

SAN FRANCISCO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Program Evaluation &
Research Unit

Evaluation
Report

**Caring School
Community**

2007-2008

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Grounded in the program's theory of action, the evaluation is designed to address two basic questions:

1. **What impact(s) Caring School Community have on students, teachers, and schools?**
2. **How is the CSC program being implemented in new schools by the district?**
3. **What factors influence effectiveness of Caring School Community program implementation?**
4. **How can the Caring School Community program be improved?**

To address these four questions, a qualitative approach that included process evaluation, classroom observations, one-on-one staff interviews of a principal, district teacher leader, instructional reform facilitator, and teacher leader were administered. The central office CSC coordinator selected Junipero Serra Elementary school as the prototypical site that fully integrated the caring schools community values since the program's inception in the San Francisco Unified School District in 2002.

1. Program Impacts

Classroom observations. Each classroom meeting that was observed had a problem or issue of concern as the focal point of discussion. A set of behavioral norms were established in the beginning of the year with the class of students which included maintaining eye contact with others to show one is listening to the speaker, students always are seated in a circular formation to encourage face-to-face contact, and only one person is allowed to speak at one time. The classroom meeting builds verbal and nonverbal communication skills as well as active listening skills that emphasize the value in respecting each others' differences by teaching the importance of eye contact, taking turns when speaking, participating in cooperative structures and using questioning techniques to encourage cross-conversation among students. The classroom group discussions are built on an interactive and supportive learning environment that are driven by the students and guided by the teacher. The effects on the school climate as a result of these classroom meetings have decreased school fighting and increased peer relationships as well as student-teacher relationships through the importance of communication and active listening.

Face-to-Face Interviews. Analyses of other available data suggest that it may be too early to expect the *Caring School Community* program to have an impact on more long-term indicators of change such as achievement, attendance, suspension and expulsion rates (see Table 8 through 10). This finding is consistent with research on whole-school improvement that suggests that three to five years are needed for effects on academic achievement. Each one-on-one interview asked a set of questions regarding their general impressions on the effects of the CSC program, mastery and effectiveness of program components, on-going professional development, and how well the CSC program fits with the overall instructional

program at their school. Interviews were conducted with principals, instructional reform facilitators, district teacher leader, and lead teacher.

Standardized Test Scores. The findings across all 26 elementary schools (Cohort I: Carver, El Dorado, Malcolm X, Jose Ortega, Junipero Serra, Paul Revere, DeAvila (closed) and Golden Gate (closed); Cohort II: Cleveland, Cobb, Jefferson, Marshall, Paul Revere (reconstituted into a Dream School), Rosa Parks, Sunset, Yick Wo; Cohort III: Dianne Feinstein, Francis Scott Key, Rosa Parks, Ulloa (district implementation); Cohort IV (district implementation): Argonne, Bryant, Buena Vista, New Traditions, Starr King, Sutro) describe the impact Caring School Community had on students' test scores. In the beginning of 2008 school year, Cohort V has begun its district-funded implementation of CSC, which includes: Glen Park, Gordon J. Lau, Hillcrest, Sunnyside, and Visitacion Valley elementary schools.

With respect to academic achievement, all Cohorts experience an increased percentage of students at or above proficiency on the California Standards Test in both English Language Arts and Mathematics from 2003 compared 2007 test score differences. Even though the isolated effect from CSC is undeterminable given the evaluation parameters, the test scores of the students affected by CSC has gradually increased.

COMPARISON OF CST PERCENTAGE AT OR ABOVE PROFICIENT

Content Area	Cohort I					Cohort II				
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
English Language Arts	18.9%	22.0%	29.3%	25.9%	26.8%	19.3%	23.3%	40.4%	40.1%	41.1%
Mathematics	25.4%	27.0%	40.8%	42.0%	37.9%	27.2%	28.9%	54.2%	51.8%	55.3%

Content Area	Cohort III					Cohort IV				
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
English Language Arts	47.8%	50.4%	54.6%	58.3%	58.0%	38.6%	37.9%	42.7%	45.7%	43.7%
Mathematics	59.4%	63.0%	67.3%	69.2%	69.1%	44.4%	45.5%	52.8%	54.6%	49.8%

2. Program Implementation

Caring Schools Community Program Components. The four complementary components of the *Caring School Community* program: 1) Classroom meetings, 2) Cross-grade buddies, 3) Homeside Activities (classroom-home connections), and 4) School wide activities. Classroom meetings provide an open forum for students and teachers to build classroom community, check-in with students, discuss issues, plan, and make decisions that effect the classroom climate, including establishing norms for classroom behavior. *Buddies* activities involve older and younger students in relationship-building learning activities, creating a school-wide climate of trust. *Homeside* activities consist of short conversational

activities that students do at home with their parent/caregiver to foster communication at home and link school learning with home experiences. Upon completion, teachers facilitate a full discussion of families' responses to the activities, integrating students' home experiences into the school's culture. School-wide activities are non-competitive schoolwide community building events that link students, parents, teachers and other adults in the school to promote inclusiveness, helpfulness, respect and responsibility.

3. CSC Program Effectiveness

Leadership and Accountability. Schools with more classrooms in stages two or three of implementation identify leadership as a critical support as captured by the following quote:

“It was good to have teacher leaders to coordinate and help the teachers to stay on task - that was a very important piece. The teacher leaders assisted with scheduling CSC Class Meetings and activities, reminding staff ‘our Cross-Age Buddies day is coming up’ or ‘what do you plan to do’ or ‘let’s have our meeting’ to plan and talk about it. That was a very important piece. I don’t think CSC would really have gotten off the ground if had just been left up to teachers to say you need to pick your buddies, you need to meet on your own. You need that organized and cohesive piece. Hopefully the teacher leader, a point person, helps teachers stay on target.” – Principal

Leadership for *Caring School Community* effectively initiates and implements reform by articulating, mobilizing, and facilitating the process of change. As indicated in the quote above, they create opportunities for teachers and other stakeholders to come together to discuss and determine the critical issues of change, recognizing that every person is a change agent. Also suggested in above quote, leadership provides a form of accountability where the point person serves as a check point, reminding teachers to stay on target throughout the school year. This role is fulfilled differently at each school that may comprise a Teacher Leader, District Teacher Leader, Instructional Reform Facilitator and the principal of the school.

Professional Development. Teachers in all stages of implementation identify the coaching component of professional development as a supportive factor:

“It was helpful when CSC coaches came into my classroom, observed buddies and ran a post-buddies meeting with my class. One time, we told the coach ahead of time there were two pairs of buddies we were concerned about, and she observed them and gave us feedback on it. That gave us insight into how we create intentional caring relationships. Just watching the CSC coach debrief students after Buddies interactions using a class meeting about it helped me with my facilitation.” – Teacher

“Our CSC [Staff developer] came in one day and helped us brainstorm ways to conduct Class Meetings and schedule Cross-Age Buddies lessons. We did a whole theme on nature and then we had a series of lessons so everything was pretty much planned out. It went fine. We just finished it and that went well. It was helpful to have her come in and model a debriefing because we often don’t have opportunities to observe and reflect due to time constraints.” – Teacher

“I do know that in the past when the CSC staff developer had done coaching with teachers, they actually saw the facilitation techniques, skills and strategies used with their population of students, and light bulbs came on.” – Principal

As suggested by the above quotes, teachers are more likely to change the way they work if they are provided with school-based professional development with continuous links to the classroom. Teachers are then more able to gain a concrete understanding of the type of *Caring School Community* practices being promoted by observing staff developers in their classroom with their current students.

Barriers to Implementation

According to principal and teacher interviews, the following three factors are barriers to full implementation:

- Priority of Caring School Community Program,
- Mastery of *Caring School Community* Practices, and
- Pragmatic Issues.

4. Program Improvement

RECOMMENDATIONS

Leadership and Goals: Leadership in its multiple forms from a Teacher-leader to members of the leadership teams should be intimately involved in implementation, attending to both the normative and technical aspects of change. School site leadership should facilitate a conversation where the school community recommit to the goal of creating a caring school community. It is important that explicit links between *CSC* and core content areas are made transparent to all. Furthermore, district leadership should facilitate a sharing of best practices and success stories across the six schools. Testimonials from other Reading First/SAIT schools and teachers can play a critical role in teachers seeing this as a priority and understanding of the interconnectivity of academic and social-emotional domains. District leadership should also support principals in extending the caring community concept to the staff. For example, principals should continue to receive professional development to model the same promoted *CSC* practices during a staff meeting.

Environment (Structure and Culture): In creating a caring school community, an on-going dialogue is needed to discuss the implications of *CSC* for school's existing culture and structures. For example, teachers together need to review professional expectations and school community norms for collaboration between and among teachers that will especially influence cross-classroom and school-wide activities. Furthermore, rather than reinvent the wheel, schools should identify effective structures that will support full implementation of *CSC*. For example, Reading First grade-level and school-wide meetings may provide an opportunity for a brief share-out of teacher strategies in incorporating *CSC* into Reading First.

Professional Development: More on-going, on-site support is needed to model and reflect on *CSC* strategies which build upon teachers' previous experience and knowledge of social-emotional program and practices. Professional development should continue to be front-loaded given that most teachers naturally work on classroom community at the beginning of the school year for the first six weeks – a time when teachers might be more open to rich

learning. Furthermore, teachers should have structured time to share best practices across the six sites. Given that Stage III (see stages of implementation on page 12-14) teachers are distributed throughout the six schools, they could share their strategies for integrating *CSC* into core content areas, problem-solving logistical issues, and trouble-shooting behavioral outbursts. For example, with respect to *Homeside* activities, schools could share already translated materials.

Accountability: At the site level, more monitoring of implementation that informs teacher practice is needed such as frequent teacher check-ins. The purpose of this form of accountability is to provide meaningful information to teachers in support of full implementation.

Again, the first year of implementation has met with initial success. According to teacher survey results, teachers at treatment schools feel an improved sense of self-efficacy as well as an enjoyment of teaching. A result emanating from program implementation is the emphasis on creating a caring district culture. The Superintendent decided to make school climate a focus for the 2004-2005 academic year, incorporating *Caring School Community* practices. For example, all K-12 principals will participate in an administrative institute focused on school climate at the beginning of the 2004-2005 year in August. These parallel shifts in school and district cultures create the internal capacity for truly sustainable change at the end of the four-year grant.

PROGRAM DESIGN

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) incorporated the *Caring School Community (CSC)* program to the Students and Teachers Achieving Results (STAR) School Initiative due to principal and teacher feedback from the 2002-2003 evaluation. The STAR School Initiative encompasses strategic interventions, specifically additional instructional materials, school personnel, and district support, to address the issue of low academic achievement at high priority schools. According to findings from the evaluation, principals and teachers indicate that additional support is needed to attend to students' mental and physical health.

Caring School Community compliments existing efforts at STAR schools by building a school climate where both students and adults feel cared for and connected to a larger school community through a combination of in-classroom, across-classroom, school-wide, and home-school activities. *CSC* is a national, research-based program that builds classroom and school-wide community, creating a culture for learning. Eighteen elementary STAR schools currently participate in the *Caring School Community* program with more schools to participate for 2008-2009.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

The *Caring School Community* program specifies two programmatic goals:

To thoroughly evaluate the effects of the *CSC* program on students and staff at participating schools.

To sustain and extend the *CSC* program within the district to six new schools each year beginning 2007 and subsequent years thereafter.

PROGRAM STRATEGIES, RESOURCES AND ACTIVITIES

The *Caring School Community* program is based on rigorous evaluation studies of the Developmental Studies Center's model character education, problem prevention, and positive youth development program that consistently demonstrates widespread positive effects on students' ethical and social behavioral development. *CSC*'s primary focus is on building and maintaining a strong sense of the school as a caring, supportive, and inclusive community for students, staff, and families. A caring school environment is particularly important for under-performing schools with large populations of poor and minority students, where students, staff, and families need additional social support to raise academic achievement (Knapp & Shields, 1991; Solomon et al., 1996). Research indicates that the positive effects on community are even greater for students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Battistich et al, 1995; Shouse, 1996).

The *Caring School Community* program consists of the following four components: 1) class meetings, 2) cross-age buddies, 3) school-wide activities, and 4) home-school activities.

Table 1 describes the essential features and resulting benefits of the four individual program components.

TABLE 1: CSC PROGRAM COMPONENTS AND BENEFITS

Program Component	Benefit
<p>Class Meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circular arrangement that enables all participants to readily see and hear all others • Open-ended topics and genuine opportunities for students’ ideas to have influence • Safe, trusting, and reflective processes with clear ground rules • Decisions made by consensus where possible 	<p>Class Meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build teacher-student and peer relationships within the classroom • Create a cohesive, caring and reflective classroom climate • Teach goal setting, planning, decision making, problem solving, and reflection skills • Teach the importance of fairness, kindness, and responsibility • Promote greater understanding of self and others
<p>Buddies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pairing of whole classes separated by two or more grade levels • Teachers assign each older child a younger buddy for the whole semester or year • Paired classes meet every week or two for interactive academic or recreational activities • Regular pre-planning and post-reflection within each class 	<p>For older buddies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience themselves as responsible and caring • Making social connections and “fit in” in ways they might not with peers • Opportunities to practice treating others the way they would like to be treated <p>For younger buddies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build friendship with and feel more comfortable around older children • Learn from a role model who is only a few years older • Develop a growing sense of belonging and security and feel a part of an extended school family <p>For teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collegial work with another teachers • Gain different view of students

TABLE 1: CSC PROGRAM COMPONENTS AND BENEFITS CONTINUED

Program Component	Benefit
<p>School-wide Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion and participation • Cooperative, non-competitive environment • Emphasis on helping others and taking responsibility • Appreciation of differences • Reflection 	<p>School-wide Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a school-wide ethos of caring, service, and inclusiveness • Bring parents and community members into the social life of the school • Help students to see connections between “school life” and “home life” • Lessen divisions between older and younger students, staff members and students, parents and teachers
<p>Homeside Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent and child conversations about what the child is learning, their family and their history, and life experience and values • Written in English and Spanish • Done once or twice a month • Classroom to home back to classroom cycle 	<p>For Parents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help them track their child’s classroom learning • Facilitate communication with their children <p>For Students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help them learn more about their parents’ lives and validate the family’s culture and traditions • Connect classroom learning with “real life” learning <p>For Teachers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help them know more about the lives of their students • Help them connect positively with parents

According to research conducted by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, the theory of action for social-emotional programs such as the *Caring School Community* program conceptualizes the change process as follows (see Graph 1):

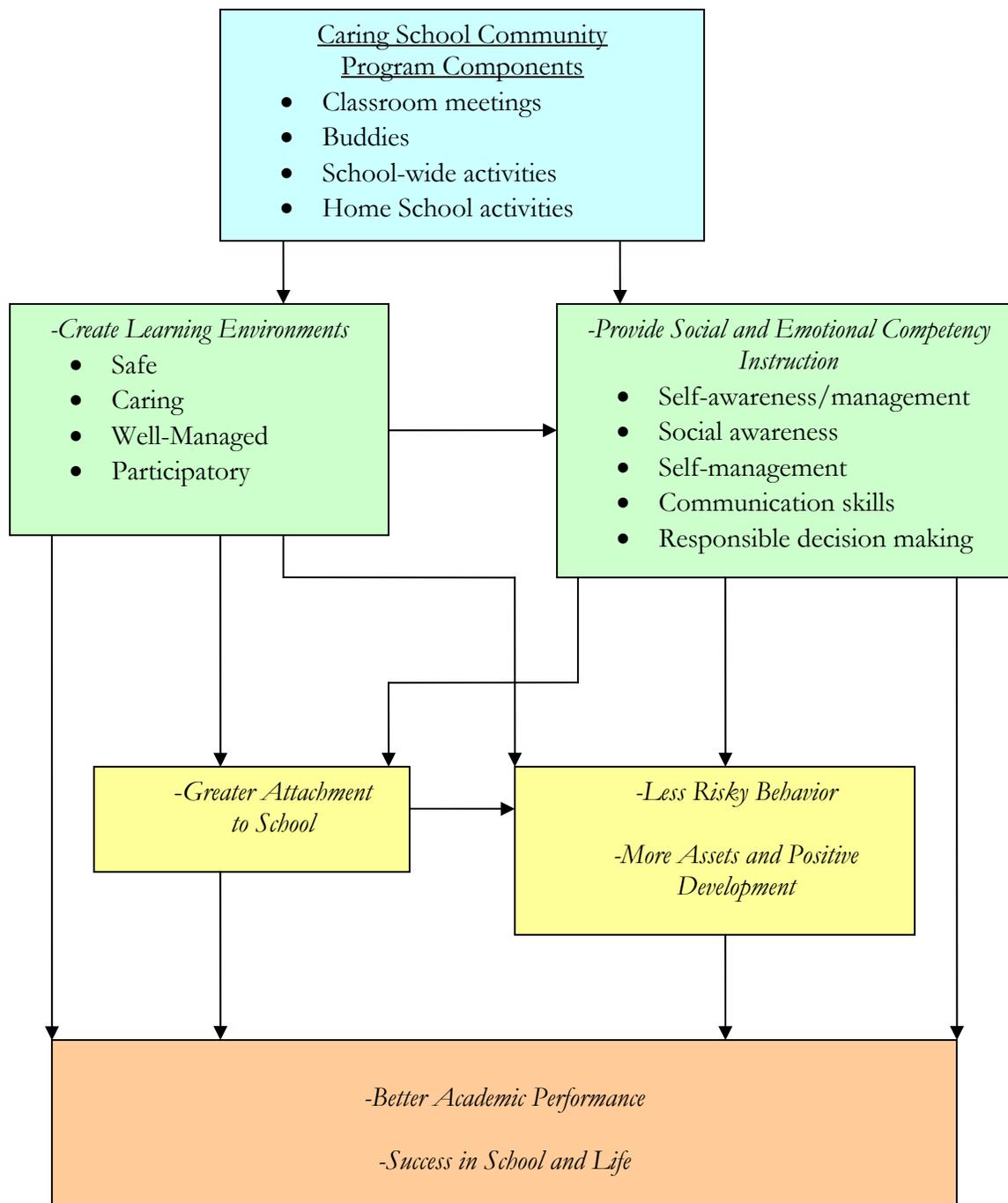
- CSC creates learning environments that are safe, caring, well-managed, and participatory;
 - As a result, students form a greater attachment to school.

- *CSC* provides social and emotional competency instruction for self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making;
 - As a result, students engage in less risky behavior and cultivate positive development
- Eventually *CSC* leads to increased academic performance and well-developed communication skills to tackle the challenges of life.

Therefore, STAR schools that implement the *Caring School Community* program should improve students' emotional engagement with their school and classroom through enhanced school learning environments and student interpersonal skills, resulting in improved academic performance and overall success. Emotional engagement is distinctly important for improved student learning, as compared to behavioral and cognitive engagement (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris, 2004). Research studies indicate that behavioral engagement in which students conform to existing roles and routines may not be sufficient in influencing student learning and achievement (Kumar, 1991; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991; Newmann, 1992 and Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Instead, research indicates that emotional engagement, the emotional quality of children's involvement in initiating and carrying out learning activities, is self-motivating and self-reinforcing, exciting learners to seek new and more engaging experiences (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Hektner & Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Whalen, 1998).

The *Caring School Community* program is consistent with research on enhancing students' engagement by teaching teachers facilitation skills to conduct learning activities and create environments that create opportunities for students to experience emotional engagement. Newman, Wehlage, and Lamborn (1992) identify three factors that affect engagement: (a) a student's need for competence, achieving cognitive understanding and skill mastery; (b) a school culture that is caring, fair, and supportive; and (c) authentic work, including intrinsic interests, sense of ownership, connection to the real world, and fun. Whalen (1998) identifies three features of teaching that enable students to experience authentic engagement: (a) communicating to students high expectations in a learning environment of continuous support and care; (b) matching student skill level with challenging learning activities allowing for student choice and control; and (c) modeling enthusiasm for learning. *CSC* accomplishes this through the full implementation of class meetings, cross-age buddies, school-wide activities, home-school activities and support of teachers, principals and other staff in their facilitation of *CSC* lessons.

GRAPH 1: THEORY OF ACTION FOR SOCIAL EMOTIONAL PROGRAMS¹



¹ Theory of Action is taken from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. (2003). *Safe and Sound: An Educational Leader's Guide to Evidence-Based Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Programs*.

EVALUATION DESIGN

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

At SFUSD, the Program Evaluation and Research Office employs an approach to evaluation that is participatory (Cousins & Earl, 1992), utilization-focused (Patton, 1986, 1994), and integrated with processes of continuous improvement and program planning (Fetterman, Kaftarian & Wandersman, 1996). Our approach is based on the idea that participation of program directors and coordinators in the evaluation process is key to ensure that program planners and managers use evaluation data to support decision-making. The involvement of program directors and coordinators has the potential to encourage program staff to think more systematically about the relationship between program activities and objectives. Such systematic reflection would be aimed at building a “culture of learning” (Patton, 1997, p. 147) to lead to continuous program improvement.

Evaluations are designed to address both program implementation (formative evaluation) and outcomes (summative evaluation) and are question-driven. Evaluators and program staff collaborate to develop evaluation questions that are linked to the program objectives and activities, and to the interests of all program stakeholders. In addition, research on the best practices in the project’s domain of activity informs the evaluation framework. The evaluation design involves a mix of qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods, such as standardized measures and tests, focus groups, surveys, and on-site observation. Each evaluation design involves the triangulation of multiple sources of data brought to bear on crucial evaluation questions.

EVALUATION OBJECTIVES

This evaluation is guided by formative and summative evaluation questions linked to the stated program objectives of the *Caring Schools Community* program. The two program objectives are: (1) to understand the school-wide impact of the implementation of the *Caring School Community* program for participating schools, (2) to expand the CSC program to new schools in the district:

What is the impact of the *Caring Schools Community* program on students, teachers, administrator, and the school as a whole?

How is the *CSC* program being implemented in new schools in the district?

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

This evaluation utilizes a qualitative approach, to understand the *Caring School Communities* implementation process and its impact. Classroom observations and face-to-face interviews with a principal, instructional reform facilitator, lead teacher, and district teacher leader were conducted. Structured interview instruments were used for each individual interview.

QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY COMPONENT

Sampling Scheme

One school was randomly selected to participate in this qualitative inquiry of how the *Caring School Community* program has affected the students, teachers, and school administrators. The purpose of the case study component is to provide detailed information regarding implementation for continuous program improvement. The case study component consists of interviews and observations.

Observations

Materials. The classroom observation protocol is developed by the Developmental Studies Center. The classroom observation protocol examines four dimensions of the *Buddies* process, including preparation for and introduction of *Buddies*, preparation for activity, the actual *Buddies* process, and reflection.

Procedures. One school was selected to participate in the classroom observations with teacher participation being voluntary. Classroom observations were conducted in April 2008. The Evaluator observed lesson activities that demonstrate caring teaching strategies as outlined in program proposal for approximately 20 minutes for 3 classes.

Sample. Three classrooms were included in the qualitative analysis. A 2nd grade, 3rd grade, and 5th grade classes were observed. The CSC Program Coordinator scheduled each classroom observation.

Data Analysis. Qualitative analysis is conducted on the observation field notes. Categories are developed based on the four domains of the observation protocol. Once field note data are coded into their categories, themes are developed to describe caring teaching practices and school communities.

Interviews

Materials. The interview protocol is developed by the Developmental Studies Center. The interview protocol consists of 10 questions for the Lead Teacher, 9 questions for the principal, 9 questions for the District Teacher Leader, and 9 questions for the Instructional Reform Facilitator. The questions are designed to obtain detailed information about participants' understanding of and attitude toward their CSC project, its implementation, and its impact on students, teachers, and school.

Procedures. A principal, instructional reform facilitator, district teacher leader and teacher were asked to be interviewed. Interviews are conducted April 2008. The Evaluator conducts interviews before, during, and after school. The average interview lasts approximately 30 minutes.

Sample. One school participated in the interviews. The CSC Program Coordinator scheduled each interview with the school's principal, instructional reform facilitator, district teacher leader, and lead teacher.

Data Analysis. Qualitative analysis is conducted on the interview transcripts. Categories are developed based on the interview protocol. The interview transcriptions are then coded for those categories. Once interviews are coded into their categories, trends and themes are developed to describe caring teaching practices and school communities.

Limitations of the Data

Changes on the California Standards Test and the California Achievement Test are the indicators used to assess improvement in academic achievement. Since many factors influence standardized test scores, any changes in student academic performance cannot be attributed with a high degree of confidence to any one single intervention.

EVALUATION FINDINGS

This section of the report is organized around the findings of the *Caring School Community* program evaluation. Grounded in the program's theory of action, the evaluation is designed to address two basic questions:

What is the impact of the *Caring School Community* program on students, teachers, and schools?

How is the *CSC* program being implemented in new schools in the district?

The findings describe the impact *Caring School Community* has on students, teachers, and school-wide environment. Supports and barriers to implementation of the program goals are further discussed in the next section of this report under "Issues to Consider for Continuous Improvement," answering questions three and four.

QUESTION 1: WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF THE *CARING SCHOOL COMMUNITY* PROGRAM ON TEACHERS, STUDENTS AND SCHOOLS?

Overall, the impact of the *Caring School Community* program on the school community has been a positive one. Building the students' and faculties' communication skills have created a sense of inclusive communities that foster an environment conducive to engaged learners and academic achievement.

Classroom observations. Each classroom meeting that was observed had a problem or issue of concern as the focal point of discussion. A set of behavioral norms were established in the beginning of the year with the class of students which included maintaining eye contact with others to show one is listening to the speaker, students always are seated in a circular formation to encourage face-to-face contact, listening to one person speaking at a time and avoiding mentioning names when discussing problems.

One of each 2nd, 3rd, & 5th grade classrooms were observed for 20 minutes each. The classroom meeting begins the class and could last for up to 30 minutes. In general, the content of the classroom meeting is focused around life lessons that involve past incidents like a behavioral concerns or a future experience like dealing with the transition into middle school. The 2nd grade classroom discussed about how each student can be responsible when a substitute teacher is teaching the class. The 3rd grade classroom dealt with the topic of honesty and trustworthiness due to a past incident of somebody in the class who lied about something. The 5th grade classroom discussed about school locker concerns when transitioning into 6th grade. The classroom meeting builds verbal and nonverbal communication skills as well as active listening skills that emphasize the value in respecting each others' differences by teaching the importance of eye contact, taking turns to speak, empathizing with others, using cooperative structures and questioning techniques to encourage cross-conversation. The classroom group discussions are built on an interactive and supportive learning environment that are driven by the students and guided by the teacher. Cross conversations during a classroom meeting is encouraged through the teaching of questioning techniques and cooperative structures. So even though the noise

level in a classroom may be very loud, this indicates high student engagement and high interactivity. The effects on the school climate as a result of these classroom meetings have decreased school fighting and increased peer relationships as well as student-teacher relationships through the importance of communication active listening and building empathy.

The classroom observations findings demonstrated that the program implementation was consistent with the CSC program components. The atmosphere in the classroom was calm and cooperative though not void of student interaction. The class meetings dealt with real issues that the students have input and investment which may contribute to learning lessons that could be applied outside of the classroom.

Face-to-Face Interviews. Analyses of other available data suggest that it may be too early to expect the *Caring School Community* program to have an impact on more long-term indicators of change such as achievement, attendance, suspension and expulsion rates (see Table 8 through 10). This finding is consistent with research on whole-school improvement that suggests that three to five years are needed for effects on academic achievement. Each one-on-one interview asked a set of questions regarding their general impressions on the effects of the CSC program, mastery and effectiveness of program components, on-going professional development, and how well the CSC program fits with the overall instructional program at their school.

- Principal Interview

In sum, the principal embraced the CSC program and has seen first-hand the positive effects the CSC program components had on the school. Bullying and fighting has dwindled to a rare occurrence. The students have learned to communicate their feelings and not react to them by physical confrontations. The school climate has been significantly more calm and safe as well as encouraging a supportive learning environment. Not only does CSC work for the students it has demonstrated benefits for the faculty and staff as well. More seasoned teachers are supportive to less seasoned ones to strengthen their CSC program components through staff meetings and other on-site professional developmental opportunities. Some barriers that was mentioned by the principal was the time balance between the CSC class meetings and teaching core curriculum for preparation of the testing requirements, parental support and understanding of the program component, and the money concern to sustain a fully functional CSC program in the school.

- Instructional Reform Facilitator (IRF) and Lead Teacher Interview

Both the IRF and Lead Teacher agreed that student engagement and behavioral problems have significantly declined as a result of CSC. The IRF mentioned a community feeling was apparent with the students as well as the faculty and staff interactions. Similar to the principal, they both have embraced the CSC program components and would completely recommend CSC to be implemented in other schools. They both stressed the importance of consistent class meetings leading to more calm, safe, and engaged learning environment at their school. One of the main challenges of both focused on the capacity and available time in training the new teachers how to implement the CSC program components. The Lead Teacher emphasized the CSC program components are relevant skills that could be applied

outside of the classroom as well. The key for a smooth and solid CSC program implementation are supportive school administration, providing CSC program modeling and training that is consistent with all teachers, and providing on-going professional development to maintain the consistency of the program components.

- District Teacher Leader Interview

The District Teacher Leader outlined the impact of CSC as fostering an environment of engagement, respect, caring, and learning. She states that CSC program consistency varies across varying levels of program implementation. The buddies program component has expanded the students’ social networks and encouraged a supportive and team building environment. One challenge in implementing the program components in new schools has been teacher buy-in. Certain teachers have resistance to this new approach and are not convinced of its impact on students, teachers, and the whole school community. The District Teacher Leader understands the value of equitable support across all new schools receiving program implementation. During the process of implementation, constructive feedback and trust building is essential factors in refining the CSC program components and adopting them in a consistent and accurate manner. Consistency and developmental growth of each school site implementation has been a continual concern to building a fully functional CSC program. In general, implementation of CSC program components at new schools has been challenging due to program consistency, time, and lack of teacher buy-in. Once these challenges are overcome, the resulting effects facilitate a caring school community.

Through these one-on-one interviews, the member of the CSC leadership team shared challenges as well as achievements of CSC. Overall, all the interview participants were appreciative of the program and would recommend it to other schools. The theme of caring communities intersects diversity and differences to create joyful learners.

Academic Achievement. With respect to academic achievement, Cohort I, II, III, and IV experience an increase in percentage of students at or above proficiency on the California Standards Test in both English Language Arts and Mathematics (see Table 8).

TABLE 8: LONGITUDINAL COMPARISON OF CST PERCENTAGE AT OR ABOVE PROFICIENT AT CSC SCHOOLS

Content Area	Cohort I			Cohort II		
	2003	2007	Change	2003	2007	Change
English Language Arts	18.9%	26.8%	7.9%	19.3%	41.1%	21.7%
Mathematics	25.4%	37.9%	12.3%	27.2%	55.3%	28.1%

Content Area	Cohort III			Cohort IV		
	2003	2007	Change	2003	2007	Change
English Language Arts	47.8%	58.0%	10.2%	38.6%	43.7%	5.1%
Mathematics	59.4%	69.1%	9.7%	44.4%	49.8%	5.4%

QUESTION 2: HOW IS THE *CARING SCHOOL COMMUNITY* PROGRAM BEING IMPLEMENTED IN NEW SCHOOLS BY THE DISTRICT?

The four complementary components of the *Caring School Community* program: 1) Classroom meetings, 2) Cross-grade buddies 3) Homeside activities (classroom-home connections) and 4) School wide activities. Classroom meetings provide an open forum for students and teachers to discuss issues, plan, and make decisions that affect the classroom climate, including establishing norms for classroom behavior. *Buddies* activities involve older and younger students in relationship-building learning activities, creating a school-wide climate of trust. *Homeside* activities consist of short conversational activities that students do at home with their parent/caregiver. Upon completion, teachers facilitate a full discussion of families’ responses to the activities, integrating students’ home experiences into the school’s culture. School-wide activities Trends across all six case study schools indicate that implementation of *Buddies* and *Homeside* activities vary within and across schools along a continuum.

Classroom Meeting: Three stages of implementation

Classroom meetings vary along three dimensions: 1) frequency, the number of times classroom meet per month, 2) classroom meeting involvement, the student participation in classrooms, and 3) types of classroom meetings, the type of function the classroom meetings serves.

TABLE 11: THREE STAGES OF IMPLEMENTATION

Dimension	Stage I	Stage II	Stage III
Frequency of Class Meeting	2 times per month	4 times per month	Daily
Classroom Meeting Involvement	Less than 75% of classrooms in the school participate in class meetings.	At least 75% of classrooms in the school participate in class meetings	All classrooms in the school participate in class meetings.
Types of Classroom Meetings	No class meeting at all.	Class meetings are used exclusively for check-ins or for the teacher to exhort students about problem behavior.	Over the course of a year, activities include a mixture of relationship-building, check-in, planning, and problem-solving and decision-making meetings.

Buddies: Three stages of implementation

Buddy pairs vary along three dimensions: 1) frequency, the number of times buddy classroom meet per month, 2) type of buddy activity, the academic and social focus of

activities, and 3) quality of buddy interaction, the way students interact with one another. Description of teacher practice and student engagement fall into three categories: 1) initial implementation stage, 2) mid implementation stage, and 3) full implementation stage (see Table 12).

TABLE 12: THREE STAGES OF IMPLEMENTATION

Dimension	Stage I	Stage II	Stage III
Frequency of Buddies	1-2 per month	2 per month	2-4 per month
Type of Buddy Activities	Reading PE activities	Math, Science Art, Music	Interdisciplinary Project-based
Quality of Buddy Interactions	Read and Listen	Question and Answer	Two-way discussion

Homeside: Two Stages of Implementation

Homeside activities vary along two dimensions: 1) frequency, the number of times these activities are conducted, and 2) type, classroom and parent workshops. Description of school practice and student engagement can be accurately described in two categories: 1) initial implementation stage and 2) mid implementation stage.

TABLE 13: TWO STAGES OF IMPLEMENTATION

Dimension	Stage I	Stage II
Frequency of <i>Homeside</i>	Four times a year	Once a month
Type of <i>Homeside</i> activity	Classroom activities	Classroom activities Parent workshop

School-wide Activities: Three stages of implementation

School-wide activities vary along three dimensions: 1) frequency, the number of times school-wide activities per year, 2) school-wide activities participation, the diversity of students and parent participation at school-wide activities, and 3) quality of school-wide activities, the affective quality of school-wide activities.

TABLE 14: THREE STAGES OF IMPLEMENTATION

Dimension	Stage I	Stage II	Stage III
Frequency of School-wide activities	Fewer than 4 school-wide activities are conducted during the school year.	4 to 5 school-wide activities are conducted during the school year.	6 or more school-wide activities are conducted during the school year.
School-wide activities participation	The same groups of students and parents participate in the school-wide activities.	Over the course of the school year, students and parents from all of the school population groups participate in the school-wide activities, but some groups are overrepresented.	Over the course of the school year, students and parents from all of the school population groups (e.g., ethnicity, age groups, socioeconomic groups, and linguistics) are equitably represented as participants in the school-wide activities.
Quality of School-wide activities	One or more of the school-wide activities contradict positive social values.	Most of the school-wide activities promote positive social values and none of them discourage positive social values.	All school activities promote positive social values, primarily cooperation, helpfulness, and appreciation of diversity.

ISSUES TO CONSIDER FOR CONTINUAL IMPROVEMENT

Supports and barriers to implementation of the program are discussed in this section of the report. Procedural and evaluative recommendations are made for its continuous improvement.

QUESTION 3: WHAT FACTORS INFLUENCE EFFECTIVENESS OF *CARING SCHOOL COMMUNITY* PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION?

Given that implementation of *Buddies* and *Homeside* is varied within and across schools, it is important to identify support and barriers to implementation.

Support for Implementation

According to principal and teacher interviews, the following three factors support full implementation:

- Leadership
- Accountability
- Professional Development

Leadership and Accountability. Schools with more classrooms in stages two or three of implementation identify leadership as a critical support as captured by the following quote:

“It was good to have teacher leaders to coordinate and help the teachers to stay on task - that was a very important piece. The teacher leaders assisted with scheduling CSC Class Meetings and activities, reminding staff ‘our Cross-Age Buddies day is coming up’ or ‘what do you plan to do’ or ‘let’s have our meeting’ to plan and talk about it. That was a very important piece. I don’t think CSC would really have gotten off the ground if had just been left up to teachers to say you need to pick your buddies, you need to meet on your own. You need that organized and cohesive piece. Hopefully the teacher leader, a point person, helps teachers stay on target.” – Principal

Leadership for *Caring School Community* effectively initiates and implements reform by articulating, mobilizing, and facilitating the process of change. As indicated in the quote above, they create opportunities for teachers and other stakeholders to come together to discuss and determine the critical issues of change, recognizing that every person is a change agent. Also suggested in above quote, leadership provides a form of accountability where the point person serves as a check point, reminding teachers to stay on target throughout the school year. This role is fulfilled differently at each school from a teacher-leader to a leadership team.

Professional Development. Teachers in all stages of implementation identify the coaching component of professional development as a supportive factor:

“It was helpful when CSC coaches came into my classroom, observed buddies and ran a post-buddies meeting with my class. One time, we told the coach ahead of time there were two pairs of buddies we were concerned about, and she observed them and gave us feedback on it. That gave us insight into how we create intentional caring relationships. Just watching the CSC coach debrief students after Buddies interactions using a class meeting about it helped me with my facilitation.” – Teacher

Our CSC [Staff developer] came in one day and helped us brainstorm ways to conduct Class Meetings and schedule Cross-Age Buddies lessons. We did a whole theme on nature and then we had a series of lessons so everything was pretty much planned out. It went fine. We just finished it and that went well. It was helpful to have her come in and model a debriefing because we often don’t have opportunities to observe and reflect due to time constraints. – Teacher

“I do know that in the past when the CSC staff developer had done coaching with teachers, they actually saw the facilitation techniques, skills and strategies used with their population of students, and light bulbs came on.” – Principal

As suggested by the above quotes, teachers are more likely to change the way they work if they are provided with school-based professional development with continuous links to the classroom. Teachers are then more able to gain a concrete understanding of the type of modeling *Caring School Community* practices being promoted by observing staff developers in their classroom with their current students.

Barriers to Implementation

According to principal and teacher interviews, the following three factors are barriers to full implementation:

1. Priority of CSC Program

Four out of six schools are involved in Readings First, a federal school-wide reform effort focused on reading. Two out of six schools are involved in the School Assistance and Intervention Team process, a state high priority schools program tied to sanctions. Within this high-stakes federal and state accountability context, teachers must prioritize their finite instructional and planning time among programs. This is a significant barrier to full implementation as demonstrated by the following quotes:

“At first to be honest I was a little hesitant or skeptical of the program, well not so much the program, but because we were doing so many other different things. And I thought this was just one extra. But I am glad we did and it has been very worthwhile for my 3rd graders. They very rarely get into the role of being responsible or caring for someone else and they take to it like a duck to water. These kids really care what happens to them, such as trying to improve their reading skills.” – Teacher

“It was time consuming. It was another professional development for a STAR school. That was tough because the teachers were really involved in a lot of professional development. I think it would have been less painful if they didn’t have the other stuff. The teachers could have really gotten into all of these ideas at the beginning of the year, but we really couldn’t implement them due to time.” – Principal

Most critical to the implementation of caring teaching practices is that teachers see that the reform is not “something added” but “value-added.” That is, the implementation of *CSC* is not “adding one more thing” but is considered by teachers to be “the thing.” *CSC* needs to be perceived as being part of and contributing to the academic core.

2. Mastery of *CSC* Practices

Five out of six schools had simple buddies pairings, usually reading buddies, prior to fully implementing and understanding the depth of the *CSC* Cross-Age Buddies component. Furthermore, three schools out of six have previous experience and professional development with other programs that promote positive school climate. Teachers perceive mastery of *CSC* or *CSC*-like practices as easily achievable as demonstrated by the following quotes:

“What’s so hard about doing Buddies. There’s nothing new. We’ve been doing this for years.” - Teacher

“Teachers like the program. They did not feel it was something just totally so new, something they hadn’t seen before. They just felt we could have done this ourselves. Why is there a program?” - Principal

“I would say you’ve got about half the people really on board, really thinking about it in new terms. The other half thought, ‘Oh well, we’ve always done buddy classes so what’s new about it.’ They’ve already been doing what they’ve seen as buddy classes.” - Principal

Given time constraints, teachers looked to the Cross-Age Buddies book and professional development as resources for new ideas but not fundamentally shifting practice. Therefore, understanding of the program, its practices, and the goals of character education in general also influence implementation.

3. Pragmatic Issues

Findings from interview data identify three pragmatic issues for *Buddies*: pairing of buddy teachers, pairing of upper and lower grade classrooms, and planning time. Pairing of buddy teachers is a real factor in the full implementation of *Buddies*, in that, a highly committed teacher who perceived *CSC* Cross-Age Buddies and building caring relationships between older and younger children to be a priority is limited to the commitment of the other teacher as captured by the following quote:

“Initially starting off, I could tell those kids were not prepped at all and did not receive opportunities to discuss and practice helping and caring for others. That provided another challenge, so I’d say for the first five months, I didn’t enjoy it at all. I felt that when the [older] graders came down, I had to do the prep that they should have received and then balance my [younger] graders at that same time and then try to get them together and it just didn’t work as well. That was really frustrating... I think who my partner teacher is makes a big difference. I know the other Cross-Age Buddy teacher pairs. They had a lot more success. It was frustrating to hear, ‘oh, my kids loved it’ or ‘they enjoyed this and I would have been so excited for it.’” - Teacher

“I’ve been fortunate to have a good situation as far as the other Cross-Age Buddy teacher. That I think is just critical. We’re both committed to doing it and we’ve done it regularly. I mean we are consistently doing Buddies. We meet once a week.” – Teacher

Another pragmatic issue is the pairing of 20-student K, 1, 2, and 3 classrooms with 30-student 4 and 5 classrooms as illustrated in these following quotes:

“I’m in a Cross-Age Buddies group where it’s an uneven number of teachers. We’ve got three second grade teachers and two fifth grades. We had to figure out how to be buddies with everyone and that provided just a headache of a challenge. So one of the second grades had to split; one part of her class went to one fifth grade and the other part of her class went to another fifth grade. Whenever we plan anything it involves so many people in an even way so it makes that much more difficult.” – Teacher

“The challenge was really in the numbers. I started the year with 30 children and my Buddy teacher had 14. It was 2 of my students to 1 of hers. So you have two older kids with one younger kid and it was challenging not having the two older ones dominate the situation, drawing the younger one in. And because of those numbers when one of my Buddy teacher’s kids is gone it would be like we have three or four to one kid. So the logistics were kind of interesting. But we tried to have things where groups of kids could help each other, not just pairs.” – Teacher

Finally, given finite time, teachers identify planning time as a barrier to implementation, however, some teachers are able to come up with creative solutions such as taking turns planning buddy activities one month at a time as illustrated in this quote:

“What we did at the beginning, I planned Cross-Age Buddies activities for the whole month. This is what we will do and then we didn’t have to worry about it. And then we switched. And then it was my Buddy teacher’s [teachers] turn to plan. She planned activities for our students and told me this is what we are going to do. She planned and prepared everything. But we did it that way because it was a lot easier and it would be one less thing to think about for the month.” – Teacher

Specific to *Homeside Activities*, given the cultural and linguistic diversity of San Francisco Unified School District, teachers and parent liaisons express the need for information to be available in several languages, a need that is applicable across all six schools. Some schools take the time to translate materials into other languages as indicated in this quote:

“Homeside was a different story, it was difficult to start. We had to have our one Chinese translation person here, who can write the translations so our parents can participate in the activities with their children. We scheduled Homeside activities a couple of months into the year and we just chose three or four to do throughout the whole year.” – Teacher

Overall, schools’ perceptions of the *Caring School Community* program as a priority and mastery of promoted CSC practices are the entry points toward effective implementation. Teachers’ attitudes towards and beliefs about character education influence their decision to devote finite time, energy and resources for *Buddies* and *Homeside* activities. Strong leadership, embedded professional development and continuous accountability further support full implementation.

QUESTION 4: HOW CAN THE *CARING SCHOOL COMMUNITY* PROGRAM BE IMPROVED?

The first year of implementation has met with initial success in that all teachers across all schools are doing *Buddies* and many teachers are beginning to use *Caring School Community* strategies to develop deeper relationships. To further support the school-wide adoption of caring teaching strategies, there is a need for (a) leadership that attends to the structural and cultural aspects of change, (b) goals that capture a shared vision of change anchored in curriculum, instruction, and assessment, (c) an environment that both structurally and culturally supports the types of change being called for by *CSC*, (d) professional development to provide teachers with the knowledge, skills and motivation to change their practice, and (e) accountability measures for monitoring progress, including attainment of goals and provision of information to address weakness. This is consistent with the growing consensus on the essential components of successfully planning, implementing, and sustaining school-wide change. As observed at schools that are consistently implementing *CSC* across classrooms and identified in teacher and principal interviews, attention to the five dimensions of school-wide change allows for truly sustainable shifts in school culture.

Based on the findings of this evaluation, including identified supports and barriers to implementation, the following are recommendations for the improvement of the *Caring School Community* program:

RECOMMENDATIONS

Leadership and Goals: Leadership in its multiple forms from a principal, teacher-leader to members of the leadership teams should be intimately involved in implementation, attending to both the normative and technical aspects of change. School site leadership should facilitate a conversation where the school community recommit to the goal of creating a caring school community. It is important that explicit links between *CSC* and core content areas are made transparent to all. Furthermore, district leadership should facilitate a sharing of best practices and success stories across the six schools. Testimonials from other Reading First/SAIT schools and teachers can play a critical role in teachers seeing this as a priority and understanding of the interconnectivity of academic and social-emotional domains. District leadership should also support principals in extending the caring community concept to the staff. For example, principals should continue to receive professional development and coaching to model the same promoted *CSC* practices during a staff meeting.

Environment (Structure and Culture): In creating a caring school community, an ongoing dialogue is needed to discuss the implications of *CSC* for school's existing culture and structures. For example, teachers together need to review professional expectations and school community norms for collaboration between and among teachers that will especially influence cross-classroom and school-wide activities. Furthermore, rather than reinvent the wheel, schools should identify effective structures that will support full implementation of *CSC*. For example, Reading First grade-level and school-wide meetings may provide an opportunity for a brief share-out of teacher strategies in incorporating *CSC* into Reading First.

Professional Development: More on-going, on-site support is needed to model and reflect on *CSC* strategies which build upon teachers' previous experience and knowledge of social-emotional program and practices. Professional development should continue to be front-loaded given that most teachers naturally work on classroom community at the beginning of the school year for the first six weeks – a time when teachers might be more open to rich learning. Furthermore, teachers should continue to have structured time to share best practices across the six sites. Given that Stage 3 teachers are distributed throughout the six schools, they could share their strategies for integrating *CSC* into core content areas, problem-solving logistical issues, and trouble-shooting behavioral outbursts. For example, with respect to *Homeside* activities, schools could share already translated materials.

Accountability: At the site level, more monitoring of implementation that informs teacher practice is needed such as frequent teacher check-ins. The purpose of this form of accountability is to provide meaningful information to teachers in support of full implementation. In addition, a result emanating from program implementation is the emphasis on creating a caring district culture. The active involvement of the three Elementary Assistant Superintendents in the Program Advisory Group resulted in the realization that a parallel shift in the district culture would further support shifts in individual school cultures. The three Assistant Superintendents became active leaders in the planning to integrate *Caring School Community* practices and process at the district level. Specifically, the Assistant Superintendents modified the bi-monthly Elementary Principals Meetings to model practices from the classroom meeting component of *CSC* and to create more of a community among the 77 elementary school principals.

Furthermore, building upon this new beginning, the Superintendent decided to make school climate a focus for the 2007-2008 academic year and beyond, incorporating *Caring School Community* practices which blends well with the newly adopted SFUSD Balance Score Card accountability system to create an environment of joyful learners. For example, all K-12 principals will participate in an administrative institute focused on school climate at the beginning of the 2007-2008 year in August. The following excerpt of the professional development plan for the Administrator Institute is an example of the emphasis on creating a caring district culture:

These parallel shifts in school and district cultures create the internal capacity for truly sustainable change that allowed the district to continue to implement the *Caring School Community* program in more new schools with district-only funding.

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