ONE

Setting the Stage

IN THIS CHAPTER I describe the two collaborative endeavors. First, I situate the cases in their state, regional, and local contexts and provide a brief historical background on the two efforts. Drawing on the principles of democratic joint work explained in the previous chapter, I then describe who participated, the vision for what this would entail, the ways in which participants interacted and made decisions, and what they accomplished. What emerge in this chapter are two contrasting stories of collaboration, one more successful than the other.

STATE, REGIONAL, AND LOCAL CONTEXT FOR JOINT WORK

To understand how the collaborative endeavors evolved in Mid Valley and Highland, one must begin with a broad understanding of the state and local contexts.

The State: Accountability Pressures and Policy Flux

The educational policy environment provides an important backdrop to the stories in both districts. In the late 1990s, the legislature—with the urging of two governors—passed a series of measures to improve education through enhanced working conditions, assessment, and accountability. Dramatically altering the nature and mood of education in the state, these policies included the following: class size reduction in lower elementary grades; the creation of a statewide testing program; the end of the practice of social promotion; and a new accountability initiative that included the public ranking of all public schools, rewards and sanctions for schools based on test scores, and capacity-building support for low-performing schools.

For educators in both districts, this wave of new policies and programs created enormous stress. When asked how these new policies affected them and the quality of their instruction, teachers repeatedly expressed frustration. One Highland teacher noted, "It takes a lot of joy right out of the profession." Similarly, a teacher in Mid Valley replied, "It's impossible to do what we're asked to do." Many were particularly disturbed by the public rankings of schools. "The kids end up really losing out," commented one Mid Valley teacher, "because you're not really educating them to function in society so much as you're just educating them to make you look good on the tests." Many teachers, administrators, and school board members were simply exhausted from the pace of reform and constant change. As one Highland board member explained, "If the state jerks us around with new laws and new testing and stuff, the way they've jerked us around the last couple of years, that just makes it harder to stay with what we need to do." In summary, the wave of new state policy created an atmosphere of constant change and pressure to produce higher test scores in both districts—one that mirrors the current national policy environment brought on by the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

The Region: Innovation and High Cost of Living

Both districts also resided in the greater Northern California Bay Area, a region famous for its natural beauty and thriving economy (at least at the time of data collection).[1] Spurred by the growth of the Internet and high-tech industries, this region witnessed a rapid increase in wealth during the 1990s, particularly among the young and the entrepreneurial. Thriving, fast-paced telecommunications, computer, electronics, and biotechnology companies dominated the political economy of this region. The growth of these industries and the allure of potential wealth attracted workers from around the country and world.

Yet not all residents benefited from the booming economy. The rising cost of living—including one the most expensive rental and housing markets in the country—made life for teachers, nonprofits, and other lower paid workers in the Bay Area extremely challenging and unattractive. Traffic and long commutes became synonymous with the region. While nonprofits struggled to find affordable office space, school districts throughout the region fought to attract and retain teachers, who streamed in and out of the area looking for higher pay and lower housing costs. Highland and Mid Valley were not immune to the impact of the region: both struggled to retain teachers and invested significant resources—bond money and general funds—to install and upgrade technological software and hardware in their schools.

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The Districts and Their Communities

As detailed in table 1.1[2], the two districts were both midsized, serving fewer than 10,000 students and supporting fewer than twenty schools. Moreover, both districts were located in mixed urban-suburban neighborhoods with demographically diverse populations. They also benefited from long-tenured superintendents.

Mid Valley

The Mid Valley School District is situated in an urban-suburban community of approximately 80,000 residents. Despite the enormous wealth of its surrounding towns, the city is often referred to as a "poor cousin" due to its sizable low-income and immigrant populations. Approximately half of city residents are

TABLE 1.1
Descriptions of Case Study Districts (1998–99)

	Mid Valley	*Highland*
Schools	16 schools (elementary & middle)	13 schools (elementary & middle)
Student demographics	9.000 students 2/3 Hispanic, 1/3 White, 1/20 Asian 1/2 English Lang. Learners (ELL) 2/5 qualify for free/reduced meals 1/10 Special Education (2000–01)	8,000 students 1/2 white, 1/3 Hispanic, 1/10 Asian 1/4 ELL 1/3 qualify for free/reduced meals 1/10 Special Education (2000–01)
Workforce	500 FTE teachers 90 percent fully certified	400 FTE teachers 90 percent fully certified
Leadership	Superintendent in office ~ 10 years	Superintendent in office > 10 years
Fiscal overview	Expenditure per student ~ $6,000 Total expenditures ~ $50 million Total revenues > $50 million	Expenditure per student ~ $6,000 Total expenditures ~ $40 million Total revenues > $40 million

Note: Unless noted, data refer to the 1998–99 school year. While the numbers have been slightly altered to maintain anonymity, the basic proportions remain true.

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white, almost one-third Hispanic, fewer than 10 percent Asian, and a little more than 1 percent African American—marking a significant change over the past thirty years or so, when the city was home to a much larger African American population and fewer immigrants.

While local government agencies are major employers within the city limits, several high-tech companies provide the majority of remaining city jobs. The focal point of the city is a historic downtown area lined with recently restored buildings, restaurants, and shops. Housing development follows a familiar pattern of an east-west divide, wherein wealthier and predominantly white residents have settled into homes in the hills and more diverse and significantly lower income residents rent apartments in the flatlands.

Most residents locate the "power base" of the city in the west side, noting that citizens in the east side of town—who are predominantly Latino—vote less frequently. In interviews, current and former elected officials were quick to note that when running for office, astute candidates concentrate their campaign efforts on west-side residents. A former elected official reported that a key ingredient to winning an election is having ties to the two west-side Catholic parishes. As for community-district relations, it is widely acknowledged that most citizens are not active in district affairs. For example, few people attend board meetings.

The elementary school district reflects the changing demographics of the city. Of the more than 9,000 students in grades K–8, in 1998–98, almost two-thirds were Latino, fewer than one-third were white, and Asian/Pacific Islanders and African Americans together made up fewer than one-tenth of students—a striking difference from 1970 when more than three-fourths of the students were white. These students also were linguistically and socioeconomically diverse, with more than 50 percent classified as English language learners (ELLs) and about 40 percent qualifying for the Free and Reduced Price Meals program. The district oversees sixteen schools, some serving grades 6–8 and most serving grades K–5.

The district organization and structure also are typical of California districts. An elected five-member Board of Education directs the overall policies of the central office and appoints the superintendent. The superintendent's staff includes four assistant superintendents who oversee personnel, curriculum and instruction, and magnet schools. Additional staff members oversee a variety of other programs and services, including bilingual education, financial services, and staff development. In terms of the teacher workforce, Mid Valley employed approximately 500 full-time equivalent, certificated teachers in 1998–98, the majority of which were fully certified.

The performance of Mid Valley students has been an area of much concern and attention for district and community leaders. As table 1.2 illustrates, while the district, like most others, demonstrated steady gains on the state-mandated Stanford Achievement Test (SAT-9) assessment, its students in

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TABLE 1.2
Mid Valley Districtwide SAT-9 Results (national percentile rankings) 1998–2000

Grade	*Reading* '00/'99/'98	*Math* '00/'99/'98	*Language* '00/'99/'98	*Spelling* '00/'99/'98
4	45/41/38	46/40/36	45/44/39	40/36/29
8	50/45/43	55/4240	52/46/43	38/31/30

Note: While the numbers have been slightly altered to maintain anonymity, the basic proportions remain true.

the aggregate were not achieving above the 50th percentile (except for a few subjects and grades). In the 1999 administration of the SAT-9, fewer than half of all second, fourth, sixth, and eighth graders scored at or above the 50th percentile in reading and math. The performance of ELLs and their acquisition of English also remains a challenge for the district.

Mid Valley School District has a long history of reform, particularly the alignment of policies around standards. In recent years, the district devoted significant attention and resources to supporting new teachers. Mid Valley has benefited from stability of leadership, employing only two superintendents in the past twenty years. Historically, the teachers' union appeared to have a good relationship with the district administration. In recent years, however, the union-district relationship has been characterized as "cool." Although the union has remained somewhat skeptical of the district's publicized budget woes and has repeatedly pushed for higher salaries, it continues to work closely with district administrators in planning and implementing many new state programs, including programs to support new teachers.

Highland

The Highland School District is located approximately thirty miles from Mid Valley. Unlike Mid Valley, which is more or less contiguous with one city jurisdiction, Highland serves students from more than five different cities and an unincorporated section of one county. Similar to Mid Valley, however, there is considerable variation in the neighborhoods and socioeconomic status of families served by the district.

Like most communities in the Bay Area, the area comprising the district has experienced tremendous change over the past thirty years—from what many described as "a little bedroom community" comprised largely of white, English-speaking, middle-class residents to a more racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse community. In recent years, the high concentration of older, reasonably priced apartments attracted many lower income residents to

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move in. As a result, the district is quite diverse, with enormous variance in wealth. As one board member explained, "we have kids who come to school in limousines and kids who come to school barefoot and live in cars." The socioeconomic and ethnic diversity appears to follow similar geographic patterns to those of Mid Valley. In Highland, however, the division appears to be north-south, with some pockets of poverty scattered throughout. Schools located north, closest to the main highway, tend to serve larger percentages of ethnically diverse and low-income families. Schools closest to the hills, in the southern part of the district, tend to serve primarily white, middle- to upper-class families.

The demographic diversity also can be mapped onto the various city boundaries. Several of the district's schools are located within a very large, ethnically diverse urban city. Another group of schools reside in an urban-suburban community of fewer than 50,000 residents, three-fourths of whom are white. The remaining schools are located in two wealthy enclaves in the southern corner of the district, where the majority of residents are white.

The demographics of the Highland School District reflect the diversity of the multiple communities it serves. In 1998–99, Highland enrolled approximately 8,000 students—half of which were white, fewer than one-third Hispanic, one-tenth Asian, and one-twentieth African American. Of these students, approximately one-fourth were English Language Learners and one-third qualified for Free and Reduced Price Meals. Thus, while Highland is more ethnically and linguistically homogeneous than Mid Valley, the socioeconomic status of total students is comparable. Moreover, like Mid Valley, the demographics of individual schools mirror the surrounding neighborhoods—thus several schools are primarily white with few students qualifying for meal programs, and others enroll high percentages of Hispanic students and ELLs.

The district oversees thirteen schools, the majority serving grades K–4 and K–5, and a few serving grades 5–8. These schools range from a nationally recognized blue ribbon school to a persistently low-performing school. Like Mid Valley, an elected five-member Board of Education directs the overall policies of the central office and appoints the superintendent. In 1998–99, the superintendent's staff included eight certified administrators, including an associate superintendent of curriculum and instruction, assistant superintendent of human resources, and directors of programs such as professional development, assessment, student services, planning/technology, and special education. The district also employed nine classified staff members, including an assistant superintendent of administrative services, directors of human resources, fiscal services, administrative services, and maintenance; and various supervisors and assistants. As for the teacher workforce, Highland employed approximately 400 full-time equivalent certified teachers, nearly all of which were fully certified.

In terms of academic achievement, Highland students performed slightly above the state average, yet at or slightly below county averages. Compared

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TABLE 1.3
Highland Districtwide SAT-9 Results (national percentile rankings) 1998–2000

Grade	*Reading* '00/'99/'98	*Math* '00/'99/'98	*Language* '00/'99/'98	*Spelling* '00/'99/'98
4	57/53/55	61/60/56	61/58/58	53/50/49
8	55/53/50	57/53/52	64/62/59	42/41/40

Note: While the numbers have been slightly altered to maintain anonymity, the basic proportions remain true.

to Mid Valley, however, Highland students score significantly higher—exceeding the 50th percentile in most grades and subjects. A selection of these results is presented in table 1.3, which indicates steady growth in scores over a three-year period. In the 1999 administration of the SAT-9, more than 50 percent of all second, fourth, sixth, and eighth graders scored at or above the 50th percentile in reading and math.

Like Mid Valley, Highland has a long history of reform, particularly in the area of literacy instruction and technology. Many educators in and outside of the district describe Highland as "progressive" and "cutting edge." The district employs site-based literacy coordinators in all schools, administers local performance-based assessments, and engages in continual planning and evaluation. Highland takes its location within the high-tech capital of the world to heart—integrating technology use into curriculum and instruction. Highland also has benefited from stability of leadership among the board and superintendent, who first took the position in the 1980s. It also has maintained a strong, nonadversarial relationship with the teachers' union.[3] Finally, the district appears to enjoy a positive relationship with its community. While no one cited examples of widespread community involvement, they all indicated that "we do not have a lot of outside folks giving us a lot of challenges."

KEY FACETS AND ACTIVITIES OF JOINT WORK

The seeds of Mid Valley's CAP initiative were planted in legislation introduced in early 1997, and it officially ended with the resignation of its director in March 2000. In Highland, strategic planning originated with preplanning activities in mid-1998 and continued with implementation activity ongoing through 2001. Table 1.4 provides an overview of these key activities, along with a summary of how the endeavors played out along the principles of joint work and democracy. The remainder of this chapter examines each of these categories in detail.

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TABLE 1.4
Overview of How Democratic Joint Work Unfolded in Mid Valley and Highland

	Mid Valley	*Highland*
Timeframe	Early 1997–March 2000	Mid 1998–2001
Key events	Advisory meetings (monthly, August 1998–February 2000) 1st Study session (April 1999) 2nd Study session (August 1999) 3rd Study session (February 2000) Collaborative meeting (March 2000) CAP director resigns (March 2000)	Preplanning (early 1998) 1st day of planning (June 1998) 2nd & 3rd days (August 1998) Plan Dissemination (September 1998) Action teams (October 1990–April 1999) Plan adopted (June 1999) Implementation (2000–2001)
Who was at the table	More representative	More participatory
What was on the table	Deliberaive democratic intent Inconsistency of participant perceptions of purpose	Deliberative democratic intent Consistency of participant perceptions of purpose
How decisions were made	Not deliberative (except Advisory)	Deliberative
What was achieved	No action Disillusionment & shift to adversarial tactics	Action Learning, renewed sense of efficacy, willingness to participate in the future

History of Mid Valley's CAP Initiative

Mid Valley School District's three-year attempt to initiate joint work started in early 1997 when the superintendent, working with a state assemblyman, shaped state legislation to fund and study a "pilot" district-run school improvement and accountability program. At the time, the state was developing a comprehensive state accountability system. Given that this system would take several years to develop, the pilot program was intended to test out the concept and "to review the benefits and ramifications of implement-

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ing a system that links pupil performance with financial rewards" (AB 644, §1[a][4]). Under this legislation, the state superintendent would allocate financial rewards if he/she determined that the pilot school district made "substantial progress" toward meeting the goals of its accountability plan.

Anticipating the passage of this legislation, the Mid Valley superintendent formulated a plan for the district: a committee of community members would determine benchmarks, annually analyze district data, judge whether the district as a whole made educational "progress," recommend financial rewards for evidence of progress (to be funded by the state), and help develop next steps to improve future student performance. By making the district the unit of change and rewarding all schools for districtwide progress, such a system would theoretically avoid the competition and fragmentation that often occur in a school- or teacher-based model that rewards individual progress. The superintendent's commitment to this program was evident in his public communication during this time. In a late-1997 editorial published in a local newspaper, he argued for a new accountability system. "[I]mprovement in student performance will not be sustained unless local school districts have the opportunity to implement incentive-driven models for students, teachers, and administrators," he wrote, adding that the model must include community engagement and must link increased district income to student performance.

In mid-1998 it became clear that the bill would not be signed into law. After making it through numerous committees in the state legislature, in July 1998 it died in committee without further action. Despite the demise of this bill, the superintendent remained committed to its concepts and decided to implement them in a new initiative called "Community Accountability Project" (CAP). In the summer of 1998 he appointed a group of community "advisors" to design this effort and a district administrator to direct it. In years past, this administrator had been a principal of a local school that participated in a regional reform effort founded on notions of school-community accountability, inquiry-based instruction, and cycles of continuous improvement. The director later hired two teachers from his former school to assist with CAP.

Throughout the early months of the initiative and even through the beginning of 1999, district leaders remained hopeful that the state would ultimately fund CAP. Starting in late 1998, the superintendent worked with state legislators to urge newly elected Governor Davis to add funds to his statewide accountability plan to support other district-level accountability models. The original sponsor of the bill also voiced intentions to resubmit the bill. By mid-1999, however, it became clear that state funding would not materialize.

Finally, some observers link the origins of CAP to a neighborhood survey sponsored by the city's community-based collaborative (hereafter, the Collaborative), in which citizens indicated that education was the highest

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area of concern. The Collaborative recommended that the district collaborate more with city government and the community to improve education for all students. The Collaborative leader believed CAP was one response to the survey findings.

History of Highland's Strategic Planning Process

Highland School District's strategic planning process originated more than a decade prior to the 1998 sessions, at the beginning of the new superintendent's tenure in the district. She believed the district needed a more powerful kind of strategic planning than had previously existed in the district—one that pushed it to set goals. After recruiting several board members to attend seminars on strategic planning, the superintendent and board adopted this new model, implemented for the first time in 1988.

The process was designed around a well-known strategic planning model developed by an East Coast consultant—a model he initially designed for corporate clients but modified almost exclusively for educational organizations. The model specified many aspects of the process, including who should participate on the planning team, key guiding principles, the length of the session, and the steps to follow. Once the plan was drafted, the district was urged to form "action teams" that develop implementation plans, to revise the draft to include a resource allocation plan, and to submit the final draft to the board for approval. Finally, the consultant recommended that districts periodically review progress and update the plan over time.

Accordingly, in 1988, the district staff—many of whom went to the consultant's training sessions—organized the district's first strategic planning session. Considered a very loosely organized process, the sessions primarily focused on defining the district's mission and solidifying core beliefs. The Five-Year Plan included almost ten strategies and thirty action plans and defined core beliefs that still govern the district. The district then repeated this process every two to five years, modifying the structure each time (e.g., tightening the timeline so that plans covered two- to three-year periods, including participation by students).

By 1998, the district had established a set of core beliefs—including statements such as "We believe learning is a life long process" and "We believe that all people must be supported to recognize their own potential for growth." They also had adopted a mission statement underscoring the importance of promoting the success of all students, preparing them for the future, and encouraging them to reach their full potential. In addition, the district had adopted a set of parameters governing their strategic planning process—including guidelines such as "We will make all decisions based on the best interest of students" and "We will not tolerate prejudicial discrimination of any kind." Finally, they narrowed the district's goal to one: *100%*

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of students will meet or exceed district standards. Given the consensus developed in the recent past around these beliefs, mission, parameters, and goals, district leaders decided that the 1998 session would not be "a complete renewal" of the strategic plan. Instead, it was intended as an update, to develop new strategies that achieve the district's goal. By 1998, strategic planning had become deeply rooted in district practice. Without solicitation, district administrators and board members interviewed for this study repeatedly cited strategic planning as a key aspect of their organizational management and practice.

WHO WAS AT THE TABLE

Both districts made efforts to constitute "representative" bodies to participate in joint work. In Mid Valley, community participants appointed to the Advisory were leaders of the community, including elected officials, parent and community activists, and respected professionals, many of whom had children in district schools. This Advisory also interacted with district administrators and school board members, who comprised another set of participants in the CAP initiative. Despite efforts to secure participation from union leaders, the district did not attain teacher representation. In total, the effort involved twenty-seven individuals: eleven from the community, fourteen from the district office and school board, and two school principals.

In Highland, community participants selected for the strategic planning team included approximately one teacher, parent, principal, and in some cases, student, from each of the districts' schools, along with some district administrators, board members, and community members from a local institute of higher education, police department, and city government. In total, sixty-two individuals participated: thirty-one school educators, twelve parents, nine district leaders or staff, three students, three citizens, two classified staff, and two facilitators. (See Appendix B and C for a detailed list of participants in both districts.)

Returning to the democratic principles outlined in the last chapter, neither district achieved—nor intended to achieve—an ideal participatory process. Not *everyone* who could be affected by the outcomes was involved. Yet within the general representative realm, Mid Valley approached the more "elite representative" end of the spectrum, involving only influential leaders of the community and failing to involve one major stakeholder group likely to be affected by CAP, teachers. As I discuss later, this decision contributed to CAP's demise. In contrast, Highland moved closer to the participatory end by including many more individuals who were likely to be affected by and responsible for implementing the decisions emerging from this process.

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Demographics of Participants

In both districts, participants represent modest demographic diversity, including a mix of individuals of different gender, ages, and ethnic or racial backgrounds.[4] Within the Mid Valley Advisory, males and females were almost equally represented (seven to six respectively).[5] The majority of Advisory members were white (77 percent), while the remaining members were Latino. Adding in the rest of the district leaders who attended meetings and interacted with the Advisory, the demographics of all participants remain quite similar: approximately half of all CAP participants were female and half male; the majority (77 percent) were white, with some Latinos (19 percent), and one African American.[6] In Highland, the majority of the planning team were white (81 percent) and female (80 percent). While seemingly homogenous, the group nonetheless mirrored the demographics of teachers and administrators in the district (this is not surprising, given the intent to involve at least one teacher and principal from each school).[7]

The Demos to Be Represented

The districts conceptualized the community or demos to be represented in very different ways. In Mid Valley, the primary community to be represented was the community writ large or the city. Their *formal* connections—as employees or elected officials of government agencies, community organizations, businesses, and schools—and *informal* connections—as members, volunteers, and congregants of other organizations (e.g., chamber, churches)—arguably made them "representative" of individuals and broader citywide constituencies not present at the table. Aside from one principal, there were no current educators included in the initial group. Moreover, school district leaders (board, administrators) were included in the deliberations only at the end of the process. Participants were purposefully not typical of all residents but instead members chosen for their status as leaders. As one CAP staffer explained, "we want[ed] to put together some influential people from the community to sit on the advisory group." This same person reported that given the political nature of the formation of CAP (around pending state legislation/funding), the board handpicked individuals who could "help influence the voting population in some way." Thus, the district selected a long-tenured principal to represent the education community; a parent volunteer who had served many years on the PTA (and who ran for elected office during the timeframe of CAP) to represent parents; and current and former elected officials and professionals to represent major county, city, and neighborhood interests.

In Highland, the primary community was defined as local school communities with a slight hint at the larger community. The parameters of the strategic planning process, adopted in past years, asserted: "We will make no

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program decisions without participation by representatives of everyone affected." Years of experience with strategic planning taught district leaders the value of involving multiple participants from each school. In words reminiscent of participatory democratic theorists, the district administrator in charge of strategic planning explained the importance of broadening participation to ensure future implementation of ideas:

> [D]oing it with that large a group is very cumbersome. But I think it's more powerful because we've found in the past [with a smaller group] it's powerful when you're there [in the planning sessions] and then it just dissipates when [the plan] goes back [to sites]. They just can't carry that intensity and the vision and the processes back to the site.

Almost 80 percent of strategic planning participants were stakeholders from local schools—students, teachers, staff, administrators, and parents. Given the district's concern with enacting the strategies, there was a bias toward involving individuals with some "status" or linkage to local governance bodies such as site councils and parent-teacher associations. Like Mid Valley, Highland participants were expected to be leaders or "take on leadership roles with peers" (see figure 1.1 for a full list of selection criteria).

Selection Procedures

The way in which leaders selected participants indicates that both districts achieved attenuated forms of representation. Unlike more strict models of democracy with formal voting processes to ensure representation, both districts appointed the members of these collaborative bodies.[8] In many ways these two cases are best understood as quasidemocratic in nature.

Nevertheless, the mechanisms used to appoint members differed greatly. In Mid Valley, the board president and superintendent selected members based on their reputation as "leaders in the community." In Highland, district administrators solicited recommendations from each principal for representatives that met the selection criteria listed in figure 1.1. Principals were also given a chart in which to recommend parents, teachers, students, and community members and indicate their corresponding gender, ethnicity, grade, program, employer, subject, and other important details. After receiving these recommendations, district staff utilized a matrix to assemble a group that represented the various stakeholder groups and to insure diversity of gender, ethnicity, and other characteristics.

Unlike Mid Valley, Highland made a much greater effort to be "inclusive"[9] by not simply inviting members that enhanced representation of all those affected by district policies (e.g., minority parents) but also providing supports that enabled their participation, including a translator, child care, and transportation. Another example of Highland's efforts to broaden representation

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Attributes:

- Reflective of values of community
- Representative of district programs
- Person of goodwill
- Use of consensus
- Subordinate special interests to good of organization
- Take on leadership role with peers
- Open minded
- Committed
- Builder, not blocker of creating future
- Articulate

Expectations:

- Attend all three days
- Become active leaders in analyzing and applying data to support site planning
- Fit criteria
- Serve on School Site Council (if possible)

Represent:

- GATE
- Bilingual
- At risk
- Special Ed
- Unions
- Mentor
- Title I
- Technology
- Literacy
- Math
- Grade levels
- SSC; DAC; PTA (school governance groups)
- Agencies
- Highland Foundation
- Experienced/new teacher
- Gender/ethnicity
- Socioeconomic diversity
- Local high school district
- Government
- Chamber
- Local business

FIGURE 1.1
Highland Criteria for Strategic Planning Team Membership

was data gathered via student forums at the middle schools. Prior to strategic planning, a group of students from each middle school attended a meeting at the district office to share ideas about what students like and dislike about the district and where they wanted change.

The selection procedures in both districts, nonetheless, introduced some level of bias. In both cases it is highly unlikely that individuals selected held views that were significantly adverse to those in charge of selection. From the outset there was a certain degree of commonality of perspective among participants—evidence counter to the norm of inclusion.

WHAT WAS ON THE TABLE: VISION AND PURPOSE

Leaders in both districts signaled deliberative democratic intent, indicating a desire to involve participants in improving the good of the district as a whole.

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In practice, however, participants in Highland more consistently understood the purpose of strategic planning, while in Mid Valley participants varied widely in their perceptions of CAP's purpose or confessed to never grasping its purpose.

Leaders' Deliberative Democratic Vision

In both districts, leaders signaled deliberative democratic purposes for these endeavors. As opposed to fora of interest-based bargaining—in which individual interests with the strongest backing win out over others—the initiatives in both districts were intended to encourage participants to coalesce around a shared mission, to expand their understandings of self as a part of a community, and to articulate ways of promoting the common good.

In Mid Valley, leaders initially hoped to engage community members in a "mutual accountability" initiative that would improve education districtwide. When asked what CAP was intended to be, the superintendent explained, "We researched and designed an R&D [research and development] project that would help pull community together around a *common vision*." Ideally, he envisioned a district where "different sub-communities articulate, 'these are our interests, these are what we have in *common* and what action steps we can put in place to bring that about together and [be] mutually responsible with the schools.'" Similarly, the CAP director described the initiative as "a collaboration to do joint work with people who share a *common interest* in the quality of life in this community," which is "different from setting up an us/them kind of relationship." Throughout early meetings, district leaders repeated that CAP "isn't just discussion," but intended to generate action around what is best for the district as a whole.

In Highland, leaders pledged to involve educators and noneducators in developing long-term strategies for districtwide improvement. According to the district organizer, the intent was for participants to decide what is best for all students "system-wide":

> So [we were] trying to find ways to get them thinking differently than just coming with a narrow view. They're asked to keep their own agenda items outside the door. Everybody comes with no identified roles—no teacher, custodian. Everybody comes in equally. And that's really stressed. And *if you have a particular bias or an issue, that's not why we're here*. We ask people to not attend if they can't feel that they can keep that apart. . . . We all come as just people without district office labels or anything else, *just working for the good of the students and improving our achievement*.

The primacy of common interests over individual needs is made explicit in the district's criteria for team selection. As noted in figure 1.1, a desired attribute of team members was an ability to "subordinate special interests to good of organization."

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Participants' Perceptions of Purpose

Despite the common leadership vision, participants interviewed in Highland demonstrated a much more consistent understanding of the purpose of strategic planning than did Mid Valley participants reflecting on CAP.

Consistency of Perceptions in Highland

Aside from a few skeptical caveats, Highland participants had a common sense of mission: to determine together where the district wants to go and how to get there. According to one principal, the purpose was "[t]o bring community members, parents, administrators, teachers, all of the different players in the [Highland] District together to create a plan that met the needs of all of the different members of the community—not just the teachers or just the students, but everybody involved." Similarly, a teacher described the purpose: "To plan for the future and how we're going to reach the needs of the children in our community." The one major exception was Maria, a non-English-speaking parent who understood the purpose as the district *giving information* to participants (I return to Maria in the next chapter).

When probed, most participants also described the discussions as ones focused on the good of the district, instead of individual interests. For example, one student explained, "I thought everyone there was trying to not only improve their schools, or fill their own needs, but they also were willing to help our district as a whole." Even those more skeptical of strategic planning agreed that the interactions maintained a "global" focus. One teacher who believed strategic planning was publicity driven observed, "There wasn't anyone being overly pushy about his school's concerns." This consistent focus on the common good was facilitated in part by the structure of meetings (see figure 1.2).

There were, nevertheless, a few exceptions. In particular, one parent, Judy, characterized the interactions as more interest based: "It was supposed to be the district as a whole, but it always came back to what you knew, so it was your own personal thing. . . . You had your own individual ideas. . . . And sometimes it would apply to the whole district, sometimes it won't, depending on where you're at." Not coincidentally, this same parent admitted a self-interested motive to her involvement in strategic planning, repeatedly noting a primary concern for her own children. "I have high-end-achieving kids," she said, "and I would keep bringing up, 'What are you going to do about those kids who are gifted? What are you going to do about those kids who already passed the norm?'"

Inconsistency of Perceptions in Mid Valley

In contrast, in Mid Valley, the idea of working toward the common good never congealed at the broader level when the community and board came

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The structure of Highland's strategic planning sessions greatly encouraged and enabled a consistent focus on the common good of the district. These structures included:

1. *Small Group Activities*. The facilitators opened the first day of planning with a small-group activity entitled (on their script) "common ground." In this activity, each member of a 6–8-person group was asked to finish three statements: "My name is . . . ," "I'm here because . . . ," and "I'm bringing to today . . ." At the end of this activity, facilitators asked groups to share with the whole group "common themes about why they are here." As the title of the activity indicates, the purpose was not only to "break the ice" but also to help individuals see that their interests were tied to the interests of others.

2. *Norms*. Facilitators introduced and secured agreement on norms of involvement, such as casting aside personal agendas and thinking globally. Facilitators reportedly enforced these norms all three days and pushed participants to think about the district as a whole. "One of the ground rules was 'stay on a strategic level,'" explained one of the facilitators, "And we talked about what that means. 'You're looking at the whole system here. There are times when you're going to look at your school.' And we would have to create that shift for them."

3. *Facilitators*. The facilitators saw their role as listening to what people said and answering the question "Where's our common ground here?" They often illustrated on poster paper common themes emerging from discussions, ultimately helping to synthesize the suggested strategies into four areas of mutual concern.

4. *Decision Rules*. Some believed the decision rule utilized in the final day also helped participants forge common ground. Instead of strict consensus taken by a vote, district leaders and facilitators agreed to adopt a strategy if participants generally "could live with it." One board member explained: "And the question's always on the table: 'Can you live with this? Is there something that you can't live with?' . . . If there's something that goes up there . . . as a recommendation, . . . [and] if there's anyone in the group who feels strongly against it, it fades away. . . . So that what you end up with is a plan that can have broad support and that isn't somebody's agenda."

These structures and techniques not only helped to focus discussion on the common good, but also to foster reason-based decision-making (discussed in the next section).

FIGURE 1.2
How Structure Encouraged a Focus on the Common Good

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together. Moreover, there was considerable inconsistency in perceptions of the purpose of CAP. Some participants admitted to never really understanding its mission:

> I think very quickly it became apparent that no one quite knew what the mission was, including the people running the program. (Board member)
>
> [W]e haven't done a very good job of explaining exactly what that's all about. I think there's a very clear view in the superintendent's head and in the director of [CAP's] head about what they're doing and why they're doing it. But that's not true in others, including mine. (District administrator)
>
> Whatever it started out to be wasn't really clear. And now I feel like for me I'm on a different mission now. (Community advisor)

And while some individuals could not articulate the mission, others conveyed a wide range of perceptions. Several people understood CAP as the initial pilot accountability program spelled out by the failed state legislation. Others noted that when the legislation failed, CAP's purpose changed. Some believed it was to become a communication tool for the district. A handful of participants, however, believed CAP's main purpose was to generate more money for the district. Yet others described this purpose as more of a hidden agenda. That is, perhaps community members were brought in under the false pretense of collaboration but were intended to serve other purposes. According to one district administrator: "[I]t was kind of brought in as a way to bring the community into the schools more so that they would support schools more financially, that it would be more willing to pass bonds or tax overrides or whatever." As examined in more depth in chapter 5, these suspicions of ulterior motives contributed greatly to pervasive mistrust and the demise of CAP.

Thus, as participants joined CAP, they held very different views about its purpose. Without a shared sense of mission, district leaders and community advisors started out on very shaky ground. In the joint Advisory-board study sessions it became clear that participants were not on the same page and were not necessarily working to achieve common ground. As many participants explained, the initiative took on a more interest-based tone over the course of the year, and meetings reflected little sense of shared goals.

Unlike Highland, Mid Valley leaders did not focus on how to structure the process in ways that lead participants to a shared understanding of purpose or a broadening of private interests. It was not until the final study session in February 2000, when the district hired an outside facilitator, that the district attended to process. While this meeting resulted in more focused dialogue around common goals for the district, by all accounts it was too late. (The next section revisits these study sessions in more detail.)

Yet the story in Mid Valley changes dramatically if one looks exclusively at the Advisory, where members shared a consistent understanding

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that they were working toward improvements for all students districtwide. Almost every community member and CAP staffer relayed a similar history and sense of purpose: once the state legislation died, the community group decided they did not want to disband but instead meet and develop strategies for community and schools to work together to improve education for all students. The CAP director explained the endeavor as "committing the time and energy to say . . . we have a common interest to keep that vision in front of ourselves. What's our common interest? What are we trying to get done?" In expressing his satisfaction with this process, one community advisor reiterated this notion of working toward shared goals: "I'm glad to have had the experience to work with other qualified professionals from different backgrounds and collaborating together toward one common good." At the first study session, when advisors introduced themselves and explained their motivations for participating, almost every one reported a similar desire to "look at the district as a whole" and "help all students meet new standards."

HOW PARTICIPANTS INTERACTED AND MADE DECISIONS

Despite similar intentions on the part of leaders in both districts, Highland came much closer to achieving a deliberative democratic process than did Mid Valley. The following section examines how these endeavors played out along the principles of deliberative democracy and joint work, including: *coconstruction and ownership of mission*, *reciprocity and equal voice*, *using reasoned arguments*, *publicity*, and *accountability and credibility*.

A Deliberative Democratic Process in Highland

Despite some struggles and tensions, Highland appeared to achieve a fairly deliberative democratic process in which participants took joint ownership and accountability for shared goals and arrived at final strategies via reason-based discussions that adhered to the principles of reciprocity, publicity, and accountability.

Coconstruction and Ownership of Mission

Starting in early 1998, district leaders involved a wide range of individuals in prestrategic planning events to develop the agenda, the structure, and overall theme ("Target Tomorrow") for the meetings. Throughout this period, the district also met with the outside facilitators who helped finalize the agenda and structure. Thus, the coconstruction of rules and ideas originated at the very early stages of strategic planning: it was more than simply a few district leaders mandating how meetings would proceed.

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This coconstruction continued throughout the three days. For example, at the start of the first day, organizers set out expectations that signaled participants would be working together to develop ideas. Facilitators also read out a set of process norms, such as: everyone participates; no one dominates; participation is equal and open regardless of status, rank, position, title, discipline; all ideas are valid; and disagreement can be productive if you do not make it personal. Participants then were asked to add to this list and to agree that this was a reasonable set of rules. Most participants interviewed affirmed that the norms were codeveloped. "The rules we created . . . as a group, so that everybody bought into them," explained one principal.

Starting on the second day, participants rotated in and out of small groups to develop the plan. In the first small group, participants were asked to discuss three questions: (1) What expectations do you have for each other during the session? (2) What expectations do you have for the two days of working together? (3) What expectations do you have for us as facilitators? Facilitators and participants reported that these discussions forged common understandings of their mission and roles. Participants saw themselves as setting the direction for their work over the next few days.

On the final day, participants first engaged in a "visioning" exercise. In small groups, they created a "district Web page for 2001" focused on how the district would achieve its goal of 100 percent of students achieving standards, including two headlines and two "links" to other web sites. As each group presented its visions to the full team, facilitators directed everyone to "listen for common themes." From here, groups reconvened to prioritize strategies that emanated from these themes. Once presented to the whole group again, the strategies were listed on a poster for everyone to consider. Each participant was given the opportunity to speak for or against a certain strategy. Facilitators then worked with the group to merge various strategies and decide upon the top four: (1) implementing a system of recognitions and interventions to assure individual student success; (2) ensuring that all children are prepared for kindergarten; (3) developing and implementing a unified K–12 educational system; and (4) expanding and restructuring the school day and school year to maximize learning opportunities. Once agreed upon, participants broke into groups to fine-tune the wording for those strategies.

By most accounts, the final ideas were negotiated and owned by the group. Some described it as "an iterative process," while others noted that "everything was sort of open for consideration." Most participants also strongly denied that the process was "rubber stamping." A principal attested to the authenticity and openness of these negotiations: "I felt like there were some things brought up that weren't in the district's original plans. And there was kind of a reason to push it away. But at least we had the opportunity to talk about it, and we had the opportunity to bring it up." Another principal

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