The Macon Miracle: A Community [Re]Designing Education to Capture the Hearts and Minds of Students
by Torres, C., Warner, T., Becker, K., Seitz, K., Robaina, M. & Pulliam, J.

Abstract/Introduction

It is clear that we live in a time of great change. Community leaders around the world are faced with dilemmas in every aspect of human living systems—whether social, economic, or environmental. We sit at a crossroads: do we try to fix what clearly is not working any longer or do we step up and design something new to achieve our desired outcomes? The leadership of Bibb County Schools—faced with this very dilemma in education—has stepped up to redesign their education system in a bold and exciting way. The road ahead is challenging and not at all guaranteed, but the conviction and strong leadership in the County are undaunted.

The purpose of this case study is to share how Bibb County School District (BCS), Macon, GA, is engaging the whole education system along with community leaders in a generative process to accelerate whole-system, positive change. Ultimately, their desired outcome is to generate a new educational system that will "ensure that all children receive a high-quality education that will prepare them to be competitive and successful in a global economy" (Bibb County Schools, 2011).

This chapter highlights key system intervention strategies, including the important role that an Appreciative Inquiry Summit played, in generating whole system change. We highlight the positive strides made to date and the challenges the County faces going forward. We conclude with recommendations leaders can use when considering a community-wide, whole system change effort.

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Macon, Georgia reflects a growing pattern in schools across the United States: an antiquated education system that no longer meets the needs of students and communities. In response to its increasing drop-out rate and declining retention rate, Bibb County sought a new superintendent; one who would bring vision and innovation to the county. Dr. Romain Dallemand took the reins of leadership at Bibb County Schools (BCS) in February 2011[1] and brought with him the vision and passion needed to move a community and a new form of leadership to Bibb County. Rather than trying to fix the problems inherent in the current system, his focus was on generating a new educational system, which would ultimately eclipse the old, making a significant difference in the lives of children.

Large-scale system change is no easy task. According to Donella Meadows (1997), the five most effective strategies for intervening in a system are:

1. Information flows

2. The rules of the system

3. The power of self-organization

4. The goals of the system

5. The mindset or paradigm out of which the system arises (p. 2).

Dr. Dallemand focused his efforts in all five of these areas. He also very intentionally chose research-based processes and tools that promised to inspire, engage, and include the whole system in redesigning itself from the inside out. Cornerstones of his effort included the use of Appreciative Inquiry

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[1] Bibb County covers 2,000 square miles, has a mixed ethnic demographic, a median income of just slightly over $37,000 and approximately 22% of its population falls below the poverty level. Superintendent Romain Dallemand is supported by a six-member leadership team as well as an eight member Board. Approximately 24,000 students attend Bibb County schools, which are supported by approximately 1,800 teachers and 3,500 employees. There are 7 high schools, 7 middle schools, 25 elementary programs and 3 specialty schools.

(AI) and the intentional development of self-efficacy among teachers, administrators, and students. AI focuses on strengths, shared visions of the future, and generative ways of engaging with one another, and self-efficacy focuses on developing mastery and belief in individual and collective capacity to achieve desired ends (Bandura, 1993). Over time, a community practicing AI and expanding self-efficacy has the potential to redesign and then generate a new educational system that supports the success of every child.

Information Flows

From the outset, Dallemand used information, data, and statistics to help teachers, administrators and community leaders understand the severity and urgency of addressing the education of youth in the community. He set Bibb County Schools within the context of the greater economic situation that the community—and the United States—is facing. Specifically, he showcased the relationship between education, and local and global economics, underscoring the importance of addressing the system. Dr. Dallemand stated that in the United States, 1.2 million students drop out of school each year; 7,000 each day; 4.8 students each minute (Broad Foundations). Such statistics suggest that if things do not change in this country, in ten years 11 million students will have dropped out of school. He went on to show that this has a tremendous impact on the country's gross domestic product (GDP). The data suggest that by closing this gap for all students in the US—zero dropouts—it would increase GDP by $1.2-$2.3 trillion! If we close the gap for low-income students alone, it would increase GDP by $400-$700 billion, and if we simply focused on African American and Latino students, GDP would be $310-$525 billion higher (Auguste, Hancock, and Laboissière, p. 2).

Dr. Dallemand further clarified that the situation is compounded by the shift in levels of education needed in the workforce. He illustrated that in 1973, 72% of the workforce could find jobs with only a high school degree or less (with 32% of dropouts able to find work). This was a time when the textile industry was alive and well in the U.S. The level of education needed to work in a more technical

world has changed the educational requirement of the workforce. In 1992, only 44% of the workforce was able to find a job with a high school degree or less (with only 10% of those who dropped out able to find work), and in 2007 it slipped further with only 41% of the workforce able to find a job with a high school degree or less. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, by 2019 it will drop even further with estimates suggesting that 17% of the jobs will require some college or an Associate's degree. Further, an additional 33% of the jobs will require a college degree or graduate school.

Referencing the data in relationship to Bibb County, Dr. Dallemand described the enrollment statistics in BCS culminating with an abysmal graduation rate for students entering 9th grade of only 44.6%. Comparing the workforce statistics against Bibb County, this meant that 55.4% of the students (i.e., the drop out rate) are competing for 10% of the jobs (the percent of jobs available for those without a high school degree).

In the face of the data presented, the community began to see things differently. This is a simple example of the power of information flows in a system. Data enables people to pay attention in ways they cannot when the information is absent. Understanding the current educational and economic reality established a framework for teachers, staff, parents, and community leaders to begin to relate differently to their school system, their students, and their future. Dr. Dallemand framed the information in a context highly relevant to community leadership: the economic vitality of the region. As they comprehended the severity of the situation and accepted that systemic change was essential, Dr. Dallemand's comprehensive leadership strategy was taking shape.

Changing the Rules of the Game

Upon arrival in Macon, Dr. Dallemand immediately focused on changing the rules of the system. He created a lean and dynamic leadership team, eliminating ten positions at the senior leadership level, saving the community $1 million. He established rules for engagement and accountability, to which he held himself and his staff accountable from his first day.

He established multiple communication venues to enhance two-way communication. Using a transparent and collaborative approach, Dr. Dallemand and his staff accepted personal accountability for improving relationships with parents and community members. For example, they established a Welcome Center to address questions and concerns raised by students and parents as well as to provide parent and community service information. Dr. Dallemand met with community members and visited every school in the district to meet and talk with all faculty, administration, staff, parents, and students. During each encounter, he shared the education and economic data and discussed the possibility that together they could change the future for BCS students and for Bibb County. For many employees of the school system, this was the first time they had seen their school superintendent, much less been invited to participate in any change process.

> *I have been working for the school system for ten years, and this is the first time I have seen such enthusiasm in people wanting to work together to make a difference for our students and to improve our school system.*
> Norma Guardiola Valle
> Core Team Member

Since his arrival in Macon, Georgia, Dr. Dallemand sought input from a cross-section of stakeholders about what was and was not working for students, teachers and parents. Recognizing that technology had changed the way people communicate, he utilized relevant social media strategies extensively, including Facebook, twitter, blogs, and email.

Each of these changes reflected an important underlying new set of rules: *the administration is transparent, will communicate openly, and values people's input and concerns*. This gave people a voice and an opportunity to contribute. The Welcome Center established early in his tenure was just one example of his willingness to create an accountable and supportive system of change. Charrissa Corbin, a member of the Superintendent's Core Team of change agents said, "I feel like I have a voice and that I know what is going on. We are listening to one another with openness and receptivity. Everyone wants to learn; we want to take on responsibility and have fun at the same time" (personal communication, December 2011).

Tapping the Power of Self-Organizing and Setting Clear Goals

The ability to self-organize is the strongest form of system resilience; it is the ability to survive change by changing, which is what Dr. Dallemand was calling for from the community.

> *The most stunning thing living systems can do is to change themselves utterly by creating whole new structures and behaviors. In biological systems that power is called evolution. In human economies it's called technical advance or social revolution. In systems lingo it's called self-organization. . . Any system, biological, economic, or social, that scorns experimentation and wipes out the raw material of innovation is doomed over the long term on this highly variable planet. The intervention point here is obvious but unpopular. Encouraging diversity means losing control. Let a thousand flowers bloom and ANYTHING could happen! Who wants that? (Meadows, 1997, p. 9-10).*

Dr. Dallemand and his leadership team wanted an element of self-organization within BCS. He acknowledged that all teachers, administrators, and parents had been working hard, and added that hard work on the wrong things will never allow the system to achieve its goal. He invited everyone to help research and identify evidence-based strategies for quality and effective teaching and learning practices and to experiment with working on the "right things," so their hard work would achieve the system goal. In order to support effective self-organizing, the goal or mission of the system must be simple and clear; the mission for Bibb County Schools is: "Each student demonstrates strength of character and is college ready" (Dallemand, 2012, p. 2). Dallemand encouraged diverse members within the community to engage and bring their differing viewpoints and ideas into the community dialogue and into the classrooms. And he advocated for many options for students and teachers so they could choose. All of which characterize self-organizing systems, where autonomy thrives within specified boundaries and simple, clear rules.

Changing the Mindset

Finally, and most importantly, he worked tirelessly to bring teachers, administrators, and community leaders to embrace a new paradigm. This new paradigm was grounded in social constructionism—the notion that we co-create our social systems in our conversations, our shared actions, and the way we make meaning together (Gergen & Gergen, 2003). Furthermore, it is a paradigm where community generativity defines both individual and collective action. Dallemand was calling for the community to

step away from past beliefs, structures, and actions that enabled a stagnate and dying education system to persist and to instead "'make their mark' on the world, through active intergenerational concern and caring; creating things and bequeathing new sources of meaning and value that make the future and our world a better and bright place" (Cooperrider, 2013).

This was bound to be a most difficult task. Mindset is comprised of the "shared ideas in the minds of society, the great unstated assumptions, unstated because unnecessary to state; everyone knows them. They constitute society's deepest set of beliefs about how the world works" (Meadows, 1997, p. 12). Inherent in a mindset are a set of rules and beliefs that we take for granted to be the way it is. These are assumptions that influence everything we see, think, and do; most of the time we are not even aware they are governing our perception and options. Gergen and Gergen (2003) teach that our worldview underscores and influences everything about the way we make meaning in the world: relationships, personal success, values, opportunities, etc. When our mindset or paradigm is challenged, it means challenging almost everything we hold to be true. We do not give that up easily.

Before Dr. Dallemand arrived, Bibb County shared a mindset about the way things worked and the way power was held in the school system. What students in the community were capable of and why the system was failing students was a part of that mindset. The idea that they might influence the way the system worked and what was possible for students was not even a possibility they considered. Clearly, Dr. Dallemand needed to challenge the current mindset if he was going to influence a radical paradigm shift among community members.

What stood out for me about the Summit was bringing that many people together to work for students. People who normally do not participate--bus drivers, cafeteria workers, parents--were there. They didn't think they were valued. Engaging them validated their importance; their stories helped ground them in why they are of value; their experiences allowed them to connect.

Bertha Caldwell, Core Team Member

Upon arriving in Macon, Dr. Dallemand began his effort by presenting at countless community, business and school meetings, showing how the present-day system evolved from an old set of beliefs about people and education and how current research about what works in education

called for a new system. He thought they *could* change the system based upon a collective belief that it was possible.

Shifting the mindset is a difficult task for a community that has felt disempowered by the system for years and in some cases, for generations. Most people did not believe it was possible; those who were skeptical were at least willing to adopt a 'show me' attitude. At a 2-day summit, Dallemand delivered his formal invitation to the community to collaborate in constructing a new education system instead of trying to fix the old one. He provided the historical background for how and why the current education system was designed. He told the audience of 4,500 that the current education system was not broken; it was doing exactly what it was designed it to do (Dallemand, October 7, 2011). This was why he was calling for the collective co-creation of a new system; one that was designed to deliver the outcomes the community wanted given the current and projected future economy.

How Do You Change a Mindset?

So how do you change paradigms? Thomas Kuhn (1962) suggests that when enough significant anomalies have accrued within a paradigm, new ideas begin to emerge that challenge the old paradigm and eventually a new paradigm takes shape. Meadows (1997) paraphrases Kuhn's recommendation for taking the lead in changing a paradigm: "You keep pointing at the anomalies and failures in the old paradigm, you come yourself, loudly, with assurance, from the new one, you insert people with the new paradigm in

> *This year is so different. All my staff participated in the Summit and it's created a critical mass in my school that finally we believe we can change!*
>
> Core Team Member

places of public visibility and power. You don't waste time with reactionaries; rather you work with active change agents and with the vast middle ground of people who are open-minded" (p. 12).

This is exactly the approach that Dr. Dallemand took. In addition to pointing out the failures and contra-indications in the current system, he actively modeled new behavior governed by a different set of rules and beliefs: those from a new mindset or paradigm. For some, a shift towards a more generative mindset began to emerge because the superintendent and his leadership team made the new paradigm explicit and then consistently modeled the way:

- They listened first and heard what people said.

- They invited complaints, input and desires from parents, teachers, administrators, students and community members.

- They made commitments and followed through.

- They encouraged engagement and made the effort to go where people were, rather than waiting for them to come to them.

- They were consistently transparent, inclusive and appreciative.

- Senior leaders and the Core Team members expanded their knowledge and understanding of the new paradigm through reading and training, and they were held to the same high expectations and standards as the superintendent held himself.

- There was zero tolerance for leadership that did not 'walk the talk.'

Dr. Dallemand was increasingly becoming aware of the issues facing his school and community. For example, he learned that there was no summer reading program for children during his first year as superintendent, and he committed to creating opportunities for students to stay engaged in learning throughout the summer by starting a Reading Challenge. People told him no one would show up for his Reading Challenge; at best he could expect perhaps 400 people. Acting on his beliefs, he communicated the opportunity to both students and parents in numerous settings. He explicitly shared, 'People have

told me no one will show up, but I tell them they are wrong. Parents believe in their children and they want to help them succeed. You will come because you care; I believe in you and your children.' He believed and challenged parents, teachers, and students to prove the naysayers wrong. He invited people personally to show up, telling them he had reserved the coliseum because there were going to be so many parents and children coming. He ended by asking them to please join him.

Against the odds, more than 4000 parents and students showed up to enroll in the Reading Readiness Program. Every student left with a book. A few days later, students received four additional books and parents received strategies for helping their children with reading. Additional support was provided through reading circles to help students maintain their knowledge throughout the summer, to improve reading comprehension, and to prepare students for the first day of school.

This, however, was only a beginning. During an interview with the Center for Appreciative Inquiry (CAI), Dr. Dallemand indicated that this was his third major district reform (personal communication, December 7, 2011). His first two attempts involved the traditional model (from the top-down) where he tried to sell a plan to the school district. Both times he was met with fierce resistance. He vowed this time to do it differently, and felt that not only leaders, but everyone, as a whole—parents, bus drivers, teachers, food service staff, principals, maintenance workers, administrators, community leaders, and, ultimately, students – must be a part of the process. He was not trying to create a new lens of positivity through which to view students. He wanted to collectively create a whole new landscape of possibilities in which the community, and education, could thrive. For this, he chose an Appreciative Inquiry Summit and he sought out the Center for Appreciative Inquiry to help make this happen. The generative core of Appreciative Inquiry was the perfect catalyst to engage the whole system in the process of liberating a collective vision of untapped possibilities, creating a plan for action, and inspiring individual and collective ownership in both the process and future outcomes. In fact, the summit experience would give the

participants permission to *live* their generative capacity through their continuous dialogues, daily activities, and program development.

An Invitation to Generate a New System: The Summit

The Gestation Period

Timing played a key factor in the success of the summit. From his arrival in Macon, Dr. Dallemand continuously reached out to engage the whole community in re-creating schools that work: schools that enable students to flourish and the community to thrive. The summit was a culmination of almost nine months of extensive engagement, outreach, administrative redesign, and information sharing. All of this activity and effort set the stage for BCS to host a highly successful two-day Appreciative Inquiry Summit, which initiated *The Macon Miracle.*

Logistics was unbelievable. I was excited; I knew what the plan was, but I was doubtful. I couldn't imagine how this was going to work. After the first day, I was a believer in this process.   ~ A Core Team Member

The Whole System in the Room?

At first blush, the idea of a 4,500-person summit seemed overwhelming, especially given the parameters: location (an athletic arena), timeline (three weeks to plan and execute the first day), window for engagement (5 hours for discovery, dream, a lunch break, and movement (for 4,500 people!). What became apparent over the course of the Summit planning and event is that an AI Summit, regardless of the overall size is the same: the work in a summit is typically done in pairs and small groups and everyone is actively engaged and generative. This means the real issues around size are logistical. Fortunately, a competent and highly committed leadership team made the impossible seem relatively simple.

The Core Team: Active Change Agents in the System

A strong, 60-person Core Team was invited to support the success of the Summit and ultimately to support the success of the Macon Miracle. As all AI summit core teams typically do, this team broadly represented all stakeholders in the community: principals, cooks, teachers, bus drivers, teaching assistants, custodians, administrators, parents, counselors, and community leaders.

By the time the Core Team received its initial training in Appreciative Inquiry, they had been exposed to AI concepts, ideas and framing

I accepted the invitation [to become a core team member] with some trepidation...I was not sure what to expect. As we began to develop the logistical plan to gather over 4,000 stakeholders in the Centreplex as a way to share ideas, I felt ecstatic that all of the major players in the school system and the community would be able to express their concerns, as well as proposals to improve the state of education in our county.

~ James Dothard, Ed. D., School Psychologist

because of the way in which Dr. Dallemand works and the behaviors that he and his staff model. At the end of the initial training, the Core Team members were asked to put AI into practice for a week and to be prepared to report back their outcomes and observations. They practiced and a week later, they had powerful stories of engaging with students, colleagues, parents and family members in ways that created positive feedback loops. They felt the generative power of AI and experienced rising self-efficacy in the practice.

The Core Team was involved in designing the Summit and helping to manage logistics for all aspects of each of the 2 Summit days. The planning followed the format found in *The Appreciative Inquiry Summit: A Practitioner's Guide for Leading Large-Group Change* (Ludema, Whitney, Mohr, & Griffin, 2003). The training, practice, and deepening experience of working with the AI principles turned the Core

Team into a powerful catalyst for the Summit. Since the Summit, they are serving as champions for AI

practices and as catalysts for cultural change in their respective schools and departments (Becker,

Pulliam, Robaina, Seitz, Torres, & Warner, 2012).[2]

Using Challenges as Opportunities to Underscore A New Way

As you can imagine, an undertaking of this size with such a short planning window provided many

opportunities for frustration and regression to old mindsets; after all, people had experienced only 9

months of transparency, consistency, and congruency. The primary challenges for the summit were

logistical (how to move, feed, and group 4,500 people for meaningful interviews, conversations,

presentations and meaning-making) combined with skepticism among employees (no one truly believed

their voice would make a difference) and varying degrees of long-standing, social, cultural, and racial

tension inherent in the community.

Any one of these issues could have erupted during the summit, fueled by unexpected snafus. For

example, employees paid ahead of time for their lunches, which came from a variety of restaurants in

town. Each restaurant made their own decision about what to put in those lunches and the difference in

perceived quality and quantity became an issue. Instead of ignoring complaints or acting defensively, the

leadership team was consistent and congruent, responding in ways they had been modeling for the last nine months: they publicly thanked people for expressing their concerns, apologized to those who felt slighted and told them it would not happen on the second day of the summit. They then followed through

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[2] For a detailed accounting of the Summit planning, process and experience, please see Becker, K., Seitz, K., Torres, C., Robaina, M. and Warner, T. Creating a Legacy to Live Into: The Macon Miracle. In Dole, D. (to be published in 2014). *AI in Schools.* NM: The Taos Institute.

and ordered meals only from those restaurants that provided a quality lunch for the price. In these small but cumulative ways, they were building trust and supporting a more generative paradigm (your voice matters, speak; you will be heard, change can happen, and you can influence that change).

In this way, problems that were expressed continued to become opportunities to ask questions, to listen, to collaborate, to respond effectively and ultimately to build an environment of appreciation, mutual respect, and trust.

Summit Design

Each of the two Summit days offered inspirational keynote addresses at the outset followed by meaningful opportunities for dialogue. For many, it was the first time that they had been invited to recall positive stories

> *During the second day, one group mentioned that they realized the culture of the schools would need to change so that 'smart became cool.' That was later captured in a strategic proposal. They realized that some of the old ways of teaching are antiquated and actually hold students back, and they were eager to get back to their classrooms to start interacting with the students to get their ideas.*   *~ CAI facilitator*

from within their system, to identify the strengths they knew were there, but had been lost with so much attention on the negative. One of the CAI facilitators reflected, "A common theme that ran throughout the groups I was facilitating was having high expectations and commitment. Teachers and other school employees wanted to be held accountable for great performance, they wanted their administrative staff to be accountable for ensuring the vision was successful, and they wanted students, parents, and community members to be held accountable for successful students/schools as well. They were setting the bar high and they knew it. They were aware that many were watching them, especially around Georgia, and they were proud of what they were doing. These themes were reflected in their posters throughout both days" (personal communication, October 10, 2011).

The opportunity to dream big and to share those dreams with the whole was inspiring for most, especially for the Core Team and leadership. The weeks between Day 1 and Day 2 of the summit provided an opportunity for the large amount of data produced in Day 1 to be synthesized, organized into usable categories, and shared with all participants. As with all their communication, they shared the data through a variety of social media venues as well as through the district intranet, enabling returning participants to choose their areas of interest for designing the new school system: Day 2 of the Summit. Students had an opportunity to weigh in as well. By the second day of the Summit, many school personnel were committed to building a positive future and beginning to believe they just might be able to do so. Their hard work during the Summit sparked a growing sense that change really was possible, and they had a special role to play in it.

One small group included an 8-person blend of teachers, bus drivers, and custodians. The custodian was mentioning how he had begun to initiate conversations with students who seemed to be lonely or not part of any group. He did not know if it would help make school any better for those students, but he said he was going to try because he wanted the students to know that someone was watching and that they were important.

~ CAI Facilitator

A CAI facilitator shared, "During both days, I received comments from people stating that they were impressed that Dr. Dallemand was inviting people's input. They had heard he was inclusive and wanted active participation, but they did not understand it to the extent they were witnessing and experiencing it until the summit. People were impressed that he, and his key management staff, were active participants in the day, and that everyone was invited to share their ideas. The people who were sharing felt like it was the first time that they might actually be heard. One person shared that previous administrative staff said they wanted feedback but never did anything that showed they were serious

about it. Not everyone had met Dr. Dallemand yet, but there was a sense that they valued and respected him for what he was doing, as evidenced by their comments that "he is courageous; he is undertaking the impossible" (personal communication, October 10, 2011).

The Generative Dance: Living into A New Design

An opening to what could be possible does not create a full paradigm shift. There is still hard work to do for BCS to reach its tipping point. Covey (1989) teaches that paradigms are the source of mindsets, beliefs, and attitudes, as well as the behaviors that embody them (p. 30); paradigms literally structure our way of being (p. 32). Whole system change is a difficult process ultimately requiring a committed shift to a new paradigm; this is most challenging since systems are inherently designed to maintain equilibrium. They resist any significant change.

Kouzes and Posner (2002) said, "Getting ourselves and others to change old mindsets and habits and substitute new ones - and commit to them, long term - is daunting. Even with the best of intention, people tend to revert to old and familiar patterns" (p. 2008), and to apply habits of thinking to problems (the tendency towards equilibrium). For example, towards the end of the second Summit day a group of coworkers asked how they were going to "take care of all those kids once they come back" (personal communication, October 10, 2011). Though their question demonstrated a step forward with the belief that a positive change will occur with more kids staying in school, it also indicated a holding onto previous frustrations and beliefs regarding scarce educational resources necessary to fulfill their responsibilities.

The predisposition to maintain comfort and familiarity causes people to linger in the old paradigm. This creates a generative dance between the old and new paradigms, which continues until the new paradigm replaces the old. In a summary of Thomas Kuhn's thoughts on paradigms, Roberts (2000)

noted, "For a time both paradigms will offer solutions...but at the end of this transition, the field will have a new set of fundamentals, having changed its overall perspective, methods, and goal" (p. 67). This shift occurs gradually in the face of consistent, congruent, and constant leadership and reinforcement from the new paradigm.

Writing on the management of change, Duck (1993) stated, "When it comes to change, people don't believe in a new direction because they suspend their belief. They believe because they're actually seeing behavior, action, and results that lead them to conclude that the program works" (para. 33). The generative nature of the dance eventually cultivates success through experience. This is why it is essential for Dr. Dallemand, his staff, and the Core Team to model new behaviors consistently, for actions to be congruent, and for new results to be shared openly. It is also the reason for on-going professional development. Consistent and congruent behavior is expressed in the words of Jontavius Reed, a fifth grade teacher and Core Team member who stated, "Dr. Dallemand has changed how people feel about their work, their heart for students. He embodies 100% professional success across the district. Every child is important. We should all try harder. He motivates the masses"(personal communication, December 2011).

As a result, there are examples of change beginning to emerge throughout the system. For example, a member of the Core Team said, " I realize now that I am reframing problems and looking at how we work with students differently. If

> *We've noticed that classified employees feel valued for the first time. They are engaged, feel heard and valued; they recognize they have a role and it's changing them. They're working harder and making a difference in the lives of students.*
>
> ~ Donna Jackson, Principal
> Heritage Elementary School

we have a discipline issue, we look at the whole situation and not just blame the student" (personal communication, December 2011).

One area targeted for professional development is in the field of self-efficacy. Bandura's (1993) research shows that our belief in our own competence influences our capacity to set and achieve goals

and to take on tasks and challenges. The famous quote attributed to Henry Ford—*Whether you think you can or whether you think you can't, you're right!* —sums this up. It turns out that a high sense of self-efficacy is a strong predictor of success. Young people with a strong sense of self-efficacy are willing to push themselves, stretch, and try hard; they have experienced success in the past for doing so and that reinforced a belief that they will succeed if they persist.

Dr. Dallemand appreciates the power of helping teachers develop their own self-efficacy as well as their ability to help students develop it. To this end, Dr. Jeff Howard's Efficacy Program is being integrated into every school, with training to help teachers and staff develop the ability to ensure every child knows that he or she matters and that they can succeed. Howard's program underscores the importance of self-efficacy and that it is our responsibility as caring adults to help them develop that.[3]

The Door Opens

Though the Summit generated a sense of hope and possibility as well as thousands of ideas for a new system, the road ahead is still not paved. Data from the Summit played a central role in the design of the Strategic Plan, which was drafted with significant input from school leadership and the Core Team. What is significant to note is that the areas of focus and the goals and action items contained in the plan surfaced through the efforts of all of those who participated in the summit. Those focus areas include: students, staff, parents and community, teaching and learning, technology, and structure. Those who participated in the Summit and who read and heard the outcomes from their work will readily see their efforts in the Strategic Plan.

The Strategic Plan was unveiled in early 2012, once again in a transparent and inclusive manner with an open invitation and 6,000 school members and community leaders present at the Macon Centreplex. The plan called for a portfolio of schools that allow students to attend the school of their choice where they will engage in interest-based learning using a broad spectrum of teaching and learning

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[3] Information about Dr. Muhammad's program can be found at http://newfrontier21.com/

strategies. It called for longer school days, year-round school and technology in the classroom and in the hands of every student. The plan framed additional goals over the next 5-7 years whereby up to12 schools will be phased out and 323 teaching and staff positions will be eliminated through attrition, saving the taxpayers an estimated $23.3 million. Goals and strategic action steps in each of the focus areas outlined in the plan were designed to deliver the mission and the vision[4] (Bibb County Schools, 2012).

As was to be expected, there were diverse reactions and emotions in response to such a radically new design. Voices reflecting the old paradigm responded with fears related to fixing the current crises, about losing students today because of planning for tomorrow, the lack of focus on the challenge of discipline in classrooms (deficit-based framing), costs associated with changes, and confusion on how all of this is going to happen. For example,

> "It didn't address discipline. That seems to be one of the biggest problems in our school. And there were a lot of pie in the sky things in the future but we've got a lot of kids now that are struggling," said Board Member, Gary Bechtel (Wilson, 2012, para. 9).

These voices were balanced by others that reflected a hope for the new paradigm; they were encouraged by the whole systems approach, by the possibility of real and sustainable change:

> "We don't need a Band-Aid on our problems, we need our problems excised and so this strategic plan makes a step toward excising all our demons and all our failures in our district over the last 50-60 years," said Board President, Tommy Barnes (Wilson, 2012, para. 11).

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[4] December 15, 2011, the School Board approved the following vision, mission and values:
Vision: Each student demonstrates strength of character and is college ready,
Mission: Develop a highly trained staff and an engaged community dedicated to educating each student for a 21st century, multiethnic, global economy.
Core Values:
- Bibb County develops a learning orientation that mobilizes effective effort to accelerate learning.
- Bibb County is committed to a culture of respect that includes equitable treatment, honesty, openness and integrity.
- Bibb County uses data and evidence-based decisions to determine the training and support provided to adults so they can be accountable for the success of all students.
- Bibb County strengthens productive partnerships for education.

"What we have now is not working. The Macon Miracle makes serious changes. It is aggressive, bold, decisive, the kind of thing we need to straighten our school system out," said Macon Mayor, Robert Reichert (Reichart and Hart, 2012).

"It's a bold, but needed plan. I've never seen this community excited about anything recently as much as they are about this! And that's a good thing, I think." Bibb County Commission Chairperson, Sam Hart (Reichart and Hart, 2012).

The recommendations provide a platform for the old and new paradigms to converge and ignite. The focus on helping all children succeed had to dance with politics, racial tension, a deep-seeded lack of trust and fears around what the changes would mean for 'me and my family'. Eventually the School Board passed the strategic plan and changes have been initiated.

Community Generativity

Historically, generativity has been used to describe the support and concern adults have for future generations; an intergenerational effort to make the future better. Generativity is about creating ideas and actions that have a positive impact on the world. Education is the ideal sector for this to occur. Some of the early efforts at designing a new school system in Bibb County to serve the youth mediates the connection between the current and future generations. Some examples are:

- **Reaccreditation**: The District recently went through the Accreditation process and they were reaccredited. Steve Oborn, lead evaluator for AdvancED, indicated that reaccreditation was granted primarily because the Strategic Plan provided a significant platform for improvement and they had made some progress on that plan.

  Oborn praised the school system's strategic plan, known as the Macon Miracle, because it provided a significant platform for improvement.

  "We heard about it over and over again," said Oborn, who highlighted a Macon Miracle assembly of about 4,500 people.

  Oborn also praised the Welcome Center, created under the Macon Miracle plan, saying that one parent used up most of the evaluators' time at the site praising the center and classes she'd taken (Stucka, 2013).

- <u>The Welcome Center</u>. A place where parents enroll their children and learn what opportunities

  the schools have for their children and for them. It is also a place where young people can get

  help with homework, where parents can take

  classes in parenting, education and even work

  towards their GED. During the accreditation

  process, parents from the Center provided very

  positive reports.

- <u>Mandarin Chinese Immersion Program</u>: Mandarin

  Chinese instruction is provided for elementary school children; within three years it will be

  offered from K-12. This program will position students for a competitive edge in the future, when

  Asian countries share a dominant economic role in the world. A partnership with a nearby

  Confucius institute brings native Chinese speakers into the classrooms to work with children.

Resistance and Reflection

Resistance

The process was not without it's fallout. There was

significant resistance to some elements of the

strategic plan. Some compromises were made;

however, Dr. Dallemand refused to compromise in

areas where he felt decisions would have a negative

impact on students. "The Macon Miracle is about

students and the future of the community," he said.

He continued, "This is bigger than one person. My focus is *what do students in elementary school today*

need in order to be successful in the future? What do *we* need to do *now* so that when they are my age

they are successful? Too often we don't look at the future, we only look at today." (personal

communication, 2013).

The school board was known for split-vote decisions, and a dance between a new paradigm and

an old one simply fueled that engine. Dallemand's passion to make room at the table for those who had

no voice and his refusal to compromise where students were at stake put his job in jeopardy. In February

2013, one month after new board members were sworn in and just two months after he was issued a

new contract, the school board bought out that contract. By June of that same year, they were

negotiating a contract with a second interim superintendent since Dallemand's departure. The board was

finally able to elect its officers at the end of April during the week of the AdvancED visit.

The AdvancED accreditation team cited serious issues with the School Board, including

leadership, poor communication, lack of parent involvement, and the inability to bring stakeholders

together as critical areas for improvement. AdvancED has established a team to monitor the School Board

for the next two years.

Reflection

Upon reflection, Dallemand believes that the problems within the educational system are deeper than

the boundaries that were pushed in Bibb County. Intrigued by the educational leaps that some

developing countries are making, he wonders if understanding how those countries are creating change

in the face of great obstacles might offer insight into what he might have done differently in response to

the tremendous push back they experienced from some segments within the community. Areas that had

significant impact on the generativity of their effort were systemic in nature—governance, culture,

economics, and race. We need ways to embrace and move beyond the present conditions that keep us

stagnate if we are going to move forward. The question begs to be asked, "How do you create

transformation in areas where *some* people do not want change or do not understand the bigger

picture?"

These questions led Dr. Dallemand to consider that it might have been more expedient to have gone more slowly; and yet, he asks, "how can I not go fast when I am watching innocent children losing their lives?" Nonetheless, taking more time up front and engaging the most challenging stakeholders early on might have had an impact on the level of resistance that ensued. It was clear that AI was a powerful practice for community generativity. Taking more time to help everyone understand the issues and move forward together, especially with groups that were resistant and/or complacent might have created space for trust to evolve. Embracing a broader set of strengths and perspectives by offering additional sessions for school and community engagement may have reassured people, providing more system stakeholders a voice in designing for positive and measurable results. That might have given Dallemand and his team the broader base of trust that was essential for transformation.

In Conclusion

Bibb County Schools is on a journey; with new leadership, the dance continues. Their efforts offer lessons for those who seek similar critical transformation for systems that are failing our children, our communities, and our country. Their experience also provides insight into the nature of generativity. In summary, we offer these insights and recommendations learned from BCS.

<u>The Importance of Leadership</u> Leadership plays a crucial role in the success of large-scale systems change and there are many levels of it that are important. Critical to success is leadership's understanding of complex systems and their ability to intervene in ways that leverage strengths and potential from the current system, while radically altering important elements to align with a new paradigm. The success that BCS had was due, in part, to the following leadership components:

- *The capacity to create a vision and passionately convey it in ways that inspire and motivate others*. This was a marked strength of Dr. Dallemand. Inspiring people to leave the comfort of their current paradigm requires a compelling message and a passionate commitment to a new

vision. Dallemand is a visionary with the capacity to move the hearts and souls of people who hear him speak.

- *A core team of change agents positioned throughout the system that consistently model the new way.* The BCS Core Team led and modeled at every level of the school system and community, supporting forward momentum for the new paradigm.

- *The ability and willingness of all leaders to model the vision, even in the face of adversity, and to hold themselves accountable to the same standards as everyone else.* Well versed in the research on positive psychology, positive image and positive action, Dr. Dallemand and his team modeled the positive and progressive culture they envisioned—holding themselves accountable for the same high standards that they expected from teachers and staff. They fostered an environment where teachers and staff felt valued, which in turn aided in their holding high expectations for their students.

- *Generative Leadership* Generativity is transformational when it goes beyond the creation of new ideas by leading and inspiring people to act on those new ideas. The leadership role in generativity is akin to a ballroom dance partnership. One may lead by giving cues to the other as to the next move, but both must move together in harmony thereafter. Dr. Dallemand began the generative dance in Macon by introducing the need to create and act upon new ideas. His summer reading program as mentioned earlier in this paper demonstrated this and did his implementation of across-the-board training in self-efficacy. The very proposition and implementation of such an all inclusive and large scale AI Summit challenged old paradigms, making everyone a partner in the dance. The generative leadership was enlarged to include the Core Team. Their out of the box thinking solved logistical challenges, such as the use of personal technology to collect large amounts of data quickly, inspired and guided associates during the interview process, and assisted facilitators in making meaningful adaptations to the Summit

process itself. Lastly, the new ideas generated at the Summit were made available to all, and were linked directly to the strategic plan for continued use and inspiration.

Communication, Technology and Transparency *An open door, genuine listening, concern and responsive follow through are key factors of good communication.* BCS modeled them all. Effective use of technology and social media to communicate and maintain transparency built trust and provided important information for the people who make the difference in the classrooms and schools on a daily basis.

In the book *Good to Great*, Jim Collins (2001) posits that technology is not a creator of momentum towards greatness, but an accelerator of that momentum (p. 152). BCS is an example of a system using technology to accelerate positive change. As mentioned earlier, Dr. Dallemand used technology extensively to communicate his ideas as well as collect information from the schools and community. Technology, combined with great organization and process planning, was used during the Summit days to efficiently and effectively collect huge amounts of data and organize it into relevant themes. Dr. Dallemand and his leadership team continued to use technology to share the strategic plan, collect feedback on it, and keep the whole informed about the development and progress of the new educational system.

System Intervention Strategies *Use information flows, rules, goals, and mindset in intentionally to shift the system*. Making relevant information transparent and easily available supported informed decision-making. Establishing a clear and compelling goal or mission for the *system* and setting simple rules aligned with the new paradigm created a field for self-organizing action, inspiring autonomy, engagement, and trust. Finally, changing mindset or paradigm requires continuous linking, alignment, consistency, and equitable accountability. Leadership must be able to hold the energy, the philosophy, the vision, and the behaviors associated with the new system while the dance between old and new generates transformation.

Opportunities for the Whole To Come Together *Create multiple opportunities for the whole system to come together in meaningful ways.* Dr. Dallemand was insistent that the whole system be face-to-face in the same room with one another: hearing the same things, working toward the same outcomes, and hearing one another's stories, hopes, dreams, and ideas. Shared meaning and shared vision are powerful mechanisms for unifying a system and a new paradigm. The structure of the AI Summit supported significant connection among people who do not ordinarily interact, but who all have a shared goal of positively impacting the youth of Bibb County. The whole system gatherings served as a potent catalyst for connecting everyone; continuing to come together for whole system communication (like unveiling the Strategic Plan) reinforced those connections and the importance of the whole.

Take the Time to Ensure Full Stakeholder Inclusion *Identify and include the network of stakeholders in a variety of dialogical ways, reaching out in different ways to diverse groups.* It is clear that schools are integral and inter-connected within our societies, culture, economic framework, and our history such that we cannot work with them in isolation. Long standing social issues and topics such as culture, race, economics, educational level, jobs, income, and politics (which all surfaced in social media, the news media and community gatherings) were not included in planning process for the summit. While Dr. Dallemand shared information with the broader community system, the opportunity to engage in an Appreciative Inquiry dialogue only occurred at the Summit.

Perhaps the act of generativity itself is generative; helping to surface diverse yet implicit assumptions, hidden connections and networks, and revealing greater and greater aspects of our wholeness. Can we know the fullness of this before we begin? Most likely, not. Awareness, however, is likely to expand with each generative effort as we learn more about where to look, how to ask, and who to include in our processes.

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Center for Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry is our "engine" for driving positive change. Working with schools, colleges and universities, governmental agencies, businesses, corporations and non-profits to focus their planning and thinking for full engagement, empowerment and collaboration that is relevant, action-oriented and balanced.

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