“The mission of the Oxford Area School District is to have all students achieve academic excellence in a safe and nurturing environment. In partnership with families and the community, we will prepare each student to be a confident, contributing, productive and responsible citizen” (http://www.oxford.k12.pa.us). The Oxford Area School District (OASD) is located in southern Chester County, and is comprised of six schools encompassing 80 acres of land. The district has approximately 450 professional and support staff, and a current population of 3, 837 students, 1,978 male and 1, 859 female. The demographics break down as follows: 2,709 white, 789 Hispanic, 172 Black, 143 Multi- racial, 20 Asian, 4 American Indian. Out of the student body 574 receive special education services, and 272 ELL services, along with 81 students who are currently monitored for ELL. There are 1,485 economically disadvantaged students in the district. (Susan Townsend, Personal Communication March 2013).

  In reviewing the OASD’s curriculum, there have been many changes over the past twenty years due to leadership rational and federal laws. Most recently, the OASD established initiatives for the many different needs of the population to comply with the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act. Each year the district analyzes the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSAs), Study Island benchmark scores, and other assessments to identify strengths and weaknesses with the schools. “Oxford improved overall state assessment scores by 40 percent, and the percentage of graduating seniors increased from 73.6 percent in 2002 to 91 percent in 2012. In 2008, the district posted the eighth highest increase in student achievement in Pennsylvania. In addition SAT scores have risen in the past 5 years with verbal scores posting 475 to 500, math 471 to 511 and writing 457 to 473” (http://www.oxford.k12.pa.us). The district has made Adequate Yearly Progress for the last eight consecutive years on PSSAs.

To support the curriculum and the population of students, each school has reading specialists, ELL teachers, and learning support teachers. Reading specialists pull out students to give small group instruction, work with regular classroom teachers, and work within the regular classroom to provide assistance to students who need extra reading support. The district also uses full inclusion where some classrooms are co-taught, having a learning support teacher and a regular education teacher within the classroom. This ensures all students are being exposed to grade level curriculum. Four years ago the district began full day Kindergarten. Some of the curriculum initiatives that have taken place in the last five years of the district have included: Response to Intervention for grades K-8, the adoption of 100 Book Challenge and the Action 100 reading model which encourages children to read more often and independently. The district has used *Foundations* in grades K-2, *Lucy Calkins Writing Workshop* in grades 1-4, *Word Journeys* grades 5-6, and has added additional Advanced Placement courses to the high school.

The district has set up a six year curriculum review cycle to evaluate the academic program and tools used to teach all aspects of the curriculum. The 2012-2013 is the school year dedicated to review the language arts curriculum and to research materials. The district’s curriculum website states, “The goal at each grade level is to help students to think critically, to build meaning and foster real life application” (para 3). I was able to interview three language arts with intent to gain an understanding of the district’s curricular changes in language arts over the years and the rationale behind the changes.

The teachers who I interviewed have all worked for twenty or more years in the district and held various positions through their careers. *Dan* was the Literacy Teacher on Assignment during the last curriculum review and he is now teaching fifth grade. The Literacy Teacher on Assignment was a person who worked as a point person for all language arts teachers in the district. This person did not work in the classroom, but worked as the liaison between the teachers and the administrators in the district. *Cathy* is currently a fifth grade Language Arts teacher, she has been teaching in the district since 1978. She began her career in OASD in the lower grades teaching many years as a special education teacher, then later moved into the regular classroom as a fourth grade teacher. She is in her fourth year teaching fifth grade language arts at Hopewell. The last teacher I interviewed has been with the district for 24 years. *Jen* has always taught language arts, but when she began teaching in Oxford the sixth grade was placed in a middle school setting, a school including grades seven and eight. She also served as a sixth grade language arts facilitator for many years. A facilitator was the teacher who facilitated the grade level language arts meetings, and relayed information from administration to their grade level language arts co- workers.

  Overall it seems there have been many changes to the curriculum over the past 20 years in the OASD, mostly due in part to the leadership turnover. As *Jen* stated, “There has not been one single voice for a long period of time.” It seems to be the trend for administrators to gain experience in Oxford, then move onto bigger, better paying districts. Although, there have been some positive periods of growth, the district struggles to maintain continuity throughout the grade levels. There have been times that teachers did their own thing and did not have a curriculum, or chose not to follow the curriculum.

Twenty years ago, there was not a curriculum followed by teachers and a curriculum was not handed to a new teacher when entering a new position. The standards movement seems to be the impetus that began a push for Directors of Curriculum and Instruction and Superintendents to get serious about the district’s curriculum and making sure everyone was on the same page. The teachers do not feel the standards movement was a bad thing because there were not only inequalities in the district, but there were many inequalities across the state and the country. Furthermore, the teachers agree that the teachers in the district worked hard to do their best for their students and did not want to be seen as a weak district.

The earliest Director of Curriculum and Instruction discussed in my interviews was *Hailey Leonard*, who pushed to get everyone on the same page and pushed the district to get serious about the standards. She urged teachers to incorporate more writing, especially writing across the curricula. Unfortunately, she struggled with the administration, the “good ole boys club.” Then an Assistant Superintendent, *Laura Miller* had new curricular ideas, but met a lot of resistance to change from principals and teachers due to her tact. During *Laura Miller’s* stint as Assistant Superintendent, the Literacy Teacher on Assignment, *Jill Peters*, helped *Laura Miller* because she had effectively communicated with the teachers and began creating a climate to get teachers to accept change. The duo implemented the role of facilitator for each grade level and subject area. This is when a more progressive movement began. These two ladies were methodical in making sure everyone knew what they should be teaching from grade to grade, and were trying to ensure there were no major gaps on learning. They created a documentation of scope and sequence, along with materials for each grade and a guideline of what was to be taught at each grade. As Superintendents, Directors of Curriculum and Instruction, Teachers on Assignment and Principals moved on from the district, unfortunately, so did accountability. As the years passed new sets of materials were purchased, and new curriculum and instruction expectations came into play. Another attempt to curriculum mapping came into play with Tech Paths. Although the staff had a few days of training on how to use Tech Paths, teachers did not use the program to its fullest effect, therefore Tech Paths was not effective. The only teachers who used the program were the subject and grade level facilitators. There was not enough follow through working from the top down and the district’s schools have become more like islands, not a cohesive district. Currently, we seem to be a “rudderless ship” because our current Superintendent will retire at the end of the year and we have no Director of Curriculum and Instruction. Furthermore, we do not have a unified K-12 language arts curriculum.

The teachers are frustrated with the lack of leadership and continuity. It is felt that the teachers are working harder, but the student’s level of achievement has gone down over the years. With the different ebbs and flows of different initiatives and instructional practices in the district, teachers feel as though they are being pulled in too many directions and have not had the time to become good at one initiative before another is introduced. The teachers want autonomy, time, collaboration, and leadership to generate a strong consistent language arts curriculum.

Our school district is treading water without a cohesive language arts curriculum. The teachers want continuity across the district and we need to find a way to raise the level of our instruction to meet the needs of the Common Core. The district has hired a consultant to guide a team of teachers, one language arts teacher from each grade level, to assist in developing the district’s English Language Arts curriculum. Although it is great teachers are involved, there is still not enough diverse teacher input. In the 2012-2013 school year, the team has met or will meet approximately every six to eight weeks. This is not enough time to create a well thought out curriculum, especially by a leader who is not invested in the district and does not work with the teachers and students every day. Additionally, it seems the consultant is making decisions for the district without much input from district leadership because there is a skeletal staff in administration. Without strong, consistent leadership, the district may struggle with implementing the Common Core Standards while creating continuity within the K-12 language arts curriculum.