

A Tale of Two Districts:

Case Studies of System-Wide Changes

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Introduction Activity

- Turn to a partner (pair work) and discuss the following questions:
 - 1) What might a school district's system look like if it had a reputation for having a high number of due process hearings?
 - 2) What might a school district's system look like if it had a reputation for promoting trust and preventing conflict between the home- school?

Large Discussion

Compare the descriptors of the two districts:

- Do you see any similarities or patterns?
- Could the first district change to fit the second district's profile? If so, how?

Objectives

- Develop a sense of understanding about how two school districts were able to overcome litigious climates by implementing system-wide changes that have since institutionalized after five years.
- Learn about the districts' problems that led to a high number of hearing requests and formal complaints.
- Learn about the system-wide changes that led to the decrease in hearing request rates and overall increase in parent satisfaction
- Gain a better insight on trust building, conflict prevention, and alternative dispute resolution practices that can foster the home-school partnership

Research Study

1. What does a school district need to do to decrease the occurrence of due process hearings and ultimately build trust with families?
2. Who are the key players involved in the implementation of such system-wide changes?

Method

Multiple case study analysis:

2 school districts identified as having a decrease in their hearing rates within the last 5 years.

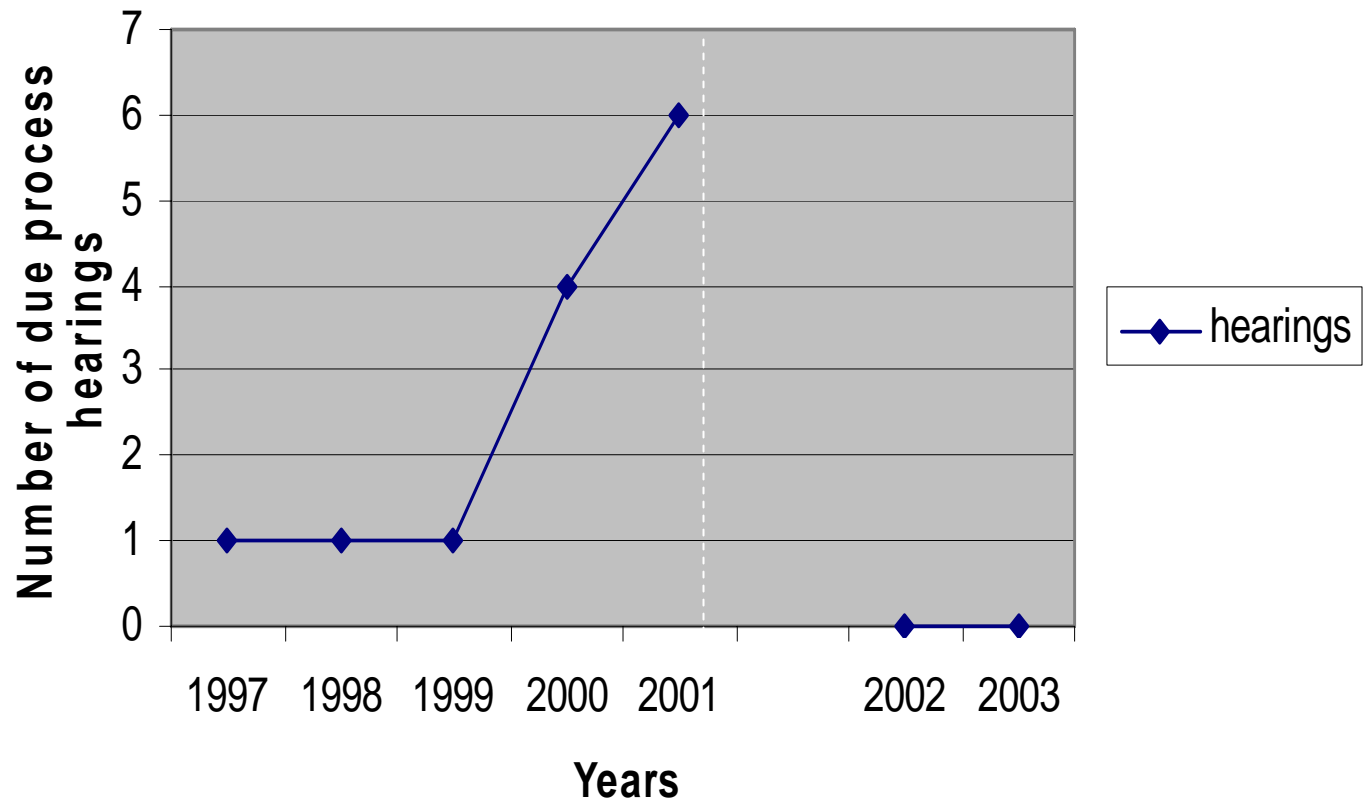
Data Sources:

- Interviews
- Observations
- Documents for analysis

Apple Field Unified District

- Located in a rural town in central coast California with a population of 7,862.
- Serves nearly 4,200 students, with approximately 400 special education students in 5 elementary schools, 1 junior high school, 1 high school and 1 continuation high school.
- In 2001, 7 hearing requests were filed by parents.
- At that time, the district underwent major changes relating to conflict prevention and alternative dispute resolution.
- By the end of the year, only 1 hearing went through.
- To date, there have been 0 hearing requests since 2001.

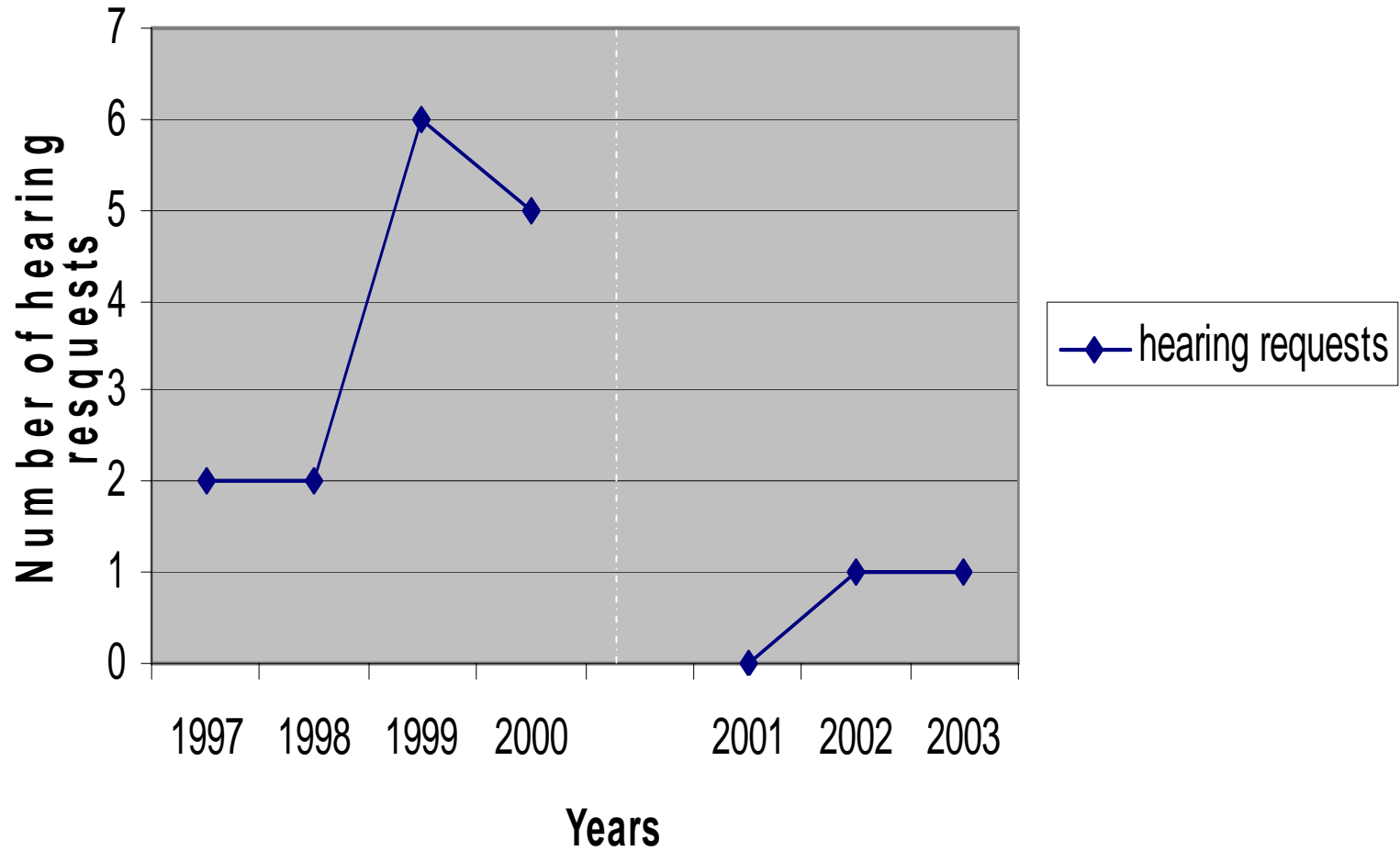
Apple Field School District



Pine Field School District

- Located in urban town with a population of 65, 883.
- Serves nearly 3,320 students, with approximately 356 special education students in 5 elementary schools, 1 junior high school, and 1 alternative school.
- In 1999, 7 hearing requests took place.
- In response to the high number of hearings, the district underwent major institutional changes.
- There have only been 3 hearing requests within the last 5 years.

Pine Field School District Hearing Requests



Participants

Apple Field Unified School District:

- 3 District Administrators
- 4 District Teachers
- 2 Parents
- 2 Related Service Professionals

11 Total

Pine Field School District:

- 4 District Administrators
- 3 District Teachers
- 4 Parents
- 1 Related Service Professional

12 Total

Reliability Participants

- 4 Special Education Local Planning Area Directors (SELPA)
- 3 Parent Advocates

7 Total

Findings

Before System-wide Changes

Reactive System

- Lack of leadership
- Delayed reaction to parent concerns
- Incomplete compliance with IDEA
- Poor quality educational services
- Exclusion of parents from decision-making
- Lack of trust

System-wide Changes

Proactive System

- Revived leadership focus
- Partnering with parents and service agencies
- Staff changes
- Professional development
- Updated educational practices
- Creative use of resources
- Communication
- Trust
- Teacher and parent support
- Alternative dispute resolution strategies

Before

After

- Lack of leadership
- Delayed reaction to parent concerns
- Incomplete compliance with IDEA
 - Poor quality educational services
 - Exclusion of parents from decision-making
 - Lack of trust



- Revived leadership focus
- Partnering with parents and service agencies
 - Staff changes
 - Professional development
- Updated educational practices
 - Creative use of resources
 - Communication
 - Trust
- Teacher and parent support
- Alternative dispute resolution strategies

Critical Change Agents

Administration



Parent Groups

Common Sources of Conflict	System-wide Changes
Design of services	Educational services
Delivery of services	Legal accountability
Relationship issues	Leadership, partnerships, communication, trust, support
Constraints	Resource creativity
Knowledge	Educational development, alternative dispute resolution practices

Activity

- Go back to the original descriptors in activity1, did you predict anything similar to what happened in these school districts?
- Large group discussion

Implications

This study emphasizes the need to . . .

- Promote communication and collaboration with parents
- Demonstrate quality leadership skills
- Become life-long learners
- Provide up to date educational services
- Respect and adhere to the spirit and mandates of IDEA
- Practice alternative dispute resolution skills
- Think creatively!