

AEIN Evaluation Team

Who are we?

The evaluation team has 3 internal members – Diane Hirshberg, Lexi Hill, and Meredith Curry – who are part of the grant staff and one external evaluator – Susan Tucker – who provides evaluation expertise and an independent viewpoint. The team works to collect, compile and analyze data about what the grant is doing, and what effects grant activities have on the university, our partner schools, teachers and students. We use our work to offer on-going formative assessment to program participants and also provide summative data for federal grant reports.



Methodology

Each year, partner schools and control schools (schools similar to our partner schools, but not part of the network), take the NSDC survey – a battery of 60 questions arranged around 12 dimensions (called “standards”) that research has identified as important for quality professional development. Each question consists of a statement describing one way quality professional development might be reflected in administrator or teacher practice, and asks respondents whether the statement describes their school never, seldom, sometimes, frequently or always. There are 5 questions for each standard.

For this analysis, we looked at the 6 standards that most closely align with the network focus areas:

- Equity (network focus: culturally responsive practice);
- Data driven (network focus: data informed);
- Learning communities and collaboration (network focus: creating professional learning communities within and communities of practice/mini-networks across the schools);
- Learning (network focus: quality professional development)
- Leadership (network focus: leadership).

We used the survey results from 2005 and 2008 to look at how schools changed over time, and how partner schools compared to control schools in 2005 and in 2008.

We converted the qualitative responses (never ...always) into numbers (0 to 4) so that we could calculate an “average” response to each question and to the groups of 5 questions that comprise each standard. We only included schools that took the survey in both 2005 and 2008, and had been partner or control schools for all three years.

The partner and control averages are unweighted – each respondent counts the same. So schools with many respondents will have a greater effect on the partner or control average than schools with only a few respondents.



Photo courtesy of Diane Hirshberg

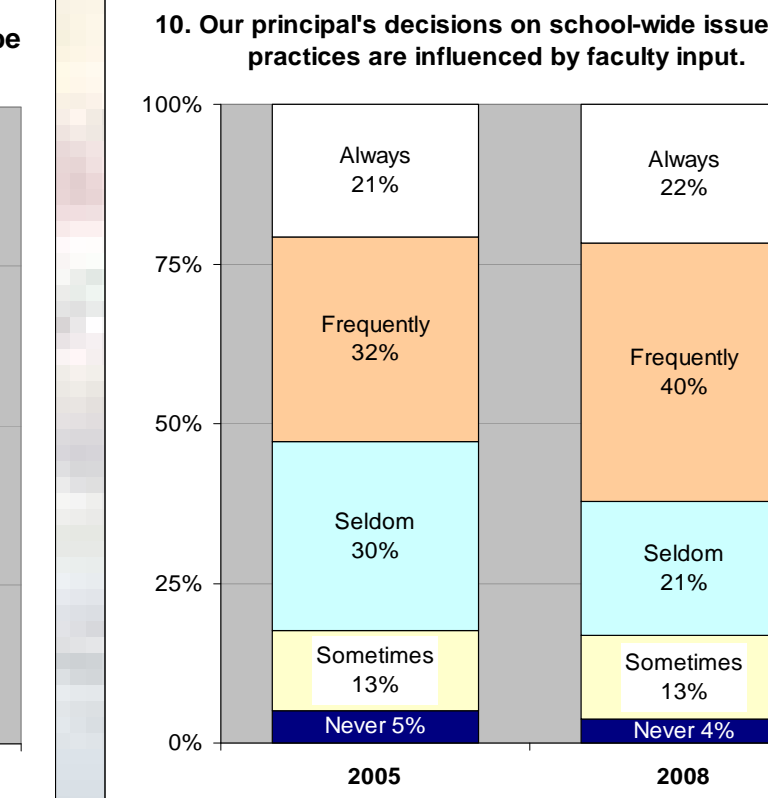
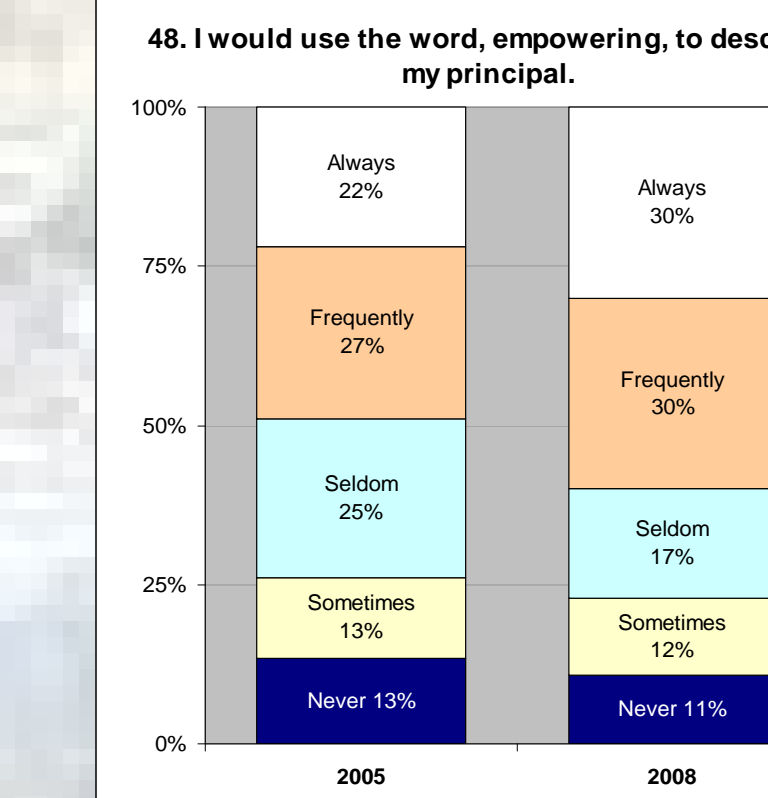
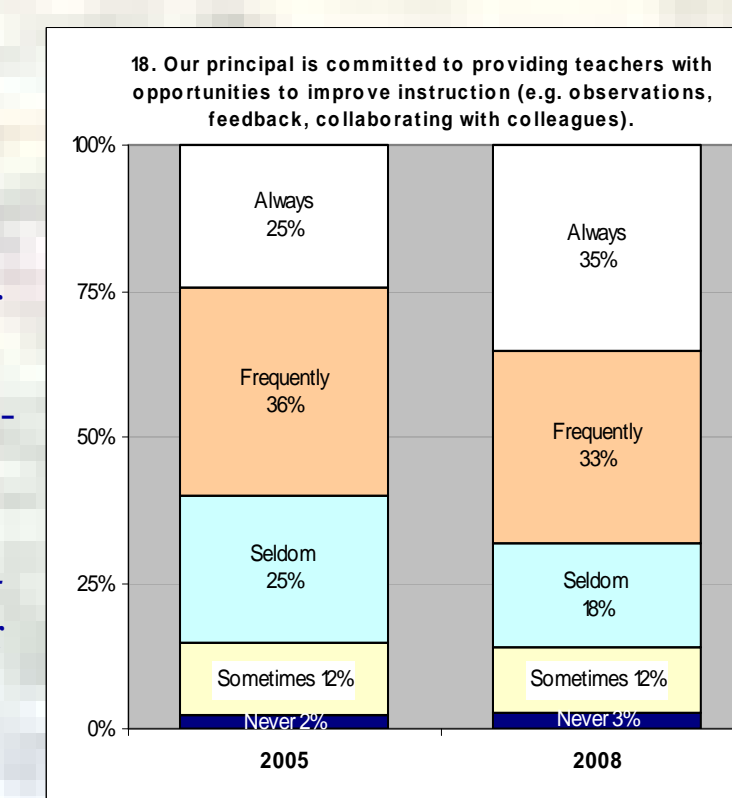
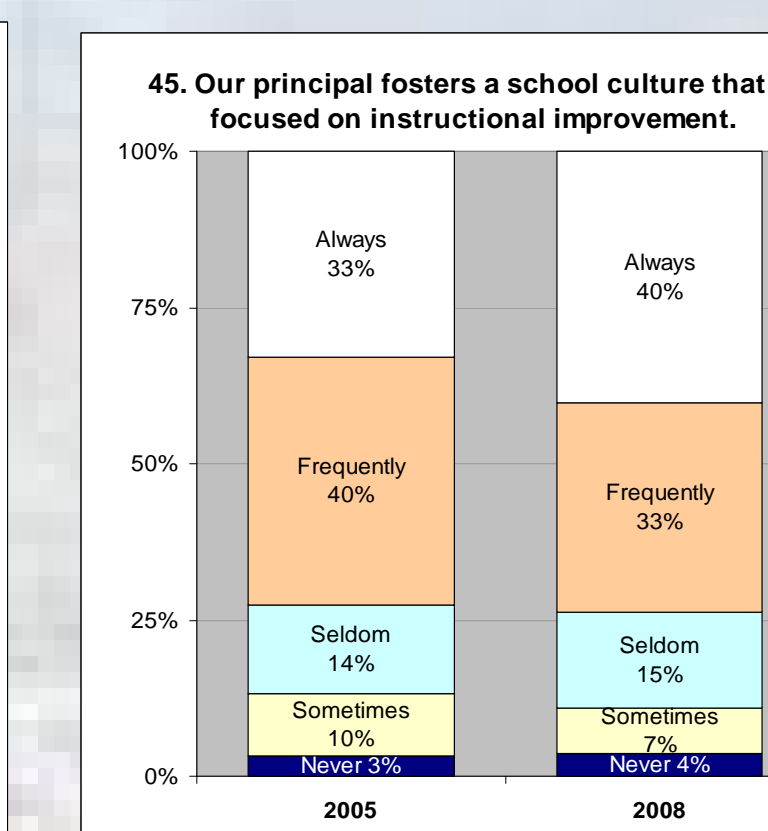
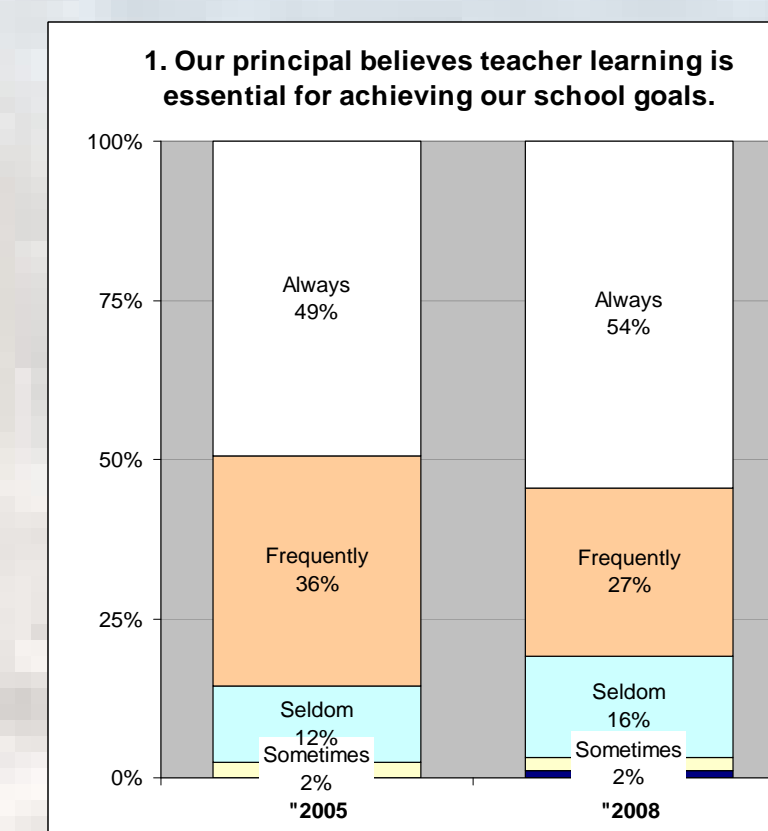
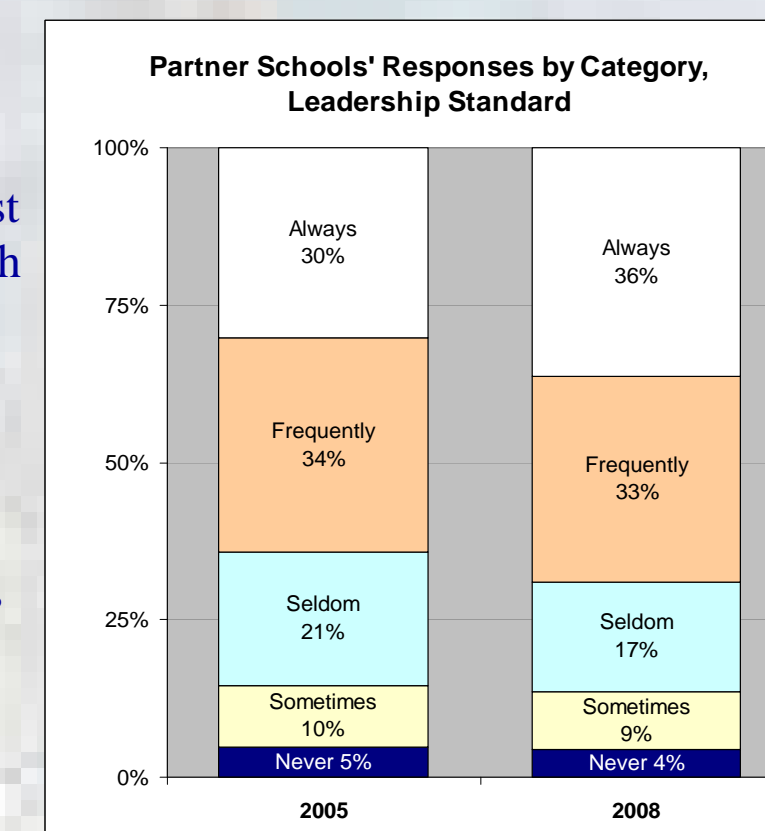
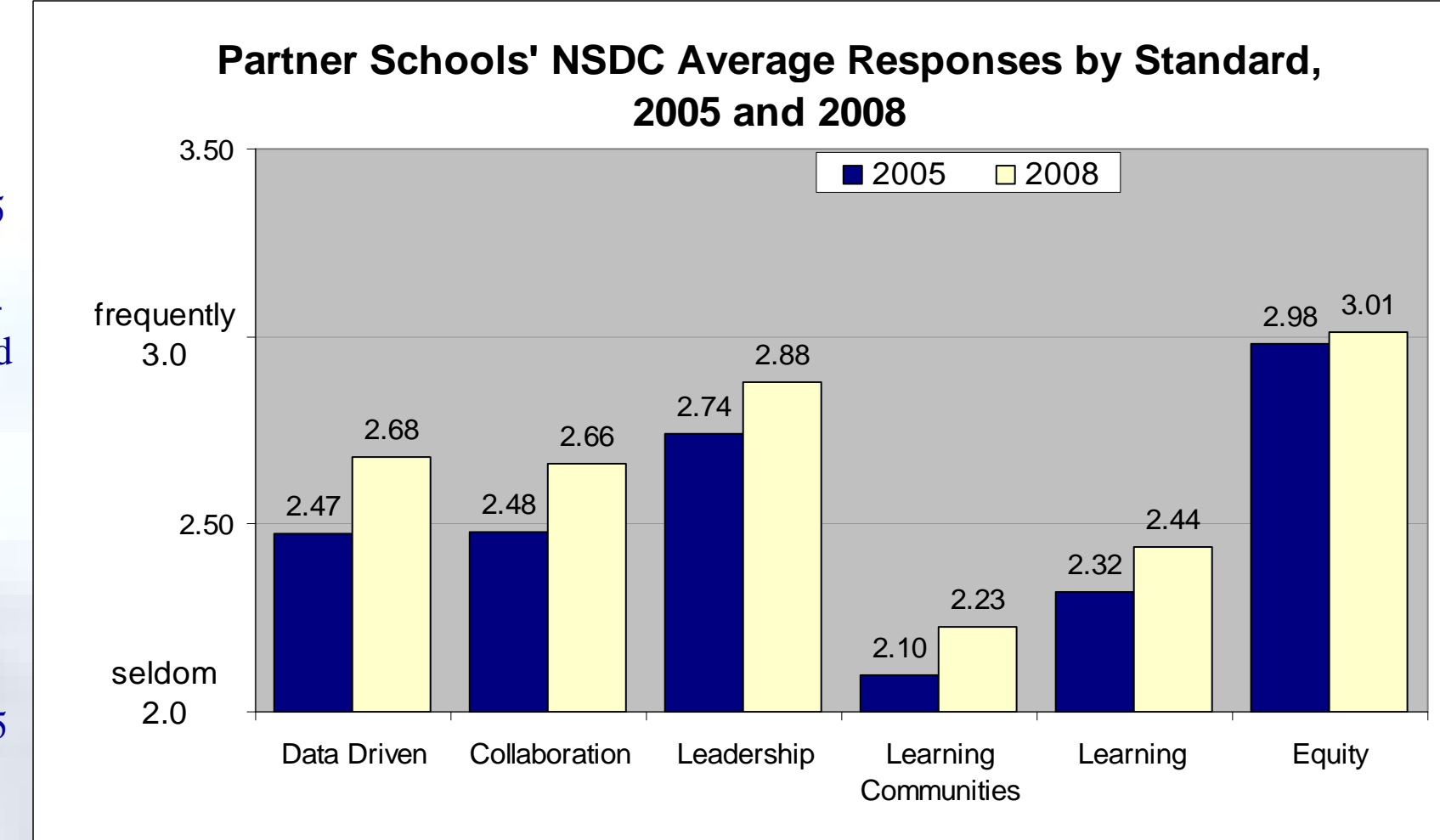
Our question for today:

What can the results of the **National Staff Development Council (NSDC) survey** tell us about the progress of the network in the areas we have focused on this year?

What are we learning?

According to respondents across the network, the 30 practices and attitudes about which the survey asks in our six focus standards were more common in 2008 than in 2005. However, the change was small, ranging from about two-tenths of a point (data driven, collaboration) to less than one-twentieth (equity). Using a 5 percent significance level (only a one-in-twenty chance that there's really no difference), the changes in Data Driven and Collaboration reflect real gains in practice across the network. Learning Communities just barely misses the cutoff, and for Leadership, Learning and Equity, these data don't provide evidence of change.

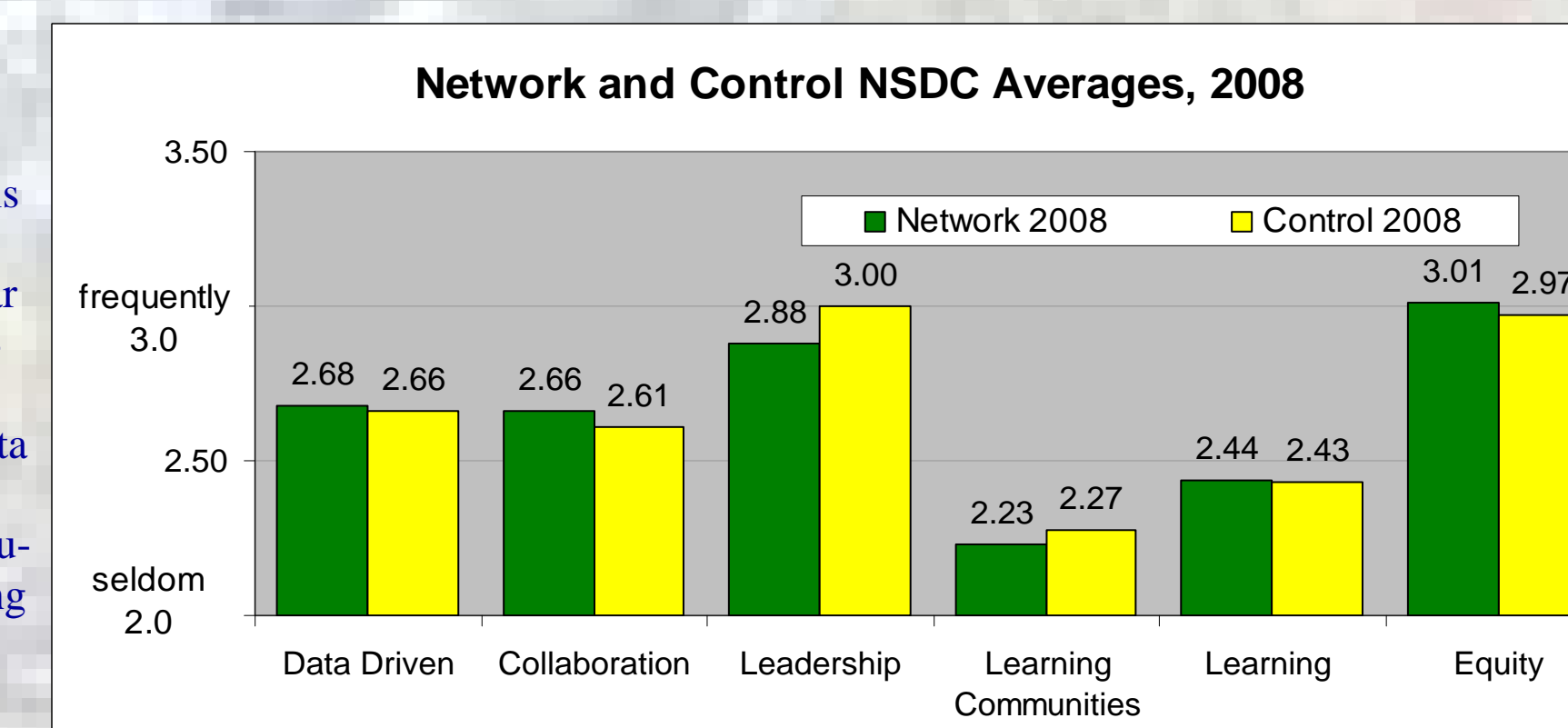
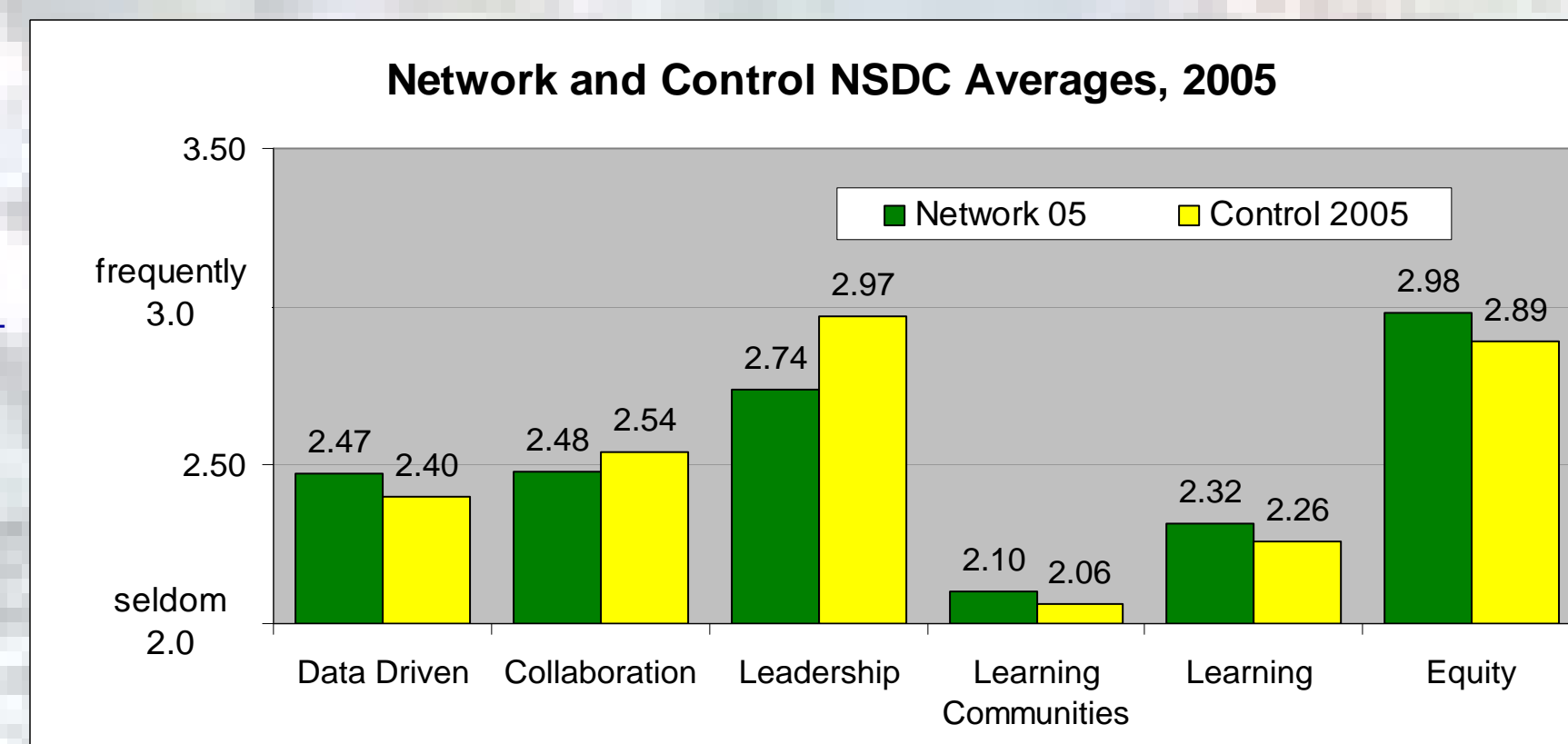
To better understand what these differences mean in terms of the response categories and specific questions from which they are derived, we looked at the response frequencies for a single standard, and for the five questions that make up that standard. We chose Leadership because it shows one of the larger gains, and because partner and control schools looked different on this standard in 2005 (presented below).



While the pattern of responses for items 18 and 25 is similar to that of the overall standard, other items are quite different. Over half of respondents report that their principal *always* believes teacher learning is essential (item 1). And so few people responded *never* to that item, that it doesn't appear on the graph. However, only 30 percent of respondents would *always* use “empowering” to describe their principal, and one in ten *never* would.

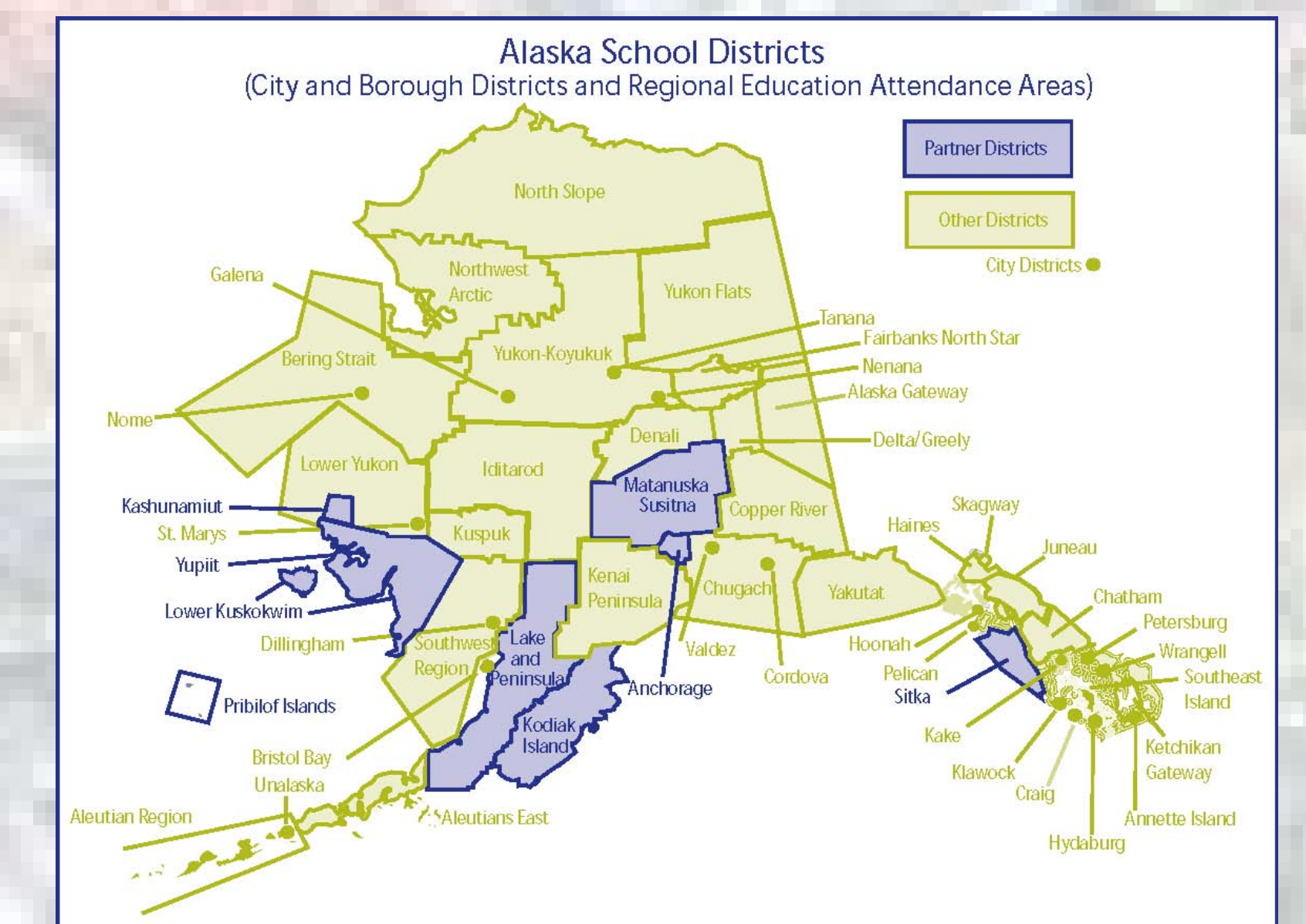
It's also interesting to compare partner and control schools on the leadership standard. In 2005, it's the only standard where the two groups of schools show a statistically significant difference. We don't know why our partner schools responded lower than control schools on these measures. Perhaps principals who were trying to improve chose AEIN participation as one approach. Perhaps it's just chance—even highly “significant” results have some possibility of occurring though chance, and that's especially true when numbers are small. Here, we have only 14 network and 5 control schools. If just one or two schools in either group had especially high (among control schools) or low (among partner schools) rankings, that could drive the difference between groups. Whatever the reason, the difference is greatly reduced by 2008. This year, none of the standards showed significant differences.

When we designed the evaluation and recruited control schools, we hoped that partner schools would show greater gains than control schools by the end of the project. They don't so far. It may be that all the schools—control and partner—are changing in the same ways for similar reasons. For example, Data Driven showed the largest and most statistically significant gains (from among our six focus standards) for both groups of schools. AEIN partners have been working together to use data more effectively to improve student learning. However, given accountability mandates, high stakes testing, and the current focus on data in education reform, the state and districts also have put a high priority on using data to inform practice and improve student outcomes.



Questions for network reflection

- How does your school's NSDC survey data look compared to that of the overall network?
- Do your school's gains parallel those of the network?
- Do your school's gains correspond to the standards on which your school has been focusing?
- Are there specific questions where you might look for change? For example, if you have been focusing on building your learning community, you might look at survey item 56: Teachers examine student work with each other.
- What might the data reveal about your school's progress? What strengths? What areas for improvement?



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