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A Case Study: Our Work Matters

Am I making a difference? Isn't that what we all want to know and demonstrate? The Professional Association of Georgia Educators (PAGE) is no different. Georgia's largest professional educator organization supports those choosing the noblest of vocations — those fulfilling their calling as teachers. As such, PAGE must be confident that its direction is clear, that its beliefs are manifested in its actions, and that the profession of teaching is markedly enhanced for the benefit of students. To ensure this, reflection and thoughtful strategic change are a key part of PAGE's organizational fabric.

In 2012, under the direction of executive director Dr. Allene Magill, PAGE designed a comprehensive project to assess its impact. Initial questions included: What should be measured? What are the correct metrics? Will the results be cogent, clear and incisive? How will we know? What will PAGE do with the evidence that surfaces?

The research involved capturing a large amount of data (evidence of influence), organizing the data and analyzing trends. PAGE then embarked on a case study of two schools that were early adopters of the PAGE High School Redesign Initiative. (The yearlong project enjoyed the added advantage of an outside, scholarly review.)

PAGE chose to study its impact through the lens of the High School Redesign Initiative for several reasons:

- The High School Redesign Initiative was PAGE's first professional learning experience specifically intended to change the culture of an entire school (versus equipping individual participants with new knowledge and skills).
- This initiative was PAGE's first undertaking that intentionally crossed role groups at the participant level, providing opportunities for teachers to work with school-based administrators, and, at times, with central office representatives, including superintendents.
- The two schools selected for the case study had concluded their official High School Redesign Initiative relationship with PAGE in 2012, thus a thorough examination of the culture of the schools two or three years later could likely confirm or refute PAGE's expectation that both schools had successfully continued to embrace engagement-focused, student-centric principles.

Adhering to case study protocols, propositions were framed, logistical details were outlined, key school personnel were contacted and timelines were created. Visits were made to each school and conversations were held with the superintendent of one district and with the principal who led the effort in the other district. Through focus groups, researchers obtained first-hand perceptual data from staff, parents and students. Interviews were also conducted with the PAGE professional learning staff and the executive director.

Throughout the process, manifest evidence, latent evidence and counter evidence were captured. These data were lifted from hours upon hours of interaction with PAGE's customers, and from the review of stacks of documents (culled from more than 1,000 email messages, school improvement plans, years of site visit notes, etc.). Audio recordings of all focus groups and interviews were used to continuously compare and calibrate hand-written notes from those sessions, and traditional data were also reviewed and analyzed. (Such data included graduation rates, poverty indicators, attendance rates, student enrollment figures, etc.)

The overarching premise investigated in the case study centered around school culture. Had the school's culture changed? If so, in what areas, to what extent, and what contributed to the shifts? Did PAGE influence any movement in individual or collective understanding, beliefs, commitments, roles, rules or relationships? As the work unfolded, it became clear that each school had experienced transformational change. Separated by nearly 200 miles, serving different students and communities, and operating in significantly distinct contexts, both schools experienced legitimate and measurable cultural changes, and the greater shifts occurred in beliefs and values, with specific emphasis on how students and parents are viewed as customers. Furthermore, aligned with that evolving perspective, some adjustments in educators' roles also emerged, grounded in a new understanding about what should constitute a school's

core business. Teachers at both schools are now consistently viewed as leaders, without regard for formal positions or titles of leadership.

Beyond a correlational connection, the research showed a strong causal link between the High School Redesign Initiative and the transformation at each of the schools. The case study confirmed that trust is a vital feature of, if not a prerequisite for, transformational change. PAGE's work is about transformation, as opposed to reform. School reform efforts, which typically rearrange existing components of alleged improvement schemes, have failed to improve K-12 education. Reform does not capitalize on trust and on the formation of pivotal long-term relationships that undergird substantive and sustainable changes. PAGE professional learning fosters the relationship building that leads to transformational change.

Due to the effectiveness of the PAGE High School Redesign Initiative, PAGE is broadening its reach. For example, it developed concomitant endeavors via a new network of high-poverty school districts, geographically situated to encourage collaboration, including across districts. These opportunities now support scores of educators, from all role groups, as teacher leaders and their colleagues identify and address existing and anticipated challenges facing their schools and school systems.

PAGE's case study illustrates that instead of permitting the status quo of anemic school reform programs to drive educators' actions, trust should be placed at the center of sincere transformation efforts, ultimately redesigning "how we do school." Serious discussions, important decisions and final determinations of quality must be run through the filter of student engagement: engagement as the means to the desired justifiable end ... real learning.

Educators can make a difference. Educators do make a difference. In students' lives. Every day. PAGE embraces its purpose and its charge, its responsibility to come alongside these educators to demonstrably amplify their impact. This first phase of research provides PAGE with great hope for increasing that scope of influence.

PAGE invites the reader to peruse the [Executive Summary](#) and/or the [Full Report](#) to learn more about the details of the case study and about the amazing potential that can be realized from truly transformational work.

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The core business of the **Professional Association of Georgia Educators (PAGE)** is to provide professional learning for educators that will enhance professional competence and confidence, build leadership qualities and lead to higher academic achievement for students, while providing the best in membership, legislative and legal services and support.

"More than 90,000 members and growing!"