policy"	MJSP

Stephanie, Supervisor of Guidance of Western High School district (March 5, 2008)

Category	Code	Abbreviated Code For Text
1. Perspective of Option Two	"NJDOE informational role"	KSNJDOE
	"Interpretation of policy intent"	KSIPI
	"Understanding of Option Two"	KSUNDER
	"Learning about the policy"	KSLEARN
	"How policy is used to create curricular programs"	KSPP
	"Plans for Option Two	KSPLANS
2. Role in the Implementation of Option Two	"Role in curriculum"	KSCURR
	"Expectations of role of principal"	KSEXPECT
3. Option Two as a lever for school/student improvement	"Option Two potential to improve student achievement"	KSACHIEVE
	"Option Two potential to improve student programs"	KSIMPROVE
	"Influence of NCLB on Option Two"	KSNCLB
	"Expectation principal has for district administrator's role in Option Two implementation"	KSPRINC
4. Success and Challenges to Using Option Two	"Student reaction to Option Two"	KSSTU
	"Teacher reaction to Option Two"	KSTEACH
	"Parent reaction to Option Two"	KSPARENT
	"Challenges with policy"	KSCP

David, Principal of City High School (August 12, 2007)

Appendix F- Data Analysis- Emic Code Matrix continued

Category	Code	Abbreviated Code For Text
1. Learning about Option Two	“How policy was learned”	LMHPL
	“Source of policy information”	LMSPI
	“NJDOE informational role”	LMNJDOE
2. Understanding Option Two	“Knowledge of policy”	LMK
	“Other principals’ use”	LMPERC
	“Interpretation of policy intent”	LMPI
	“Implementation concerns”	LMIC
3. Using Option Two	“History of policy use”	LMHIST
	“Current innovation policy”	LMCIP
	“Programs created with policy”	LMPRO
	“Plans for policy use”	LMPLANS
	“Community needs and policy use”	LMPERC
4. Success and Challenges to Using Option Two	“Perceived successes with policy”	LMSP
	“Perceived challenges”	LMPC
	“Resolution of challenges”	LMRC

Bill, Principal of North Central High School (August 14, 2007)

Category	Code	Abbreviated Code For Text
1. Learning about Option Two	“How policy was learned”	MZHPL
	“Source of policy information”	MZSPI
	“NJDOE informational role”	MZNJDOE
2. Understanding Option Two	“Knowledge of policy”	MZK
	“Other principals’ use”	MZPERC
	“Interpretation of policy intent”	MZIPI
3. Using Option Two	“Principal’s role”	MZROLE
	“Response to student needs”	MZSTU
	“Program creation process”	MZPCP
	“Rules governing programs”	MZRULES
	“Programs created with policy”	MZPRO
	“Plans for policy use”	MZPLANS

	“Community needs and policy use”	MZPERC
	“Use of policy to resolve problems”	MZRP
	“School community’s needs and impact on policy use”	MJSCN
4. Success and Challenges to Using Option Two	“Successes with policy”	MZSP
	“Challenges with policy”	MZCP
	“Resolution of challenges”	MZRC

Anthony, Principal of Northeastern High School (August 21, 2007)

Category	Code	Abbreviated Code For Text
1. Learning about Option Two	“How policy was learned”	ASHPL
	“Source of policy information”	ASSPI
	“NJDOE informational role”	ASNJDOE
	“Clarity of policy information”	ASCPI
2. Understanding Option Two	“Description of policy”	ASDP
	“Opinion of policy”	ASO
	“Interpretation of policy intent”	ASIPI
3. Using Option Two	“History of policy use”	ASHIST
	“Programs created with policy”	ASPRO
	“Adaptation of program for policy”	ASADAPT
	“Plans for policy use”	ASPLANS
	“Other principals’ use”	ASPERC
4. Success and Challenges to Using Option Two	“Successes with policy”	ASSP
	“Challenges with policy”	ASCP
	“Resolution of challenges”	ASRC

John, Principal of Southeastern High School (September 29, 2007)

Category	Code	Abbreviated Code For Text
1. Learning about Option Two	“How policy was learned”	JOHPL
	“Source of policy information”	JOSPI
	“NJDOE informational role”	JONJDOE

Appendix F- Data Analysis- Emic Code Matrix continued

	“Clarity of policy information”	JOCPI
2. Understanding Option Two	“Description of policy”	JODP
	“Knowledge of policy”	JOK
	“Interpretation of policy intent”	JOIPI
3. Using Option Two	“Use of policy to resolve problems”	JORP
	“Programs created with policy”	JOPRO
	“Plans for policy use”	JOPLANS
	“Rules governing programs”	JORULES
4. Success and Challenges to Using Option Two	“Successes with policy”	JOSP
	“Challenges with policy”	JOCP
	“Resolution of challenges”	JORC

Rick, Principal of Shore High School (November 7, 2007)

Category	Code	Abbreviated Code For Text
1. Learning about Option Two	“How policy was learned”	RAHPL
	“Source of policy information”	RASPI
	“NJDOE informational role”	RANJDOE
	“Clarity of policy information”	RACPI
2. Understanding Option Two	“Description of policy”	RADP
	“Interpretation of policy intent”	RAIPI
	“Other principals’ use”	RAPERC
	“Opinion of policy”	RASO
3. Using Option Two	“History of policy use”	RAHIST
	“Reason for using policy”	RARUP
	“Use of policy to resolve problems”	RARP
	“Use of policy to create programs”	RAPP
	“Response to student needs”	RASTU
	“School community’s needs and impact on policy use”	RASCN
	“Assessment of policy programs”	RAAP
	“Impact of policy on programs”	RAIMPACT

	“Plans for policy use”	RAPLANS
4. Success and Challenges to Using Option Two	“School community reaction to policy”	RASCRP
	“Successes with policy”	RASP
	“Sustaining successes”	RASS
	“Challenges with policy”	RACP
	“Resolution of challenges”	RARC

Ellen, Principal of Eastern Regional High School (November 26, 2007)

Category	Code	Abbreviated Code For Text
1. Learning about Option Two	“How policy was learned”	THHPL
	“Source of policy information”	THSPI
	“Opinion of policy”	THSO
	“NJDOE informational role”	THNJDOE
	“Clarity of policy information”	THCPI
2. Understanding Option Two	“Description of policy”	THDP
	“Interpretation of policy intent”	THIPI
	“Perceived future of policy”	THFUTURE
	“Relationship between policy and politics”	THPOL
3. Using Option Two	“Reason for using policy”	THRUP
	“Use of policy to create programs”	THPP
	“Response to student needs”	THSTU
	“Rules governing programs”	THRULES
	“Management of policy”	THMAN
	“Impact of policy on programs”	THIMPP
	“Impact of policy on students”	THIMPS
	“Use of policy to resolve problems”	THRP
	“Assessment of policy programs”	THAP
	“Local values’ impact on policy implementation”	THLV
	“Plans for policy use”	THPLANS
4. Success and Challenges to Using Option Two	“School community reaction to policy”	THSCRP
	“Successes with policy”	THSP
	“Challenges with policy”	THCP

	“Resolution of challenges”	THRC
	“Principal’s role in sustaining success”	THROLE

Ellen, Principal of Eastern Regional High School (March 5, 2008)

Category	Code	Abbreviated Code For Text
3. Using Option Two	“Use of policy to create programs”	THPP
	“District administrator role implementing Option Two”	THADMIN
	“Expectations of role of district administrator”	THEXPECT
	“Response to students’ needs”	THSTU
4. Option Two as a lever for school/student improvement	“Option Two potential to improve student achievement	THACHIEVE
	“Option Two potential to improve student programs”	THIMPROVE
	“Influence of NCLB on Option Two”	THNCLB
	“Influence of school DFG on use of Option Two”	THDFG
5. Success and Challenges to Using Option Two	“Board reaction to Option Two”	THBOARD
	“Challenges with policy”	THCP
	“Successes with policy”	THSP

Tom, Superintendent of Eastern Regional High School district (March 4, 2008)

Category	Code	Abbreviated Code For Text
1. Perspective of Option Two	“NJDOE informational role”	PRNJDOE
	“Interpretation of policy intent”	PRIP
	“How policy is used to create curricular programs”	PRPP
	“Plans for Option Two”	PRPLANS
	“Perspective on the senior year”	PRSENIOR
2. Role in the Implementation of Option Two	“Role in curriculum”	PRCURR
	“Role in Option Two implementation”	PRROLE

Appendix F- Data Analysis- Emic Code Matrix continued

	“Expectations of role of principal”	PREXPECT
3. Option Two as a lever for school/student improvement	“Option Two potential to improve student achievement”	PRACHIEVE
	“Option Two potential to improve student programs”	PRIMPROVE
	“Influence of NCLB on Option Two”	PRNCLB
	“Option Two influence on political factors in the school community”	PRPOL
	“Board role in Option Two”	PRBDROLE
4. Success and Challenges to Using Option Two	“Board reaction to Option Two”	PRBOARD
	“Teacher reaction to Option Two”	PRTEACH
	“Parent reaction to Option Two”	PRPARENT
	“Successes with policy”	PRSP
	“Challenges with policy”	PRCP

Robert, Principal of South Central Regional High School (December 5, 2007)

Category	Code	Abbreviated Code For Text
1. Learning about Option Two	“How policy was learned”	PLPL
	“Source of policy information”	PLSPI
	“Opinion of policy”	THSO
	“NJDOE informational role”	PLNJDOE
	“Clarity of policy information”	PLCPI
2. Understanding Option Two	“Description of policy”	PLDP
	“Interpretation of policy intent”	PLIPI
	“Other principals’ use”	PLPERC
	“Opinion of policy”	PLSO
3. Using Option Two	“Reason for using policy”	THRUP
	“History of policy use”	PLHIST
	“Use of policy to create programs”	PLPP
	“Response to student needs”	PLSTU
	“Rules governing programs”	PLRULES
	“Management of policy”	PLMAN
	“Impact of policy on	PLIMPP

Appendix F- Data Analysis- Emic Code Matrix continued

	programs”	
	“Use of policy to resolve “problems”	PLRP
	“School community’s needs and impact on policy use”	PLSCN
4. Success and Challenges to Using Option Two	“School community reaction to policy”	PLSCRIP
	“Successes with policy”	PLSP
	“Challenges with policy”	PLCP
	“Principal’s role in sustaining success”	PLROLE

Robert, Principal of South Central Regional High School (February 29, 2008)

Category	Code	Abbreviated Code For Text
1. Learning about Option Two	“Clarity of policy”	PLCPI
2. Understanding Option Two	“Interpretation of policy intent”	PLIPI
3. Using Option Two	“Use of policy to create programs”	PLPP
	“District administrator role implementing Option Two”	PLADMIN
	“Expectations of role of district administrator”	PLEXPECT
	“Rules governing policy”	
4. Option Two as a lever for school/student improvement	“Option Two potential to improve student achievement”	PLACHIEVE
	“Option Two potential to improve student programs”	PLIMPROVE
	“Influence of NCLB on Option Two”	PLNCLB
	“External accountability and Option Two”	PLACCOUNT
5. Success and Challenges to Using Option Two	“School community reaction to policy”	PLSCRIP
	“Challenges with policy”	PLCP
	“Student reaction to Option Two”	PLSTU

Michael, Supervisor of Guidance at South Central Regional High School district (March 3, 2008)

Category	Code	Abbreviated Code
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Appendix F- Data Analysis- Emic Code Matrix continued

		For Text
1. Perspective of Option Two	“How policy was learned”	STPL
	“Interpretation of policy intent”	STIPI
	“How policy is used to create curricular programs”	STPP
	“Plans for policy use”	STPLANS
	“Reason for using policy”	STRUP
2. Role in the Implementation of Option Two	“Role in curriculum”	STCURR
	“Role in Option Two implementation”	STROLE
	“Expectations of role of principal”	STEXPECT
	“Expectations of role of other district administrators”	STADMIN
3. Option Two as a lever for school/student improvement	“Option Two potential to improve student achievement”	STACHIEVE
	“Option Two potential to improve student programs”	STIMPROVE
	“Influence of NCLB on Option Two”	STNCLB
	Option Two influence on political factors in the school community”	STPOL
4. Success and Challenges to Using Option Two	“Board reaction to Option Two”	STBOARD
	“Parent reaction to Option Two”	STPARENT
	“Successes with policy”	STSP

Appendix G- Data Analysis- Etic Code Matrix

This matrix illustrates the relationship among the research questions, the review of literature and the etic codes that were used during the data analysis phase of my research. The etic codes were derived from my review of the literature.

Category (Research Questions)	Literature Review	Code	Abbreviated Code For Text
1. Learning about Option Two	How principals learn about curriculum reform policy	Articulation of policy	AP
		Rate of articulating policy	RAP
		Communication of policy	COP
		Policy language	PL
		Policy interpretation	PI
		Policy clarity	PCL
		Policy coherence	PCO
2. Understanding Option Two	How curriculum reform policy is implemented in schools	Coherence and understanding	CAU
		Policy language and understanding	PLU
		Policy Interpretation and understanding	IAU
		Policy clarity and understanding	PCU
		Intentions of policy	IOP
3. Using Option Two	Effect of curriculum reform policy on curricular programs	Use versus intent	UVI
		Variation of use	VU
		Influence of local needs on use	ILN
		Influence of institutionalism on use	IIU
		Impact of understanding on use	IU

Appendix G- Data Analysis- Etic Code Matrix continued

		Relationship between school needs and policy intent	SNPI
		Use of policy to innovate	UPI
		Use of policy to satisfy school needs	UPSN
		Effect of policy on school program	EPSP
		Effect of policy on instructional practice	EPIP
		Teacher beliefs about reform and use of policy	TBUP
4. Success and Challenges to Using Option Two	Conditions needed to successfully use curriculum reform policy to create programs	Policy articulation and success	PAS
		Policy coherence and success	PCS
		Principals as instructional leaders	PIL
		Principal time constraints and policy implementation	PTC

1 Appendix H- Sample: Informed Consent Letter

2 The letter below was provided to participants before they take part in the interviews.
3
4

5 ***Scott Taylor***

6 www.schoolsalive.com

7 taylor@schoolsalive.com

8 119 Donaldson Street • Highland Park, NJ • 732-317-2788
9

10 INFORMED CONSENT

11 DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH: You are invited to participate in a research study on Option Two that will be
12 used to examine how principals understand and use the policy in their schools. You will be asked to answer a series
13 of questions. Your answers will be audio-taped and transcribed after the interview. The transcripts will be analyzed
14 and included in the final report. Scott Taylor, a doctoral candidate at Teachers College, Columbia University, at your
15 school, will conduct the research.

16 RISKS AND BENEFITS: The risk associated with this study is the sharing of information that you may not feel
17 comfortable sharing, including how Option Two is or is not used in your school and the challenges to implementing
18 Option Two that you may identify during the interview. The benefits of this study include the opportunity for you to
19 share information about Option Two and the opportunity to learn more about Option Two upon completion of the
20 study.

21 You may opt not to participate in this study at any time. While I cannot guarantee that my research will be free of
22 risk, there will be no penalty for removing yourself from the study.

23 DATA STORAGE TO PROTECT CONFIDENTIALITY: I will preserve your confidentiality by not referring to
24 you by name in my study. The tape-recording and transcript will be kept confidential and will only be used for the
25 purposes of this study.

26 TIME INVOLVEMENT: Your participation in this study will take approximately 60-90 minutes.

27 HOW WILL RESULTS BE USED: The results of the study will be used in my dissertation. Data will be presented
28 in writing and at the oral defense of my dissertation that will take place upon successful completion of the study.

29 PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS

30 Principal Investigator: Scott Taylor

31 Research Title: High School Principals' Perspectives of Curriculum Reform Policy: Examining
32 How Nineteen New Jersey High School Principals Relate to Option Two

33 •I have read and discussed the Description of the Research with the researcher. I have had the opportunity to ask
34 questions about the purposes and procedures regarding this study.

35 •My participation in research is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw from participation at any time
36 without jeopardy to future medical care, employment, student status or other entitlements.

37 Appendix H- Sample: Informed Consent Letter continued

- 38 •The researcher may withdraw me from the research at his/her professional discretion.
- 39 •If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which
40 may relate to my willingness to continue to participate, the investigator will provide this information to me.
- 41 •Any information derived from the research project that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or
42 disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- 43 •If at any time I have any questions regarding the research or my participation, I can contact the investigator, who
44 will answer my questions. The investigator's phone number is 732-672-9276.
- 45 •If at any time I have comments, or concerns regarding the conduct of the research or questions about my rights as a
46 research subject, I should contact the Teachers College, Columbia University Institutional Review Board /IRB. The
47 phone number for the IRB is (212) 678-4105. Or, I can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University,
48 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY, 10027, Box 151.
- 49 •I should receive a copy of the Description of the Research and this Participant's Rights document.
- 50 •If video and/or audio taping is part of this research, I consent to be audio/video taped _____. I do not consent to being
51 video/audio taped _____. Only the principal investigator will view the written, video and/or audio taped materials.
- 52 •Written, video and/or audio taped materials may be viewed in an educational setting outside the research _____.
53 Written, video and/or audio taped materials may not be viewed in an educational setting outside the research _____.
- 54 •My signature means that I agree to participate in this study.

55 Participant's signature: _____ Date: ____/____/____

56 Name: _____

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