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Teacher Perception of Professional Learning Communities on the Instructional Climate  
At Flintville Elementary School in Lincoln County, Tennessee

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A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

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by

David Golden

May 2017

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Keywords: Professional Learning Communities, Collaboration, Leadership, Action Research

## ABSTRACT

Teacher Perception of Professional Learning Communities on the Instructional Climate

At Flintville Elementary School in Lincoln County, Tennessee

by

David Golden

A qualitative investigation was conducted to explore teacher perceptions of Professional Learning Communities on the instructional climate at Flintville Elementary School in Lincoln County, Tennessee. Participants in the study included five teachers, the evaluation supervisor, and one parent from Flintville Elementary School. Through the analysis of interviews and a review of documents collected from Professional Learning Communities (PLC) meetings in grades Pre-K through 8, the investigator was able to extract meaning and code the data into categories that led to an understanding of the perceptions being researched.

Professional Learning Communities at Flintville Elementary School have changed the instructional climate concerning teacher collaboration and teamwork as well as attitudes of teachers regarding students. The data from the interviews and documented PLC meetings indicated that teachers were working together to develop and analyze common assessments, cultivate individual student growth and success, and reach the standardized testing goals for the school. As a result of PLCs, teachers were having professional conversations on improving student achievement and increasing teacher effectiveness, which indicated a climate change. Teachers were also using PLC meetings as a source for developing in-house professional development activities. Teachers were developing skills in the school based PLC meetings that would allow them to conduct professional development activities.

The results of this study were intended as a reference for schools that may be involved in the future implementation of Professional Learning Communities as a tool for changing instructional climate and as a way to improve student achievement through collaboration among teachers.

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my two children, Dylan and Jaxson. I want both of you to know the importance of education and to always strive to be the best that you can be in every aspect of your lives.

I would like to dedicate my educational journey to my wife, Trace, for being there always and pushing me when I didn't want to keep going, and my parents, Kenneth and Diannah Golden who started me on this journey 22 years ago at Maryville College.

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A very special thank you is for my wife Trace who was my rock as I began this process. You were the one who told me that I should follow my dream that I had so many years ago to earn my doctorate. I hope this journey shows my two boys, Dylan and Jaxson, the importance of education. And to my Mom and Dad, thank you for always pushing me to be the very best I could be.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	2
DEDICATION.....	5
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	6
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION .....	11
Statement of Purpose .....	13
Qualitative Research Questions .....	13
Significance of Study .....	14
Delimitations and Limitations of the Study .....	14
Overview of Study .....	15
Definition of Terms.....	15
2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE .....	18
Introduction.....	18
Professional Learning Communities.....	18
Implementation Transition.....	24
Trust as a Phenomenon .....	30
Instructional Climate.....	36
Professional Collaboration.....	43
PLC Leaders.....	50
Student Learning.....	55
3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....	62
Introduction.....	62



Research Questions .....	62
Qualitative Design .....	63
Case Study .....	63
Framework for Study Design.....	64
The Social Milieu.....	65
Parents.....	65
Teachers .....	65
District Administration .....	65
Statement of Researcher Perspective .....	66
Setting and Participants for the Research .....	68
Population .....	68
Sampling .....	69
Perceptual Research .....	70
Credibility .....	74
Triangulation.....	75
Ethical Considerations .....	76
Data Collection .....	78
Data Analysis .....	79
4. DATA ANALYSIS.....	81
Introduction.....	81
Participant Information .....	82
Research Question 1 .....	83
Interview Question 1-1 .....	84

Interview Question 1-2 .....	85
Research Question 2 .....	87
Interview Question 2-1 .....	87
Interview Question 2-2 .....	89
Interview Question 2-3 .....	90
Interview Question 2-4 .....	93
Research Question 3 .....	95
Interview Question 3-1 .....	95
Interview Question 3-2 .....	99
Interview Question 3-3 .....	101
Interview Question 3-4 .....	104
Interview Question 3-5 .....	106
Research Question 4 .....	108
Interview Question 4-1 .....	108
Interview Question 4-2 .....	111
Interview Question 4-3 .....	113
Emerging Themes .....	115
5. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	117
Introduction.....	117
Discussion.....	117
Study Findings .....	119
Teachers .....	120
Parent .....	122

Evaluation Supervisor.....	123
Recommendations for Future Practice.....	126
Recommendations for Future Research.....	127
Summary.....	127
REFERENCES .....	139
APPENDICES .....	128
Appendix A: Letter to Potential Participants.....	148
Appendix B: Interview Questions.....	149
Appendix C: Informed Consent Form .....	151
Appendix D: IRB Approval Letter .....	154
Appendix E: Flintville Elementary School PLC Meeting Sign-In Sheets .....	155
Appendix F: Flintville Elementary School PLC Norms.....	156
Appendix G: Flintville Elementary School PLC Common Assessment Analysis Worksheet .....	157
VITA.....	159

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

With the ever increasing demands of standardized testing and school reform, professional learning communities have been established in schools throughout the United States to address the need for higher student achievement on standardized tests and to foster collaboration among teachers (Erkens et al., 2008, p. 3). Traditionally, teachers worked individually interpreting the meaning and importance of the standards they were to teach students in order to increase test scores of their students (Morris, 2011). Jealousy, resentment, and a lack of collegiality among professionals often occurred (Allen, 2013). As these issues became prominent factors within schools and overall test scores failed to meet expectations, the need for unity and an improved instructional climate became a necessity. This led to the development of professional learning communities focused on all students in all classrooms, and through subsequent professional conversations, teachers began coming out of isolation and focusing collaboratively on student success. Through PLCs, teachers are able to create an environment that fosters mutual cooperation, emotional support, and personal growth through collaboration to achieve what they could not achieve alone (Dufour & Eaker, 1998). New strategies and processes were introduced through teacher collaborative work resulting from the PLC initiative (Elbousty & Bratt, 2010). With professional learning communities in place, teachers can focus on all students in each classroom in every grade level. DuFour, Eaker, and DuFour (2005) wrote that professional learning communities are the “most powerful strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement” (p.7). The shift to PLCs moved teachers from an era of isolation and the idea of

“my students” to a realm of teacher collaboration driven by professional conversations and the idea of “our students” (Eaker & Keating, 2012, p. 8).

I chose to study teacher perceptions regarding the effect of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) on the instructional climate at Flintville Elementary. PLCs were fully implemented at Flintville Elementary School during the 2013-2014 school year. The PLC meetings were conducted on a weekly basis in grades K-5 during common planning periods. PLC meetings in grades 6-8 were also conducted on a weekly basis but as one unit instead of separate grade levels for a variety of reasons which included: multi-grade teachers, low student enrollment in grades 6-8, and the desire of teachers to work as a single unit.

Flintville Elementary School failed to meet Tennessee Department of Education mandated Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs) and Gap Closures. AMOs are annual learning targets distributed to each district and schools as part of the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) (Annual Measurable Objects, 2014, p. 1). Flintville Elementary School’s gap closures relate to closing the distance between state mandated achievement targets on standardized tests between students with disabilities and students without disabilities as well as educationally disadvantage students and non-educationally disadvantaged students. Flintville Elementary also failed to reach state the mandated achievement target in 3-8 English Language Arts. As a result of this, Flintville Elementary School was required to institute grade level and subject level PLCs.

The implementation of PLCs at Flintville Elementary School was instituted to address not meeting the AMO’s and Achievement Gaps from the previous year. Eaker and Keating (2012) suggested that PLCs center on the following four questions: “1. What do we want students to learn, 2. How will we know if students are learning, 3. What will we do if they haven’t learned it, and 4. What will we do if they’ve demonstrated proficiency?” (p. 51). As a result of utilizing

research from Eaker and Keaton, the following central concepts were established by the principal and school district administration for the PLCs: key learning targets being taught, methods of assessments, developing interventions for students who did not gain mastery of the taught learning targets, and creating enrichments for students who did master the taught concepts to gain further knowledge and application skills. With support from the school district administration, Flintville Elementary School implemented weekly PLC meetings to address academic failure and ensure that learning targets were met.

### Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore teacher perceptions of Professional Learning Communities on the instructional climate at Flintville Elementary School in Lincoln County, TN.

### Qualitative Research Questions

1. What are teacher perceptions regarding the PLC impact on instructional climate at Flintville Elementary School?
2. What are teacher perceptions regarding PLC implementation and professional collaboration at Flintville Elementary School?
3. What are teacher perceptions regarding PLC implementation and teacher leadership at Flintville Elementary School?
4. What are teacher perceptions regarding PLC implementation and student learning at Flintville Elementary School?

### Significance of the Study

This study examined Flintville Elementary School, a rural school in central Tennessee. The significance of this study was in the success of PLCs on the instructional culture of the school and the impact of PLCs on school achievement. This study will serve as a guiding tool for other high poverty, failing rural schools that will implement PLCs to address instructional climate and student achievement issues. This study will add to the body of research supporting the benefits of PLCs on instructional climate and student achievement by addressing the specific impact of PLCs on instructional climate in a low achieving, high poverty school.

### Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

This research study is a case study. Delimitations in a study are the boundaries set by the researcher that describe what is not being done by the researcher, the literature not reviewed, and the population not being studied (Baltimore County Public Schools, 2010). Delimitations allow the researcher to create boundaries that allow for the research study to become more focused (Kornuta & Germaine, 2006, p. 29). Delimitations for this study included a small sample size (five teachers, one evaluation supervisor, and one parent), only one school in the South Central Region of Tennessee was studied, and the scope of the study.

Limitations in a research study identify issues outside of the researcher's control. Kornuta & Germaine (2006) wrote that limitations are weaknesses of the study in which the researcher has no control. A limitation of this study included was that all participants were female. This limits the transferability to other populations. This study was limited to teacher perceptions of PLC impact on the instructional climate from only one school. This limits the

transferability to other schools in the local district, state, and nation and their level PLC inclusion. This study was limited to the fall and spring semester of the 2013-2014 school year.

### Overview of Study

This study was organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 includes the introduction with statement of purpose, research questions, significance of the study, and definition of terms, limitations and delimitations, and the organization of the study. Chapter 2 is a review of related literature. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the research methodology and includes the research design, population information, and research questions used in the study.

### Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this research the following definitions are provided:

1. **Professional Learning Community (PLC):** A school where “educators, create an environment that fosters mutual cooperation, emotional support, and personal growth as the work together to achieve that what they cannot accomplish alone.” (Dufour and Eaker, 1998, p. 11).
2. **Reading First:** A federal program that provides scientifically based reading research instructional practices in early reading classroom settings that enable all students to read on grade level by the end of the third grade. (Programs: Reading First, 2014).
3. **Race to the Top (RTTT):** Legislation authorized under the American Recovery and Reinvest Act of 2009 by President Obama. RTTT calls for more rigorous standards,



better assessments, use of data systems, support for teachers and school leaders, and a focus on individual student interventions. (Race to the Top Applications, 2014).

4. **Team Norms:** “Team norms are simply agreed-upon parameters within which the team will conduct its work” (Eaker & Keating, 2012, p. 113).
5. **Collaboration:** “To work together, especially in a joint intellectual effort” (*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language: Third Edition*, 1992, p.371).
6. **Common Assessments:** Formative assessments developed collaboratively by a group of teachers (Eaker & Keating, 2012, p. 121-123).
7. **Annual Measurable Objective (AMO):** “AMOs are unique yearly targets in reading and mathematics for each subgroup, school and district.” (Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), 2013).
8. **Achievement Gap:** “The “achievement gap” in education refers to the disparity in academic performance between groups of students.” (Trawick, 2015, p. 1)
9. **Response to Intervention (RTI):** As part of the PLC model, RTI’s underlying purpose to provide specific interventions that are appropriate, directed, and methodical to students who need remediation. (Mattos, Buffum, & Weber, 2012)
10. **Comprehensive School Reform (CSR):** Refers to the use of scientifically based research and effect practices that are used to assist public schools in raising student achievement. (About CSR, 2014)
11. **Lindamood Bell Reading Program (LMB):** A reading program “designed for students with reading disabilities who also have unreliable auditory perceptions, teaching alternate ways to perceive various sounds that make up words in the English language. (Lindamood & Lindamood, 1998)

**12. Implementation transition:** Implementation transition consists of the steps that school leaders take to implement PLCs into a school setting. Step one occurs when the principal or school administrator introduces the concept of PLCs. Step two occurs when the principal supports the move through some type of activity that involves the entire faculty. An example is a book study that can be conducted through email or through meetings during the summer. Step three is the formation of PLC norms that provide the framework for the PLCs. Step four involves setting the meeting times, conducting the meetings, and providing documentation of the meetings. Step five is providing opportunities for teachers to collaborate outside of PLC meetings such as co-teaching activities.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Introduction

This study was designed to examine the phenomenon of PLCs on the instructional climate at Flintville Elementary School from the perspectives of teachers, district administrators, and parents. In order to understand this study in the proper context, a review of literature was completed. This review of literature was arranged by theme beginning with the concept of professional learning communities.

#### Professional Learning Communities

The reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA), called The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), called all students to be held academically accountable and prepared for college and career (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). The Race to the Top legislation called for more intensive and more structured teacher observations as well as higher student achievement mandates. Because of these legislations, teachers were being placed in situations where they were asking for more professional development on strategies, concepts, data analysis, and other areas that will strengthen them in classroom effectiveness (Race to the Top Applications, 2010). The development of PLCs was implemented and included a variety of types and formats that included grade level/horizontal, vertical, and subject matter (Nadelson, Seifert, & Hettinger Coats, 2013). The introduction of PLCs into schools directly impacts teachers as they learn from one another in areas such as effective teaching strategies, data analysis, and the development of student-centered interventions. Fullan (2001) stated that “There is the intimate link between knowledge building and internal commitment on the way to

making good things happen” (p. 81). Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, and Many (2010) stated the importance of PLCs as:

Educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. Professional learning communities operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous, job-embedded learning for educators. (p.3)

Mullen and Schunk (2010) identified “leadership, organization, and culture” as PLC elements that can offer schools and districts positive change. Olivier and Huffman (2016) wrote that “the professional learning community conceptual model is organized around five dimensions: shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collaborative learning and application, shared personal practice, and supportive conditions” (Abstract). Rasperry and Girija stated that:

Professional learning communities in the educational setting can be defined as groups of individuals committed to continuous improvement through shared values and reflection. In PLCs, teams are open to critical thinking, reflective dialogue, self-examination, and resolving issues that impede student success. Each member must be committed to the time, energy, and collaboration required to bring about lasting change in their classrooms and school. (2)

Senge (2006) defined that a learning group is “where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together” (p.3). Senge went on to state that a learning community is at the center of a learning group where people are constantly evaluating their own sense of reality through discovery and creation. PLCs ensue when all stakeholders (teachers, school leaders, other faculty/staff members) share responsibility and accountability for attainment of the PLC goals and objectives (Reitzug, 1997). Sparks (1999) stated that PLCs are “places in which teachers pursue clear, shared purposes for student learning, engage in collaborative activities to achieve

their purposes and take collective responsibility for student learning (p. 53). Teachers and school leaders have been able to take the work of Senge and apply it to the education field even though his writings were written for written organizations. Teachers in successful schools collaborate, research, study, and evaluate teaching materials and resources and participate in shared work (Little, 1982). Dufour and Reeves (2016) state that “the genuine PLC process calls for working together in collaborative teams; establishing a guaranteed and viable curriculum; using formative assessments stemming from the curriculum; and using the result of the assessments to inform interventions and teaching” (Abstract).

The professional learning community concept was an area which allowed teachers to increase their knowledge and ability on a variety of areas that allowed them to become more effective in the classroom. “The very essence of a *learning* community is a focus on and a commitment to the learning of each student” (Dufour, Dufour, & Eaker, 2008, p.15). Focusing on student achievement, proven teaching strategies and methods, the school vision, and all stakeholders are the right things for PLCs to focus on and lead to success for all (Elmore, 2004). Easton (2011) identified the PLC setting as “one in which a self-organizing group of people explore students’ work, to assess the quality of that work, and make shared decisions about what to do when student performance is poor” (XVI). Hord stated that professional learning communities were designed to meet the needs of educators and student learning (1997). PLC practices demonstrated success through methods that included co-planning, co-teaching and co-assessment that led to the analyzing of data that showed student achievement increases in areas that include social, emotional, and creativity (Owens, 2015).

Newmann and Wehlage (1995) outlined five crucial elements of PLCs: (1) shared norms, (2) constant focus on student learning, (3) thoughtful dialogue, (4) share effective teaching

strategies/methods, and (5) stress teacher-to-teacher collaboration. The weekly or monthly PLC meetings set up by school leaders allowed teachers to openly address these areas. Teachers became learners during PLC meetings as they participated and listened to one another. Teachers discussed strategies and techniques to increase their ability to become more effective as classroom teachers. As teachers began talking about methods and strategies that impacted student learning and growth, comradery was developed. Teachers were no longer viewing themselves as isolated and teaching only their students; instead, teachers were working together to develop strategies and interventions that allowed all students to grow and learn (Evans, 2012). PLC meetings help teachers move from a negative climate to one of trust and support (Hord & Tobia, 2011). Sergiovanni (2009) stated that a learning community is:

A group of people who personally interact, face-to-face or electronically, and are bound together by the pursuit of common questions, problems, or issues. The members of the group have developed clear norms and procedures to ensure that their interactions go forward in a way that honors the ideas of mutualism, collegiality, trust loyalty, and friendship, while showing a bias for hard-nosed analysis and concrete action. (p.114)

The transition to an instructional climate of trust and support is attributed to teachers having a professional community in which to develop professional collegiality (2011). The development of formalized PLC meetings has led to positive improvements in instructional culture and division wide improvement (Baker, 2010; Dufour & Eaker, 1998).

Within the elements of creating a PLC climate, it is important for school leaders and stakeholders such as teachers to understand the PLC process. The Southwest Education Development Laboratory (SEDL) created a system of six steps to align state assessments, standardized tests, and school curriculum: (1) study, (2) select, (3) plan, (4) implement, (5) analyze, and (6) adjust (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2005). This system created by the SEDL created an ongoing process for participants to experience team-building

while understanding the learning processes for educators with the end result of a higher level of student learning as the focus (Southwest Educational Laboratory, 2005). These strategies work within the PLC meeting to improve student learning.

PLCs can lead to positive changes within a school. Lopez-Flores (2014) identified four changes that PLCs can make on the instructional climate of a school: (1) professional learning, (2) improved teaching strategies/methods, (3) higher level of student achievement, and (4) improved interventions for students (Abstract). Educational needs, school improvement, and student learning are positively effective by PLCs by providing “quality professional development, role modeling, and observed expectations” when school leaders implemented PLCs (French, 2013, Abstract). Marsh et al. (2015,) stated that PLCs along with academic coaches can improve data analysis and teaching methods within a school:

We found that coaches and PLCs played important roles in mediating teachers' responses to data and were often associated with instances in which teachers used data to alter their instructional delivery (as opposed to surface-level changes in materials and topics). Further, the dynamic relationship between vertical expertise (an individual's knowledge and skills) and horizontal expertise (knowledge that is co-created through interactions and movement across contexts) may help explain the ways in which PLCs and coaches facilitated deeper level changes in pedagogy. Finally, dialogue was a central mediating practice, and school leadership and the district-level context shaped the possibility for change. (Abstract)

PLCs positively impact teachers in classroom instruction. Kingsley (2012) stated that each teacher participated in PLCs which led to a solid “a broader community” to address school issues in and out of the classroom setting (p. 24). Royer (2012) identified the PLC theory as one “based on a theory of action that calls for the involvement of a community of teachers and leaders working together to improve the learning conditions and achievement results of students” (Abstract). Tam (2015) noted that PLCs positively impact the development of teachers and induce teacher change by assisting teachers in taking a look at school curriculum, teaching

methods, teacher learning, teacher roles in schools, and student learning (Abstract). Dufour (2014) stated that PLCs allowed for the best setting that teachers could work in where effective professional development enable for the individual school's staff to work together to develop instructional methods that would impact student learning in a positive manner.

PLCs are perceived as a new way to develop teaching methods, develop teacher leaders, and increase student achievement. Nehring and Fitzsimons (2011) wrote:

First, PLC practices are countercultural to mainstream teacher practice. School leaders and external change agents introducing PLCs in mainstream schools must, therefore, approach the work not as a technical task but as cultural transformation. Second, group facilitation skill is a crucial leadership attribute for the effective cultivation of a PLC. Third, to be effective, PLC cultivation must be perceived not as an end-to-itself, but as the "means" to a clearly identified, shared, and compelling goal for student learning. (Abstract)

Daniels (2011) reflected on her own teaching and involvement in PLCs and stated that PLCs have positively affected her own teaching because of the following PLC elements: “(1) Administrative support both in word and deed is crucial; (2) Communication was vertical and horizontal; (3) Fostering independence and collegiality was tricky; and (4) The PLC implementation has been refreshing for her teaching” (Abstract). PLCs allow for teachers to reflect on their own teaching strategies and methods that can lead to teachers making positive changes to their own teaching style (Stegg, 2016). Woodland and Mazur (2015) state that school leaders can use PLCs to develop new teachers and provide support to struggling teachers to ensure that “subpar teaching is systemically addressed, acceptable teaching is improved upon, and outstanding teaching is sustained and replicated” (Abstract). Hirsh and Shirley (2008) stated that school leaders can use PLCs to impact the instructional climate of their school and also to continue to learn in the principal role in two effective manners: “(1) by participating with teachers in PLCs that are designed for schoolwide learning; and (2) by working with other principals to learn specifically about school leadership and other topics.



## Implementation Transition

Implementation transition consists of the steps that school leaders take to implement PLC meetings into a school setting. Middendorg (2013) stated that “leadership played a key role in successfully implementing professional learning communities” (PLCs) (Abstract). Dufour et al. (2008) wrote that the difficulty of shifting a school from a traditional setting to one of collaboration was not convincing teachers that the PLC process was best for students and the instructional climate; instead, the difficulty was in the actual implementation of the PLC idea. Implementation transition can include meetings to establish vision, norms, PLC leaders and other operational guidelines. These guidelines serve as rules and structures that include talking, listening, discipline, play, safety, risk, individual learning, and group learning that must be maintained in order for the success of the Professional Learning Community (Easton, 2009). These rules and structures were essential items that create success for the PLC (Easton, 2009). Hord and Rutherford (1998) established the following methods for a school to transition to PLCs: (1) school leaders and teachers unite on a common purpose to improve student learning, (2) an internal or external power to establish the PLCs, (3) an instructional climate that allows for shared leadership that leads to all goals being accomplished, and (4) a school-wide focus that has the benefits of all students as the motivator. Rules and structures for operations are an important foundational element for the development of effective PLC meetings.

These rules and structures are called “norms” and are developed by the teachers as parameters for their PLC meetings. By allowing teachers to take ownership of their norms and PLC meetings, the PLC is strengthened (Eaker & Keating, 2012). Bailey and Jakicic (2012) developed a set of norms that established boundaries and brought a sense of professionalism to a PLC that included:

We will arrive on time, we will be participant members, we will stick to our focus on student learning during our meetings, we will listen to others' opinions respectfully and will use a consensus process, we will base our decisions on data, and we will not blame the students. (p. 7)

Teachers knew their norms and could address issues, teaching strategies, data analysis, and other student centered issues with professionalism. While there were a number of PLC meeting norms available, it was vastly important that teachers at the school develop their own. The norms allow for the teams to monitor what they are doing to improve and enhance the effectiveness of the PLC meeting (Eaker & Keating, 2012). Through the PLCs, a focus on improving teaching methods would increase student achievement (Elmore, 2004). The development of these norms is imperative as it sets the parameters for the teachers and school leaders to go by as they begin their PLC meetings.

There are specific areas of need which must be addressed before a PLC meeting can be fully implemented. These needs are as follows: teacher and administrator knowledge of PLC meetings, teacher and administrator view of collaboration, schedule and financial concerns, and lack of resources (Pillari, 2011). Moore (2010) wrote that there was a strong correlation between two areas of PLC meetings concerning school leaders: implementation and sustainability. As the a school begins the transition to PLCs, it must focus on making the right shifts within its instructional climate: (1) shift from teaching to learning, (2) shift from what was taught to what was learned, (3) shift to student content knowledge, and (4) shift from providing teachers state standards to a focus on teacher collaborative teams that share professional knowledge on curriculum (Dufour, 2004).

Teachers need to have a full understanding of what a PLC meeting is and how it should look before successful implementation can occur. There are major differences between grade level meetings, data meetings, and PLC meetings. A PLC meeting involves all teachers

participating and analyzing data. This is the direct opposite of a grade level meeting where a school leader such as a principal, assistant principal, or curriculum coordinator leads the meeting. In a PLC meeting, the teachers collaboratively analyze student data, develop interventions and provide enrichment opportunities (Eaker & Keating, 2012). A data meeting is a one-on-one meeting with a teacher and a school leader. In this meeting the previous year's state assessments results or progress monitoring test results are discussed. Interventions and enrichments are not discussed in data meeting.

School leaders must also understand how a PLC meeting should function. A school where high expectations for both students and teachers could not exist without a strong principal (Brookover & Lezotte, 1979). It is the school leader's role to participate along with the teachers in the PLC meeting. Louis, Kruse, & Raywid (1996) wrote that the principal is a very important factor in the PLC process and growth of the PLC within the school. One of the important transitions to during the PLC implementation process is for the principal to share the decision making process with the teachers. Thompson, Gregg, and Niska (2004) stated that school leaders in PLCs who used a democratic leadership method are more supportive of an instructional climate where collaboration is encouraged. The school administrator must facilitate, offer suggestions, and support teachers as they formulate strategies to ensure that students learn (Eaker & Keating, 2012). As teachers and school leaders work together, they begin to foster a culture of collaboration that becomes a positive working environment for all. Scheduling PLC meetings is an area that can be addressed during times that students are not in school. For example, the summer before school begins is a time where school leaders can begin meeting with teachers to establish a time before, after, or during the school day that the PLC meeting can be conducted. Principals and other governing bodies can support PLC meetings by

adjusting schedules in support of PLC meeting times (Garrett, 2010). Addressing these areas of concern can allow for the PLC meeting to become more effective.

Effective PLC meetings are directly related to student success (Eaker & Keating, 2012, p. 41). Jacobs' (2010) study on a North Carolina school system stated that increased student achievement on standardized tests can be directly linked to use of effective PLC meetings. Effective PLC meetings stem from the full support of the school's administration. Dufour (2004) discussed a process that focused on student learning, teacher collaboration, and focus on end results necessitated educators to: (1) change previous practices and assumptions, (2) stop using excuses such as discipline, low morale, and negative data, and (3) begin to focus on student learning and success.

Bailey and Jakicic (2012) established four steps that a PLC meeting should take to be successful: Plan, Do, Study, and Act. In the Plan phase, care is taken to develop a clear plan for instruction and assessment. During the Do phase, the plan is put into action by the principal and teachers. Results from common assessments and progress monitoring are analyzed during the Study phase. Teachers collaborate together to discuss trends found during common assessment analysis such as one commonly missed questions by students. During the Act phase, teachers take the results from the Study phase and implement interventions and enrichments based off of individual student needs. Teachers work collaboratively by developing intervention strategies that may include special grouping, educational assistant attention, or before and after-school individual study time with the teacher. By outlining what teachers were supposed to do with information gathered during a PLC meeting, parameters were made that held teachers and administrators to task (Eaker & Keating, 2012). Teachers and administrators now had a clear vision of what was to be addressed and accomplished within the PLC meeting.

The inclusion of PLC meetings has led to school reform. PLC meetings are used as a professional development activity that allows participants to engage with one another on a number of topics that increase teacher efficiency and improve student learning (Monroe-Baillargeon & Selma, 2010). Reeves (2004) wrote that once teachers begin examining their own practices and acknowledged the realm of accountability for their own teaching methods and strategies, they would transform into a powerful entity that would have positive impacts on student learning. Morrissey (2000) stated that “a professional learning community becomes the supporting structure for schools to continuously transform themselves through their own internal capacity” (p. 10). Effective PLC meetings are an example of a shift to school reform as teachers work together to address the needs of each student.

Difficulties and negative feelings are associated with PLCs before implementation. Kincaid (2014) identified three obstacles during the implementation phase of PLCs: time shortage, absence of shared leadership, and communication deficiencies (Abstract). O’Keeffe (2012) stated that PLC meetings were merely a fad and teachers have been collaborating in professional work for as long as they have been working. Akopoff (2010) stated that erratic PLC implementation had a negative impact on the overall effectiveness of PLC meetings. In a case study of Bayside Public School, Ferguson (2013) stated that administrators struggled in implementing PLC meetings due to lack of funding for the implementation. Ferguson (2013) also wrote that tensions rose among stakeholders (principals, teachers, parents, and union) as it pertained to PLC meeting time during the school day. Teachers complained of lost planning time and having more work to do. Parents complained that teachers were not available due to meetings. PLC inhibitors include teacher overload, a deficiency in resources, and leadership

mandates; however, the school leader's style of leadership can nurture and develop PLCs in a positive way (Schechter, 2012).

Effective PLC implementation is a process. Goodwin (2012) wrote that an Action Plan with well researched data to support each step is needed for effective PLCs to impact school climate and student learning. According to Goodwin (2012), the Red Clay Consolidated School District took the following steps to firmly establish PLCs as form of district-wide educational reform:

The PLC Overview and Guidelines were developed based on this work and ongoing training was provided to staff. In addition, a comprehensive literacy plan and School PLC Lead job description were developed to define the roles and responsibilities to support the schools. Multiple sources of data were used to evaluate the implementation of PLCs such as surveys, focus groups, a program evaluation, and ongoing collaborative meetings with district- and building-level personnel during the project implementation to refine the process and procedures to support the development of PLCs. Results of the project illustrate that although it is necessary that PLCs follow established procedures and protocols, these protocols are insufficient to predict changes in instruction or student achievement. PLCs need clear instructional targets and data on their effect on student achievement as outlined in the District Success Plan. Based on this understanding, survey data, additional qualitative measures, and research on effective professional development, the a PLC Action Plan was developed to provide the structure for the new vision of the professional development delivery model and to support PLC implementation and embed professional development on research-based instructional strategies. The next steps and recommendations for continued work in this project are outlined in the PLC Action Plan. The PLC Action Plan helps establish a vision for professional development in the district. In order to provide the environment, resources, and commitment necessary to ensure every student succeeds, the district must develop the capacity of educators within the district. To develop this capacity, the PLC Action Plan focuses on three areas: Focus on Learning, Focus on Collaborative Culture, and Focus on Results. (Abstract)

Effective PLC implementation at both the district and school levels can lead to a positive change in the instructional climate that in turns positively impacts student learning. Deluca's (2012) study found that PLCs are positive forces on a school's instructional climate because they are "a) ongoing and connected to the specific needs of the population at each individual school and (b)

provide a viable means for internal professional development, capitalizing on the skills, strengths, and varied backgrounds of teachers at each school site.

### Trust as a Phenomenon

Trust within any type of environment is an important element to the success of any organization (Covey, 2006). This concept is true within a school environment especially in the instructional climate area. PLCs are avenues that allow teachers to step out of the norm of working in isolation to build trust and community to benefit student learning (Rasberry & Mahajan, 2008). Absence of trust along with a sense of isolation has been identified by teachers as an element that has hindered effective PLCs (Seisay, 2013). Trust must be developed between all stakeholders inside a school building starting between the principal and faculty and then between faculty members. Smylie, Mayrowetz, Murphy, and Louis (2007) stated that trust was an important leadership characteristic in shared leadership and can be seen as “dynamic and reinforcing” (p. 499). Eastwood and Louis (1992) wrote that the most important factor for a school to gain continual success is for it to build and establish a collaborative environment. Trust in the form partnerships is essential in the instructional climate of a school as professional information enters and leaves the school (Lambert et al., 2002).

As school leaders move their school’s culture from isolation to collaboration trust must be established between the school leaders and faculty (Betts, 2012). Lambert et al. (2002) wrote that collaboration begins and sustained that is focused on the development of teaching practices that in turn lead to higher level of student achievement, a community within the school is formed. Hord (1997) wrote that it is the goal of both teachers and school leaders to improve student learning through collaboration. As schools make the transition from traditional schools to

PLCs schools, trust is an important factor for motivation and morality as everyone works towards a common goal (Wofford, 2011). Kruse, Louis, and Bryk (1995) identified five characteristics of PLCs that revolved around trust: (1) collaboration, (2) idea sharing, (3) open dialogue on teaching, (4) student progress monitoring, and (5) shared accountability. Wofford (2011) stated that the establishment of PLCs would create trust as they would they are now viewed as supporters of learning for both students and faculty members. By being viewed as supports of both student learning and faculty development, school leaders can gain trust from faculty members as they are seen as supporters for all stakeholders within the school. The effectiveness of a PLC meeting is directly impacted by relational trust as demonstrated through actions of the school leader (Thorton & Cherrington, 2014). An important part in the development of trust between school leaders and teachers is support. An example can be principals providing support for teachers as the teacher teams face confusion or need clarification on a state standards (Eaker & Keating, 2012, p.139). Gray and Summers (2015) wrote that the effectiveness of the PLC rests on the level of trust between the principal and faculty and between faculty members.

The development of teacher-to-teacher trust is a vital element in the formation of PLCs to positively impact a school's instructional climate. Jennings' (2013) study identified trust was an issue as PLCs were being developed. Jennings (2013) also stated that the potential PLCs had the ability to impact the instructional climate and student learning as the collaboration in the PLCs developed. Woodland and Mazur (2015) identified three elements that will lead to a successful PLC and instructional climate change: collaboration, the deprivatization of teaching methods, and assessments on the classroom level. The deprivatization of teaching methods allows for the building of trust between teachers as each one begins to value and appreciate one another on a



professional level. Nelson (2009) outlined in a study on teacher professional development on math and science teachers that collaboration and building of trust was at times difficult for teachers especially when it was called upon to share student work; however, confidence in PLCs are seen if the teacher work is supported by school leaders. Morr (2010) stated that all PLCs should some time focusing on trust building exercises to ensure that relationships remain positive and focused.

A community within a school becomes united through common goals and shared vision that allows the school to move from a climate of isolation to one of collaboration (Sergiovanni, 2006). Teachers must be able to move out of isolation and begin professional interactions with teacher in the same grade level or content area (Eaker & Keating, 2012). A school climate where trust is a focus encourages school communities to take new risks that initiate and establish new networks that benefit all stakeholders inside the school community (Wald & Castleberry, 2000). The move from isolation to collaboration is a focus on relationships and appreciation of each person as a professional. Lambert et al. (2002) wrote that “If we do not understand each as an equal – in the sense of having something of value to bring to the process- we cannot form relationships that contribute to growth and purpose” (p. xvii-xviii). Hord (1997) established five PLC components that focus on trust: (1) shared leadership, (2) combined creativity, (3) mutual values and vision, (4) support by leaders, and (personal accountability). Teachers of different disciplines’ perceptions of collaboration are impacted by trust and collaborative relationships (Laine, 2013). As teachers begin to trust and collaborate with one another, the trust relationship between teachers can begin to supersede the trust relationship between the faculty and principal. As the teacher-to-teacher levels of trust increase, the teacher-to-principal becomes less important as teachers work together to develop stronger methods of instruction (Liou, 2010).

The effectiveness of a PLC is built on a foundation of trust (Stollar, 2014). Huffman and Hipp (2003) wrote that even if a school has created structures, communication methods, effective educational means, PLCs will have little impact on a school's instructional climate the following factors are not established and nurtured: trust, respect, and a sense of fellowship. As school leaders move towards a school climate that has effective PLCs that is focused on trust and student learning, an effective starting point for a school faculty is to establish a shared and common vision (Bezzina & Testa, 2005). A shared mission, well-defined direction, and mutual values steer the PLC goals through an ethical purpose that outlines why each day's efforts are so important in the school (Dufour et al., 2008). With a common goal, vision, or purpose, teachers can work together collaboratively until all students achieve at a high level (Dufour et al., 2005). Wald and Castleberry (2000) stated that "Shared purpose and values serve to enhance the cohesiveness among staff, connect the school to its higher purpose and reenergize staff when the going gets rough" (p. 14). Positive perceptions of PLC meetings demonstrate that teachers viewed elements that elements of PLC meetings had impacted their school in areas such as mission, vision, values, goals, teaching, student learning, principal leadership, culture, and trust (Stollar, 2014).

Trust between the principal and faculty is an important element to the success of PLCs. Levels of trust within an instructional climate are impacted by the relationship between teachers and the principal as well as background characteristics of the school (Hogg, 2013). Hallam (2015) "Trust is critical in effectively implementing the PLC model, and the school principal is best positioned to influence school trust levels" (Abstract). Liou and Daly (2014) stated that three factors are important to building the relationships needed to ensure that PLCs are effective

within a school: teacher-to-teacher trust, principal-to-teacher trust, and professional conversations held with the principal.

Teachers are able to feel a sense of trust and support between one another by professionally collaborating with one another. Teachers who work within PLCs are supported by sharing the accountability and responsibility for student success, the removal of isolation feeling, improved teacher effectiveness through much improved teaching methods and strategies, higher level of teacher morale, and a lower rate of teacher absenteeism (Dufour et al., 2008). Teacher morale and classroom instruction improve due to trust established in PLCs. McDonough wrote that:

Teacher morale was positively impacted with professional learning communities and classroom instruction was increased due to the PLC. Implications of practice include setting a vision for the campus that focuses on collaboration, develop a level of trust among the campus, provide time for collaboration, set goals or expectations for collaborative meetings, and have the administrator participate and be part of the collaborative meetings.

As teachers begin to work within PLCs, they may begin to feel a sense of doubt, weakness, or helplessness. Kelly (2013) states that through PLCs “The community that developed within the PLC was a group of individuals who were bonded together by natural will and who together enhanced the overall strength of the PLC by creating a set of shared ideas and ideals” (Abstract). Teachers were able to overcome their nervousness about the change to PLCs by working together. School leaders can also develop activities to develop trust among teacher groups. Hewitt and Weckstein (2012) identified a “critical friends” activity that focused on school personnel issues, managing shifts, and implementation of new initiatives to develop trust among teams.

Trust between colleagues in a PLC setting can lead to teachers becoming more committed to student learning and achievement (Lee et al., 2011). Lee et al. (2011) also stated that trust between school faculty members can positively impact student discipline. Wang (2015) stated that PLCs by “genuine collegiality, promoting disciplined collaboration and shared responsibility.” Wang (2015) also stated:

Professional learning is ongoing, supported and fully integrated into the culture and operation of the school system. Emotional bonds, trust and an inclusive school culture contribute to genuine collegiality. These learning communities establish a system of focused collaboration, peer mentoring and collective responsibility, which leads to improved teaching and student learning. (Abstract)

Webb et al. (2009) identified four themes in a study on PLCs in England and Finland that led to a healthier teacher which in turn strengthened both PLCs and student learning: school community, professional development, collaboration, and trust with accountability. Hamos et al. (2009) stated that mutual respect and trust within a school are important characteristics for a school to develop for teachers to begin de-isolating themselves and their teaching practices. In a study of PLCs held within Christian school, Marley (2010) found that the supportive conditions in which positive relationships between teachers and students were characterized by trust and respect scored the highest dimension.

Trust established through PLCs allow for teachers to positively change the instructional climate. Von Gnechten (2011) wrote that teachers use PLCs to establish a climate of inquiry where can develop action research projects that promote student learning, professional development, and professional collaboration. Repicky (2009) wrote that there was nothing more important than trusting teachers through PLCs to manage their teaching, student-centered interventions, and instructional rigor. Pella (2011) stated that teachers who work together improve their teacher effectiveness by creating new ideas and confidence are built through PLCs.

PLCs allow teachers a forum where they can trust one another to deal with school issues that include: student achievement, testing, discipline, academic events, athletic events, and other school matters (Dever & Lash, 2013). Characteristics of teacher trust that are seen in PLCs include the sharing of practices and learning along with an instructional climate that promotes collaboration that in turn leads to school reform (Song, 2012). Dufour (2007) stated that teacher dedication and commitment through trusting, collaborative conversations within PLCs can lead to student and adult learning.

Teachers with various skill and experience levels are able to learn from each through trusting one another in PLCs. Doerr (2009) stated:

The most effective teachers not only get to share best practices with their colleagues, but they also have an opportunity to learn about other effective techniques to continue to improve their own teaching. Likewise, new teachers can learn from veteran teachers' wisdom of practice as well as contribute their own fresh perspectives. Veteran teachers and new teachers each have different skills and knowledge to bring to the table and share. (Abstract)

District and local support allow for PLCs to foster teacher learning where trust leads to improved instruction and teacher methods that lead to increased student learning (Jones & Dexter, 2014). PLCs that have a strong sense of trust and community can lead to a higher rate of teacher effectiveness. Trust in PLCs leads to improvements in teaching.

### Instructional Climate

According to the research, the climate in a school can best be defined as “the totality of factors that affect a learning environment” (Cardichon & Martens, 2015, p.1). The instructional climate of a school can be changed through the implementation of PLC meetings. As schools make the transition to PLCs, a shared vision that focuses on student learning and professional appreciation will give the change efforts the energy it needs to ensure that the change is sustained

(Dufour et al., 2008). Dufour et al. (2008) stated that PLCs impact the instructional climate of a school in multiple ways that include: shared vision, goals, and commitment from all stakeholders, professional appreciation, focus on student learning, the action research approach, continual improvement by all stakeholders, and a focus on the end results needed for school success. The PLC process impacts multiple dimensions of a school that leads to an improved instructional climate for teachers and students. PLC meetings have been identified as a strategy of placing instruction and curriculum as the focal point of schools (Spanneut, 2010). The instructional climate of a school is strengthened through PLC meetings that promote friendliness among peers, conflict resolution, and self-worth among educators increase (Sterr, 2011). Bostic (2013) found six conditions that led to the effectiveness of PLCs that impacted instructional climate: school leader support, shared vision, group learning, collaboration, relationships, and structure.

Elements of instructional climate that are impacted in a positive manner through implementation of PLCs include daily instruction, planning, and professional development (Finley, 2013). Schmoker (2005) wrote that through PLCs “success could redefine public education and education professions and enable us to reach unprecedented levels of quality, equity, and achievement” (p. xiv). Another area that is impacted by PLCs is student learning (Alylsworth, 2012). As PLCs are implemented, the instructional climate is affected through the implementation of improvement processes, the establishment of instructional targets, and the application of best practices that are researched-based (Thessin, 2010). Another element that was impacted that led to the transformation of a school’s instructional climate was the formation of interventions for each individual student (Peters, 2013). Instructional climate as part of school improvement is improved through the implementation and impact of PLCs (Kiburz, 2011).

Instructional climate positively changes as PLCs develop at their own pace as development, implementation, and sustainability is continuous (Jones, 2013). As PLCs are developed, obstacles that impact the instructional climate of a school including lack of communication, resources, leadership issues, faculty resistance, and relationship barriers may develop (Padilla, 2013). Consistent PLCs impact the instructional climate of a school through participation in PLCs by all subject and core areas including special education and can lead to an improved instructional climate as special education teachers can move away from the feeling of isolation and become members of the collaborative teams (Katz, 2013). Owen (2014) stated:

There are challenges for working in a professional learning community which deprivatises teaching and is characterised by common goals and builds interdependence. The key is building a culture which goes beyond the work group and is open to new ideas and guarding against insularity.

Mohabir (2009) found that several collaborative situations such as de-isolating teachers and teaching strategies, analyzing data, building trust, and developing a shared vision lead to effective PLCs that positively impact the instructional climate and student learning. PLCs allow opportunities for teachers to share successful teaching practices with other teachers that allow for a positive instructional climate that is characterized by collaboration that is centered on student learning and achievement.

To positively improve and change the instructional climate of a school, PLCs should be implemented using an approach that establishes a foundation, familiarizes the PLC model, and forms the PLC culture (Herrera, 2012). The characteristics discussed by Dufour et al. (2008) outline how the instructional climate of a school is positively impacted once these characteristics are used. These characteristics include: (1) the sharing of purpose and vision, (2) teacher collaboration that is centered on student learning, (3) focus on improving teaching that centers on effective strategies, (4) action research based, (5) emphasis placed on constant improvement, and

(6) a focus on the end results. Dufour et al. (2008) differentiated teachers working in traditional schools from teachers working in schools where PLCs were implemented by stating the following: (1) teachers are not isolated when teaching issues arise, (2) collaboration occurs on the subject of teaching strategies, (3) all teachers work together to accomplish goals, (4) each faculty member benefits through a focus on student learning, (5) everyone understands accepts accountability and work to contribute to PLC process for all stakeholders.

Continual PLCs allow for the instructional climate to become a support system for teachers as they use collaboration to improve teaching methods (McLelland-Crawley, 2014). In a study of a Taiwanese High School, Chen and Wang (2015) found that three themes were essential for PLCs to positively impact the instructional climate of a school: (1) effective team building, (2) individual teacher learning that occurred within shared learning, and unified investigation into curriculum. Jennings (2013) stated that PLCs that use value sharing, have high expectations, and use professional collaboration have the ability to make a positive change in the instructional climate of a school. Rutherford (2012) conducted a study and found that math teachers' beliefs, understanding, and teaching strategies were changed in a positive way due to the impact that participating in PLCs had on them. Harris and Jones (2010) wrote that PLCs are one way that school districts and positively change the climate of the entire school district by supporting the PLC effort within individual schools. PLCs offer teachers a place where they can participate in continual learning opportunities as well as work collaboratively which leads to school improvement (Hord, 2008).

Shared leadership between school leaders and faculty members through PLCs can positively change and impact the school climate. Carpenter (2015) conducted a study and found that when teachers are supported by school leaders who offered shared leadership opportunities,



a positive school climate was created. Carpenter (2012) found teacher collaboration and interactions supported by school leaders led to a change a change in pedagogy through PLCs which positively changed school climate in three Nebraska schools. Olivier and Huffman (2016) wrote: “As the Professional Learning Community (PLC) process becomes embedded within schools, the level of district support has a direct impact on whether schools have the ability to re-culture and sustain highly effective collaborative practices” (Abstract).

Constant improvement in the instructional climate is an important element of the PLC process that involves teacher collaboration. Allen (2013) indicated that the three elements of a teachers’ PLC meetings were means, materials, and modes of engagement. The main emphasis was on teacher conversations that centered on collaboration, inquiry, and collective responsibility for every child’s education. From there, the emphasis indicated how each of the factors can be improved. Furthermore Allen (2013) encouraged teacher conversations that center around collaboration, inquiry and collective responsibility for every child’s education. From there, the emphasis switched to ways that each one of these factors could be improved. In a study conducted with two female secondary teachers and the researcher, Masuda (2010) remarked that a teacher study group conducted as a PLC meeting allowed for “teacher as professional” and teacher development opportunities. Adams and Vescio (2015) found that as professional conversations occurred within PLCs that it is important to focus on both group learning and individual learning as each teacher may be at different levels within the teaching profession. Professional conversations are an important element of PLC meetings and lead to overall improvement in the instructional climate.

Instructional climate is impacted by effective PLC meetings and the PLC process that includes professional collaboration. Williams (2012) stated while collaboration may vary

depending on teacher discipline, collaboration on all topics included student learning and other professional tasks. Williams (2012) listed five strategies for participating in the PLC meetings with the intent on collaboration and school change: (1) Develop and Use Norms of Collaboration; (2) Learn to Provide Constructive Feedback; (3) Resolve Group Conflicts; (4) Build Trusting Relationships; and (5) Clarify Decision-Making Processes (p. 1-2). Teachers were encouraged to transform the concept of “my students” into “our students” (Eaker & Keating, 2012, p. 40). By employing his way of thinking, teachers were able to collaborate and assist one another, grow, and become more effective. Once this barrier was removed, teachers who had predominately felt intimidated to share and work together, for whatever reason, then felt empowered to share and discuss what made them successful with other teachers.

Teachers view their school climate as a positive one when PLCs are implemented. Roberts (2013) found that when there is a strong sense of team within a building that was supported by school leaders then the PLCs were effective. Jimerson (2013) conducted a study on three teachers with a focus on PLCs and the change of the culture in a struggling secondary school. Jimerson stated:

The perceptive findings cited professional learning communities as systematic and structured methods of reform. The success of the method, however, was perceived to be predicated on collaborative effort, valued perspectives, effective leadership, and reflective insight among all stakeholders. (Abstract)

Colvin (2013) stated that overall school improvement can be achieved through PLCs when two components the focus: determined work and positive relationships. Graham (2007) wrote that teacher-to-teacher conversation and teacher commitment to participate in the PLCs are essential to the effectiveness of the PLC and to the school climate.

PLCs positively impact the instructional climate of a school by focusing on teacher morale. Almanzar conducted a study on 93 teachers in which 42 teachers participated in and

found that teachers showed leadership support, shared vision, collective learning, collective practice, led to a higher morale within a school. Collaboration, learning opportunities, and structure enable effective change to occur for teachers and within schools (Tam, 2015). Gioe stated “professional learning communities have the potential to serve as an effective method of professional development for teachers, with the ultimate goal of identifying and implementing practices that support student learning” and can lead to effective school climate change (Abstract). Visone (2016) wrote that collegial visits, teachers viewing other teachers teach, builds the instructional climate of school by strengthening and supporting a culture where teachers shared teaching methods and strategies.

School leaders use PLCs to increase teacher morale and the instructional climate of a school (Ngalawa et al., 2015). Moirao et al. (2012) stated that school leaders can use PLCs to review their effectiveness by looking at these four goals: “(1) Culture; (2) Knowledge; (3) Practice; and (4) Achievement” (Abstract). Redd and Swaminathan (2016) conducted a study on one high school principal and found that the school leader used three things to improve school climate: (1) PLCs, (2) shared leadership, and (3) social justice leadership. Kitchens (2011) conducted a study on veteran teachers who were assigned new assignments within a school building and found that their transitions were effective because of the school leaders’ support in open communication, learning culture, and shared leadership. School leaders who use transformational leadership methods in PLCs to positively impact the climate of a school by allowing stakeholders to participate in decision making for the school (Wiestling, 2010). School leaders positively impact the instructional climate of a school with the use of PLCs.

PLC meetings are seen by principals as must for cultural change (Cranston, 2009). Cranston (2009) also stated eight dominate concepts of PLC meetings that principals feel were

important to their understanding of PLC meetings for cultural change: professional learning communities were about process; structural supported enabled the development of professional learning communities; trust as the foundation for adult relationships; congenial relationships dominated conceptions of community; learning was an individual activity; professional teaching was derived from attitudinal attributes; teacher evaluation shaped how principals think about learning in professional communities; and, teacher evaluation impacted principal and teacher relationships in professional learning communities. The cultural shift that occurs when schools begin conducting PLC meetings is one that leads to mutual trust that enables everyone to grow professionally.

### Professional Collaboration

Collaboration in a professional manner has been an element of PLC meetings. Riveros, Newton, and Burgess (2012) proposed that peer collaboration was crucial for school improvement. Schmoker (2006) indicated that there was a buffer that prevented principals from knowing what was going on in a classroom and prevented members of the board of education from knowing what was going on in a classroom or school environment. The buffer also prevented teachers from sharing ideas with one another, which could have increased student achievement. By getting past this buffer, teachers could have shared and learned from one another and the community and school leaders could have known what was happening in the school while it was in session. Once the barriers were down, educators were able to collaborate together and build professional learning communities to improve student test scores and teaching.

Teacher collaboration can lead to a better understanding of PLC meetings and the PLC process. In schools where the principal has implemented PLC meetings, teachers have linked teacher collaboration and practice to successful PLCs (Morris, 2011). Developing activities that allow teachers to understand collaboration as a method for action research strengthens the PLC process (Cunningham, 2011). A community of practice through teacher collaboration can be sustained over time because of the involvement of shared member goals, frequent discourse that was both active and social, and problem solving among the members of the teams (MacPhail et al., 2014). Teacher collaboration within a PLC is an important factor to the success of a PLC (Nehring & Fitzsimons, 2011). Seisay (2013) identified six themes centered on teacher collaboration: “student learning, school culture, teacher collaboration, teacher isolation, PLC and teacher socialization and growth, and PLC issues” (Abstract).

Hardin (2010) noted that there is correlation between PLC meetings and CTE (Collective Teacher Efficacy) as defined by Bandura (1997). Salm (2014) wrote that the development of PLC meetings within a school team that included various therapists from different fields enabled the workers/teachers to work through collaboration issues and learn about each other’s field of work. This, in turn, enabled the workers/teachers to work with students with behavioral and academic needs. Garcia (2013) stated that collaboration in PLCs can benefit student learning in situations where students are diagnosed with ADHD.

PLC meetings do not always impact test scores in a positive manner, but they can impact the instructional climate of a school. Kincannon (2010) stated that PLC meetings do not always lead to increased test scores as found in large high schools with 2,000 or more students when the students took the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS).

Teacher individualism must be acknowledged in a school where PLC meetings have been implemented. Leibowitz, Ndebele, and Winberg (2014) conducted a study of higher education in South Africa and determined that collaborative research provided opportunities for new knowledge and professional growth but remarked that attention needed to be paid to the interrelationship between individuals and collective identities. Evans (2012) stated that understanding the importance of an instructional climate that fosters collaboration among teachers leads to the overall success of the school. Rasberry and Mahajan (2008) stated effective PLCs include collaborative inquiries such as discussions on data analysis, teaching methods, and student-centered instruction. The instructional climate of a school must incorporate the idea of teacher individualism along with PLC meetings.

Decision-making opportunities inside PLC meetings lead to a higher rate of teacher satisfaction. Phillips, Sweet, and Blythe (2011) proposed a model that involved PLC meetings which they were experimenting with inside their own College of Education that provided faculty members with the ability to have decision-making power, sense of both collaboration and cooperation with administrative members, and compensation for their time and efforts, and a high level of satisfaction for their work. Teachers who feel like they have a say in the decision making of a school within PLC meetings have a high rate of professional satisfaction. Brucker (2013) wrote that “allowing schools to select content for PLC meetings and more effective team construction were the strategies most often suggested to enhance the PLC experience” (Abstract). Teachers who are able to make the decisions in a collaborative manner as to what the PLCs will cover lead to more effective PLCs that will impact instructional climate and student learning.

Collaboration is an important element in the success of PLCs. Hart (2013) wrote that “teacher collaboration is essential for the improvement of student achievement and teacher performance” (Abstract). Her study showed that “teacher performance and student achievement are positively affected by the opportunities of collaboration” (Abstract). Richmond and Manokore (2010) found that collaboration that involved teacher learning was one of five essential elements that led to the success of PLCs. Thi (2008) found that teachers can change their effectiveness and style of teaching due to analyzing student data and work due to collaborative work with other teachers during PLCs. McDonough (2013) found that collaboration was an important element of the success of PLCs as they positively impacted the overall instructional climate of a school.

Teacher learning is an important part of teacher collaboration. Taukeiaho (2013) stated “the strengths of authentic learning is the interaction with others, and that the focal point of every school system, should be the learning that takes place in the classroom” (Abstract). Hellner (2008) stated that both teachers and students are benefitted from PLCs due to the professional collaboration that occurs during the meetings. Wennergen (2016) stated “When teachers take responsibility not only for their own learning but also for their colleagues', it can lead to a shift in attitudes towards collaborative learning” (Abstract). Williamson (2012) stated that collaboration was important to the success of PLCs and the overall instructional climate of a school when teachers have effective time for collaboration, develop a commitment to improve the instructional climate of the school, are able to build trust in their relationships, and can participate in decision-making for the school. Graham stated (2007) that effective PLCs that used professional conversations along with sense of community led to teacher improvement. Hillery (2013) conducted a study on school leaders and teachers perceptions on the principal's

role in PLCs and found that PLCs offer a place where teachers can learn from one another to improve teacher instruction and effectiveness.

Effective and purposeful collaboration in PLCs can lead to improved student learning. Nobles (2013) conducted a study on a K-8 school and found that writing scores improved due to collaborative efforts in PLCs. Fullan (2006) stated that a school climate that fosters collaboration lead to innovative methods and learning for both adults and students. Williams (2011) conducted a study on a large Texas school district and found that PLCs positively impacted both teaching and student learning. Collaboration and shared leadership are essential elements to increases in student learning (Williams, 2010). Richburg-Burgess (2012) found that students were able to improve in the areas of decoding and fluency due to the collaborative efforts teachers made during PLCs.

Collaboration allows teachers to converse, study, and work together to meet all mandates and to ensure teacher effectiveness and student achievement. In a study conducted on two elementary schools, four common themes were identified for principals who successfully implemented PLC meetings: (1) understood that PLC meetings took priority over non-teaching duties, (2) ensured time issues were not a factor, (3) assessed the faculty for professional development wants and needs, and (4) participated within the PLC meetings (Maynor, 2010). Scheduled PLC meetings take importance over non-teaching duties such as cafeteria duty and bus duty. PLC meetings can take longer than scheduled in order to ensure that the needs of all students were discussed and a plan was implemented. As teachers learn from each other, the need for focused professional development to allow for a high level of teacher effectiveness can occur, and it is the principal's responsibility to provide resources for professional development activities. The principal must also participate in PLC meetings to demonstrate to the faculty the



importance of the meetings. It was also found within these successful PLC elementary schools that principals who develop a cultural environment within a school where teachers have a say in school decisions, have high expectations, a high level of professionalism, and a caring/supportive environment where teachers felt valued and supported, were more likely to have a higher success rate for both teachers and students (Maynor, 2010). As teachers feel less isolated, collaboration and sharing of methods and strategies that are effective takes place which impacts the environment in a positive way.

Principals and assistant principals can model and build a culture of collaboration that is expected to occur within PLC meetings. Building trust within a professional community between the assistant principal and the faculty is a vital element in improving a school's environment and instruction (Kolosey, 2011). Assistant principals could then use what they learned in PLC meetings to further improve the learning environment for teachers and students (Sieveke-Pearson, 2010). The principal and assistant principal(s) are essential in creating professional community where instructional conversations and personal responsibility for student learning could occur (McNair & Nations, 2000). Principals and assistant principals who model collaboration demonstrate expectations for their building's PLC meetings and can use the PLC meetings to improve both instruction and student achievement.

Developing opportunities for teachers to meet in informal settings allows teachers a chance to learn and share with one another. A principal can give a teacher team the autonomy to set aside times where they could meet to conduct pre-instructional meetings to discuss effective strategies and methods that are effective for the next standards to be taught. Skills learned from various sharing opportunities can lead to strengthened PLC meetings. The leadership behaviors of principals were examined by Shorter (2012) who found that teacher study groups and

professional development programs created by the principal helped support a collaborative culture for professional learning. Establishing multiple opportunities for teachers to learn and share from one another strengthens PLC meetings.

Teachers who work in an instructional climate where shared leadership is promoted will positively impact the effectiveness of a PLC. In a study conducted on a rural school district's professional development program, Gaspar (2010) penned that teacher leadership was an important factor in effectiveness of the PLC. Gaspar also identified democratic leadership where teachers had sharing power, authority, and decision making was essential for the PLC initiative to mature. Teachers benefit through collaboration and leadership opportunities that also lead to effective PLC meetings.

Principals support and promote PLC meetings by taking responsibility of ensuring their success by supporting teachers, offering leadership opportunities, and creating a structured PLC climate. Huggins, Scheurich, and Morgan (2011) wrote that the most important part of establishing and maintaining professional learning communities was responsibility taken from principals. This support came in the form of structure, pressure, and support as the teachers used professional learning communities to learn better practices. Akopoff (2010) also suggested that strong administrative support and teacher leadership opportunities provided the support needed for PLC meetings. Spanneut (2010) wrote when principals create parameters and conditions, PLC meetings have the opportunity to flourish because teachers focus on norms and values that pertinent to students. Shechter and Feldman (2013) wrote that principals play a vital role in the nurturing of PLC meetings within a special education school because this allows for the promotion of collective thinking that leads to problem solving when it comes to teaching and

student centered learning. PLC meetings are successful when they are principal supported which can lead to improved teaching instruction through collaboration.

### PLC Leaders

School leaders directly impact the instructional climate of the school (Eaker & Keating, 2012). Through their leadership, they can create a culture that is conducive to student learning through teacher collaboration (Eaker & Keating, 2012). Lieberman (2009) wrote that teachers and administrators can change from a previous state of individualism to one of innovation and inquiry which strengthens teacher effectiveness. As teachers begin to embrace the idea of a PLC, they want to feel supported in actions they are taking. As teachers begin to work with common assessments, team-teaching strategies, and data analysis, the need for positive support from administrators is needed. Teachers want to see school leaders support them through both speech and actions as they move to a PLC environment (Daniels, 2011). Once a support system is developed by school leaders for teachers, the teachers can then develop and provide a support system for students that supports a positive learning culture for all (Eaker & Keating, 2012). Having a professional environment that is supportive allows teachers to grow professionally which leads to a positive instructional climate for all stakeholders within the school.

School leaders can implement PLC meetings to positively influence the instructional climate of a school (Williamson, 2009). The implementation of PLC meetings by principals directly impact teacher concerns that include teacher isolation and morale (Williamson, 2009). School leaders strengthen the climate in a positive manner by creating a sense of ownership by all teachers by the inclusion of five elements: (1) Shared Norms and Values, (2) A Focus on

Student Learning, (3) Reflective Dialogue, (4) Public Practice, and (5) Collaboration (Williamson, 2009). Shared Norms and Values are developed by the teachers during the development stage and allow teachers to feel a sense of empowerment and ownership. The Focus on Student Learning element gives the teachers a clear mission and task. Reflective Dialogue enables teachers to have a professional conversation among themselves to develop student centered academic needs. Public Practice shows the community that everyone is working together to ensure all students succeed academically.

The support of PLC meetings by the principal is an important factor in the success of the PLC meetings to ensure that all students learn. The principal's role in schools has changed from a building manager to one of an instructional leader where the principal has new roles that include: learning process participant, being a learner, facilitator, and a participating leader (Eaker & Keating, 2012). The principal has several vital roles in establishing, participating, and supporting PLC meetings. These roles include creating an environment that allows both students and teachers to continually improve, dispersing leadership throughout to building to foster trust and strengthen teachers, and arranging the structure and attitude of the school to insure a high level of learning for all students (Dufour et al., 2008). Principals and other educational leaders should implement strategies that are specifically designed to foster PLC meetings that encourage professional collaboration and analysis of curriculum, instruction, and strategies that will directly impact and improve student achievement (Ikhwan, 2011). Once a principal support system is in place and principals and teachers are working together, more effective teaching will occur as teachers will begin to use proven strategies and methods learned in the PLCs that will lead to student success.

Principals can support the PLC meetings held within their schools by participating within principal-only PLC meetings. Principal only PLC meetings are composed of district principals that adhere to norms with a focus on best practices, results, continual improvement, shared commitments, and modeled behavior (Eaker & Keating, 2012). Within these school district administrator led PLC meetings, principals can develop their expectations and practice the behaviors they want seen within their schools' PLC meetings (Eaker & Keating, 2012). As principals learn and participate in their own PLC meetings and prepare to implement them within their own schools, district leaders must provide support for the principals as they begin implementation. DuFour et al. (2010) wrote that district leaders must build the capacity of the school leader's knowledge and skills that it takes to implement, lead, and participate in PLC meetings. Through principal only PLC meetings held at the district level by the school district administration, principals gather this knowledge and are then able to apply within their own schools. District administrators need to model expectations, procedures, and behaviors in district-led PLC meetings that are expected to occur at the individual school setting (Eaker & Keating, 2012). Horton and Martin (2013) outlined four themes district leaders identified for shift for all to participate in PLC meetings: leadership dynamics, responsibility for student learning, collaboration and spirit, and data based decision making. The PLC concept does not only occur at the school level.

The role of the school principal has changed over the past several years due to accountability from both state and federal governments. While the principal must still maintain the school's facilities, work with discipline issues, and ensure community involvement, the principal must serve as the key instructional leader in the school. The principal must understand every part of the curriculum program including and participating in PLC meeting, classroom

observations, teacher evaluations, student achievement data (Eaker & Keating, 2012). Through leading and participating in PLC meetings, the principal of the school makes the transition from building manager to key instructional leader.

In order to influence the organizational culture of a school, the principal must have knowledge about and be involved in the curriculum, instruction, and assessment program within the school (Duling, 2012). In reviewing the overall curriculum and instructional program of a school, the principal must take action to ensure that leadership is shared. Learning by both teachers and students is at the center of importance. Through PLC meetings, teachers learn from each other by discussing effective teaching strategies and methods that impact all students' learning. This is accomplished by developing individual student interventions to address academic concerns by monitoring the students' learning on a frequent basis (Eaker & Keating, 2012). Duling (2012) wrote that where learning-centered leadership and PLC meetings intersect, shared leaderships and collective learning appeared to have occurred. Collaborative learning by teachers then can impact student achievement in a positive manner. More and more teachers are linking principal support and professional collaboration to student achievement. In a study of 37 elementary classroom teachers, supportive conditions and leadership were linked to professional conversations that led to higher student achievement for students (Bennett, 2010). Within a supportive environment where principals and teachers collaborate, higher student achievement has been noted in many schools (Allen, 2013). The overall outcome for teachers who participated in effective PLC meetings where shared leadership has occurred has led to a higher quality of teaching that impacts student achievement and teacher effectiveness (Royer, 2012). Effective PLC meetings can lead to professional learning by teachers and increased student test results.

Cherkowski (2012) penned that principals can impact and improve instruction through the sharing of compassion. An example of compassion is a principal providing guidance and understanding for a teacher who may be struggling with understanding or teaching a particular standard instead of displaying frustration or annoyance to the teacher. The principal can work with the teacher team to develop student-friendly statements that are based on the standards they are struggling with (Eaker & Keating, 2012). The showing of compassion towards faculty and stakeholder member renewed the faculty's and stakeholders' commitment to teaching and instruction (Cherkowski, 2012). Hallinger, Lee, and Ko (2014) found that principals are critical for the development of professional learning communities to assist teachers in productive school change and reform. An example of developing PLC meetings is for the principal to provide practice situations.

Principals must learn to conduct and use action research as the concept was designed for continual school improvement. Batagiannis (2011) stated that people who want to be principals should learn how to use action research because it has the potential to impact learning identity, deep issues, transformational leadership, stakeholder reflections, and professional learning community growth. Concerning student achievement and student learning, DuFour and Mattos (2013) wrote that principals could achieve greater student success and higher achievement by establishing high-quality professional learning communities that focused not on teaching but on students by the evaluation of the evidence of student work. By reviewing and analyzing student work, teachers could focus on areas that would ultimately lead to higher standardized test scores.

Assistant principals within a school remained as resources within a school building who could be utilized to improve instruction within a professional learning community. Hilliard and Newsome (2013) suggested that the curriculum-based talents of assistant principals should be

employed within professional learning communities to improve instruction instead of standard responsibilities such as bus duties, cafeteria duties, and disciplinarian duties. Oleszewski, Shoho, and Barnett (2012) furthered that the assistant principal role is under-used, under-developed. The suggestion was also made that the assistant principal role does not have a precise job description. By providing a job description that outlines specific duties, the assistant principal position was able to strengthen the school.

Many schools have a position called Literacy Leader or other various instructional/curriculum coordinator/coaches. The Literacy Leader position was provided by the Race to the Top segment of the No Child Left Behind legislation with the purpose of confirming each child's reading proficiency on grade-level (Understanding the No Child Left Behind Act: Reading). The Literacy Leader can positively impact a school's instruction in many ways by conducting informal walkthrough evaluations, leading and participating in PLC meetings and serving as an instructional coach (Hanson 2011). Baker (2010) wrote that some principals believed that instructional coaches should be implemented within all schools as an instrument to improve instruction and serve as a liaison between principal and the faculty. Mraz et al. (2011) concluded that there were features of a relevant preschool literacy coach that included: content expert, promoter of reflective instruction, facilitator of professional development, and builder of schoolwide learning communities. Instructional coaches such as a Literacy Leader can impact the instructional climate of a school through PLC meetings in many positive ways.

### Student Learning

Tennessee uses the standardized TCAP test to assess the state's children in grades 3-8 on a yearly basis. "The TCAP Achievement test is a timed, multiple choice assessment that



measures skills in reading, language arts, mathematics, science and social studies” (Grades 3-8 TCAP Achievement Test, 2014). Discovery Education was “A ground-breaking cross-curricular resource designed to simultaneously engage students and provide educators with instructional support to implement the Common Core State Standards. Thousands of learning objects, tools, and assessment activities encouraged student content creation, critical thinking, and collaboration” (Discovery Education Streaming Plus, 2014). Teachers used Discovery Education to benchmark students on State Standards, as a means of formative assessment, and as a strategy of intervention to improve student learning.

Schools can improve student learning through multiple efforts that include instructional climate. High-poverty schools can become schools that achieve and have students with higher achievement on standardized tests by following a framework for high-poverty schools that consists of: (1) Values, beliefs, and norms that HP/HP schools exhibited in their leadership practices, school culture, and academic expectations; (2) Ways to increase the school’s influence on student, family, and community relationships; (3) Tips on optimizing time, resources, and personnel; and (4) Strategies for eliminating the mindsets, policies, and practices that were barriers to improving achievement in high-poverty schools. School climate can lead to improved standardized test scores through the inclusion of multiple initiatives (Parrett & Budge 2012).

Teacher collaboration that includes PLC meetings can positively impact student learning. Building teams of collaborating teachers can develop teaching strategies to improve student learning in math (Bay-Williams & Speer, 2012). Royer stated that PLCs provide “positive social change” that lead to “improved teaching practices that can result in academic growth for students” (Abstract). New teachers entering the profession developed strategies to enable, mentor, and maintain quality math teachers. Other ideas included creating leaders, coaching

elementary math specialists, and ways that constantly improved instruction and student achievement. Educational leaders use PLC meetings to improve student learning by providing educational practices to improve teacher effectiveness, providing effective ways to analyze and use data, testing and accountability, and providing strategies to support professional learning teams and instructional coaches (Toll, 2012). PLC meetings involve teachers focused on student learning, collaboration in a professional manner, and results of student learning (Garrett, 2010). By focusing on learning for teachers and students, PLC meetings become effective by providing proven strategies in math and other disciplines that allow for maximum student learning. Focusing on student learning is the essential key for PLCs (Dufour, 2004). Smith (2012) remarked that clearly focused PLC meetings assisted the Sanger Unified School District, which had one time been named one of the state's worst school districts in California's Central Valley, by raising academic achievement to where the school district was named third-highest rated California school district of 10,000 students or more as it pertains to closing the gap. Smith also wrote that this achievement was not attainable without collaboration efforts of administration, faculty, and staff who participated in the PLC meetings. Teacher collaboration within PLC meetings can lead to standardized test scores improving.

Progress monitoring and interventions developed through focused PLC meetings can lead to improved student learning. Jacobs (2010) stated there is a direct correlation between standardized test scores and the use of focused PLC meetings. Terry (2009) wrote that benchmarks should be used as a formative assessment to monitor students' achievement within PLC meetings. Terry (2009) also shared that benchmarks showed an increase in both reading and math scores. Brig (2014) remarked that two Colorado math teachers link their participation in PLC meetings to their achievement of the highest growth scores in grades third through tenth

in a 22,000 student district. PLC meetings improve test scores by focusing on students and developing interventions through formative assessments and progress monitoring.

Continual learning occurs throughout the standardized testing process. NCLB mandates for teachers to be trained in data collection, data analysis, and data management to improve post-standardized test instruction (Palucci, 2010). Continued instruction after standardized tests benefitted students as they were constantly being taught new material. Post-standardized test instruction also allowed teachers to develop interventions and enrichments based off of standardized test results to ensure that continual student learning occurs. There is a positive link between system wide PLC implementation and positive increases in student learning (Jacobs 2010). Strategies for post-standardized testing are developed and implemented through focused PLCs.

Significant improvement is not always linked to PLC meetings. Nadelson et al. (2012) found that in a study conducted among 145 K-12 educators who participated in PLC meetings, teachers were for the most part positive about their participation in PLC meetings; however, a relationship between student achievement in standardized test scores and PLC meetings was not found. While teachers have positive remarks to say about participating in PLC meetings, data does not always support increased standardized test scores. A study conducted by Miller (2013) yielded results that indicated that there was not a relationship between PLCs and student learning; however, RTI at the Tier 1 level showed an increase in student learning in math. Smith (2010) conducted a study of 145 teachers from 11 Title 1 schools where PLCs were held and found there was not a positive link between schools that met AYP and schools who did not meet AYP. Jones (2011) discovered in her studies of 29 middle schools with similar demographics in Tennessee found that schools with PLCs showed now significant differences but that schools

without PLCs had one significant result. Through Morris' (2011) study, it was found that benchmark and progress monitoring results did not show any type of increase in student scores although evidence suggested that teachers believed that PLCs positively influenced student achievement. Lesar's (2013) study of one K-12 school district in the southwestern United States found that there was no relation between schools that implemented PLCs and student performance on the AIMS math test; however, qualitative data suggested that teacher knowledge of student performance, instructional practices, collaborative support, and leadership opportunities could be linked to both an improvement in teaching strategies and student learning. While no significant links were found between PLCs and student learning, Linton (2014) found that teachers and administrators identified five positive factors of PLCs: (1) PLCs were being used in the building, (2) school leaders believed that their schools function as PLCs, (3) PLCs met at a regular rate, (4) there was a conscious effort by all to create a collaborative climate, and (5) PLCs were of high importance for school leaders.

PLC meetings can involve other stakeholders that include community members and other outside of the school resources. Jacobs, Koellner, and Funderburk (2012) shared a model that incorporated professional learning which impacted community and supported both instructional improvement and student learning by incorporating a problem solving cycle that included the use of PLC meetings to positively impact student learning standardized test scores. A solution for students who were not reading on grade level or were not proficient at reading is to form a university and school district partnership which would provide appropriate professional learning within PLC meetings (Taylor & Gordon, 2014). The overall goal of improved student learning in reading for the Florida's East Learning Community was achieved by creating common language, knowledge, and skills for teachers, literacy coaches, and assistant principals and by

identifying effective instructional practices and methods within PLC meetings. Involving all possible resources can lead to improved student learning.

Patrick (2013) conducted a study in which it was determined that PLCs partially supported the growth in math achievement for students. Brookhart (2009) established methods to insure that formative assessments are used to promote increased student learning through PLCs. These methods include:

(1) Defining formative assessment; (2) Sharing goals for student learning; (3) Listening to students and providing effective feedback; (4) Encourage student thinking and reflection; and (5) Using formative assessment in instructional planning. Easy-to-use charts, checklists, and templates support every step of getting started and keeping your PLC on track. (Abstract)

Buch and Spaulding (2011) conducted a study and found that students who benefitted from teachers participating in PLCs outdid students who were taught by teachers who did not participate in PLCs (Abstract). Stollar (2014) also conducted a study and found that “teachers do perceive the PLC model to impact teaching effectiveness and student learning through reflection and collaboration regarding student learning as well as continuous monitoring of student learning for continuous improvement” (Abstract). Byrd’s (2012) study certified support staff members were interviewed found that PLCs positively impact both student learning and professional development.

Principals can use PLCs to positively impact student learning. Hirsh and Shirley (2008) wrote that any type of PLC that a principal participates in whether is at the school level, district level, or community level could lead to an increase in student learning. School leaders use PLCs to impact both increase both teaching effectiveness and student learning (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008).

Important tools that teachers can use to increase student learning and achievement are common formative assessments and intervention models. Hill (2013) wrote that “Common

formative assessments (CFAs) help teachers align curriculum, assessment, and instruction while building the collective knowledge of the professional learning communities (PLCs).” Betts (2012) conducted a study to understand how elementary teachers formed and used common formative assessments. She stated:

The goal of professional learning communities (PLC) is for teachers to come together to discuss and examine student learning and ultimately to make instructional changes that can lead to improved student learning. The formative use of assessments that are commonly agreed upon by this community of teachers is believed to enhance their improvement efforts. (Abstract)

Betts’ study found that PLCs and the use of common formative assessments can have a positive influence on instruction and student achievement (Abstract).

By using PLCs to align all of these components, student learning was impacted in a positive manner. Teachers were able to use RTI along with collaboration within PLCs to promote student achievement (Diakakis, 2014). PLCs give teachers formal settings that allow them to focus on student success and achievement (Fisher et al., 2009). Easton (2015) listed five important habits of PLCs that increase student learning: (1) teacher accountability, (2) use individual teacher skill sets, (3) focus on relationships, (4) focus on learning, and (5) driven for purpose. Backman’s (2013) study of 26 elementary schools, 439 teachers, and 11,000 students found that student achievement was increased by effective PLCs. Sigurdardottir (2010) linked the level of PLCs within a school building to the level of school effectiveness in regards to test scores. Hord (2009) stated that the most effective teacher learning occurs within the PLC meetings and also stated that once effective teacher learning occurred then student achievement will improve. Brig (2014) found that two math teaches in Colorado attribute their students’ high achievement to PLC participation.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore teacher perceptions of Professional Learning Communities on the instructional climate of Flintville Elementary School in Lincoln County, TN. The study instrument was developed by the researcher and conducted by the current Curriculum Coordinator who was not employed at Flintville Elementary School during the 2013-2014 school year. Five constructs were synthesized from the previously mentioned instrument which investigated the impact of PLC meetings on instructional climate, standardized test scores, implementation, leadership, and faculty collaboration. Data collected from interviews with five teachers, the Lincoln County Department of Education's Evaluation Supervisor, and one parent were analyzed to answer the following research questions:

#### Research Questions

1. What are teacher perceptions regarding the PLC impact on the instructional climate at Flintville Elementary School?
2. What are teacher perceptions regarding PLC implementation and professional collaboration at Flintville Elementary School?
3. What are teacher perceptions regarding PLC implementation and teacher leadership at Flintville Elementary School?
4. What are teacher perceptions regarding PLC implementation and student learning at Flintville Elementary School?

## Qualitative Design

Qualitative research is a form of collecting data three different ways: interviews, observations, and documents (Patton, 2008). Qualitative research methods were intended to exhibit “actual, rather than intended, effects,” use “the evaluator’s perceptions and expertise to draw conclusions,” and are responsive “to diverse stakeholder perspectives” (Ritchie, 2008, p. 30). Patton wrote that “the single case study is likely to be made up of many smaller cases – the stories of specific individuals, families, organizational units, and other groups” (Patton, 2008, p. 297). Denzin (2011) explained:

Quantitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including fieldnotes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. (p.3)

A qualitative case study was used to gather data to investigate and gain insight to the effect of PLCs on the instructional climate at Flintville Elementary School during the 2013-2014 school year.

## Case Study

Case studies are qualitative research methods that search a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals; the cases involved are bounded by time and collected using multiple data gathering methods over a constant period of time (Creswell 2009). Patton (2008) wrote “by using a combination of observations, interviewing, and document analysis, the fieldworker is able to use different data sources to validate and crosscheck findings” (p. 306). Merriam (1998) defined case study as a “holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit” (p. xiii).



A case study can be used to collect data when the variations and interpretations of people are needed to study a phenomenon (Patton, 2008). It is because of the individual interpretations of those involved in PLCs during the 2013-2014 school year that the researcher chose to conduct a case study to understand and gain insight to the phenomenon that the PLCs had on the instructional climate at Flintville Elementary School.

### Framework for Study Design

Case studies of PLCs in schools have been studied in many ways. Kaminiski (2011) wrote that PLCs positively influenced the school studied in areas including: staff empowerment, collaboration, collegiality, and special education. Early (2012) wrote that in an environment where authentic learning takes place, PLCs established supporting conditions, sharing of individual practices, and collaboration on learning and application. Burns (2012) found that there was a positive relationship between PLC implementation levels and levels of reflective practices. By studying PLCs in case studies, their impact can be seen in a variety of manners.

This study focused on teacher perceptions of Professional Learning Communities on the instructional climate of Flintville Elementary School in Lincoln County, TN. This conceptual framework provided suitable balance between structure and flexibility. The questions were structured to elicit an understanding of impact on instructional climate, implementation, leadership development, and collaboration. This framework allowed for flexibility, open-ended answers, and the focusing to be on participants' experience (King & Horrocks, 2010). Perceptions of those interviewed allowed for the study to occur.

## The Social Milieu

The social milieu of a school's professional learning communities involves parents, teachers, and district administrators. The school's milieu can impact the instructional climate of a school in a positive way through participation in PLC meetings. Zaykowski and Gunter (2012) wrote that the school climate theory proposes that a school's milieu, as part of the school's social system, affects several student outcomes that include academic achievement and attendance. A school's social milieu that includes parents, teachers, and district leaders can lead to a positive instructional climate through PLC involvement.

Parents. Parental support and involvement in professional learning communities can impact student learning and positive instructional climate change. Unal and Unal (2014) wrote that knowledge, skills, and practices of parents can be effective in classrooms over an extended period of time. Rapp and Duncan (2012) wrote that connecting parents and families to student learning lead to greater student gains. Alexander (2012) argued that bridging the gaps between teachers and parents by using volunteering activities, decision-making assistance, and collaborative measures leads to higher rates in attendance and academics with a lower rate in discipline issues. Place (2013) established methods including conferences between parents and teachers, weekly newsletters that will lead to more parental involvement that would then lead to a higher rate of student success. Involving parents in the classroom setting positively impacts a school's instructional climate and increases students' achievement rates.

Teachers. Teachers, as part of a school's social milieu, work with one another and other stakeholders to increase student achievement through PLC meetings. Through PLC meetings, teachers have the most impact on the instructional climate of a school. Peters (2013) wrote that teacher-involved PLC meetings were labeled as vital reasons that led to higher rates of student

achievement, school success, and school change. Seglum (2009) wrote that PLC meetings can strengthen teachers as they learn from one another and professional learning opportunities which then positively impacts student achievement. Teachers are an important factor in impacting the instructional climate of a school through participation in PLC meetings.

District Administration. District administrators impact the instructional climate of a school through support of PLC meetings. Thessin and Starr (2011) wrote that district administrators can support PLC meetings through four methods: developing and leading PLC meetings, teaching teachers how to collaborate with one another, displaying how PLC meetings are part of the district's improvement plan, and supporting each school's unique needs. Honig and Rainey (2014) wrote that district leaders can support schools and PLC meetings in two capacities: coming to work with a teaching attitude instead of a managerial orientation attitude and establishing conditions that are conducive to effective PLC meetings. District administration impact the instructional climate of school by supporting PLC meetings in a variety of methods that include attitude and supporting and establishing PLC meetings.

#### Statement of Researcher Perspective

I have served as principal of Flintville Elementary School for six years where I have observed each teacher's individual methods of instruction and assessing their children. Upon entering the building, I witnessed grades kindergarten through third grade having grade level meetings once a week that followed the guidelines of the Reading First grant that was awarded during the 2002-2003 school year. However, grade level meetings were not occurring in grades four through eight.

Grade level meetings for kindergarten through third grade were led and conducted by the Literacy Leader position that was created by the Reading First grant. During meeting observations, I saw the Literacy Leader discuss with the teachers progress monitoring, teaching methods and strategies, center activities, and interventions to improve student learning and outcomes.

As principal for the past six years, I have witnessed and experienced the need for teacher collaboration. However, my observations during my first months of the K-3 grade level meetings, that were Literacy Leader lead, led me to the conclusion that the teachers were not participating on the level that was conducive to a true collaboration environment.

The foundation established by the Reading First grant and conversations with the district administration have led to the implementation of principal-led PLCs at Flintville Elementary School. The idea of PLC meetings implemented within individual schools and school systems to improve student achievement and teacher effectiveness for the present and future warrants further study. Researchers have provided documentation into the effectiveness and establishment of PLC meetings that are shown in the literature review of this study.

My vision of Flintville Elementary School had been one where teachers openly discussed student learning with the idea of working together in a collaborative manner that would improve the overall success of the school. I was interested in learning the perceptions of the teachers involved in the PLC meetings to see how the PLC meetings impacted the instructional climate of Flintville Elementary School. The research conducted provided discernments through interviews and surveys from participating teachers within Flintville Elementary school. I will share the findings with other school leaders who wish to implement PLC meetings within their buildings to improve student achievement, teacher effectiveness, and overall school success. It is vital to

understand methods of PLC implementation and formal formatting of PLC meetings that can be crucial to the success of a PLC. My knowledge and experience of effective leadership practices is not a weakness but a valued asset to the methodology and findings of this study. I made every effort not to impact the research study.

### Setting and Participants for the Research

The research took place in the natural setting of Flintville Elementary School where interviews were conducted. Interviews were used to let the participants share their personal interpretations and reflections on the experience (Seidman, 2013). The Curriculum Coordinator at another elementary school, who was not employed at Flintville Elementary school during the 2013-2014 school year, conducted the interviews. The research participants included five teachers who were employed at Flintville Elementary School during the 2013-2014 school year, the district's evaluation supervisor, and one parent of children who attended Flintville Elementary School during the 2013-2014 school year. Participants were assigned pseudonyms to insure their anonymity. The physical setting of the research study was 37 Flintville School Road, Tennessee. McMillian and Schumacher (2010) wrote that to ensure privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity, the participants involved in the study should not have their names provided in written form.

### Population

The population identified for this research study was five teachers chosen from the 36 faculty members of Flintville Elementary School who were employed by the Lincoln County

Board of Education (LCDOE) and assigned to Flintville Elementary School during the 2013-2014 school year, the district's evaluation supervisor, and a parent of children who attended Flintville Elementary School during the 2013-2015 school year. There were no attempts by the researcher to generalize the findings of the participants to all faculty members of Flintville Elementary School. Instead, the researcher is seeking the perceptions of five teachers, the district's evaluation supervisor who participated in the PLC meetings, and a parent to identify the impact PLC meetings had on the instructional climate at Flintville Elementary School.

### Sampling

Sampling is an important element of qualitative research and is required for this study. Emmel (2013) wrote that sampling is used to define a population that can be represented and to guarantee that from this predetermined population, which is measurable, can the opportunity to be involved. Mertens (2015) identified sample as "the group that you have chosen from your population from which to collect data" (p. 4).

This research study incorporated a purposeful sampling strategy. Patton (2008) wrote that "the purpose of purposeful sampling is to select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study" (p. 46). The five teachers who participated because they were teachers at Flintville Elementary School before the PLCs began in 2013-2014. They were able to provide a perspective from varying viewpoints: before, during, and after the PLC implementation.

## Perceptual Research

Perceptions of teachers and others involved in a school climate are valuable in understanding what the instructional climate is. Moore (2010) conducted a study of teacher perceptions of school leadership and climate in two rural elementary schools that focused on relationships between school leaders and PLC meetings and school climate and PLC meetings. Moore wrote that the creation of PLC meetings were able to provide solutions for educators as they faced various challenges that schools faced. Williams (2012) wrote that the Critical Friends Groups PLC had a significant impact on the perceptions of teachers as it relates to the school as a PLC, professional growth and development, and instructional practices. Teachers' views are important in understanding the instructional climate of a school.

Teacher perceptions of professional growth and learning impact the instructional climate of the school. Lowrie (2014) outlined a framework where large-scale professional learning led to the provisions for rich and empowering professional learning for classroom teachers and educational leaders. Enthoven and de Bruijn (2010) wrote that practitioner research in educational practice and educational research was promising as it served to improve teacher professional development. Izadinia (2014) discussed that teachers entering the profession often times developed a negative image of themselves as professionals but did strengthen their professional self-views through academic induction which contained features such as learning communities which cultivated supportive and professional relationships that encouraged self-inquiry and involved teachers in reflective activities. Garner (2011) conducted a study among math teachers and wrote that educators who participated in the study had a positive perception in regards to teacher collaboration/communication, shared leadership, and the continual growth

offered in professional development. Teachers' growth and effectiveness occurs in PLC meetings as they learn from one another.

Professional activities allow for teachers to work together and learn from one another. Fulton and Britton (2011) penned that STEM teaching became more effective when PLC meetings were implemented and made available for teachers because teachers were able to develop their content knowledge and pedagogical skills which led them to become more satisfied with their careers as educators. McIntosh (2008) wrote that PLC meetings have impacted standardized test scores by teachers combining core subjects such as English and Math with other disciplines such as theatre, music, art, and science. Ermeling and Gallimore (2013) penned that making school learning places for teachers as well as students was something schools and districts have been interested in, and in forty districts, the professional communities the authors visited fell into two categories: compliance-driven and workshop driven. Butler and Schnellert (2012) presented evidence of a case study of a complex inquiry community where teachers collaborated to assess students through "learning by reading". The study focused on three questions: "What did inquiry look like within this community?", "How was collaboration implicated in teachers' inquiry?", and "How was engagement in inquiry related to meaningful shifts in teachers' practice and learning?" Positive links between "teacher inquiry, collaboration, and educational change" were discovered within study. Teachers learn from one another and apply skills to ensure learning for all stakeholders.

Teacher perceptions on trust is an important part of the instructional climate. Watson (2014) wrote that through effective PLC meetings that exhibited certain characteristics and attributes teachers were engaged in professional learning and development that led to enhanced pupil learning. As a facilitator of PLC meetings, Edwards (2012) suggested establish, converge,



and diverge as three key determinants to the success of PLC meetings. Patton, Parker, and Pratt (2013) conducted a study to examine the pedagogy of physical education professional development and stated that three strategies were evident that included: “learning as doing: providing structure without dictating”, “learning as trying: creating and testing new ideas”, and “learning as sharing: public presentation of work”. In a study centered on relational trust between teachers and administrators where 12 principals were the participants, Cranston (2011) wrote that the relationship between teachers and separately between principals and teachers led to school improvement but only when relational trust is focused on.

Teacher perceptions on PLC meetings as school reform are an important element of the instructional climate. Vail (2011) conducted a study on science teachers who participated in physical science professional development activities in four different Central California high schools as a method to improve teaching methods, strategies, and practice. Vail (2011) wrote through professional learning the six respondents reported that they acted as change agents in their own “practice, schools and learning communities.” In a study of the historical context and development of PLCs, Archer (2012) wrote that PLC meetings have been a new form of school reform as it relates to NCLB. Archer also wrote that PLC meetings have often times been shortly dismissed and all together abandoned which left little effectiveness proof; the suggestion was made that analyzing educators reaction to PLC meetings and other forms of school reform could lead to the understanding of the PLC meetings movement and fate as well as other school reform programs and initiatives. PLC meetings as an element of school reform are evident in teacher-led professional activities and in the understanding of school reform.

Teacher perceptions on PLC implementation can lead to the success or lack of success of the PLCs. Boone (2010) conducted a study of one urban middle school that implemented PLC

meetings during the 2007-2008 school year and noted that the PLCs were not implemented according the literature recommendation. This led to the discovery of a high level of teacher dissatisfaction among teachers who participated in the studied middle school's PLC meetings. Along with incorrect implementation, hostile work environment and teacher isolation may have led to the high level of teacher dissatisfaction of PLC meetings. Unsuccessful PLC implementation can lead to negative perceptions of the instructional climate of a school.

Teacher perceptions on PLC meetings can occur in different educational settings. In a study of PLC implementation between elementary and secondary schools, Curry (2010) wrote that there were different perceptions of implementation of PLC meetings and self-efficacy by the 200 elementary and 200 secondary teachers who were involved in the study. According to Curry (2010), the different perceptions were explained by the structure differences between elementary and secondary schools, but when the PLC meetings operated effectively, these differences were then lowered. Robertson (2011) conducted a study on a rural school district in North Carolina where participants included educators from 26 school within the district and stated that results showed that relationships between PLC meetings and collective teacher efficacy and relationships between particular phases of development (initiation, implementation, and initialization) demonstrated positive and significant relationships, particularly at the elementary level. Different educational settings can lead to different perceptions on PLC meetings, but the level of effectiveness can determine the amount of differences.

Perceptions of all stakeholders are important in understanding the impact PLC meetings have on the instructional climate of a school. In a case study of certified support staff in a Georgia middle school, Byrd (2012) wrote that the findings support PLC meetings as they seem to impact the overall instructional climate through teamwork, student achievement, and

professional development. The support staff study also demonstrated the perception that PLC meetings nurtured team building and collegiality. Effective PLC meetings lead to positive perceptions of the instructional climate of a school.

### Credibility

Credibility of a research project is an essential element for the research process. The objective of a research study is to provide outcomes that are deemed to be credible (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). Credibility was defined by the *The American Heritage Dictionary* (1992) as “the quality, capability, or power to elicit belief” (p. 438). McMillian and Schumacher (2010) wrote that credibility relates to the reality level of the research as it pertains to the level of accurateness, trustworthiness, and reasonability of the results that stem from the research. Credibility of a research study deal with issues and concerns such as objectivity, research bias, reasonability of conclusions, methodology appropriateness, external funds support, and extent of research the investigator has developed (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). When conducting research, the processes involved in conducting the research are a primary concern (Stringer, 2007). During the research process, the investigator addresses potential arguments that add credibility to the subject researched and also addresses potential criticisms the results of the study may bring (Patton, 2008). Patton (2008) wrote that credibility issues are dealt with by the publishing of visual data. Credibility is an important element to the research process that deals with several issues and can be supported through the publication of visual data.

Validity is an equally important component of the research process. The validity of the research questions were confirmed by the dissertation committee and the chair of the committee. The interview protocol (Appendix A) was used identically in each interview to preserve the

interview data's reliability. The reliability of the interview transcripts was confirmed by each educator who was interviewed which safeguarded the accuracy of the data collected.

The Curriculum Coordinator employed at another elementary school conducted the research. The Curriculum Coordinator used an Apple iPad to document interviews conducted with each research participant. The recordings offer validity to the study and other researchers methods used for the study.

### Triangulation

Credibility is heightened when numerous information sources are used when conducting a research project (Stringer, 2007). Triangulation is an effective way of conducting research as it allows one research method's strengths to offset the weaknesses of another used method. A study on a school's instructional climate is an example of a triangulation centered research study. Triangulation allows the researcher to corroborate, confirm, and validate the findings of the research design (McMillian & Shumacher, 2010). Patton (2008) wrote that triangulation of data resources adds to the levels of credibility and accuracy of the research design. In qualitative research, triangulation of resources can include interviews, group meetings, observations, interactions, and a review of literature and documents. Researchers use triangulation as a method of comparing different sources, scenarios, and approaches to identify possible similarities in a reoccurring theme or pattern (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010).

Triangulation occurred in this research study by incorporating the responses of three participant groups in the PLCs at Flintville Elementary School. These participant groups included teachers, a district evaluation supervisor, and parent. The teachers and district evaluation supervisor participated in the PLCs during the 2013-2014 school year. A parent of

children who attended the school during the 2013-2014 school year was included to identify the impact of PLCs on the instructional climate, from the perspective of a community member.

### Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations must be observed when conducting qualitative research. The innate landscape of qualitative research involves the researcher immersing himself/herself into the individual(s) or group(s) studied as to understand the experiences and cultural significance of the situations and or actions (Patton, 2008). Patton (2008) wrote that it is the qualitative researcher's responsibility to remain detached and bias free during the process of the study. Patton (2008) wrote that by remaining detached and bias free, the qualitative researcher can understand the very essence of the individual(s) and or group(s) experience. However, it is also the qualitative researcher's role to report each finding from an unbiased and honest perspective (Patton, 2008). It is important to note that while remaining unbiased, an in-depth immersion into the study is vital, as without it, the significance and analysis of the study may be jeopardized (Patton, 2008).

When conducting a qualitative study, the researcher must understand that the interview process may be placing the interviewee(s) in an uncomfortable situation. It is vital that the researcher convey at all times that the person being interviewed has the right to privacy and the results of the interview will remain anonymous at all times (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010, p. 338-339). By doing this, the researcher is able to establish and maintain trust with the person(s) being interviewed. Patton (2008) wrote:

While the observer must learn how to behave in the new setting the people in that setting are deciding how to behave toward the observer. Mutual trust, respect, and cooperation

are dependent on the emergence of an exchange relationship, or reciprocity (Jorgensen 1989:71; Galluci and Pergugini 2000) ...(p. 312)

When conducting fieldwork, a personal journal is an important tool for the qualitative researcher. By recording ethical concerns or considerations, the qualitative researcher can make choices that are justified in the data collection and analysis areas of the research (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). In these journals, researchers can write and depict the everyday actions and experiences of the people being researched (Stringer, 2007). Patton (2008) established that through field notes researchers can provide a description of what was observed and their own feelings and reactions to the observations (Patton, 2008).

The researcher contacted each participant through email to determine willingness to participate in the research study. Each participant responded that they wanted to participate in the study. The researcher was the direct supervisor of the study and did not serve as the interviewer. A surrogate interviewer was used to avoid bias. For this research design, the Curriculum Coordinator from another elementary school used an Apple IPAD to record the interview sessions with all the participants. I trained the interviewer on how to ask the questions and how to use secondary questions to build off of the answers the participants gave. She did not video tape them. She used the voice recording APP called QuickVoice Recorder for the interview sessions.

The interviews were conducted in the Curriculum Coordinator's office after school hours to provide for confidentiality and anonymity. Each participant was given a coded name to also ensure confidentiality and anonymity. McMillian and Schumacher (2010) wrote that it is the sole responsibility of the researcher to protect those who participate in a study from others in the setting and from the general population as whole.

## Data Collection

In order to conduct the research involved for this study, permission was granted by the IRB (Institutional Review Board) of East Tennessee State University. The IRB approval documentation is documented as Appendix D. Each participant involved in the study was made aware of the IRB approval and documentation through verbal and written methods including pre-interview and email conversations. The expert review panel authorized the researcher agreement after it was made away to each member through email.

The data collection method used for this research study involved the interview method. Interviews are an important way in conducting research on things that cannot be observed through direct methods (Patton, 2008). Kvale (1996) defined the research interview as: “An interview whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the describe phenomena” (p. 5-6). Weiss (1994) wrote that through qualitative interviewing, participants are able to display their extent of the studied content, and researchers and then use the answers to make judgments on the participants’ levels of knowledge, intellect, reasoning, inspirations, and personalities. The interview method allowed the researcher to gain insight to how the participants viewed the impact that PLCs had on the instructional climate at Flintville Elementary School.

The interview method allowed the researcher to understand the impact level the participants viewed the PLCs as having on the instructional climate of the school. The qualitative researcher uses interviewing methods to understand the experiences of people and how these people view these experiences (Seidman, 2013). Rubin and Rubin (2012) wrote that the qualitative researcher who uses the interviewing method is about to reconstruct and create experiences that the researcher never experienced and gain a picture of how complicated

processes may have occurred. Experiences and understanding of the study's participants were examined through the interview method.

### Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis has many methods and strategies (Miles et al., 2014).

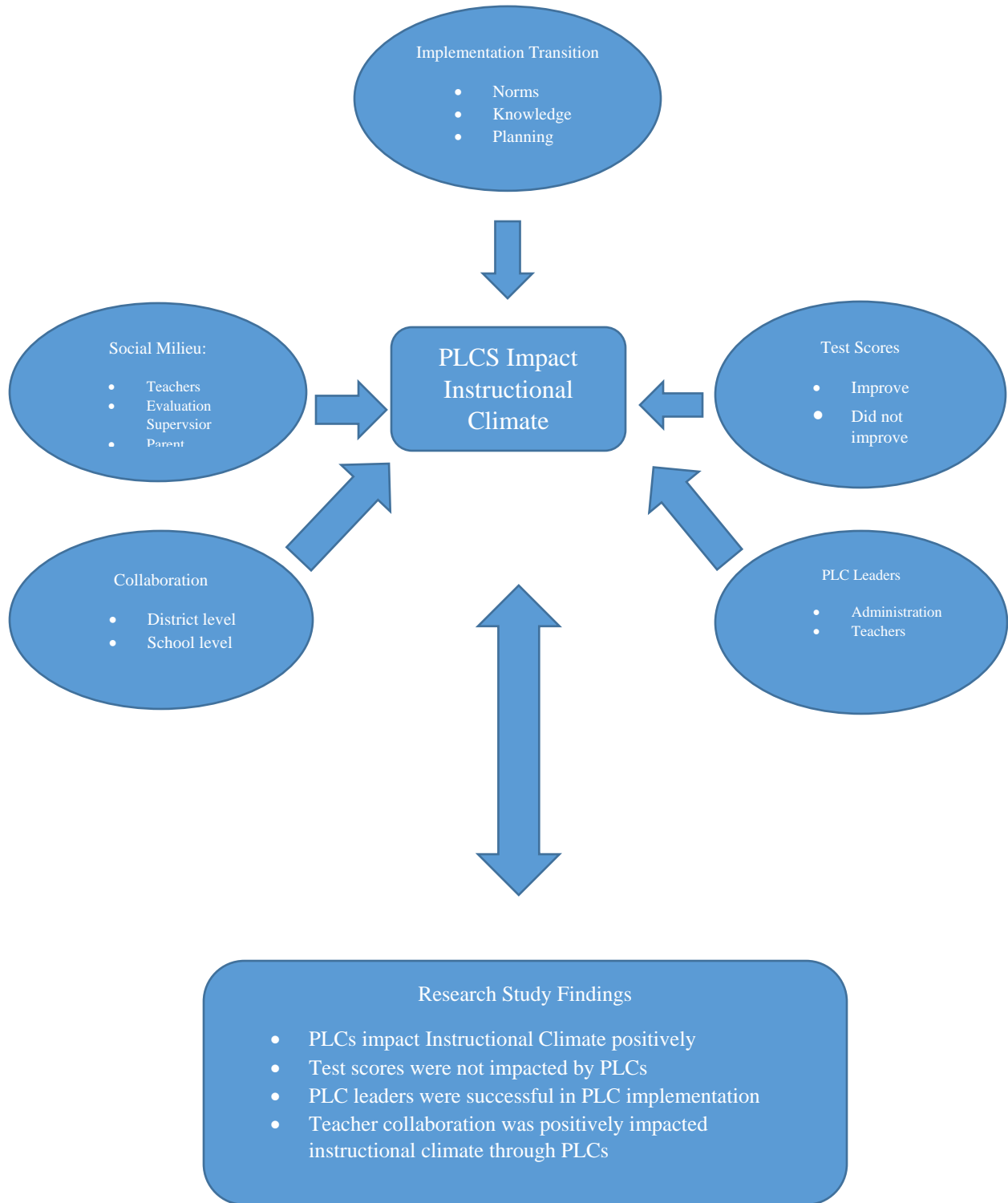
According to Edmonds and Kennedy (2013), the quantities of possible settings, circumstances, and situations for researchers to conduct studies are immeasurable. Qualitative data analysis has many strengths that include natural occurrences and settings, proximity groundedness, richness, and holism (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Because of the multiple possibilities in which qualitative research can occur, the strengths of qualitative data analysis are evident.

Data analysis for this study was conducted by the researcher after the interview sessions between the Curriculum Coordinator and participants. Each answer was recorded and documented appropriately. Bazeley (2013) wrote that coding has become a type of methodology for qualitative research. Saldaña (2012) identified a code as:

“a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data. The data can consist of interview transcripts, participant observation field notes, journals, documents, drawings, artifact, photographs, video, Internet sites, e-mail correspondence, literature, and so on.” (p.3)

The interview responses were then coded to develop themes. Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) wrote that coding allows the researcher to identify key phrases or words that each participant mentioned or spoke of independently during the data collection portion of the researcher project.





**Figure 3.1** *Graphic Organizer of the Research Study Framework*

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA ANALYSIS

#### Introduction

The data for this qualitative study were collected through comprehensive interviews with teachers, a parent, and an evaluation supervisor associated with Flintville Elementary School. This case study was based on perceptions of PLCs on the instructional climate at Flintville Elementary School during the 2013-2014 school year.

Five teachers who were employed at Flintville School before, during, and after implementation of PLCs were interviewed. The evaluation supervisor who worked directly with all teachers and participated in the PLCs was also interviewed. To triangulate the study, a parent who had students in Flintville Elementary School before, during, and after PLCs were implemented was also interviewed.

Ethical issues for this study were examined and measured judiciously. Additionally, the East Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board granted approval to conduct human subject research (See Appendix D). The seven participants were sent a letter of participation identifying the researcher and the content of the study (See Appendix A). Participants were also sent a letter of consent to sign if they chose to be a part of the study (See Appendix C). The participants were allowed to choose a time after school hours to be interviewed. The interview responses were recorded on an Apple iPad. The answers to the questions were then organized and assessed to allow for commonalities to be extracted. Each interview was conducted in a private room after school hours in the Curriculum & Instruction Room at Flintville School with each interview lasting approximately 1 hour.

### Participant Information

Each participant was selected based off of a certain criteria. Participating teachers were chosen because of their service before, during, and after PLC implementation. The evaluation supervisor was chosen because she participated in PLCs in all grade levels. The parent was chosen because she was highly involved in Flintville Elementary School and her children were enrolled at Flintville Elementary School before, during, and after PLC involvement.

Participant 1 chose Dana as an alias. Dana has taught at other schools during her career. Dana has earned a master's degree and has over ten years of teaching experience. Dana taught in a variety of grade levels during her career before the implementation of PLCs at Flintville School. The researcher has known Dana for many years, which resulted in an easy interview process.

Participant 2 chose Leslie as an alias. Leslie has taught in other school districts during her career. Leslie has a master's degree and has been teaching over ten years. Leslie has had a variety of teaching assignments while at Flintville Elementary School. The researcher did not know Leslie until his employment at Flintville Elementary School began in January 2011.

Participant 3 chose Stephanie as an alias. Stephanie has children who have attended Flintville Elementary School for all of their school years. Stephanie has been very active at Flintville School as a volunteer and PTO member. The researcher has known Stephanie for approximately 20 years, which allowed for an easy interview process.

Participant 4 chose Barbara as an alias. Barbara has taught at Flintville Elementary School for her entire career. She has taught the same grade level each year during her tenure at

Flintville Elementary School. She has a master's degree. The researcher did not know Barbara until his employment at Flintville Elementary School in January 2011.

Participant 5 chose Abigail as an alias. Abigail has a master's degree. Abigail has taught at several schools during her career. She has had several grade placements and subject assignments during her tenure at Flintville Elementary School. The researcher has known Abigail for approximately 25 years, which allowed for an easy interview process.

Participant 6 chose Andrea as an alias. Andrea has a master's degree. She has taught at Flintville Elementary School for her entire career. She has had several teaching assignments including subject matter and grade level during her tenure at Flintville Elementary School. The researcher went to school with Andrea during elementary, middle school, and high school. This relationship allowed for an easy interview process.

Participant 7 chose Regina as an alias. Regina has an educational specialist degree. She has been in education for almost thirty years. She has taught at the high school level and served as an assistant principal at the elementary level. She is currently the Evaluation Supervisor for the Lincoln County Department of Education. The researcher has known Regina for 25 years. This relationship allowed for easy interview process.

### Research Question 1

What are teacher perceptions regarding the PLC impact on instructional climate at Flintville Elementary School?

Interview Question 1-1: Discuss your perception of how PLCs have had an impact on the instructional climate at FES.

Regarding PLCs impact on the instructional climate at Flintville Elementary School, all participants made statements that said the PLCs had brought them closer together as a faculty.

Andrea said the PLCs were positive and led to the faculty being goal-oriented.

The PLCs have made us more goal-oriented. We talk about data and that drives our instruction. Our data talks have improved our student's confidence, and I think the PLCs have improved the children's work ethic because they come to us, and it's made it more positive.

Dana discussed how the middle school portion of the school, where she is assigned, works "together as a family for the students." She stated that "we know our kids better because we can have the same talks to them about their progress monitoring that we have in our PLCs."

Collaboration was an important element that all participants talked about during the interviews. Katz (2013) stated that "the sense of isolation was reduced through participation in the PLC" (abstract). Abigail said that she never really knew how other teachers in other grade levels "taught their students", but through the PLC process, she "now uses strategies that other teachers are using". Abigail also believes that this type of collaboration through PLCs is helping strengthen the student learning because she has students tell her "that's the way we did last year in Mrs. .... Class." Abigail furthered this statement by saying "teachers are using common strategies to teach the kids." Abigail also stated that "teach are collaborating more than ever. We share ideas with each other more than ever."

Barbara said that now her grade level was "more of a collaborative unit." Leslie discussed both vertical and horizontal PLCs in her interview.

It gives us good ideas, for example, if we have a vertical PLC with 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, we can see some areas we need to work on in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade to help the students. It's the same way with 1<sup>st</sup> grade. We can let them know some things that can help us out.

Stephanie noted that several times, she would hear teachers coming down the hall discussing teaching methods with another that they would try the following week in their classrooms. Regina noted that the conversations in the PLCs were “very powerful” as she observed teachers beginning to converse “on student learning” and “effective teaching.”

The teachers were discussing methods and strategies that completely align to the evaluation rubric that I use to evaluate them. They were also discussing ways that would allow students to discuss answers not only with the teacher but with each other. Teachers openly discussed multiple ways to group the children and differentiate their instruction. It was exciting to see how the teachers began to talk and work together.

Interview Question 1-2: Describe the ways that teachers engage professionally at FES.

Answers to this question were built off of answers from Interview Question 1.

Participants discussed the weekly formal PLCs they participated in. Barbara and Leslie discussed meeting once a week during the planning periods. Barbara said “We meet once a week during our planning period on Tuesday.” Leslie stated “While I really don’t want to give up a planning period, it does help a lot to meet and discuss what we are doing and where the students are at when we progress monitor.”

Andrea shared how teachers engage professionally with the students and not just the teachers.

The data talks we have with the students are very important because they [the students] are not all advanced and proficient, and those children who are basic or below basic feel like they don’t belong. However, when you start showing them their growth, and they can see that they are growing and working towards being advanced, they see they are learning and getting it.

Andrea discussed how the teachers shared effective strategies that can be used in multiple classroom settings.

We talk all the time, and we share everything. We talk about what we are doing in the classroom. I am definitely not an ELA person, but when I get a chance to incorporate writing into my classroom now to support the ELA teachers, I do it. And they [the other teachers] tell me how they bring math into their science and ELA classrooms. That’s

how we engage with each other. We work together and share ideas. We do not try to out-do one another.

Abigail discussed teacher engagement with one another.

Teachers are engaging professionally more than ever now that use PLCs. We are able to engage professionally through our weekly PLCs, during planning periods, before and after school, and through our monthly PDs [professional development activities].

Participants also discussed informal PLCs that occurred during school hours. Leslie commented that “a lot of times we discuss our classrooms at lunch.” Barbara discussed that progress monitoring and different ways to help students were discussed during lunch times because her grade level teachers also shared the same lunchtime. Dana also commented on lunchtime as an informal PLC time.

We all eat lunch together. Most of the time we talk about our kids and how we can help them grow and learn. Lately, we talk about how we can help our students to write better. Since our team isn't grade level or subject matter specific, I feel that these lunchtime discussions help just as much because we can figure out ways to get everyone to teach writing.

Stephanie shared the following which relates to how the teachers engage with one another on a professional level:

While I don't get to see the PLCs when they meet in the office, I do get to see what all the teachers are doing when I come to volunteer. And, I also get to eat lunch with them on the days when I volunteer. I am amazed to see how the teachers are almost always talking about their students and classrooms.

Regina commented on teacher engagement.

I got to sit on many PLCs during the school year. It was exciting to watch the teachers bounce ideas off each other and grow and learn from each other. One of the things that I found particularly interesting was what some of the teachers were referring to as “tasks”. These tasks were cross-curricular activities that were designed as scavenger hunts. I thought that was a great way to get kids excited about learning, and I don't think that type

of student excitement would have happened in the teachers if the teachers were not talking in a professional manner.

### Research Question 2

What are teacher perceptions regarding PLC implementation and professional collaboration? Four interview questions were used to investigate and gain additional perception of research question 2.

#### Interview Question 2-1: How has the time set aside for PLCs impacted effective teaching at FES?

Regina stated that the PLC time set aside “allowed for teachers to collaborate at a higher level than what she had seen” prior to PLC implementation. She stated that teachers knew what was expected because they had a “set time, sign-in sheet, and agenda to go by.”

Andrea shared the following:

It’s made everyone step their game up. I think when you hear everyone talk, and if you are the one who didn’t want to, it makes you change. Everyone started sharing ideas. I think it benefits everyone including the kids and the teachers. In our PLCs, we heard about things that the elementary wing was doing, and we got to try those things. We got to learn more about differentiated instruction. Now, people are working harder, and it’s brought us, elementary and middle school, closer.

Abigail responded:

I was very nervous at first when we began having the PLCs. First, I didn’t want to give up a planning period. I was also nervous about how it would all work and what they would look like. Once we got started and I got to see how they work, it changed how I viewed everyone. I got to learn from the others and share what I was doing in my classroom. I believe teachers have and continue to change their teaching styles and habits because of the PLCs. We are learning from each other now more than ever and trying different things that are being discussed in the PLCs.

Barbara stated that there were several differences between the Reading First grade level meetings and the PLCs.



There were many differences between the two meetings. When we were under Reading First, we mostly listened to [Literacy Leader] and were told what to do. We did talk about DIBLES and tracking the students, but it wasn't at the level we are doing now. We didn't get to talk about new and different ways to teach the students either. There were certain strategies that we were told to use by [Literacy Leader] and we couldn't try anything else. Because of the PLCs, we get to talk about the ways we are teaching the kids, and we have the freedom to try new things. I think it's great now because I feel like we are treated as professionals.

Leslie said there were big differences in the PLCs and grade level meetings during pre-PLC years.

When we had grade level meetings that were led by [Literacy Leader], she did most of the talking. We just sat there, took notes, and didn't add much to the meeting. With the PLCs, we get to do the talking. There is an agenda and we follow it, but we get to discuss what we are doing and how it either needs to be fixed or how we need to keep doing what we are doing.

Barbara stated that with the PLCs, her opinion now mattered.

We know that when we go into our weekly PLC, what we say to one another is valued and that we are appreciated. While I dreaded the weekly grade level meetings, I now look forward to PLCs, even though I lose a planning period, because we get talk about things that will make me a better teacher.

Dana talked about how the time changes have benefitted and not benefitted her.

When we started the PLCs in the middle school, we first started having subject specific PLCs. Since there were only two middle school ELA teachers, we didn't see that it was beneficial, so we decided to have grade level PLCs. That was better since we actually added another teacher to our team. But what we did that might be different from the other grades was that we all got together as a middle school and decided to ask and see if we could start meeting as one big team. Once we started doing that, it changed everything for the better. We had to decide to meet in the afternoons after school to accommodate everyone's schedule, but it helped because our team got stronger, our teaching got better, and more importantly our students learned more. Our progress monitoring and test scores showed that.

Stephanie stated that she "never knew what the PLC set times were", but she did know that they were occurring because she saw "teachers get their stuff together to go to the office to

have the PLCS.” When Stephanie was asked what stuff she saw the teachers get together, Stephanie responded “The teachers got their data sheets and materials.”

Interview Question 2-2: How has the use of time set aside for PLCs impacted the monitoring of student progress at FES?

Andrea stated that through the PLCs they were able to understand and know more students.

We know more about students academically and personally. We are aware of any discipline problems. Basically, we know and understand the kids better. Because of that I feel that we can teach them better. We use our data to have talks with the kids. We use common assessments and progress monitoring tools. The most challenging thing that we found, or at least what I found was finding the time to create a common assessment. But once we started working on those together, it was easier.

Dana discussed how she had never had a professional talk before with a student, but now with the PLCs and data talks that the teachers were having, she could then go back to her classroom and have the same conversations with the students.

Discussing with a kid where they were at when we progressed monitored was something I had never done before or even considered. But once we started having student-centered PLCs that involved each child having a data notebook, I learned that we could talk about students and where they were scoring on our progress monitoring tools. The students were able to see for themselves where they were scoring and where they were expected to score, and I found that to be very powerful.

Abigail stated that “it all has to do with the data talks we have with the kids.” Abigail said that students are now able to understand the purpose of the progress monitoring tools because they “not only get to see their results, but we get to talk to them [the students] about them [the results] and where we expect them to be.” Abigail noted that “data tracking has made a huge impact on student learning and gains.”

Leslie stated that the PLCs have pushed her “to be organized and focused” because she has “to bring common assessments, notes, and anything else” that she needed for PLCs. This organization allows her to keep up with student progress on because she knows “what skills have to be taught for common assessments” and “which skills need to be re-taught if needed.”

Barbara stated that the PLCs have allowed her to be able to give “more data to discuss with school leaders”. Barbara also commented that the professional developments that occurred after school “turned into vertical PLCs because it allowed her to see what was working for other teachers.”

Regina stated that all PLCs should be “focused on student-learning” and “the PLCs that were student-centered led Flintville Elementary School to earning a Rewards School selection.” Regina stated that “because teachers monitored their students and held the students accountable, test scores improved.”

Stephanie stated that she was “surprised when her daughters came and said that their teachers talked to them about their data.” Stephanie said that when she discussed this with her children she “saw that teachers were concerned about how her daughters were learning and doing in their class.” Stephanie also said that as she volunteered and worked in the classrooms, she was then able “to understand what teachers were talking about with students when they would meet for one-on-one conversations at the teacher’s desks”.

Interview Question 2-3: How has the implementation of PLCs impacted professional collaboration at FES?

Andrea stated that the PLCs “are what changed our building.” Andrea discussed the importance of data driven discussion. She commented on data driven collaboration.

Everything we do is driven by data. When we have our PLCs, we all bring our data. We talk about the kids and what they are learning and struggling with. We even talk about the data during lunch, so I guess our lunch time has become PLCs too. Before, we started the PLCs, it was like our data was only our data, the individual teacher. Now, the data is all of our data. We look to see if there is something that the kids have in common, and we decide how to address it as a team. In fact, when we first started our PLCs, the teams were divided into grade levels. But we decided, in the middle school, to become one team. And when you look at our test scores, I think it shows.

Andrea stated that she would like to see “more” PLCs used as professional collaboration opportunities.

One of the things I think we can improve on at Flintville is that we need more vertical PLCs used for professional development. After seeing what the vertical PLCs have done in the middle school after we decided to become one team, I think everyone in the building can benefit from them. We have seen great results because of the vertical PLCs, so we want more vertical PLCs.

Barbara commented that the professional collaboration have “caused us to learn from each other”. Barbara discussed team teaching.

We began to work together and even team teach some lessons. The special education teachers came down and we taught some standards together. They got to watch how we questioned our kids, and then they got into the lessons. We began dividing the classes into teams, and the kids loved it.

Barbara also discussed collaboration with the use of student data.

We have always used DIBELS as our data. The difference between before the PLCs and now with PLCs is that we use the data in different ways. Before, we talked to [Literacy Leader] about our data and that was it. It was up to us in our classroom to work with the data and help students learn. Now, it is different. We talk about our kids as a whole grade level, and we also talk about our different ways of grouping and using differentiated instruction. We also talk about what works the best in our classes, and that’s been a way we have learned from each other. I like getting the ideas from my grade level teammates.

Leslie discussed the differences between collaboration in PLCs and the Reading First grade level meetings she participated in before PLCs began.

When we had our Reading First meetings, [Literacy Leader] led the meetings. We basically sat in the meetings and listened to her. We discussed grouping and centers a lot, and we also talked about progress monitoring with DIBELS. We did participate some

with her, but mostly it was just us listening. When the PLCs started, it took some time for us to get used to actually what was going on. We talked to one another and discussed how we could work together. We had this sign-in sheet that had four questions on it. We answered these four questions together, and it eventually got us to planning what we were doing in our classrooms together. At one point, we started dividing the kids into levels, and during intervention time, we all had leveled lessons for the kids we got. It worked great, and I really enjoyed us working together like that. We got to know each and appreciate each other as professionals.

Dana stated that the PLCs have “have changed our building.” Dana also discussed differences she experienced during her years in lower grades and working under Reading First and then her experiences during the PLCs.

When I was under Reading First, [Literacy Leader] pretty much dominated the meetings and what we did in our classroom. It was almost a dictatorship mentality. Our weekly meetings consisted of us going into [Literacy Leader’s] room and listening to her tell us what to do. When we went to the PLCs, it was almost like a culture shock. It was structured, but it was different. With the PLCs, we were valued and were able to talk. I have been teaching a long, and I finally felt valued. That meant a lot. Once we got used to how it worked which took a few weeks, I loved it. We started talking about teaching, and we were given the freedom to finally teach how we wanted. We started trying new things and team teaching. I remember once when a third grade class came to my room so my eighth graders helped them on a state standard. It was great because we had the freedom to set that up among us teachers.

Stephanie stated “I saw teachers coming into each other’s classroom to help and show them how to use the iPad and some apps.” Stephanie also commented that “other than that, I saw the teachers come out of the conference room talking about what they were going to do in the classroom.”

Regina responded on the change in instructional climate because of the professional collaboration.

I was fortunate to be able to sit and be a part of the PDs [professional development activities] at Flintville Elementary School. And it was great to be a part of and witness. What I saw was teachers teaching teachers. Everyone was talking and learning from each other, and that’s what it is about. Teachers teaching other teachers will improve their instruction which can only impact students in a positive way. I believe that this

ultimately led to Flintville Elementary School to becoming a Rewards School this past year [2015]. I loved how teachers were able to openly discuss the tools they were using in their classrooms to teach students.

Interview Question 2-4: What are teacher perceptions of PLCs used as professional development activities?

Dana commented that the professional development “allowed us to be taken seriously” and “once again we were valued.” Dana stated “it was fun because we were able to lead them and not just sit there and listen to administrators.”

Dana stated that the PLCs have “changed us [the teachers] for the better” because now we talk to each other “about what we are doing and about our kids.” Dana discussed how “everything we do now is about our kids.” Dana also commented on the development of professional development activities from the PLCs.

The professional developments that happened actually led to becoming PLCs, I think. We spent each PD [activity] talking and learning from each other. They were a lot of fun too, but I think we learned more. I actually learned how to use iPads and a Mimeo in my classroom, and I don’t think I ever used those before. I really like how we got to lead them and not someone from the office or central office. I felt valued and like I knew what I was talking about when it was my turn to talk or lead.

Andrea discussed specific professional development activities.

The two that stands out to me are the “Techy Tuesday” and the “Appy Hour” ones. I got to lead parts of the “Techy Tuesday” ones. It was great because I use technology a lot in my class, and I got to show the neat things that I use and how to use them. What I also really liked about the “Techy Tuesday” was that teachers in the lower grades got to come to my room and I showed them. We had it set up on a 15 minute rotation, and several teachers got to come to my room and learn about the mimeo. The “Appy Hours” were also set up great. I think this is where we really got to bond as school. We had food and [non-alcoholic] drinks set up real fancy like, and we got to talk and get to know each other from each end of the building. That was fun. Then we moved to our stations and stated the [PD].

Abigail discussed the professional developments as a whole. She stated that “our faculty meetings became PDs, and I think it helped change the school.” Abigail also commented on the recent PDs that she has been leading for Flintville Elementary School during the 2015-2016 school year.

I have been able to lead PDs this year, and I have really enjoyed it. We have this writing thing we call POW/TEAM. It’s a district wide writing program to help us get our kids ready for the TNReady Test. Several of us were trained by our school district, and then we brought it back to our school. I was one of the teachers who led the PD, and I really felt good to do it. I want to be an administrator and leading the PDs give me a chance to gain some experience.

Barbara discussed the vertical teams professional developments which “turned into PLCs.” Barbara stated “the vertical teams were the best part because I really didn’t know what and how the other grade levels were teaching.” Barbara went on to discuss the differences in previous years as compared to year PLC implementation occurred. She stated that “we used to have our grade level meetings [Literacy Leader] and then it was up to implement and do what we were told.” Barbara also stated that “now, we can discuss what we are all doing and what is working.

Leslie discussed the differences between PLCs during the day and the professional development activities that occurred during the after-school hours.

We don’t get to use the PLCs during the day for professional development, but we do use the PDs sometimes for PLCs. One of the ones we used was “Appy Hour”. We all got together in groups and shared iPad apps to use in our classroom. We were in groups that had several grade levels in it, and we were able to learn and see what other teachers were doing with iPads to teach their children. We also had some PDs on technology and some websites that other teachers use for teaching their kids. I wouldn’t know these apps and websites had it not been through the PLCs and PDs where I can learn from the other teachers.

Both Barbara and Leslie discussed the importance of the professional development opportunities as PLCs. Barbara stated that “learning from each has brought us closer as a

faculty”, and Leslie stated that “we can now go to each other to find out what helps us as teachers and what helps the kids.”

Stephanie stated that she “did not go to any of the PDs [professional developments] but she did notice “several teachers using technology” more than they ever had. She also stated “I saw teachers coming into each other’s classroom to help and show them how to use the iPad and some apps.” Stephanie also commented that “other than that, I didn’t see any of the professional developments or PLCs that came from the professional developments.”

Regina responded on the change in instructional climate because of the professional developments.

I was fortunate to be able to sit and be a part of the PDs [professional development activities] at Flintville Elementary School. And it was great to be a part of and witness. What I saw was teachers teaching teachers. Everyone was talking and learning from each other, and that’s what it is about. Teachers teaching other teachers will improve their instruction which can only impact students in a positive way. I believe that this ultimately led to Flintville Elementary School to becoming a Rewards School this past year [2015]. I loved how teachers were able to openly discuss the tools they were using in their classrooms to teach students.

### Research Question 3

What are teacher perceptions regarding PLC implementation and teacher leadership at Flintville Elementary School? Five interview questions were used to investigate and gain additional perception of research question 3.

Interview Question 3-1: Describe how school leaders at FES promote teacher collaboration.

Dana commented that “our leaders do a fantastic job of promoting teacher collaboration.” Dana stated that the collaboration has changed us to how “our school should be”. She stated that



now she felt like she was able to “come out of her classroom and talk about teaching and students learning.

Working together in the PLCs have allowed us to work in a way that we weren’t able to before. Before we started with the PLCs, we basically were told to teach the kids and that was it. We would have one on one talks with [former Curriculum Coordinator] and those were awful. I can remember leaving in tears after each of those meetings. When we started having the PLCs, all of that changed. Now, we talk about how we are teaching the kids and what we can do to make sure they all learn. When we have our data talks with [new Curriculum Coordinator], we don’t leave in tears. Instead, we feel like we make sure that all the kids learn.

Abigail stated that the collaboration was “great” and that “teachers are collaborating and sharing ideas more now than we ever have and it’s because of how our administrators implemented them.” She stated that the principal would “come over the intercom and announce that the next PLC was about to begin.”

When [principal] started to announce them over the intercom, we knew that the PLCs were going to be taken seriously. In the first PLCs, we talked about change and the direction of the school. [Principal] would talk about change and how much we were valued. It was great. We finally started to feel like our opinions and what we were doing in the classroom was important. Our opinions were never taken seriously before. Before, we were told what to do and we were made feel like we did not have a say in our teaching. Now, our opinions on teaching were taken seriously.

Andrea commented that “this was the change we needed.”

When [principal] started having them and talking to us about change, we knew that this was what we needed. It was almost like a light bulb had went off. [Principal] would have us meet in the main conference room and it was like everything else stopped. He wouldn’t deal with discipline or do cafeteria duty. The focus was on us, changing our school, and teaching the kids. Nothing else mattered. [Principal] encouraged us change our teaching and work together, so we started having what we called tasks which were our first attempts at common formative assessments. We would come questions that involved all of our subjects, give them to the students, and then talk about the results. When we got the results, we knew which kids we needed to either reteach or move on.

Both Abigail and Andrea discussed the data program that the new Curriculum

Coordinator brought when she was hired. Abigail said that when [Curriculum Coordinator] arrived “each teacher got a data notebook with all of the students’ data from the most recent standardized test and each student got their own data notebook with only their data in it.” Both also commented on the data talks with the children that they were encouraged to have by the Curriculum Coordinator. Abigail stated that the “data talks with the kids are great because I bring each student back to my desk and we talk about where they scored and where we want them to score.” Andrea said that “the data talks with the kids that we are having makes them feel more accountable and responsible for their own learning.” Andrea also talked about the data talks the principal and Curriculum Coordinator had with the kids.

In our PLCs, we would talk about the kids and which kids needed to be pushed more or needed some encouragement. We would give a list of those kids to [principal] and [Curriculum Coordinator], and they would bring those kids up to talk them. Those kids would come back and talk to us and the other students about the data talks. The kids who didn’t have the data talks with them started asking to go talk to them about their data. Before we knew it, [principal] and [curriculum coordinator] brought each child into the office to talk them about their data. It was like they were having PLCs with each child.

Abigail and Andrea both discussed the data talks as a form of collaboration. Abigail stated “we were all talking about our students and about our teaching.” Abigail also said “everything revolved around us talking and collaborating with each other.” Andrea said “the collaboration was great.” Abigail discussed how the collaboration was encouraged in the PLC meeting.

The PLC meeting revolved around the four questions, and it was up to us to answer the questions. When we first started having them, [principal] would lead them because we weren’t exactly sure how they [PLCs] were supposed to be. Once we got used to them, [principal] would guide us and facilitate the PLCs. We talked about how we were going to answer the four questions. The discussions were left up to us, the teachers. I really enjoyed it because those discussions led to other discussions that we would have whether it was at lunch or in the hallways. Everything we did and talked about was encouraged by [principal].

Barbara discussed how collaboration was different in the principal-led PLCs than the

## Literacy Leader-led Reading First meetings.

The PLCs were very different than what I had experienced with the Reading First meetings. [Literacy Leader] would led and do most of the talking in the meetings. I remember just sitting there and not saying much. But with the PLCs, it was different. [Principal] encouraged us to talk and discuss our teaching. It took a while to get used to, but once I did, I really enjoyed it. We were guided by our sign-in sheet which had the four questions on it. [Principal] would lead them, but at the same time, we had to do the talking. We were able to discuss our progress monitoring results from DIBELS and STAR. We talked about some of our teaching methods, and it was great to learn from the others and share what helps me teach the kids.

Leslie discussed how the principal began the implementation of the PLCs.

During that summer, [principal] started sending us quotes from a PLC book. These quotes were about teachers collaborating and working together. When school started, we started having the weekly meetings, and it was neat to see how it all worked. [Principal] had a set time each week that we would meet in the conference room, and we would all sign-in and start talking. I enjoyed it because it wasn't someone else doing the talking. It was us, the teachers, who would talk about our classrooms. Whenever we would stop talking or come to something we couldn't answer, [principal] would prompt us or give us some suggestions, and that would get us to talking again.

Both Barbara and Leslie commented on collaboration as a method of change. Barbara said "we were encouraged to talk and collaborate as way of changing our school by [principal]."

Leslie said "this was the change we needed so that we could feel like we were appreciated and that was not how it was before [principal] got here." Both also commented on the collaboration encouragement. Barbara said that "[principal] would say in the PLCs that we needed to talk to each other and not him. [Principal] would say that we were the ones in the trenches and we needed to be discussing how we could grow our kids." Leslie discussed the principal encouraging the teachers to team teach.

The change here has been great. It wasn't easy getting us to talk in the meetings because the ones of us who were here before weren't used to it. One of the things that [principal] encouraged us to do was team teach with the older grades. I took my kids several times down to the middle school teachers to have their kids work with mine. We did this in math and reading classes. I thought it was awesome to work with the teachers on the other end of the building as well as the ones in my own grade level.

Stephanie stated that “while she was not in the PLCs, I did hear [principal] come over the intercom and announce that the PLCs were beginning. I believe that he did that once a week.” Stephanie also commented on her children working with other teachers in other grade levels. “My kids would come home and tell me that they got work with the middle school math or English teacher, and I remember thinking that that was a good idea. It was great for my kids to go ahead and start working with the teachers that they would have one day. I also thought it was great to know that all the teachers were working together for my kids.”

Regina commented on school administrators encouraging teacher collaboration.

I have been in education for several years, and I remember when PLCs started in schools in our area. I knew how effective they could be if they were conducted in the right way and with effective teaching for student learning as the focus. I was excited when [principal] said that FES was going to start having PLCs. I knew that if they were conducted right that student learning and test scores would improve, and they did overtime. I was also excited to be invited to the PLCs. As the Evaluation Supervisor, I get to go into all the buildings to conduct teacher evaluations. When I was at FES, I always would try to sit in on a PLC. I was very impressed with the PLCs that I saw. The teachers were teaching and [principal] would lead them. Part of my job is helping teachers improve their methods and strategies to help students learn. What I saw in those PLCs at Flintville was exactly that: teachers working together to help each other. It wasn't [principal] doing the talking. He was in there and leading them, but it was the teachers doing the talking, and they were talking about common formative assessments, the students' data, activities, strategies, and methods. They were sharing and learning from each other, and I was very excited to see that.

Interview Question 3-2: Describe your perception of trust as it pertains to the working relationship of school leaders and teachers at FES.

Dana stated that “trust between us the teachers and our school leaders are at an all-time high.” Dana commented on teachers being able to discuss issues within the building with school leaders.

Up until now, we have never been able to go to the office and talk with our administration. I do believe that we can now, and yes, it does stem from our PLCs that we started having. I know that when [principal] started asking us our opinions on our

teaching in the PLCs that things started to change, and I feel that we needed that. I know that I was able to tell him my opinions on what we needed to be successful in the classroom, and [principal] allowed us to do that. If we needed a new computer program to help the students with intervention, I went to him and told him and then he made sure we got it. I do believe that the teachers have always had a high level of trust between us, and now we have that with our administration. I also know that if I have a curriculum or teaching question, I can go to [Curriculum Coordinator] and ask which I wasn't able to do before she was hired. The last CC we had made us feel like we weren't good teachers, and it seemed like she was out to get us. Now with [Curriculum Coordinator], we can go to her and she helps us and offers us a suggestion. It's great now because we all work together for our kids and it's just a great place to work.

Abigail stated that "trust is great between us and the administrators." Abigail commented on the faculty and

Our school leaders and teachers have a strong sense of trust at FES. We all work together and know that we can trust each other to help us do our best. I know that if I need something whether it's for my classroom or if it is about something else, I can go to our administrators. They are great to work with and for. They [school administrators] have worked really hard at creating a school that makes us feel appreciated at it and it shows. I trust them to ask about ways to improve my teaching or to ask for suggestions.

Andrea stated that "the trust between us and the front office is better than it ever has been." Andrea commented on the journey to building trust between the administrators and the teachers.

Getting to the point where we were are today had definitely been a journey. When [principal] got here, we were all very nervous about the changes he would make. The PLCs helped tremendously because we got to see that he supported what we were doing inside the classroom to help our kids learn, and we appreciated it. I know I did. There was a lot of animosity between [principal] and the former CC, and us teachers didn't know how to take that. When we started having the PLCs and [principal] started showing that he actually valued what we thought and had to say, we started to trust him. When we got our new CC and saw how they worked together, it was great because we knew they trusted each other. And that meant that we could trust them.

Leslie discussed how her role in the school has changed because of the trust between herself and the school administrators.

I would say there is a high level of trust between us and the administrators. Speaking for myself, I had a lot of ideas for getting our little kids involved, but I never went to the office about them before they got here. I wanted to start a club for the kids in the smaller grades to get them

involved in games and things like that to build our school spirit. Once the change in our building started, and it started with the PLCs, I went to [principal] with the idea of the Krazy Kats, and he supported me 100%. It was great to know that I was trusted enough to start something and make it work for our kids.

Barbara discussed how the Curriculum Coordinator had built a trusting relationship that benefited student learning.

When [Curriculum Coordinator] was hired, it was great. We had someone we could go to for teaching things and answers to our questions. I know that before she got here, I never wanted to go the other CC because she didn't make me feel good about what I was doing in the classroom. Now, I have someone I trust that I can go to. I trust her opinion because she tells me things that help me help my kids learn, and I appreciate that.

Stephanie commented on what she saw when she came into the building.

When I would come into the office to sign-in, I would always see the teachers asking [principal] questions about different things. What I saw that was interesting was that they didn't seem to be scared or intimidated about talking to him. I saw a lot of smiles and everyone laughing. It was evident that they could go to him and talk about things that needed to be talked about. I would say there was a high level of trust between them based off of what I saw, and I was in the building at least once or twice a week.

Regina stated that "based off of what I saw when I came into the building to conduct the teacher evaluations, there was a high level trust between [principal] and faculty. Regina discussed the level of trust she observed.

There has to be a high level of trust that exists between any administrator and faculty, and I was able to observe that when I was in the Flintville Elementary School building. First, there has to be that trust factor to have the PLCs that they were having. When I was able to sit-in on the PLCs, I saw everyone having open discussion about teaching and student learning. Everyone seemed to be at ease with one another. What I thought was very interesting and important as well was that there are high levels of expectations at Flintville Elementary School, but at the same time, everyone was having fun while having the professional conversations that were occurring in the PLCs.

Interview Question 3-3: Describe how the implementation of PLCs at FES has impacted leadership.

Dana offered this about PLCs and teacher leadership.

The idea of teachers as leaders is something else that has changed our building. I know I have said it before, but before [principal] got here, we felt like we worked under a dictatorship. We were told what to do and not question it. When we started the PLCs and we saw that we valued and appreciated, it changed us. The PLCs allowed us to really take the lead in our classrooms and our building. We started forming teams and committees to make our school better. Some of us took on leadership roles in that way, and it was great because [principal] encouraged us and allowed us to do that.

Abigail responded this about her experience as a lead teacher.

The experiences that I had in the initial PLCs at Flintville led me to want be a part of the Lead Teacher program that we have in our district. I wanted to try a more leadership role in order to work alongside administrators, supervisors, and my fellow peers. Being a part of this program has allowed me to mentor new teachers, plan professional developments, attend numerous different trainings, and learn more about my own skills as a leader.

When Abigail was asked how her experience with the Lead Teacher program was linked to the PLCs held at Flintville Elementary School, she stated “the idea that we were leading the conversations in the PLCs got me to thinking about being a school leader.” Abigail responded that “the PLCs led us to change what we were doing at Flintville.” Abigail then commented that “if our principal could do that here, then maybe I could do that at another school as a leader.”

Andrea discussed how the PLCs have allowed her to develop leadership skills as she works with her colleagues.

The Lead Teacher program aided me in learning more about myself as a professional and more about working alongside my peers. I am a big fan of using data to help my students learn, and I was able to lead those conversations in the PLCs to help all of the students grow.

When Andrea was asked how her experience with the Lead Teacher program was linked to the PLCs held at Flintville Elementary School, Andrea stated “I learned how to talk professionally in a formal setting to my teammates.” Andrea added “By learning to talk to everyone professionally, it gave me confidence to go on and apply for the Lead Teacher program.”

Barbara discussed how leadership in the building has changed as whole.

What I see as far as the PLCs and leadership is that everything has basically changed. Our administration has changed in every way possible, I think. Now our administrators talk to us and don't seem so intimidating. It is like we have a voice and we didn't have that before. When we meet in our PLCs, we talk about our students and how we are teaching, but I think what matters the most to me is that it is us doing the talking. Before, we were pretty much told what to do and didn't have much of a voice. Now, our leaders are letting us teach the kids like we want. We still have to teach the standards, but we are given the freedom to teach them like we want, and we talk about that in the PLCs.

Leslie discussed how the PLCs assisted her in deciding to become a leader in the Flintville Elementary School building.

Once I understood how the PLCs worked, I thought it was great to be able to open up and talk to everyone about teaching and the students learning. It took a couple of months to get used to, but I saw it changing our school. Because of everything changing, I thought it would be a great idea to try new things in our building so I started some clubs for our younger students to help develop school spirit.

When asked how the programs she started was linked to PLCs, Leslie stated "I developed the confidence to go and try new things from being in the PLCs." Leadership roles in the building "were things I wasn't ever interested in." Leslie also stated "when we all started talking and trying new things, I just felt like seeing if we could try new things in the building." Leslie also stated that "I went to the principal and he supported me 100%."

Stephanie commented on leadership within the building.

When I think about the school and the changes, I am not sure if the PLCs had anything to do with it or not, but I do know the school changed. I know new things were being tried to get the kids involved. When I would come in and help, several times some of the teachers told me that they were either trying something new or something they heard about in one of their PLCs. I also know that several of the teachers that I worked with said they felt more support than ever.

When asked if the change in school climate was linked to the PLCs, Stephanie stated "I am not sure because I wasn't in the PLCs, but I do know the teachers said they really liked them. Stephanie also stated that "her children loved coming to school after the new things that they



were doing in the classrooms.” Stephanie also said “after a few weeks of being in the building, it was obvious that the school was changing, and I appreciated that as a parent.”

Regina discussed the impact that she saw that the PLCs at Flintville Elementary School had on the Lead Teacher program for the Lincoln County Department of Education School District.

I do think the PLCs had an impact on leadership at Flintville Elementary School, but I not in a way that most would think. I believe that the PLCs had Flintville Elementary School inspired teachers to think about becoming future administrators. In our Lead Teacher program for the district, it is evident that the Lead Teachers from Flintville are strong and will be future building leaders. The district has used the Lead Teachers from Flintville in multiple ways especially in the past year to train all Pre-K and kindergarten teachers in the portfolio assessment that was mandated by the state department.

When Regina was asked how the PLCs at Flintville Elementary School could be linked to the effectiveness of the Lead Teachers from Flintville School. Regina stated that “they were able to discuss openly teaching strategies and methods which led to some of the teachers beginning to think about leadership roles.” Regina also said “teachers in PLCs learn how to have meaningful professional conversations, and I think that is evident in the teachers from Flintville.” Regina concluded by saying, “I absolutely believe that the PLCs at Flintville helped develop leadership opportunities and skills for the teachers.”

Interview Question 3-4: Describe how administrators at FES promote teacher leadership.

Explain how these efforts promote teacher leadership.

Dana offered a view from a teacher who was not in the LCDOE Lead Teacher program.

Even though I am not a Lead Teacher, I still feel like I get to be a leader. Where I get to be a leader at is in the classroom mainly. Before the PLCs, I was told what to teach and how to teach it. Now, I feel like I have a voice in my classroom to teach how I want. I still have to teach the standards, but it is up to me on how to teach. What I like is that if I need anything or have an idea, our administration is open to it. There is an open door policy that allows us to come up and talk to them and give them our ideas. I feel like I am trusted because they know that I always have what’s best for the students and school in mind when I approach them. Since I am one of the oldest teachers, many of the

younger ones come to me when they are too nervous about going up there. I just feel like my role as teacher leader is different but still very important.

Abigail responded on her experiences when she asked to work with the administrators at Flintville Elementary School.

When I decided that I may want to go into administration, I went to [principal] and talked about it with him. He said the first thing I needed to do was to learn about middle school scheduling, so [principal] came up with an activity for me to do along with some other teachers who were interested in being administrators one day. We had to develop a mock middle school schedule with mock teachers who had dynamic personalities. We had to consider loyalty, small town politics, athletic coaches, teaching ability, and all the special education laws. It was a lot of fun and a great learning opportunity.

Andrea discussed being involved in leadership meetings as a result of being involved in the LCDOE Lead Teacher program.

When [principal] first arrived, there was a leadership team with only a few people who probably shouldn't have been on that team. Now that most of those people are gone, it's us lead teachers who are on it, and it's great because we are in the classrooms and can talk about what we really need for the kids and for the school. I think what stands out to me is that we get to talk and our administration listens. I think that promotes me as a leader because I get to see how listening to the faculty can help the entire school.

Barbara discussed how she has served as a leader in her grade level.

I am the teacher with the most experience in my grade level, so what I see as far as promoting leadership is that when something is needed for my grade level, the administrators at Flintville come to me and ask me for my opinion. I didn't have that before they got here. Now, I am even considering applying for the Lead Teacher program.

Leslie talked about having the freedom to develop a new club. She stated that she felt "supported" as she organized the new club and worked with other teachers. Leslie said that knowing that she could come up to the "front office and not be criticized" for having a new idea gave her a high level of confidence. Leslie also stated that when she had the idea for her new clubs, she went to [principal] who said to "make it work." She commented that the school administration gave her the "financial support" to get her club started. Because of this

experience, Leslie believes that she and “all the teachers feel supported to start new things for the school to make it better.”

Stephanie commented that she “wasn’t sure how Flintville Elementary School administrators supported teacher leadership”. Stephanie also commented that her children “were really enjoying everything that was new.” When Stephanie what new things her children were enjoying, she responded that “the new spirit club that was beginning in the elementary grades.”

Regina discussed how she observed administration support of teacher leadership through her observations.

I work directly with the Lead Teacher program for the Lincoln County Department of Education. One of the things that stands out about Flintville School is their Lead Teachers. Whenever I need one or two of them to help lead a professional development activity, the administration at Flintville is always very supportive. When I have sat in on the PLCs, I have witnessed the teachers take the lead in PLCs which is what is supposed to happen. While the administrators guide the PLCs, the teachers are the ones leading them and doing the talking, and that is great. I think that the Flintville administration is doing a great job supporting the Lead Teachers and also developing teacher leaders. I know we use them a lot at the Central Office, and the Flintville administration has never once complained.

Interview Question 3-5: Describe your perception of the Pre-Instructional PLCs led by lead teachers.

Dana commented on the subject-matter discussions that occurred during the Pre-Instructional PLCs that she participated.

What I thought was great with the meetings was that could talk specifically about ELA which is what I teach. We could talk about our standards that we were teaching for that week and what strategies we could use. We talked about kids a lot in PLCs, and I think that is something else that we did important in those meetings. I want the kids to learn and also what’s best for this school. I also think that the Pre-Instructional meetings without the administration being there is great. We are able to talk freely and I think that makes us a stronger faculty when we are able to talk about things that make teaching and learning better for our school.

Abigail discussed her experiences leading the Pre-Instructional PLCs and also participating in them.

The experience leading the Pre-Instructional PLCs at Flintville have been a great experience for me because it gave the opportunity to lead and see if I have what it takes to be an administrator. [Principal] gave me the template to use and also set up the meeting, and from there, it was up to me to lead it. We met once a week and we talked subject specific instruction and also talked about our kids. I also think it was great to have these meetings because it allowed all of us teachers to get together and talk without the administration being there.

Andrea discussed her experiences participating in the Pre-Instructional PLCs at Flintville Elementary School.

The idea of the Pre-Instructional PLC was very new to me, and I didn't know what to expect at first. But after the first few times of being involved in them, I can see how they are beneficial. I think it is great for us teachers to be able to sit down away from the administration and talk about kids and their data. It was also good for me to sit down with the other math teacher and talk about math instruction. I think she needed some help because she was teaching a new grade level, and I think I was able to provide that for her.

When Andrea was asked about her experiences leading PLCs she responded that she “took turns with the other lead teacher in the middle school.” Andrea also responded that she “gained experience by leading them” and that she “would be able to use that experience if she ever decided to go into administration.”

Barbara discussed her experiences in the Pre-Instructional PLCs.

I think it was a great idea. I think it helped a lot as a grade level especially in my grade. The other two teachers are younger and need help with their grouping and things like that. Even though I didn't lead the PLCs, I still think that they helped us out a lot because I was able to work with the other teachers.

Leslie discussed how she felt as a leader in the Pre-Instructional PLCs even though she did not lead them.

What I liked about the Pre-Instructional PLCs was that I was able to work with the other teachers in my grade level. I was able to talk them about things that helped me to teach the kids and be successful. I was able to also learn from the other teachers, especially

one who has been teaching for almost 30 years. But at the same, I did feel like a leader because they asked me about how I was doing some things and I was able to share that.

Stephanie stated that she “was not aware of the Pre-Instructional PLCs” and that she could not really “give her perception of the Pre-Instructional PLCs.”

Regina linked the Pre-Instructional PLCs to the promotion of teacher leadership.

The Pre-Instructional PLCs are a great example of how the administration at Flintville supports and develops teacher leaders. It takes a lot of confidence in the lead teachers to give them the responsibility of the Pre-Instructional PLC. I also think that it great when teachers discuss best practices with teachers, and this is what is going on at Flintville. My perception of the PLCs is that when teachers work with teachers and discuss student learning and best practices test scores and will go up.

#### Research Question 4

What are teacher perceptions regarding PLC implementation and student learning at Flintville Elementary School? Three interview questions were used to investigate and gain additional perception of research question 3.

Interview Question 4-1: Explain how administrators use teacher input to impact the instructional climate.

Dana discussed how current Flintville Elementary School administrators listen to teachers’ ideas and suggestions. She also discussed how teachers approach the administration in PLCs and other conversations.

Before the current administration arrived, we [teachers] didn’t feel like we had a voice. I know I have already said that, but it’s very true. Now, once the PLCs happened and we saw that we could talk and be heard, we go to our administrators with our ideas on how to help the students learn and how to make our school better. A great example of this was last year when we, as a middle school team, went to [principal] and asked that we move our lockers that are in the rooms to the hallways. We felt like that would give our kids a sense of growing and maturity. We also thought this would make our test scores better because the kids would take ownership and care because they would feel like they were growing up. Instead of moving the lockers into the halls, [principal] bought new lockers for grades 5-8 and even gave the middle school and new paint scheme to support us.

When these things happens, it makes us [teachers] feel better about ourselves and our school.

Abigail discussed the open-door policy of the current administration.

One of the things I think helps us is the open-door policy. We [teachers] feel like we can go to them and talk to them about things going on in the building. If we have a curriculum question we can go to [Curriculum Coordinator] about it. If we have another issue or idea, we can go to [principal]. The best part is that we feel like we appreciated and that they really listen.

When asked to provide an example, Abigail shared the conversation she had with the principal about moving classrooms to be close to the other subject matter teacher.

A couple of years, [principal] approached me about moving classrooms to be closer to the [teacher] who teaches ELA also. I didn't want to move, so I went to [principal's] office and talked to him about it. He was very open and let me talk to him about my concerns. After I listened to him and why he wanted me to move rooms, which was so it would be easier for us to collaborate, I decided to move. And now it has worked out for the best because I feel like a stronger part of the middle school team.

Andrea gave specific examples of how the administration asked directly for her input on a variety of things.

During the year that we started the PLCs, there was a lot of changes that were going for the better at our school. I have known [principal] for almost our entire lives, and during the first PLC year, he began asking my advice about the middle school schedule for the next year. Over that spring semester, I was able to take ideas that I had to make the middle school schedule better to [principal], and we were able to develop a schedule that was better for the teachers and kids.

Andrea also discussed working with the administration with athletics.

As athletic director, I have to discuss things with the administration that concerns our teams. One of the important things I have to discuss is fundraisers. Every time I have gone to [principal] about a fundraising idea, he has always been very supportive. When coaches have changed or coaching issues have come up, [principal] and I have always discussed them openly and honestly.

Barbara discussed the teacher input during PLCs as having a positive impact on the instructional climate at Flintville Elementary.

When I think about teacher input, it all started that first year during the PLCs when we first started. When we learned that we could openly talk about teaching, everything changed. It changed how we worked, our environment, and how we viewed the front office. We started talking about the way we taught and then we talked about things we needed in the classroom. Some of us needed more manipulatives or computer stuff, so we started asking. Some of the things we asked for would have never been considered before in the past, but now [principal] would listen to us and purchase the stuff that we needed.

Leslie discussed how she was felt when she realized that she could approach the school's administration concerning issues that impacted the school's instructional climate.

Having been here since before the PLCs and now after, things are so much different. It's great. What we started doing in the PLCs have now changed to how we even talk to the administrators about stuff in our building. Not only do we talk about instruction and the kids, we talk about everything from our fundraisers to athletics to making the building more welcoming. In the past couple of years, we have asked for the hallways to be changed from solid to white to a more colorful setting. Now we have big murals painted in our elementary hallways.

Leslie was asked how teacher input from the PLCs impacted the instructional climate.

She discussed how she was benefiting from horizontal and vertical PLCs.

Our weekly PLCs are with our grade level team, but we also have monthly vertical meetings. I have really enjoyed those because I get to learn from [the grade above] what the kids need help with or are struggling with, and I also get to share with [the grade below] what the kids coming up are needing help with. Overall, I think those meetings are what has helped change us. We are now a team. Everyone is talking about teaching and the kids, and we didn't have that before. What we had was these are your kids, these are the standards, and go teach them. When we progress monitored, our data was shown to us in one-on-one data meetings and we also were made to feel awful about ourselves and what we were doing. Now, we all bring our data and we talk about the kids as a team. It is very positive.

Stephanie discussed her observations of teachers discussing ideas with the administration in various settings that she observed.

When I look back at that school year, some of the things I noticed that were very different than previous years was that the teachers and [principal] were talking more about ways to

make the school better. I saw that in the hallways a lot. I also saw it in the office. There were times I would have to wait to see [principal] because several teachers were in the office talking to him. It wouldn't always be a single teacher, but sometimes it would be a group of them. I thought it was great to see that a group of teachers would come to him and be able to talk about things to make it better for everyone.

Regina discussed the changes she observed after suggestions were made during her observations in the PLCs.

Once again, I would like to tie this answer into teacher leadership and what I saw as a whole during the PLCs. Once the teachers started opening up and sharing, the entire culture of Flintville changed. The teachers seemed to be genuinely excited to come to the PLCs. I saw them talk about teaching, the students, and the schedule. They talked about various things they needed or wanted in the classroom and school, and [principal] listened. The teachers wanted to try some pretty innovative stuff with intervention, and [principal] allowed them. When I sat in on some middle school PLCs, I saw them talk to [principal] about scheduling and ideas on how to make it better and even who should be teaching what subject matter. Once again, he listened. When I sat in on some K-2 PLCs, the teachers were concerned over some standardized testing and asked if they could what we call morning boards. Once again, [principal] listened and bought each K-2 teacher a morning board.

Interview Question 4-2: Describe how the implementation of PLCs have impacted student learning at FES.

Dana discussed test scores after the first year of PLCs and then the test scores from 2014-2015. She also discussed the impact of the data notebook program and how it was used in the PLCs.

It's hard to know how our test scores would have come out after that first year had the tornado not have hit and we would not have had South Lincoln in our school with our kids. I know we all felt confident about the TCAP going in especially on my end of the building. But I think it all paid off the next year. When [Curriculum Coordinator] arrived and brought the data notebook program, I think it was the missing piece. We have always used data but not like that. Each kid had their own data notebook with all their test scores and progress monitoring in it. We could talk to our kids about how they did and how they were doing. It was a great way for us to hold them accountable. We would also bring our notebook to our PLCs that [Curriculum Coordinator] that had all the kids data in it, and we would use that to talk about where the kids were at and how to grow them. I think that is what led us to be a Rewards School for the next year.



Abigail also discussed the situation with the tornado and two schools in one building and the Rewards School recognition a year later.

No one can argue that the tornado that hit us and South Lincoln had an impact on our test scores. South Lincoln [Elementary School] was wiped out and they spent the last two weeks in our school, so I think our test scores were not where they needed to be for sure. When that happened, we as a faculty all went to work and bought into the data notebooks that [Curriculum Coordinator] brought to us. It was great because we could talk to the kids, and we could also send some of the kids up to the office to talk to them [Principal and Curriculum Coordinator]. I think that was also a very important piece to the Rewards School. We all as a faculty held the kids accountable, and I think they took a lot of pride in the test and how they were doing. We all worked as team, teachers and kids, and it paid off.

Andrea discussed how the use of data impacted test scores after the 2014 tornado hit the Flintville Elementary School and South Lincoln Elementary School.

We didn't get to see how the PLCs helped our test scores after the first year of the PLCs because of the tornado. When we started the using the data and data notebooks next year, our test scores were great. It was fun to work with the kids and show them how they were doing and where we wanted them to score. I think the kids really stepped up and matured. It led us to be named a Rewards School, and that is one of the biggest honors that our school could have gotten. It took a lot of hard work, but it paid off.

Barbara discussed how the PLCs helped improve test scores in the elementary wing of Flintville Elementary School.

At first, the PLCs helped us all work together, and that was something that was really new to us on our side of the building. It took us a while to understand that everything didn't just depend on the individual teacher. When we realized, or at least, when I realized that we could all help each other, things started to change. In our PLCs, I asked how the other schools were helping their kids to grow, and that's how we learned about teachers at other schools using morning boards. I immediately said I wanted one and so did the other teachers. [Principal] ordered all of one, and then we immediately using standard-based instruction with those morning boards, and our kids' scores went up. It was great.

Leslie stated that "the PLCs helped us to learn from each other and discuss what we needed which led us to getting the morning boards." Leslie discussed how the teachers worked together to use the morning boards to impact standardized test scores.

When we started learning about the morning boards, most of us wanted one because teachers at other schools were using them. Before we got the morning boards, we all taught Reading First in our reading block. We were made to that before the [principal] got here and before the PLCs. Once we learned that we could stop teaching Reading First and start using the morning boards as standards teaching, the test scores went up.

Stephanie discussed how she felt when she received the news that Flintville Elementary School had earned a Rewards School recognition.

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Regina stated that “absolutely the PLCs impacted student learning in a positive way.”

Regina discussed how the PLCs led to the Rewards School.

I don’t think you can question if the PLCs led to better student performance on a standardized test. Earning a Rewards School distinction is a huge accomplishment, and I truly believe the PLCs and what was going at Flintville led to the student gains and the Rewards School. I was in the building multiple times, and I was able to witness how the teachers worked together in the PLCs and the PDs (professional developments) to improve instruction so the kids would learn and perform at a high level on the TCAP test.

Interview Question 4-3: Explain how teachers utilize student progress data at FES.

Discuss how the use of data has impacted student learning.

Dana stated that “everything we do centers around student learning and their data.” She commented that “when we meet in PLCs, we all have to bring our most updated data.” Dana also discussed how the teachers used student data for interventions.

One of the things that we did was take our student data and use it to develop interventions for the kids. We take each kid’s progress monitoring from the STAR program and develop interventions for them. We talk to the Interventionist about each kid and gave her the standards that the kids needed to work on based off of the STAR progress monitoring results. It was great because we all used the same data for each child.

Abigail discussed how she uses progress monitoring to develop appropriate groups that benefit student learning.

One of the things that I use the student data for in my class is grouping. I use it to group in different ways. One of the ways is I group according to skill level. Once I get the data back, I place the kids in three groups: lower, middle, and high. I work directly with the lower kids so they get more teacher instruction. I place the middle kids with an educational assistant, so they can work independently and with assistance if needed. I place the higher kids in a group by themselves, and I give them a tougher assignment on the standard I just taught so they can go deeper into it.

Andrea stated that “everything she does now in the classroom revolves around student data. She commented that “using data has made her more aware of each child and what each child needs to grow.” Andrea discussed how important the use of data is for student growth.

Everything I do revolves around student growth. Growth shows learning, and that is what I want in my classroom. I want the kids to grow and learn. Whenever we get new STAR data, I meet individually with each kid at my desk and we talk about how they scored and where they need to go. We also have a growth board that shows how they are scoring and growing. I don’t use their real names, but I do use their lunch numbers. The kids can see how they are growing and they can also see how their classmates are doing too. I think that works great because it makes the kids own their learning and it also develops some competitiveness in them. I think the kids don’t want it to seem like they are not keeping up, so they work harder.

Barbara discussed her experiences using student data before and after PLCs began.

When we taught only Reading First, we used data to help the students on their DIBELS scores. When we started using STAR and having PLCs, it changed everything. Now my grouping is different, my intervention time is different, and my instruction is different. I teach a standard and then I see how the kids perform on either the test or a common assessment. From there, I make lessons and interventions for child or group level that will help them learn more.

Leslie discussed how she works with other teachers in her grade level to develop common assessments that to progress monitor students.

One of the things that we do in my grade level is that we work together to make common assessments. We do that so we have a way of measuring the students on each standard that we teach. We basically progress monitor throughout the year besides using DIBELS and STAR. Whenever we see that a student or group of students is struggling with something that we taught, we can stop and help them out immediately. We also get to

work with our Interventionist on our end of the building when it comes to each child or a group of lower kids.

Stephanie commented on her children's data notebooks and individual talks with the teachers and school leaders.

When my children came home with the notebooks, I asked them what they were for, and they told me they were for their test stuff. My kids told me that they talked to the teachers and the [school leaders] about their notebooks whenever they took a certain test. My kids told me that they would talk to the teachers by themselves at the teachers' desks about how they scored and where the teachers wanted them to score. My kids also told me that they would go to the office and talk about the same things with [school leaders]. I think that it's great to know that everyone at the school took such an interest in my kids and the students.

Regina discussed the importance of progress monitoring and the role it played in Flintville Elementary School becoming a Rewards School.

Progress monitoring and the use of the student data is one of the key reasons that Flintville Elementary School became a Rewards School last year. I really liked watching the teachers use the data notebooks in PLCs, and I think that is what really made the PLCs more effective. I was at the school once and saw the kids called into the office to talk to [school leaders] about their data. When everyone gets involved, and everyone is the students, teachers, and administration, with the data, you can see the results in the Rewards School award. Everyone at Flintville was involved in the student data and progress monitoring. They teachers used the data in the PLCs to develop student specific instruction, and then the teachers and administrators held the students accountable as the year went on.

#### Emerging Themes

- PLCs are strengthened through school leaders' support.
- PLCs are strengthened through the use of students' progress monitoring data.
- Teachers feel valued when their opinions are heard, have leadership opportunities, are allowed to collaborate, and have the autonomy to use strategies they feel are necessary.
- PLCs lead to a high level of trust between school leaders and teachers.

- PLCs positively impact the instructional climate of a school.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATION

#### Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore teacher perceptions of professional learning communities on the instructional climate at Flintville Elementary School in Lincoln County, Tennessee. The study relied on the interviews of five teachers who were employed at Flintville Elementary School before and during PLC implementation, one parent of children who attended Flintville Elementary School before and during PLC implementation, and the Evaluation Supervisor for the Lincoln County Department of Education.

Data analysis of the interviews showed concepts that supported PLC implementation and described how the use of PLCs positively impacted the instructional climate at Flintville Elementary School. The data analysis also indicated that all aspects of the PLCs impact were not visible to those who were not directly involved in classroom instruction.

#### Discussion

The study findings, conclusions, and inferences of this qualitative study along with the recommendations for additional study are outlined in Chapter 5. Chapter 1 of this study outlined the topic introduction. Chapter 2 consisted of the Review of Literature. Chapter 3 outlined the Research Methodology that included the Research Questions for the study on relevant subjects and areas. Chapter 4 consisted of the data collection through interviews with the participants.

The data gathered through interviews with the participants allowed the researcher to construct a theoretical framework to understand the impact PLCs had on the instructional climate at Flintville Elementary School. Triangulating the study with a parent and the Evaluation Supervisor assisted to confirm the teachers' perceptions that PLCs positively impacted the instructional climate at Flintville Elementary School.

The data composed supports the theory that PLCs can positively impact the instructional climate at a school. By using a case study approach, the information gained shows that one school, Flintville Elementary School, changed its instructional climate by fully implementing and conducting PLCs. Interviews with participating teachers, the Evaluation Supervisor who attended, observed, and participated in the PLCs, and a parent who observed teacher conversations indicate that PLCs led to a changed instructional climate, higher teacher morale, improved instruction, and improved student learning.

Data collected from the teachers allowed for an in-depth look at PLC implementation and the impact the PLCs made on the instructional climate at Flintville Elementary School. Teachers shared their experiences and rich knowledge of how the PLCs changed the instructional climate. Common themes throughout the interviews with the teachers included improved teacher collaboration, ability to adapt instructional methods, data-based and student centered instruction, effective use of progress monitoring tools, improved administration support, high levels of trust between the administration and faculty members, structured meeting times with agendas, teacher leadership opportunities, and improved standardized test scores over time.

The parent's responses allowed for an outside view of the PLCs on the instructional climate at Flintville Elementary School. The parent was able to share observations within the building through unbiased eyes. She was able to observe conversations in the hallways and in

other parts of the building occurring between teachers that she was unaware of before PLC implementation. She also discussed the improved relationship between her students and the teachers along with the administration as it pertains to her children's education. Observations included conversations with the teachers and administrators concerning her children's progress monitoring through the use of individual data notebooks. She also was able to comment that she did not attend the PLCs but was able to observe the teachers gathering their "stuff" that included "data sheets and materials" to attend the PLC meetings. She also observed teachers assisting one another with technology in their classroom. She also stated that she believed the PLCs led to the Rewards School recognition.

The Evaluation Supervisor correlated the responses of the teachers and parent. The Evaluation Supervisor stated that the PLCs played an important role in changing the instructional climate of Flintville Elementary that has resulted in a Rewards School recognition two years after PLC implementation. Themes that correlated with the teachers included teacher leadership opportunities, improved collaboration, effective professional development, improved instructional methods, and student-centered instructional focus.

### Study Findings

The research questions used to structure this case study examined the perceptions of teachers, a parent, and the Evaluation Supervisor of the Lincoln County Department of Education on the implementation and effectiveness of PLCs on instructional climate on Flintville Elementary School in Lincoln County, Tennessee.



## Teachers

The teachers chosen for the study agreed that the PLCs implemented and conducted positively impacted the instructional climate at Flintville Elementary School. Teachers agreed that they are engaging in more professional conversations and activities due to the PLC implementation. Teacher conversations discussed include PLCs, Pre-Instructional PLCs, and informal PLCs conducted during lunch and planning times that were not set aside for PLC meetings. Teacher activities that were mentioned included common formative assessments, tasks, and team-teaching opportunities.

Teachers discussed how the time set aside for PLCs increased instructional strategies and methods. Teachers agreed that the sharing of ideas and effective methods increased their effectiveness in the classroom. Teachers discussed how the formal setting of the PLC changed the instructional climate by incorporating an agenda that allowed for a framework in which the teachers were able to converse about individual students and teaching. They stated that conversations centered on each student and that student's individual progress monitoring data.

The use of data was a common theme that the teachers discussed. They agreed that the use of data and progress monitoring students allowed them to develop individual instruction that was designed to allow for either intervention or enrichment activities specifically designed for that student. Teachers stated that they are expected to bring their most up-to-date data for each PLC meeting. Teachers also discussed how they used data to design grouping levels of students and group centered activities to address the needs of students who were on the same level or skill.

Teachers also discussed how the PLCs led to more effective professional development activities. A consensus of the teachers were also that the PDs allowed for teacher interactions

that centered on methods that allowed them to provide more effective teaching by learning from each one another. Some of the identified PD activities included technology specific opportunities where teachers discussed, modeled, and demonstrated how they used various technology tools and iPad apps that were being used in the classroom. As the PLCs and PDs developed, traditional faculty meetings turned into professional activities. Many of the professional development activities turned into vertical PLCs which allowed teachers in multiple grade levels to communicate and discuss instructional strategies.

Teachers also agreed that school administrative support for PLCs and teacher input was a positive change on the instructional climate. Teachers discussed support from the school leaders as they transitioned from the Reading First program in lower grades to standard based discussion. Teachers in upper grade levels discussed administrative support for freedom to try new methods and instructions.

Teachers emphasized that trust between the faculty and administrators was at a high level. Teachers cited financial support, instructional support, leadership opportunities, and higher visibility as evidence of trust. Teachers also discussed the freedom to come to the principal's office to discuss issues or ideas to improve the school and increase student achievement as evidence of trust.

Teachers discussed opportunities for leadership within the building as evidence that PLCs have positively impacted the instructional climate. Teachers discussed how the PLCs gave them confidence to apply for the LCDOE Lead Teacher program. They also discussed the development of the Pre-Instructional PLCs that were led by the lead teachers. They commented that this allowed them to grow and gain experience as instructional leaders. Teachers also discussed how the link between trust and leadership opportunities. Teachers stated that they

were able to freely come to the principal's and assistant principal's office with new ideas of clubs and organization. They stated they felt supported by the administrators both financially and professionally as they created opportunities for student engagement within the building.

Teachers linked opportunities for teacher leadership to PLCs. They stated that the PLCs allowed them to feel more professional and gave them confidence to try new things in their classes and careers. These things included special event committees, new teacher teams, and the application for district-wide programs. Teachers also discussed how their experience in participating and leading Flintville Elementary School PLCs gave them knowledge and the ability to lead district-wide PLCs.

Administrative decisions based off of teacher input was also elaborated on during interviews. Teachers discussed how valued they felt during the PLCs as they were able to voice their opinions on a variety of issues that would positively impact student learning, teacher effectiveness, and the school climate. Noted conversations with the administrators included changing from Reading First centered instruction to Tennessee State Standards based instruction, team teaching opportunities, and new clubs/organization. Teachers also discussed a strong link between administrator and faculty trust to teacher input. Due to the trust that existed between the current administrators and the faculty, they felt they could bring up issues and concerns to the administrators in both formal PLC meetings and informal conversations with the administrators.

### Parent

The parent chosen for the study agreed that the PLCs implemented and conducted positively impacted the instructional climate at Flintville Elementary School. Through her observations, it was noted that the meetings were of high importance and held in a formal setting weekly. She noted that during times where she volunteered at the school, she observed teachers

gathering materials to attend the PLCs. After the PLC meeting, the parent commented that she heard the teachers talking about specific students and ways to increase their learning. She commented that she observed several teachers implementing teaching strategies and methods they said they talked about during the PLC meetings.

The parent correlated the teachers' responses in regard to individual data driven instruction. She commented that her children had individual talks with the teacher in which their progress monitoring was discussed. The data tracking was updated in an individual notebook that each one of her children was assigned. It was noted the same process was used by the administrators. Her children were individually called to the office to discuss their progress monitoring on tools such as the STAR program and common assessments.

She also noted that the trust between the faculty and principal appeared to be high as seen through her observations. She commented that while she was not in on the weekly PLCs, Pre-Instructional PLCs, or the meetings between the administrators and faculty she did see teachers come out of the principal's office with positive expressions. She stated that the teachers discussed new clubs and activities that stemmed from the conversations held with the administrators.

She also discussed new clubs and activities and noted she wasn't sure if the new clubs stemmed from teacher leadership opportunities; however, her children were enjoying the new clubs that were sponsored by teachers who did not sponsor any clubs in previous years.

### Evaluation Supervisor

The Evaluation Supervisor for the Lincoln County Department of Education correlated the responses of the teachers and the parent chosen for the study. She agreed with the teachers

and parents interviewed by stating that the PLCs held at Flintville Elementary School positively impacted the instructional climate.

The Evaluation Supervisor commented on several aspects of teacher communication with one another. She stated that the time set aside for PLCs was able to promote teachers working with other teachers to promote effective teaching and a higher level of student learning. The Evaluation Supervisor was able to comment on her personal observations as she participated in the PLCs. She stated that teachers “were not complaining” but having “conversations that centered on student learning.” The Evaluation Supervisor stated that teachers were discussing common assessments, various grouping strategies, and other methods and strategies designed to improve student learning.

The Evaluation Supervisor linked various portions of the interview together and said that these combined are reasons for the change in “the instructional climate at Flintville.” She was personally able to watch the teachers work together in PLCs and observed the teachers talk about instruction and student learning multiple times in all grade levels.

The Evaluation Supervisor commented that the PLCs developed and improved during the first year. She was able to reference the first attempts at common formative assessments as an example. She stated that the first common formative assessments started out as what the teachers called “tasks”, and then later, the teachers began using common formative assessments. She referenced the evolution as an example of trust developing between the school administration and the teachers. The trust between the two groups allowed the teachers the freedom to experiment and develop strategies and methods to measure student academic growth as the school year developed. This trust allowed teachers the opportunity to engage in meaningful

conversations and develop leadership skills that helped to change the school's instructional climate.

The Evaluation Supervisor elaborated on teacher leadership opportunities. She stated that the format of the PLCs enabled teachers to lead conversations on student learning that led to the strengthening of the Lincoln County School District's Lead Teacher Program. The format allowed the teachers to lead the conversations and not the school's administration. Teachers who were already enrolled in the LCDOE's Lead Teacher program were able to use these conversations as a way to develop their leadership skills while at the same time doing work that led to a higher level of student learning at Flintville Elementary School. At the building level, the Flintville Elementary School Lead Teachers were able to lead Pre-Instructional PLCs without administration supervision. At the District Level, the Flintville Elementary School Lead Teachers were able to lead District-Wide PLCs to train other schools on a variety of topics which included portfolios, common formative assessments, and effective writing strategies. At the state level, Flintville Elementary School teachers were able to engage in challenging conversations as issues with the new portfolio model and usage developed.

The Evaluation Supervisor also directly linked Flintville Elementary School's earning a Rewards School distinction to the PLCs. She stated that during her times of participating in PLCs and being in the buildings during the initial PLC year and the years after PLC implementation has led to a higher level of student learning. She stated evidence from progress monitoring tools, common formative assessments, and state testing results. The Evaluation Supervisor commented that everything that revolved around the PLCs and their implementation led to the Rewards School distinction. These implements included school leader-teacher trust,

PLC format, teacher leader opportunities, teacher leader support, progress monitoring, and professional conversation.

### Recommendations for Future Practice

Since results of this study indicated that PLCs have the potential to create positive instructional climate that focuses on collaboration and trust, the following recommendations have been made for future practice.

- School administrators who are not using PLCs for the purpose of data discussion and improvement of instructional climate are recommended to implement PLCs at every grade level at the individual schools to see if this makes a significant change for them.
- School administrators who are not combining PLCs and faculty meetings are recommended to combine PLCs and faculty meetings to provide and promote teacher leadership opportunities.
- Student achievement in schools where PLCs have been implemented are recommended to track student progress monitoring data to see if student learning is sustained and increased.
- School districts should consider providing scheduled administrator PLCs to allow for best practices to be discussed among principals so they can in turn take the results back for individual school implementation.

### Recommendations for Future Research

While the results of this study yielded some positive feedback on the use of PLCs on instructional climate at Flintville Elementary School, strategic planning is recommended. Recommendation for school leaders includes the following suggestions. School leaders could duplicate this same study in five years to see if PLCs are being properly maintained at a high level. It is also recommended that school leaders conduct future research to see how teacher leadership opportunities are being utilized to impact student achievement. School leaders may also want to conduct a comparison study of student achievement five years before PLC implementation to five years after PLC implementation to see if a high rate of student achievement was maintained.

### Summary

The research conducted for this case study showed that PLCs implemented at Flintville Elementary School in Lincoln County, Tennessee changed the instructional climate at the school. Teachers, one parent, and the Evaluation Supervisor agreed that instructional practices with a focus on student learning through PLCs has impacted the school in a positive manner. Statements from those interviewed confirm that teachers are taking on more leadership roles and succeeding due to a high level of trust and support from the school's leaders. This is evidenced by Flintville Elementary School earning a Rewards School distinction for the first time in school history.



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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A

#### Letter to Potential Participants

Dear Potential Participant,

I am a doctoral student at East Tennessee State University (ETSU) and currently completing my dissertation entitled, *Teacher Perception of Professional Learning Communities on the Instructional Climate At Flintville Elementary School in Lincoln County, Tennessee*. I have received permission from Dr. Bill Heath, Director of Schools for the Lincoln County Department of Education, to conduct the interviews with teachers, the Evaluation Supervisor for the Lincoln County Department of Education, and a parent. I have also received authorization from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct this study.

I am requesting your approval for an interview that will take approximately one hour. An outside administrator will be conducting the interview. The interview will take place in the Curriculum and Instruction Room. I hope to schedule the interviews during after-school hours.

Your participation is vital to this study and consists of only the one hour interview. This study is to provide important information to the body of research of professional learning communities. I hope you will support my efforts to provide valuable research information to PLCs.

If you choose to participate in this study, sign the consent form. Once you have signed the consent form, place it into the wooden mailbox located beside my office door. I will contact you to set up the interview.

I certainly appreciate the vital role you are taking in this important study. Your effort will benefit other schools and school systems who wish to use PLCs.

Sincerely,

David Golden

Doctoral Candidate, East Tennessee State University

Email: goldend@goldmail.etsu.edu

(Cell) 931-652-9142

## APPENDIX B

### Interview Questions

**Principal Investigator's Contact Information:** 931-652-9142 OR EMAIL AT DGOLDEN@LCDOE.ORG

**Organization of Principal Investigator:** EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

### Interview Questions

1. Discuss your perception of how PLCs have had an impact on the instructional climate at FES.
2. Describe the ways that teachers engage professionally at FES.
3. How has the use of time set aside for PLCs impacted effective teaching at FES?
4. How has the use of time set aside for PLCs impacted the monitoring of student progress at FES?
5. How has the implementation of PLCs impacted professional collaboration at FES?
6. What are teacher perceptions of PLCs used as professional development opportunities?
7. Describe how school leaders at FES promote teacher collaboration.
8. Describe your perception of trust as it pertains to the working relationship of school leaders and teachers at FES.
9. Describe how the implementation of PLCs at FES has impacted teacher leadership.
10. Describe how administrators at FES promote teacher leadership. Explain how these efforts promote teacher leadership.
11. Describe your perception of the Pre-Instructional PLCs led by lead teachers.
12. Explain how administrators use teacher input to impact the instructional climate.
13. Describe how the implementation of PLCs have impacted student learning at FES.

14. Explain how teachers utilize student progress data at FES. Discuss how the use of data has impacted student learning.

## APPENDIX C

### Informed Consent Form

**Principal Investigator's Contact Information:** 931-652-9142 OR EMAIL AT DGOLDEN@LCDOE.ORG

**Organization of Principal Investigator:** EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

### INFORMED CONSENT

This Informed Consent will explain about being part of a research study. It is important that you read this material carefully. Then you can decide if you wish to voluntarily participate.

- A. Purpose:** The purpose of this research study is to understand what teachers think about teamwork with other teachers. These teacher meetings took place at Flintville Elementary School during the 2014-2015 school year. The results of this study will help the school principal to determine if these meetings were productive. The research could serve as a guide for other schools hoping to use similar meetings.
- B. Duration:** There will be one interview. This interview will be take one hour.
- C. Procedures:** You will meet with a school administrator. This meeting will be held in a private room. Interviews will be held after-school at Flintville Elementary School. You will be given a coded name. The administrator will ask you interview questions. The interview questions will be open-ended. The study will be recorded on an Apple iPad.
- D. Alternative Procedures/Treatments:** There are no alternative procedures if you decide not to take part in this research.
- E. Possible Risks/Discomforts:** The interviews will be conducted at Flintville Elementary School. They will be recorded on an Apple iPad. The Apple iPad will be stored in my office. There is a possibility that your voice may be identified. The interviews will be deleted from the Apple iPad right after the interviews.
- F. Possible Benefits:** There are no known benefits to you for being part of this research.



**Voluntary Participation:** Your part in this research experiment is voluntary. *You may choose not to be a part of this research.* You can quit at any time. You will not be affected in a negative way if you quit. You may quit by calling David Golden. The number is 931-652-9142. You will be told immediately if any study results might make you change your mind about being part of the research.

**G. Contact for Questions:** If you have any questions or problems related to the research you may call David Golden. The phone number is 931-652-9142. You may also call the Chairperson of the ETSU Institutional Review Board. The number is 423-439-6054. This person can answer any questions you have about your rights as a participant. If you want to talk to someone independent of the research team or you can't reach the study staff, you may call an IRB Coordinator. The number is 423.439.6055 or 423.439.6002.

**H. Confidentiality:** Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept private. A copy of the records from this study will be stored at Flintville Elementary School for five years. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a part of the research. The audio recordings will be deleted. The recordings will not be presented or published. The ETSU personnel responsible for this research have access to the research and to the study records.

---

By signing below, I confirm that I have read and understand this Informed Consent Document. I had the opportunity to have them explained to me verbally. You will be given a signed copy of this document. I confirm that I have had the chance to ask questions and that all my questions have been answered. By signing below, I confirm that I freely and voluntarily choose to take part in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

If signed by someone other than the Participant, state your relationship to the Participant and why you are allowed to act on the Participant's behalf:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

---

Signature of Principal Investigator

---

Date

---

Signature of Witness

---

Date

APPENDIX D

IRB Approval Letter

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Manager, IRB** <[irbmanager@etsu.edu](mailto:irbmanager@etsu.edu)>

Date: Monday, April 4, 2016

Subject: IRB approval letter

To:

Dear Golden, David,

RE: Teacher Perception of Professional Learning Communities on the Instructional Climate  
At Flintville Elementary School in Lincoln County, Tennessee

I do not feel that title of the study compromises confidentiality as there are a 35 teachers in the school. The school is one of a total of 8 schools.

Your new protocol submission has been approved by the IRB. Please log in to IRBManager to view and obtain your approval letter and associated documents.

PLEASE NOTE: If your study is a MSHA study, you must obtain MSHA approval as well before initiating the study.

APPENDIX E

Flintville Elementary School PLC Meeting Sign-In Sheet

**FLINTVILLE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

**PLC Meetings**

<i>What do we want students to learn?</i>	<i>How do we know they learned it?</i>	<i>How will we respond when students have difficulty?</i>	<i>How will respond when students do learn?</i>
STANDARDS	DEVELOP COMMON ASSESSMENTS	Plan and apply interventions for individual students	Develop enrichments
OBJECTIVES	COMMON SCORING		Apply enrichments
	CALIBRATE STUDENT WORK		Revise enrichment extensions if needed
	ANALYZE STUDENT WORK		

**POWER STANDARDS:**

**SIGN-IN:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Administrator:** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATA NOTES/COMMENTS/SPECIFICS:**

## APPENDIX F

### Flintville Elementary School PLC Norms

#### **FLINTVILLE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY NORMS**

- **The primary focus of our meetings will be directed toward improving learning levels of students at Flintville Elementary School.**
- **All students will be the concern of everyone on the team. We will move from a culture of "my" students to one of "OUR" students.**
- **As a team, we will work TOGETHER as a COMMUNITY to anticipate potential questions, issues, and problems and collectively seek the best ways to respond.**
- **We will OPENLY SHARE LEARNING DATA, always seeking to help and support each other, as well as learn from each other in a friendly and collegial atmosphere.**
- **We will practice, rehearse, and model the behaviors we are expecting of collaborative teams within the school.**
- **We will engage in collective inquiry – seeking BEST PRACTICES as we strive to improve learning in Flintville Elementary School.**
- **We will go HARD ON IDEAS AND ISSUES and SOFT ON THE PEOPLE**
- **WE WILL NEVER BLAME THE STUDENTS.**
- **We will keep confidential our discussions, comments, and deliberations.**
- **We will value consensus rather than majority rule after examining all points of view.**
- **We will use humor, as appropriate, to help us work better together.**
- **We will maintain a POSITIVE PERSPECTIVE that will in return reflect a POSITIVE ATTITUDE.**
- **We will exhibit the highest level of PROFESSIONALISM in all that we do.**
- **We will embrace the idea of UNITY to the fullest extent and make the effort to bridge any GAPS.**

## APPENDIX G

### Flintville Elementary School PLC Common Assessment Worksheet

Flintville Elementary School

Common Assessment Analysis Form

1. POWER STANDARDS/LEARNING TARGETS MEASURED:  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. IN WHAT AREAS DID OUR STUDENTS DO WELL?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. WHAT INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES HELPED OUR STUDENTS?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. WHAT SKILL DEFICIENCIES DO WE SEE?  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. WHAT PATTERNS DO WE SEE IN THE MISTAKES; WHAT DO THEY TELL US?  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. WHICH STUDENTS DID NOT MASTER ESSENTIAL STANDARDS AND WILL NEED ADDITIONAL TIME AND SUPPORT? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. WHAT INTERVENTION WILL BE PROVIDED TO ADDRESS UNLEARNED SKILLS, AND HOW WILL WE CHECK FOR SUCCESS?  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. DO WE NEED TO TWEAK OR IMPROVE THIS ASSESSMENT? \_\_\_\_\_
9. WHICH STUDENTS MASTERED STANDARDS, AND WHAT IS OUR PLAN FOR EXTENDING AND ENRICHING THEIR LEARNING?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

	CLASS 1	CLASS 2	CLASS 3	CLASS 4	CLASS 5	CLASS 6
TOTAL STUDENTS						
INTENSIVE SUPPORT						
STRATEGIC SUPPORT						
APPROACHING STANDARD						
MEETING						

STANDARD						
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VITA  
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