

Composite Middle and High School: A Fictional Scenario

Principal Harold Hope has written three progress reports over three years, first assessing the current situation at his school and then outlining next steps, as we often do in education. Sometimes, as you will see, the results of the actions he takes are intended and positive; sometimes they are unintended and positive; and sometimes they are unintended and negative. Read through his reports to see if any of the people, relationships, patterns of behavior, and conflicts apply to your situation. Follow this school on its journey to trust.

The Administrators

Harold Hopes

Harold is the principal of the new school. He has been at the school for two years—the first year as an assistant principal and the second as a principal replacing Sarah Solo, who retired. This is his second assignment as an administrator but his first in a school with middle school students.

Norma Newby

Norma, the assistant principal, is new to the position and to the school district. She was appointed when Harold became principal. One of her strengths, due to her many years as an instruction and assessment consultant, is staff development.

The Students

The school has a population of 1000, with a 30:70 ratio of middle to high school students. Most come from upper-middle-class farm families. These are well-established, wealthy farm businesses. However, a new housing development has brought low-income, immigrant families to the area, who typically are employed on the farms as laborers. The majority of children in this housing development are elementary and middle school students, resulting in expected growth in this section of the school.

The Staff

The middle and secondary school teachers have separate staff rooms. Neither group knows much about the other, but there is an active rumor mill and destructive gossip about how easy it is to teach “on the other side.” Each side feels betrayed, but no one is talking about it openly. Morale is also low not just because of the integration but also because of the remnants of the autocratic style of the previous principal and the challenges of the new student population. The two union representatives don’t speak to each other. The calendar contains no social activities.

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Composite Middle and High School: A Fictional Scenario (cont'd)

Five Key Staff Members

Ashira Accountable has been promoted to a newly created position of elementary literacy facilitator for the school (E.L.F.) and has high expectations of raising the literacy levels in the middle grades.

Coretta Character is a senior grade-7 teacher who has been a champion for a character-education program to improve behavior. She had been resistant to the amalgamation of the two schools because of the poor behavior of the high school students.

Connie Collaborative is a new high school union steward, voted in by a strong majority and with a mandate to change from the combative relationship between the previous principal and the last union steward to a more collaborative one.

Pablo Proud is the high school languages department head. His efforts at building a strong team have started to pay off this year. He also applied to be the literacy facilitator, the position that Ashira got.

Victor Vigilant is a long-standing union steward representing the elementary staff. He has been making sure that the move from the middle school doesn't create added workload for the teachers.



Progress Report: End of Year One

During the summer, as a key part of my entry plan and because of my lack of experience with middle school students, I met several times with Jake Kinder, the principal from the JK–5 school nearby who became my mentor.

From my observations and experiences as assistant principal here under Sarah Solo, I knew that morale was low.

I believe there were four causes of this at the time of my entry plan as principal for both schools:

1. Consequences for student misbehavior were not seen to be appropriate and consistent.
2. The lengthy memos issued by Sarah Solo reprimanded everyone for the mistakes of a few. This created lingering resentment.
3. Sarah took on too many new initiatives without consultation with the staff, who saw them as political bandwagons created solely for her benefit. They want a say in the direction of the school.
4. The middle school staff is upset at losing their school building and moving in with us.

My Long-Term Goals Over the Coming Years

1. To rebuild staff morale and productive working relationships
2. To bring the two school cultures together into one, based on a compelling vision for the future
3. To improve student achievement in literacy in middle grades (as per the board-mandated program)

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Composite Middle and High School: A Fictional Scenario (cont'd)

My Specific Short-Term Goals for This Year

These were set last June in my entry plan as principal:

1. To build productive relationships between staff and administration during the year

Action (September onward): Be visible in the hallways and make rounds to visit each teacher's classroom at least once a week. Tell them why this will become a routine of mine.

Positive Consequence: I am beginning to make connections with both middle school and secondary staff. This has given us new insights about each other. I didn't realize the amount of time middle school teachers spend on their room design.

Action (monthly): To meet with my mentor Jake (JK-grade 5 Principal) at least once a month to be more knowledgeable of the middle school grades and therefore a more respected leader.

Positive Consequence: I have learned so much in the areas of identifying special needs children, the importance of involving parents in decisions we make about their children, and the different kinds of time demands facing grades 6–8 teachers with limited planning time and hours of work to prepare manipulative materials and activities. When Jake walks through the halls and classrooms with me, the staff can see how serious I am about learning about their world.

2. To form an effective administration team with Norma Newby during the year

Norma has many skills that complement mine. I was surprised by her commitment to work through the personal strategies. She told me it gave her valuable insights into her own levels of self-trust. She also had the courage to take the initiative and ask for feedback from the staff. I had seen it as just more "self-help" jargon and ignored it. I was wrong. She was right.

Action (middle of November): Administer the trust survey with Norma first, and assess the results.

Unintended Positive Consequence: I was afraid of asking the whole staff, so I started with Norma. This led to a valuable discussion during which she told me that I had embarrassed her by correcting her in front of staff and students and by often taking over situations that she could handle. I apologized to her for this. We have agreed to meet more regularly and to share the workload.

3. To identify the core issues around our low staff morale in the fall term and act on the results over the winter and spring terms by establishing a facilitation team to work with me.

I was starting to find out how deep the resentment of the secondary staff toward the last principal went. I have learned that Ms. Solo didn't involve the staff in decision making about new initiatives and took credit for the work others did. She was not into teamwork and kept all the control herself. Many staff felt undervalued and bitter. I needed to visibly implement a more collaborative leadership style.

Action (since last June): I made it my practice to stop taking on new initiatives without staff approval, stop the lengthy memos "from on high," and deal directly with individuals who weren't following procedures instead of reprimanding the whole group.

Positive Consequence: Changes were all well received by staff and gave me some time to achieve other goals rather than take on new initiatives.

Action (February): Established a facilitation team that is representative of the staff.

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Positive Consequences:

- a. I presented my rationale for this new group at a special staff meeting and gave them a week to consider it. After a discussion at the next staff meeting, there were three nominations and two volunteers. We agreed to include each of these five people on the facilitation team so no vote was needed (thankfully). The members ended up being: Victor Vigilant, Connie Collaborative, Coretta Character and Norma Newby and Pablo Proud.
- b. They quickly elected Pablo Proud as the leader of the facilitation team because of his success with teamwork in his department.
- c. (March) After two lengthy meetings getting to know each other and clarifying their mandate with me, the facilitation team decided to lead a discussion at the April staff meeting of an article called *Improving Relationships in the Schoolhouse*.
- d. (April) The discussion of the article was effective, because both staff groups met together for this first time. They were organized into small, mixed groups (middle and high school) to get to know each other better.
- e. Connie Collaborative suggested at the end of the meeting that we should hold joint staff meetings whenever possible with both the middle and high school staff together. A show of hands indicated almost everyone agreed.
- f. (May and June) The facilitation team added the Rumor Mill activity at the end of joint staff meetings in May and June to correct misinformation.

This brought out a surprising assumption, namely that both the middle school and secondary teacher groups each thought the other group had an easier job than theirs! This was informative for everyone. We also learned more about the effects of the previous principal's style and why there is such a fear of speaking up. This will be a regular agenda item for future staff meetings.

4. To assist the merging of two schools into one

Action (May and June): The final two staff meetings were held jointly.

Positive consequence: Having everyone in the same room at meetings is building stronger relationships. They are learning each other's names to begin with.

Actions That Didn't Work:

- a. I asked for curriculum plans from each grade and department.

Negative Consequences: Only a few plans were submitted. Ashira told me in the parking lot one night that the middle school staff currently plans their curriculum as individuals and, therefore my request was impossible—and they didn't know how to tell me this. She said that if they started to plan more as grade teams in the future, I could try this again next year.

- b. I decided to share my personal vision with the staff at the May meeting.

Negative Consequences: When I shared my vision for the school, it was received with blank stares and silence instead of the positive reaction I expected. It may have been premature and I should have coordinated this message with the facilitation team's plans. It was a noble gesture but everyone wondered why I did it.

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Composite Middle and High School: A Fictional Scenario (cont'd)

My Goals for Next Year

1. (September) Get to know the staff members better—all of them.

How: Tell the staff before they leave for the summer that I am going to schedule individual meetings beginning next September.

2. (Ongoing) Reach out and include more people to help me, and use the expertise on staff.
How: The facilitation team will be a good start, but I need to involve other strong people who do so much around the school, like Noel Network and Paul Peacemaker

3. (September) Conduct a trust survey about myself with the staff.

How: Seek advice from Norma on how she did it, and get going.

4. (Ongoing) Build my professional relationship with Norma.

How: Hold weekly meetings with her to clear the air, debrief what happened recently, and plan together for the coming week.

5. Learn more about leading a middle school staff.

How: Continue meetings with Jake Kinder, and talk more with other middle school principals at our meetings.

6. Work on the literacy mandate.

How: Include Norma Newby and Ashira Accountable in getting the data we need for literacy baselines as a start. Involve them in planning.

7. Work with the new facilitation team under the leadership of Pablo Proud to do the following:

- Establish school norms for meetings (involve both staffs)
- Conduct a staff trust survey
- Reestablish the social committee in order to plan fall and winter activities and have fun together, especially at the first staff meeting.
- Continue to bring the two groups together as one staff.



Progress Report: End of Year Two My Long-Term Goals Over the Coming Years

1. To continue to build the two schools so that we become one school with one compelling vision
2. To continue to improve student achievement in literacy in grades 6 to 8

My Short-Term Goals for This Year

1. To get to know the staff better through scheduled one-on-one meetings

Action (September): Although I intended to conduct all the meetings myself, this quickly became too time consuming, so Norma and I decided divide the staff between us. We completed this task by the end of October.

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Composite Middle and High School: A Fictional Scenario (cont'd)

Positive Consequences: Norma's staff development background was useful in helping me develop a set of questions for the staff to find out about their hopes and dreams, their achievements, and their expertise. We gave these questions out ahead of time and used many of the principles of appreciative inquiry she had read about. We also included all support staff—secretaries, caretakers, educational assistants—and outside staff from the district level who are liaisons with our school. Being candid with the staff prevented a lot of "fear-mongering."

2. To do a trust survey about myself

Action (Beginning of Oct.): I summoned up the courage to do my trust survey with the staff.

Positive Consequences: It was a stroke of brilliance to ask Jake Kinder to administer, score, and share the results with my staff.

Key results about me from the Trust Survey:

- I need to have more confidence in the expertise and commitment of my staff.
- I scored well on "honesty" and "openness to listen to candid comments" questions.
- There were several anecdotal comments about my being a welcome change from the last principal and the team spirit I have encouraged. (Someone suggested doing a trust survey with the facilitation team as a focus. Good idea!)

Negative Consequence: Several people scored me very low on almost all of the questions. (Were they middle school teachers, or the ones who remain loyal to Sarah, or maybe they read the scoring scale backward?)

3. (Ongoing) To strengthen my professional relationship with Norma

Action: Set regular meetings with Norma Newby.

Positive Consequence: We have started having quick "huddles" during the day to share information. She appreciates having me as a sounding board and coach. We debrief sensitive events and decisions and respect each other's viewpoints even though we sometimes disagree. Doing this privately works better than the way I used to do it.

She told me recently that she and Jake are thinking of requesting permission to swap jobs next year for a term to grow professionally and build relationships with the JK-5 school. This was initially exciting news, but later I worried about such a huge change.

4. (October) To learn more about instruction and assessment in grades 6–8.

Action: Study the curriculum documents for these grades. Then, to get a better understanding, ask Victor and Ashira to teach me about the differences I should expect to see from my high school perspective.

Positive Consequences: We had three in-depth conversations. I developed a greater respect for the complexity in these grades. We continued our lessons over the month. I started to do more "walk-throughs" in these classrooms to observe more.

5. (October) To develop a literacy plan based on the data from Norma and Ashira.

Action: Ashira and the middle school teachers met with me, and she led us through the research and graphs from Bryk and Schneider on math and literacy (and staff trust in the principal) from their research in Chicago schools.

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Positive Consequences: Ashira was able to provide data for the past three years about each of our students and talked about using a Data Wall next year to track their literacy levels. She gave us several articles to read about Data Walls. Pablo heard about this at a facilitation team meeting and wants his Languages Department to be invited to future meetings.

The teachers are starting to understand the use of data and seem less fearful of talking about it. Norma has suggested we explore the growing need for ESL classes next year due to the new school population.

They decided to start a remedial literacy room in the spring term and asked if the smaller staff room could be converted for this purpose by then. This accidentally solved the problem of our two separate staff rooms and everyone started using one staff room in March.

Negative Consequence: Victor reported to me that several teachers had approached him with concerns that the Data Walls were going to make confidential information publicly accessible. I redirected him to share his message with Norma and Connie.

6. (Oct—Dec.) Support the facilitation team as they help us establish staff meeting norms, conduct their own staff trust survey and re-establish the social committee to bring the two schools together.

Action: To assist the facilitation team to develop a team identity and staff meeting norms.

Positive Consequences: We held two evening meetings in October to accomplish this and asked Norma to be the facilitator. These became monthly meetings and have become the highlight of my job. The facilitation team members are so talented and they do this on top of their teaching duties, often wearing multiple hats and responsibilities. Norma and I want to think of an appropriate recognition for them.

Action: To mediate the conflict between Connie and Victor

Positive Consequences: Norma and I had a special dinner meeting with Connie and Victor. Victor later wrote me a note of appreciation that I will keep forever in my archive folder.

Action: The facilitation team will administer the staff trust survey.

Positive Consequences: Pablo and the facilitation team set the stage well and administered the Staff Trust Survey at the end of October. Victor took a lead role in the process because of his experience doing staff surveys for the union.

Negative Consequences: We were surprised to see in the results the extent of the distrust the staff have for each other. Overall, the scores were very low on these three items:

- At least four staff members indicated that they wouldn't recommend this school to others (question 10) and might leave the school.

The middle and secondary groups differed in some of the results:

- Middle-school results were very low for question 2 (about working as equals). They feel the secondary staff "has more" than they do. They want more planning time, larger budgets, and time to prepare their anecdotal report cards.
- Secondary staff scored level 3 or 4 (high) on question one: "Staff openly share their thoughts and feelings with each other." (Not as good as it could be, but higher than their elementary colleagues.)

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- There were hurt feelings in the middle school staff about losing their school and concern about my lack of experience in leading a middle school.
- Anecdotal comments revealed that staff members don't trust administrators to deal with student misbehavior fairly and consistently and also that staff members are not consistent in applying school rules themselves. We are definitely not a "sinking" school anymore, but we are still "struggling" as we develop more trust.
- Because of the survey, we decided to take the following action.

Action: The facilitation team adapted the Abilene Paradox to suit our community and acted it out for the staff to encourage them to speak up and make suggestions.

Positive Consequences: These suggestions and actions arose from the activity.

- The staff decided to form middle school grade teams to plan instruction and assessment together. We need to find a way to provide time for this during the day.
 - Teachers volunteered to teach in different grades. For example, a grade 6 teacher is going to teach grade 9 and 10 mathematics next year and a secondary phys ed teacher is going to take a grade 6 homeroom and do middle school health and phys ed classes too. Victor and Connie are going to oversee the process. Maybe I can encourage more of that kind of voluntary integration.
 - The facilitation team members divided up the staff into mixed groups (middle school and secondary) and became facilitation team contacts to open up communication lines. Victor voiced his concern about additional workload because of this. We agreed to look at ways to provide release time for the facilitation team.
 - The facilitation team decided on a goal for the whole staff to collaboratively develop a school vision and action plans based on their beliefs and values by the end of May.
 - The staff worked in two separate groups on the I've Been Framed activity. We all were pleasantly surprised to see the similarity of the beliefs about teaching and learning in both middle school and secondary staff groups. When they saw this they decided to make a common Belief Wall in the staff room representative of the whole staff. It was the first concrete step to unite the two groups into one.
 - This led to a joint session for building norms for our staff meetings, based on the premise that we are one school and not two schools in one building. It grew into a discussion about norms for the organization of the school. The heated debate was made manageable by the logical process we followed.
 - When the norms were complete, Connie suggested that the two staffs line up facing each other. Then she reshaped the group into a circle. It was very symbolic of the change they were experiencing—even more so as she is a union rep. We were finally one school!
7. (Ongoing) To reach out and include more people to help me and use the expertise on staff more effectively.

Action: To form a social committee to involve more people and have more fun.

Positive Consequences: Our social committee (in consultation with the facilitation team and admin) has taken on a new life with Noel's leadership. She formed a small committee

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Composite Middle and High School: A Fictional Scenario (cont'd)

with the intention of having more fun and having people get to know each other better. They led the Personal Histories and Shoebox activities at the December staff meeting. People just kept talking and didn't want to leave.

They planned an honorable ending for the elementary school in January. Both school staffs prepared their own history maps separately and then presented them to each other. That was an eye-opener. There was a public celebration and formal ending ceremony featuring the creation of a hallway with historical photos, memorabilia, and bricks from the other building. All the former staff members were invited. There was a special assembly for all the students, and many parents came as well.

Unexpected Positive Consequences: I was surprised at how quickly a team formed to organize a year-end staff retreat to celebrate our year and honor the work of the former middle school teachers and their school that closed.

Parents are being invited to sit on the planning team. Both union reps want to be on the team. (A great idea to get them to work on something meaningful together.) They want to administer the staff trust survey again and present the results to see if there has been any positive movement in trust levels. We will have presentations from Ashira about literacy levels and Data Walls, and trust-building activities such as:

- A speaker on laughter and humor at work
- Activities like What's in My Name? and Childhood Photos
- Giving awards for staff involvement

Norma and Jake Kinder agreed to swap positions for a second term next year.

Actions that didn't work and unintended results: When we asked staff to give their preferences for which grade and subjects they wanted to teach next year, five staff members opted to transfer to another school. Two were loyal to Sarah Solo; one felt our school was "just fine the way it was before me" and was "cruising" on past achievements; and two others didn't want to be in a school with high school students. The warning signs were there in the survey results when I looked back at them.

Pablo was successful in a promotion he applied for and is leaving the school to become an assistant principal in the district.

The facilitation team had planned to begin the action planning process with staff this spring but wisely postponed it when they ran out of time.

My Goals for Next Year

1. Develop higher levels of trust on the staff so we can learn more collaboratively with the ultimate goal of improving our results with all of our students.
2. Develop an interview process with the staff that focuses on trust, collaboration, and risk taking. This would include a plan for induction and mentoring of new teachers that join the staff.
3. Support the facilitation team as we:
 - Choose a new leader, due to Pablo's promotion
 - Develop action plans for the decisions made at the June retreat

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Composite Middle and High School: A Fictional Scenario (cont'd)

- Follow through on the plans to lead the staff and student conversations about our vision scenario and develop action plans based on it (This never took place this year due to time constraints.)
 - Develop a new English as a Second Language Program
 - Co-ordinate with the literacy team to plan a professional learning session on the purpose and procedures of data walls to track student progress and improve results
4. Seek funding from the superintendent for the facilitation team and other key people to attend a conference with me during the January exam break about learning communities and assessment



Progress Report: End of Year Three *Our Long Term Goals Over the Coming Years*

1. To develop stronger relationships with the JK–grade 5 school in our community
2. To identify the impact of the growth patterns in the community schools in the vicinity
3. To develop higher levels of trust on the staff so we can learn more collaboratively with the ultimate goal of improving our results with all of our students

My Immediate Goals Over the Summer Break

During the summer, I devoted time to four goals that needed action before the next school year began.

Goal 1 (August)

Seek funding from the superintendent for the facilitation team and other key people to attend a conference with me during the January exam break with two results: To learn more about learning communities and assessment and to build trust on the team.

- **Action.** I met with the superintendent to ask for funding.
- **Positive Consequences.** Sonya Superintendent wanted to meet with our facilitation team and listen to their reasons for wanting to attend this conference/institute.

Goal 2 (August)

Meet with the facilitation team during the summer break to get a head start on the school year

Action. I invited the facilitation team to an afternoon meeting followed by a barbecue dinner at my house in August. I also invited Sonya Superintendent, Jake Kinder, and everyone's spouses or partners to join us later for dinner.

Positive Consequences:

1. Norma brought a flip chart and we sat in a semicircle around it in the backyard. When I raised the issue of finding a replacement for Pablo, Victor nominated Connie as the new facilitation team leader and everyone agreed—including Connie. I had worried about how this decision would be made. In the end it was easier than I thought it would be.

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Composite Middle and High School: A Fictional Scenario (cont'd)

2. I shared the results of my meeting with our superintendent about the conference in January and our obligations. They want to include Noel Network and Paul Peacemaker and the ESL teacher we hire, if we could afford it. Connie and Victor pointed out that there is funding available from the unions as well.
3. Then we reflected on the success of the retreat at the end of June and recorded the priorities and ideas that arose from it:
 - Increasing lateral trust levels among staff members, as measured by the staff trust survey
 - A greater understanding of the data wall concept thanks to Ashira and her team
 - Permission to have fun as a staff and to enjoy benefits of laughter and humor, both in our own personal lives and in our classrooms.

Note: The dinner speaker we hired to speak to us on the topic “Happiness at Work” not only gave us permission to have fun as a staff but also opened doors to the benefits of laughter and humor, both in our personal lives and in our classrooms. This speaker exceeded our expectations. Inviting Jake Kinder to join us for the dinner speaker segment enabled staff to get to know him better in the informal conversations that took place.

4. I shared with them the dates of the interview/hiring process during the last week of August. We developed four interview questions that included:
 - Our focus on building trust and teamwork with this unique Grade 6–12 staff
 - Credibility-competence and character examples
 - Concrete examples of risk-taking and teamwork behaviors
 - Willingness to work hard but to also have fun and be creative at work

They also developed the format of the interview including a tour of the school.

Goal 3 (July)

Learn more about the elementary contract between the district and the union.

Action: I met with Jake Kinder over several breakfast meetings to continue our mentoring relationship.

Positive Consequences: Jake was extremely helpful pointing out key clauses in the elementary contract that could cause me problems, possibly resulting in a grievance if I weren't careful. We have entered into more of a coaching relationship this summer, as he is now asking me questions about high school cultures in preparation for his switch with Norma in February.

Goal 4 (End of August)

Conduct the interviews for vacant positions from a trust-based perspective.

Action: Norma and I redesigned the process for filling six vacant positions.

Positive Consequences: We were able to hire six new staff members and found the expertise we needed. One was an ESL teacher for many years and was prepared to help us start this new program. Two were beginning teachers who said they were drawn to this school because of our

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reputation for teamwork and creativity, and they liked that trust. I believe the specific questions we asked told us more about their character in addition to their competence to teach.

Unintended Negative Consequence: It became apparent early in September, (after the week of interviews for new staff in August), that I was expecting far more than the facilitation team could deliver in terms of time commitment. Norma sensed their frustration early on.

Action: We quickly called a meeting with the facilitation team to examine our operating procedures.

Positive Consequence: They all concurred with Norma's intuition. They didn't know how to tell me it was a little too much responsibility for them. Coretta suggested that the facilitation team had to see itself as a co-coordinating leadership team and we needed to identify other interdependent teams that would have specific responsibilities and share the workload. We identified the teams already in place that would liaise with the facilitation team:

- Social committee with Noel Network as the leader
- Literacy team with Ashira as the leader
- Breakfast and Snack team

This meeting was a turning point in maintaining the willingness of the facilitation team to continue and to manage their role on top of their teaching duties. They said this was workable.

Our Three Short-Term Goals for This Year

Goal 1 (Ongoing)

Support the facilitation team.

Action: Met with the facilitation team and other team leaders as a group to work out our operating procedures and agree on our structure with the overall coordination of the facilitation team.

Action: Noel suggested that the facilitation team start to use the in-school email system to hold online conferences and share ideas quickly before meetings.

Goal 2 (Ongoing)

Support the facilitation team's plans to build high-trust staff relationships, especially with new staff members, by listening, sharing my expertise, and providing resources.

Action: Examine the results of the staff trust survey, looking for specific areas to address.

Positive Consequences: The experienced teachers we hired were paired up with a buddy in their department or division who guided them through the first weeks of school. They were expected to explain our staff meeting norms, our progress over the last two years since the two schools merged, the role of the facilitation team and other interdependent teams, and the shared leadership role of the principal and assistant principal.

New teachers were assigned a formal mentor for their first two years. The mentors had much the same role as the buddies, with additional responsibilities involving guidance with instructional strategies and classroom management.

All new staff were given a copy of Roland Barth's article and discussed it with their buddy or mentor.

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Composite Middle and High School: A Fictional Scenario (cont'd)

The facilitation team members decided to share their own work on personal trust, their self-assessments, and their trust touchstones with each of their contact groups at lunchtime meetings. (This led many staff members to conduct personal trust surveys with their colleagues and develop touchstones themselves.)

Negative Consequences: We learned from the trust survey results that our elementary staff in general reported greater fear of speaking up and raising issues.

Because of these results, a professional learning session on Personality, Conflict Patterns and Problem-Solving was offered in October. Most staff members attended and reported it was very helpful in understanding that conflict is to be expected and how to deal with their own fears about conflict and resistance. There were many requests for follow-up discussions from the feedback forms.

Action: Norma came back in March to help me administer a trust survey with all staff about myself. (I felt I should do this survey again mainly because of new staff.)

Positive Consequence: The middle school teachers gave me higher scores this time round, most notably in my levels of competence and my willingness to learn more, both from them and from Jake. I had impressed them with my actions, and their trust in me had grown.

Because of the results, I decided to make it a priority to share information more transparently by:

- Continuing my morning walkabouts whenever possible to talk with staff one on one
- Starting an open binder in the staff room with announcements, critical papers
- Writing key messages on the blackboard in the staff room (Jake's suggestion)

Goal 3 (November PD Day)

Support the facilitation team as they lead the staff, parent and student conversations about our vision scenario, our beliefs and core values, and subsequent action plans.

Action: They asked me to introduce this important action planning series of activities at the October staff meeting by explaining why I believed students and parents should be involved as well as staff for the full-day session in November.

Positive Consequence: When they realized that many of the activities we had done over the past two years were actually components of the action planning model, Connie suggested that if we broke up into work groups we might be able to develop our goals (in draft form) in one day. We had compiled data related to literacy and we had our History Maps completed. If we hadn't built a base of trust, I think it would have been an impossible task to complete in one day. Their enthusiasm showed me how much progress we had made in just over two years.

Action: The facilitation team met twice to co-ordinate the plans for the PD Day and included the Student Council President and the chair of the Parent Advisory Council. They established these work groups for the day:

- a. A personal vision work group. They were asked to develop a suggested process for staff members to use.
- b. A 'future-oriented' work group that would craft a first draft of our school Vision Scenario.

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- c. A core values work group that would base its work on our Belief Wall to identify our core values and, if possible, develop a draft school mission statement or credo.
- d. An appreciative inquiry work group to identify what is already working well.
- e. A data analysis work group that started with the Tree activity to identify what is in the bud, bloom, full flower, and withering flower stage.

Staff members had their choice of which work group they would join. Student Council and Parent Advisory Council members also joined in. Each work group took its turn in the first part of the morning and gathered information and ideas from everyone assembled in the library. For example, the vision scenario group distributed post-it notes and asked for everyone's response to a question.

Then all the work groups dispersed to different locations, analyzed their information, and prepared a progress report for the whole group. We met together for lunch and listened to spokespeople for each work group describe the progress they had made and answer any questions we had for them. By midafternoon, each work group was ready to report, and we met back in the library. By the end of the day, we had created:

- A guideline for each staff member to use to develop his or her own personal vision
- A draft vision scenario for the school
- A draft document with our core values, beliefs, and school credo (They preferred this term to "mission statement.")
- A draft list, organized into categories, of what the staff thought was working well
- A large chart replicating the Tree activity with sticky notes in each section. This helped us see what we could let go of or slow down on in order to make time for our new goals.

Unintended negative consequence: We all noticed one staff member who was continually marking test papers during the morning. (This violated one of our agreed upon norms—focus on the task.) When Paul Peacemaker directly asked her at lunch to respect our meeting norms, she quickly put everything away. I followed up the next day with a private chat with her. She explained that she was way behind with her marking and couldn't catch up at home because her kids were sick. We explored some ways she could get reliable assessments of student progress without bringing her work to staff meetings. She agreed with the necessity of following meetings norms and apologized.

Positive Consequences: We were all truly impressed by what we achieved in one day. All of the work was reproduced for distribution later that week so that staff could reflect on it before the next staff meeting. The parents and students had made it all the more real. They had valuable contributions to make, and they learned a lot that day about us too. People commented about how hopeful this had made them for the future of the school. Our higher levels of trust enabled us to face these daunting tasks together with honesty and integrity for the good of the school.

Action: At the staff meeting early in December, we reviewed the results from the PD Day and discussed each aspect. We reached common ground to proceed on four major goals to enable us to reach our future vision scenario.

The facilitation team's task was to establish any necessary new work teams and help them develop their own detailed action plan with timelines, responsibilities and resources to achieve their

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Composite Middle and High School: A Fictional Scenario (cont'd)

mandate. Systems had to be put in place to measure progress at regular intervals. At the same time, the facilitation team had to coordinate the plans, the timing, and the resources each work team requested. They aimed to have the work teams in place by the February staff meeting. Major decisions had to be made by each work team during the spring in preparation for the following school year.

These are the four goals and highlights of the plans with the work teams.

A. To restructure the school to enable all students to learn to their potential.

Work Team 1: Structure and Timetable

The goal here is to have multi-age, multi-grade groupings instead of set grades, so that students can proceed at their own rate. New students could enter at their own language level and advance at their own rate. Staff will be grouped into interdisciplinary teaching teams ranging from entry level (grade 6 to graduation level (grade 12). The timetable will be structured to provide common planning time for groups of teachers and a weekly meeting block of time for the facilitation team. Jake will work with the new teacher who was hired because of her expertise in this type of timetabling.

Work Team 2: Literacy

Continue the work of the literacy team to include the development of a new ESL program to meet the needs of students with English as their second or third language.

B. To continue to focus on trust as a core school value

Work Team 3: Trust

The facilitation team wanted to teach the staff what it had learned about trust and also to expand the use of trust surveys for ongoing feedback. They planned to include students and parents in this work team. They especially wanted to explore what impact even higher levels of trust would have on staff relationships and student learning and what that could look like. They saw themselves more of a study group and wanted to read more on the topic and seek further speakers and resources.

C. To change the name of the school and therefore establish a new identity for the future

Work Team 4: New Name and Identity

Finally, it became apparent that choosing a new name to reflect our school vision and core values, and also our history, was not going to be as easy as we thought. A small work team of one parent, one student, one senior community member, and one teacher (Hank Historical) was formed to develop an inclusive process to honor the history of the school in the community and come up with three or four possibilities, with a rationale for each, before the end of March.

Unintended Positive Consequence: Sonya Superintendent revealed at a principals' meeting that she had advance knowledge of a new 'Focus on the Arts' system mandate for next year. I took this back to the facilitation team to discuss how we should handle this, since this was *not* going to be our focus. They decided to wait and see what latitude we had when, and if, the board mandated it. They appreciated the heads-up I gave them and were determined to fight for our decision. I am optimistic that there is room to negotiate with Sarah, as she is supportive of our focus on trust.

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Composite Middle and High School: A Fictional Scenario (cont'd)

Goal 4 (End of August)

Reward the efforts of the facilitation team and provide an opportunity for long-range planning

Action: Go to a conference with a team from this school and the JK–grade 5 school to learn about the current thinking, to assess our results so far, to plan for our next steps, and to build trust

After much planning for our substitute teachers and Norma's willingness to supervise both schools while we were away, we attended the conference. It gave us much needed time to get to know each other better. We quickly realized that we were well ahead of many other schools in developing learning communities. Many schools were interested in our background with trust as a core value.

Later in April, Sarah Superintendent asked me to become principal of a new high school, and I declined the offer. While it was a compliment to me, I knew I needed to stay with this staff, which had worked so hard and made so much progress. We had built significant trust in each other and I knew they wouldn't want me to leave.

Jake and Norma decided to make their job switch permanent. We began planning for Victor's retirement. (I know the district union will want to be on the planning team for that.) When Ashira announced she would be going on a maternity leave, the new ESL teacher volunteered to chair the literacy team until she returned.

My Reflections at the End of Three Years

As this third year comes to an end and I have made the commitment to continue as principal, I can feel how much I have grown as a leader. I now understand that trusting others and being trustworthy myself have a wide-ranging impact. My time is spent in more meetings than before, but they are now action-oriented and not simply focused on information dissemination. There are definitely decisions that only I can make, but they are the exception rather than the rule.

Teacher leaders on staff extended their trust in me and now the facilitation team is deeply embedded in our organizational structure. I saw each staff member who took a leadership role grow over the three years, both personally and interpersonally.

Connie Collaborative wants to leave her role as union rep but remain as leader of the facilitation team. The staff has decided that they only need one union rep for the whole staff now.

Ashira Accountable made the successful transition from classroom teacher to in-school ELF and is thinking of applying for a central consultant position that will open up in a year or two. Our literacy program is so much stronger because of her.

Our high school has benefited greatly with the addition of the middle school grades. In fact, I am glad we were thrown together. We are far more prepared to meet the needs of our existing families as well as our new families. We have programs in place for basic needs like food for breakfast and lunch, and high-quality instruction and remediation for all of our students. Creative ideas are flowing. Enthusiasm is showing. Excitement is growing.

I look forward with anticipation to working with this amazing staff and students for years to come. We have a sense of direction and trust each other to take risks, speak up, and be honest about our progress and our challenges. Morale is better than ever, but not as good as it could be. We can finally call ourselves a school that's 'moving.' I believe that we can only do this together!