Elementary accreditation: Pro forma or substance?  
A view from inside the schoolhouse gates

Maryann Johnson Minard

University of New Hampshire, Durham

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Elementary accreditation: Pro forma or substance? A view from inside the schoolhouse gates

Abstract
Since the publication of A Nation at Risk in 1986, educators, government officials and community members have grappled with the unwieldy task of defining effective measures of school improvement. Calls for accountability and improvement resound in the halls of legislatures, the media, and in communities nationwide. The accreditation of schools has served as a conduit for accountability, but has it served as a vehicle for improvement?

This study sought to determine how closely the process of elementary accreditation through the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) aligns with research-based models of effective school change and acts as a leverage point for school reform.

The study focused on determining the impact and value of elementary school accreditation procedures on school improvement initiatives in five elementary schools in the New England States, as reported by school leaders, teachers and support personnel whose schools have participated in the NEASC accreditation process.

Integrating quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches, the study employed a survey and interviews to gather responses to questions designed to explore the relationship between NEASC accreditation research-based models of effective school improvement. The impact of participation in NEASC accreditation on school change efforts, professional inquiry, curriculum, instruction and assessment, community support, and student achievement are reported and analyzed with differences noted by role and school.

Analysis of the survey data revealed that respondents valued participation in the elementary accreditation process and identified it as an effective means of school improvement. Complementarity of results was noted in the data analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data. Significant differences in responses by role were noted, with school leaders attributing more value to the process than teachers or support personnel. Significant differences were identified between schools and were described using a framework (Timar, 1989) adapted to analyze the mode of implementation utilized by each school to accomplish the accreditation tasks.

Recommendations for changes in the accreditation process and suggestions for future research are included in the study.

Keywords
Education, Administration, Education, Elementary
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ELEMENTARY ACCREDITATION: PRO FORMA OR SUBSTANCE?

A VIEW FROM INSIDE THE SCHOOLHOUSE GATES

BY

MARYANN J. MINARD

B.S.E., Westfield State College, 1971
M.P.A., Troy State University, 1988

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
Education

December, 2002
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This dissertation has been examined and approved.

Thesis Director, Todd A. DeMitchell
Professor of Education

Assistant Professor of Education

Superintendent of Schools, York, ME

Assistant Professor of Education

Assistant Professor of Education

Date

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DEDICATION

To my parents,
Geraldine Grady Johnson
and
William Richard Johnson,
members of
the Greatest Generation
whose love, guidance
and many sacrifices
ensured that I was afforded
the rich opportunities
denied to them
by history and circumstance
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In September of 1997, I came to the University of New Hampshire in a quest for knowledge, renewal and challenge. I have found all of those and so much more in the past five years and am truly grateful to those whose wisdom and guidance have been an unwavering source of support as I’ve trekked the uncharted personal path to complete this dissertation. I sincerely thank:

My husband and best friend, Michael P. Minard, for his unconditional love, encouragement, patience and belief that my dream of pursuing a Ph.D. was an attainable one.

My daughter, Megan Elizabeth Minard, who I hope will always have the opportunity to pursue her dreams, and who always seemed to understand the reasons for my quest and the resultant lack of homemade desserts.

My advisor, Dr. Todd DeMitchell, who has generously shared his experience, knowledge, resources, and time with kindness, compassion and personalized attention that astounds me and makes me grateful for his goodness and wise guidance.

Dissertation Committee member, mentor and friend, Dr. Henry Scipione, who models total integrity in public education leadership and whose steadfast advocacy has helped me to find my voice as a leader and a scholar.
Dissertation Committee member, Dr. Casey Cobb, whose mathematical expertise, patience and ability to make complex statistical procedures seem possible permitted me to take the risk completing a quantitative analysis.

Dissertation Committee member, Dr. Ruth Wharton-McDonald, who from our first mutual days at UNH set high standards, encouraged me to pursue an advanced degree, and explained the need for tenacity in this endeavor.

Dissertation Committee member, Dr. Liza Finkel, who asked the hard questions, pushed my thinking and helped me to see that there are no simple answers.

NEASC Director of the Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools and wonderful friend, Dr. David Flynn, who believed in me before I believed in myself and who assisted me in this study by sharing his expertise and granting me access to NEASC materials and meetings.

UNH Professor Emeritus, Dr. Ellen Corcoran, my first UNH mentor who knew so well how to pose the right questions and who sat quietly beside me as I puzzled through the process to find the responses in my own heart.

The UNH Department of Education faculty members, including Dr. Barbara Houston, Dr. Barbara Krysiak, Dr. Michael Andrew, Dr. Thomas Schram and Dr. Charles Ashley, whose courses I have been privileged to attend and who have made my lifelong learning experience at UNH such a joyous one.
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ABSTRACT

ELEMENTARY ACCREDITATION: PRO FORMA OR SUBSTANCE?

A VIEW FROM INSIDE THE SCHOOLHOUSE GATES

by

Maryann J. Minard

University of New Hampshire. December 2002

Since the publication of A Nation at Risk in 1986, educators, government officials and community members have grappled with the unwieldy task of defining effective measures of school improvement. Calls for accountability and improvement resound in the halls of legislatures, the media, and in communities nationwide. The accreditation of schools has served as a conduit for accountability, but has it served as a vehicle for improvement?

This study sought to determine how closely the process of elementary accreditation through the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) aligns with research-based models of effective school change and acts as a leverage point for school reform.

The study focused on determining the impact and value of elementary school accreditation procedures on school improvement initiatives in five elementary schools in the

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New England States, as reported by school leaders, teachers and support personnel whose schools have participated in the NEASC accreditation process.

Integrating quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches, the study employed a survey and interviews to gather responses to questions designed to explore the relationship between NEASC accreditation research-based models of effective school improvement. The impact of participation in NEASC accreditation on school change efforts, professional inquiry, curriculum, instruction and assessment, community support, and student achievement are reported and analyzed with differences noted by role and school.

Analysis of the survey data revealed that respondents valued participation in the elementary accreditation process and identified it as an effective means of school improvement. Complementarity of results was noted in the data analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data. Significant differences in responses by role were noted, with school leaders attributing more value to the process than teachers or support personnel. Significant differences were identified between schools and were described using a framework (Timar, 1989) adapted to analyze the mode of implementation utilized by each school to accomplish the accreditation tasks.

Recommendations for changes in the accreditation process and suggestions for future research are included in the study.
CHAPTER I

GENERAL INFORMATION

Introduction

Excellence cannot be mandated. It cannot be imposed on any institution, nor can participants be coerced into pursuing it. Excellence emerges as a quality of the particular goals and norms chosen, the understandings and expectations created and shared by a group of people. It is the commitments of the participants which is the key. More precisely, institutional excellence is not so much a matter of individual values, as of norms participants share, norms which define the crucially important ethos, the moral order, of a school. The excellence challenge then is a matter of generating an environment conducive to a shared commitment to excellence (Raywid, 1984, p. 14).

Mary Anne Raywid’s words, written in 1984, followed the National Commission on Excellence in Education’s report, *A Nation at Risk* (1983). Raywid’s concept of institutional excellence that arises from shared norms supports the value of mutual reflection and group collaboration, hallmarks of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges’ (NEASC) accreditation process (Commission Handbook, NEASC, 1997). When the 1983 federal report jolted the United States into an era of school reform, it also spurred NEASC to expand its standards-based accreditation process to include public elementary schools. By 1987, nearly 400 New England elementary schools had applied for membership in NEASC, seeking a system for measuring school effectiveness that had “public legitimacy” (Wilson, 1999, p. 28). *A Nation at Risk* concluded that American students were performing poorly in international academic competition, were not
challenged by school curricula, and were not spending enough time on their studies. Since the report was issued, educational communities nationwide have struggled with the question of how to initiate, implement and sustain significant, positive school change (Cushing, 1999).

For nearly twenty years, educators, government officials and community members have grappled with the unwieldy task of defining effective methods for promoting school improvement. Nationally, the challenge of educational innovation has been complicated by state mandates that require compliance by legislating student outcomes, prescribing test measures, monitoring graduation requirements and demanding school improvement plans (Fullan, 1982; Tye, 2000). School system compliance with these requirements is measured through the completion of yearly school improvement plans, and the measure of a successful school, by state standards, is often increased student performance on criterion-referenced tests and norm-referenced measures designed to align with the state’s standards of learning (Bracey, 2001).

Historically buffered from federal intervention in matters of state-controlled education regulations, educators nationwide now face a new challenge with the recent passage of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) (PL 107-110, 2002). This law requires the collection of data on student achievement data collection, disaggregation and reporting to track and report student progress across the United States. It requires states to establish criteria for measuring successful student performance, and it mandates the type of measures that may be used to gauge student learning. The NCLB legislation requires identification of under-performing schools and establishes the rights of students...
to transfer out of a school identified as under-performing. The stakes have historically never been higher for assuring student success through school improvement efforts.

Many New England schools, like their counterparts nationwide, have been thrust into the spotlight, subject to public scrutiny and political dissatisfaction when measurable gains have not been documented through standardized test results (Ludes, 2000; Popham, 2001). Elementary schools in all of the New England states must now expand their testing programs in light NCLBA to document student achievement at multiple grade levels in order to comply with the recent national legislation. Kossakoski (2000) lends insight into the political climate that has fueled the debate on public school accountability:

The constant barrage of negative reports concerning achievement levels in our nation’s schools has led to the belief that mandated testing programs, as an unbiased and powerful method of ensuring that improvement has taken place, must be implemented (p. 2).

School improvement plans, federal reporting requirements on elementary student Adequate Yearly Progress reports for underachieving schools, and local and state data collection and accountability requirements that must be verified by student performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) or other nationally-normed tests are all demands that compete for the limited time and resources of educators. As educators attempt to balance the tasks of designing and delivering effective classroom instruction with the these ever-growing requirements for public accountability and seek to respond to the public cry for sustained school improvement, the challenge of designing quality curricula, implementing effective instructional strategies and assessing the success of these programs can be overwhelming (Bracey, 2001).
School membership in regional accrediting organizations is often recognized as yet another measure of public accountability. Such membership, replete with its own standards and repertoires for determining adherence to those standards, creates additional demands on the time and resources of educators nationwide. In the New England states, 214 public elementary and middle schools hold voluntary membership in the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, a regional accrediting agency committed to using qualitative standards to measure school effectiveness (Appendix A). Schools analyze their effectiveness through the lens of the NEASC standards in the areas of Mission and Vision, Curriculum, Assessment, Instruction, Leadership and Organization, School Resources for Learning, and Community Resources for Learning. Schools seeking accreditation through NEASC must complete an eighteen-month self-study process which requires full staff involvement in reflection and reporting on the school’s level of compliance with the NEASC standards. Each school hosts a three-and-a-half day visiting team on-site evaluation following completion of the self-study. Aspiring member schools agree to address the recommendations that are reflected in the visiting committee’s report and that are included in the accreditation status letter issued by the Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools (Commission Handbook, NEASC, 1997).

Participation in the elementary school accreditation process is time-consuming, demands adherence to a rigorous process of self-study and peer review, and competes for limited resources in an era characterized by increasingly complex demands for accountability. Schools undertake accreditation for multiple reasons. Some wish to obtain validation of their educational practices through peer review. Others seek the
official recognition of the NEASC status of a fully accredited school to improve public
perception of the effectiveness of their organization. Still others use the process as a tool
for cross-school communication, collaboration and reflection on needed changes.

Because research should inform educational practice, in light of the push for
accountability and adherence to standards, this elementary school accreditation process
and its alignment to effective models of school improvement, as documented in
educational research, bears examination. While Flynn (1997) and Cushing (1999) have
conducted studies on the perceptions and attitudes toward New England high school
 accreditation, this study provides the first glimpse of educators’ opinions about the value
of the elementary accreditation process and its impact on school reform efforts.

Purpose of the Study

This study seeks to examine how New England elementary school principals,
teachers, teacher-leaders and support personnel perceive and value participation in the
New England Association of Schools and Colleges’ (NEASC) voluntary accreditation
process as a vehicle for school improvement. It is the first study undertaken on
elementary accreditation in the New England states. This study focuses on determining
the impact and value of elementary school accreditation procedures on school
improvement initiatives in five elementary schools in the New England States, as reported
by elementary school principals, teachers, support personnel and NEASC Steering
Committee Chairpersons whose schools have participated in the NEASC accreditation
The goal of this research is to answer the question, "Do educators perceive that participation in the elementary accreditation process contributes to school improvement in New England schools?" This study will also look at factors that explain differences in the selected groups, such as role and school differentiation.

The Research Questions

This study integrated quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches to gather responses to the following six questions about the impact and value of voluntary participation in NEASC accreditation.

(1) What are the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents about the role of the accreditation process in fostering educational change initiatives within the school and community?

(2) What are the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents about the structure of the self-study processes of accreditation in fostering the development of a community of professional inquiry?

(3) What are the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents about the impact of participation in the accreditation process on the school’s curriculum, instruction and assessment methodologies?

(4) What are the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents about the impact of participation in the accreditation process on the community’s support for the school?
What are the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents about the impact of participation in the accreditation process on efforts to increase student achievement?

Are there differences in the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents, by role and school, about the value of the accreditation process as viewed through these five subsets of change initiatives: professional inquiry; curriculum, instruction, assessment; community support; and student achievement?

Creating a profile of what actually occurs within the schoolhouse gates in elementary schools seeking to obtain and maintain accreditation status is a worthwhile endeavor. By reporting and analyzing the impact of the NEASC's accreditation processes as reported by educators in five New England states who teach in schools of varying sizes with disparate populations, inferences about the value, or lack of value, of elementary accreditation may be made. In an era when the political climate dictates that teacher time and community resources must be effectively expended to improve education for all children, determining the impact of accreditation processes on school improvement efforts will be helpful to schools, political leaders, and the accrediting organizations.

Research Methodology and Data Analysis

Using a survey case study method, including an on-site visit to each location to conduct in-depth interviews and administer a survey instrument, this study documented the responses of educators in five elementary schools within New England which have participated in the NEASC accreditation process between 1994 and 1999. The schools
were selected for their diversity in geographic location, size, student population and socio-economic status.

Quantitative and qualitative methodologies were employed to collect and analyze data. (Miles & Huberman, 1994). While the quantitative data was aggregated by variables and categories, the qualitative data was used to “look for corroborating incidents and disconfirming ones as well . . . to understand these people” (Stake, 1995, p. 76). The integrated use of quantitative and qualitative methodologies in this study was prompted by the researcher’s desire to utilize multiple sources of data to “create a holistic picture, analyze words, write detailed views of the informants, and conduct the study in a natural setting” (Creswell, 1998, p. 15) while employing statistical analysis techniques to the survey data.

Quantitative data were collected through a 27-question survey instrument administered to the teachers, principals and support personnel at the five schools by the researcher. Descriptive statistics were used to portray demographic data. The researcher used the computer software program, Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) to derive statistics of frequency, variability, and central tendency 27 survey questions.

For purposes of analysis, questions numbered 1 through 26 were organized into five subsets corresponding to the first five research questions. The final question, number 27, was not placed within any of the subsets. The subsets were juried by a panel of experts to assess validity and a measure of internal consistency was used to determine the reliability of the subsets.
A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine whether there were significant differences among mean responses by schools and roles for each subset. An alpha level of .05 was used as a threshold for statistical difference. Means for each assertion were also determined and compared via one-way ANOVAs. Follow-up multiple comparisons were used to indicate any pairwise differences. In addition, a post hoc analysis was conducted, grouping principal responses with Steering Committee Chairperson responses. (Each school participating in accreditation selects a teacher-leader to organize and facilitate the school's self-study. In some cases, two faculty members share the responsibility through co-chairmanship.) Combining the responses of principals with teacher-leaders permitted the creation of a school leadership category with sufficient numbers of responses to allow comparisons among the responses from this group and those of teachers and support personnel. The post hoc analysis answered whether the leader associated with accreditation differed significantly in their perceptions and attitudes about NEASC processes from teachers and support personnel along the five dimensions under study.

The second component of the integrated research design involved qualitative data collection and analysis. One randomly selected teacher from each school, the Steering Committee Chairperson, and the principal, all of whom had been employed in the school during the most recent accreditation on-site visit, were interviewed. A set of interview questions (Appendix B) was designed to elicit responses to the "Grand Tour" (Spradley, 1979) question of whether participation in the accreditation process contributed to school improvement. All interviewees were asked the same questions. All interviews were...
audio taped. The tapes were transcribed, analyzed, coded and catalogued by frequency responses. Interview data were analyzed for confirming and non-confirming fit with the quantitative data (Stake, 1995).

Significance of the Study

Scrutiny of public schools is an activity taken up by many. Calls for accountability and improvement resound in the halls of legislatures, the media, and in communities across our nation. The accreditation of schools has served as a conduit for accountability, but has it served as a vehicle for improvement? Since participation in the school accreditation process is time-consuming, requires a serious commitment of funding and energy, and demands adherence to a rigorous process of self-study and external review, the value of this practice should be examined carefully to determine how educators at the elementary school level view its effectiveness and value all components of the accreditation process. The goals of accreditation are achieved primarily through the efforts of those who work inside the schoolhouse gates. Teachers and principals stand at the crossroads of accreditation deciding whether it becomes a perfunctory exercise or a substantive vehicle for improvement.

The research questions posed in this study are designed to reflect current research on models of effective school improvement. How closely does the process of NEASC accreditation align with these research-based models of effective school change and provide accountability to the communities which educate their children in public elementary schools desiring accreditation through NEASC? Since accountability is
pervasive and improvement is required, is accreditation an effective leverage point for school reform?

A review of the literature indicates that there has never been a study conducted on the elementary school accreditation process in New England. The results of this study will provide important insights for elementary schools and school systems deciding whether to participate in the process of voluntary accreditation through NEASC. It will also provide information for state agencies attempting to determine if the elementary accreditation process is perceived as a worthwhile endeavor that should be recognized and endorsed as an effective vehicle for improving education for children. Moreover, it will provide information for state educational leaders as they grapple with establishing effective measures of elementary school success and design systems for implementing systematic school improvement initiatives. And, it will provide information to NEASC’s Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools (CPEMS) and will be of interest to the five other United States’ regional accrediting agencies in determining principals’, teachers’ and teacher-leaders’, and support personnel’s perceptions about the strengths and limitations of the NEASC process in encouraging and supporting school improvement efforts. Such information will be helpful during review and revision of procedures for all United States’ elementary education accrediting bodies, and will also inform the international commissions of each regional accrediting agency.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to a subset of public elementary schools in New England which participate in accreditation through the New England Association of Schools and
Colleges through the Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools.

Generalizations to New England schools at all levels that report to other NEASC accrediting commissions may be precluded. Private elementary schools and public middle schools were excluded from this study because the NEASC standards for these schools differ from those established for public elementary schools.

Because this study was limited to those schools which completed the self-study and on-site visit of the accreditation process within 1994 and 1999, generalizations to all elementary schools accredited by NEASC should be approached with caution.

Nature and Order of Presentation

Chapter I introduced the scope and nature of the study, including the purpose, the research questions, the significance and limitations of the study.

Chapter II provides a review of the literature in the areas of politics and school reform, educational change, and educational leadership. It includes the history of accreditation, the evolution of the NEASC's role in elementary accreditation in relation to the national standards movement, and the precedence for this study.

Chapter III describes the methodology employed in this study.

Chapter IV presents the analysis of the data collected in this study.

Chapter V offers general conclusions of the study, suggests areas for further study, and discusses the implications of the study findings for NEASC member schools and for the NEASC Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools.
Definition of Key Terms

**NEASC.** The New England Association of Schools and Colleges, the agency that employs the processes of school self-evaluation and peer review to oversee the accreditation of schools in New England.

**Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools.** The group composed of 24 individuals representative of member schools' elementary level teachers and administrators throughout the New England states and one public member who formulate the standards, review the visiting committee reports to determine accreditation status of the schools seeking membership in NEASC, and participate in policy-making decisions for NEASC (Commission Handbook, NEASC, 1997, p. 3).

**Accreditation Process.** The ten-year cycle of a schools' self-study, on-site visitation by a team of NEASC educators, and follow-up activities and reports as required by the NEASC Commission (Commission Handbook, NEASC, 1997).

**Accreditation Status.** The rating awarded the school following the review of the visiting committee's report by the members of the NEASC Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools (CPEMS). Accreditation ratings include Accreditation or Continued Accreditation, Accreditation with Warning, Accreditation with Probation, and Denial or Termination of Accreditation (Commission Handbook, NEASC, 1997).

**Accreditation Visit.** The three-and-a-half day on-site visit conducted by an NEASC Visiting Committee at the conclusion of the school's self-study process. (Commission Handbook, NEASC, 1997, p. 9).
Accreditation Report. The document submitted by the Visiting Committee to the NEASC Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools following the on-site visit to assist in the determination of accreditation status by the CPEMS (Commission Handbook. NEASC. 1997. p. 9-10).

Self-Study. The process of analyzing the school’s degree of compliance with the standards of NEASC through the completion of a report with input from all members of the school community about the degree to which the school exceeds, meets or fails to meet the standards.

Educational Reform. The widespread policy changes at national, state and local levels that have been implemented in attempts to improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools (High Standards for All Students. 1994. p. A-8).


Educational Performance Standards. Standards designed to measure the student achievement of content standards through the establishment of indicators for determining levels of student proficiency in a given content area (High Standards for All Students. 1994. p. A-17).

School Improvement. Efforts to reshape the ways “policies, programs and pedagogy are employed to increase student learning and engage educators in analyzing the effectiveness of their teaching practices” (Tye. 2000. p. 3).
Collaboration/Collegiality. Collective actions in which analysis, evaluation and experimentation are based on a common purpose and done in concert with colleagues in the atmosphere of mutual cooperation and shared responsibility (Balke, 1997, p. 5).

Teacher-leaders. For the purpose of this study, teacher-leaders are the teachers who served in leadership roles as Steering Committee Chairpersons for the NEASC accreditation process.
CHAPTER II

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

While learning is a natural activity, it is highly complex and not fully understood. When learning is structured to take place within the context of schooling, its inherent complexity is confounded by the complexity of a social organization. Therefore, in order to improve learning, educators must confront the basically conservative structure of schooling. Because of its essential function of socializing the young, American education tends to be conservative (Cremin, 1976; Webb, Metha & Jordan, 2000). Utilizing leverage points, those places in an organization in which pressure can most efficiently be applied to bring about a desired change, can facilitate school reform. The search for leverage points to apply to schools to improve learning is a large challenge, given the social complexities facing those who see school reform as necessary to prepare students for life in the twenty-first century. But, if society seeks to reform schools, then it is important that these leverage points be identified. Leadership, school culture, increased professionalism, and professional preparation and development have all been suggested as levers (Fullan, 1999; Newman & Wehlage, 1995; Hoy, Tarter & Kottkamp, 1991). The challenge for reform still remains. The search for more levers or levers used in conjunction with each other in a new equation for reform is important.
School reform is not the exclusive domain of educators. However, what happens in the schools is of vital interest to society. The United States Supreme Court in *Meyer v. Nebraska* (1923) wrote, "The American people have always regarded education and the acquisition of knowledge as matters of supreme importance which should be diligently promoted" (p. 393). Furthermore, the Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) opined that, for the State, education is perhaps the most important function of government. Because education is so central to society, government through the political process has applied pressure on the schools to reform. Groups that wish to influence schools typically gain their objectives working through government. Since public schools are a federal interest, state responsibility, and local function, government is a logical starting point for gaining an understanding of whether accreditation is a leverage point for school improvement.

**Politics and Reform**

With the National Commission on Excellence in Education's publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, United States' educators were compelled to examine their practices and face the demands of the American public for "more"—more accountability, more rigorous courses of study for students, more standardized testing, more time on task, more certification requirements for public school personnel (Balke, 1997). Pervasive fears that students were not being prepared for the challenges of life in a modern society or leaving school with the tools necessary for success in the modern workplace drove the political agendas at the state levels to "raise the bar" for public school performance by establishing requirements for accountability that were applied to the existing structure of
school organization (Cuban, 1987). Despite these demands placed on schools by state legislatures, the results of the call to improve the state of public education by enacting increased quality control measures (Coan, 1995) established higher standards for schools, but did little to alter the way in which schools implemented these standards or delivered instruction to students because it failed to establish clear connections between high standards and increased student achievement (Cushing, 1999). Some argue that this “first wave of reform” (DeMitchell, 1992) did not result in significant change because of its inherently political nature.

Reform often fails because politics favor symbols over substance. Substantial change in practice requires a lot of hard and clever work on the ground, which is not the strong point of political players (Fullan & Miles, quoted in Schmoker, p. 1).

“By the early nineties,” stated Cushing, “when it became clear that the first wave of reform did not live up to its promise, a second wave of reform which emphasized restructuring became the main focus of the reform effort” (1999, p. 16). Calling for a “paradigm shift” Goodlad (1987, p. 4) emphasized the need for schools to reduce isolation through multiple interactions among staff, provide leadership driven by knowledge of content and pedagogy, increase teacher and student inquiry, encourage shared decision-making by staff and pay close attention to school culture. The complexity of school change was becoming clearer to those who toiled inside the schoolhouse gates.
The Change Process and Reform

The Complexity of Change

Fullan and Stiegelbauer asserted that "educational change is technically simple and socially complex" (1991, p. 65). It appears that the authors' claim of social complexity is frequently validated in school districts across the nation as educators, politicians and community members grapple with the unwieldy task of school improvement and the challenge to alter educational practices, structures and culture in light of the impact of such changes on all members of the school community.

The technical simplicity of the school change process that Fullan and Stiegelbauer wrote of in 1991 has evolved over the past decade into a more significant challenge to educators as state mandates increasingly call for accountability by legislating student outcomes, prescribing test measures, monitoring graduation requirements, and frequently amending prescribed standards for student learning. Faced with time constraints for compliance to such directives, educational leaders have responded by initiating changes in curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices. In providing professional development opportunities, school systems frequently design straightforward action plans that can be implemented by staff with a focus on the mechanics of documentation, data analysis, and adherence to timelines for adoption of prescribed curricula. However, attending merely to technical compliance and surface level changes ignores the complex human issues that can spell success or failure for school reform efforts (Evans, 1996).

Ensuring that the prescribed standards are being implemented in classrooms across a school district is a challenge that cannot be met through technically efficient processes

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alone. Fullan and Stiegelbauer's concept of social complexity is evidenced by the excruciatingly slow pace of authentic educational changes in instructional practice and the resistance to change that often seems to permeate school cultures. In the turbulent decades following the alarm sounded in *A Nation at Risk*, implementing practices that will effect sustained school change has been proven to be challenging and painstakingly slow.

Describing the nature of change, Robert Evans (1996) wrote:

> Change is not a predictable enterprise with definite guidelines but a struggle to shape processes... Its result is an emerging outcome that will be modified during the process of implementation as internal and external conditions shift, data accumulates and judgment dictates (1996, p. 15).

Using the metaphor of Chaos Theory to frame his description of the challenges facing educators, Evans discussed the social, economic and political forces that have impacted schools and indicated that change cannot be explored without paying attention to the culture of an organization. Schein (1988), acknowledging the importance of attending to an organization's culture, suggested that artifacts are the "constructed physical and social environment" that may provide insight into the culture of an organization (p. 14). As the 21st century dawned on American schools, the dramatic increase in home-schooled students, voucher systems, charter schools and school choice initiatives stand as national artifacts reflecting discontent with the status quo and the desire to alter the educational experiences of children. While most parents and community members believe that their local school provides a positive learning environment for their children, there is a more general perception that public schools in general are failing at worst and mediocre at best (Berliner & Biddle, 1995).
Creating a Community Supportive of Change

Educational change is a complex social process that impacts scores of individuals and requires the development and maintenance of shared values (Sergiovanni, 1994). Schools are a reflection of the political, cultural, social, and economic changes in society and changes schools undertake can be sustained only if multiple constituencies understand and support the changes (Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

The greatest challenge to educational leaders in the 21st century is to foster engagement and commitment from the community of learners, consisting of students, teachers, parents, and citizens (Wagner, 2001). Creating a sense of community is possible when community members share a common purpose for learning. A study by the Claremont Graduate School's Institute for Education in Transformation finds that although the technical focus of curriculum has been perceived as the center of teaching and learning, relationships emerge as the most significant aspect of education (Lambert, 1995). Building and maintaining positive relationships with community members and encouraging collaboration among the members of educational institutions is a complex task requiring skills of effective communication, facilitation and inspiration.

It is by examining the relationship among student, teacher and the subject under study that one can gain an understanding of how students can be encouraged to maximize their learning (Sizer, 1984). Effective schools are unique institutions that reflect their own communities and are effective in motivating students. The heart of reform is the willingness of the students to approach the hard work of schooling with commitment and a sense of responsibility for their own learning. When parents, teachers, and community
cooperate in an environment that empowers and supports student effort, significant, long-term reform is possible (O'Neil, 1995).

Carefully crafted vision and mission statements and communication efforts aimed at defining the community's purpose of education are necessary and inspiring, but are often quickly disregarded in classrooms when teachers confront the fact that striving to meet a community's endorsed vision and mission may require significant alterations to familiar and comfortable practices. Evans (1995), building on Bolman and Deal's (1995) work, acknowledges that change is dependent upon those who must implement it. The nature of change results in conflict, resistance, feelings of loss, and concerns about personal and organizational competency. In order for educational change to take root in instructional practice people must first see change as necessary.

Because teachers are central to operationalizing any changes in their own classrooms, the change process must begin with them. People construct meanings in the context of their own life experiences, thus the change process must begin by "challenging people's view of themselves, their performance and their clients" (Evans, 1995, p. 56). Schein (1988) warns that resistance to innovation is rooted in individual psychology and group culture. Encouraging risk-taking while increasing attention to behavior that violates shared ideals is one way to disconfirm ineffective practices and begin the trek toward sustained change. Such disconfirmation must be balanced by support and recognition of the value of the personnel involved in the work of schools. A sense of loss is inevitable as people relinquish former practices and recognize the personal cost involved in change. Time, continuity and personal contact are the hallmarks of effective support during this
The creation of such changes must be built on the bedrock of teacher understanding—understanding about the nature of change and the impact of change on citizens' beliefs and American culture; understanding about the nature of teaching, learning and student motivation; understanding about the changes in curricular content and methodology. When teachers recognize the level of change that has occurred over the past 25 years, they will recognize that the system of education that has historically served America well is in need of reform. Yet reform alone is not sufficient, educators must reinvent education and they must do so without finger pointing and excuses for poor performance. Indeed, the credo for the Harvard Institute for School Leadership is "No shame, no blame, no excuses." However, adopting such a stance requires trust and it is impossible to ignore what Fink (2000) referred to as the "lens of teachers' lives and work" (p. 132) as they deal with life cycle pressures and possible teacher burnout in the
context of change. Even teachers who are committed to innovation are not immune to the pressures that may dull their appetites for sustained involvement in change efforts.

While Fullan (1993) noted that “change is mandatory, growth is optional” (p. 135), he advocates for focusing on the individual teacher growth as the most effective means of accomplishing systems change. Collaboration and cooperation and carefully planned opportunities for group reflection and analysis are methods that can support such growth. The Cox and deFrees study (quoted in Fullan, 1993) of ten Maine schools involved in restructuring established common elements for successful restructuring that include clear focus, strong systemic organization, effective management of time and people, and state funding to support change (pp. 60-61). Yet real change occurs when individuals learn to think and work independently. By creating personal visions of excellence and recognizing how teachers’ classroom work is connected to a larger purpose brings a “practical and moral meaning to their profession.” (Fullan, 1993, p. 145).

Changing formal structures does not have the same level of impact that changing the culture of an educational organization requires.

Collaboration and Culture as Levers for Reform

The work of changing a school culture must begin with the individual, but can be supported by collaborative groups. Fullan (1999) outlined how “collaborative organizations encourage passion and provide emotional support as people work through the roller coaster of change” (p. 38). Such organizations also foster the sharing of quality ideas about teaching and learning. When educators focus on student learning, discuss original ideas, and share documented best practices, they are participating in a process...
that Fullan declares is essential to school change. Collaborative cultures reflect the complexity of the times and must "foster diversity while trust-building, provoke anxiety and contain it, engage in knowledge creation, combine connectedness with openendedness, and fuse the spiritual, political and intellectual" (Fullan, 1999, p. 37). This is a tall order for educators besieged by time constraints, policies and state mandates, yet such forces outside of the group are inevitable and groups that are internally collaborative will fare better in dealing with outside pressures by using political and moral mobilization and increased knowledge as they design programs. Collaboration is an essential component for change that has lasting impact on student academic achievement (Rosenholtz, 1989).

Collaborative groups that have student work as their focus can encourage teachers to participate in discussions that can validate their individual and collective efforts. Critical Friends' Groups can encourage teachers to study their efforts from different perspectives while posing questions, collecting appropriate evidence and engaging in reflective practice with feedback from supportive peers (Costa & Kallick, 1993).

Reform Efforts as Levers for Student, School and Societal Improvement

Fullan (1999) encourages educators to approach large-scale reform "armed with the sophisticated knowledge that we can turn complexity's own hidden power to our advantage" by utilizing "interaction, quality information and moral purpose" (p. 84) as forces for school and societal improvement.

To enable schools to focus on such important work, an infrastructure that supports change initiatives is imperative. The parameters of effective infrastructure include shared vision, strong communication, a solid system for human resource
development and deployment, the ability to adapt innovations to fit specific needs, and formative evaluation that includes reflection and active research (Ucelli, 1999).

Newmann and Wehlage (1995) identified what they term “Authentic Pedagogy” as essential to sustained school change. Only when school staff establish a clear purpose, take collective responsibility for student achievement and participate in collaborative activities with student achievement as the focus of their collaborative efforts, they assert, will significant change occur. The solution to improved schools, according to Newmann and Wehlage (1995), is in creating circles of support for student learning. Authentic pedagogy is the circle of support with the most intimate connection to the student. It involves instruction based on higher order thinking, substantive conversation with students, deep knowledge, and connections to the world beyond the classroom. This type of instruction is supported by setting and using standards to “steer reform toward the intellectual quality we seek in the classroom” (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995, p. 19).

Authentic pedagogy requires that school staff use standards to reflect on their pedagogy.

A profile of a healthy school includes among its indicators high collegial leadership and high academic emphasis. The healthy school is reflected in the setting of high but attainable goals and the deliberate commitment of students and teachers to academic excellence (Hoy, Tarter & Kottkamp, 1991).

When teachers pursue a clear purpose for all students’ learning and understand the need for institutional integrity, in which the school is shielded from narrow, vested interests of community and parental demands, student learning and achievement can be maximized (Hoy, Tarter & Kottkamp, 1991). The more the school community...
collaborates, the more interesting changes it is able to make. In light of those changes, “the school should seek (not avoid) evaluation data, including information generated through external standards assessment. Such schools seek external standards to test and extend their performance” (Fullan, 1999, p. 47). Newmann and Wehlage found in their 1995 study on successful school restructuring that “internal collaboration extended to encompass the external use of . . . external accountability standards” (p. 47). Schools whose staff members “were motivated to search for help and to draw insights and ideas from external resources about standards and how to put them into practice” were identified by the authors as schools creating a culture that will support sustained change.

Educators in this age of reform must focus on issues of substance. Sergiovanni (1992) posed the questions: “What are we about? Why? Are students being served? Is the school as a learning community being served? What are our obligations to this community? How can we best get the job done?” (p. 129). The value the school organization places on the process of reflection is shaped by the culture of the school and the infrastructure of the organization. Leadership in promoting and supporting change efforts through processes that encourage external review as an aid to reflection requires courage, vision and integrity to publicly acknowledge the challenges of change. Encouraging members of the educational organization to approach reflection and external review with honesty and openness can promote shared responsibility for school change efforts.
Leadership and Reform

Leadership as a Shared Responsibility

As the twenty-first century dawns on America, the notion of a school being led effectively by a single individual is unrealistic, given the number and complexity of the demands on educational institutions. Distributed leadership is the key to success. It takes a paradigm shift to look at leadership in a different way. The role of educational leaders in this new paradigm is “to develop leadership skills across the school community, to assure the accessibility of necessary resources and supports, to promote the overall vision and to retain an appropriate method of accountability” (Newmann & Simmons, 2000, p. 12). Warren Bennis (1999), professor and founding chairman of the Leadership Institute at the University of Southern California, noted, “The more I look at the history of business, of government, the arts, and the sciences, the clearer it is that few great accomplishments are ever the work of a single individual” (p. 315). Building capacity within the organization for all individuals to contribute to “great accomplishments” is, then, an important function of a leader.

The Annenberg Institute for School Reform hosted a panel discussion to reflect on issues facing schools in this new century. It was the group’s consensus that “promoting leadership at all levels that advances the instructional agenda in schools” (Neuman & Pelchat, 1998, p. 733) is a major challenge. Linda Lambert’s (1998) constructivist leadership definition asserts that “leadership is the reciprocal learning process that enables participants in a community to construct meaning toward a shared purpose” (p. 18). This concept of shared responsibility extends beyond the classroom as teachers...
participate in dialogue, mentoring, and professional tasks that Lambert says promote educators' collaboration and support. Sustaining school improvement initiatives requires leadership, and this leadership capacity must be increased in educational organizations.

School districts must create conditions that foster such growth. Staffing schools with educators possessing the capacity and skill to accomplish the tasks of change is an important first step, followed by trust building and a focus on student achievement and adult learning. Designing and supporting a culture of inquiry that includes a cycle of reflection and systematic planning, inclusive governance structures and policies that promote shared decision-making are some of the elements that Lambert urges school districts to incorporate into their plans for school improvement. "We must institutionalize the processes of collaboration and collective responsibility," she urges, to build "the foundation for sustaining school and district improvements" (Lambert, 1998, p. 19).

A Historical Perspective of Effective Leadership

These concepts of shared responsibility and collaborative leadership differ considerably from the public's perception of school leadership. A laundry list of roles has been ascribed to principals as school leaders since the beginning of the 20th century. Spiritual leadership was the primary role of the educational leader of the 1900s, giving way to the authoritarian leader in the 1920s. The efficiency expert was valued in the 1930s, while in the 1940s the democratic leader on the home front was needed and valued. The 1950s focus was on leaders with a scholarly approach, followed by the bureaucrat of the 1960s. The unrest of the 1970s dictated that the educational leader be a humanistic
facilitator, while the 1980s turned to instructional leadership as the primary quality that was valued. As the millennium dawns, spirituality, stewardship and service appear to be the "attributes of choice" that will define leadership effectiveness in the years to come (Scipione, 2000).

While this brief overview is somewhat simplistic, it paints a graphic picture of how society’s changing needs are reflected in the leadership qualities that are valued in any given historical era. As society has adapted to changing conditions, leadership roles have been re-defined in light of the society’s expectations for their educational leaders, and their success or failure is often measured against these expectations.

Leadership as a Moral Endeavor

James MacGregor Burns (1978) believes that the true measure of a leader’s effectiveness transcends these somewhat fickle expectations. "The effectiveness of leaders," he wrote, "must be judged not by their press clippings, but by the actual social change measured by intent and by the satisfaction of human needs and expectation..." (p. 3). Describing the quid pro quo interactions that characterize the relationships between political leaders as transactional leadership activities, Burns contrasts these interactions with what he terms transforming leadership skills that search out individual’s motives, seeks to meet needs, and relates effectively to people. This type of leadership experience, he says, “will convert followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents” (p. 4). Howard Gardner’s (1995) analysis of the qualities of eleven internationally recognized leaders concludes that their successful leadership is a product of their passion to attempt to create a better world through their actions (p. 297). Indeed,
Fullan (1999) identifies moral purpose as essential to successful change efforts and argues that leaders must attend to social as well as academic development of students as a goal of this moral purpose.

The need for attending to such moral purpose has increased during the last decade as unbridled capitalism has collided with the Information Age. Americans now have vivid images and detailed information of third world country populations suffering from horrific deprivation, disease and exploitation. They are increasingly aware of poverty and problematic issues of substance abuse that plague their own country and marginalize ever-growing numbers of Americans. The need to educate American children in basic skills and basic compassion that recognizes a single world society has been established as a priority (Purpel, cited in Scipione, 1995, p. 13). Sergiovanni (1992) identified the “hand, head and heart” (p. 7) of leadership and wrote of the principle of moral leadership as the practice that can result in shared commitments and connections. Fullan (1999) echoed the ideas expressed by Sergiovanni as he examined the similarities and differences between business enterprises and schools. While both environments are reflective of change, confusion and multiple demands, the enterprise of education is “explicitly and deeply a moral enterprise, providing schools with an inspirational mandate of the highest order” (Fullan, 1999, p. 7).

Effective leaders inspire, model and engender the trust of those who work closely with them. Trust in organizations is dependent on the leader’s moral compass (DePree, 1997). When followers have reason to believe that a leader can be depended upon to make a morally sound decision, they will develop trust in the organization. Trust, says DePree simply, is built on kept promises. Effective leadership, however, consists of
Sergiovanni's (1992) "head" of leadership plays a significant role in determining the direction an organization will take. The knowledge of theoretical underpinnings and the life experiences of the leader, in concert with a commitment to deliberate and reflective decision-making, comprise the "head" of leadership. The "heart" and "head" in conjunction with the practical, well-organized managerial "hand" will result in effective leadership practices.

The Complexity of Leadership

Using a list of leadership behaviors delineated by Bass (1985) that reflect the eclectic nature of the work that leaders do, McEwan (1998) elucidates some of the traits central to effective leadership. According to Bass, leaders can be differentiated from followers by their strong drive for responsibility and task completion, vigor and persistence in pursuit of goals, venture-someness and originality in problem-solving, drive to exercise initiative in social situations, self-confidence and sense of personal identity, willingness to accept consequences of decisions and actions, readiness to absorb interpersonal stress, willingness to tolerate frustration and delay, ability to influence other persons' behavior and the capacity to structure social interaction systems to the purpose at hand" (Bass, as cited in McEwan, 1998, p. 3).

Reflecting on these qualities and their applicability in the public school setting, it is hard to dismiss even a single identified behavior as unnecessary for effective leadership, but the practical focus on observable behaviors seems to ignore "the heart" that is seen as increasingly important in today's world.

Kouzes and Posner (1995) conducted an extensive study that included over 400 case studies of leaders on four continents. They used surveys and interviews to
determine what attributes are necessary in a leader to inspire followership. Their findings indicate that honesty, vision, inspiration and competence are most often cited by people as effective qualities of a leader. Similarly, Evans (1996) identified integrity and savvy, the craft knowledge that he declares indispensable for success, as characteristics of an “Authentic Leader” (p. 190). To create confidence among followers, trust must be established and maintained by paying scrupulous attention to matters of principle and by providing a deliberate, clear direction that promotes a vision of attainable excellence for the organization.

Savvy educational leaders in schools today, however, are recognizing that they cannot lead effectively alone. In a time when creating a school community means reaching out to constituencies to develop a shared vision of educational excellence, it is necessary to listen to the needs, wishes and dreams of those constituencies, and encourage them to work in concert with others to achieve the organization’s vision. Barth (1990) is sympathetic to the challenges created by this kind of shared vision. He illustrates the complexity of the task with a story:

Finally, one principal noted, “I am working on a vision- but to be worth a damn it has to be a vision that comes from and reflects the thinking of the whole school community. It’s a very complicated process to try and find a consensus where at the moment little exists. If and when we find that consensus, I’ll be the first to engrave it over the door of the school” (p. 154).

Greenleaf (1998) asks, “Can the key leader be persuasive enough that responsibility for generating and maintaining that vision is widely accepted as a serious obligation?” (p. 79). The vision must be clear to all members of the organization in order to allow them to focus their attention on what is truly important (Fullan, 1993).
Peter Senge (1999) writes of the need for a leader to seek clarity about mission and vision. Mission, he says is the guiding star, the long-term purpose; while vision is what transforms mission into "truly meaningful intended results." Vision, he says, inspires passion and he argues that "the passion at the heart of every great undertaking comes from the deep longing of human beings to make a difference, to have an impact." It comes, he says, "from what you contribute rather than from what you get" (Senge, 1999, p. 62).

Leaders must inspire others to contribute to the overall good of the organization.

In an era that demands full "hand, head and heart" leadership, school administrators cannot possibly lead alone. School leadership, therefore, must be redistributed in ways that share responsibilities across the school community and that value collaborative decision-making (Neumann & Simmons). The Annenberg Institute offers several practical suggestions for leaders. These include developing a shared vision, determining clear priorities, promoting continuous professional learning, linking schools to community assets, providing a strong accountability system and reorganizing the school and district structure (Neumann & Simmons, p. 10).

Using leadership effectively will redistribute the authority and power in the schools so that a professional community can begin to grow. The vision of reciprocal leadership is one that will construct meaning and result in shared purpose (Lambert, 1998). In order to build leadership capacity in schools, administrators must act as facilitators in planning and supporting collaborative inquiry while helping to focus the group and ask significant questions.
The hard work of creating a culture of distributed leadership cannot be accomplished from a distance. As people are encouraged to take leadership roles, they must have support, recognition and opportunities for celebration. Deal and Petersen (1999) discussed the importance of rituals, traditions and ceremonies in identifying what is important and valued in an organization. Effective leaders realize that opportunities for reflection and connection are inherent in the activities, which symbolize what is valued and important (p. 45). Bolman and Deal (1995) asserted that the connections leaders help to make among an organization's members can be strengthened by shared stories.

"Throughout history people have relied on narrative to express deep spiritual messages hard to communicate any other way," they write (p. 142).

Leader as storyteller, leader as celebrant, leader as encourager—these images are far removed from the concept of leadership as power and control over people. When members of an organization are empowered, administrators exchange power over for power to. "Power over," writes Sergiovanni, "is rule-bound, but power to is goal bound...anyone committed to shared goals and purposes can practice power to" (1994, p. 132). Power to enables people to use their talents in creative and innovative ways; it encourages critical thinking and risk-taking.

If leaders focus on capacity building while recognizing and attending to the needs of the individuals within their organizations, then over time, changes will occur over time. The process of change is cumbersome, and Fullan warns that there are no shortcuts to changes in a system's cultures because change occurs at the individual level. When

The effective school leader of the twenty-first century must focus on capacity building and must possess strong facilitation skills, trust in others, and a deep understanding of the complexities of change. Effective interpersonal skills that encourage risk-taking and a moral compass that points unwaveringly to decisions made in the best interest of students are traits that are essential for the leaders who will guide schools successfully through the turmoil of change.

Leadership and Outside Collaboration

Fullan (1999), writing at the close of the twentieth century, muses that the future could go in one of two opposite directions. One path could lead to increasing self-interest and wider discrepancies between the classes of society, the other could lead to the higher moral ground. Fullan (1999) suggested that the educators of the new century will be key players in influencing the choice of direction. "Interaction, quality information and moral purpose represent powerful forces for the public good," he writes (p. 84).

Interaction that involves shared vision-building, empowerment, distributive leadership, careful listening, and attention to human needs can result in individual changes that will impact organizations. Quality information, as leaders create a community of learners through sustained inquiry and reflection, and attend to the issues of policy and politics with a focus on what is best for students, can strengthen schools.

Fullan (1999) explained, "By extending purposeful alliances to diverse outside partners we gain moral meaning in educational reform and contribute to its spread."
Such external collaboration is essential to deepening knowledge and continuing intellectual capacity building, he holds. Newmann and Wehlage (1995) suggested that successful schools concentrate on capacity building by strengthening the professional community. Some of this capacity building, they maintain, will be enhanced by relationships with external agencies and parents that support schools to achieve high quality student learning.

There must be reciprocity in the relationship between the inside and outside collaborators. When the outside collaborators can learn from local action, Fullan (1999) says, the chances of widespread change are increased. Lambert (1998) writes,

Leading the conversations is at the heart of... leadership. It is the facilitation of the reciprocal processes that enable the participants in an educational community to construct meanings toward a common purpose for teaching and learning. It is a skilled undertaking... it is a shared responsibility” (p. 102).

Conversations centered on self-assessment in light of standards that define a common purpose are valuable to an institution as it reflects on the need for change and plans for the future. When such conversations expand to include outside collaboration with those experienced in facilitation, the likelihood of sustaining change increases. Outside collaborators do not have answers to the myriad questions that educational change efforts engender in an educational organization, but may, rather, facilitate the conversation and lend insights that will precipitate change.
Accreditation and Reform

Accreditation is

the process by which an institution of education evaluates its educational activities, in whole or in part, and seeks an independent judgment to confirm that it substantially achieves its objectives and is generally equal in quality to comparable institutions or specialized units (Young, 1983, p. 23).

It is characterized by its predominantly voluntary composition and its self-regulatory function. It includes self-study and focuses on providing consultation to member schools as it makes evaluations about the educational quality of schools.

The History and Composition of the New England Accreditation Agency

While the era of school reform has placed the issue of accountability at the front and center of the national agenda for education, the accreditation process in American schools has long sought to ensure that students are educated in institutions of high quality. Accreditation in the United States was at the University of Michigan in 1871 as an attempt to ensure that local high schools were preparing students adequately for university level work. In the ensuing years six regional accrediting organizations have been established across the country. The oldest of these, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), was founded in 1886 to facilitate communication between college preparatory institutions and universities (NEASC, 1986). Followed by The Middle Association of Schools and Colleges, North Central Association, the Southern Association and finally the Northwest and Western Associations, these organizations have evolved from public entities to "private, voluntary member- and practitioner-based
organizations...devoted to overseeing and managing the process of accreditation and its members” (Wilson, 1999).

NEASC consists of five commissions, each representing different sectors of the educational community. The Commission on Independent Schools, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, the Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools, the Commission on Public Secondary Schools, and the Commission on Technical and Career Institutions each consisting of professional educators from member school systems and “at large” representatives to ensure public accountability (NEASC.org, 2002). In addition to these commissions focused on New England educational institutions, NEASC accredits nearly 100 international schools through the Committee on American and International Schools Abroad (NEASC.org, 2002). NEASC currently accredits over 1,800 New England schools, relying on 3,400 volunteers each year to conduct site visits. Team members for each visit are drawn from a 22,646 person roster maintained by NEASC (NEASC.org, 2002).

Political and Public Perceptions of Accreditation

Historically, accrediting institutions are the organizations that developed standards and systematically measured educational organizations against those standards. In the era of school reform, however, most states have established their own indicators of school effectiveness and have designed assessment measures to evaluate school and student performance. In some cases, such funding has been linked to the achievement of these state standards. Other organizations, such as the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the National Parent Teacher Organization, and the National
Association for the Education of the Young Child, have also established standards for their particular areas in recent years. In an age of shrinking resources, some educators feel that spending public dollars for membership in a private, voluntary association is a luxury they can no longer afford. Still others question the need for guidance and adherence to a format for self-study from a group perceived as "outsiders" as they engage in reflection on their practice using proven effective models, such as the Critical Friends Groups' protocol (Wilson, 1999).

Despite these issues, accrediting institutions across the nation are thriving, especially at the secondary level, where graduation from a "fully accredited" school is often considered to be the passport to admittance at a prestigious college or university. One study of New England accreditation (Wilson, 1999) found that community members perceived accreditation as important to their schools, yet knew very little about the process. According to Wilson (1999), "While most people want their children to attend an accredited school, they have little notion of what being accredited actually means" (p. 13). School reform literature abounds with the advice that community support, involvement and collaboration is essential to the success of change efforts (Barth, 1990; Fullan, 1999; Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Newmann & Wehlage, 1993, 1995; Hoy, Tarter & Kottkamp, 1991; Sergiovanni, 1994). Given the public perception about the value of accreditation, it appears that the process will remain a part of the public school assessment process for the foreseeable future.
Reform and Expansion of Accreditation to the Elementary Level

As the national focus on measuring student learning and school effectiveness has expanded to include elementary level students and schools, NEASC's role has also expanded to include elementary and middle schools in its membership.

Long associated with standard setting and compliance monitoring for New England high schools and colleges, NEASC was well positioned to assist communities as they sought ways to improve education for young children, while improving public perception of the effectiveness of their elementary schools (NEASC CPES Handbook, 1997). In 1984, at a time of political dissatisfaction with the way public schools were operating, the Executive Committee of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges shed an Ad Hoc committee of public and independent school representatives to examine the feasibility of creating a Commission on Public Elementary Schools. The commission's purpose would be to create a program of voluntary accreditation for public schools serving students in kindergarten through grade eight. This action was in response to a national call by the National Association of Elementary School Principals seeking accountability through evaluation in an effort to improve elementary education (NEASC Notes, 1984).

Following a two-year development process, a Committee on Public Elementary School Evaluation and Accreditation was established and nearly three hundred elementary schools enrolled as charter affiliates. By 1987, over 400 elementary schools throughout New England had sought membership in NEASC through the Commission on Public Elementary Schools.
A cycle of review and revision of standards ensures that the Commission continues to assess its measures of school evaluation. Elementary standards have undergone two revisions since the original standards were implemented in 1986. Middle level standards, based on a review of effective middle school practices, were adopted by NEASC in 1999. In 2001, all middle level schools were placed under the administration of the NEASC Elementary Commission. The Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools was created in 2002, with separate committees for elementary and middle schools, each with its own leadership and protocols (NEASC notes, 2002).

The Process of Elementary Accreditation

The current trek toward elementary accreditation in New England begins with a school, district, or community level decision to participate in a process that evaluates a school’s effectiveness in light of standards designed and approved by member elementary schools. Following pre-candidacy status, in which a school’s readiness for participation in the process is examined, the school must participate in a self-study lasting eighteen months to two years. During this phase, the school community focuses its efforts on examining their mission and vision, curriculum, assessment, instruction, services, resources, and environment to determine their level of compliance with these standards.

Once the self-study phase is completed, a NEASC Visiting Committee of peers from other New England elementary schools conducts an on-site, three-and-a-half day visit to validate the self-study report in light of adherence to the NEASC standards. The chairperson of the visiting team submits a detailed report of the team’s findings, including
descriptions, perceptions, commendations and recommendations, to the NEASC Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools.

Twenty-four commissioners, selected to represent a balance of teachers, principals, central office administrators, and a public member from member communities in each of the New England States, review the report. The CPEMS, which is convened three times a year, studies the visiting committee’s report in light of the standards of accreditation and votes to establish the accreditation status of the school (NEASC.org, 2002). The report is initially read and assessed by the appropriate committee (elementary or middle level) and a recommendation for accreditation status of the school is accomplished through discussion followed by a full Commission vote. A school receives a rating identified as either Accreditation, Accreditation with Warning, Accreditation with Probation, or Termination. Schools that receive full accreditation are required to submit two-year planning documents and five-year follow-up reports, describing the measures that have been taken in response to recommendations made by the visiting team (NEASC, 1989). After ten years, an accredited school must again reevaluate its effectiveness through a complete self-study and peer review process.

A school may also be required to submit Special Progress Reports to the Commission if there are concerns that need to be addressed before the regularly scheduled progress reports. Focused Visits by an NEASC team to monitor progress toward the school’s attainment of recommendations included in the visiting committee report may be scheduled by the Commission when it has concerns about the school’s direction in one or more standard area. CPEMS is committed to using this process as a vehicle for on-going
support while reinforcing the message of the need for accountability to standards
(NEASC.org, 2002). Jake Ludes, Executive Director and CEO of NEASC states: “The
accreditation process we have developed over the years is a major vehicle that can and
should be used to bring about educational improvement at all levels” (NEASC.org. 2000).

The seriousness and honesty with which a school considers its compliance with
NEASC standards necessarily impacts the process and delineate the response of the
school and community to the accreditation. Timar (1989) has defined four basic
categories of implementation response. Although his research centered on the
implementation of career ladders, the framework he outlines for studying the effectiveness
of evaluation processes works equally well as a lens to categorize the responses that
schools have to the elementary accreditation process. Timar (1989) defines an integrated
mode of implementation that he says is the preferred response of the organization to
evaluation because it creates conditions under which “meaningful school improvement is
most likely to occur” (Timar. 1989, p. 334). In this mode, the process of evaluation is
seen as a means to strengthen instruction and the organization views the compliance to
external standards as a means to improved evaluation and expanded professional
responsibilities for teachers.

The programmatic mode of implementation focuses on the administrative
dimensions of the process. “emphasizes the administrative dimensions of the program at
the expense of professional development... the emphasis is generally on getting the right
results with little attention to formal procedures for achieving results” (Timar. 1989,
p. 334).
The procedural mode of implementation is described as one in which school improvement is viewed as synonymous with procedural fairness and objectivity. The intrinsic value of these elements makes them valued by society, yet it is possible for processes to be fair and objective, yet not lead to school improvement.

Finally, Timar describes the pro forma implementation mode as one that complies minimally with the evaluative requirements. In this mode, implementation is manipulated for the sake of convenience and, although the reports "exist on paper" (Timar, 1989, p. 335), they have no bearing on organizational behavior or school improvement. This framework will be used in Chapter V as a tool for analysis of the school level implementation of the accreditation processes.

The role of school leaders in articulating the purpose of seeking accreditation and establishing direction for the time-consuming and intensive tasks of the self-study process cannot be ignored. Likewise, the process must be understood and facilitated by teachers who understand the significance and recognize the value of the inquiry process.

Accreditation, states Wilson (1999), is a method of inquiry conducted by practitioners closest to the classroom.

School practitioners carry out most key planning and decision-making activities. Serving on a voluntary basis, they set the standards, conduct the self-study, visit schools and decide whether schools will be accredited or not. This often confounds government bureaucrats, education researchers and sometimes NEASC... itself. NEASC does not have the usual plethora of consultants and experts that cluster around state departments, districts and schools" (Wilson, 1999, p. 45).
It is through the leadership of practitioners that the work of accreditation is accomplished, and educational research indicates that the roles of these practitioners must change as the need to build leadership capacity in schools increases (Neuman, 1998).

**Precedence for the Study of Accreditation**

A review of the literature on school accreditation revealed that there has never been a study conducted on the process of elementary accreditation in the New England States.

Flynn (1997, p. 137) examined the attitudes and perceptions of Massachusetts school leaders about the effectiveness of the high school accreditation utilized by NEASC and drew the following conclusions:

1. NEASC membership is perceived as having little value beyond the accreditation process.

2. The accreditation process itself is valued by school committee persons, superintendents and principals.

3. A school’s accreditation status is seen as important to the life of a school, but an action adverse to accreditation or the actual loss of accreditation is far more crucial.

4. Fiscal limitations as well as demands of the Massachusetts Education reform Law of 1993 negatively impact the ability of a community to meet the expectations of the accreditation process.

5. The accreditation process has a direct effect on educational change.
(6) The community at large has little awareness or investment in the accreditation process.

In a 1999 replication study based on Flynn's research, Cushing studied the perceptions of New Hampshire school board members, principals and superintendents about impact and value of the NEASC high school accreditation process and its connection to school improvement and to the New Hampshire state mandated District Educational Improvement Plan (DEIP). Cushing (pp. 112-123), extending Flynn's findings, reached the following conclusions:

1. It is clear, from the data, that membership in NEASC is viewed as beneficial to the school, school system and community.

2. School improvement is the most important result of the process and the self-study is the most important part of the process.

3. The accreditation status serves to strengthen the perception that the school is a quality institution, but according to the stated perceptions of school leaders, any status less than full accreditation is not acceptable to the general public.

4. The accreditation process brings about educational change.

5. There is not widespread linkage between the accreditation process and the New Hampshire District Education Improvement Plan.

The NEASC process was designed for introspection and reflection on the part of educators as they participate in self-assessment, yet Wilson's study (1999) of the NEASC process in six New England high schools found that school staff responded to the self-study component of the accreditation process with "strong negative responses." He
warned that the significance of these responses must be carefully considered. "since many schools go through a period of extended fussing during the early stages of coming to grips with what they must do" (p. 57). He notes that negative comments were often offset by "acknowledgments that completing the self-study had been a constructive activity for the school because it allowed the school to pull together all that it was doing."

Flanders (1997), conducting a study of 600 North Central Association schools over a three-year period, found that the self-study component of the accreditation process allowed the schools to "focus on improving knowledge and skills in communication, problem-solving and caring for self and others" (p. 134).

Brogan (1996) studied a school district’s systematic efforts to develop a school accreditation process that would support the district’s reform agenda "while providing a forum for inquiry and self-reflection." Her conclusions list what she calls "significant lessons." The process can be effective, she argues, if several conditions are met. First, sufficient time must be allotted to the self-study. Second, careful attention must be paid to the composition of the groups who will be engaged in the self-study process. Third, the process is most effective when it is not viewed as a school task, but is instead valued as a part of the school district. Fourth, parents, whose roles have been expanded in the accreditation process, must be educated about accreditation if they are to be effective participants.

Balke (1997) examined the accreditation process in light of local change efforts and teacher collaboration. Her qualitative work with seven elementary schools in Illinois found that the self-study process began as a top-down edict, with teachers responding by
providing information about programs to teachers. However, she notes that interactions among teachers did increase over time, but varied according to the structures and procedures that a principal selected. The primary motivation of educators, she noted, was to fulfill the mandate to complete the self-study.

Balke (1997) declares that principals set the stage for how the process will be perceived by the staff and that if leadership from the principal has encouraged honest dialogue, engendered trust and encouraged risk-taking, it appears that the self-study will be viewed by teachers as an opportunity for reflection and sustained conversations about what matters most to those involved in the life of the school. In these cases, a thoughtfully completed self-study can provide direction for the development of a school improvement plan that is truly "owned" by the school community. Current research on school change indicates that such collaboration and communication are vital to organizations committed to creating and sustaining significant educational changes.

In a political era that demands accountability from its educational institutions, exploring the effectiveness of elementary school assessment based on holistic standards is a study worth undertaking. Political leaders may fail to recognize that school and student success can be measured in ways not limited to traditional standardized tests. When education about alternative forms of school evaluation, such as participation in accreditation, is accomplished perhaps sustained school reform will become more than a promise of what might be.

Clearly, the similarities between the accreditation processes required by participation in the New England Association of Schools and Colleges and those
processes documented by respected educational researchers as most successful in effecting sustained school improvement are well-established in theory. The study of the accreditation process in action, however, will permit a view from inside the schoolhouse gate that will elucidate the practicality and explore the reality of whether voluntary accreditation is a vehicle to implement and sustain school change.

Summary of the Research Review

This dissertation explores the attitudes and perceptions of educators at the school level toward the NEASC accreditation processes. Because a political and historical context is required to understand the change initiatives schools are attempting to implement, the literature reviewed outlined the political challenges public educators have faced since 1983 and elucidated the role played by NEASC in the establishment and enforcement of standards at the elementary level.

Conditions supportive of effective school change as delineated by the educational researchers cited in the literature review will be central to the framework the researcher has chosen to use in analyzing the effectiveness of NEASC processes at the elementary level.

While the bulk of the work in completing an accreditation self-study is accomplished primarily by teachers, the beliefs of the principals, the central office administrators and the school committee about the purpose and value of the accreditation process and resultant changes set the stage for how the process will be perceived by the staff. This literature review includes findings of those who have examined changing roles of educational leaders. The need to build leadership capacity and to develop collaborative
cultures valuing teacher inquiry are examined in light of the national focus on student
achievement and school improvement.

Finally, a historical perspective of the role of accreditation is provided and the
process of elementary level accreditation is included to frame this integrated study of the
perceptions of teachers, principals, and teacher leaders about the impact of the process of
voluntary accreditation on school improvement.
CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to measure the attitudes and perceptions of principals, Steering Committee Chairpersons, teachers and support personnel about the value of participation in the NEASC accreditation process at the elementary level as a lever for school change. Elements of school improvement, as documented in educational research, will frame the investigation of accreditation as a lever for reform.

The study investigated the following six research questions:

(1) What are the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents about the role of the accreditation process in fostering educational change initiatives within the school and community?

(2) What are the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents about the structure of the self-study processes of accreditation in fostering the development of a community of professional inquiry?

(3) What are the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents about the impact of participation in the accreditation process on the school's curriculum, instruction and assessment methodologies?
(4) What are the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents about the impact of participation in the accreditation process on the community’s support for the school?

(5) What are the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents about the impact of participation in the accreditation process on efforts to increase student achievement?

(6) Are there differences in the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents, by role and school, about the value of the accreditation process as viewed through these five subsets of change initiatives: professional inquiry; curriculum, instruction, assessment; community support; and student achievement?

Sample

The five schools selected for participation in the study were purposefully chosen by the researcher from the roster of public elementary schools that participated in accreditation on-site visits between 1994 and 1999. The five schools reflect the diversity of NEASC’s member schools, include rural, urban, and suburban populations and represent five New England states. NEASC does not maintain consolidated data on member schools’ socio-economic status, size or location. However, a review of the roster of member schools indicates that all New England states are represented, with Massachusetts and Connecticut having the highest numbers of members. Connecticut schools include those determined to be “under-performing” by state standards, with the membership reflective of growing numbers of urban schools. Vermont and Rhode Island have the fewest number of NEASC member schools.
Schools were also chosen for participation in the study based on geographic location and accessibility to the researcher. Working from the roster of elementary member schools, the researcher selected schools that were within a 200-mile radius of her home. Assistance from NEASC CPEMS Commissioners was sought in suggesting member schools within the identified areas in their states that would create the range of locations, grade levels and socio-economic indicators sought for the study. The principals of the schools identified as possible participants in the study were next contacted with a request for access. Three principals immediately agreed to allow their staff to participate in the study. One school system declined to participate, citing the need to limit required meetings for teachers. Two of the principals agreed to participate in the study but required central office approval before access was granted. Descriptions of each of the schools are included to permit the reader the opportunity to appreciate the diversity of the elementary school sites chosen for the study.

School Descriptions

Village Green Elementary School

Village Green Elementary School educates 420 students in pre-kindergarten through grade 3 in a rural Connecticut community of 8,500 in the foothills of the Berkshires. The picture-prefect village center includes upscale shops clustered around a spacious green with white-spired churches punctuating the skyline of the valley. The predominantly Caucasian student population (98%) includes no non-native English speaking children and nearly 83% of the students reside in two-parent households, with only 3% of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch. Class sizes range from 15 to 21
students per class. Nearly 88% of the faculty members hold advanced degrees and the community strongly supports education, with nearly 92% of school funding received from local tax dollars.

The school serves as the focal point of the community, with its location in the center of the village. The brick-faced, white-columned facility, originally constructed in 1925, was expanded in 1955 and underwent extensive renovation in 1988. Spacious, clean, well-lit classrooms and a four-acre site with paved areas, grass and modern playground equipment establish a positive, pleasant environment for the students and staff.

Following the on-site accreditation visit, Village Green received fully accredited status through NEASC’s Commission on Public Elementary Schools.

City Center School

City Center School is located near the crest of a hill in a central Massachusetts inner-city neighborhood where chain-link storefronts and boarded-up factories are located less than a mile from the school’s front door. The school educates 410 children in a pre-kindergarten through grade six setting. The city of nearly 170,000 people is home to an immigrant and transient population that includes a high percentage of Hispanics, Asians and Black Americans. Approximately 80 percent of the children at City Center School qualify for free or reduced lunches, although the principal explains that this figure is constantly shifting because of the high rate of student transience. The principal reports that the majority of the students live in single parent families and that the population of the school includes 6% of children with limited English proficiency. City Center School’s
student population is approximately 31% Hispanic, 18% Asian, 11% African American, and 40% Caucasian. The Caucasian population figure includes an increasing number of immigrant students of Eastern European origin.

The children of City Center School are educated in a facility that was constructed in 1929. A small area of cracked pavement behind the three-story red brick building provides limited play space with a paucity of equipment for students and doubles as secure parking for staff with the presence of a heavy security gate. The peeling brown paint on the main entrance and chain-link fencing protecting the windows belies the cheerful, pleasant atmosphere one encounters upon gaining admission to the school through the security-locked doors. Although the building’s interior is dark and in need of renovation, the facility sparkles with cleanliness and children’s work dominates the hallways. Open doorways lend opportunities to glimpse students engaged in various types of learning situations, from whole class to small group instruction, with pairs of teachers often co-teaching lessons. Class sizes range from 20 to 34 and approximately one-third of the faculty hold advanced degrees.

Funding for this inner city school is subsidized heavily by the state of Massachusetts and it receives federal funding because of its high poverty status. Over 60% of the school’s operating budget is dependent on these subsidies. Partnerships with the local mall and an area university have resulted in some innovative programs designed to provide additional funding to encourage high student aspirations and increased parental involvement in the school.
City Center School received accreditation status following the on-site visit, but the Commission noted several areas of concern. Follow-up action by the Commission included a Focused Visit to the school and submission of a Special Progress Report to monitor progress toward changes in curriculum, assessment, instruction, inclusionary special education practices, community involvement and staff expectations for student achievement.

Harborside Elementary School

The location of Harborside Elementary School stands in striking contrast to the City Center community. This elegant Maine seaport town is home to 3,600 year-round residents who are joined during the summer months by over 7,000 seasonal residents and thousands of tourists who flock to the sandy beaches and rocky coast of the Atlantic Ocean. A verdant golf course, yachts dotting the harbor and gracious historical homes, as well as newly constructed houses, attract the affluent commuter yet retain the local population of lobstermen and fisherman whose families have lived in the community and earned their living from the sea for generations.

Harborside Elementary School educates just over 300 students in a kindergarten through grade six setting. There are no non-English speaking students, but there are several ESL students, whose presence is generally attributed to international adoptions. Ninety-eight percent of the student population is Caucasian. Nearly 84% of the students live in two-parent households with fewer than 5% receiving free or reduced lunches. Class sizes range from 14 to 25 students per class and over 60% of the faculty hold advanced degrees.
The school facility is a one story wooden structure that was constructed in 1953. Upon entering the facility, visitors can view the small but carefully appointed faculty lounge, with comfortable, overstuffed furniture and a pleasant dining area. The principal is quick to point out that the furnishings were gifts from the parents of a Harborside student. Across the hall, the office area is cramped, with limited space for the school secretary and a principal’s office that barely accommodates a desk and two additional chairs. The original building underwent extensive renovations and additions in 1966 and 1980, but portable units house an overflow of second grade students and provide classroom space for specialists. Despite vigilance about routine maintenance, the building is in need of updating and the staff lists the need for additional instructional space in the permanent building as a top priority. While the building is bright, cheerfully decorated with student artwork and clean, parents and staff have concerns about the quality of the facility and favor the increased appropriation of town resources to support improved facilities at Harborside.

Located a short walk from the center of the town, and a shorter stroll to the coast, the location of Harborside School is idyllic. Community playing fields abut the school property and an extensive labyrinth of modern playground equipment, donated by the same parents who furnished the teachers’ lounge, provide abundant space and a pleasant setting for children to recreate.

Funding for the school comes primarily from local taxes, since the community is ranked in the top 10% of Maine communities in its ability to pay. Seventy-seven percent of the financial support for Harborside Elementary School is obtained through local
Despite the affluence of the community, the school district budget, often a source of contention among taxpayers, recently failed to win voter approval at the polls, resulting in a reduction of nearly $600,000 to the operating budget for 2002-2003.

Harborside School received full accreditation status following their on-site visit, but was required to file a Special Progress Report to document progress made toward achievement of the recommendations of the Commission on student assessment and curriculum.

Uptown Elementary School

Uptown Elementary School is located in an urban valley setting in the Green Mountains of Vermont. The county seat, this community of 18,000, attracts residents with its proximity to state and federal governmental services, including health services, welfare and family services, unemployment compensation and government subsidized housing. The development of adjacent suburban communities has resulted in an exodus of more affluent residents from this aging city and substantially decreased property values. Formerly an industrial center, recent plant closings in the city have increased unemployment, leaving some residents dependent on the ski industry for their earnings, a relatively low-paying and seasonal source of income.

Uptown Elementary School is a K-2 facility that houses 275 students in an L-shaped building constructed in 1953. Set in a neighborhood of small, single family homes, mobile homes, larger early twentieth century apartments and governmentally subsidized duplex housing units. Uptown Elementary School perches atop a city hill and affords a view that extends across the city to the soaring mountains in the hazy distance. Space in
the one-story building is limited, with the art teacher providing instruction in regular classrooms and music lessons taking place on the school stage. The nurse's office is housed in a section of the school library. The classrooms are adequate in size, well lit and clean. A second building, adjacent to Uptown, provides special education services to students with moderate to severe learning needs.

A large playground area consists of a basketball court, a field with limited playground equipment including metal swings and several picnic tables. The school grounds are separated from the regional prison grounds and a storage area for National Guard vehicles and equipment by a rusty chain-link fence.

The student population at Uptown elementary is primarily Caucasian, of French, Irish and Italian descent. The principal reports that many students have multiple social, academic and physical needs and reside in impoverished homes. Sixty-eight percent of the children at Uptown elementary receive free or reduced lunches. There are no non-English speaking students in the school. Students are educated in classrooms with class sizes that range from fifteen to twenty and are staffed with a faculty of 25, nearly 50% of whom hold advanced degrees.

Approximately 40% of the education funding for the students at Uptown Elementary comes from local tax dollars, with state aid based on a funding formula that reflects the community's economic need.

Uptown Elementary School received full accreditation status through NEASC, but was required to file a Special Progress Report with the Commission noting changes made
in curriculum and assessment. The school was also required to respond with an immediate report documenting action on matters of student health and safety.

Mountainview Elementary School

Nearly 370 students in kindergarten through grade 8 are educated in the Mountainview School under the shadow of Mount Washington, New Hampshire’s highest peak in the White Mountain National Forest. The town of approximately 2,700 year round residents sends its children to the school in the center of the village, as do the residents of four other local villages. Dependent on the ski industry and tourism for its livelihood, the town has a significant number of vacation homes, a large ski resort and several seasonal tourist attractions. The sprawling school facility consists of five interconnected structures constructed between 1958 and 1990. The most recent addition includes a large library space that houses both the school’s and town’s library collections. Students and adults have access to the facility during the school day and extended evening hours.

The building is spacious and welcoming, decorated with children’s artwork and child-created messages about student aspirations. An imposing figure of an upright bear, the school’s mascot, stands outside the main office with a Mountainview School baseball cap perched jauntily on its head. Classrooms are generously sized and the facility sparkles with cleanliness.

A large field adjacent to the school provides space for recess and sporting events. A well-equipped playground encourages student physical activity and a review of the cars in the parking lot behind the school speaks to the commitment of the staff and
community members to outdoor activity. On one day in mid-May, bike racks, kayak racks, a canoe and several ski racks--remnants of the bygone winter season--are visible atop the vehicles of adults who spend time in Mountainview School.

The Mountainview Elementary School educates primarily Caucasian students who are native English speakers. There are only two students of color in the school and 42% of the children reside in two-parent families. Twelve percent of Mountainview students qualify for free or reduced lunches. Class sizes average nineteen children per teacher and nearly 65% of the school's 25 teachers hold advanced degrees.

The presence of vacation homes and recreational facilities contributes to a solid tax base for the Mountainview School, although the State of New Hampshire ranks the Mountainview community as 160 out of 175 in the ability to pay for education for its students. Eight-five percent of public school funding comes from local tax sources.

The Mountainview School gained full accreditation status following the on-site visit, with immediate action required to correct a potentially dangerous traffic pattern in the school's driveway.

Sources of the Data

Data for this study were obtained through the use of an integrated multiple case study approach, including a single survey administered to purposefully selected elementary school principals, Steering Committee Chairpersons, teachers and support personnel who had been employed in the building during the schools' most recent accreditation on-site visit. Interview questions were also posed by the researcher to the principal, the Steering Committee Chairperson and one randomly selected teacher at each
school. The NEASC's Visiting Committee Reports were studied to obtain specific information about each school, and a day-long visit to each location provided the researcher time to interact with the students and staff, as well as tour the school facilities.

Triangulation using this combination of qualitative and quantitative methodology provided the opportunity to collect information from a diverse range of individuals and settings using a variety of methods "...to obtain a better assessment of the validity and generality of the explanations..." (Maxwell, 1996, pp. 75-76). Using an integrated approach that combines the use of qualitative data with quantitative data it is possible to corroborate findings, elaborate on quantitative analysis and explain unexpected findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Complementary integration as a methodology recognizes that overlaps between quantitative and qualitative approaches exist, and applied together, add scope and breadth to the study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000).

The Survey and Interview Design

The survey (Appendix B) contains four demographic items and 27 closed response items that required responses using a four-point Likert scale with a "No Opinion" option available for each item. Among the 27 forced-choice items, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each item, choosing among responses from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree."

Ten of the survey assertions (Numbers 1, 5, 8, 10, 14, 15, 18, 19, 21 and 24) are replications of the questions posed by Flynn (1997) and Cushing (1999) in their research on perceptions of the effectiveness of high school accreditation processes and were validated through test-retest procedures (Flynn, 1997) and competent judges ratings

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The remaining sixteen assertions were developed by the researcher to elicit information in an effort to determine if an alignment exists between accreditation processes and various components of nationally recognized effective school improvement models.

A panel of four expert judges was selected by the researcher, based on their expertise on school change and knowledge of the accreditation processes, to examine the construct validity of the subsets of survey and interview questions, and to provide feedback on the content of the questions. Fraenkel and Wallen (2000) identify this method of expert examination as an accepted practice in quantitative research and the technique parallels the validation process used by Cushing in his 1997 study on New Hampshire high school accreditation.

The experts selected for participation in the validation of the instruments included an elementary school principal from rural New Hampshire, an elementary school principal from a large Massachusetts city, and an assistant superintendent of schools from a suburban Connecticut community. All three serve as members of the Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools, have guided their own schools through the accreditation process and have acted as chairpersons on NEASC visiting committees. The fourth panel member, the Director of the NEASC Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools, was selected because of his expertise as an NEASC leader, former superintendent of schools, and researcher in the field of secondary school accreditation in New England.
These educators read the survey assertions independently and provided suggestions for changes that would result in more clarity for respondents. This process involved a group session with considerable discussion on how to reword survey assertions #16 and #24, resulting in full group consensus. Both assertions were amended by the researcher following approval of the dissertation committee. Although the panel of expert judges favored elimination of the five negatively worded assertions and omission of the “No Opinion” response option in the survey, further discussion with the researcher’s dissertation committee resulted in the retention of these survey techniques to reflect accepted quantitative research design practices (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000).

The panel of experts next tackled the task of examining the construct validity of the survey assertions in light of the subsets of research questions. The survey instrument was reformatted to include two boxes next to each survey assertion for the use of the panel members. The group was given copies of this form and a separate copy of the research questions. They were asked to read each survey assertion and independently indicate in the boxes next to the question which research question or questions it best addressed. The panel was directed to mark the box with an “O” for “omit” if they felt that an assertion was ambiguous or did not apply to at least one of the research questions. Following this process, the group discussed their choices. Examination of the results indicated unanimous agreement on 26 out of the 27 assertions. The panel felt that Assertion #3 was better suited to elicit information about the community of professional inquiry, rather than the curriculum change question to which it had been initially assigned. Following approval of the dissertation committee, this shift in question alignment was
accomplished. The alignment between the research questions and the survey assertions is outlined in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1
Relationship between Research Questions and Assertions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Survey Assertions Identified by Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1, 2, 5, 8, 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3, 17, 23, 25, 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4, 9, 10, 12, 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>13, 15, 18, 19, 21, 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>6, 7, 11, 16, 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1-26, 27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The panel of experts next examined the interview questions in the same manner. They agreed that all questions were clearly worded and would evoke responses reflective of the researcher’s questions; the group reached unanimous agreement that verified the alignment of these questions to the subsets of research questions. This alignment is represented in Table 3.2.

Following the administration of the survey, the survey instrument was evaluated to determine the internal coherence among the five subsets of questions, or composites. A Cronbach’s alpha score was obtained for each subset. These scores are summarized in Table 3.3.
Table 3.2

Relationship between Research Questions and Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Interview Questions Identified by Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Change</td>
<td>1. 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Professional Inquiry</td>
<td>6. 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment</td>
<td>3. 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Community Support</td>
<td>5. 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Student Achievement</td>
<td>2. 4. 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Overall School Improvement</td>
<td>1. 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cronbach’s Alpha is a general form of the Kuder-Richardson (KR20) that is useful in calculating the reliability of items that do not have a correct or incorrect response (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). For research purposes, reliability should be at least .70.

While composite scores of responses to assertions related to research questions #2 through #5 indicate moderate to strong internal consistency. Research Question #1’s alpha score is lower, indicating that for respondents, the survey assertions were not as closely related to the indicators as the panel of experts had previously determined them to be. Research Question #1 dealt with the concept of school change and the five assertions used in creating the composite solicited information about the changes in curriculum and
assessment, and the use of the NEASC report and recommendations to drive improvement initiatives and direct changes in the school. The slightly lower alpha score was explicated somewhat by the interviews, when respondents indicated that they felt that school change efforts were not always solely prompted by NEASC processes, but were also effected by state and local change directives. The words of the Harborside Steering Committee Co-Chairpersons lend insight to what may be one of the factors impacting this somewhat lower alpha score on research question #1:

We’d been doing an awful lot of work . . . because the state Learning Results had come out and we were trying to get in line with that . . . It’s so very difficult to separate the two because we were going through the accreditation process at the time that so many of these things changed, it’s hard to know which was driving us. . . . I’d find it very hard to separate if it was going through the process or if it was everything that was changing.

Further discussion of composite question #1 is included Chapter IV.
The relationship between the six research questions and the assertions included in the survey (Appendix B) is provided in Table 3.4. Table 3.5 identifies the relationship between each of the seven interview questions (Appendix C) and the six research questions.

Table 3.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Survey Assertions Identified by Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Change</td>
<td>1, 2, 5, 8, 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Professional Inquiry</td>
<td>3, 17, 23, 25, 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Curriculum, Instruction,</td>
<td>4, 9, 10, 12, 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Community Support</td>
<td>13, 15, 18, 19, 21, 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Student Achievement</td>
<td>6, 7, 11, 16, 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Overall School Improvement</td>
<td>1-26, 27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.5

Anticipated Relationship between Research Questions and Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Interview Questions Identified by Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Change</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Professional Inquiry</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Community Support</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Student Achievement</td>
<td>2.4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Overall School Improvement</td>
<td>1-7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following confirmation of internally reliable composite measures, composite mean scores were established for each of the first five research questions. This was accomplished by computing the mean score of the responses to all of the subset assertions relating to that question. Mean composite scores were compared across role status and by school. Additionally, research question #6 was addressed through the use of the Pearson Product Moment correlation measure to determine the strength of correlation between the “Grand Tour” assertion #27 and each of the subsets.

Field Testing of the Survey and Interview Questions

Following approval by the University of New Hampshire Institutional Review Board, the survey and interview processes were field-tested at a New Hampshire elementary school that had participated in the accreditation process and had hosted an
NEASC accreditation on-site visit in 1999. This school was chosen for its geographic proximity to the researcher. The researcher spent a day visiting the school, interviewed the principal, the Chairperson of the Steering Committee during the accreditation process, and a randomly selected teacher. Interviewees were asked if they had any concerns or questions about the content or clarity of the questions. The three participants responded positively and did not make any suggestions for change to the interview questions. The survey instrument was administered during an after-school faculty meeting to all staff that had been employed at the school during the 1999 on-site visit. Respondents were asked for feedback about the composition of the assertions. All respondents indicated that they understood the assertions and had no difficulty in responding to the survey. The survey data were entered in a database (SPSS) and analyzed by way of descriptive statistics. Responses were generally consistent with the qualitative data.

Data Collection Process

Telephone contact with the principals of these schools resulted in the researcher being granted access to three of the five selected schools. Two school districts had strict School Board policies about outside educational research that was cumbersome to navigate, so alternative sites similar in demographics were chosen. The New Hampshire school first considered for participation in the study was used as the pilot site, and a second New Hampshire school was selected for its comparable rural location and K-8 population. The researcher obtained written permission to conduct the study at each school and verification by letter of the research subject, times and dates were communicated to each school (Appendix D).
Day-long visits were scheduled for each school. Following introductions by the principal and a school tour, the researcher was given a private space in which to conduct the interviews, which were typically around 45 minutes in duration. Principals, Steering Committee Chairpersons and one randomly selected teacher (the teacher whose name appeared first on the alphabetical roster of those employed in the school during the most recent accreditation visit) were interviewed. All interviews were audio taped using two machines to ensure accurate and complete recordings, with minimal notes made by the researcher. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their statements and were encouraged to reflect honestly on the effectiveness of the accreditation processes in their responses. Informed Consent documents (Appendix E) were signed by all interviewees prior to the start of the interview process and were retained by the researcher. All participants were asked the same seven questions (Appendix C), although the researcher occasionally interjected a clarifying question or requested further information. A total of fifteen interviews were conducted with sixteen participants, since two schools had designated co-chairpersons during the accreditation process. One school opted to have the co-chairpersons interviewed as a team. The second school that had appointed co-chairpersons during the NEASC process had intended to also have both chairpersons interviewed, but illness precluded one member from attending the interview session.

The researcher had requested copies of the schools' NEASC Visiting Committee reports and these were studied during and after the researcher's on-site visits to note the nature of the major commendations and recommendations and the perceptions of the
NEASC Visiting Committee, as well as to obtain demographic information about each school.

Lastly, the survey instrument was administered to the entire population of the staff who had been employed in the school during the most recent accreditation visit, including administrators and Steering Committee Chairpersons, teachers and support staff. The surveys, which were color-coded by school for ease of identification, were distributed to the groups at faculty meetings. Principals had set the stage for the survey administration prior to the researcher's visit and a letter was distributed to staff (Appendix F) outlining the nature of the research and providing contact information if the participants had any further questions or concerns about the survey process. A single page of written instructions (Appendix G) containing definitions of terms utilized in the survey was also given to school staff prior to the distribution of the survey.

Identical procedures were used to administer the surveys at all of the schools, including the same introduction, oral directions and collection procedures to minimize threats to internal validity (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000, p. 448). School staff members were encouraged to complete the surveys independently and to return them to the researcher immediately upon completion of the survey. This on-site administration of the survey resulted in a 100% return rate, although four responses were returned by FAX because participants had to leave the meetings early due to extra-curricular responsibilities. A total of 84 surveys were returned for analysis, a 100% response rate.
Treatment of the Quantitative Data

The survey data from the 84 returned surveys yielded 2,268 responses that were entered into the SPSS database by the researcher, who assigned numerical codes for each possible response. Initially, the "NO" (No Opinion) response was coded as a neutral response with a centered score, but subsequent discussion with the dissertation committee resulted in the recoding of the "NO" responses as missing data, eliminating them from mean comparisons. The five negatively worded assertions, numbers 1, 7, 9, 17 and 21, were restated in the positive and the coding reversed to allow comparison of means.

Means and frequency distributions of responses for all survey assertions were recorded and the SPSS software program was used to obtain a mean composite score for each respondent on each question. All subsets of assertions demonstrated internal consistency with Cronbach alpha scores of .60 for the subset of assertions on school change; .71 for the subset of assertions on professional inquiry; .81 for the assertions on curriculum, instruction and assessment; .70 for the subset of assertions on community support; and .83 for the subset of assertions on student achievement.

The demographic data were disaggregated by gender; however, the low number of males (six) in the studied sample did not constitute a large enough sample size to warrant further examination of the gender variable. Likewise, the number of years in the school and the number of years in the current position provided some interesting information, but did not include sufficient data to justify undertaking further analysis of these data, since not all current or past staff members were represented due to personnel changes and
the fact that the survey was administered only to those who had been in the school during the school's last on-site visit from NEASC.

The low number of respondents in the categories of principal (five) and Steering Committee Chairpersons (seven) did not allow generalizations to be drawn about these groups, and did not support comparison of the data among these groups and the teachers and support personnel groups. However, based on the assumption that school principals and Steering Committee Chairpersons assumed leadership roles in the NEASC accreditation process, the responses from these two groups were combined to create a "Leadership" category to provide data that could be compared for significant differences with data containing the responses of teachers and support personnel.

Cross tabulations were generated which permitted the comparison of participant responses by school, role (principal, Support Team Chairperson, teacher, or support personnel), gender and the additional combined leadership role created for principals and Steering Committee Chairpersons.

To facilitate data analysis, assertions #1 through #26 were organized into five subsets, or composites, with correlations to the research questions previously validated by a panel of experts and validated by statistical measures of internal consistency.

The research questions were designed to investigate the perceptions and attitudes of respondents about the role of the NEASC accreditation process in fostering change, the development of community of professional inquiry and community support of schools. Additionally, the research questions were designed to explore the impact of accreditation on curriculum, instruction, assessment and student achievement. A one-way analysis of
variance (ANOVA) was employed to determine differences in mean responses among the five schools to each subset of assertions. Likewise, separate ANOVAs were used to identify differences in responses by role (i.e., leadership, teachers, and support personnel) to each subset of assertions. In cases where the omnibus F tests were significant, multiple comparisons were employed. An alpha level of .05 was used to identify the presence of a significant difference.

Correlational statistics were employed to determine the relationship between the subset composite scores and the “Grand Tour” assertion #27. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, considered the most appropriate correlation coefficient to use when data for both variables are expressed in terms of quantitative scores (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000, p. 232) was employed to determine the direction and the magnitude of the relationships.

Treatment of the Qualitative Data

The qualitative data in this study were collected through the audio taping of fifteen extended interviews with principals. Steering Committee Chairpersons and randomly selected teachers at the five schools. Seven interview questions (Appendix C) were posed to each participant and approximately 45 minutes per interview was allotted to provide time for thoughtful and in-depth responses. The interview questions were designed to provide supporting information for the subsets of research questions and the “Grand Tour” question of whether participation in the accreditation process leads to school improvement. Current educational research on models of effective sustained school improvement provided the basis for the content of the questions.
The researcher listened to each of the audio tapes two times immediately after each set of interviews and created preliminary notes in the initial stages of data analysis (Wolcott, 1995; Huberman & Miles, 1994). At the completion of all quantitative data collection, the researcher transcribed the audio taped interviews. This collection of what Joseph Maxwell (1996) calls “rich data” (p. 95) resulted in a detailed and complete record of the interviews. During this time, additional notes were recorded to log the researcher's thoughts about the confirming and disconfirming information in the interview data that could elucidate responses on the survey (Huberman & Miles, 1994; Maxwell, 1996). A wide margin was set on the left hand side of each transcript to permit space for note taking by the researcher. Colored dots were used on the transcripts to code responses to survey assertions and matching colors were used to highlight potential quotations to lend voice to the participants in the analysis and conclusions of the study (Wolcott, 1994; Huberman & Miles, 1994). Interview data were also analyzed for frequency of response and tallies were established to note similar responses to the research questions using categorical aggregation (Creswell, 1998; Huberman & Miles, 1994). This data provided the researcher with explanations that often elucidated reasons for differences in survey responses among schools, provided details about the processes employed during the schools' participation in accreditation processes, and permitted interviewees time to reflect on the significance of the schools' involvement in accreditation through NEASC. Chapter IV incorporates the qualitative findings into the data analysis.
Bias Threats

One important note should be made about the potential issue of non-response bias. Individuals who had left the schools due to resignation, non-renewal, transfer or retirement since the NEASC on-site visitation did not have the opportunity to participate in the survey. This absence of full participation could result in a non-response bias (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000) and attention is given to this facet of the study in the analysis of the data.

Because the researcher has been involved with the processes of elementary accreditation for over sixteen years and has completed a six-year term as a member of the NEASC Commission on Public Elementary Schools, it is necessary to examine how the values of the researcher may influence the conduct and conclusions of the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) outlined the need for theoretical sensitivity, through which the qualitative researcher must carefully attend to personal pre-dispositions, biases and knowledge of the topic under study. Peshkin (1988) identifies the need to recognize the “Subjective I’s” of researcher orientation, and states that this consciousness can assist in escaping “the thwarting biases that subjectivity engenders, while attaining the singular perspective its special persuasions promise. Certainly, in this instance, the choice of the research topic was a result of an abiding interest in the accreditation process and a desire to learn more about the perceptions and attitudes of educators whose schools undertake accreditation through NEASC.

As a frequent chair of NEASC Visiting Committees, the researcher has seen firsthand how some schools embrace the process of accreditation and welcome the
opportunities for reflection and change, while others conduct the self-study and subsequent on-site visit in a perfunctory manner with a task-oriented focus on earning the "stamp of approval" of the accrediting agency. It was this dichotomy that first interested the researcher, for in an era of increased demands on educators, time and resources are precious commodities that should be used wisely to impact school improvement and student achievement. This study explores the beliefs of school staff members about the effectiveness of the process, and the researcher is committed to reporting these attitudes and perceptions accurately. Because of the researcher's connection to NEASC, she has conducted the interviews, administered the surveys and analyzed the data, keeping foremost in her mind the need to collect and report the data accurately, giving equal voice to supporters and detractors of the NEASC accreditation process.

To ensure against bias, the researcher had the survey and interview questions evaluated by a jury of experts and sought alternative perspectives on the survey design from her Dissertation Committee. This resulted in the addition of negatively worded survey assertions and refinement of several assertions. The interview questions elicited responses about the "least helpful" aspects of the accreditation process and the use of audio tape recordings and verbatim transcription guaranteed that all responses were documented. Deliberate attention was given to ensuring that the negative aspects of the accreditation process as reported in the interviews and survey data were honestly represented in the data analysis.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) outline the need for qualitative researchers to carefully attend to their understanding of self to gain a deeper understanding of research
respondents and their research experience. Maxwell (1996) discusses the implications of personal connections to the research topic and states, “Recognizing your personal ties to the study you want to conduct can provide you with a valuable source of insights, theory and data about the phenomena you are studying” (p. 16). However, he declares that such personal ties can be a threat to research validity if they are not openly acknowledged and given careful attention by the researcher. Since it is impossible to eliminate the researcher’s theories, preconceptions or values, Maxwell speaks to the need for the researcher to address the issue of possible bias, and explain what efforts will be employed to deal with it. Maxwell (1996), quoting Fred Hess, states that “validity in... research is not the result of indifference, but of integrity” (p. 91). This researcher has committed to representing all respondents’ viewpoints fairly, and to maintaining personal integrity as she researches and reports on a topic that she has identified as personally compelling.
CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

This study was designed to measure the attitudes and perceptions of school leaders, teachers, and support personnel about the value of participation in the NEASC accreditation process at the elementary level and its relationship to effective models of school improvement. Additionally, the study sought to examine the relationship between the NEASC accreditation process and successful school improvement models.

This chapter provides an analysis of the data gathered from the 84 surveys and sixteen interviews generated during this research project. The researcher conducted on-site interviews and administered the surveys to principals, Steering Committee Chairs, teachers, and support personnel who had been employed in the school during the time of the last NEASC accreditation visit. The return rate on the surveys was 100%, with all data usable. The study investigated the following six research questions:

1. What are the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents about the role of the accreditation process in fostering educational change initiatives within the school and community?

2. What are the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents about the structure of the self-study processes of accreditation in fostering the development of a community of professional inquiry?
(3) What are the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents about the impact of participation in the accreditation process on the school's curriculum, instruction and assessment methodologies?

(4) What are the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents about the impact of participation in the accreditation process on the community's support for the school?

(5) What are the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents about the impact of participation in the accreditation process on efforts to increase student achievement?

(6) Are there differences in the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents, by role and school, about the value of the accreditation process as viewed through these five subsets of change initiatives: professional inquiry; curriculum instruction, assessment; community support; and student achievement?

The survey instrument included 27 assertions (Appendix B). Each respondent was asked to react to each assertion using a four point Likert scale to indicate his/her current perception. Respondents could also opt to reply to each assertion with a "no opinion" indicator. Fifteen interview sessions were conducted by the researcher, three at each of the five schools chosen for participation in the study. School principals, Steering Committee Chairpersons and one randomly selected teacher at each school were asked to respond to seven interview questions. One school had two Steering Committee Co-Chairpersons who met with the researcher together to participate in the interview process.
The first section of the chapter includes reporting and analysis of the demographic data obtained through the surveys and draws upon information from the interviews to inform analysis of the demographic data. The second section of this chapter presents an analysis of the responses to the first five research questions by both role and school. Three reporting categories have been established for the purpose of analysis by role: leadership, teachers and support personnel. Analysis of the data has been accomplished by reviewing the responses to the subsets of questions designed to address each research question and integrating the qualitative data into the comparison of role and school data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The final section of this chapter provides an analysis of the data obtained from the response to the “Grand Tour” survey assertion #27 by role and school. Additionally, correlational statistics have been employed to analyze the relationship among the five subsets of assertions and their relationship to the “Grand Tour” survey assertion about the overall impact of NEASC processes on school improvement efforts.

Demographic Data and Analysis

The demographic data collected on the survey instrument includes the number and roles of respondents from each school, the number of years the respondent has been employed in the school system, number of years the respondent has been in her current position in the school, and the gender of the respondent.

Despite variations in school size, the number of respondents from each school was fairly consistent, ranging from a high of twenty at Mountainview School to a low of
thirteen at the larger City Center School. Table 4.1 presents this information in chart form.

Table 4.1
Survey Respondents by School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Number of Survey Participants</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Village Green</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harborside</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Center</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountainview</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uptown</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Harborside respondents numbered nineteen, while Uptown Elementary had fourteen staff members who participated in the survey. The Mountainview School had the greatest number of staff still in place nearly four years after their NEASC accreditation visit. The Mountainview principal noted that during his first years of tenure at the school, which were the initial stages of the schools' self-study, nearly 30% of the school staff resigned, retired or had contracts that were not renewed as the school examined its core values and committed to innovative practices through a community-wide "Future Search" process. He indicated that he had deliberately encouraged some
staff members to seek alternative career paths and had recruited replacement staff who he felt would be "risk-takers and commit to collaboration."

City Center School, on the other hand, had the lowest number of staff still in place following the accreditation on site visit. The principal explained that, in a large city district, employee transfer is an option that staff may take advantage of when challenges are made to staff to change practices. The NEASC Visiting Committee's report was one of those challenges, she says. The school was faced with a follow-up Focused Visit a year after the original on-site accreditation visit to demonstrate the progress made in several critical areas, including instruction and school climate. The principal remarks:

The staff who had the professional commitment to hold high expectations for all children and who had a sense of professional responsibility to learn more and to do more for children stayed and continued to be here. Those who felt that they could do the 'same-old, same-old,' because we are a large system, had an option of moving on to other schools.

Harborside, Uptown and Village Green all report relatively consistent staffing with little turnover, especially among professional staff.

As expected, each school included one principal among the respondents and these individuals remained in place throughout the accreditation process. Two schools, Harborside and Village Green, had co-chairpersons for the NEASC Steering Committee, resulting in a total of seven Steering Committee Chairpersons who responded to the survey and interview questions. Surveys were completed by 58 teachers and fourteen support personnel who had been employed during the schools' on-site visit from NEASC and actively involved in the completion of the schools' self-study. Figure 4.2 provides a table of survey respondents by role.
Table 4.2
Survey Participants by Role

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Number of Survey Participants</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steering Committee Chairperson</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Personnel</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>84</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Typical of elementary level educators, only six males were surveyed in the populations of these five schools. Two of those six males were building principals, one was a custodian, and the remaining three were classroom teachers. Table 4.3 displays the breakdown of the survey participants by gender.

Table 4.3
Survey Participants by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>92.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The demographic data of survey participants' years of service in the school district paints a picture of New England educators whose years of experience in their school systems are fairly equally divided. Of the 84 participants, 31 were in the school
ten years or less. 27 were employed by the school between eleven and twenty years, and 28 educators served in the same school for over twenty years. Figure 4.1 presents this data in graphic form.

Figure 4.1

Survey Participants by Years in School District

Mountainview has the greatest number of new employees among those surveyed. The principal’s interview comments about a high rate of staff turnover resulting from his leadership initiatives and his efforts to counsel under-performing staff out of education during the early years of his tenure at Mountainview validate the survey data. City Center has only one staff member among those surveyed with less than ten years experience, while Uptown’s staff has the highest seniority level. It should be pointed out that only staff members who were present for the most recent accreditation on-site visit were surveyed, so these data, while interesting, may not give a complete picture of the staff at each of the schools.

Survey responses indicate that the senior staff members at Uptown have remained in their positions considerably longer than staff members in the other four schools.
despite a major reconfiguration of the school system's elementary and middle schools in 1995. Mountainview's staff has experienced the greatest number of changes in assignments. The principal of Mountainview explained that school-wide changes—such as multi-age, co-teaching and looping models—have prompted staff re-assignment, and that not all changes have been optional for staff. City Center's absence of staff in the one to five year group for position assignment is a result of the fact that replacement staff who transferred from other locations within the city school system to replace the transferred veteran staff following the accreditation visit were not part of this survey. Figure 4.2 illustrates these figures.

Figure 4.2

Survey Participants by Years in Current Position

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Research Findings

This section of Chapter IV reports the findings of the six research questions as indicated by the responses of the target groups to the 27 assertions as analyzed through the subsets, or composites.

**Research Question 1:** What are the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents about the role of the accreditation process in fostering educational change initiatives within the school and community?

The findings of the first research question are based upon the responses to the following five assertions:

1. The accreditation process has raised my awareness of the strength and needs of our school. (Scoring reversed and negative wording eliminated for analysis purposes)
2. Participating in the accreditation process has resulted in changes to the curriculum in our elementary school.
5. The accrediting agency's Standards of Accreditation are the criteria for school improvement in our school.
8. Our school-wide educational improvement plans include the accrediting organization's recommendations.
22. The Visiting Committee's report was used to develop action plans for improving our school.
Table 4.4

Composite Mean Scores by Role and School for Research Question #1
Fostering Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>OVERALL</strong></td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BY ROLE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Personnel</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**BY SCHOOL **</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village Green</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harborside</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Center</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountainview</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uptown</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* indicates the ANOVA was statistically significant at the .05 level

The responses to the subsets of questions for Research Question #1 indicate that, on average, school leaders, teachers, and support personnel clearly recognize the NEASC accreditation process as one that fosters change. Of the three target groups, the leadership respondents had the highest mean, with teachers and support personnel having equal mean responses to the composite questions. However, a one-way ANOVA indicated that there were no significant differences on the composite among the three target groups by role.

When analyzed by school, respondents in the five schools perceive that the NEASC process has fostered change in their schools. City Center attaches the highest value to the NEASC accreditation process, followed by Village Green, Harborside and Mountainview. Uptown’s mean of 2.98 indicates that they do not perceive that
participation in the NEASC process has fostered change to the extent that the other schools do. A one-way ANOVA identified a significant difference ($p < .001$) between the school means. A Bonferroni post hoc analysis revealed three pairwise differences. City Center and Uptown's mean difference of .48 was significantly different ($< .001$). City Center and Mountainview had a significant mean difference of .37 ($p = .003$), while Village Green and Uptown also showed a significant mean difference of .30 ($p = .022$).

Interviews conducted at City Center point to some of the reasons that NEASC is perceived as having a substantial impact on school change in that building. The principal, whose arrival coincided with the beginning of the self-study process, stated that the process "served as an additional lever to move us forward in our actions." She spoke of a faculty that was previously accustomed to instructional isolation and relationships among staff that were primarily collegial. The NEASC process, she says, allowed her to encourage staff to become risk takers professionally. She says, "When we would have meetings, they would look to me for an answer and I would say, 'Look at each other. Talk to each other.' It took us a long time, and that was something that was needed for us to move forward with the recommendations from NEASC, too."

Uptown, with a mean 2.98 on the composite question, did not share City Center's enthusiasm for the self-study portion of the NEASC process, possibly because Uptown's participation in the accreditation process was one that staff describes as "imposed" upon them by the Central Office. While the principal extolled the benefits of the reflective nature of the self-study process, and teachers spoke of the value of cross-
grade level collaboration during the accreditation process, the Steering Committee Chairperson indicated that the staff was not enthusiastic about the process:

A lot of the process was time consuming. A lot of people were upset that they even had to work on this committee. I think that was least helpful. Like some of it wasn’t really necessary, I don’t think. A lot of it was redundant. We didn’t have special teachers on the committees so it was difficult to get their ideas and we’d had so much turnover with art, music and phys ed people that it was very difficult to get that part.

Review of the qualitative data elucidates the complexity of the change process and reflects the divergent perceptions of school staff about the value of undertaking school-wide accreditation. Overall, analysis of the quantitative data for Research Question #1 indicates that educators perceive that participation in the NEASC accreditation process has fostered change initiatives within the schools.

Assertion #1 solicits responses on the role of the NEASC accreditation process in raising respondents’ awareness of the strengths and needs of the school. It is evident that all target groups by role agree that the NEASC accreditation process affects staff by allowing them to identify the school’s assets and limitations. While the leadership of the schools appears to be in stronger agreement with the assertion, a one-way ANOVA indicated that there were no significant differences among the groups in their perceptions on Assertion #1.
Table 4.5

Descriptive Statistics for Assertion #1 Relating to Research Question #1 by Role and School

The accreditation process has raised my awareness of the strengths and needs of our school. (Scoring reversed and negative wording eliminated for analysis purposes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>% Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>% Disagree</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
<th>% Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>OVERALL</strong></td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>56.0%</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BY ROLE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>41.4%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Pers.</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BY SCHOOL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village Green</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harborside</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>36.8%</td>
<td>57.9%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Center</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>92.3%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountainview</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>35.0%</td>
<td>55.0%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uptown</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* indicates the ANOVA was statistically significant at the .05 level

When Assertion #1 is viewed through the lens of the school-based target groups, however, the ANOVA indicates that there is a significant difference of .05. The Bonferroni post hoc analysis shows a significant mean difference of .56 between Village Green and City Center. While 16.7% of Village Green respondents indicate that they either strongly disagree or disagree that the NEASC process heightened their awareness of the strengths and needs of the school, their counterparts at City Center have no responses in the disagree or strongly disagree categories.

The reason for this difference was elucidated through the interviews. Village Green staff felt that they were already involved in deliberate actions to identify their
school’s strengths and needs prior to undertaking the NEASC process. In the words of the Village Green Steering Committee Chairperson:

I do think that we’re quite reflective, so I do think things change every year, whether it be curriculum or whether it be assessments, or whether it be the type of group you have. We are quite reflective in that if something isn’t working, we’ll make the change. So, I’m not sure if it came from the process or if we just wanted to make the changes.

For City Center, the accreditation process provided a vehicle for reflection and shared professional conversation, a new way of thinking about practice and a new way of working collaboratively to identify the school’s strengths and limitations. A City Center teacher says:

Gathering the data, we had to go through the process of just really trying to figure out just what it was that we were doing and then preparing to document that. It was a good self-reflection piece. I’ve been here for eighteen years and I’ve seen lots of things happening, but it’s never been as good as it is now. I think accreditation brought us to this point.

Village Green did not attribute as much value to the self-study process of accreditation because they were already practicing what to City Center was a new way of communicating about the needs of the school.
Table 4.6
Descriptive Statistics for Assertion #2 Relating to Research Question #1 by Role and School

Participation in the accreditation process has resulted in changes to the curriculum in our elementary school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>% Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>% Disagree</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
<th>% Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>OVERALL</strong></td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BY ROLE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>60.7%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Pers.</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BY SCHOOL</strong> *</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village Green</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>70.6%</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harborside</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
<td>68.4%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Center</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>92.3%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountainview</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>64.7%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uptown</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>78.6%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* indicates the ANOVA was statistically significant at the .05 level

Assertion #2 elicited responses about the impact of the NEASC process on curricular changes. When analyzed from the perspective of the target groups by role, it is evident that all groups feel that changes to curriculum were influenced by participation in NEASC processes. The mean scores for all target groups are equal and the ANOVA did not identify any statistically significant differences among the responses.

When analyzed by school target groups, statistically significant differences emerge for Assertion #2. The results of the ANOVA, with significance at the <.001 level, and the Bonferroni post hoc analysis indicate that City Center differs significantly from all of the other schools. City Center and Village Green show a mean difference of .63
City Center also differs from Harborside with a significance level of <.001 and a mean difference of 1.19. City Center again differs from Mountainview with a significance level of .001 and a mean difference of .81. City Center and Uptown differ significantly with a mean difference of .99 and a significance level of <.001. Village Green and Harborside also show a statistically significant difference, with a mean difference of .56 and a statistical significance of .022.

The perceptions of the respondents, as reflected on their survey responses, indicate that City Center was affected to the greatest degree by the NEASC's recommendations for curricular change. Although Village Green responses indicate that 100% of the respondents believe that curricular changes have occurred as a result of the accreditation process, only 30% strongly agree with the assertion, versus 92.3% of the City Center personnel surveyed. Harborside (73.7%) and Mountainview (88.2%) also clearly agree that curriculum change has taken place because of the NEASC accreditation process, but the strongly agree responses are more plentiful from City Center. Uptown and Harborside show the highest responses in the disagree category, with 14.3% and 21.1%, respectively, of the respondents disagreeing with the assertion. The interview data supports the statistical data.

Harborside, with 5.3% of the staff reporting strong disagreement with the assertion that the NEASC process has led to curricular change reports that they had already committed to curriculum revision before the NEASC process. The principal states:
When we went through accreditation, we were in the process of aligning our curriculum to the Maine Learning Results. And I think accreditation helped foster that process, but we were already in process to do that—we knew where we were going with it.

For City Center, the self-study process of NEASC allowed the staff to identify the need to make curricular changes. A City Center teacher admits:

I think it helped us more to align more to the State Frameworks. I think before the accreditation, manuals used to be up on the shelves and never looked at. They never really aligned the lessons to the curriculum and lots of people just used the textbook... This really helped us to realize that you really need to align with the state frameworks.

Table 4.7

Descriptive Statistics for Assertion #5 Relating to Research Question #1 by Role and School

The accrediting agency's Standards of Accreditation are the criteria for school improvement in our school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>% Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>% Disagree</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
<th>% Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OVERALL</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
<td>65.8%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BY ROLE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>69.1%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Pers.</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BY SCHOOL *</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village Green</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>52.9%</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harborside</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>63.2%</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Center</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>84.6%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountainview</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
<td>58.8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uptown</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>76.9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* indicates the ANOVA was statistically significant at the .05 level
Assertion #5 required that respondents react to a statement indicating that the NEASC standards are used as the criteria for their school improvement efforts. The data indicates that there is agreement among all groups that the NEASC's standards are used to establish the direction of school improvement efforts. Nearly 82% of teachers responded that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the assertion, followed by support personnel whose "agree" or "strongly agree" responses totaled 78.5%. The responses of those in the leadership category were slightly lower, with 75% of those respondents noting either agreement or strong agreement with the statement. The ANOVA indicated that there were no statistically significant differences among the respondents by role.

When viewed by school, the ANOVA denoted significant statistical difference among the respondents at the .05 level. However, when the more conservative Bonferroni was employed to identify the difference by school, no statistically significant pairwise differences were identified.

Nonetheless, interview responses about the effect of the NEASC standards on school change are indicative of the impact that the examination of current practice in relation to standards can have on a school. In the words of the Harborside principal:

I think that just looking at ourselves in relation to standards- we had not ever done that before. We had looked at ourselves in relation to other schools, we certainly looked at our test scores. . . but looking at those standards and seeing what the New England Association saw as important points kind of made us rethink how we did things. Rethink what was important. . . So, that really changed for us, how we saw the school change, how we saw student learning change, how we saw teaching change. It changed our picture of it, and that, I think changed education.
Not all schools felt as strongly that the NEASC standards have been the impetus for change. Although Mountainview’s most recent accreditation was a decennial visit, meaning that the school had experienced the accreditation process ten years prior to the most recent on-site visit. Mountainview data indicates that no staff member surveyed strongly agreed with Assertion #5. In fact, 41.2% of the staff either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the assertion. The Steering Committee Chairperson lends some insight to the reason for the less positive response when she says passionately:

By the time the second accreditation came around, as I said to the School Board, “We’re not going to have a problem with this accreditation because it’s who we are, and everything that you see in these lines (the standards), we match up perfectly with, because it’s what we believe in, it’s who we are.” And when the next accreditation comes around, I think you’ll find that same attitude and that same drive and that same pride and strength.

At Mountainview, the standards are not viewed by the staff as externally imposed measures of accountability, but rather are a means to validate the staff’s commitment to school improvement.

Despite the fact that nearly 23% of Uptown teachers disagreed with Assertion #5, the principal found value in the self-study process and stated that self-assessment against NEASC standards was a “tremendous asset.” The lack of sustained commitment to ensuring adherence to NEASC standards, however, became apparent in interviews with the steering Committee Chairperson. When asked about the staff’s commitment of meeting time to discuss the NEASC standards, she reported, “It just sort of dissolved after the accreditation process. We haven’t really heard much about it since we did the process.” Attributing the lack of serious consideration of the NEASC standards to the
change in school level leadership and to the fact that the decision to undertake district-wide accreditation was a Central Office decision, one Uptown teacher states, "I'm not sure we had bought into it—it was just imposed on us."

The wide disparity of opinions expressed in the interviews points to the fact that school culture and leadership both have substantial impact on how the school values accreditation.

Table 4.8

Descriptive Statistics for Assertion #8 Relating to Research Question #1 by Role and School

Our school-wide educational improvement plans include the accrediting organization's recommendations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>% Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>% Disagree</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
<th>% Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OVERALL</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>48.2%</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BY ROLE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>46.6%</td>
<td>46.6%</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Pers.</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>61.5%</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BY SCHOOL*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village Green</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>61.1%</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harborside</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td>68.4%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Center</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>69.2%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountainview</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>47.4%</td>
<td>47.4%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uptown</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>64.3%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*indicates the ANOVA was statistically significant at the .05 level

Assertion #8 required respondents to indicate to what degree the recommendations made by the NEASC Visiting Committee were included as part of school-wide improvement plans. When analyzed by role, all respondents clearly felt that

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school improvement plans incorporated the recommendations of NEASC. One hundred percent of those in the school leadership category reported that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, while 93.2% of the teachers either agreed or strongly agreed with Assertion #8. The ANOVA indicated that there were no statistically significant differences among the leadership, teacher and support target groups.

When viewed from the school level, however, the ANOVA revealed a significant difference ($p = .004$). Application of the Bonferroni post hoc analysis indicated that City Center differed significantly from Uptown, with a mean difference of .78 and a significance level of .004. Uptown also differed significantly from Harborside as shown by the -.76 mean difference ($p = .011$).

While 78.6% of Uptown teachers reported that they agreed or strongly agreed that the NEASC recommendations were included in school improvement plans, 21.4% of Uptown teachers disagreed with the assertion, as opposed to teachers at Harborside, Village Green and City Center who had no responses in the disagree or strongly disagree categories.

The City Center principal cited an example of how the NEASC recommendation for changes in assessment practices was one area in which the connection to school improvement plans was clear:

That's really valuable. This year, even more so, when we developed our School Improvement Plan, it's linked to the state's Turnaround Plans for schools, so we really had to look at all kinds of data. Before NEASC we did the tests because they had to be done... but now as a school, we are moving forward and using assessment to frame our future instructional decisions.
A comment from the Uptown Steering Committee Chairperson sheds some light on the reason for the lack of consensus among the staff:

We’ve had so much coming along. The state initiative of DRA testing... We have the Framework... We have Act 60 that requires action plans and I’m not sure where we decide what we want to work on. I’m not sure where that all comes from... some of it’s probably come from NEASC, and so, in my mind, it’s probably all intertwined.

At Harborside, establishing the connection between School Improvement plans and NEASC recommendations was simplified by the way the schools’ committee work was organized. One of Harborside’s Steering Committee Chairpersons explains.

“We also had to continue with the School Improvement Teams, so the members of the NEASC Steering Committee became the School Improvement Team.”

It appears that assigning leadership responsibilities for school improvement planning to those familiar with NEASC standards can result in close connections between the two processes. Articulating connections between NEASC recommendations and required school improvement plans, it appears, requires coordination that will not occur spontaneously. At Uptown, with a change of building level leadership, teachers who had not been involved in NEASC follow-up reports had limited recollection about the recommendations made by NEASC and were unable to accurately discern where school improvement initiatives had originated.
Table 4.9
Descriptive Statistics for Assertion #22 Relating to Research Question #1 by Role and School

The Visiting Committee’s report was used to develop action plans for improving our school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>% Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>% Disagree</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
<th>% Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>1.2%</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BY ROLE</strong> *</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>3.83</td>
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<td>0%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>63.8%</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Pers.</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>64.3%</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BY SCHOOL</strong> *</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village Green</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>72.2%</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harborside</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td>68.4%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Center</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>84.6%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountainview</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>95.0%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uptown</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* indicates the ANOVA was statistically significant at the .05 level

Assertion #22 requested that respondents indicate their level of agreement with the statement that the NEASC’s Visiting Committee’s report was used to develop action plans for school improvement. When analyzed by mean and percentages, all of the respondents in the role target groups report agreement, with 98.8% of the total respondents indicating that they either agree or strongly agree with the assertion. An ANOVA revealed a significant mean difference of .51 (p = .005) between the responses. Likewise, there was a mean difference of .48 (p = .048) between leadership responses and those of support personnel. Leadership respondents expressed a “strongly agree” rating 83% of the time, as opposed to the teachers and support personnel who, while agreeing...
that the NEASC report influenced school improvement plans, did not agree as strongly as
the leadership of the schools.

This may be related to the type of communication that takes place in the post-
accreditation phase. Four of the schools reported that the schedule of meetings and
opportunities for conversations about the direction of change were altered after the
NEASC on-site visit. While some groups continue to meet, others disbanded or meet
infrequently, limiting communication opportunities. In the words of the Village Green
principal:

We haven't continued that committee work as it was structured except for the
couple of times we had to respond to some of the recommendations... but it
did encourage a lot more conversation cross-grade level than it had before,
which I think is very healthy.

Teachers and support personnel, who may not have direct roles in designing
school improvement plans, perceive that the NEASC recommendations are included in the
plans, but may not be involved enough in the planning process to identify how close the
alignment may be between the NEASC recommendations and the school improvement
initiatives. School leaders, on the other hand, may see the connection more clearly
because of their higher level of involvement in the state-required school improvement
plans. They also bear the responsibility of ensuring that NEASC recommendations are
addressed and periodic reports are filed with the CPEMS.

When analyzed by school target groups, only 1.2% of the respondents do not
agree or strongly agree that the results of accreditation are used to design action plans for
school improvement. The ANOVA indicates that there are significant differences among
the schools, and the Bonferroni identifies City Center and Village Green as having a mean difference of .5684 at a significance level of .006. The difference between City Center and Mountainview is indicated by the .60 mean difference and a .003 level of significance. Likewise, City Center differs from Uptown with a .85 mean difference and a .001 level of significance. Harborside also shows statistically significant differences with Mountainview (mean difference .43 and significance of .004) and Uptown (mean difference .68 and significance of <.001). While nearly all respondents from all schools recognize the inclusion of NEASC recommendations in the development of action plans for school improvement. Harborside and City Center respondents agree more strongly that NEASC recommendations are used as criteria for formal school improvement plans.

Research Question 2: What are the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents about the structure of the self-study processes of accreditation in fostering the development of a community of professional inquiry?

The findings of the second research question are based upon the responses to the following five assertions:

(3) The accreditation process encourages teachers to assess the effectiveness of their own instruction through conversations with other teachers in the school.

(17) The self-study process resulted in increased conversations about teaching and learning among our faculty members. (Scoring reversed and negative wording eliminated for analysis purposes)

(23) The accreditation process has increased the role of teachers as leaders in our school.
(25) The accreditation process has encouraged dialogue with educators outside of our school about the challenges of educational change.

(26) Participation in the accreditation process has improved professional development opportunities for our school staff.

When the composite means of the subset of assertions for Research Question #2 are analyzed by role, it is evident that respondents recognize the nature of the NEASC accreditation process as one that includes opportunity for collaboration and professional inquiry. School leaders value the accreditation process as a tool for increasing professional collaboration to a greater degree than teachers and support personnel, although no statistically significant differences were detected by the ANOVA.

From the perspective of the target groups by school, however, the ANOVA indicates that there is a statistically significant difference among the respondents at the .006 level. Application of the Bonferroni resulted in determining the significant difference to be between City Center and Uptown, with a mean difference of .44 (p = .006).

City Center emerges as the school that most strongly identifies the collaborative aspects of professional community as connected to NEASC processes, followed by Village Green. Participants in Uptown clearly see limited connections between professional community and NEASC processes. While interviews conducted at Harborside and Mountainview reveal that participants felt a strong professional community existed before the NEASC accreditation work was initiated, Uptown attaches little importance to the role of professional collaboration, despite the NEASC recommendations that cited the need for increased teacher communication opportunities.
The interview with a Uptown teacher expresses the district’s lack of follow-through in sustaining cross-grade level and cross-school groupings to promote the development of professional inquiry and support. She explains:

One thing that I remembered about NEASC was that they wanted us—they felt we should meet with the other teachers at the other primary school periodically. So for one year we did that—one staff meeting a month was held at either their school or ours. And some sharing went on, and maybe some actual work sessions too. There again, I don't remember. . . it blurs in my mind.

Table 4.10

Composite Mean Scores by Role and School for Research Question #2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Inquiry</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BY ROLE</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Personnel</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BY SCHOOL *</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village Green</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harborside</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
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<td>City Center</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td>Mountainview</td>
<td>2.94</td>
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<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uptown</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* indicates the ANOVA was statistically significant at the .05 level

A City Center teacher, on the other hand, articulates the commitment to professional inquiry that was fostered through NEASC accreditation work when she speaks of the subcommittees that teachers felt they had choice in joining, and the close
match between the Accelerated Schools teacher cadre groups and the accreditation subcommittees:

We’re still continuing to do cadres and things like that. Like this year, we focused our challenge area, so in September we’ve got new focus areas, so we’re used to collaboration... teachers will get together and discuss books, so there is a lot of collaboration here. You know, we have planning time as well. Classroom teachers have planning time and some of those issues come up during that time too.

Unlike Uptown, which seems to feel that the requirement for collaboration was imposed from an outside agency, City Center staff has recognized the value of professional community and embraces the opportunity for collaboration and conversation, expanding their efforts to adoption of models of with protocols for professional inquiry through the Accelerated Schools Model for school change.
Table 4.11

Descriptive Statistics for Assertion #3 Relating to Research Question #2 by Role and School

The accreditation process encourages teachers to assess the effectiveness of their own instruction through conversations with other teachers in the school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>% Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>% Disagree</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
<th>% Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OVERALL</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BY ROLE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
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<td>.79</td>
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<td>16.7%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>72.4%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sup. Pers.</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>85.7%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village Green</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>61.1%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harborside</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>73.7%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Center</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
<td>61.5%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountainview</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>70.0%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uptown</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>85.7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* indicates the ANOVA was statistically significant at the .05 level.

Assertion #3 required respondents to examine their perception of how the accreditation process encourages teachers to assess the effectiveness of instruction through conversations with other teachers in the school. When analyzed by role target groups, 90.5% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the accreditation process fostered such conversation. Although the ANOVA finds no significant differences among target groups by role, there is some difference in mean scores among the groups, with leadership means the highest at 3.50, and teachers the lowest at 3.05. Percentages indicate that the school leaders and support personnel perceptions that
professional conversations had occurred among teachers were somewhat stronger than teachers themselves report.

When school target groups' responses are analyzed, it is evident that all schools feel that opportunities for dialogue about instructional effectiveness occurred during the NEASC accreditation process, although City Center clearly reports the highest positive response, with 100% of the respondents indicating that they agree or strongly agree with Assertion # 3. The ANOVA indicates a significant mean difference (p = .003). The Bonferroni post hoc analysis identifies the difference between City Center and Uptown as a .76 mean difference (p = .007). It also shows a statistically significant mean difference of .67 (p = 0.13) between City Center and Harborside.

Examining the qualitative data lends clarity to the reasons for these differences.

The City Center Steering Committee Chairperson explains the impact of the NEASC self-study on the school staff:

I think it really brought us all together, even though we were under the impression that we were a really tight faculty... We shared the frustrations, the concerns, the intimidations and really supported each other to work through it and come up with a document that was truly what our school said it was at the time. There was a cohesiveness about the whole process... It forced us to look at areas we had thought we were really 100% A-okay with, we found out that we really did need to change, that we had to take a good hard look at what we did to move forward, and... we’ve come so far since that initial process. It’s on-going and people are truly invested... to continuing that process of constant reflection to see what we need to do to bring our students forward and to support our teachers to bring them forward.

On the other hand, an Uptown teacher reports a very different value to the self-study aspect of the NEASC process.
Well, I think it was just one more thing we had to do in our already busy lives, and it wasn’t something that came from us—it was imposed on us. And I know my feeling was that the person who thought we should do this did not have to do all the work. It was an idea, maybe it was a fine idea, but we weren’t asked or anything, and it was quite time consuming.

At Harborside, it appears that the staff was very involved in conversations about instruction during the self-study phase of the accreditation process, but that the formal, structured time for such meetings has lessened since the NEASC on-site visit. The principal of Harborside explains:

Within the school, I would say that it [meeting time] has continued to some degree, but what I think has happened is that we haven’t had much of a purpose for it. It certainly continues in our follow-up committee—they are very cross-graded kinds of committees, but the eighteen months of the (self-study) process were probably the times, in terms of communication, that I’ve ever seen in this building. And we’ve maintained some of it, but not to the same degree.

It is interesting to note that in all five schools, commitment to undergoing the accreditation process had been initiated at the Central Office level. Interview data reveals that in the case of City Center, the school was able to continue to utilize the self-study meeting format for undertaking and sustaining change; while at Uptown, the process was not valued as much by the staff and was quickly discontinued following the on-site visit. School-wide communication about the nature of the process and building level leadership that facilitated cross-grade communication appear to have impacted staff perceptions about the importance of the NEASC accreditation process.

Harborside continues to use a committee format for responding to NEASC recommendations, but the involvement is not as intensive as it had been when there were formal, defined structures in place to allow the time for conversations about instruction.
The principal speaks to the challenge of providing time for staff to meet. "Trying to find time for it, though. and trying to find quality time, was tough... that was probably the biggest issue to work around." The effects of school culture, building level leadership and time constraints appear to be significant factors that influence the commitment to conversations about instruction. Finding time to continue the conversations was reported by all schools to be an on-going challenge.

Table 4.12

Descriptive Statistics for Assertion #17 Relating to Research Question #2 by Role and School

The self-study process resulted in increased conversations about teaching and learning among our faculty members. (Scoring reversed and negative wording eliminated for analysis purposes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>% Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>% Disagree</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
<th>% Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>**OVERALL *</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>.54</td>
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<td>3.6%</td>
<td>60.2%</td>
<td>36.1%</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
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</tr>
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<td>.53</td>
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<td>71.4%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
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<td>**BY SCHOOL *</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Village Green</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>76.5%</td>
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<td>Harbor Side</td>
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<td>City Center</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>.37</td>
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<td>0%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>84.6%</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mountainview</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
<td>35.0%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uptown</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>85.7%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*indicates the ANOVA was statistically significant at the .05 level
Assertion #17 asked respondents to indicate the degree to which participation in the accreditation process had impacted opportunities for discussions about teaching and learning.

When analyzed from the perspective of the target groups by role, leadership, teachers and support personnel all clearly agree that participating in the NEASC accreditation process provided occasions for discussion about teaching and learning. One hundred percent of the school leaders surveyed either agreed or strongly agreed that opportunities for discussions about teaching and learning characterized the NEASC process. Although 96.5% of teachers either agreed or strongly agreed with the assertion, only 29.8% strongly agreed, as differentiated from the leadership who strongly agreed 83.3% of the time. Support personnel’s responses were closer to teachers’ than to the leadership responses, with 92.8% either agreeing or strongly agreeing that the NEASC process had led to increased conversations about teaching and learning. The ANOVA indicated statistical significance at the .001 level, and the Bonferroni post hoc analysis demonstrates that there is a significant mean difference of .57 \( (p = .002) \) between school leaders and teachers. A similar trend exists between the responses of school leaders and support personnel, with the Bonferroni confirming a significant mean difference of .69 \( (p = .003) \).

When analyzed from the perspective of target groups by school, the data indicates that the staff perceives that schools did experience opportunities for conversations about teaching and learning through the NEASC accreditation process. Village Green’s 94.1% represents the lowest percentage of staff from all schools that either agreed or strongly
agreed, while at City Center, 100% of the surveyed staff indicated that professional conversations had been facilitated through NEASC processes. The ANOVA showed statistically significant differences among the groups (p = .012), and the Bonferroni identified that City Center and Village Green had a significant mean difference of .72 (p = .002). Likewise, City Center and Harborside are shown as having a significant mean difference of .53 (p = .042). City Center and Mountainview demonstrate a significant mean difference of .5462 (p = .030). The City Center School once again emerges as the school with the strongest positive feelings about the impact of the accreditation process. Interestingly, it is the only school among the five schools surveyed to be required to participate in a Focused Visit because of the NEASC’s Visiting Committee’s concern about curricular and student achievement issues. How the process affected the school is explicated by the principal, who speaks of the connections that helped to enrich the conversations in a school that was seen by NEASC and the state as under-performing:

For us, being in the place that we were in, having the two-year Focused Visit was essential. Knowing when people came back, they saw. They didn’t just read what we wrote. They saw the interactions of the staff... they saw the efforts and the processes we were building. For us, it was essential having those people come back. And another thing for us is we’re involved with the Accelerated Schools process, which has a model sort of like Critical Friends—coming in, doing a self-study and offering suggestions to move people further along the path to powerful learning, also linking together with accreditation the Accelerated Schools model... those things linked together for us really well.

The Village Green Steering Committee Chairperson indicates that conversations about teaching and learning occurred during the accreditation process, and continue among staff without a formal structure for meeting. She states, however, that because the school
faced few recommendations for change following their NEASC on-site visit, the need for continued meetings was not seen as a priority.

We haven’t continued the committee work as it was structured. We didn’t have huge amounts of reasons for those people to get back together. But it did encourage a lot more conversation cross-grade level than it had before, which I think is very healthy.

It appears that when school leaders are able to maintain a schedule that allows teachers the time to meet to discuss teaching and learning, the value of such time is recognized by staff. In the case of City Center, formalizing meetings with a protocol for these discussions has resulted in 100% of the staff acknowledging the value of the discussion time. While all five schools established the time for meetings to accomplish the self-study phase of accreditation, four of the schools report that they have not met with the same regularity as they did when undergoing the accreditation process.
Table 4.13

Descriptive Statistics for Assertion #23 Relating to Research Question #2 by Role and School

The accreditation process has increased the role of teachers as leaders in our school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>% Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>% Disagree</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
<th>% Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td><strong>OVERALL</strong> *</td>
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<td>2.4%</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>63.9%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BY ROLE</strong> *</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>58.3%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
<td>63.2%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sup. Pers.</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>BY SCHOOL</strong> *</td>
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<tr>
<td>Village Green</td>
<td>2.83</td>
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<td>66.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harborside</td>
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<td>68.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>City Center</td>
<td>3.46</td>
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<td>0%</td>
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<td>46.2%</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mountainview</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uptown</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*indicates the ANOVA was statistically significant at the .05 level.

Assertion #23 asked respondents to indicate the degree to which participation in NEASC accreditation had increased the role of teachers as leaders in their schools. The majority of those surveyed indicated that NEASC had positively impacted the roles of teachers as leaders in the schools, with 77.2% of the respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing with Assertion #23. When analyzed by the role target group, the ANOVA indicated a significant difference (p = .050). However, application of the more conservative Bonferroni did not identify any significant differences among the three groups of leaders, teachers, and support personnel.
Interestingly, though, 24.6% of teachers surveyed did not feel that the NEASC process increased the role of teachers as leaders, while 91.6% of the leaders surveyed perceived that the role of teachers as leaders had been influenced by accreditation. Since Steering Committee Chairpersons, who are teachers, were considered to be in leadership positions for the purposes of this study, it appears that those more involved in administrative aspects of the process of accreditation perceived the increased responsibility of teacher leadership to a greater degree than the average teacher whose participation may have been less demanding of time and effort.

When the data was analyzed by school target group, the ANOVA demonstrated statistically significant differences were present \( p = .001 \). The Bonferroni post hoc analysis again showed a significant difference of .63 between City Center and Village Green \( p = .045 \). City Center and Mountainview exhibit a statistically significant mean difference of .61 \( p = .047 \). City Center and Uptown have the most disparate views on the impact of NEASC on the increased roles of teachers as leaders as evidenced by the significant mean difference of 1.08 \( p = .001 \). Over 92% of Uptown teachers did not perceive any increased role for teacher leaders due to NEASC, while 100% of City Center teachers agreed or strongly agreed that the roles of teacher leaders had increased because of their involvement with NEASC accreditation.

Interview data can be used to explicate such widely divergent views. Uptown teachers talk of the cross-grade level committees that were formed for the purpose of completing the self-study, but remarked that the groupings did not include all teachers or continue after the on-site visit. The Steering Committee Chairperson at Uptown lends
insight into how the roles of teacher leaders were perceived as burdensome to the staff:

"It impacted some people more than others, because some people weren't as involved as I was on it. And it was very stressful, very time consuming."

The principal of Uptown indicates that the role of teacher as leader was new to the staff and describes the process of assigning subcommittee chairperson roles by "looking at all the report areas and dividing up the number of people and saying, 'Will you chair this, will you chair that?'" A City Center teacher, on the other hand, describes a cadre system that was already in place that had provided for development of teacher leaders:

We had focus areas; different challenges that different teachers according to their interests would join these cadres and try to come up with solutions to problems using the inquiry process, so I think when it came time to do accreditation… people joined the areas that were of interest to them. So I think they really had a vested interest in their topic so there was a lot of collaboration. It wasn’t just led by one person.

Of the Harborside staff, 78.9% indicate that teacher leadership increased as a result of accreditation. The 21.1% who disagree feel that teacher leadership has long been valued and promoted in their school. One of the Steering Committee Chairpersons of Harborside explains: "It’s always been a staff that has liked to look toward new things. We aren’t people who just sit back and do things the way they have always been done. Lifelong learners.”

The differences between the schools, then, seem to have complex explanations, with it being clear that City Center perceives the NEASC process as instrumental in promoting teacher leadership in concert with the Accelerated Schools model of inquiry.
cadres. Harborside perceives that they have a long-standing tradition of inquiry and professional growth, while Uptown appears to have disbanded all formal cross-grade level groups after receiving its initial accreditation. Communication about teaching and learning at Uptown appears to be largely informal. When asked if any cross-grade level or cross-school groups are still in existence, the Uptown teacher responded, “Not that I know of.”

Table 4.14
Descriptive Statistics for Assertion #25 Relating to Research Question #2 by Role and School

The accreditation process has encouraged dialogue with educators outside of our school about the challenges of educational change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
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<th>% Disagree</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
<th>% Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OVERALL</td>
<td>2.85</td>
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<td>2.6%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
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<td>0%</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>2.77</td>
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<td>Mountainview</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*indicates the ANOVA was statistically significant at the .05 level

Assertion #25 required a response about the level of agreement with a statement indicating that NEASC processes had encouraged dialogue about the challenges of educational change with educators outside of the school. When analyzed by the role target group, it is evident from the responses that all levels of school staff feel that
participation in accreditation provides opportunities for conversations with professional educators from outside the school. Although the ANOVA finds a significant difference ($p = .045$), application of the more conservative Bonferroni did not identify any significant differences among the three groups. However, the fact that nearly 20% of teachers disagree that such opportunities for dialogue with educators outside of their school occurred during the NEASC accreditation process speaks to the interaction between the Visiting Committee and the school staff, as well as the level of involvement in the process by staff members.

When the data were studied by school target groups, the schools generally agree that participating in NEASC accreditation provided time for discussions with educators from outside of their schools. However, it should be noted that the range of disagreement with the assertion is between 0% and 26.3%. While the ANOVA did not identify any statistically significant differences among the schools' responses, the finding may bear examination by NEASC leaders to determine how the organization and leadership of the Harborside on-site Visiting Committee structured its time so that 100% of the school staff felt that they had opportunities for conversations with Visiting Team members about teaching and learning. The relationship building that occurred during the on-site visit was described by the Harborside principal:

I have to say our team made us feel like we were the best school in the State of Maine... and we know we had issues, and they pointed out the issues, but they did it in such a way that we came out of the experience feeling like this was super... I remember the last day the team was here and, and it was, "Do we have to let these people go?" It was a great experience.
Table 4.15
Descriptive Statistics for Assertion #26 Relating to Research Question #2 by Role and School

Participation in the accreditation process has improved professional development opportunities for our school staff.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>% Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>% Disagree</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
<th>% Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OVERALL</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>2.91</td>
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<td>25.0%</td>
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<td>28.1%</td>
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<td>10.5%</td>
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<td>Sup. Pers.</td>
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<td>15.4%</td>
<td>69.2%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Mountainview</td>
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<td>30.0%</td>
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<td>5.0%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>21.4%</td>
<td>78.6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* indicates the ANOVA was statistically significant at the .05 level

Assertion #26 requested that respondents indicate their level of agreement with the statement that participation in NEASC accreditation had increased their opportunities for professional development. Analysis of target groups by role shows that while 72% of those surveyed indicate that they either agree or strongly agree with the assertion, over one-fourth of the respondents perceive that they do not see a connection between NEASC and increased opportunities for professional development. The ANOVA indicated that no significant differences existed among the three groups.

When analyzed by school, the ANOVA found significant differences among schools ($p = .014$). The Bonferroni post hoc analysis established a significant mean
difference of .80 (p = .010) between City Center and Harborside. City Center staff perceives that participation in NEASC accreditation has resulted in increased professional development opportunities, with only 7.7% of the staff disagreeing with Assertion #26. In contrast, 41.5% of Harborside teachers either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement because of the school and district's already strong support for professional development. One of the Harborside Steering Committee Chairpersons' comments clarifies the reason for such a high number of negative responses:

We look at every new thing that comes along. We've always had somebody who went to look at Rebecca Sitton Spelling, or the literacy movement. Or we took a whole bunch that went to see the New Zealand prototype. A whole pile of us went off one summer and we used Eisenhower money to do problem solving math with a California person. We've been kind of on the forefront of this stuff, so... it was just another part of the whole process, the whole thing we've always done.

The City Center principal, in contrast, was able to use the NEASC recommendations for expanded professional development opportunities for staff to gain the skills and knowledge needed to effect school change. She comments:

Having those recommendations from NEASC validated things that I wanted to move forward, but also validated to Downtown that they needed to support us in a lot of different aspects. And they did do that, you know, through planning professional development, or money to focus on materials, or to support training or our inclusion model.

With the support of NEASC, professional development opportunities increased for City Center staff. Harborside, on the other hand, already had secured district-level support for substantial professional growth and did not have to address NEASC recommendations about professional development. It is interesting to note, however, that all schools' perceptions indicate that professional development opportunities are those
that are provided through course work, in-service and workshop offerings. Although all participants in the interviews were clear about the value of the NEASC process in impacting changes in their schools, none of the individuals interviewed recognized the self-study process itself as a form of professional development.

Research Question 3: What are the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents about the impact of participation in the accreditation process on the school’s curriculum, instruction and assessment methodologies?

The findings of the third research question are based upon the responses to the following five assertions:

(4) The accreditation process encourages teachers to meet to discuss changes to the schools’ curriculum.

(9) The accreditation process has led to changes in instructional practices in our school. (Scoring reversed and negative wording eliminated for analysis purposes)

(10) The accreditation report provided information on which to make sound educational changes in our school.

(12) Participation in the accreditation process resulted in changes to how our school uses the results of student assessments.

(14) The accreditation process effected positive change in our elementary school’s educational program.
Table 4.16

Composite Mean Scores by Role and School for Research Question #3
Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>OVERALL</strong></td>
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<td>79</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BY SCHOOL</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Village Green</td>
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<td>Harborside</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mountainview</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uptown</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* indicates the ANOVA was statistically significant at the .05 level

Analysis of the composite data for the subset of assertions aligned to Research Question #3 indicates that surveyed school members at all levels agree that the NEASC accreditation process has impacted curriculum, assessment and instruction in their schools (overall M = 3.11). Statistically significant differences across role target groups were identified by an ANOVA (p = .025). The Bonferroni post hoc analysis identified the difference between leadership and teacher responses as significant (p = .022), with a mean difference of .24. In part, this may be due to the fact that those teachers included in the leadership group for the purposes of this study may be more involved in the initiatives prompted by the NEASC processes than teachers and support personnel whose leadership roles are not as strongly developed in these areas.
An ANOVA revealed that differences were also apparent across schools (p = .011). Village Green and City Center indicate that curriculum, assessment and instructional practices have been influenced by participation in NEASC processes. Harborside, Mountainview and Uptown share this perception to a lesser degree than City Center and Village Green. Bonferroni tests revealed that City Center and Mountainview show a statistically significant mean difference of .33.

Mountainview staff members feel that, while meetings were held and changes made to curriculum, instruction and assessment in light of NEASC accreditation self-study processes, the hard work of change was already in progress. The Mountainview principal reports that the NEASC process “did validate for us that we were moving in the right direction.” A Mountainview teacher explains:

I think that is where we have a lot of work to do. I think we need to align and sequence better than what we are doing and NEASC pointed some of those things out... I would say that NEASC did help us in that area, I mean, here’s really some gaps, here’s some holes, here’s some problems, here’s some overlap, so that was very helpful. You know, I think the biggest thing of those three—curriculum—was the one that to me really opened our eyes. The other two, I think we were pretty well headed in those directions anyway, but may have speeded things up, or caught some details we would have missed along the way.

City Center was required to address changes in all three areas of curriculum, assessment, and instruction in response to the recommendations of the NEASC Visiting Committee. The result, explains the City Center Steering Committee Chairperson, has had some profound effects on teaching and learning at City Center.

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Teachers realized that we had to align our curriculum and our teaching with the Frameworks. I think people, once they realized that this was the way the school leadership wanted us to go and the accreditation process had suggested. I just think it’s been a much more active and lively—a more engaging curriculum for students. The assessment piece—we used the assessment piece to drive our instruction too. That’s something we visit every year, as soon as the SAT 9’s come in, we sit as a cross-grade group. We go through them, we look to see where kids’ needs are.

At Uptown, none of the three staff members interviewed could articulate how the NEASC process had affected curriculum, instruction, or assessment practices. The Steering Committee Chairperson indicated that of the three areas, assessment was impacted most directly by NEASC accreditation processes. The Uptown teacher spoke of being confused with some of the many initiatives for change coming from state and district mandates. The principal mused over the question, and when asked specifically about changes to curriculum, assessment, and instruction replied, “Well, that’s a really good question. I’m not sure it did.”
The accreditation process encourages teachers to meet to discuss changes to the schools’ curriculum.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>% Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>% Disagree</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
<th>% Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>1.2%</td>
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<td>61.4%</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BY ROLE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
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<td>.51</td>
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<td>0%</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
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<td>Sup. Pers.</td>
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<td>57.1%</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village Green</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td>58.8%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harborside</td>
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<tr>
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<td>70.0%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uptown</td>
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<td>.55</td>
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<td>14.3%</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* indicates the ANOVA was statistically significant at the .05 level

Assertion #4 elicited responses from survey participants about the impact the NEASC accreditation process had on encouraging teachers to meet to discuss changes to the school’s curriculum. When analyzed by role and school target groups, agreement is strong that the NEASC’s self-study component of the accreditation process includes opportunities for school staff to discuss curricular change. Roughly 93% of the survey participants in role target group responded that they either agreed or strongly agreed with Assertion #4. The ANOVA, applied to the role target group, did not identify any statistically significant differences.
When the data were analyzed by school, 85.7% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the assertion. Village Green and City Center both had no responses in the disagree or strongly disagree category. The ANOVA indicated a significant mean difference by school, but the application of the (relatively conservative) Bonferroni test did not result in any statistically significant differences among pairs of schools. Uptown, however, had the greatest number of responses in the disagree category, with 14.3% of the surveyed staff responding that curricular changes had not occurred as a result of participation in NEASC.

The principal of Village Green describes the type of conversations that took place during the accreditation process that resulted in changes to curriculum for Village Green students:

Everyone on staff was involved in committees. So we had all of our instructional assistants and we had our custodians and we had everybody involved in our committees, and really—when you have—they’re mixtures, the committees ended up being mixtures of people that normally would not mix together, so I think it allowed everybody to take a really distinctive, sort of different viewpoint on what we taught. And that was healthy. Very, very healthy I thought. And it served, you know, to be sort of an eye-opener for some of the other people who didn’t have the opportunity to look at curriculum in that way.

Uptown’s participation in K-12 district-wide curricular initiatives, and a lack of control or ownership over the process of curricular change may explain why some staff at the Vermont school disagreed with the Assertion # 4. The principal of Uptown speaks of the school’s reaction to NEASC recommendations about needed curricular changes:
I know there were a few areas we needed to improve on. One of the areas we were dealing with in curriculum at the time was at the time, our K-12 group was on going, so we kind of kept referring things to that group because the building wasn’t involved by itself. So maybe if that hadn’t been going on it would have been different, maybe we would have said, “Oh yes, in Language Arts we need to improve here and there,” but we kept saying, “The K-12 group is developing that.”

Table 4.18

Descriptive Statistics for Assertion #9 Relating to Research Question #3 by Role and School

The accreditation process has led to changes in instructional practices in our school. (Scoring reversed and negative wording eliminated for analysis purposes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>% Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>% Disagree</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
<th>% Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>3.33</td>
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<td>16.7%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>62.1%</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sup. Pers.</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BY SCHOOL *</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village Green</td>
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<tr>
<td>City Center</td>
<td>3.84</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mountainview</td>
<td>3.45</td>
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<td>45.0%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uptown</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*indicates the ANOVA was statistically significant at the .05 level

Analysis of responses by school and role indicate that there is an unmistakable relationship between participation in NEASC accreditation processes and the instructional changes. Over 90% of the target groups by role attribute change in instruction to the impact of accreditation. The ANOVA results do not demonstrate any statistically significant differences by role.
Although over 90% of the respondents by school either agree or strongly agree that accreditation has influenced instructional practices, when the responses of this target group were analyzed, the ANOVA pointed out a statistical significance ($p = .001$).

Application of the Bonferroni post hoc comparisons identified a significant mean difference of .74 ($p = .004$) between City Center and Village Green. City Center and Harborside also show a significant mean difference of .80 ($p = .001$). City Center and Uptown demonstrate a significant mean difference of .99 ($p = .001$). Additionally, Mountainview and Uptown show a significant mean difference of .59 ($p = .023$).

City Center, with 100% of the staff reporting that they agree or strongly agree with Assertion # 9, emerges as the school that most strongly attributes instructional changes to the participation in NEASC accreditation. The City Center Steering Committee Chairperson speaks of the response to the call for change included in the NEASC Visiting Committee report:

> Teachers realized that the old way, lecture, was not the way that we were going to best suit our students. That we needed to do more hands-on cooperative type things, a center-based approach which was difficult for some and is still a process for some.

The interviews of the three Uptown staff members reveal that they did not perceive that their instructional practices were altered by participating in NEASC accreditation. The principal responded, "No, no, I don't," when asked if he had witnessed changes in practice during the accreditation process. The Steering Committee Chair and the teacher echoed the sentiments that instructional change had not been
prompted by NEASC, although the survey data demonstrate that 78.5% of the staff feels that such changes have occurred.

Interestingly, 95% of the Mountainview staff agree or strongly agree that instructional practices have been impacted by NEASC processes. A comment from a Mountainview teacher describes the impact the Visiting Committee recommendations had on the direction of instructional changes:

Instruction. I think that goes along with assessment. We were headed there anyway, but this (the NEASC report) may have clarified things, may have pointed out to certain people that they need to reflect more on their method.
Table 4.19

Descriptive Statistics for Assertion #10 Relating to Research Question #3 by Role and School

The accreditation report provided information on which to make sound educational changes in our school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
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<th>% Disagree</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>67.5%</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BY ROLE</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>8.3%</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>71.9%</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sup. Pers.</td>
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<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village Green</td>
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<td>0%</td>
<td>76.5%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harborside</td>
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<td>.56</td>
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<td>5.3%</td>
<td>63.2%</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>City Center</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>.48</td>
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<td>0%</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>69.2%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountainview</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>.52</td>
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<td>5.0%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>92.9%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*indicates the ANOVA was statistically significant at the .05 level

When the data from Assertion #10 are studied, it shows that both target groups undoubtedly feel that the NEASC process has provided them with information that is valued in making educational decisions for their schools and their students. Nearly 98% of the role target group either agree or strongly agree with the assertion, and the identical percentage holds true for the school target group responses. No significant differences were found for the role target group, but when the ANOVA was applied to the target groups by school, a significant mean difference was noted (p = .015). When the Bonferroni post hoc analysis was applied, City Center and Mountainview demonstrated
a significant mean difference of .49 (p = .048). City Center and Uptown also displayed a significant mean difference of .62 (p = .011).

City Center's call to educational change was prompted by the new leadership and also by the need to respond to the NEASC recommendations through a supervised process that included a Focused Visit. An NEASC Commissioner and the Director of the CPEMS returned to the school two years after the initial visit to observe and document the responses to the recommendations. The City Center principal explains how the Focused Visit assisted in the planning and implementation of needed changes:

Having the Focused Visit, knowing it was coming, that was a two-year block of time that we sort of had the recommendations as our guide, our benchmark to keep- we needed to take stock and keep moving forward. . . One of the things the NEASC group talked about was teacher expectations and we looked at how those assumptions and expectations across racial and ethnic categories influence what we expect of children and we planned professional development to examine our assumptions and to focus our work.

At Uptown, the follow-up to recommendations of NEASC were not addressed directly with the staff by the administration. The Steering Committee Chairperson spoke of receiving the report from the NEASC Visiting Committee and how they were utilized by the administration:

They did go over the reports with us, but after that was shown to us, it hasn’t been brought up since. When asked about her role as Steering Committee Chairperson in completing the required two-year follow-up report, the teacher replied, “I didn’t do anything with the two-year.”

While City Center and Uptown were both held accountable by NEASC’s requirement to demonstrate measurable progress toward the recommendations for change made by the Visiting Committee, it appears that knowing NEASC representatives would
return to City Center was an additional lever used by the school administration to initiate change. It does not appear that NEASC recommendations for change were used to facilitate any changes at Uptown. This may possibly be attributed to the fact that one year after the on-site visit by NEASC, the school principal was promoted to Assistant Superintendent and a new principal from outside the school district who was unfamiliar with the NEASC process assumed the school's principalship.

Ninety-five percent of the Mountainview staff perceived that the NEASC report provided them with solid information on which needed changes could be made. The Steering Committee Chairperson explains how the report was used to alter practices at Mountainview.

What we did was we looked at those commendations and we looked at those “needs improvement” and beyond that, we probably looked at information that was particularly geared to our team. And then, from that, we looked at how we can improve. What we can do to make things better educationally for children within our unit, and by doing that within every unit, we find out by discussing with other colleagues that it’s made the whole school a better place for children academically.
Table 4.20

Descriptive Statistics for Assertion #12 Relating to Research Question #3 by Role and School

Participation in the accreditation process resulted in changes to how our school uses the results of student assessments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>% Strongly Disagree</th>
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<th>% Agree</th>
<th>% Strongly Agree</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OVERALL</td>
<td>2.84</td>
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<td>1.2%</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
<td>65.9%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>25%</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>2.77</td>
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<td>1.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Village Green</td>
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<td>17.6%</td>
<td>76.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harborside</td>
<td>2.55</td>
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<td>38.9%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mountainview</td>
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<td>25.0%</td>
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<td>10.0%</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uptown</td>
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<td>28.6%</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*indicates the ANOVA was statistically significant at the .05 level

Of respondents in the both the role and school target groups, 75.7% agree or strongly agree that the use of student assessments has been altered by participation in the accreditation process through NEASC. When analyzed by the role target group, the ANOVA did not indicate any statistically significant differences among the target group by role. However it is interesting to note that support personnel feel most strongly that the ways in which assessment results are used by the school staff has changed. Teachers perceive that there have been fewer changes in assessment utilization than support personnel, with 25.9% of teachers disagreeing that assessment use has changed following NEASC accreditation. Although 25% of the school leaders strongly agree that assessment
usage has been changed by participation in NEASC accreditation processes, another 25% disagree with Assertion #12.

When Assertion #12 is considered by school target groups, 75.7% of the survey respondents either agree or strongly agree that the use of assessment has changed due to participation in NEASC processes. The ANOVA points out a significant difference (p = .010), and the Bonferroni post hoc analysis identifies a significant mean difference of .75 (p = .004) between City Center and Harborside.

The City Center interviews elucidate how the use of assessment measures has been expanded, based on NEASC recommendations. A City Center teacher talks about how the school has responded:

Since the accreditation we are now testing using the Developmental Reading Assessment, which helps us to focus in on the reading skills. . . and also in other areas, just looking at the MCAS (Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment S 9's System) and things like the SAT 9's (Stanford Achievement Tests). We've really sat down and focused on specific questions the kids had challenges in, the types of questions and really trying to adjust our teaching, to add more of those types of questions to, for the ones the kids have trouble with. We've really started to analyze the data more.

The principal of City Center echoes the teacher when she remarks, “As a school we’re moving forward and using assessment to frame our future instructional decisions.”

The Harborside principal perceived that NEASC had an impact on the use of assessment data. She said, “We were just starting to look at assessment practices and the recommendations we received on assessment practices really helped us to move forward.”

A Harborside teacher recognizes the work in progress before the accreditation process as
the motivation to change, rather than the NEASC recommendations. She describes the timing of the assessment work:

We had also started working on that (assessment). . . we went to Connecticut to see how they do their performance-based assessment. We took some training in how to do that. And we knew that that was certainly coming along and we needed to get started on that. So again. I think the timing was right for that and we had started to learn about the new kinds of assessment, and also knowing the deadline was coming from the State, they were going to require our district to have assessments in place. I think the timing was very good. too.

While City Center’s impetus for changing the way assessment results were used was the recommendations included in the NEASC Visiting Committee report, similar recommendations in the Harborside report held less significance for staff because the school had already taken initial steps to re-evaluate their use of assessment to inform instruction.
Table 4.21

Descriptive Statistics for Assertion #14 Relating to Research Question #3 by Role and School

The accreditation process effected positive change in our elementary school’s educational program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>% Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>% Disagree</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
<th>% Strongly Agree</th>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
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<td>57</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sup. Pers.</td>
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<td><strong>BY SCHOOL</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Harborside</td>
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<td>90.0%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uptown</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>.47</td>
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<td>14.3%</td>
<td>78.6%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* indicates the ANOVA was statistically significant at the .05 level.

Assertion #14 required respondents to indicate the degree to which they agreed with a statement about the role of NEASC in fostering positive change in the schools’ educational programs. Teachers and support personnel respondents did not agree as strongly as leadership respondents that positive changes were the results of NEASC accreditation processes. The ANOVA indicated statistically significant differences (p = .004), and the Bonferroni established a significant mean difference between leadership and teachers to be .44 (p = .005). The significant mean difference between leadership and support personnel was established at .51 (p = .010). So, while all but two survey participants agree or strongly agree that accreditation has resulted in positive...
changes, it is the schools’ leaders who most emphatically attribute successful school change initiatives to participation in NEASC accreditation.

When analyzed by school target groups, only Uptown does not have all survey participants either in strong agreement or agreement that positive school change has come about because of the school’s involvement with NEASC accreditation. While 85.7% of Uptown staff either agreed or strongly agreed with Assertion #14, two Uptown respondents disagreed. The ANOVA established a significant difference (p = .001) and the Bonferroni post hoc analysis identifies City Center and Mountainview with a significant mean difference of .52 (p = .008). A significant mean difference of .69 (p = .001) between City Center and Uptown is also indicated by the post hoc analysis.

The City Center principal speaks of her vision of school change, and the close alignment between that vision and the recommendations put forth by the NEASC Visiting Committee:

The recommendations were linked to good practice. I could have come in and said that we needed to do those things because I believe those things needed to be moving forward, but having an outside team come in, a recognized professional organization come in and say, “This is where you need to move if you truly want to serve children.” well, it added weight to where I wanted us to go.

Mountainview, with a staff already committed to self-reflection and self-initiated change, valued the NEASC’s role as change agent somewhat less, using the process for validation of the direction they had undertaken prior to the visit. The principal of Mountainview explains: “I really believe that it’s important to have people from the
outside come in and take a close look at what you’re doing in your school, and I think the validation piece is an important piece.”

Uptown, despite the two dissenting staff members, recognized that change did occur through the NEASC process. The Steering Committee Chairperson admits:

“...There were some good things that came out of it. Some things were accomplished. It may have taken a lot longer than we wanted it to, but some things were accomplished and we still need to work on others.”

**Research Question 4:** What are the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents about the impact of participation in the accreditation process on the community’s support for the school?

The findings of the third research question are based upon the responses to the following six assertions:

(13) The accreditation process increased parent and community involvement in our school.
(15) The accreditation process served to make the community aware of the needs of the school.
(18) The accreditation process improved public perceptions of our school.
(19) Our accreditation status has increased the expectations of the community for our school.
(21) The community has had an interest in the results of the accreditation process.

(Scoring reversed and negative wording eliminated for analysis purposes)

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The accreditation process provided the opportunity for our school to be accountable to the public.

Table 4.22

Composite Mean Scores by Role and School for Research Question #4
Community Support

<table>
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<td>Teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support Personnel</td>
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<td>BY SCHOOL*</td>
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<td>Harborside</td>
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<td>Mountainview</td>
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<td>.39</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uptown</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* indicates the ANOVA was statistically significant at the .05 level

When analyzed by role, the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents about the impact of participation in the NEASC accreditation process on the community’s support for the school indicate that school leaders feel that community involvement has been positively impacted by NEASC. While support personnel agree that NEASC has played a significant role in increasing the community’s support for the schools, teachers are somewhat less convinced that NEASC processes have impacted changes in the level of community involvement. The ANOVA, however, identified no statistically significant differences among the target groups by role.
City Center and Uptown staff feel that the NEASC process has had the least impact on their schools, while Mountainview staff members perceive the strongest connection between increased community support and the NEASC processes. When the ANOVA is employed to analyze the responses by school, a statistically significant difference is identified ($p = .002$). The Bonferroni post hoc analysis shows a significant mean difference of .46 ($p = .001$) between Mountainview and Uptown schools.

The qualitative data informs the reasons for the disparity among the schools. Mountainview was successful in recruiting community members for involvement in the NEASC process. The Steering Committee Chairperson explains:

I think the cross-section of people that was chosen to come in, it wasn’t just one economic group, it was a strand from your upper to lower. I think it was a strand of attitudes that carry, from those that are very positive about our schools, and we also invited those that we knew had some issues with our school. . . I can see the difference that parents now look at our school as a connection to the community, it’s not split down the middle, we are all together, and that’s still in focus even though we have been accredited for a few years.

City Center, on the other hand, struggled to find a way to involve their community members in the process. Because their community connections were not strong, one of the NEASC recommendations they were required to address involved employing strategies to increase community support and involvement in the schools. The Steering Committee Chairperson at City Center describes the challenge of accomplishing this in an inner city setting:

Parents are working and they get home from work, many of our parents are single parents, they’re overwhelmed and challenged. The last thing they want to do is come into school. . . If we have some sort of an incentive the attendance is higher. . . . We have a monthly library trip, we provide pizza and a bus.
The City Center teacher interviewed spoke to the fact that the NEASC recommendation about increasing community involvement encouraged staff to persist in their search for ways to reach out to the community: “It kind of verified what we were doing, and helped us keep on the mission of trying to get parents to come in, and other community support. It’s a challenge in this neighborhood, it’s different.”

The City Center principal indicates that she feels that parents and community members exhibit pride in having their school be accredited, and that the Central Office and school committee has committed to supporting the elementary accreditation process citywide. She explains:

Because we’re an urban system it validates. “Yep, this is a school that someone from the outside the school system has said is doing good things for children, and is focused on student achievement, and this is a good place for your child to go to school.”
Table 4.23

Descriptive Statistics for Assertion #13 Relating to Research Question #4 by Role and School

The accreditation process increased parent and community involvement in our school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>% Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>% Disagree</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
<th>% Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td></td>
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<td>Leadership</td>
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<td>Teacher</td>
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<td>25.0%</td>
<td>58.9%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
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<td>Sup. Pers.</td>
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<td>71.4%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>BY SCHOOL *</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village Green</td>
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<td>0%</td>
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<td>22.2%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mountainview</td>
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<td>57.9%</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uptown</td>
<td>2.30</td>
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<td>0%</td>
<td>76.9%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*indicates the ANOVA was statistically significant at the .05 level

Assertion #13 requested specific information about NEASC’s role in increasing parental and community involvement in the schools. Of all respondents in both target groups, 75.6% see a positive correlation between accreditation and community involvement. When analyzed by role target groups, no significant differences emerge, although support personnel feel more strongly that there has been a positive community response to becoming involved with the schools than school leaders or teachers report.

When the data is studied by school target groups, the ANOVA finds significant differences (p = .001). The Bonferroni post hoc analysis identifies a significant mean
The Village Green principal spoke of the role of the school district’s superintendent in promoting community support for the schools through the involvement with NEASC:

Our superintendent is an adamant supporter of NEASC. . . and he would use the accreditation in the public every time he was in the public as a positive thing. . . he was a real leader in that area. I think he really promoted that in the community. We also did. but as superintendent he had a sort of unique stance, a sort of unique audience. . . at budget hearings and things like that. I wouldn’t have that audience necessarily.

A Mountainview teacher indicates that the NEASC process increased parental involvement in their schools and implied that their input was valued.

Getting parents on some of the committees has an important message-that we value them. That we think that they have important ideas to bring and share that we haven’t thought of. So, for the individuals who were in on those discussions, yes. I think that’s automatically a good thing for interaction between the schools and community.

Uptown’s striking level of disagreement, with 76.9% of staff indicating that the process did not increase parental involvement, was not echoed in the interview with the school principal who felt strongly that parental involvement had increased as a result of participation in the NEASC process. He spoke of the involvement of parents on subcommittees for the self-study process and the fact that parents learned information about the school that they could then “spread through the grapevine.” The Steering Committee Chairperson of Uptown stated that there has been a small but active group who are consistently involved with the school, and she explains that “a lot of that was
taking place before accreditation." The efforts to involve parents in the self-study process do not appear to have been sustained once full accreditation status was awarded to the school. The Uptown teacher recalls:

Well. we did have a community component, didn’t we? We had people on the team- I’d forgotten that... and I know afterwards, after the report came out, it was talked about at our PTC meetings so the parents who came, who weren’t on the committee, heard about... where our strengths are and where we needed to work toward. So, I think that in a limited way, for our school it had some impact.

Table 4.24

Descriptive Statistics for Assertion #15 Relating to Research Question #4 by Role and School

The accreditation process served to make the community aware of the needs of the school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>% Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>% Disagree</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
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<td>69.6%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>56</td>
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<td>.53</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
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<td><strong>BY SCHOOL</strong> *</td>
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<td>Mountainview</td>
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<td>Uptown</td>
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<td>0%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* indicates the ANOVA was statistically significant at the .05 level

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Assertion #15 required respondents to indicate their level of agreement with a statement about how the NEASC accreditation process facilitated community awareness of school needs. Analysis of responses by both role and school target groups to Assertion #15 reveals that 87.9% of respondents in both groups feel that community awareness of the schools' needs was advanced by the participation in NEASC processes. The ANOVA found no significant differences between the responses of school leaders, teachers and support personnel, although it is interesting to note that the leaders agree more strongly than do teachers or support staff with this assertion, perhaps due to more frequent contact with parents and community members.

Among schools, the ANOVA identified a statistically significant difference ($p = .080$). The Bonferroni post hoc analysis, a more conservative measure, did not indicate any statistically significant differences among the schools. Although the quantitative data appears to indicate agreement, the qualitative data provides insights that demonstrate the different levels of awareness that the schools attributed to participation in NEASC accreditation. The Harborside principal laughed as she explained that involvement and awareness are of paramount importance to those in the community:

If they got anymore involved I think we’d have to move out! They’re so involved. Our parents were on every committee, they were involved in a huge volunteer effort... I do think it helped our parents to understand that we were serious about education, that we were willing to put ourselves out there-to have these 18 committees that met and involved a parent on every committee ... so I think that it influenced how parents saw us, but didn’t change involvement.

While Harborside School had some facility issues that were cited in the NEASC report, the principal indicates that parental awareness of those needs was already high...
prior to undertaking the accreditation process. Uptown, on the other hand, felt that facility issues were one area in which the NEASC report did impact community support for needed changes. The Steering Committee Chairperson cited the changes to the physical plant as the most beneficial result of participating in the NEASC process. She explained that safety issues in the stairwells, air quality due to contaminants in a special education classroom rug, and the lack of locked storage space for prescription medications in the nurse's area were all remediated when the school received the NEASC Visiting Committee recommendations.

Table 4.25

Descriptive Statistics for Assertion #18 Relating to Research Question #4 by Role and School

The accreditation process improved public perceptions of our school.

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<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
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<td>.62</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Harborside</td>
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<td>15.8%</td>
<td>73.7%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Center</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>61.5%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountainview</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uptown</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>58.3%</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*indicates the ANOVA was statistically significant at the .05 level
Respondents were asked to react to a statement indicating that participation in the NEASC process improved public perceptions about the school. Target groups, both by role and school, responded in 79.2% of the cases that they either agreed or strongly agreed with this assertion. Although teachers expressed the highest level of disagreement with the assertion at 26.8%, and leaders agreed or strongly agreed with Assertion #18 91.7% of the time, the ANOVA did not identify any statistically significant differences among the groups by role.

When the data is analyzed by school, however, the ANOVA identifies a significant difference (p = <.001). Application of the Bonferroni post hoc analysis confirms that a significant mean difference of .98 (p = <.001) exists between Mountainview and Uptown. Mountainview and City Center also show a significant mean difference of .63 (p = .010). Finally, Mountainview and Village Green display a statistically significant mean difference of .51 (p = .033).

With 100% of the Mountainview staff reporting that they agree or strongly agree that public perceptions of their school have been improved by participation in NEASC accreditation, interview data helps to explain the reasons for the positive response. The Steering Committee Chairperson reported that the effects of deliberately enlisting community members as partners during the accreditation self-study has been a benefit to the school. She remarks:
I see that they (community members) still feel really good about the school now because they were invited in... and I found that they went back to the community and talked to everyone... because it's a small town, you go to the corner store and you talk to the group... but the conversation is still the same, whether it's in a board room or in P's store... nothing has changed since accreditation. What was there is there, only it's better.

City Center and Uptown, the most impoverished of the schools in the study, report the least agreement with Assertion #18. Of Uptown staff, 58.3% do not see a connection between the NEASC process and improved public perceptions of their school. The Steering Committee Chairperson speaks of the fact that, given the school's marginalized population, communication efforts about the process to the entire community was sometimes ignored. "There's a lot of people out there who don't know that we've even been through the process," she says. The City Center School faces similar challenges in attempting to engage community members in the life of the school and has committed to increasing opportunities for community involvement by "thinking outside of the box." The NEASC recommendation that they deliberately search for ways to increase community involvement was operationalized by the staff in one instance when the holiday caroling party sent teachers singing through the neighborhood, to be joined by students and parents as they passed their homes.

The principal of City Center explains that the accreditation status of the school and the Focused Visit "gave parents a sense of increased confidence in our school." The Steering Committee Chairperson mentioned cautiously, however, that in order for the community to fully appreciate the value of the accreditation process, the leadership of the Visiting Committee needs to be deliberately selected to ensure that community members
feel valued and respected. She explained that the chairperson of the NEASC Visiting Committee, "someone from an upper class rural community" did not have the understanding about the community that could create meaningful connections for community members and parents who volunteered to serve on sub-committees. "It's different, it's so different... it was totally out of her realm, and so as a leader, the report missed that awareness that intuitiveness. . . ."

While community members at City Center may have lost ground with some community members due to the leadership of the NEASC Visiting Team, the Village Green interview data suggest that the community was well aware of the strengths of the school even before accreditation. The Steering Committee Chairperson at Village Green sums up the community's response to the accreditation report in the following words: "We knew you could do it. We're happy, we're shining. We knew you were going to shine... okay, now you've got the seal of approval."

At Village Green, public perceptions about school effectiveness were already solidly established. While at Uptown and City Center the challenge to interest and involve the public in the life of the schools is a necessary first step to creating understanding between the schools and their communities.
Table 4.26

Descriptive Statistics for Assertion #19 Relating to Research Question #4 by Role and School

Our accreditation status has increased the expectations of the community for our school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>% Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>% Disagree</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
<th>% Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OVERALL</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BY ROLE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>31.5%</td>
<td>61.1%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sup. Pers.</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>64.3%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BY SCHOOL</strong> *</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village Green</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harborside</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Center</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>61.5%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountainview</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>55.0%</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uptown</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*indicates the ANOVA was statistically significant at the .05 level

Assertion #19 required respondents to indicate their level of agreement with the statement that accreditation increased community expectations for the school. When studied by both role and school target groups, 72.5% of all respondents either agree or strongly agree with the assertion. The ANOVA did not identify any significant differences among the responses in the role group. School leaders report a higher level of agreement with the assertion than teachers or support personnel.

When the examination of data is undertaken by school target groups, the ANOVA shows a significant difference ($p = .043$) level. The Bonferroni post hoc analysis identifies a significant mean difference of .61 ($p = .034$) between Mountainview and
Uptown. Mountainview clearly feels that the community involvement has been positive for the school and recognizes that community expectations have risen as a result of NEASC accreditation. The principal feels that the increased expectations of the community and the NEASC fully accredited status of the school permits the staff to participate in innovative initiatives. He explains:

I keep telling our staff that NEASC... the outside honor from respected educators builds the trust in your community and from the board to let you do those things that you think are in the best interest of kids... we have great freedom, we have autonomy to run our show.

Uptown interviews do not provide any insight into community expectations for school improvements, but the limited involvement of community members in the accreditation process and the fact that the staff speaks of the challenge to involve community members on an on-going basis indicates that increased communication with the community is needed before public perceptions of the school can be improved.
Table 4.27

Descriptive Statistics for Assertion #21 Relating to Research Question #4 by Role and School

The community has had an interest in the results of the accreditation process. (Scoring reversed and negative wording eliminated for analysis purposes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>% Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>% Disagree</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
<th>% Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OVERALL</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>63.4%</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BY ROLE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>3.83</td>
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<td>0%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sup. Pers.</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>64.3%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BY SCHOOL *</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village Green</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>64.7%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harborside</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>63.2%</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Center</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>84.6%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountainview</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>.60</td>
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<td>5.0%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uptown</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>61.5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* indicates the ANOVA was statistically significant at the .05 level

Assertion #21 asked respondents about their perceptions of community interest in the accreditation status and Visiting Committee report. The data indicates that overall, staff at all levels surveyed and across all schools feel that the community was interested in the accreditation results. Of respondents by role and schools, 86.6% indicate that they either agree or strongly agree with the assertion. When the ANOVA was applied to the role target group, no statistically significant differences were discovered among the respondents. It is interesting to note that while no school leaders disagree with the assertion, 16.1% of teachers do not perceive that the community has had an interest in the report, accreditation status, or follow-up activities required on the school by NEASC.
The ANOVA points out a significant mean difference (p = .003) among school responses. The Bonferroni post hoc analysis identifies Harborside and Uptown as significantly differing in their responses, with a mean difference of .62 (p = .043). Mountainview and Uptown show a .8615 significant mean difference of .86 (p = .001).

One of the Harborside Steering Committee Chairpersons explains that the community’s interest in accreditation continued after the on-site visit was accomplished due to the principal’s pro-active role in continuing the conversation about school change.

We’ve always had this group called Friends of the Harbor, but it wasn’t a particularly cohesive group, so K. [the principal] took this opportunity to rework it and she’s gotten even more participation through that.

Mountainview clearly utilized the process to celebrate the success of the school and promote the positive aspects of achieving successful accreditation. The principal remarks:

What it did for us was validate that we were headed in the right direction... we had three recommendations, so it was kind of like, “All right, you’re headed in the right direction” for teachers and parents and board members.

The Mountainview Steering Committee Chairperson agrees with the principal’s remarks and concludes:

It gave us a showcase to be proud of, but it also gave us things to work on, because nobody’s perfect and we needed to make some changes. And when the next accreditation comes around, I think you’ll find that same drive and that same pride and strength will be there and will not go away and that’s what I think made the accreditation process so valuable for the school, the staff and the community.

The Steering Committee Chairperson at Uptown, in contrast, did not indicate that the community expressed interest in the accreditation results, although there had been a
public presentation of the report. Her comments indicate that for community members and staff, the impact of the process ceased to exist once the school obtained the status of an accredited school. The fact that the Steering Committee Chairperson has not been involved in any follow-up reports speaks to the lack of communication about the ongoing commitment to reflection and the public reporting of progress in addressing NEASC Visiting Committee recommendations.

Table 4.28

Descriptive Statistics for Assertion #24 Relating to Research Question #4 by Role and School

The accreditation process provided the opportunity for our school to be accountable to the public.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>% Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>% Disagree</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
<th>% Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OVERALL</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>70.2%</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BY ROLE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
<td>69.0%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sup. Pers.</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>78.6%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BY SCHOOL*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village Green</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
<td>77.8%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harborside</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>78.9%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Center</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountainview</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uptown</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>64.3%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* indicates the ANOVA was statistically significant at the .05 level

Assertion #24 requested school staff to indicate their degree of agreement with a statement about the NEASC's role in fostering school accountability to the public. There was consistency in the responses by role and schools, with 88.1% of all respondents
indicating that they agreed or strongly agreed with the assertion that the NEASC process provided a measure of public accountability.

The ANOVA detected no statistically significant differences among the responses for either target group, although it is interesting to note that by role, teachers had the highest level of disagreement with the assertion. By school, Mountainview clearly sees public accountability as a positive aspect of accreditation, with 100% of staff either agreeing or strongly agreeing that NEASC provided this for their school and community.

Research Question 5: What are the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents about the impact of participation in the accreditation process on efforts to increase student achievement? The findings of the fifth research question are based upon the responses to the following five assertions:

(6) Participation in the accreditation process has influenced how our school measures students’ academic achievement.

(7) The accreditation process has resulted in sustained staff discussions about ways to increase student achievement. (Scoring reversed and negative wording eliminated for analysis purposes)

(11) Participation in the accreditation process has resulted in teachers having higher standards for student achievement.

(16) The accreditation process encouraged on-going dialogue with school staff about high expectations for student achievement.

(20) The accreditation self-study process led to analysis of student work to determine how student performance can be improved.
Table 4.29

Composite Mean Scores by Role and School for Research Question #5
Student Achievement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>OVERALL</strong></td>
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<td>.47</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Personnel</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**BY SCHOOL *</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village Green</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harborside</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Center</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountainview</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uptown</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* indicates the ANOVA was statistically significant at the .05 level

In seeking to determine if participation in accreditation resulted in increased efforts to improve student achievement, respondents were asked to indicate their levels of agreement with five related assertions. The results for this research question, tabulated into a composite score, show the weakest level of agreement by the respondents of the five research questions posed. When analyzed by both role and school, the composite mean is measured at 2.93, indicating that staff’s level of agreement is somewhat less positive in this area than in the areas of school change: curriculum, assessment and instruction; professional collaboration; and community support.

The ANOVA did not identify any significant differences among the target groups by role, but when the data was analyzed by schools, a statistically significant difference is noted ($p = .002$). The Bonferroni establishes significant mean differences between City
Center and all other schools surveyed, with the exception of Village Green. City Center and Harborside show a significant mean difference of .41 (p = .001). Likewise, City Center and Mountainview show a significant mean difference of .34 (p = .009). City Center and Uptown also show a significant mean difference of .50 (p = .002).

By studying the interview data, it is possible to examine some of the practices at each of the schools that influenced these responses. The City Center teacher explains that efforts to increase student achievement were prompted by participation in NEASC. The principal recalls the impact of the NEASC recommendation to examine teacher expectations for student learning:

One of the things the NEASC group talked about was teacher expectations, and we looked at how assumptions and expectations across racial and ethnic categories influences what we expect of children and we planned professional development to help us examine our assumptions and to kind of focus our work.

She further explains that continued professional development through the Accelerated Schools model has assisted with this raising of teacher expectations for student achievement, and articulates the staff’s commitment to inclusionary practices, again a response to an NEASC recommendation.

Both Harborside and Mountainview schools felt strongly that they were already in the process of aligning to state curricular documents in efforts to increase student achievement. A Harborside Steering Committee Chairperson remarks: “If we hadn’t been a school that was very pro-active, I think we would be saying more definitely this (accreditation) would change our practice.”
The Mountainview principal speaks of the on-going commitment of the staff to increase student achievement and explains that their school has turned to differentiated instruction and “looping” placement practices, where teachers remain with students for two consecutive years, to ensure that students are continuing to gain academically. He explains NEASC’s role in these changes as “validating what we are doing.”

In contrast, Uptown focused on the student population and their multiple needs as stumbling blocks to increased achievement for children. When asked if accreditation positively impacted student achievement, the Steering Committee Chairperson replied:

Probably in some ways. Some of it is, I think- it’s far-fetched for some children we are not going to see the achievement we want to see for the kids we have in this population. The administration is really pushing for raising the bar for all students in this school. We have a very low-income population in this school and it’s hard to see a lot of academic progress in a lot of these children because of issues that they are dealing with at home.

City Center’s commitment to examining instructional practices and teacher assumptions, and then supporting changes to these areas through professional development, appear to have been positively influenced by NEASC recommendations and furthered by participation in the Accelerated Schools model of inquiry cadres. Uptown interviews indicate that staff members appear to be looking toward external factors that limit student achievement rather than at instructional issues to ensure that student are being challenged and that needs of children are being met.
Table 4.30

Descriptive Statistics for Assertion #6 Relating to Research Question #5 by Role and School

Participation in the accreditation process has influenced how our school measures students’ academic achievement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>% Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>% Disagree</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
<th>% Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>OVERALL</strong></td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>70.7%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**BY ROLE ***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
<td>63.2%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sup. Pers.</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BY SCHOOL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village Green</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harborside</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
<td>68.4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Center</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>84.6%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountainview</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uptown</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>78.6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* indicates the ANOVA was statistically significant at the .05 level

Assertion #6 required respondents to designate their level of agreement with a statement that states that NEASC processes have impacted how the school measures student achievement. Of the respondents in the role and school target groups, 76.8% indicate that they either agree or strongly agree that participation in the NEASC accreditation process has had an influence on the ways in which the schools measure student achievement. The ANOVA, applied to the target group by role, identified a statistically significant difference (p = .045 level), but the application of the Bonferroni post hoc analysis did not validate any differences among the roles. It is interesting to note, however, that 31.6% of the teachers, those most closely involved with student...
assessment, do not attribute any changes in assessment practices to participation in NEASC accreditation.

At the school level, the ANOVA and Bonferroni do not identify any statistically significant differences. There is generally solid agreement that NEASC has resulted in changes to assessment practices. The Village Green principal states: "It definitely helped us focus on the assessment portion. We definitely got better after the accreditation visit."

The Harborside principal echoes the same sentiments when she says, "I think the thing it's helped with is that we're looking at more multiple measures of assessment, so we're not so dependent on the MEA."
Table 4.31

Descriptive Statistics for Assertion #7 Relating to Research Question #5 by Role and School

The accreditation process has resulted in sustained staff discussions about ways to increase student achievement. (Scoring reversed and negative wording eliminated for analysis purposes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>% Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>% Disagree</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
<th>% Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OVERALL</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>55.4%</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BY ROLE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>61.4%</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sup. Pers.</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>64.3%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BY SCHOOL *</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village Green</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>64.7%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harborside</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>57.9%</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Center</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>92.3%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountainview</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uptown</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>78.6%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* indicates the ANOVA was statistically significant at the .05 level

Assertion #7 required respondents to indicate the degree to which NEASC accreditation processes resulted in conversations among staff about ways to increase student achievement. Of staff surveyed by role and school target groups, 89.1% responded that they either agreed or strongly agreed that NEASC processes had facilitated such conversations.

The ANOVA, applied to the role target group, did not identify any significant differences among school leaders, teachers and support personnel. The ANOVA does find a statistically significant difference (p = .001) and the Bonferroni identifies significant...
mean differences between City Center and all other four schools. One hundred percent of City Center staff either agree or strongly agree that conversations about student achievement were direct results of undergoing the accreditation process, with 92.3% of the respondents strongly agreeing with Assertion #7. City Center and Village Green show a mean difference of .81 (p = .005). The significant mean difference between City Center and Harborside is .82 (p = .003). City Center and Mountainview show a significant mean difference of .82 (p = .003), while City Center and Uptown have a significant mean difference of .92 (p = .002). Clearly, City Center perceives that participation in the accreditation process has resulted in sustained conversations about the need to increase student achievement. According to the City Center Steering Committee Chairperson, recommendations from the NEASC Visiting Committee report initiated the discussions because “it really forced us again to truly look at where we were and where we should be and how we needed to get there.”

Village Green School, with 11.8% of staff surveyed disagreeing that NEASC prompted the discussion of increased student achievement, notes that the strong in-house assessment system had been used to track student achievement over time. The principal explains that the results of school-level testing are analyzed and the assessments are revised based on teacher recommendations each year. The opportunity for such discussion existed before the school undertook the accreditation process, but the NEASC accreditation process provided time for reflection on the effectiveness of the assessment practices, according to the principal. Likewise, Mountainview staff and Harborside staff, with 15% of staff disagreeing with Assertion #7, recognize the effect of NEASC on
encouraging conversations about student achievement, but also perceive that the conversations, prompted by assessments, had begun prior to the schools starting the NEASC accreditation process. The Mountainview principal explains:

I don’t evaluate [teachers] on assessment data, but I do evaluate that they have looked at their assessment data and found those areas they need to improve on. . . and people in teams, we looked very carefully at the data and we have continuous improvement plans.

Analysis of Uptown data indicates that 92.9% of the staff perceived that discussions about student achievement were prompted by the NEASC processes. However, it appears that the dissolution of committees, once the school achieved accreditation status, resulted in the reflective process for analysis of student achievement being discontinued on any formal level.
Table 4.32
Descriptive Statistics for Assertion #11 Relating to Research Question #5 by Role and School

Participation in the accreditation process has resulted in teachers having higher standards for student achievement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>% Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>% Disagree</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
<th>% Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>OVERALL</strong></td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
<td>62.7%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BY ROLE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
<td>63.2%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Pers.</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BY SCHOOL</strong> *</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village Green</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>72.2%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harborside</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>36.8%</td>
<td>57.9%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Center</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountainview</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
<td>65.0%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uptown</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>69.2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* indicates the ANOVA was statistically significant at the .05 level

Assertion #11 elicited responses from survey participants about the degree to which participation in the accreditation process raised teacher expectations for student achievement. Analysis of the data by role and school target groups indicates that 76% of respondents either agree or strongly agree that there is a positive correlation between participation in accreditation and heightened expectations for student achievement. While the ANOVA found no statistically significant differences among the role target group, the school target group displayed a significant difference (p = .001). Once again, City Center emerges as the school that differs significantly from all four other schools. On the Bonferroni, City Center and Village Green show a significant mean difference of .59
City Center and Harborside portray a significant mean difference of .85
(p = .034). City Center and Mountainview have a significant mean difference of .76
(p = .002). City Center and Uptown show the most significant mean difference at 1.03
(p = <.001).

Unmistakably, City Center recognizes that the accreditation process was a
catalyst for change in the way teachers view student achievement. Prompted by the
challenge of the NEASC recommendation to examine their grouping practices and their
expectations for student learning. City Center embarked on a journey of change that was
facilitated by the leadership of their principal and their parallel participation in the
Accelerated Schools model of school improvement. Harborside, Village Green and
Mountainview felt that they were already working on strategies to increase student
achievement. Uptown, while positive about the opportunities for discussion about
student achievement that NEASC accreditation afforded, appears to have lost the impetus
to systematically examine instructional practices to effect positive changes on student
achievement. The Uptown teacher remarked that NEASC recommendations indicated
that staff could benefit from cross-grade level and cross-school groupings, but that the
meetings, held for only one year, were no longer scheduled. She comments:

It blurs in my mind with other services we’ve had in that building. Maybe
something came from those meetings that would have an impact on student
progress or learning- maybe just coordination or sharing of ideas—a way of
getting this done or whatever.

While the purposeful formation of cadres to examine teacher expectations and
redefine grouping practices resulted in changes to City Center instructional practices, it
appears that the Uptown meetings did not have a clearly defined purpose, and were
discontinued because they were not seen as important or valuable to staff.

Table 4.33

Descriptive Statistics for Assertion #16 Relating to
Research Question #5 by Role and School

The accreditation process encouraged on-going dialogue with school staff
about high expectations for student achievement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>% Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>% Disagree</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
<th>% Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>.54</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>70.2%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BY ROLE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>58.3%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
<td>70.7%</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Pers.</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>78.6%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BY SCHOOL *</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village Green</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>72.2%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harborside</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>78.9%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Center</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountainview</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uptown</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>64.3%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*indicates the ANOVA was statistically significant at the .05 level

Assertion #16 required participants to indicate their degree of agreement with the
statement that on-going dialogue about high expectations for student achievement were
fostered through the participation in the accreditation process. It is clear that the
majority of respondents by role and school agree with the assertion. Of the participants,
84.5% either agree or strongly agree that NEASC accreditation has provided
opportunities to discuss staff expectations for student achievement. The ANOVA finds
no statistically significant differences for the target group by roles.
The ANOVA indicates that the school target group, however, has a significant difference ($p = 0.12$) in their responses to Assertion #16. The Bonferroni post hoc analysis finds that City Center and Harborside have a significant mean difference of .57 ($p = .033$). City Center and Uptown have a significant mean difference of .68 ($p = .011$).

HARBORSIDE staff spoke of the increased expectations for students that had been established through the examination of the school’s philosophy prior to undertaking NEASC accreditation. The principal explains:

> It sounds terrible, but the school was ignoring that aspect of student achievement and learning. We saw ourselves as the home away from home and everybody needs to be happy. The all of a sudden we said, “Okay, now wait a minute, we’re on the wrong track here...” and that raised our expectations, and when you raise expectations, nine times out of ten you raise achievement.

UPTOWN, on the other hand, does not seem to be engaged in sustained conversations about increasing expectations for student achievement. Despite the fact that the Steering Committee Chairperson speaks of the fact that “the administration is really pushing for raising the bar for all students,” she indicates that teacher expectations are lower for students who enter school with home situations that may distract them. “It’s hard to see a lot of progress in these children” she states. The principal admits, “I don’t know if they looked at instructional practices as carefully as curriculum and other areas.”

Interview data from City Center, however, demonstrate that the school has taken the recommendations from NEASC seriously. They have created a structure that encourages teachers to examine their practices and their attitudes that may limit student
achievement and collaboratively explore ways to increase student achievement. In the words of a City Center teacher:

It [accreditation] forced us to take a good hard look at ourselves, what our commitments were, number one, what our investment was going to be, and I think the results have been overwhelmingly positive. People willing to, you know. "Yup, I do need to know more about that; no, I'm not set in my ways." You know, so that has been a positive thing... we recognized that the recommendations were, in fact, a vehicle for us to move forward.

Table 4.34

Descriptive Statistics for Assertion #20 Relating to Research Question #5 by Role and School

The accreditation self-study process led to analysis of student work to determine how student performance can be improved.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>% Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>% Disagree</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
<th>% Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OVERALL</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
<td>59.0%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BY ROLE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
<td>53.4%</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Pers.</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>92.3%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BY SCHOOL *</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village Green</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>72.2%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harborside</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Center</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountainview</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>65.0%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uptown</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* indicates the ANOVA was statistically significant at the .05 level

Participants responded to Assertion #20 indicating their degree of alignment with a statement that addressed the NEASC self-study process as one that led teachers to examine student work in efforts to improve student performance. Of the respondents in
both the role and school target groups. 69.8% agreed or strongly agreed that examination of student work occurred as a part of the NEASC accreditation process. When analyzed by roles, the ANOVA established no statistically significant differences between school leaders, teachers, or support personnel.

When analyzed by school target groups, City Center staff again clearly has the strongest agreement of the five schools, with 100% of the staff either agreeing or strongly agreeing that examination of student work was prompted by the NEASC self-study process. The ANOVA establishes a significant difference \( p = <.001 \) and the Bonferroni post hoc analysis determines that there are significant mean differences between City Center and all four other schools. City Center and Uptown displayed a significant mean difference of \( .42 \) \( (p = .002) \). City Center and Harborside also had a significant mean difference of \( .41 \) \( (p = .001) \). City Center and Mountainview have a significant mean difference of \( .34 \) \( (p = .009) \).

Interview data indicate that City Center perceives that NEASC processes promoted the analysis of student assessment data, while Harborside and Mountainview report that they were already using analysis of student work to guide changes in instructional practices. Uptown interviews do not include any references to examination of assessment data or student work samples to guide instruction or impact changes to curriculum, although 50% of the teachers surveyed felt that analysis of student work was prompted by participation in NEASC processes. It appears that City Center, the school whose accreditation status included a Focused Visit because of the Visiting Committee’s myriad of concerns about curriculum, assessment, teacher expectations, and community...
involvement, was able to mobilize its staff to undertake a deliberate and positive study of student work to address the recommendations of NEASC. The City Center principal looks back on how the use of student authentic assessment results has changed for the staff at City Center:

Each year, we’ve developed more skills in how to analyze and use student data, we actually acquired different assessment tools. So, in our reading program, which was something we’ve moved forward with, with professional development that was teacher-led, with teacher-to-teacher training, using the Developmental Reading Assessment. So teachers have learned how to use that tool, how to use the information from that tool to develop small groups for Guided Reading that are flexible. So, that’s been really valuable.

Research Question 6: Are there differences in the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents, by role and school, about the value of the accreditation process as viewed through these five subsets of change initiatives: professional inquiry; curriculum, instruction, assessment; community support; and student achievement?

The findings of the sixth research question are based upon analysis of the responses to the “Grand Tour” Assertion #27 (Our participation in the accreditation process has contributed to the overall improvement of our school’s educational program) and the correlation of this data to the responses on the first five composite questions as interpreted through the subsets of assertions. The first five subsets of questions were each designed around a component determined by current educational research to be indicators of effective and sustained school improvement (Newman & Wehlage, 1995; Hoy Tarter & Kottkamp, 1991; Fullan, 1999). Comparing the responses on these five elements of school improvement factors to the “Grand Tour” assertion
responses on overall school improvement provide insight into the comparative value the respondents place on each of the five factors.

Two methods were utilized to accomplish this analysis. First, a one-way analysis of variance, ANOVA, was employed to ascertain if there were statistically significant differences between responses on the “Grand Tour” Assertion #27 by each of the target groups, identified by role and school. Second, the Pearson Product Moment correlation measure was used to determine the strength of correlation between the “Grand Tour” assertion and each of the subsets of assertions.

Analysis of the data indicate that all respondents clearly recognize the value of the NEASC elementary accreditation process as a means to school improvement. The role target group, with 100% of the leadership responses either in agreement or strong agreement with Assertion #27, demonstrates strong agreement from teachers and support personnel as well: with 93.1% of teachers surveyed either agreeing or strongly agreeing with Assertion #27, while the support personnel surveyed supported the assertion with a 92.8% agree or strongly agree response. The ANOVA indicates a statistical significant difference (p = .009). The Bonferroni post hoc analysis identifies a significant mean difference between the surveyed school leaders and the teachers at .55 (p = .008). School leader responses also differed from support personnel survey responses on Assertion #27 with a significant mean difference of .52 (p = .037). While responses from all groups are undoubtedly positive about the value of the NEASC accreditation process in fostering school improvement, the statistically significant differences among the three groups bear examination and will be taken up in Chapter V.
Table 4.35

Descriptive Statistics for Assertion #27 Relating to Research Question #6 by Role and School

Our participation in the accreditation process has contributed to the overall improvement of our schools' educational program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>% Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>% Disagree</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
<th>% Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OVERALL</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>65.5%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BY ROLE *</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>70.7%</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Pers.</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BY SCHOOL*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village Green</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>72.2%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harborside</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>57.9%</td>
<td>36.8%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Center</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>76.9%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountainview</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>85.0%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uptown</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>85.0%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*indicates the ANOVA was statistically significant at the .05 level

When analyzed by school target group, the responses were also extremely positive. No school included any strongly disagree responses, and each school exceeded 94% when combined agree or strongly agree responses were tallied. The ANOVA found significant differences among the groups at the <.001 level. The Bonferroni post hoc analysis identified the significant differences as between City Center and Village Green (mean difference .60, p = .001); City Center and Mountainview (mean difference .72, p = .001); and City Center and Uptown (mean difference .84, p = <.001). As the qualitative data have previously illustrated, City Center reports that it has used the
vehicle of NEASC accreditation to consciously effect school change. The implications of these data will be discussed further length in Chapter V.

Table 4.36

Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Assertion #27 and Research Questions #1 through #5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composite Research Question</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Composite #1 Change</td>
<td>.438</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite #2 Professional Inquiry</td>
<td>.406</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite #3 Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment</td>
<td>.548</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite #4 Community Support</td>
<td>.293</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite #5 Student Achievement</td>
<td>.419</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The correlational data demonstrate that there is a moderate correlation between the composite questions 1, 2, 3 and 5 and the Grand Tour Assertion #27. Composite Research Question #1 included responses from the survey participants about the role of NEASC in the school change process. The data indicate that there is a significant correlation (r = .438) between respondents perceptions of overall school improvement through NEASC accreditation and the role NEASC has played in fostering school change initiatives.

Composite Research Question #2 required respondents to indicate their degree of agreement with an assertion about the role of NEASC in promoting the development of a
community of professional inquiry. The Pearson Product Moment score establishing the
correlation between Assertion #2 and the Grand Tour assertion indicates that there is a
moderate correlation \( (r = .406) \) between responses on Assertion #2 and beliefs about the
role of NEASC in fostering school improvement.

Survey responses also showed a moderate correlation \( (r = .548) \) between
Assertion #27 and Research Composite Question 3. The question elicits responses about
the role of NEASC in effecting change in the school’s curriculum, assessment, and
instructional methods. Participants recognition of school improvement through the
NEASC process then, aligns with their perceptions that changes in curriculum,
assessment and instruction have occurred as a result of their participation the in NEASC
process.

Composite #4 shows a weaker correlation with Grand Tour Assertion #27
\( (r = .293) \). Composite Question #4 solicited responses on the NEASC’s accreditation
process’ impact on community support and involvement. The qualitative data informed
that quantitative survey with interviews that identified some reasons for schools’
responses. City Center and Uptown schools struggle to involve parents and community
members due to the constraints on parents’ time and socio-economic factors that limit
participation in school-based activities. Harborside and Village Green report that
community and parental involvement have always been solid in their schools, while
Mountainview used the NEASC process to expand the role of parents and community in
the school. While all four schools demonstrate clear agreement with the effect of the
NEASC accreditation process on school improvement, it is evident that they differ in
their perceptions of the value of NEASC in promoting community support and involvement in their schools. The lower level of correlation on Research Question #4 and the qualitative data indicate that the community support and involvement component of the NEASC process is not perceived by the respondents as positively as the other four factors identified in this study.

Composite Research Question #5 sought to determine the impact of the NEASC process on student achievement, and again the correlation between the Grand Tour Assertion #27 and the composite question is moderate ($r = .419$), indicating that school improvement initiatives efforts to increase student achievement are promoted through participation in NEASC accreditation.

The Pearson Product Moment Correlation identifies statistically significant correlation among all five Composite Research Questions and the Grand Tour Assertion #27. Respondents generally perceive that the NEASC accreditation process is valuable, and recognize the positive effects of accreditation on change initiatives within the school, professional collaboration, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and efforts to increase student achievement. Their perceptions of the role of NEASC in promoting community support and involvement are not as solidly positive, however, with a lower correlation to the Grand Tour assertion on school improvement and multiple explanations for this difference provided in the interview data.

Summary

Chapter IV presented the analysis of the data collected through the 84 surveys and sixteen interviews obtained during this study of the attitudes and perceptions of
elementary school staff about the accreditation process of NEASC. The first section of the chapter presented the demographic information collected through the survey. The second section of Chapter IV presented the data and analyzed the responses to the first five research questions posed by the researcher. Reporting included the use of mean, percentages, and standard deviation on scores for all subsets of questions related to the five research questions. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) measures were employed to determine any significant differences among responses by both role and school. Qualitative data obtained from the interviews was woven into the reporting and analysis for each question, giving voice to the educators who work within the schoolhouse gates of accredited elementary schools.

The third section of this chapter includes analysis of the sixth research question, designed to distinguish significant differences among the subsets of responses aligned to the research questions. Data were analyzed using mean, percentages, and standard deviation to study the Grand Tour Assertion #27. This assertion, requiring respondents to identify a level of agreement with a statement about the effectiveness of the NEASC process in contributing to overall school improvement, was further analyzed using an ANOVA and a Bonferroni post hoc analysis for both role and schools. To identify the differences in responses to the Grand Tour assertion and the Composite Research Questions as interpreted through the subsets of assertions, the Pearson Product Moment test was utilized to determine the correlation between the first five research questions and the Grand Tour Assertion #27.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The goal of this research was to determine how New England elementary school principals, teachers, teacher-leaders, and support personnel perceive and value participation in the New England Association of Schools and Colleges’ (NEASC) voluntary accreditation process as a vehicle for school improvement in five New England schools that hosted on-site NEASC Visiting Committees between 1994 and 1999. Further, this research examined the relationship between the NEASC process and research-based models for effective, sustained, school change. The following six research questions were the focus of this investigation:

1. What are the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents about the role of the accreditation process in fostering educational change initiatives within the school and community?

2. What are the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents about the structure of the self-study processes of accreditation in fostering the development of a community of professional inquiry?

3. What are the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents about the impact of participation in the accreditation process on the school’s curriculum, instruction and assessment methodologies?
(4) What are the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents about the impact of participation in the accreditation process on the community’s support for the school?

(5) What are the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents about the impact of participation in the accreditation process on efforts to increase student achievement?

(6) Are there differences in the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents, by role and school, about the value of the accreditation process as viewed through these five subsets of change initiatives: professional inquiry, curriculum, instruction, assessment, community support, and student achievement?

An integrated multiple case study method was used to collect data from school leaders (principals and Steering Committee Chairpersons), teachers, and support personnel in elementary schools selected for their diversity in geographic location, size, student population, and socio-economic status. Quantitative data were collected through a 27-item survey instrument administered to the three groups at each school. The participants responded to each assertion by indicating their degree of agreement through the use of a four-point Likert scale. Response options ranged from Strongly Agree (4 points) to Strongly Disagree (1 point). Survey participants could also opt to select a No Opinion response. Seven interview questions were also posed to principals, Steering Committee Chairpersons, and one randomly selected teacher at each school.

Analysis of the data was presented in Chapter IV. In Chapter V I will discuss the conclusions that emerged from those findings. The chapter includes post hoc analysis of
the qualitative and quantitative data and employs a framework for analyzing the level of
implementation of NEASC processes in the five schools studied.

Conclusions and Findings

Impact and Value of Participation in the NEASC Elementary Accreditation Process for
the Purpose of Supporting School Reform

Conclusions

Six primary conclusions can be derived from the findings of this study. These
conclusions must be considered within the context of the study. They are based on the
perceptions of principals, teachers, and support personnel at five selected elementary
schools in New England. While the data are instructive, efforts to generalize beyond these
five schools should be approached with caution. However, the data do provide important
insights into the five school sites that were studied and may be used to inform practice
and policy development around the issue of accreditation.

#1 – The NEASC accreditation process positively impacts school improvement
and is valued by school leaders, teachers and support personnel in the five New England
schools that participated in the research project.

The data indicate that the respondents are overwhelmingly positive about the
value of participation in the accreditation process. Over 93% of respondents to the
“Grand Tour” assertion (#27) report that they attribute improvements in their schools’
educational program to their participation in the NEASC accreditation process. The
overall mean response of 3.22 on a four-point scale is indicative of the positive impact
participants attribute to the NEASC process. In addition, responses to the five subsets

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of assertions indicate a high level of agreement with mean scores for the composite
questions reported at 3.28 for the subset of assertions relating to school change: 3.02 for
responses relating to the subset of assertions on professional inquiry: 3.11 for responses
relating to the subset of assertions on curriculum, instruction and assessment: 2.98 for the
subset of assertions on community support and involvement: and 2.93 for the responses
to the subset of assertions on student achievement. In the words of the Mountainview
Steering Committee Chairperson:

It’s not a book that has dust on it on a shelf that’s sitting there for the next ten
years until we haul it down again. What we’re doing is that... even though we
don’t carry the paperwork with us from it [the accreditation report], we carry
it up here in our heads and in our hearts and we’re looking at that all the time.
We’re not perfect, but we’re working on it.

The hard work of creating and sustaining school change is complex and challenging.
The participants in this study have indicated that they perceive that the NEASC process
has provided them with a valuable tool to assist them in their efforts to improve
education for children. Their responses also support the assertion that the NEASC
processes are aligned with what educational researchers have identified as effective models
for sustained school improvement. Inside and outside collaboration, a focus on student
achievement, attention to curricular, instructional and assessment matters, and community
support and involvement all emerge as components that are included in the NEASC
process of elementary school accreditation. While participating school respondents
identified these factors which have been shown to effect change in schools, the spirit in
which school staff undertook the NEASC accreditation process differs from school to
school and the mode of implementation (Timar, 1989) impacts the perceived benefits of
the NEASC processes on school change efforts and the level of change effected.

#2 – School leaders perceive the NEASC process to be more beneficial than
teachers or support personnel do.

Although the accreditation process is perceived as generally positive by all
participants, when responses to the survey and the interview data were analyzed by role
target groups, significant differences emerged among responses from school leaders,
teachers, and support personnel.

Responses to the five subsets of research questions, studied by role, suggest that
the leadership group consistently has the highest mean score for each subset. Subset One,
which addressed perceptions and attitudes about the role of NEASC in fostering change,
had an overall mean of 3.28, compared to a leadership mean response of 3.46. The power
of the NEASC self-study process to encourage school-wide reflection and staff
collaboration is recognized by all groups. and references to the positive impact of the
NEASC self-study process is cited 80 times in the transcriptions of the 15 interviews
sessions. Yet teachers (M = 2.93) and support personnel (M = 3.07) are not as positive
in their perceptions and attitudes about NEASC’s role in fostering a community of
professional inquiry as those in school leadership positions (M = 3.33).

Likewise, school leaders felt more positively (M = 3.33) about the impact of
NEASC processes on changes to curriculum, instruction, and assessment than did
teachers (M = 3.05) or support personnel (M = 3.20). School leaders also identified the
impact of NEASC processes on student achievement as more significant ($M = 3.13$) than teachers ($M = 2.85$) or support personnel ($M = 3.10$).

School leaders may have greater investiture in NEASC accreditation than teachers and support personnel. Indeed, their administrative alignment may compel their support of the process. While school leaders have important roles in shaping a school’s culture and fostering conditions that will encourage school improvement, the real heart of reform is what occurs between student and teacher in the classroom and the collaborative activities in which that teachers engage with student achievement as their focus (Fullan, 1999; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). For an elementary school to truly initiate and sustain change through the NEASC process, those most directly involved with student instruction must recognize the value of the NEASC process to the same degree that their school leaders do. Teachers and support personnel must share a common understanding of the value of the process and possess a clear vision of the purpose for seeking membership in NEASC if it is to achieve its promise of school improvement.

Often initiated at the Central Office level, the decision to undertake accreditation generally involves several administrative team meetings with the Director of the NEASC CPEMS and provides time for the exploration of the administrative commitment to the process, the school system’s rationale for participation, and their alignment with the NEASC philosophy of school improvement through accreditation. Some school systems invite the CPEMS Director to attend an initial meeting with staff to describe the process, and may seek staff approval before committing to undergo accreditation. Once a school has decided to participate in the accreditation process, the Director of CPEMS presents
an overview of the process to the school staff that outlines the timeline, the structure of the required committees and subcommittees, and the scope of the process. A pre-visit meeting with the school principal and Steering Committee members is scheduled by the Chairperson of the Visiting Committee two months prior to the on-site visit. The three-and-a-half day visit provides the most direct contact time between the school staff and NEASC representatives. Following the on-site visit, unless significant concerns are noted by the Visiting Committee, the school has no further visits from NEASC representatives. Earlier and more frequent contact with NEASC representatives by all staff members could increase staff understanding of the accreditation process.

Opportunities for staff education about the strong connections between the collaborative inquiry process required by NEASC accreditation and successful models of school change, as documented in educational research, could foster deeper understanding of the value of the process. School leaders experience more frequent opportunities for learning about and experiencing the benefits of participation in the accreditation process as the early exploration of the benefits of NEASC membership occurs. School leaders meet with NEASC representatives at least three times prior to the on-site visit while the majority of teachers and support personnel will have direct contact with NEASC representatives only during the initial staff meeting and the on-site visit. To enable the school staff to develop the understanding of what the basic tenets of NEASC membership mean for the entire school, more direct contact with NEASC personnel would be beneficial. Given the limited full-time staffing of the organization, and the reliance on the
educators of NEASC member schools as volunteers, however, the challenge of implementing increased on-site meetings with school staff is significant.

Fifty-seven interview statements obtained during the fifteen interview sessions attested to the importance of outside collaboration, and all interviews addressed the significance of interaction with the NEASC Visiting Committee. A Mountainview teacher explains his feeling that interaction between the school staff and NEASC should be expanded when he says:

Yeah, even just to say it is going to take a lot of time and we appreciate it. I think that buys a huge amount of good faith from people that are stressed and busy. And I don’t know if you can come in again and touch base during the process, but I think that might be a nice addition to the program. Instead of just this huge thing every ten years, it could be made into a true on-going process that doesn’t have so many dips or valleys and mountains in the energy required and all that.

Indeed, if a school meets the majority of the NEASC standards and is awarded full accreditation status, it may not have any direct contact with the accrediting agency for approximately eight years, when it prepares for the re-accreditation visit. NEASC could strengthen the process by including a follow-up visit component for all schools as they prepare their two- and five-year progress reports. This sustained, direct contact between school staff and the accrediting agency may also assist a school in ensuring that there is sufficient attention given to implementation of the NEASC’s recommendations for school improvement. The City Center School principal cited her school’s involvement with a Focused Visit as essential to the successful implementation of change initiatives. It provided the momentum and guidance, she noted, “to take stock and keep moving forward.”
Including a research-based component about the value of collaborative inquiry in initial school briefings by the NEASC Director of CPEMS could also assist staff in recognizing the importance of the self-study process from the initial stages of the accreditation process. Further, including established, consistent protocols for collaborative inquiry in the NEASC instructions for the self-study process could result in ensuring that the reflective task of the NEASC self-study is undertaken in a manner that facilitates critical analysis and develops understanding of the school organization and culture by all staff members.

Twenty-three interview comments regarding the time and effort required to complete the accreditation process were recorded in this study, with only six of those comments attributed to principals. Publicly acknowledging the sheer amount of work required of staff to complete the self-study process and committing school resources and dedicated time to the tasks could also result in more positive perceptions of the value of the process by teachers and support personnel. NEASC development of suggested protocols for the self-study process that include release time options for staff could serve the schools well in providing dedicated time for the time-consuming, yet important, shared inquiry experience.

The study data indicate that perceptions of support personnel, while lower than school leaders' responses, were slightly higher than those of the teachers in response to the assertions included in subsets 1 through 5. Their responses to the “Grand Tour” assertion aligned nearly perfectly with teachers’ responses. It is challenging to draw any conclusion from this information, since the fourteen support personnel members had
varied responsibilities within the schools ranging from custodial positions to classroom-based teacher aides. Support personnel were not included in the interviews conducted during this study; however, comments from school leaders and teachers speak to the fact that support personnel were perceived to appreciate the opportunity to participate actively in the accreditation process, a professional experience that was uncommon for the majority of employees at this level. Their participation was likewise valued by school staff, as indicated in eleven interview responses that addressed the involvement of the entire school community in investigating the school’s compliance with NEASC standards that extend beyond academic achievement. A Mountainview teacher comments:

I realized how much goes into making it a good place for kids. It’s not just your classroom settings; that was the biggest thing I came away with— an appreciation for all the stuff that happens, all of the people involved, all of the systems that are in place that I wasn’t aware of before. That helped to see that it is a much bigger group taking part in this than just the teacher in the classroom.

School leaders generally have this broader perspective, given the nature of their supervisory positions. Participation in the NEASC process fosters increased appreciation on the part of teachers and support personnel for the complexity of the school organization, but until teachers and support personnel share a deep understanding of the value of accreditation from the beginning stages of the process, are given the time and protocols to use when completing the self-study, and have extended opportunities to meet with NEASC representatives following the on-site visit, the hard work of the
accreditation process will be perceived as intrusive to the instruction that teachers view as their "real work."

Educational journals and texts abound with evidence that shared responsibility and collaboration are essential for sustained school improvement (Fullan, 1999; Lambert, 1998; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). NEASC, with its 1,828 member schools in the six-state region and in 52 countries overseas, could lead the way in requiring that the majority of the professional activity of collaborative inquiry be conducted by educators within the contractual school day, using well-established protocols for reflection and analysis of the effectiveness of their schools. Utilizing the educators of member schools to conduct post-accreditation visits would foster continued commitment to outside collaboration. Elevating participation in collaborative inquiry to equal status with classroom instruction, and providing the release time for educators to accomplish this work, would send a clear message about the value of shared professional inquiry as a tool for sustained school improvement to the entire school community, and to the member schools of NEASC.

#3 - The principals of the elementary schools involved in the accreditation process appear to play a significant role in how the self-study process and Visiting Committee recommendations will be used to influence school improvement.

The data from the school target group responses, while illustrating the value of the NEASC process to all five schools studied, identifies one school that clearly has used the accreditation process to effect significant change to a greater degree than the other four schools that participated in this research project. City Center School, located in an impoverished urban neighborhood with a highly transient, marginalized student
population, limited facilities and scarce resources, reports that the NEASC accreditation process was a vehicle for substantial, sustained change for the school. The qualitative interview data verifies survey the data in identifying City Center School as the elementary school that found the most value among in the NEASC process in influencing school change initiatives. Interview data also include eleven references to the leadership of the City Center principal in ensuring that the NEASC process was fully implemented and that the organization’s recommendations were addressed by school staff.

The other four schools, while all clearly recognizing the value of the NEASC process in the interviews, were identified as having lower levels of agreement with the survey assertions about the effectiveness of the process in impacting school change. Comments about the principal’s leadership from these schools ranged from three comments at Uptown to five each at Harborside, Village Green, and Mountainview. The principal at City Center is portrayed in the qualitative data as an instructional leader who has identified a vision of excellence as obtainable by this struggling school. She has organized the school’s existing collaborative inquiry cadre structure of the Accelerated Schools model to effectively implement the NEASC accreditation process. The fusing of Accelerated Schools inquiry protocols with the NEASC process by the principal at City Center may also have fostered the spirit of collaboration and risk-taking in the completion of a self-study that was reflective of the school’s many needs.

In contrast, Uptown’s three interview comments on this topic centered on the use of student achievement assessment data by the school system’s administrators, the imposition of the NEASC process upon the staff, and the fact that follow-up reports
were filed with NEASC by school administrators without input from staff members. At
no time during the interviews any reference made to instructional leadership or direct
involvement of any aspects of the self-study except the assignment of staff to
committees.

At Mountainview, the principal’s focus on using the NEASC Visiting Committee
report to validate the positive aspects of the school was noted in the five interview
statements about the principal’s leadership during the accreditation process. The
principal of Mountainview identified validation as the most compelling reason for
participation in NEASC and explained that such validation resulted in increased public
trust and resultant increased school autonomy.

Interview data from Harborside and Village Green identify leaders who have
recognized the importance of the accreditation process and communicated this effectively
to staff members, while searching for equity to ensure that time and responsibility for the
process were shared equally among the staff members. The Harborside principal
mentions that she:

    did as much as I could to give them as much as I could. . .  I cancelled staff
    meetings. . . and did everything by memo. . . it was all I could offer and I had
    to support it in some way.

The efforts of the principals who search for ways to make the process less burdensome
are recognized by the staff. A Village Green teacher remarks:
A. [the principal] sets the tone. I think she really does and she is also very kind in saying, "I don’t care how you do it, you know, whatever each group decides, I will make it within my boundaries as possible as I can." Which meant realistically she did everything she could during the school day and once we saw her, honestly and sincerely meeting that commitment, then people said, "but how much time in the day can she find?" and then we needed to decide what we could give up ourselves.

The role of the principal was critical in determining how the accreditation process was perceived by the school staff. Balancing the “heart” of leadership (Sergioyanni, 1992) that recognizes and communicates the challenges of reflective practice and change with the managerial “head” that provides organizational structures to guarantee adequate time and resources for the NEASC process results in a self-study that is honest and complete. When the school staff is encouraged by the principal to identify its own collective strengths and limitations in a safe and collaborative manner, then the direction of, and commitment to, implementing school change is driven not by the need to respond to the NEASC recommendations, but by a shared desire to improve education for children. Indeed, a self-study completed with integrity that identifies the needs of the school establishes the direction for school improvement efforts, and leads to a Visiting Committee report also reflects recommendations that the school itself has already identified and is committed to implementing.

It is this level of ownership that NEASC desires to foster in its member schools. The NEASC standard on Leadership and Organization articulates this vision of “shared responsibility for implementing the mission and expectations of the schools and effectively meeting the needs of students” (New England Association of Schools and Colleges, 2002 [On-line]. Available: http://www.neasc.org).
The NEASC accreditation process promotes school change by fostering staff collaboration and inquiry around curricular, instructional and assessment matters. Survey respondents indicated that the NEASC process promoted the creation of a community of professional inquiry. The mean score for Composite Question #2, which was designed to elicit information through a subset of questions on collaboration and inquiry, was 3.02 indicating a high level of agreement with the assertions. School leaders felt the most positively about the impact of NEASC on collaboration (M = 3.33), followed by support personnel (M = 3.07) and teachers (M = 2.93). Respondents indicated that opportunities for discussions about curriculum, instruction and assessment through the self-study process resulted in changes to those areas. The mean score of 3.11 for Composite Question #3, which dealt with the influence of NEASC on curricular, instructional and assessment changes, demonstrates the respondents' perceptions that NEASC processes promote the use of collaboration and inquiry to effect changes in these areas.

The importance of professional inquiry and collaboration has been well documented as a method essential to sustained school improvement (Lambert, 1998; Fullan, 1999; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Rosenholtz, 1989). The focus on curriculum, instruction and assessment within collaborative groups has been shown to be most effective when standards are used as the basis for reflection on pedagogy (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). This research study suggests that the process of NEASC accreditation promotes the use of collaborative groups to explore how well the school is meeting the
NEASC standards and to identify the strengths and limitations of the institution in these areas.

It is clear that all of the schools in this study valued the collaborative nature of the process and used the NEASC standards on curriculum, instruction, and assessment to guide them in their self-study. The degree to which this was seen as a benefit of the process was dependent on the school’s prior commitment to collaboration and examination of these important areas. For City Center, it was a new beginning, a truly eye-opening experience as they focused on academic standards and student achievement. At Harborside, Mountainview and Village Green, the collaborative process was already in place, but the use of NEASC standards to guide the examination of practices reaped benefits for the schools. At Uptown, although the staff acknowledged that collaboration was required to complete the self-study component of NEASC accreditation, the lack of follow-up has resulted in little sustained collaboration.

The NEASC self-study process requires collaboration and full staff involvement. It also requires careful examination of a school’s curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices in responding to the guiding questions contained in the self-study manual. All schools involved in accreditation must address these three areas in their written report, and collaboration with the Visiting Committee provides opportunity to clarify the school’s success in meeting NEASC standards, and establish the future direction of the school’s efforts. While the NEASC process guarantees that scrutiny of these areas will occur within the context of the self-study and the on-site visit, what it is unable to
guarantee is the important follow-up that results in implementation of needed changes and sustained commitment to these changes on the part of the school staff.

When the accreditation process is utilized by a school in a pro forma or programmatic mode (Timar, 1989), the commitment to sustaining change may not exist and collaborative groupings may dissolve after the accreditation status is awarded to the school. Uptown stands as an example of this type of implementation. The role of the school's leadership in establishing collaborative practice as an essential part of the school's culture cannot be minimized. Likewise, the commitment to extended outside collaboration through regular follow-up visits by members of NEASC accredited institutions could expand collaborative inquiry to include outside members and could also assist in maintaining the focus on the curricular, instructional and assessment practices within the school.

#5 – Participants in the study perceive that the NEASC accreditation process does not include a community education component about the importance of parental and community involvement in the school improvement process.

This research study found that while participants recognized that community support and involvement was encouraged through the accreditation process, the level and type of involvement varied from school to school. The mean score of 2.98 on Composite Question #4 portrays a moderately positive perception of the process, yet analysis of interview data demonstrates wide differences for their responses. Schools like Harborside and Village Green recognized their strong community support and involvement as areas that were not in need of strengthening, and at times wished for a bit less parental
involvement. Schools such as City Center and Uptown reported the challenges of
encouraging participation from adult populations that were sometimes intimidated by the
school environment, or unable to commit time and effort to school-related activities.
Mountainview, in a close-knit rural community, was successful in utilizing the NEASC
process to more fully involve the community in the life of the school.

NEASC processes include the requirement that community members serve on
sub-committees and share in the work of school improvement, but the recruitment and
rationale for this participation is left up to the schools to communicate to the community.
Cushing's 1999 study of high school accreditation in New Hampshire identified a need for
NEASC and its member schools to craft a community education component that schools
would utilize as they began the accreditation process. On the basis of this study, the
need appears to exist at the elementary level as well. Systematically educating parents
and community members about the value of accreditation and the significance of their
roles in the process is a valuable step in encouraging their active and purposeful
involvement in the process.

The need for parental and community involvement in schools has been noted by
educators and educational researchers as an element of support required for sustained
school change efforts (Wagner, 2001; Lambert, 1995; O'Neil, 1995). NEASC could assist
in expanding the level of community and parental involvement by providing schools with
educational materials to explicate the accreditation process to community members and
encourage their participation in the accreditation process. Communication from NEASC
outlining successful strategies utilized by member schools to increase community participation could also be helpful to school initiating the accreditation process.

#6 – Participants’ perceptions of the impact of the NEASC accreditation process in effecting student achievement are reported primarily in terms of the results of the schools’ large scale, standardized assessments.

The quantitative data indicate that of all the areas studied in this research project, participants perceived that the NEASC process had the least impact on efforts to improve student achievement. The overall mean of 2.93 demonstrates a moderate level of agreement by participants that participation in accreditation and increased student achievement are positively connected. Qualitative data elucidates some of the reasons why school staff members do not perceive the association between NEASC processes and student achievement to be as positive as reported in the other composite questions. Interview data suggest that school personnel identify efforts to increase student achievement with increased student performance on state and national assessments. When asked about the impact of NEASC accreditation process on student achievement, 100% of those interviewed replied with descriptions of student achievement based on state and national standardized tests. They express frustration at this reality, yet face the fact that this trend is growing, and recognize that they cannot ignore the call for this kind of accountability, even when the results do not portray the school accurately. The Harborside principal explains:
Because our population is small, we tend to be skewed all over the lot... if we have a high percentage of special needs kids, our scores go down, if we have a high percentage of top-notch kids our scores go up. In two years, we had the lowest scores in the county and the highest scores in the county. So that's a problem.

This sentiment is echoed throughout all of the interviews as staff grapples with ways to increase student achievement on mandated testing measures. The City Center principal explains that for the first time, her school exceeded the state average on the MCAS test in the 2001-2002 school year. She attributes some of their success to the recommendation by the Visiting Committee that the school use the results of student assessment to frame instructional decisions.

While the overall mean of 2.93 for Composite Question #5 identifies a moderate level of agreement that the accreditation process results in efforts to increase student achievement, the importance of this finding bears close examination. With the increasingly stringent requirements for school accountability and mandates for graduation and promotion emanating from the state and federal levels, NEASC processes must include opportunities for schools to pay close attention to the matter of student achievement in an effort to increase the effectiveness of instructional practices and curricular decisions.

A review of the NEASC standards finds that student achievement is addressed through the standards on assessment (Appendix A). The self-study process ensures that school staff must analyze their assessment practices and utilize the results of the analysis to improve curriculum and instruction to be in compliance with the NEASC standard. The assessment standards also include references to the school's mission statement as the
tool for establishing high academic standards for students. Nowhere in the NEASC standards is high stakes testing mentioned, yet the interviews demonstrate that school staff members identify these measures of student achievement as where they are compelled to focus their attention.

NEASC has long prided itself on the holistic view it takes of school improvement efforts, citing the need for organizations to utilize multiple measures to identify student and school success. This viewpoint is critically important, and NEASC and its member schools must encourage legislators and state departments of education to recognize the folly of establishing definitions of school or student success based solely on standardized test results.

Educational research findings demonstrate that when teachers collectively share responsibility for student achievement and undertake collaborative efforts to increase student achievement, significant school change will result (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). While the NEASC standards promote this type of interaction and encourage schools to utilize multiple measures of student achievement to inform curricular and instructional decisions, the national trend toward accountability through standardized measures will not disappear.

The interview data in this study provide a clear reflection of the pressures schools experience to ensure that students “make the grade” on required standardized assessments. NEASC should recognize this struggle and assist schools by including a requirement that they report student test data in the schools’ self-study and identify the ways in which this data is used to inform curricular and instructional decisions. Student
test scores would not be used as criteria of school success by NEASC; rather, the information would be used to assist educators as they engage in the collaborative work of analysis of student achievement measures. The City Center School principal speaks of the power of collaborative inquiry to assist in making instructional changes based on testing results:

We’re moving closer and closer to using assessment to drive instruction. Before, we did the tests because they had to be done, and now, you know, each teachers and each of us is at a different stage in that process, but as a school we are moving forward and using assessment to really frame our instructional decisions.

By including a requirement for reporting of standardized assessment results in the self-study, the NEASC CPEMS would recognize the reality that all New England educators face and could gain a deeper understanding of the challenges facing the schools as they grapple with ways to measure and report student achievement that align with state and national mandates. Inclusion of standardized test scores in the school’s self-study would provide one more piece of the holistic reporting puzzle and would also increase the ability of NEASC to ensure that a school utilizes the results of these assessments to guide instructional and curricular decisions.

Unless NEASC moves to include the reporting of student achievement data in the school’s self-study document, it risks losing credibility with state agencies and local boards of education, who are compelled to pay close attention to this information. NEASC is in a position to continue to advocate for multiple measures of student achievement, and to promote the holistic standards that have characterized the organization for decades. However, the organization cannot afford to ignore the reality
that educators face, and should include a requirement for systematic reporting of student assessment results to ensure that member schools are employing effective data analysis techniques to improve teaching and learning for students.

Findings

Post hoc analysis indicates that there are significant differences among the perceptions of teachers, school leaders and support personnel about the value of participation in the accreditation process. Analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data led to some intriguing findings that gave insight into the reasons for the differences among responses by role and school. In examining the data, it is useful to employ a framework developed by Thomas Timar (1989). Timar’s research centered on twelve Utah school districts’ implementation of career ladders as a tool for school reform. Timar’s use of an integrated methodology of case study and survey, and his study of efforts to “improve the quality of teaching and better use teacher talents outside the classroom” as strategies for school reform (Timar, 1989, p. 330) aligns well to this research on the NEASC accreditation process and the impact on school improvement efforts. Both career ladders and school accreditation are evaluative in nature, center on efforts to improve education for students, and impact perceptions of school staff about effective practices in education. Timar (1989 concludes: “How much and under what circumstances schools change depends on their willingness and capacity to align cultural values with organizational goals” (p. 330). The organizational goal of achieving school accreditation and its connection to cultural values of the schools has been explored in this research on perceptions and attitudes of those who have participated in the accreditation
process. The use of Timar's four basic categories of implementation response, therefore, is helpful in analyzing the responses of the five school staffs in the five New England elementary schools studied.

Timar (1989) defines an "integrated mode" of implementation that he says is the preferred response of the organization to evaluation because it creates conditions under which "meaningful school improvement is most likely to occur" (p. 334). The process of evaluation is seen as a means to strengthen instruction and the organization views the compliance to external standards as a means to improved evaluation and expanded professional responsibilities for teachers.

The "programmatic mode" of implementation focuses on the administrative dimensions of the process and, says Timar (1989), "emphasizes the administrative dimensions of the program at the expense of professional development... the emphasis is generally on getting the right results with little attention to formal procedures for achieving results" (p. 334).

Timar next describes the "procedural mode" of implementation as one in which school improvement is viewed as synonymous with procedural fairness and objectivity. The intrinsic value of these elements makes them valued by society, but Timar suggests that processes can be fair and objective, yet not lead to school improvement.

Finally, Timar describes the "pro forma implementation mode" as one that complies minimally with the evaluative requirements. Implementation is manipulated for the sake of convenience and, although the reports "exist on paper" (Timar, 1989, p. 335), it has no bearing on organizational behavior or school improvement.
These four modes of implementation can be used to interpret the data collected in this study. Adaptation of Timar's framework permits analysis of the data specific to the accreditation process, and assists in classifying schools at differing levels of implementation (see Table 5.1).

The data were analyzed utilizing quantitative and qualitative measures to determine school placement in a designated category. Employing Timar's (1989) methodology, tallies of interview responses, overall mean scores by school and analysis of interview data were techniques employed to assign schools to a given category. There are discernable differences among the schools in "the organizational cultures of schools that are reflected in the responses of teachers and administrators" (Timar, 1989, p. 336).

Uptown School emerges as the school whose response to the implementation of the NEASC process has occurred in a pro forma manner. Uptown's mean responses on the composite questions were the lowest of all schools in the study, ranging from 2.52 to 2.98. Interviews reveal that with a top-down mandate emanating from the district's Central Office that required staff to participate in a process they did not value, staff felt little ownership and resented the additional work imposed upon them. Few concessions were given to Uptown staff to allow release time for report completion, and there was no follow-up to NEASC recommendations that involved full staff input. Although the Visiting Committee's report was shared with the staff and community, recommendations were largely ignored after the on-site visit and had little significance to the staff.

School improvement initiatives fostered through participation in NEASC were described by the staff primarily in terms of changes to the physical plant, with limited
Table 5.1
NEASC Process Implementation Modes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emphasis on realization of organizational ends (school improvement)</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>(High)</strong></td>
<td><strong>(Low)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated</td>
<td>Procedural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis on adherence to process</td>
<td>There is a preoccupation with procedural fairness, e.g. a “fair” system for NEASC school accreditation. School accreditation is identified with procedural regularity and fairness, based on objective standards. Focus is on maintaining the integrity of the process. Adherence to NEASC guidelines and procedures become ends in themselves and may shift the focus away from the professional and organizational interests of sustained school improvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEASC processes are seen as instrumental to the organizational purpose of school improvement. Procedural and substantive congruence, managerial competence and teacher professionalism are means to organizational competence, i.e. school improvement. The NEASC process is perceived not only as fair, but as leading to improved sustained school change.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Center School</td>
<td>Harborside School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village Green School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programmatic</td>
<td>Pro forma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis on adherence to process</td>
<td>Implementation is ad hoc, driven by local needs. Schools regard the program as an imposed process and little attention is paid to using the process to improve the school. Focus is on paper compliance, avoidance of responsibility for the implementation of the process or the follow-up response to recommendations. NEASC accreditation is used to satisfy central office requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis is realization of programmatic ends- the achievement of status of a fully accredited school through NEASC. Processes are attenuated, preoccupation with identifying “right results” in the self-study which are defined in programmatic terms. Focus is on substantive ends and the accreditation process is valued as a validation measure of the school’s success.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mountainview School</td>
<td>Uptown School</td>
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</table>
references to the value of reflection and cross-school communication as tools for improvement of education for children. With changes in leadership at the district and building levels following the NEASC on-site visit, Uptown lacked clear direction in how to utilize the recommendations of the NEASC Visiting Committee report. Instead, the report was largely ignored, with responses to the NEASC request for a Two-Year Special Progress Report on curricular, assessment and facility concerns dealt with at the administrative level.

A conscientious, hard-working staff completed the self-study report and met the requirements for NEASC accreditation, but did so without understanding the spirit and intent of the self-study process. They never fully explored the possibilities for effecting real school change through the process because district leadership did not communicate the value of the process or connect it to the real work in which teachers engage at Uptown.

Mountainview School approached the process through the programmatic mode of implementation. Their composite question mean score is highest at 3.28 in the area of community support. NEASC was seen as a tool that was effective in garnering increased public approval. Interview data reveal a close-knit school staff that was accustomed to collaborative reflection and sharing of responsibility. They had established their direction and identified their needs prior to undertaking the accreditation process, possibly basing their actions on their prior accreditation experience. Their desire for accreditation was based on the need to have an outside agency validate their successful educational program to the local community. Accreditation through NEASC was seen as a stamp of approval.
from a respected organization. The principal of Mountainview School likens their NEASC membership to the school's Blue Ribbon and Eddy state level awards for excellence and cites the community's trust in the school that such awards have fostered as the greatest benefit of NEASC membership.

Mountainview staff completed the process of accreditation with a focus on achieving validation, and some staff members resented this approach. A Mountainview teacher explains:

At the time we went through it, there were comments that were really nasty, negative comments about the whole process and I think there was a feeling that year on the part of a lot of the faculty that we are just jumping through hoops to try to show everybody something that we may not even be. To try to impress somebody that we aren't concerned about impressing. I think most people here, their heart is with the kids and this was taking away from that, so there was a lot of resentment. I think, that first year.

The Visiting Committee report at Mountainview was generally positive, with few major recommendations, but those that did not align with the positive report generated in the school's self-study were met with initial resistance. A recommendation about student arrival and dismissal procedures, for example, was not noted by the staff in their self-study, but was discovered by the Visiting Committee. When the report was received by the school, the teacher reports:

There was a lot of grumbling because a lot of people resist change. It affected each of us a little differently, though I think that now we say, "Hey, this does make sense, it does work better, it's safer."

This teacher also reported that he did not recognize the true significance of the entire accreditation process until "two or three years after, when it comes full circle." He further states that, "It was an important thing to do, and it was worth the time."
Mountainview School clearly values the NEASC process, as indicated in the survey and interview data, but the focus on validation of NEASC standards may have initially hampered the staff’s capacity to use the self-study process to focus on improving educational programs for students.

It appears that Village Green and Harborside schools approached the accreditation process with a focus on procedural implementation, but were able to move to the integrated mode during the period prior to the on-site visits. Staff interviews include references to the need for equity in committee assignments, and the efforts of the school leaders to readjust schedules and maximize the use of time within the school day to ensure that the responsibility for the completion of the NEASC self-study was accomplished in a manner that was minimally intrusive to staff members. The Harborside principal remarks that “trying to find time for it, and to get quality time for it--that was tough, that was probably the biggest issue to work around.” A Village Green School teacher addresses the importance of release time to accomplish the task of the self-study when she says:

When you make that time, which is what the system really allowed us to do, you got the time away from your classroom within the day to meet in committees and those conversations had the chance to take place so it was more than worthwhile professionally, personally, and I think as a staff and a system.

Although both schools initially struggled with issues of procedural fairness and regularity, once they established a schedule to which staff was amenable, they were able to utilize the accreditation process in an integrated manner. The principal of Village
Green explains the shift in thinking that occurred as the staff became engaged in school improvement efforts through the NEASC process:

Initially you are sort of faced with this mountain of work that has to be done, and you know, when you are at the bottom of the mountain looking up at the top of the mountain, it looks very overwhelming. And the positives just so outweigh the amount of work that you do, just because of the way you look at curriculum, the way conversations happen. I think it opens up an appreciation for what you are doing really well, as well as making you look at where you could get better.

In a similar manner, the Harborside staff altered their focus from an initial concern over procedural fairness and the time requirements of the process to a focus on utilizing the NEASC self-study to drive school improvement. In the words of a Harborside teacher:

I think we all started out with an attitude of, “It’s a lot of work, is it going to be worth it?” and I think we came full circle by the end of it. We were delighted with some of the things we were doing well, and we were able to pinpoint the things we weren’t doing well. . . for instance communicating grade level to grade level. We were not doing that well at all. But we would not have noticed that, we would not have attacked that if we hadn’t done the very in-depth study.

Both schools acknowledge the role that participation in NEASC accreditation has had on the direction of school improvement activities. By looking at all aspects of their schools through the lens of rigorous NEASC standards, new levels of expectations arose from within the school staff. The Harborside principal states, “Looking at those standards and seeing what the New England Association saw as important points kind of made us rethink how we did things--rethink what was important.”

It is the City Center School, however, where the most significant change has been noted, where the staff feels the most strongly about the value of accreditation. The mean
scores on composite questions 1, 2, 3 and 5 range from 3.70 to 3.46. Their only score that reflects less than a strong agreement with the assertions of the survey is on the research question that deals with community support, a continual struggle for this impoverished urban school.

City Center has fully implemented the accreditation process in the integrated mode. The overwhelmingly positive benefits of NEASC are touted by the staff and acknowledged by the principal. The reasons for their success are multiple and varied.

The principal’s strong leadership in using the self-study to promote an agenda for change stands as one pillar of the strength of the process. Her ability to deliberately connect the self-study process with the protocols of the already-in-place Accelerated Schools model strengthened the manner in which the self-study was undertaken. Her commitment to shared inquiry and the promotion of teacher leadership through her active involvement and modeling provided another pillar of strength.

The fact that the school had multiple needs, some of which were identified by the self-study, others that the Visiting Committee discovered, resulted in a continuing relationship with NEASC. As the teachers, administrators, and staff worked to address the multiple recommendations, NEASC worked alongside teachers, administration, and school staff, requiring regular reports and using a follow-up Focused Visit to ensure continued contact with the school and provide support for the steps toward change that were required. The ability of the NEASC organization to provide this type of sustained attention and encouragement is another pillar of support that strengthens the
implementation of the school change process. A City Center teacher remarks on the importance of this continued support from NEASC:

It’s good when they came back the second time to see how much—how many gains we’ve made, and it’s kind if like a pat on the back, and it kind of helps you keep moving forward.

Of the five schools involved in this research study, the school with the greatest needs appears to have reaped the greatest benefits from participation in the NEASC accreditation process, and has implemented the process from the initial stages in the integrated mode. Interview data indicates that the school scores on the mandated MCAS testing has risen, for the first time, to the average of all city schools. Inclusionary opportunities for special needs students have been increased, efforts to expand community outreach have been initiated and staff participation in professional development opportunities has increased, with teachers often responsible for planning and teaching their peers. NEASC would do well to explore the manner in which the principal of City Center approached the implementation of the NEASC process from her first days in the school to her continued use of the Visiting Committee recommendations as, in her words, “a lever for change.”

Assisting school leaders to articulate the value of the NEASC self-study and promote the use of the self-study as a vehicle for change could lead to increased numbers of member schools that undertake accreditation in the integrated mode. The success of City Center’s school change agenda has reaped benefits for students and teachers and has resulted in higher standards for students and staff. The NEASC standards served as the basis for these improvements as the school staff studied their needs in relation to these
high standards, and operationalized their commitment to improving their school for
children by addressing the needs identified through the self-study and the on-site visit.
However, the NEASC process was used by the school in conjunction with the previously
established Accelerated Schools model of collaborative inquiry, and staff members who
were resistant to the call for substantial school change in the Visiting Committee report
were able to request transfers out of the school. New staff members who transferred in
did so with a clear understanding about the direction of school reform efforts underway in
response to NEASC recommendations. These factors had a significant impact on City
Center’s implementation of the NEASC process. From the perspective of Timar’s
framework it is evident, that at City Center, NEASC processes are seen as instrumental
to the organizational purpose of school improvement. Procedural and substantive
congruence is attended to through the use of collaborative groups with clear protocols for
teacher inquiry. The focus of these groups is determined by the NEASC
recommendations, but teachers recognize and agree with the need for this focus, with a
sense of professionalism that Timar cites as essential in his model of the integrated mode
of implementation. The principal’s strong instructional leadership aligns with Timar’s
concept of managerial competence and promotes the use of the NEASC process as a tool
for school improvement. In conjunction with a commitment to professional development,
attention to curricular, instructional and assessment changes and alliances with outside
agencies. City Center School has been able to implement the recommendations of NEASC
in the integrated mode.
Recommendations

As a result of these findings, the following recommendations are offered:

(1) The NEASC Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools should redefine the process of on-site visits to include more contact with school staff from initiation of the accreditation activities through the two- and five-year follow-up process.

(2) The NEASC Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools should develop supporting materials for the schools undergoing the self-study phase of the accreditation process that demonstrate the clear connection between the NEASCII process and the educational research on the value of collaboration and shared inquiry.

(3) The NEASC Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools should work to develop protocols for staff collaboration during the self-study process based on proven effective models of collaboration to assist the schools in maximizing the value of the self-study process.

(4) The NEASC Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools should revise the standards on School Leadership and Organization to include a standard identifying the attributes of effective school leadership.

(5) The NEASC Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools should educate school staff about implementation modes (Timar, 1989) and their application to the accreditation process in an effort to assist schools to make
conscious choices about their commitment to, and reasons for, participation in the NEASC accreditation process.

(6) The NEASC Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools should revise its process to require that schools continue the collaborative groups during the years following the accreditation on-site visit to ensure that NEASC recommendations are fully implemented and collaboration about curriculum, instruction and assessment continues.

(7) The NEASC Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools should take steps to develop materials for parents and community members that schools could utilize to educate the community about the value of participation in the NEASC process.

(8) The NEASC Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools should revise their requirements for the self-study profile of the school to include the results of standardized student achievement testing to monitor how effectively schools are utilizing this data to modify curriculum and instruction.

(9) New England state educational leaders and policy makers should purposefully collaborate with NEASC, whose long-standing experience with standard setting and school evaluation could assist these leaders as they design accountability measures that encompass holistic, multiple measures of school success and student achievement.

(10) NEASC should work with other United States' regional accrediting agencies to educate federal policy makers and Department of Education personnel about the
alignment between the accreditation process and research-based models of
effective school improvement.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study, limited to five elementary schools in New England, identified areas
that present some intriguing possibilities for continued study. Therefore, the following
suggestions are offered for future research efforts:

(1) A study of the relationship between leadership qualities of elementary school
principals and successful accreditation experiences.

(2) A study of the factors encouraging elementary teachers to assume leadership roles
during the accreditation process.

(3) A study of the factors that distance teachers and support personnel from the
NEASC accreditation process.

(4) A study of community's awareness of, and support for, elementary accreditation.

(5) A study of the connection between the collaborative inquiry process of
accreditation and school improvement efforts in New England middle schools.

(6) A study comparing the process of accreditation through NEASC with the
processes of the other five regional United States accrediting agencies.

Final Comments

This research project was designed to study the perceived impact and value of
participation in the NEASC elementary accreditation process on school improvement
efforts. The study sought to answer the question, "Do educators perceive that
participation in the elementary accreditation process contributes to school improvement in their schools?"

The findings reported here suggest that the NEASC elementary accreditation process does, indeed, contribute to school improvement. The responses to the "Grand Tour" question, with a mean of 3.22, clearly establish the NEASC process as one that is valuable for a school focusing its efforts on school improvement. Likewise, the exploration of the relationship between the NEASC accreditation process and the purposeful activities identified in educational research as leading to sustained school change resulted in the discovery that the NEASC accreditation process aligns with proven practices for school improvement.

School change is complex, and the integrated case study utilized in this study identified some of the complexities faced by educators in New England elementary schools. The NEASC accreditation process challenges educators to effect school change by measuring their institution against standards and establishing their own priorities for school improvement. It is clear from the data that this extended opportunity for inquiry and collaboration is perceived as most valuable by teachers, school leaders and support personnel involved in NEASC accreditation. However, the interview data identifies a process that is often initially viewed as time-consuming and frustrating by educators faced with competing responsibilities and limited time.

NEASC employs a model for school improvement that is clearly aligned with educational research findings about the effectiveness of reflection and inside and outside collaboration with a focus on curriculum, instruction and assessment, yet the community
and the members of the school staff often do not initially recognize the full value of participation in the process. NEASC’s Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools, by developing materials with solid connections to educational research, could assist schools’ staffs and communities in understanding, from the initiation of the accreditation process, the value of these efforts.

The value of membership in NEASC is recognized by its members, but the President of NEASC Richard Wylie notes that it may not be well recognized by the public. NEASC, he says, should emerge as the regional expert on school quality and should maintain its focus on identifying the multiple characteristics that define effective schools. In this era of accountability, the voice of NEASC needs to speak for the member schools facing the narrowed focus of state and federal accountability. Wylie (2002) remarks in the NEASC Spring Report:

Our mission is well-defined, and we perform an essential service. It is successful because of the many volunteers who believe in peer review and self-improvement. It will be important to our future that that our voice become louder and clearer in advancing school improvement in an open and understandable process (p.3).

The findings of this research study echo his perceptions and point the way to some new directions that could expand the role of NEASC in promoting school improvement. Showing the connection between the NEASC process and documented research-based models for effective school change will encourage respect for the process. Expanding communication to promote the NEASC process and advocating at the state and national levels for what the organization recognizes as sound measures of school effectiveness are important actions that can impact children being educated in our nation’s
schools. Raywid (1984) claims that "excellence cannot be mandated," (p. 14) but it can be consciously promoted through voluntary membership in an organization dedicated to school improvement.
REFERENCES


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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Standards for Accreditation

NEASC Commission on Public Elementary Schools

STANDARDS FOR ACCREDITATION

Mission and Expectations

1. The school has a mission statement, which flows from the educational community's beliefs about education, states the purpose and goals of the school and is reflective of the unique culture of the school.

2. The school has established measurable expectations that reflect the mission statement and set high academic standards for students.

3. The school's faculty and administration, with participation from parents, students, central office personnel and other constituencies of the school, establish, accept and support the mission statement and expectations.

4. The mission statement and expectations are congruent with those of the district and reflect current local, state and national standards.

5. The mission statement and expectations guide the school’s planning and decision-making about policies, procedures and programs as well as the social, academic and intellectual development of the students.

6. The faculty and administration set a clearly defined cycle for the review and revision of the mission and expectations to adapt to the changing needs of students and present any revisions to the educational community.

Curriculum

1. The school's written curriculum is aligned with the school's stated expectations for students' academic achievement and developmental needs.

2. Each curriculum learning area clearly articulates learning standards, which support the expectations, and ensures that all students have sufficient opportunity to achieve.
3. The curriculum is intellectually challenging, is developmentally appropriate and allows for the hands-on application of knowledge.

4. Effective curriculum coordination and articulation takes place in the school as well as with all receiving and sending schools.

5. There is a systematic and ongoing process for curriculum development, review and revision, which takes into account stated academic expectations and assessments of student performance.

6. The school’s library technology and media services program supports and is integrated into the school’s curriculum and instructional practices, and the library staff participates in the school’s curriculum and instructional decisions.

7. The school commits sufficient time, fiscal resources and staffing for the development and implementation of the written curriculum.

8. The school provides professional development opportunities to assist in the development, understanding and implementation of the written curriculum.

**Instruction**

1. Classroom instruction embodies the school’s stated beliefs about teaching and learning, reflects current research on effective teaching strategies and is designed to enable all students to meet the school’s expectations for academic achievement.

2. Instruction addresses the individual needs of students, enables all students to have successful experiences and promotes independent life-long learning.

3. Appropriate instructional materials and services are available for all programs including those for students identified with special needs and students whose abilities present unique needs.

4. Teaching facilitates learning by including practices that are exploratory, individualized, self-directed, authentically based and integrated across the disciplines.

5. Instruction promotes the development and application of higher order thinking skills and problem solving techniques.
6. Instruction fosters appropriate behavioral standards, responsible citizenship and an appreciation of diversity.

7. Technology supports instruction and improves student learning.

8. The school provides professional development opportunities to improve instructional practices, resulting in increased student achievement.

9. The discussion of instructional practice is a significant part of the professional culture of the school.

10. The school commits sufficient time, fiscal resources and staffing to support effective instruction.

11. Supervision of faculty is focused on the improvement of student learning.

12. Students are active learners and have the opportunity to assess their own learning.

**Assessment**

1. The school utilizes an assessment system that embodies the mission statement and expectations for academic achievement and measures its progress in meeting those expectations.

2. An appropriate variety of classroom assessment strategies, reflective of current assessment research, is integrated with instructional practices.

3. The faculty and administration discusses and utilizes student assessment results in the review, evaluation and revision of the curriculum and the improvement of instructional strategies.

4. The identified learning standards for each curricular learning area are the basis for assessing each student's progress. (see Curriculum #2)

5. The school provides a variety of reporting procedures to communicate the methods of student assessment and the results of individual student progress to parents.

6. The school provides professional development opportunities which foster effective assessment practice and strategies.

7. The school commits sufficient time, fiscal resources, materials, technology, supplies and staffing to support effective assessment procedures.
8. The school systematically interprets and reports the level of attainment of its stated expectations for academic achievement to the community.


Leadership and Organization

1. The principal provides leadership, facilitates the development and maintenance of a vision and establishes a focus on student learning and growth.

2. The school’s administration, faculty and support staff are sufficient in number, appropriately certified and share the collegial responsibility for implementing the mission and expectations of the school and effectively meeting the needs of the students.

3. There is a program of professional development which is collaboratively planned, supports the school’s mission and expectations and enables the faculty to strive to improve teaching and learning.

4. The school has a planned orientation program for new administrators, faculty and support staff.

5. The school climate is positive, respectful, safe and orderly, and it encourages pride, growth, renewal and constructive risk-taking among students and staff.

6. There is evidence of mutual respect, common purpose and shared support among all members of the school community.

7. The school regularly acknowledges, celebrates and displays the work, contributions and achievements of students and school personnel.

8. The school establishes developmentally appropriate rules, expectations and consequences for student behavior and school attendance, which are clearly articulated to the entire school community.

9. The school encourages and supports a process of clear, consistent and meaningful communication within the building and between school and home.

10. The school welcomes parents and involves them in meaningful and effective activities to support the academic achievement and the emotional and social growth of their children.
11. The school has clearly defined crisis/emergency response plans, and all occupants of the building are familiar with these procedures.

12. The school has a clearly defined process for the evaluation and supervision of faculty, staff and administration which is utilized for continual improvement of the quality of the educational program.

**School Resources for Student Learning**

1. Student support services are designed to enable each student to participate in and benefit from the educational programs within the school and to support the school's mission and expectations.

2. Student support services personnel interact and work cooperatively with other school staff and community resources to address the academic, social, emotional and physical needs of students and to enhance student learning opportunities.

3. The physical areas provided for student support services are appropriate to the particular service.

4. Parents are kept informed about the range of available student support services and are involved in the coordination of services as they pertain to their children.

5. Services are in place to ensure the health and well being of the students, and information pertinent to the learning process and/or essential for safety is communicated to the appropriate faculty and staff.

6. The school maintains all student, administrative and personnel records in a confidential and secure manner consistent with federal, state and local law or regulation.

7. The school's library technology and media services program has an appropriate space to ensure the accessibility of its technology and materials by students and teachers and is staffed by qualified personnel who are trained and supervised by a certified library/media specialist.

8. The school’s library technology and media services program has a wide range of print, non-print and electronic materials and equipment which is appropriate to an elementary school, supportive of the curriculum, accessible to students and teachers, and reflective of a global and multi-cultural society. Materials and equipment are adequately maintained, catalogued and updated.
9. The school’s library technology and media program has clearly defined objectives which ensure that student needs for research and learning are met.

10. The school’s faculty, staff and administration are familiar with the objectives of the school’s library technology and media services program and are directly involved in the selection of materials, equipment and resources to complement and improve teaching and learning.

11. The school has policies in place for the Internet and for the selection and removal of print and non-print multi-media materials.

**Community Resources for Student Learning**

1. The community, through its school board, provides educational leadership, sets and disseminates policy, and ensures an adequate and reliable revenue source.

2. The community, through its school board, provides appropriate school programs, personnel, professional development programs, facilities, equipment, technological support, materials and supplies for student learning.

3. The school and the school district have an ongoing planning process which addresses capital improvement needs as well as future program, staffing and facility needs.

4. The faculty and administration of the school are actively involved in the development of the school’s budget which is supportive of the school’s mission and expectations.

5. Appropriate relationships with the community-at-large foster partnerships, develop and strengthen communication and encourage mutual cooperation and good citizenship.

6. The school invites parental involvement, encourages ongoing and effective home-school communication and provides avenues to address parents’ questions and concerns.

7. The school building and grounds provide a setting for an appropriate, positive and safe learning environment.

8. There is a planned, on-going program of building and site maintenance to ensure the health and safety of the occupants and proper documentation is on file to indicate the school’s compliance with local, state and federal law or regulations.
9. If food services are provided, the area, menu and equipment ensure that the well being of students is a priority.

10. If transportation is provided, appropriate procedures are in place to ensure the safety of the students.
APPENDIX B

Survey Instrument

Demographic Information

My role in the school during the most recent accreditation visit (check one)

[ ] Principal
[ ] Steering Committee
[ ] Teacher
[ ] Other (please specify below)

[ ] Not employed in the school during the accreditation visit.

How long have you been employed by the school system?

How long have you held your current position within the school?

What is your gender?

[ ] Female
[ ] Male

Limited Response Survey

In the column at the right of the statements, circle the response that most accurately describes your current perception or attitude about each statement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>No Opinion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Current Perception

1. The accreditation process has not raised my awareness of the strengths and needs of our school.
   SA A D SD NO

2. Participating in the accreditation process has resulted in changes to the curriculum in our elementary school.
   SA A D SD NO

3. The accreditation process encourages teachers to assess the effectiveness of their own instruction through conversations with other teachers in the school.
   SA A D SD NO

4. The accreditation process encourages teachers to meet to discuss changes to the schools’ curriculum.
   SA A D SD NO

5. The accrediting agency’s Standards of Accreditation are the criteria for school improvement in our school.
   SA A D SD NO

6. Participation in the accreditation process has influenced how our school measures students’ academic achievement.
   SA A D SD NO

7. The accreditation process has not resulted in sustained staff discussions about ways to increase student achievement.
   SA A D SD NO
8. Our school-wide educational improvement plans include the accrediting organization's recommendations.

9. The accreditation process has not led to changes in instructional practices in our school.

10. The accreditation report provided information on which to make sound educational changes in our school.

11. Participation in the accreditation process has resulted in teachers having higher standards for student achievement.

12. Participation in the accreditation process resulted in changes to how our school uses the results of student assessments.

13. The accreditation process increased parent and community involvement in our school.

14. The accreditation process effected positive change in our elementary school's educational program.

15. The accreditation process served to make the community aware of the needs of the school.

16. The accreditation process encouraged ongoing dialogue with school staff about high expectations for student achievement.

17. The self-study process did not result in increased conversations about teaching and learning among our faculty members.

18. The accreditation process improved public perceptions of our school.

19. Our accreditation status has increased the expectations of the community for our school.

20. The accreditation self-study process led to analysis of student work to determine how student performance can be improved.

21. The community has not had an interest in the results of the accreditation process.

22. The Visiting Committee's report was used to develop action plans for improving our school.

23. The accreditation process has increased the role of teachers as leaders in our school.

24. The accreditation process provided the opportunity for our school to be accountable to the public.

25. The accreditation process has encouraged dialogue with educators outside of our school about the challenges of educational change.

26. Participation in the accreditation process has improved professional development opportunities for our school staff.

27. Our participation in the accreditation process has contributed to the overall improvement of our school's educational program.
APPENDIX C

Interview Questions

1. What, if anything, do think your school gained by participating in the accreditation process?

2. What aspects of the accreditation process were the most helpful to your school’s efforts to improve education for your students? Least helpful?

3. In your opinion, did participation in the accreditation process influence changes in curriculum, instruction and assessment practices? If so, how?

4. Do you think that participating in the accreditation process has resulted in increased student achievement? If yes, what makes you think so? Can you cite any evidence to support your belief?

5. Do you think that participation in accreditation has had an impact on community involvement and support for your school? If so, how?

6. Describe the type of professional collaboration involved in completing the self-study. Did similar opportunities for collaboration exist before the self-study process? Have they continued since the completion of the on-site visit?

7. Do you have any additional comments you’d like to make about the accreditation process and its effect on your school?
APPENDIX D

Letter to Schools

York School Department
Office of the Superintendent of Schools

Principal
School
Street
City, State

Dear __________:

I have received notification from the University of New Hampshire's Institutional Review Board that my dissertation proposal has been approved and I look forward to visiting your school, interviewing the steering committee chairperson for the NEASC accreditation process, one randomly selected teacher (first alpha roster name) who taught at __________ School during the most recent NEASC on-site visit, and yourself.

I will also administer a brief survey to the faculty in an after-school meeting that should take no longer than twenty minutes.

I appreciate your willingness to permit me to gather this information on the perceptions and attitudes of school staff toward the accreditation process and I will look forward to visiting your school on ____________.

I will call you prior to that date to confirm my plans and establish an arrival time that is convenient for you. A copy of the Visiting Committee's report would also be extremely helpful to me, if one is available for my use.

Thank you once again for your help and I look forward to spending the day at __________ School.

Sincerely,

Maryann Minard, Curriculum Coordinator
Doctoral Candidate, University of New Hampshire
APPENDIX E

Informed Consent Document

Informed Consent Document for Interviews

Elementary Accreditation: Pro Forma or Substance?
A View from Inside the Schoolhouse Gates

This study will be conducted by Maryann Minard, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of New Hampshire under the supervision of Dr. Todd DeMitchell, Chairperson of the UNH Department of Teacher Education. The purpose of the research is to study perceptions and attitudes about the value of participation in elementary school accreditation processes and their connection to school improvement efforts. This information may be helpful to district level administrators and policy makers as they plan for sustained educational change. The research may also be of interest to teachers and building level administrators who seek to understand the challenges of educational reform issues. The research methods have no foreseeable risks or discomforts to the subjects, although some before or after-school meetings may be scheduled for interviews or survey distribution. Benefits to the participants may include opportunities to reflect and collaborate with peers about challenges facing teachers as they implement innovative practices in their schools.

The researcher will visit five schools in New England that have undergone an accreditation on-site visit in the past five years. She would like to interview the principal of each school, the individual who served as the Steering Committee Chairperson during the on-site visit and one randomly selected teacher. She will request that these individuals also complete the survey instrument. Approximate length of time for participation in the interview and survey is estimated at one hour. The researcher will seek permission to audiotape the interviews. Since the researcher has no supervisory or evaluative authority over the study's subjects, there is no risk associated with the study. The researcher agrees to maintain strict confidentiality of the identities of the participants. Neither the names of the participants nor the identities of the schools will be reported in any use of this study. All interview records, tape recordings of interview sessions, surveys and related materials will not identify individual respondents and the tapes and notes of the interview sessions will be stored in a locked cabinet to which only the researcher has access. These materials may be used for future research.

Participation in the study is voluntary and refusal to participate will involve no penalties or loss of benefits to which the participants are otherwise entitled. Subjects may discontinue participation at any time without penalties or loss of benefits. Dr. Todd DeMitchell in the UNH Department of Teacher Education can be contacted at 603-862-1234 if there are any questions about the research and research subjects' rights, or in the event of a research-related injury. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may also contact Julie Simpson in the UNH office of Sponsored Research at 603 862-2003.

I, ____________________________________________, have read the above Informed Consent document and agree to participate in the study described in the document.

__________________________________________
(signature)  (date)
APPENDIX F

Survey of Participants

York School Department
Office of the Superintendent of Schools

April 1, 2002

Dear Fellow Educators:

I truly appreciate the time you have taken to meet with me and to complete the survey for the project I am conducting as part of my doctoral dissertation work at the University of New Hampshire.

My research focuses on the perceptions and attitudes of educators about the elementary accreditation process. The survey will take approximately ten minutes to complete. All of the data will be treated with complete confidentiality, and neither the names of the participants nor the schools will be reported.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and refusal to participate will involve no penalties or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Dr. Todd DeMitchell in the University of New Hampshire Department of Education can be contacted if you have any questions about the research and research subjects' rights, or in the event of a research-related injury.

I again thank you for your time and effort on my behalf.

Sincerely,

Maryann Minard
Curriculum coordinator
UNH Doctoral Candidate

469 US Route One • York, Maine • 03909-1006 • Tel. 207-363-3403
• Fax 207-363-5602

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APPENDIX G

Survey Introduction and Definitions

To: Participants in the Accreditation Case Study
From: Maryann Minard, K-12 Curriculum Coordinator
York, Maine

April 2002
Subject: Accreditation Survey

Thank you for taking part in this survey. All data will be treated with complete confidentiality and in anonymity.

**There are two parts:**
*Demographic Information – Attitudinal Survey*

Please take the time to complete the entire survey. Results of the surveys will be made available to all participating schools at the completion of the study. Thank you for agreeing to be part of this study.

**Definitions**

**For the purposes of this survey, the following definitions are being used:**

**Accreditation process:** A continuous process beginning with the self-study completed by the faculty, followed by the accreditation visit accomplished by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges’ visiting committee, and continued through the follow-up reports and the activities required of the school staff as a result of those reports.

**Accreditation status:** A school’s standing with the accrediting agency (Accreditation: Accreditation with warning: Accreditation with probation. Termination).

**Accreditation visit:** The three and a half days spent by the accreditation agency’s visiting committee at the school.

**Accreditation report:** The final report submitted by the visiting committee to the accrediting agency to assist in determining a school’s accreditation status.
APPENDIX H

IRB Approval Letter

UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

Office of Sponsored Research
Service Building
51 College Road
Durham, New Hampshire 03824-3585
(603) 862-3564 FAX

LAST NAME

DEPT

OFF-CAMPUS ADDRESS
(if applicable)

PROJECT TITLE

Elementary Accreditation - Pro-forma or Substance? A View from Inside the Schoolhouse Gates

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research has reviewed and approved the protocol for your project as Exempt as described in Federal Regulations 45 CFR 46, Subsection 46.101(b) category 2 with the following contingencies:

- In the consent form, the investigator needs to address the following:
  * In the second sentence of the second paragraph, change "She will interview..." to "She would like to interview...
  * Add completion of the survey instrument as well as participating in an interview.
  * Add approximate length of participation (i.e., for survey and interviews).
  * Request permission to audio tape interview and add information about disposition of tapes at the end of the study. Tapes do not have to be destroyed, if kept, they should be maintained in a secure manner and subjects should be informed about how they may be used, i.e., for future research, and how subjects' identities will be protected.
  * Add the following statement. "If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact Julie Simpson in the UNH Office of Sponsored Research at 903-862-2003 to discuss them."

Please forward a copy of the revised consent form to the IRB for the file.

Approval is granted to conduct the project as described in your protocol. Prior to implementing any changes in your protocol, you must submit them to the IRB for review, and receive written, unconditional approval. If you experience any unusual or unanticipated results with regard to the participation of human subjects, report such events to this office within one working day of occurrence. Upon completion of your project, please complete the enclosed pink Exempt Project Final Report form and return it to this office, along with a report of your findings.

The protection of human subjects in your study is an ongoing process for which you hold primary responsibility. In receiving IRB approval for your protocol, you agree to conduct the project in accordance with the ethical principles and guidelines for the protection of human subjects in research, as described in the following three reports: Belmont Report, Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 46; and UNH's Multiple Project Assurance of Compliance. The full text of these documents is available on the Office of Sponsored Research (OSR) website at http://www.unh.edu/ost/compliance/Regulatory_Compliance.html and by request from OSR.

If you have questions or concerns about your project or this approval, please feel free to contact our office at 862-2003. Please refer to the IRB above in all correspondence related to this project. The IRB wishes you success with your research.

For the IRB,

Julie F. Simpson
Regulatory Compliance Manager

cc: File
Todd DeMitchell, Education

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